



A

Little Book  
of Life's  
Lessons



**Earle Gray**

## **LITTLE BOOKS**

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Canadian Speeches

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## 10 commandments

I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth.

Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.

Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land

which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Thou shalt not kill.

Neither shalt thou commit adultery.

Neither shalt thou steal.

Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour.

Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's

*King James Bible, Deuteronomy 5:6-21*

## **5 rules**

1. Let not one kill any living thing.
2. Let not one take what is not given to him.
3. Let not one speak falsely.
4. Let not one drink intoxicating liquors.
5. Let not one be unchaste.

*The Five Moral Rules of Buddha (Prince Siddhartha Gautama, 563-483 BC).*

## **Love is better than anger**

My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world.

*Jack Layton (1950-2011), one of Canada's best-loved politicians who led his New Democratic Party to its greatest election victory in Parliament in May, 2011. A little more than four months later, Layton was seriously ill with cancer when he wrote this, the concluding paragraph of an open letter to his friends and supporters on August 20. He died less than 48 hours later.*

# The first laws

Written laws that seek to enforce varying concepts of rules of life date back more than 4,000 years to Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization that lay between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, stretching from the Persian Gulf northwest to the mountains of Turkey, embracing parts of what are now Iran, Iraq and Kuwait. The laws were scratched on stone monuments, or steles. They were foundations stones of civilization.

*Hammurabi's code of 282 laws, circa 1,750 BC, is inscribed on a stone pillar, 7-feet-5-inches high. BELOW. Engraving at the top depicts Shamash, the sun god, investing Hammurabi with royal power.*



The oldest of the known laws are said by scholars to be remarkably lenient for their time, prescribing the death penalty only for murder, robbery, adultery and rape, imposing monetary fines for other crimes while seeking to promote fairness and peace. Three hundred years later, a more extensive code of Mesopotamian laws was much harsher, demanding death for even petty crimes.

The oldest known published laws were laid down by King Ur-Nammu at the city of Ur near the southern end of Mesopotamia about 2,100 BC. Fragments were discovered in the 1950s and 60s, enabling archeologists to reconstruct and translate some 40 of the 57 laws, known as “The Code of Ur-Nammu.”

In the prologue to his laws, King Ur, “the mighty warrior,” says he founded the code “in accordance with his principles of equity and truth.” He vowed to “establish equity in the land; he banished malediction, violence and strife... The orphan was not delivered up to the rich man; the widow was not delivered up to the mighty man; the man of one shekel was not delivered to the man of one mina.” [One mina of silver was worth 60 shekels.]

Violent men who injured others had to pay fines: half a mina for the loss of one eye; 10 shekels for cutting off a foot; one mina for smashing a limb with a club; two-thirds of a mina for cutting off a nose with a copper knife; two shekels for knocking out a tooth.

But not all was perfectly fair. Women and slaves were

**REMEMBER** the five simple rules to be happy. 1) Free your heart from hatred. 2) Free your mind from worries. 3) Live simply. 4) Give more. 5) Expect less.

second best under Ur law. If a wife were to seduce someone else's husband, "they shall slay that woman, but the male shall be set free." A man who flowers the virgin wife of another young man is to be killed, but the man who "deflowered the virgin slave woman of another man" had only to pay five shekels of silver.

More famous are the laws of a mightier king than Ur. King Hammurabi conquered all Mesopotamia, and handed down his code of 282 laws sometime during his reign between, 1,792 and 1,750 BC, at his capital, Babylon, 80 kilometres south of present Baghdad. The stele on which Hammurabi's code is scratched is a dark, polished, cylindrical stone that stands more than seven feet high. The stele was on public display in Babylon, where everyone could see the laws and the literate few could read them. After Hammurabi's death his kingdom crumbled. The stele was stolen and moved to Persia (now Iran). The French discovered it in 1901 and moved it to the Louvre Museum in Paris, where it is on display.

The first English translation was published in Edinburgh, London and New York in 1903. Hammurabi's

**MANY UNDESERVING** men are rich, while their betters are poor. But we will not exchange what we are for what they have, since the one gift abides while the other passes from man to man. *Solon (638-559 BC), Greek statesman who relieved the city state of poverty and hunger, and laid the foundation for the later emergence of Athenian democracy. Plutarch, Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans (also known as Parallel Lives), circa 110 AD.*

code was described as “one of the most important monuments in the history of the human race.” For half a century it was the oldest known set of published laws.

Hammurabi’s laws governed the conduct of business and protection of private property as much as personal conduct. They included such matters as the price of brides, the treatment of children, concubines, captives and slaves; brawling in a wine shop, perjury and the cultivation of fields. A tenant’s rent for a garden was fixed at two-thirds of his produce.

