

“**Throughlines - Part II**”

by Rev. “Twinkle” Marie Manning

The *Thought for Contemplation* during Part I of this **Throughlines** theme were words by Karisha Longaker of the musical duo **MaMuse**:

*“We shall be known by the company we keep;
By the ones who circle round to tend these fires.”*

Her words in her song continue on to say:

“We shall be known by the ones who sow and reap;
The seeds of change, **alive** from deep within the earth.

It is time now, it is time now that we thrive.
It is time we lead ourselves into the well.
It is time now, and what a time to be alive.

In this Great Turning we shall learn to lead in love.
In this Great Turning we shall learn to lead in love.

Our *Thought for Contemplation* today is **Raymond Carver**’s words:

“And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?”

This fuller version of this brief query, entitled LATE FRAGMENT, includes both question AND answer:

“And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?”

“*I did.*”

“And what did you want?”

“*To call myself beloved,
to feel myself beloved on the earth.*”

These poetic assertions of Carver’s are also the inscription on his tombstone.

These correlations between what it takes for us as individuals to feel we have lived our lives well, lives we are not just **content** with but **grateful** for;

And lives that have been impacted by others around us in positive ways, even as we have impacted others' lives in positive ways is both a longing and, perhaps even, a **great purpose of life**.

During **Throughlines Part I** we looked at the framework for what became widely known as **The Stanislavsky System** or **Stanislavsky Method**. A systematic acting approach he called the “**art of experiencing**” - Actors experiencing their characters via a throughline that has brought them to where they are, what they are doing, why they are doing it, who they are doing it with, and, *potentially*, **probable results** of what happens next as a result of what the character does **now** in the present scene.

For Stanislavsky, it was of primary importance that an actor be *believable* in unbelievable surroundings.

To that end, he created the '**Magic If**' -
- a tool that could produce
“an instantaneous, inner stimulus.”

Essentially an actor would ask:

“What would I do **if** I found myself in this (the character's) circumstance?”

Such form of inquiry can help an actor understand the thoughts and feelings that they need to portray for each ‘beat’ or scene.’

“**If**” when used in this way can present a magical hypothetical that causes one to respond to the **hypothetical** “sincerely and definitely.”

When used effectively **if** has three positive outcomes according to **Zen Lawyer Patrick Trudell**:

‘**First**, *if* “does not use fear or force” or make us do anything. Rather it reassures us “through its honesty, and encourages [us] to have confidence in a supposed situation.” This allows us to image the **if** supposition naturally with our subconscious feelings emerging.

Second, **if** brings to the forefront of the subconscious an “inner and real activity” –meaning to answer the **if** we must imagine ourselves in action. This according to Stanislavski leads to mental activity that results in subconscious creativity. Subconscious creativity gets us to our highest emotional level of thought and being.

Third and most important when used correctly we do not try to invoke our feelings when using the **if** supposition. Rather we concentrate on the given circumstance of the situation.

When doing this we reach a “**sincerity** of emotions.” This is because our subconscious feelings emerge. These are our **true to life emotions** in the given situation.

Speaking about “**The Magic of ‘If’**” theory **Stanislavski** says this:

“When I give a genuine answer to the “**if**” then I **do** something, I am living my own personal life. At moments like that there is no character. **Only me.**”

I would posit that there is credible reason to use **The Magic of If** not only as a tool for actors *but* in our actual lives. In doing so we could become more deeply *authentic* in our own lives, and in connection with the lives of those around us.

The Magic of If could help us identify that which is most important to us, elusive as it can sometimes seem. It can help us live from a place centeredness and of *sacredness*.

Stanislavski also **believed in** and **promoted** the theory of the “unbroken line.” Another concept that originates with this prolific acting teacher, that can be **useful contemplation** for everyday life.

The term, “unbroken line,” describes the overall trajectory of the character’s life, a trajectory - when acting - that the actor must be aware of so they can sustain and maintain throughout the course of the role.

Stanislavski’s *Unbroken Line* (or **Throughlines**) Theory, as with his *Art of Experiencing*, Magic of If and each part of **The Stanislavski Method**, is derived from a psychological analysis and psychological lens.

Stanislavski observed that every person has an “unbroken line,” or trajectory, that their lives follow.

Sometimes knowingly, all too often **unconsciously**.
Sometimes evident to even a casual observer.

Yet also often hidden from even the most intimate relation.
Yes, sometimes even hidden from ourselves.

But not undiscoverable.

Though a person’s attention and even *understanding* may move from one distraction to the next, from one life event or circumstance to the next; **yes** even from one area of focus to the next, a person’s **life trajectory** remains the same, or, said another way, a person’s life - is “unbroken.”

Choreographer/composer and Writer **Tonya Tannenbaum** says of the *Unbroken Line Theory*, this:

“Consider your own life. It generally moves in an unbroken line. You have an overall set of goals and objectives that you pursue.”

On a day-to-day basis, you may become briefly distracted by what you see in the news, or by an upsetting personal event, or by an exciting achievement, but those events are mostly momentary.

They usually don’t change the course of your life. Your life mostly continues down one main path or direction. Without a main path to follow, a person can feel “lost” in their lives. Likewise, Konstantin Stanislavski believed an actor must discover, and sustain, a character’s unbroken line.

