

# **THE ART OF BEING BETTER**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Eugene X. Perticone, Ed.D.** (Rutgers) is a licensed psychologist in private practice specializing in psychotherapy and personality assessment. He was a graduate professor at the State University of New York at Oswego for twenty-four years where he taught courses in clinical methods, personality theory, emotional adjustment, and the psychology of personal growth. He also has been Director of Research and Evaluation for a comprehensive mental health facility, a consultant psychological examiner for the New York State Department of Social Services, and has worked as a psychologist in schools. His previous book credits include *The Mosaic Technique in Personality Assessment: A Practical Guide*, *The Clinical and Projective Use of the Bender-Gestalt Test*, and *Just Two for the Road*. A recipient of the Graduate Research Award of the New Jersey Psychological Association, he is a member of the American Psychological Association, a fellow of the Society for Personality Assessment, and a member of both the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis and the Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis.

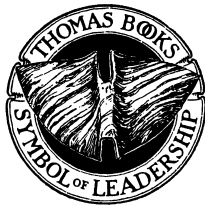
# THE ART OF BEING BETTER

An Approach to Personal Growth

*By*

**EUGENE X. PERTICONE, Ed.D.**

*Professor Emeritus  
State University of New York, College at Oswego  
Oswego, New York*



**CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.**  
*Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.*

*Published and Distributed Throughout the World by*

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.  
2600 South First Street  
Springfield, Illinois 62794-9265

This book is protected by copyright. No part of  
it may be reproduced in any manner without written  
permission from the publisher. All rights reserved.

©2007 by CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.

ISBN 978-0-398-07771-6 (hard)  
ISBN 978-0-398-07772-3 (pbk.)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2007018969

*With THOMAS BOOKS careful attention is given to all details of manufacturing  
and design. It is the Publisher's desire to present books that are satisfactory as to their  
physical qualities and artistic possibilities and appropriate for their particular use.  
THOMAS BOOKS will be true to those laws of quality that assure a good name  
and good will.*

*Printed in the United States of America  
MM-R-3*

**Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**

Perticone, Eugene X.

The Art of Being Better : an approach to personal growth / by Eugene X.

Perticone.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-398-07771-6 (hard)—ISBN 978-0-398-07772-3 (pbk.)

1. Self-actualization (Psychology). 2. Self-realization. 3. Conduct of life.

4. Self. 5. Personalism. I. Title.

BF637.S4P447 2007

158.1—dc22

2007018969

*For Marjorie Perticone*



## FOREWORD

We live in a curious time, one in which we are relentlessly bombarded with offers of pills or potions that will take away our pains or mask our inadequacies. As we scan the pages or stare at the screen, we almost begin to feel ashamed that we are growing older or losing hair. After all, what would we be without whiter teeth or more staying power? We are led to believe that these enhancements, along with driving a sportier automobile or redistributing the curves and bulges of our bodies, will make us more appealing to the opposite sex in particular and the world in general. As the myriad of products is paraded by us, we might even find ourselves wondering whether the product that is being sold is actually a potion to instill in us the unwarranted fear that being what and how we are as human beings is never good enough. We are being taught that by masking our presumed imperfections and creating a more desirable appearance, no matter how superficial or external the means, our lives will be happier and more satisfying, that we will somehow be better.

It is easy to understand why we want to get better when we are ill or our health is threatened. It is less obvious, unless we really think about it, why we seem to feel such urgency to appear better, even when doing so distorts who and what we really are. It seems that we have learned to replace ourselves with an idea, an idea of a self that appears better but is not real. Where is the pill that will help us to recover from that?

One possibility is that there is no pill. Another is that there is no need for one. Dr. Eugene Perticone's inspiring and compelling message in the present volume, *The Art of Being Better*, is that the motive and the means to be better, to reconnect with our deeper, more authentic selves, are built into each of us. In the pages that follow, Dr. Perticone invites us to turn our attention inward to rediscover, under-

stand, accept, and appreciate our true nature, and express it wisely in the world. He encourages us to widen our consideration of what it means to be human beings and to attend to those miraculous aspects of life and experience that we often take for granted or fail to notice at all.