The first two laws proscribed the death penalty for casting spells. Death was also proscribed for stealing or holding stolen goods from the temple or the palace; for breaking into a house; for the woman who fails to seize rioters in her wine shop and drive them to the palace. The penalty for a novice priestess who enters a wine shop was to be burned to death. All told, death is called for in 26 of the 282 laws.

Hammurabi’s code may have been one of history’s most important monuments, as the publisher’s of the 1903 translation claimed, but its importance in the world was soon eclipsed by the Moasic code, the Jewish Torah, with its 365 prohibitions and 248 positive commandments. But here, too, there is the harshness of the death penalty: for adulterers, for children who curse their parents, and for the daughter of a priest who engages in prostitution—she is to be burned alive, much like the novice priestess who enters a wine shop under Hammurabi’s laws.

**TO LIVE HAPPY** ever after, don’t be after too much.

## A writer's triumph over pain

Surprising how things turn out better than feared when we meet adversity and pain with courage and resolve.

We are talking about Reynolds Price, a novelist whose “stories about ordinary people in rural North Carolina struggling to find their place in the world established him as one of the most important voices in modern Southern fiction,” according to his obituary in *New York Times*, January 21, 2011.

Born in Macon, North Carolina, Price lived all his life in northeastern Carolina, except for three years when he studied at Britain's Oxford University on a Rhodes scholarship. Before he died at age 77 in 2011 he wrote 13 novels; a dozen other books; and dozens of short stories. For more than half a century he taught writing and the poetry of 17th century English poet John Milton at Duke University.

At age 51, he suffered an adversity that might well have stopped the career of a lesser man. An eight-inch malignant tumour had wrapped itself around his spine, from the neck down. Operation and extensive radiation therapy removed the tumour and prevented any reoccurrence, but left him in excruciating pain and paralyzed from the waist down. Then hypnosis to relieve his pain brought an unexpected gift. The hypnosis brought

**I CAN LIVE** on \$80 million. At least, I think I can. *Media mogul Conrad Black (1944- ), on his diminished wealth, after serving 29 months of a 42-month sentence in a U.S. prison for fraud and obstruction of justice. Interview, Vanity Fair, October, 2011.*



*“My God, this is a  
great country!”*

EARLE GRAY

About Canada. By Earle Gray. 168 pp. 17x20.5 cm. Illustrated. Indexed. Soft cover, \$17.95. Toronto: Civil Sector Press, November 2012. ISBN 978-1-895589-95-5.

“A very valuable and readable book.” *Desmond Morton, O.C., McGill University historian, past director of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada.*

“Earle Gray knows amazing stuff about Canada. He has strong opinions about Canada too. It’s all there in About Canada. I’m a fan.” *Christopher Moore, best-selling popular historian, Governor General Award Winner in Chil-*

*dren's Literature for "Then and Now: A Short History of the World."*

"A bright, lively book that serves to remind Canadians that as a country we have done much to be proud of." *Robert Bothwell, historian, author of "The Penguin History of Canada."*

"This is Earle Gray unleashed. Canada's foremost oil historian delivers 1,000 years of intriguing Canadian history, everything we don't know—or thought we knew—about this fabulous country." *Robert Tremain, Oil Museum of Canada.*

"*About Canada* is a freight train of a book with boxcars full of sardonic self-appraisal, buckets of background, heaps of history, delightful details." *Munroe Scott, filmwriter, author, playwright*

"As a school teacher I try to help kids see the exciting parts of history and *About Canada* is a wonderful treasure trove of anecdotes I can use. I've been up nights reading and taking notes of some startling facts from this amazing research." *Bev Jaremko, Calgary high school teacher.*

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a flood of childhood memories that provided the material for two more novels, followed by a flood of more writing.

“Previously I’d average a book every two years at least... but I’d always said truthfully that writing was hard for me, very hard, and now it’s not,” Price said seven years after his operation. During a 13-year period after the operation that left him paralyzed and in pain, Price wrote eight of his 13 novels, two plays, three books of poetry, and eight books of essays, autobiography and other non-fiction.

A deep moral tone ran through much of Price’s writing. He was said to be “an unorthodox Christian, a non-churchgoing believer.” Price himself said that, “The whole point of learning about the human race presumably is to give it mercy.

