

Revel in spiritual journey that is life

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The Facts

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“Turning and turning in the
widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the
falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre
cannot hold. ...
The best lack all conviction,
while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity”
— W. B. Yeats,
“The Second Coming,” (1920).

This Yeats passage seems universally true for all generations. We cannot recall the soaring falcon. Things seem to fall apart, especially in the wake of a major hurricane. Some around us seem sotted with apathy. Some are full of naïve “passionate intensity” in times of trials.

Life is a series of cycles, widening gyres, spirals in particular. We live in spirals of zeniths and nadirs, high points and low points. We have a good year with personal bests; we have a poor year with personal worsts. We grow older, we run slower, we have more aches and pains.

I became a born-again runner in my early 40s. I was full of “passionate intensity.” I have gone through some severe, sidelining injuries and real

spiritual nadirs. I have experienced unbelievable highs, particularly when I became a marathoner and then a triathlete.

I still am passionate about running on the threshold of 70. After three decades of training and running, swimming and cycling, I still am passionate about my physical activities.

When I hit those low points, those dark nights of the soul and those dark nights of the sole, I sustain my passion and my intensity by reminding myself that I still am running, and many around me cannot run or have abandoned running. I chant the mantra, “Accept your limitations; lower your expectations. Revel in the joy of following your bliss.”



Father Jim Abernathy, former rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Freeport, once told me when faith fades, others in your spiritual community have faith enough to sustain you in spiritual low points, that is if you belong to a spiritual community. The same is true of physical fitness, that is if you belong to a physical fitness community. We cannot stand alone.

“I ran to regain control of my life,” said the late cardiologist and running guru George Sheehan in “Personal Best” (Rodale Press, 1989). “I ran to find myself.”

I began my running regimen in my early 40s for the

same reasons. I was fat, smoked a couple of packs of cigarettes a day and ate too much. I was on track for an early heart attack.

I still run to control my life, to find myself. I still find running a journey of self exploration, even more so as I grow older. Those who cannot sustain their passion for a physical fitness regimen in the wake of injuries, physical and spiritual nadirs and the inexorable ravages of age, lose control of their lives. They lose themselves just as the falconer in Yeats’ poem loses control of the soaring falcon. The falconer represents the physical self; the falcon represents the soul or spirit. If we remain earthbound in the “busyness” of the chaotic world around us, “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.”

“Life is a permanent bootcamp,” Sheehan said. “We must always be in training — and training not only for our bodies but our minds and spirits as well.”

“The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation,” said Henry David Thoreau in *Walden*, “... it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.”

Things seem to fall apart in the chaos all around us. We lose the centers in our spiral journeys in life. Revel in the splendor of those high points; accept the disappointments of those spiritual and physical nadirs. Revel, too, in the spiral spiritual journey that is your life.

Return to that center. Carpe diem.