An accomplished professor of psychology who has been an enormous inspiration to many students, Dr. Perticone has, for the past 35 years, practiced psychotherapy with individuals who were struggling to be better. In addition, he has devoted himself tirelessly to his own personal self-exploration that in turn has led to his extensive study of great works of literature, psychology, philosophy and spiritual traditions. In the present volume, he presents in a clear and uncluttered fashion a distillation of some of the most significant concepts and practices that have benefited him and his fellow travelers in the journey toward being better.

For those who would choose to embark or continue on the simple but often difficult path of being better, Dr. Perticone suggests a remarkably clear and practical guide that can be of immense benefit to anyone who aspires to grow in living life more fully and authentically. His guidance is based not upon faith, persuasion, or claims of knowledge of "truth." He presents instead his vision of what being better means and what its attainment may require of us, but he does not regard this presentation of stimulating ideas and possibilities as sufficient. Rather, we are encouraged to explore empirically and experientially the validity of his suggestions through participation in a series of fifty-nine process activities. In addition, he makes the uncommon assertion that learning and being better are actions, not merely ideas. Learning is not the acquisition of information alone, but a process that requires that the information be acted upon in the real world before it truly can be said to have been learned. The reader is challenged to be better not just in thought, but in deed.

At each step of his presentation, Dr. Perticone provides exercises and suggestions so that we, ourselves, are able to consider, refine, and validate notions of who and what we are and how to be better. Our attention is directed to our inner space where we are encouraged to locate and awaken the neglected or dormant resources present in every human being and apply them in the world. We are offered tools that will enable us to wrest free from dogma and conditioning as the



foundation of our beliefs about what being better means. In its place we are urged to reclaim and to be guided by personal truth, a truth that is to be found not in any pill but within each of us.

If art is the giving of expression to an inner vision, then Dr. Peticone is encouraging us to become the artists of our own lives. By increments, we are led to explore and to immerse ourselves fully in life—first our own, then the lives of others, and ultimately the source of life itself. Perhaps it is more accurate to say we are led to realize the connections that already exist, but that we often may not notice. In setting forth in this volume his hard-won insights for the benefit of others, Dr. Peticone demonstrates his own commitment to the principles and discoveries that he describes. His own explorations and discoveries, along with the carefully crafted activities that may help others in their own explorations, are presented humbly but fearlessly, with his characteristic clarity and unmistakable compassion for all of us who want to be better in the truest sense.

JOHN B. RUSKOWSKI, PH.D.



## PREFACE

The words that comprise the title of this book, *The Art of Being Better*, were selected to convey a comparative meaning, namely that there is what we are, and there is what we can become. “Being Better” implies a process of improvement, in this case one that is ongoing, but improvement of what? The answer is the improvement of you, the Reader, whoever and whatever you might be. This may seem a bit presumptuous since I don’t know anything about you personally. Then, you may ask, how am I to know that any improvement in you is needed or even possible? Let me suggest something to you. We are brothers and sisters under the skin and more alike than different from one another. It doesn’t matter who you are, how much success you have attained, or how well-respected you might be since these conditions are relevant to the present, while “being better” refers to a goal yet to be attained. You may believe that you are prosperous, happy, and trouble-free, and by your standards you indeed may be all these things, but such conditions are fleeting and subject to change as a result of intentional or capricious circumstances that can arise in a matter of seconds, and even if all goes well, change is inevitable. What provides happiness for you now might not fit the bill as you grow older and your circumstances alter. In addition, and as unlikely as it may seem at this point in your life, you probably are unaware of what your potentials really are or what your true purpose is unless, of course, you have been blessed by some form of illumination provided from a transcendental domain, a source that is not to be found on any road map you can purchase.