## **Lessons from ancient Egypt**

*Ptahhotpe, circa 2,350 BC, was the vizier—the highest official to serve a pharaoh in ruling ancient Egypt—under King Iseis in the Egyptian Fifth Dynasty. Here is some of the advice he wrote for his son, as reported by William Kelly Simpson in The Maxims of Ptahhotpe (1973).*

Teach him what has been said in the past; then he will set a good example to the children of the magistrates, and judgment and all exactitude shall enter into him. Speak to him, for there is none born wise. Do not be arrogant because of your knowledge, but confer with the ignorant man as with the learned.

Beware an act of avarice; it is a bad and incurable disease.

Follow your desires as long as you live and do not perform more than is ordered; do not lessen the time of

following desire, for the wasting of time is an abomination to the spirit... When riches are gained, follow desire, for riches will not profit if one is sluggish.

One who is serious all day will never have a good time, while one who is frivolous all day will never establish a household.

*More maxims of Ptahhotpe, from Christian Jacq, French Egyptologist, in The Living Wisdom of Ancient Egypt.*

All conduct should be so straight that you can measure it with a plumb line.

Do not gossip in your neighbourhood, because people respect the silent.

To listen is better than anything, thus is born love.

As for the ignorant man who does not listen, he accomplishes nothing. He equates knowledge with ignorance, the useless with the harmful. He does everything which is detestable, so people get angry with him each day.

Only speak when you have something worth saying.

May your heart never be vain because of what you know. Take counsel from the ignorant as well as the wise.

So do not place any confidence in your heart in the accumulation of riches, since everything that you have is a gift from God.

**ANGRY MEN** are blind and foolish, for reason at such time takes flight and, in her absence, wrath plunders all the riches of the intellect, while the judgment remains the prisoner of its own pride. *Pietro Aretino, (1492-1557), Italian poet. Letter to Girolamo Quirini, November 21, 1537.*

## **Are men necessary?**

Recklessness, violence and stupidity are among the reasons why men don't live as long as women, according to a lead editorial in the *British Medical Journal*. And men, it is argued, are in danger of becoming increasingly irrelevant, even extinct.

“Despite having had most of the social determinants of health in their favour, men have higher mortality rates for all 15 leading causes of death and a life expectancy about seven years shorter than a woman's,” says the *Journal*. It blames the penchant of men to start and wage wars, drink too much, and accept stupid risks, from fast cars to sexually transmitted diseases.

And the one indispensable role of men — maintaining the species — could soon disappear.

“With the advent of sperm banks, in vitro fertilization, sex sorting techniques, sperm-independent fertilization of eggs with somatic [non-sperm] cells, human cloning, and same-sex marriages, it is reasonable to wonder about the future role of men in society,” the *Journal* states.

*Source: “Are Men in Danger of Extinction?” British Medical Journal, November 3, 2001.*

## **Dance, smell, marry**

Dancing is practiced in order to see whether lovers are healthy and suitable for one another; at the end of the dance the gentleman is permitted to kiss his mistress, in order that he may ascertain if she has agreeable breath. In this manner... dancing becomes necessary for the good of society. *Thoinot Arbeau (1520-1595), French priest and author who wrote under the pseudonym Jean Tabournet. La Gaillarde (1589).*

## **Cry, then get back up and go**

My first 430-km day I stopped three times in shops along the way because of rain. Each time I buried my face in my arms and cried. I had lost all hope. But when it came down to it, I got back up and went out there in the rain again to be battered and beaten some more before having to stop and cry again. You may have to take a breather every once in a while, but make sure you get back up.

*Cornel Dobrin, 26-year-old Langley, B.C. cyclist dipped his toes in the Pacific Ocean at English Bay, Vancouver, on Canada Day, July 1, 2009. After biking 7,200 kilometres, he tipped his toes in the Atlantic at St. John's, Newfoundland. He made the cross-Canada bicycle trip in a record 27 days, 5 hours and 30 minutes, beating the previous record by more than one day.*

## **God counts the tears**

All the blessings of a household come through the wife, therefore should her husband honour her... Men should be careful lest they cause women to weep, for God counts their tears. *Hebrew proverb. Hymen Polano, The Talmud Selections, Part Fourth. Proverbs and Sayings of the Rabbis (1876).*

## **Make your enemies happy**

When we hate our enemies, we give them power over us — power over our sleep, our appetites, our blood pressure, our health, and our happiness. Our enemies would dance with joy if they surmised that they would worry or lacerate us. Our hatred is not hurting them at all; it only turns our own days and nights into a hellish turmoil. *Dale Carnegie (1888-1955). Attributed.*

## **The Prayer of Saint Francis**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.  
Where there is injury, pardon.  
Where there is doubt, faith.  
Where there is darkness, light.  
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I  
May not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

*Sebastian Temple (Johann Sebastian von Templehoff, 1928-1997), South African-born British singer and composer. Make Me a Channel of Your Peace, a hymn based on The Prayer of Saint Francis, attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, although modern scholars have attributed it to a Franciscan, Jacopodi Toddi.*

## **The gift of an egg**

“You must have a vision, to believe in something. You must also have perseverance. There were times when my better sense wondered whether I should be continuing on this or settle down and do something normal people do.

