



# Life Is a Conversation

Author August Gold Delivers Weekly Inspiration

by AUGUST GOLD

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Sooner or later life's going to come along and knock you on your a--. No matter who you are, how high and mighty, rich or poor, spiritual or worldly, it is going to happen. The thing about getting knocked down is you can't change what happens to you once it's happened. You have no leverage. Your power lies in how you're going to respond to it: intelligently or unintelligently.

If you respond intelligently, the injury's going to grow you; respond unintelligently, and it's going to shrink you. The catch is that it's nearly impossible to respond intelligently until we understand one stupendously important thing about life: Life is a conversation.

When we don't know that, nothing makes sense. We don't understand why bad things happen to good people like us, and why bad things have to happen at all. In time we will call the hard experiences of our life, "God's will," which, of course, answers nothing but affords us the consolation of some comfort.

Twenty years ago I was in the first year of my work as a spiritual counselor. I conducted my business out of my office, which was really my apartment. With my handful of clients I made just enough money to pay my rent&until the neighborhood I was living in was given an "official" name: The Flat Iron District.

Overnight rents skyrocketed. I got a notice slipped under my front door that my rent was being increased \$500. That was a 50 percent increase and it was unfair. I was angry at being wronged. Within minutes I was on the phone with the NYC Office of Landlord-Tenant Relations. They explained that in a building that was not rent-controlled or stabilized, the landlord was free to charge whatever the market would bear. I was forced to bear it or move, however neither was an option; I didn't have the money to stay and I didn't have the money to move.

Einstein says that the mind that created the problem in our life isn't the same mind that can solve it. So I turned within. Call it what you will -- I call it prayer. My prayer was short, and it was clear: "Shrink the rent!" What I heard within my heart in response to that prayer taught me something about Life that would change the way I lived my life forever. I heard these exact words. "Do not ask me to shrink Life, ask me to grow you."

The sacred text of the Tao Te Ching, the Taoist philosophy of life written in 81 verses about 3,500 years ago, says in Verse 29, "All of life is a movement towards perfection." The Greek root of the word "perfection" is completion, wholeness. Greatness, even. In other words, Life leads us into becoming the whole and complete person we were born to be by bringing to us experiences that awaken our deeper,

greater nature within. Life opens a way so that, as Robert Browning saw it, "the imprisoned splendor may escape."

Incredible as it sounds, this means that Life isn't happening to us, it's happening for us. That is why the great Buddhist teacher Pema Chodren advises us to meet each experience of our life with the words: "I agree, I agree." That is why D.H. Lawrence wrote that when the "three strange angels" come knocking on our door, we must admit them. That is why in the book "The Prayer Chest" that I wrote with Joel Fotinos years back, the third and most important secret of answered prayer was "Welcome everything." For if everything in Life is coming to grow us, then by asking life to shrink our rent, or our relationship problems, or our illness or our whatever, we are telling life not to do the job that it is designed to do. We are stopping the flow of life from flowing through us because we don't realize that the strange angel that is knocking on our door is Life's messenger of growth. And it's usually the strange angels that light a fire under our a-- and get us going faster and farther than the Hallmark ones.

Life is a conversation means that without exception Life brings us the experiences we need in order to find within ourselves the greatness that is needed to overcome any obstacle. "Within, within," verse 62 of the Tao Te Ching claims, "this is where the world's treasure has always been." Life leads us down below our everyday surface selves to find the gold buried in the rich, dark soil of our depths. There we find what we're really made of and who we really are.

But because we don't know that Life is a conversation about our growth, humankind sends its prayers out to the stratosphere for light and ease and peace and quiet and nice-things-only-please to prevail. And the majority of those prayers -- if not all of them -- seem not to be answered. The truth is they are answered!

They are answered by bringing us challenges, sometimes big challenges -- the very ones that only our bigger Self can overcome. That's the idea -- to take our bigger Self out of hiding, the bigger self we don't even know is indwelling until we have reason to call on it. Only our bigger Self is big enough to handle the insurmountable problem for it doesn't see the problem as a problem, but as an opportunity. An opportunity to grow like everything else in nature. For when does the baby bird learn that it has wings and how to use them except in the seemingly heartless moment when its mother pushes it from the nest. Only when we start seeing our Life in this way do we begin to live the greater story of our lives.

To enter the conversation with Life, we have only to change one key word: We have to stop asking why this is happening to me, and start asking why it is happening for me?

In the Brothers Grimm fairy tale "The Three Languages," when the son is disowned by his father and sent into the woods to die, he doesn't spend the rest of his days asking "Why me?" He enters the conversation with Life by moving ahead on the path, even when it leads him to the basement of an old tower filled with angry, wild dogs. To survive he must find a way to calm and understand them. Facing that outrageous obstacle helped him understand who he truly was, and grew him into the man Life needed him to be. The hero's journey is not for heroes. It is the true journey our soul takes through this life here on Earth. It is our journey.

The world problems that we collectively face, while far larger and more complex, are no different than the ones that face us in our personal lives. We need to enter the conversation, and respond intelligently. We need to stop asking Life to "Shrink the rent," and instead ask Life to "Grow me." We need to stop asking, "Why is this happening to me," and instead ask, "Why is this happening for me?" When we "welcome everything" we waste no time with blame.

In this way we see every experience in Life for what it truly is: a conversation, a movement toward our greater wholeness. This safe and natural process that grows us to a size bigger than the problems that confront us is called transformation. Only as we transform can we transform the world.

*To hear August Gold speak, come to "BREAKTHRU w/August Gold" held in the Concert Hall at the Ethical Culture Society on the first Wednesdays of the month. She is the founder and director of Sacred Center New York, a spiritual teacher and counselor for 20 years in New York City, and an award-winning author.*

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