I say these things because they apply to you, to me, and to everyone who lives and breathes. There are limits to sensing, perceiving, and understanding that have to do with the way we are made. As members of our species we have evolved over time, but the sensory

and neurological systems that now regulate our bodies and minds are hardly sufficient to permit a full comprehension of the simplest object as it really is, if, indeed, it exists at all. The restrictions imposed on us by our physiology, not to mention our psychology and the conditioning that social circumstances provide, are all the more powerful because most of us are unaware of the extent to which they influence and limit us. Yes, we have scientists, philosophers, theologians, and teachers who strive to bring us closer to what we hope will be a better understanding of our world, but the conclusions they share remain the interpretations and conceptualizations of fallible mortals. The knowledge they offer, therefore, is subject to error and always must be open to revision. Although we may see the steps and degrees of difference in both consciousness and competence that exist between the lower and higher life forms, we cannot really presume that human beings represents the top of the line with nothing beyond that is more competent, cognizant, or knowledgeable.

“Being better” refers to improvement, but not only at one level. In just how many areas advancement is possible one cannot be completely certain, but it seems reasonable to focus on three, the material, mental, and transpersonal. These are presented and discussed sequentially, and you will be encouraged to apply the concepts practically in your day-to-day life so you can demonstrate for yourself what their meaning and value may be.

Throughout its pages, a prime intention of this book is to stimulate an awareness of your *Authentic Self* through the presentation of ideas and practical exercises designed to help you develop a perspective that is wide enough to include these three levels of experience and to profit from what they have to offer. You will be encouraged to consider the option of “being better” than you presently are, not in terms of social prominence or financial gain, but in a greater recognition of the miracle that life represents and an increased awareness of the wonderful possibilities that have been deemphasized, if not ignored, for expanding your consciousness and fulfilling the promise of what you truly can be.

EUGENE X. PERTICONE

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author expresses his thanks to Dr. John B. Ruskowski for taking the time to review the draft of the manuscript and for offering his helpful editorial suggestions. I also am most pleased that he was willing to write the Foreword that is included in this book. Thanks are due to the many students who shared their perspectives and experiences while they participated in the various growth courses and seminars I have taught and so instructed me in the nature of the self-growth processes. The many teachers I have had, some of whom I have never personally met, are far too numerous to mention, but as dedicated instructors, I am confident that they know how important their guidance is to one who wishes to expand both knowledge and awareness. And, of course, I am particularly grateful to my Inner Friend who prods me, entices me, and presents me with important insights whether I want them disclosed to me or not. Finally, sincere thanks are due my wife, Nancy, who tolerated my frequent disappearances while I sat for long hours before the keyboard in order to complete this project.



## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Foreword by John B. Ruskowski</i> .....	vii
<i>Preface</i> .....	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i> .....	xiii
 <i>Chapter</i>	
1. AN INVITATION TO BEING BETTER .....	.3
What Am I Getting Into? .....	.3
Little Invitations .....	.6
Encouragement and a Word of Caution .....	.7
Being Flexible .....	.8
Accepting the Challenge .....	.9
Ready to Begin .....	.11
2. THE CHALLENGE OF BEING BETTER .....	.13
A Personal Look Backward .....	.13
A Program That Is Always Running .....	.15
Wearing a Mask .....	.16
The Need to Appear Acceptable or More .....	.19
3. ACCEPTING YOURSELF .....	.23
A Crucial Dimension of Personhood .....	.23
Self-acceptance versus Self-approval .....	.27
Acquiring the Attitude .....	.29
4. PERSON AND PERSONALITY .....	.33
What is a Person? .....	.33
Working with Personal Traits .....	.37