“Sometimes you lose heart completely. It’s not so much the faith and the rewards, the belief that this path would lead to success. But it was faith that what I was doing was important.”

For Maurice Strong, the memory of the gift of a tiny egg from a starving woman means that pessimism is an act of betrayal.

It was 1984 and sub-Saharan Africa was in the midst of one of the continent's most devastating droughts. Two hundred million people in 30 countries were affected, and the survival of 30 million people was at imminent risk.

Strong, then under-secretary general of the United Nations, was travelling with a convoy of trucks heading for a temporary refugee camp in the Western Sudan. Before they reached the camp, they came across some "two or three hundred people sitting in little clusters in the dust by the side of the road," Strong writes in his book *Where on Earth Are We Going?* (2000). "There was nothing else there: no village, no huts, no trees, no shelter, no water, just the people." Over the protests of his officials, Strong orders that a bag of meal be dropped off at each cluster of people.

As the convoy pulls away, he notices that a woman with two small children have been missed. He orders a truck to return and provide them with a bag of meal. The woman tells Strong that she and her children had nothing to eat for several days, more days than she can remember. She presses in Strong's hands a gift: a tiny egg wrapped in a scrap of paper.

Unwilling to either keep a gift of food from a starving woman or affront her by refusing it, Strong orders one of

**RESENTMENT** is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die. *Malachy McCourt, (1931- ), Irish-American actor, writer and politician. New York Times, July 29, 1998.*

his officials to return it later, as a “special treat” for the children.

Strong sums up what the gift of the egg has meant to him:

“Whenever anyone asks me the ‘why’ of my long life of public service, I continue my optimism in the face of what seems like gathering anarchy and imminent ecological catastrophe, whenever anyone questions the utility of foreign aid or the politics of relief, whenever anyone, someone who should know better, demands in a fit of postmodern Western anomie why they should bother to ‘fix the unfixable,’ the woman in the Western Sudan desert comes to mind.

“That woman had managed to miraculously preserve the human gift of generosity in the face of unspeakable privation. That precious egg — wrapped so carefully in its torn scrap of paper — has become for me a metaphor of the largeness of the human spirit. In the face of that memory, pessimism becomes an act of betrayal.”

## **Virtues of a Stoic life**

“Nowhere can a man find a quieter or more untroubled retreat than in his own soul,” wrote Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius (121-180). His *Meditations of Marcus of Aurelius* is considered the most readable extent exposition of the ancient Greek philosophy of Stoicism.

Stoicism can still be seen as an amour against hardships and misfortunes found in the contentment of a life lived modestly and virtuously. It was a philosophy suited to the times of Marcus Aurelius, when the Roman Empire began to crumble, with wars on the frontiers and

plagues and hunger at Rome. It seems a suitable philosophy for our times, when American global hegemony has begun to crumble; the tyranny of tyrants and the terrorism of religious fanatics tear the fabric of life in many nations; economic troubles bring hardship to prosperous nations; and global warming brings deadly storms with growing ferocity and frequency.

A kernel of Marcus Aurelius' Stoic philosophy is found in this short passage from his *Meditations*:

“Never esteem of anything as profitable, which shall ever constrain thee either to break thy faith, or to lose thy modesty; to hate any man, to suspect, to curse, to dissemble, to lust after anything, that requireth the secret of walls or veils. But he that preferreth before all things his rational part and spirit, and the sacred mysteries of virtue which issueth from it, he shall never lament and exclaim, never sigh; he shall never want either solitude or company: and which is chiefest of all, he shall live without either desire or fear. And as for life, whether for a long or short time he shall enjoy his soul thus compassed about with a body, he is altogether indifferent. For if even now he were to depart, he is as ready for it, as for any other action, which may be performed with modesty and decency. For all his life long, this is his only care, that his mind may always be occupied in such intentions and objects, as are proper to a rational sociable creature.”

**CHARACTER GROWS** in the soil of experience, with the fertilization of example, the moisture of desire, and the sunshine of satisfaction.

## **Marcus Aurelius for business leaders**

**BE A GOD.** It's indeed very possible to be a god on earth, yet not be recognized by anyone! Remember that. And another thing. Remember that you really need very little to live a happy life. If you have abandoned all hope of being a great thinker or scientist, don't make that an excuse to give up on being free, modest, sociable, and obedient to God.

