

Lynne Twist

## Two Quotes I Live My Life By

*Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too.*

*All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets:*

*Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.  
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it!*

— **William Hutchison Murray**

The above quote opens my most recent book, *Living a Committed Life: Finding Freedom and Fulfilment in a Purpose Larger Than Yourself*. Murray conveys the essence of the power of commitment to transform your life. Here, I am speaking of commitment as dedication to a cause or purpose larger than yourself, a commitment to the common good -- to something that actually takes you out of yourself and into the realm of service. It is what is being called for in these times of turmoil and transformation, and it will take many millions of us living purposeful lives -- lives of commitment to the future rather than to just our own comfort and desires.

Living a committed life involves making a commitment by taking a stand and giving your word that you will live into that stand and have it guide your life. It requires keeping that commitment in the face of challenges by creating a context of possibility and transformation. You learn to pay attention, to train yourself to navigate the upsets and challenges and learn from and be nourished by them. Even life's difficulties show up differently -- in a way that you are served by them rather than being taken down by them. When you can learn to turn breakdowns into breakthroughs, then whatever comes at you in life can become a gift -- a job loss, a death, cancer, the breakup of a marriage -- it's all there to teach you, to empower you somehow.

In committing to a vision, a purpose larger than your own life, you are freed from the smallness and pettiness of your own mind and catapulted out of anxiety and fear into inspired action. That is what is conveyed in this second quote that has sat on the mantel above my fireplace for decades. It is from British writer and activist George Bernard Shaw.

*This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.*

*I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.*

*I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I've got a hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.*

**– George Bernard Shaw**

For me, this quote epitomizes the meaning of commitment. Over the years, I have seen my own “selfish little clod of ailments and grievances” disappear as I devoted myself to a higher calling.

A profound commitment is a declaration of the soul of who you are and what you're up to this lifetime. It can be the most powerful action a person can take, life-altering and life-defining. A commitment larger than your own wants and needs lifts you out of the landscape circumstances and personal desires, the petty day-to-day moods, irritations and upsets about things not going your way. It becomes the context of your life, and it's especially powerful when connected to the needs of the world that touch your heart. It enables you to take your grievances and your heartache about the world and do something about it -- to respond to, to contribute what you have to give.

To me, Shaw's first line is probably the most important one. “This is the true joy in life.” It is truly joyous and fulfilling to focus your talents and energy on making a difference in the world. Living a committed life can have tremendous challenges, but its benefits are enormous. Imagine seeing yourself as a splendid torch lighting the way for future generations!