5.	DOING WHAT YOU WANT	.43
	Appropriate Assertiveness	.43
	Obstacles to Self-assertion	.45
	A Plan for Acting Assertively	.47
6.	RELATING RESPONSIBLY TO OTHERS	.52
	Tendencies, Similar and Dissimilar	.52
	Honoring Others as Well as Yourself	.53
	Friendship	.58
7.	EXPANDING YOUR PERSONHOOD	.63
	Person and Personality Again	.63
	Improving Personality	.64
	Coping Techniques and Defense Mechanisms	.66
	The Motivational Factor	.71
8.	BEING A CAUSAL PERSON	.75
	Inner and Outer Dimensions	.75
	What “Being Causal” Means	.75
	Focused Awareness	.76
	Moving Into the Objectively-observing Self	.78
	The Power of Intention	.80
	Thinking about Goals	.82
	The Role of Expectancy	.83
9.	THE SEARCH FOR WHAT IS TRUE	.87
	Opinions are Not Truth	.87
	Well-considered Opinions	.90
	A Karmic View of “Good” and “Bad”	.92
	A Psychological View of “Good” and “Bad”	.93
10.	BE GUIDED BY YOUR “TRUTH”	.98
	Taking a Stand	.98
	External Resources to Guide You	.100
	Consummating What You Learn	.105
	Endnotes	.108



11.	OPENING TO NEW POSSIBILITIES .....	109
	Focusing on You .....	109
	Authentic and Counterfeit Selves .....	110
	Moving Toward a Higher Self .....	116
	Endnotes .....	118
12.	OBJECTIVITY AND THE IMPERSONAL SELF .....	119
	Developing Objective Self-awareness .....	119
	Your Impersonal Self and Nonjudgment .....	125
	Objectivity and Well-considered Opinion .....	126
13.	MOVING INWARD .....	129
	Preliminaries to Turning Inward .....	129
	The Positive Pause .....	133
	An Inner Friend .....	136
	Contacting Your Inner Friend .....	137
	Endnotes .....	141
14.	MENTAL SELF-PROTECTION .....	143
	The Importance of Vigilance .....	143
	Canceling Mental Pollutants .....	145
	A Variation for Canceling Pollutants .....	149
	From Negative to Positive and Beyond .....	151
15.	INNER CONVERSATIONS .....	154
	Unknowable, But Useful Dynamics .....	154
	Messages from the Inner Friend .....	157
16.	LIVING WHAT YOU LEARN .....	163
	More on Expanded Definitions .....	163
	Nonproficient Action .....	165
	Wholeheartedness .....	168
	Endnotes .....	173
17.	TRANSPERSONAL QUALITIES AND ELEVATED ATTRIBUTES .....	174

	Personal and Transpersonal Aspects . . . . .	174
	Awareness of Higher Attributes . . . . .	179
	Developing Elevated Attributes . . . . .	181
	Personal Use of a Transpersonal Quality . . . . .	184
18.	REMEMBERING REVERENCE . . . . .	188
	A Special Quality . . . . .	188
	Reverence and Personal Growth . . . . .	191
	The Experience of Awe . . . . .	193
	Reverence and Love . . . . .	194
19.	SEEKING STILLNESS . . . . .	199
	The Uses of Being Still . . . . .	199
	Creating Mental and Psychic Space . . . . .	201
	Meditation . . . . .	203
	Appreciating Solitude . . . . .	207
20.	A TIME TO REVIEW . . . . .	211
21.	CONTINUING THE JOURNEY . . . . .	225
	The Option to Continue . . . . .	225
	Limits, Perception, and Knowledge . . . . .	227
	Knowing More Fully . . . . .	228
	Choosing What to Know . . . . .	232
	A Final Consideration . . . . .	234
	<i>References</i> . . . . .	237
	<i>Suggested Readings</i> . . . . .	238
	<i>Index</i> . . . . .	239

## LIST OF PROCESS ACTIVITIES

<i>Process Number</i>	<i>Process Name</i>	<i>Page</i>
1	Perceptions of You . . . . .	17
2	Your Personal Worth . . . . .	19
3	Appearances . . . . .	21
4	Images of Self . . . . .	24
5	Rating Self-acceptance . . . . .	26
6	Rating Self-approval . . . . .	30
7	Defining <i>Person</i> . . . . .	35
8	What Are Traits? . . . . .	38
9	Your Personal Traits . . . . .	40
10	Modifying Your Traits . . . . .	41
11	Rating Your Assertiveness . . . . .	45
12	Practicing Assertiveness . . . . .	49
13	Attitudes Toward Others . . . . .	56
14	Abou Ben Adhem . . . . .	57
15	Friendship . . . . .	60
16	Observing Observing . . . . .	65
17	Coping Mechanisms . . . . .	67
18	Defense Mechanisms . . . . .	69
19	Direction and Persistence . . . . .	72
20	Pursuing a Goal . . . . .	73
21	Centering Yourself . . . . .	78
22	Intention . . . . .	80
23	Expectancy . . . . .	84
24	Your Personal Views . . . . .	88
25	Payback Principle . . . . .	93
26	Constructive versus Destructive . . . . .	96