**FICKLE FAME.** Perhaps that silly thing called fame will torment you. Remember how fast everything is forgotten. Look at the chaos of infinite time on each side of the present. And the emptiness of applause. And the fickleness and want of judgment in people who pretend to praise us.

*From Marcus Aurelius for CEOs, translated and published by Fred Louder, Verdun, Quebec (1998).*

## **Love and beauty in death**

*“Living with people who are dying can be a remarkably rich time that yields valuable insights about the beauty and mystery of life and the things that are most important,” according to Teri Crockford, a senior palliative care nurse at a Hamilton, Ontario, not-for-profit hospice.*

*Crockford talked about the dying days of her own mother, as reported by Sarah Hampton in the Toronto Globe and Mail, August 29, 2011 in this excerpt:*

Her mother was lying in bed, staring off into the middle distance.

“What do you see, Mom?”

“Oh, your father,” came the calm reply.

Her father had died seven months earlier. Now her mother was close to death.

“And how is he,” asked the daughter, gently.

“Oh, he’s good,” said the mother.

“Why is he here?”

“He’s asking if I’m ready to go,” she continued calmly.

A pause. “Are you?”

“Oh, no, no. Not quite yet, dear.”

*Crockford concludes that in death, as in life, “the only richness is in family and friends. That’s really where the wealth is.”*

## **For lifetime happiness, build a garden**

There is a Chinese proverb that says that to be happy for a week you take a new concubine. To be happy for a month, you kill a pig, and to be happy all your life, you build a garden.

*Princess Abkhazi (Peggy Pemberton-Carter, 1902-1994), a British heiress and wife of Prince Nicholas Abkhazi, who fled Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Both were Second World War prisoners — she a Japanese prisoner in China and he a German prisoner in Germany. They married after the war and settled in Victoria, BC, where they created Canada’s most celebrated private garden, the subject of a 1989 book, In a Canadian Garden.*

*Source: Francine Dube, “Bulldozers threaten a princess’ Eden,” Toronto National Post, August 25, 1999.*

**GENIUS** is admired, wealth is envied, power is feared,  
but only people of good character are trusted.

## **Kindness is a health miracle**

Improving your social relationships can improve your “long-term health in ways every bit as powerful as adequate sleep, a good diet, and not smoking,” say scientists at the Harvard Medical School, in the school’s online newsletter, *HealthBeat*.

“Dozens of studies have shown that people who have satisfying relationships with family, friends, and their community are happier, have fewer health problems, and live longer,” the letter reports (HealthBeat, <http://health.harvard.edu/healthbeat>)

“Conversely, a relative lack of social ties is associated with depression and later-life cognitive decline, as well as with increased mortality. One study, which examined data from more than 309,000 people, found that lack of strong relationships increased the risk of premature death from all causes by 50 percent — an effect on mortality risk roughly comparable to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and greater than obesity and physical inactivity.”

Acts of social support—from offers of help or advice to expressions of affection—can reduce stress that adversely affects coronary arteries, gut function, insulin regulation, and the immune system, while caring behaviour can trigger the release of stress-reducing hormones, scientists say. Care giving helps the health of the giver as well as the receiver.

“All of this is encouraging news because caring involvement with others may be one of the easiest health strategies to access. It’s inexpensive, it requires no special equipment or regimen, and we can engage in it in many ways,” say the Harvard medical scientists.

## Rest your brain from DD

Give your brains rest periods from the distraction of digital devices. Youth are said to be the most afflicted, mentally and physically, but many—perhaps most—from 20 to 80 or even older are also affected.

Educators and psychologists worry that digital distraction is turning kids into scatterbrains who don't get enough sleep or enough exercise, who fail to do their homework, suffer falling school grades and attention deficit disorder.

In order to learn, the brain needs periods of rests from constant data input so that it can absorb the data and convert information into knowledge. But digital distraction leaves many kids with no time for brain rest.

“Computers and cellphones and the constant stream of stimuli they offer, pose a profound new challenge to focusing and learning,” health and wellness writer Matt Richtel reports in the *New York Times*, November 10, 2010.

The brains of digitally distracted kids “are rewarded not for staying on task but for jumping to the next thing,” says Michael Rich, associate professor at Harvard Medical School and executive director of the Centre on Media and Child Health in Boston. “The worry is we’re raising a generation of kids in front of screens whose brains are going to be wired differently.”

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, more than

**SWALLOWING ANGRY** words is much easier than having to eat them.

half of students age 8 to 18 are watching TV, or are on the Internet or other digital devices when they are supposedly doing homework: 31 percent “most of the time,” and 25 percent “some” of the time.