27	External Codes . . . . .	101
28	Your Personal Code . . . . .	104
29	Extended Definition of Learning . . . . .	107
30	Authentic and Counterfeit Self . . . . .	111
31	Authentic Self . . . . .	115
32	Objective Awareness . . . . .	121
33	Remembering Yourself . . . . .	123
34	Assessment versus Judgment . . . . .	127
35	Personality Types . . . . .	131
36	Positive Pause . . . . .	134
37	Inner Friend . . . . .	137
38	Mental and Psychic Pollutants . . . . .	144
39	Canceling Pollutants . . . . .	146
40	Using Your Elicitor . . . . .	147
41	Positive Inputting . . . . .	151
42	Dream Record . . . . .	158
43	Answers from Within . . . . .	161
44	Expanded Definition . . . . .	164
45	Action . . . . .	166
46	Beyond the Commonplace . . . . .	169
47	Deed . . . . .	172
48	Transpersonal Experiences . . . . .	177
49	Transpersonal Qualities . . . . .	180
50	Developing Attributes . . . . .	182
51	Infusing Qualities . . . . .	185
52	Defining Reverence . . . . .	189
53	Reverence and First Cause . . . . .	192
54	Levels of Love . . . . .	196
55	Tolerating Inactivity . . . . .	201
56	Meditating . . . . .	204
57	Solitude . . . . .	208
58	Deeper Knowing . . . . .	229
59	Your Interests . . . . .	232

# **THE ART OF BEING BETTER**



## Chapter 1

### AN INVITATION TO BEING BETTER

#### WHAT AM I GETTING INTO?

**B**efore getting started, it is important to explain what the aims of this book are and what they are not. *The Art of Being Better* is written to serve two main purposes. The first is to help you to expand your consciousness of, and appreciation for, the experience of personhood. The second is to share techniques the author has explored, experimented with, and applied over many years that have proven most facilitative for him and a good many of the people with whom he has had occasion to work. The work I speak of has to do with the efforts one may undertake in order to be more successful in living a full and meaningful life. The term *successful*, of course, will connote different things to different people, but in this book three aspects are taken into account from which the quality of one's life might best be considered. These are the material (physical and practical), the mental (intellectual and intrapsychic), and the transpersonal (transcendent). The first of these has to do with the day-to-day demands of the phenomenal world and the effectiveness and appropriateness of the responses made to them. The second concerns the very real, but invisible mental and psychodynamic processes that underlie responses to the observable objects and ongoing life events presented to the senses. The third involves the plane of consciousness that connects each individual to the greater whole, that is, to the forces and purposes of *all* creation, the domain of experience that includes your personal history and development, but extends well beyond it.

In no way, however, does this book pretend to be a statement of the only way or the correct way to define *success* because it is ultimately up to *you* to decide what should be included in that term's definition. Nor does the book insist that you abandon your present world view, your values, or your principles. The same applies to any traits or habits, desirable or undesirable, that characterize you. In fact, it leaves any and all changes that you may wish to work toward entirely up to you. Although you are responsible for making your own decisions and plotting your own course, you will be encouraged to expand the awareness of your personhood and face some growth-inducing challenges, little ones at first, bigger ones as you progress. You will be asked to consider, for example, whether or not the decisions you make in daily life are preferences that you *freely choose* or options that you feel *compelled* to adopt. You also will be asked to examine your perceptions so that you may assess your degree of objectivity when you seek to give meaning to experience, and you will be prompted to do some "stretching." This will be something you can accomplish quite easily and without being overly taxed or throwing yourself off balance. "Stretching" means engaging in new learning in a special way, but only at a level that is well within your capability to understand and apply.

In this book, in other words, the ideas and techniques that concern "being better" are presented in a manner that allows you to examine concepts and experiment with them practically and easily so you can determine for yourself their worth and utility. The approach taken necessarily is based on premises that you will be asked to consider and use as guides for thought and action. You are free to reject the premises if you wish, but then this work will not be for you. On the other hand, when the premises are explicitly stated, I am confident that you will find them reasonable and eventually confirm their worth as you apply them in your daily life. Two central premises to which I refer are the following:

Premise: Valuing what is true, rather than what appears to be true, is fundamental to any worthwhile effort one makes to understand what being a better person means and what its attainment involves.

Premise: It is better to act constructively, rather than destructively, when striving to meet goals or deal with life problems.



As you read further, the importance and relevance of these two premises will become clearer, but a few words about them are in order now.

With respect to the first-stated premise, *truth*, or what is *real*, is the basic issue, and while many of us may hold an opinion to the contrary, truth is a very elusive thing. Indeed, even the most sincere and learned individual is likely to forget that what one professes about anything is actually nothing more than a *belief* about truth and not the actual and *experiential knowledge* of truth. This conclusion may fly in the face of what your common sense seems to tell you, and perhaps you will decide to reject the notion altogether. Then again, if you are certain that what you already “know” is the honest-to-goodness truth, why be afraid to subject it to your inspection? Truth certainly should be strong enough to withstand objective scrutiny. A willingness to examine your views objectively is essential to personal growth.

Concerning the second-stated premise, the history of humankind reveals the disastrous results of destructive approaches to goal-attainment and problem-resolution. The costs at the individual and societal levels have been both cruel and staggering and hardly need comment. This unfortunately has been the case in the past and is critically and most dangerously so in the present. Survival itself may rest on humankind’s decision to move from destructive choices to options whose effects are constructive. Doing what is constructive rather than destructive implies that actions taken will have outcomes that are benevolent rather than damaging, an ideal that is sometimes difficult to achieve, but is generally more appropriate than not. It always should be the first consideration where choice is possible.

To return to the purposes of this book, if you are sincere in your desire to be better as a person and decide to make such improvement your quest, you will find that you are doing much more than beginning a project that could have interesting and useful consequences. You may discover that you have embarked on an exciting adventure, and if you stay the course, it eventually will dawn on you that you have been traveling the path of personal growth and discovery all along, but perhaps without a clear awareness that you were doing so. This adventure simply may be your part in the inevitable unfolding of the human tendency to evolve to ever-higher levels of being.

**LITTLE INVITATIONS**

Undoubtedly, your life already has presented you with numerous “invitations” to experience something new. By this I mean that you occasionally have had an awareness of the opportunity to choose something that would be a bit out of the ordinary, some different way of thinking or acting, for example, that might get you out of a rut you have been in, or reveal to you an important idea not considered previously. But such “invitations” typically were not passive or inert. More likely, they were nudges from within that came to you privately, unexpectedly, and somewhat insistently. They may have seemed inexplicable and were probably unrelated to what you consciously were doing or thinking at the time. For instance, while browsing in a book store, a title or an author’s name oddly may have attracted you. The impulse to acquire that particular book, although strong, may have appeared frivolous or even silly. To purchase it would have seemed a waste of money since you had no clear notion of what the book was about, although you may have come across the author’s name in the past and felt drawn to it then. Such a little “invitation” may not have been recognized for what it was: a knowledgeable voice inside that was attempting to bring something potentially useful or important to your attention. You actually may have intuited the purposefulness of the prompting, but nevertheless concluded that it would be foolish to respond to such an “illogical” urge. However, by not acting on it, a very valuable opportunity may have been lost.