Students at Woodside High School in Red Wood City, California, quoted by the *Times*, show how digital devices are stealing the time and the brains of youngsters.

On YouTube “you can get a whole story in six minutes,” says 17-year-old Vishal Singh. “A book takes so long. I prefer the immediate gratification.” Vishal’s only summer homework assignment was to read a Kurt Vonnegut novel, but at the end of the two-month summer break he had read only 34 pages. A gifted student, Vishal Singh has seen his grade plummet as he pursues his abiding passion and career goal as a video- and filmmaker, to the exclusion of nearly everything else.

“I’m doing Facebook, YouTube, having a conversation with a friend, listening to music at the same time,” says Vishal. “I’m doing a million things at once, like a lot of people my age. Sometimes I’ll say: I need to stop this and do my schoolwork, but I can’t. If it weren’t for the Internet, I’d focus more on school and be doing better academically.”

Other Woodside students are lured and trapped by the same digital distractions.

“I can text one person while talking on the phone to someone else,” says 14-year-old Allison Miller. She sends and receives 27,000 text messages per month.

Ramon Rchoa-Lopez, a 14-year-old introvert, spends six hours on video games each weekday, and more on weekends, while “leaving homework to be done in the bathroom before school.”

Sam Crocker, like his closest friend, Vishal, failed to

finish either of his two summer reading books. “I know I can read a book, but then I’m up and checking Facebook,” Sam told the *Times*. “Facebook is amazing because it feels like you’re doing something and you’re not doing anything. It’s the absence of doing something, but you feel gratified anyway. My attention span is getting worse.”

“Downtime is to the brain what sleep is to the body,” says Dr. Rich. “But kids are in a constant mode of stimulation.”

## **A moral code for children**

*French children aged 12 to 13 must have been precocious if they were captivated by the Catéchisme universell advocated for their guidance in 1798 by French military officer, poet and philosopher Jean Francois de Saint-Lambert (1716-1803). It was to be a moral code that spurned religion in favour of enlightened self-interest. Saint-Lambert was one of the prominent French writers and philosophers—including, most notably, Voltaire—known as humanists, but also sometimes as agnostics or atheists. Most believed in God but were severe critics of the Roman Catholic Church, advocated a secular society, and paved the way for the French Revolution.*

*There is no report of how many French children may have read, heard, understood, or paid any attention to this catéchisme:*

Q: What is a man? A: A being possessed of feeling and understanding.

Q: That being so, what should he do? A: Pursue pleasure and avoid pain.

Q: Is this not self love? A: It is the necessary effect thereof.

Q: Does self-love exist in all men alike? A: It does, because all men aim at self-preservation and at attaining happiness.

Q: What do you understand by happiness? A: A continuous state in which we experience more pleasure than pain.

Q: What must we do to attain this state? A: Cultivate our reason and act in accord therewith.

Q: And what is reason? A: The knowledge of truths that conduce to our well-being.

Q: Does not self-love always lead us to discover those truths and act in accord with them? A: No, for all men do not know how self-love should be practiced.

Q: What do you mean by that? A: I mean that some love themselves rightly, and others wrongly.

Q: Who are those who love themselves rightly? A: Those who seek to know one another, and who do not separate their own happiness from the happiness of others.

*Catéchisme, as published by Will and Ariel Durant in The Story of Civilization, vol. IX, The Age of Reason (1965).*

## **Hang in there**

Hang in there. Hang in there because the greatest quarterbacks complete only six of 10 passes. The best basketball players make only 50 percent of their shots. The top oil companies, with all their geologists, drill 10 dry holes for every wet one. And even the most successful actors flunk 29 auditions for television commercials before they land one. So, HANG IN THERE.

*From Council Fire newsletter published by Boy Scouts of America.*

# Miraculous beliefs

“Beliefs make history, especially when they are wrong; it is for errors that men have most nobly died.”

Will Durant (1885-1981), U.S. historian, philosopher and teacher, comments on the legend of Santiago, the Spanish term for St. James the Apostle, in *The Story of Civilization, vol. IV, The Age of Faith* (1950), compiled in 10 monumental volumes over 40 years with his wife, Ariel.

Eight hundred years after St. James, the first Christian martyr, was beheaded in Jerusalem by the sword of Harod (AD 44, *Acts of the Apostles 12:1*), in the mountains of Spain a shepherd is said to have found the bones of the saint in a marble coffin.