I recall a time spent hiking in a desolate area of a southwestern state with the girl I would one day marry. As we trekked over a hilly portion of the primitive terrain, I had the impulse to pick up some bits of rock that lay scattered here and there on the ground. I had neither geological training nor an interest in rock collecting, but the urge to gather up the random bits of stone was quite strong. So without questioning my purpose, I gathered a number of samples and stuffed them into my camera bag. On returning home from the excursion, I promptly forgot about them.

About two weeks later, while sitting at my office desk, the image of myself collecting the rocks came to mind, and I again experienced a strong urge, much as if I was being instructed to do something. This time it was to retrieve the rocks from my camera bag and examine

them. When I did this and looked closely at them under the light of a desk lamp, I saw that each rock was covered by yellow markings I hadn't noticed earlier, but now suspected were streaks of gold. Since the gold, which it later was confirmed to be, was not imbedded *in* the rocks, but appeared only on their surfaces, the conclusion offered me by an experienced prospector was that these "ordinary" stone fragments had somehow scraped or rolled against an exposed vein of the precious metal and so picked up the yellow traces. It seems my future wife and I inadvertently had been wandering about an area where a natural treasure might be found!

What actually impressed me the most about the discovery, however, was the peculiar nature of the prompting, or little "invitation," to collect the rocks in the first place. It was as if a separate intelligence inside me "knew" there was something valuable to be found if I chose to look for it. This inner source of knowledge, I have come to realize, is itself a very great treasure.

Now it may be your turn. Perhaps your picking up this book has been a response to one of these "invitations," and deciding to read further could be an indication that you are ready to accept the nudge from within to discover what its special meaning may be for you. If you do discover that meaning, it conceivably could turn out to be of substantial value, even something that could change your life for the better. Such a prospect may seem far-fetched at the moment, but I do not think it is. In fact, it is my honest anticipation, as well as my sincere wish, that the concepts and methods presented in these pages will be put to very practical and beneficial use by you.

### **ENCOURAGEMENT AND A WORD OF CAUTION**

Assuming that you have reflected on the importance of "being better," and that you also have decided to move seriously in this direction, the question arises: How do you make it happen?

Throughout the ages, many women and men have discovered what they believe "being better" means and what it entails, and then have offered suggestions to help others get there also. Interestingly, such inspired ones not only have been the philosophers and poets, prophets and saints who became famous for their teachings and the ways in

which they lived, but include very ordinary and less well-known figures as well. The fact is that *anyone can be better* if the awareness of the possibility exists and the intention to improve oneself is present. *Awareness* is the condition that brings the idea to light; *intention* is the resolve to change the idea to a fact. Awareness and intention are keys to success in any endeavor. If you agree with this perspective, you also must see that it is one thing to believe that “being better” is a worthwhile goal, yet quite another to commit yourself to turning that sentiment into an authentic outcome, but it can be done.

My own stance is that the aspiration for personal improvement is not only a very desirable one; it is an essential one. The record suggests that the urge to seek something higher always has been present in the collective consciousness of humanity although the expression of this drive often has been perverted by antagonistic and more regressive tendencies also common to our species. Nevertheless, the impetus for “being better” can be considered a universal impulse that has revealed itself in the lives of individuals, cultures, and nations alike. It is a promise of the future, one that is wholly consistent with both practical and spiritual orientations because it follows the ubiquitous life impulse of evolution itself.

However, there is a danger to be mindful of, and that is the potential risk of taking someone else’s notion of what “being better” involves and converting it into a dogmatic world view or creed that paradoxically will interfere with further evolution. Even a cursory review of world history, from the remote past to the recent present, will disclose the disastrous effects of any dogmatism or fanaticism that attempts to force its will on people, especially when it is done in the name of a holy, fervently political, or even scientific notion. I would suggest that this danger applies not only to convictions held in these categories, but to *any* view that a person rigidly holds about *anything*, whether it is holy, political, or otherwise.

### **BEING FLEXIBLE**

You probably have concluded by now that identifying what constitutes “being better” is at best a very subjective thing, and a definition of the term, therefore, will be nothing more than a matter of opinion.