Angels are claimed to have carried the headless corpse from Jerusalem to the shores of Spain in a rudderless, unmanned vessel. It was then moved across Spain to the mountain site, awaiting the discovery by the shepherd. In a second miracle, Santiago soon appeared to join the Christian army in the battle of Clavijo, in which the defeat



*Cathedral Santiago de Compostela, Spain, said to be the site of the bones of St. John the Apostle. Some 270,000 pilgrims visited the holy site in 2010.*

of the Moors led to the *Reconquista* of Spain by the Christians.

First a chapel, then an enormous granite cathedral and finally a walled city, Santiago de Compostela, was built at the site of the bones. As a site for Christian pilgrims, it is exceeded only by Rome and Jerusalem, and has been the most popular pilgrimage for Western European Catholics since the Middle Ages.

Various routes covering hundreds of kilometres, known as the “Way of St. James,” lead to Santiago de Compostela. The pilgrims travel by foot, horseback, donkey or bicycle. Those who make the final 100 kilometres on foot, or 200 kilometres by bicycle, receive a certificate, the *compostela*, from the Pilgrim’s Office in Santiago de Compostela.

Some 270,000 pilgrims made the journey in 2010, many not so much as devout worshippers or true believers but for an interesting challenge or for historic interest.

The bones of St. James are also claimed by the church of St. Saturnin at Toulouse, France, while Portuguese are said in another legend to have carried the bones to the Central African Kingdom of Kongo in 1483.

Religious relics abounded in the Middle Ages—the hair, bones, blood, tears, clothing and artifacts of Christ, the disciples and numerous saints; even crumbs from the bread fed to Judas at the Last Supper. Three churches in different regions of France each claimed to have the complete corpse of Mary Magdalene; five said they had the one authentic relic of Christ’s circumcision.

**COURAGE** is the quality it takes to look at yourself with candour, your adversaries with kindness, and your setbacks with serenity.

Cathedrals, churches and monasteries used thousands of relics to raise money from pilgrims and worshippers, and when more funds were needed, new relics were discovered. Dead saints were dismembered “so that several places might enjoy their patronage and power,” Durant reports.

The Spanish bones of Santiago were also put to effective use. Durant notes that, “The sacred bones proved invaluable in stirring morale, and raising funds, for the wars against the Moors.”

**Affluenza**

Affluenza is defined as an “unhappy condition of overload resulting from the dogged pursuit of more,” in a PBS film by John De Graaf and Vivia Boe, broadcast September 15, 1997.

De Graaf and Boe claim that overspending can produce real ailments, including headaches, low back pain, heart palpitation, unexplained aches and pains, hyperactivity, depression, anxiety attacks, and sleeplessness.

*Source: Utne Reader, November 1997.*

## **To live, choose courage**

When I saw my mother fight to survive, it gave me an early view of bravery and what life was about. Your mother dies, you're 18, and you face a choice: are you going to take drugs or are you going to become more spiritual? Why not go with the one that seems more positive? Everything's a choice in life, and I was not drawn to being

**DEATH** is nature's way of telling you to slow down.  
*Robin Williams (1951- ), U.S. actor, comedian and writer.*

a victim. I am not the clown in the makeup masking pain. It doesn't happen to be my story.

*Canadian comedian Martin Short (1950- ) says he was blessed by his parents with a sense of humour and spiritual values that helped him overcome early tragedies: the loss of a brother who died in a car crash, the loss of his mother to cancer, and two years later the loss of his father to heart stroke. Quoted by Dotson Rader in Parade and cited in Reader's Digest, February 2002.*

## **More than faith alone**

They say anything is possible if you have enough faith. Is it really so simple? If someone does something successfully, we say, "Look how much faith they had." But faith alone is merely one ingredient in a larger recipe. Along with faith there must be vision. With vision there must be imagination. With imagination we need intelligence. With intelligence there must be accurate information. You have all that now and more. Use it well and you will find (almost) anything IS possible. *Advice to Pisces from syndicated British astrologer Jonathan Cainer (1957- ), who dispenses more earthly homilies than celestial forecasts. Toronto Star, September 2011.*

## **How politicians get elected**

Be lavish in your promises. Men prefer a false promise to a flat refusal... Contrive to get some new scandal aired against your rival, for crime, corruption, or immorality.

*Quintas Cicero offers advice to his more famous brother, Marcus Cicero (106-43 BC), Roman orator and statesman, on how to get elected to the Roman senate. Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, vol. 3, Caesar and Christ (1944).*

## Too helpful

The producers of Candid Camera, the TV show that uses humorous gags to capture people in mildly embarrassing situations, thought a gag-idea suggested by a viewer would be a winner, but they under-estimated the sympathy of women for other women in distress. The gag was one of only three accepted out of thousands suggested by viewers for the 1997-98 viewing season.

In the gag, a woman stands on the street with a broken heel on her shoe and asks to borrow shoes from passing women, explaining that she has an important interview in an adjacent building. The producers expected most women to refuse to lend their shoes. But the gag flopped when every woman who was asked agreed to lend her shoes to the lady in distress.

*Notes from "Behind the Candid Camera" by Finbarr O'Reilly, Toronto Globe and Mail, June 17, 1998.*

## Best things to give

The best thing to give your enemy is forgiveness; to an opponent, tolerance; to a friend, your heart; to your child, a good example; to a father, deference; to your mother, conduct that will make her proud of you; to yourself, respect; to all men, charity. *Francis Maitland Balfour, (1851-1882). British biologist. Cited in Leadership, December 14, 1999.*

**WHAT LIES BEHIND US** and what lies before us are insignificant compared to what lies within us.  
*RalphWaldo Emerson (1803-1882), U.S. essayist and poet. Attributed.*

## Churchill rules for life's battles

*Some rules for life from Winston Churchill (1874-1965), the 20th century's best-known statesman and author.*

We make a living by what we get; but we make a life by what we give. *Attributed.*

Change is the master key. It is no use saying to the tired "mental muscles" "I will give you a good rest" or "I will lie down and think of nothing." The mind keeps busy just the same. If it has been weighing and measuring, it goes on weighing and measuring. If it has been worrying, it goes on worrying. It is only when new cells are called into activity, when new stars become the lords of the ascendant, that relief, repose, refreshment are afforded. *From a 1932 essay, cited in Forbes, January 27, 1997.*

You will make all kinds of mistakes; but as long as you are generous and true, and also fierce, you cannot hurt the world or even seriously distress her. *My Early Life (1930).*

What is the use of living, if not to strive for noble causes and to make this muddled world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone? How else can we put ourselves in harmonious relation with the great verities and consolations of the infinite and the eternal? And I vow my faith that we are marching towards better days. Humanity will not be cast down. We are going swinging bravely forward along the high road and already behind the distant mountains is the promise of the sun. *Speech at Kinnaird Hall, Dundee, Scotland, October 10, 1908.* *Liberalism and the Social Problem (1909).*

The day may dawn when fair play, love of one's fellow man, respect for justice and freedom, will enable tormented generations to march forth triumphant from

the hideous epoch in which we have to dwell. Meanwhile, never flinch, never weary, never despair. *From Churchill's last major speech in the House of Commons, March 1, 1953.*

## **Find yourself lost in a cause**

There is a lesson to be learned from people who devote all their energy to important work. These people never suffer from worry, simply because they feel they are working for a cause far more important than themselves. This belief satisfies their super-ego, which in turn refuses the need for self-punishment that the worrier feels.

*Illustrated Weekly, as quoted in Quote, The Speaker's Digest, April, 1994.*

## **The pain of exclusion**

People really seem designed to get along with others, and when you're excluded, this has significant effects. To live in society, people have to have an inner mechanism that regulates their behaviour. Rejection defeats the purpose of this, and people become impulsive and self-destructive. You have to use self-control to analyze a problem—in an IQ test, for example — and instead, you behave impulsively.

*Researcher Roy Baumeister on studies at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio, which showed that rejection can cause people to become more aggressive, while dramatically lowering their IQ scores.*

**THE REAL ART** of conversation is not simply saying the right thing at the right time and the right place, but leaving unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.

*Researchers used two groups of people. In the first group, half of a number of strangers were each told that no one else wanted to work with them; the other half were each told that everyone wanted to work with them. People in the second group took personality tests and were given false feedback: half were told they would wind up alone in life, and the other half were told they would be surrounded by family and friends.*

*The rejected ones were given tests for aggression, which increased; for IQ, which dropped by 25 percent, and for analytical reasoning, which dropped 30 percent.*

*Source: Emma Young, "Rejection massively reduces IQ," New Scientist, March 15, 2002.*

## **Password to Utopia**

Say "Yes" to the seedlings and a giant forest cleaves the sky. Say "Yes" to the universe and the planets become your neighbours. Say "Yes" to dreams of love and freedom. It is the password to Utopia.

*Brooks Atkinson, (1894-1984). U.S. drama critic and journalist. Once Around The Sun (1951).*

## **None born for slavery**

God has sent all men into the world free, and nature has made no man a slave. *Alcidamas (450-404 BC), Athenian statesman and military leader. Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, vol. 2, The Life of Greece (1939).*

Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), French philosopher and novelist. The Social Contract (1762).*