When this line is broken, he believed, the actor gets “lost” in the role, the life of the character “stops” and the actor loses the overall thrust of the character.

Could the same be true of us in our own day-to-day lives?

Do we lose ourselves to a world filled with distractions?

If *and when* we do...Do we have the ability to bring ourselves back to ourselves, and to the lives we are truly living?

Are we willing to cultivate practices that bring us back to ourselves?

Back into alignment with who we want to be in the world?

Do we surround ourselves with people who, support our desires to be the greatest versions of ourselves?

Do we have, as core parts of our lives, family and friends who recognize **our truth**? Who safeguard **our trust** and Who seek to keep **us safe** body, mind and spirit?

Are we willing to let go of those who do not? To walk away from situations and people who do not have our highest good as a priority?

Can we let go of any lingering or long-lasting ideas that would lock us into family patterns, emotional and physical addictions, and begin to view them **not** as **Who We Are**, but as distractions From Who We Are Meant To Be?

Are we willing to look carefully into patterns that seem to emerge in our lives, in people, in situations, in **us**, that cause us pain?

And, differentiate those to the people, situations and things that bring us joy?

Shifting briefly from Stanislavski's *Throughlines* to those found in poetic writing. Which, according to writer Garrett Stack,

“A practical definition might go as follows: throughlines are the narrative pathways that form the spine of a poem and onto which we attach our observations in order to give the poem form and meaning. Without a throughline, poems are either amalgams of disparate thoughts or amorphous blobs of abstraction.”

:)

Said another way - A throughline is the overarching structure that holds any story together, giving the whole tale a sense of purpose. It determines where the story begins, what makes a strong ending, and which events fit in the middle.

A throughline is what the story is about.

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You. Only YOU get to determine what YOUR STORY is about!

And you can do so at any point, and *as many times as needed*, throughout your **lifelong journey!**

Back to Stanislavski :)

He incorporated seven steps into his program of discovering what a character's story is about. What their ***throughlines*** are.

They included the following questions:

1. **Who Am I?**
2. **Where Am I?**
3. **When Is It?**
4. **What Do I Want?**
5. **Why Do I Want It?**
6. **How Will I Get It?**
7. **What Do I Need To Overcome?**

Contemplating these questions can assist us in clarifying the circumstances and trajectory of our lives. And, *in doing so*, determining if course corrections, shift in itinerary, or change of **setting, scene and supporting cast** are needed.

Ask yourself the Seven Questions, and really consider them:

1. Who Am I?

Who Am I to myself?

Do I like this person I see in the mirror?

Why or why not?

Is this who I am meant to be?

Is this who I want to be?

If the answer is Yes - rejoice!

If the answer is No -

- what can you do to become ***the You*** you wish to be?

2. Where Am I?

Sometimes our world seems so small.

The planet is vast.

Are you content to live where you are living?

To work where you are working?
To retire where you've retired?
If you could choose anywhere - Where Would You Be?

3. When Is It?

There are various theories regarding the inner and outer workings of time and space.

One thing is clear though, even to the greatest skeptic:

We are where our minds focus on.

When is it - for you?

Where, or rather **when**, do you find your mind wanders to much of your waking hours?

Are you five years old? *Ten? **Thirteen? Twenty? Thirty?***

Are you **ten years ago**?

Or **five** years from now?

How often are you in the Present Moment?

When Is It - for you?

4. What Do I Want?

What do you want from this precious life?

Do you want to be secure and steady?

Or ferrel and free?

Or something in-between?

Do you want to be doing the things
you do each day in your life?

Do you want to explore a new career or artist endeavor?

Do you want a new house, a new car, more money?

Do you want to be Healthier? Happier?

What Do I Want?

5. Why Do I Want It?

If - the *Magic of If* - If you got what you want

What would change in your life?

Do you really want it?

Or is it a mechanism for distraction?

Why Do You Want What You Want?

Is it for your greatest good?

Or the greatest good of others?

6. How Will I Get It?

This thing that you want - how will you get it?

Will it come easily to you?

Will you have to work for it?

Do you have to **let something go**, to make space for this thing you want to enter your life?

7. What Do I Need To Overcome?

What do I need to overcome to become

Who I want to Be?

To be Where I want to Be?

To Love my love my life so much
that I can be Present for it.

To have what I want in life, and let go of the things that no longer serve me.

To see clearly any obstacles
and act decisively

when I identify that which is most important to me.

And, perhaps the most important question:

What really are the throughlines in my story?

In *my life*?

Ask yourself:

What have I accepted that is simply not true, - or need not be true anymore
- about myself, about my circumstances, that I can choose to align more
closely to my authentic throughlines?

For, be it by poetic definition or Stanislavski's,

I would like to persuade you that:

the people, situations and things that bring us joy - those - **those** are our
Throughlines.

And, because, as with any Great Story, Time is of the Essence!

I will conclude with words once again by Raymond Carver, who proclaimed
on his gravestone that he indeed got what he wanted out of life - namely:

*To call him self beloved,
to feel himself beloved on the earth.*

In addition to that, he also had his poem entitled, "GRAVY" engraved on his tombstone:

"GRAVY

No other word will do.
For **that's** what it was.
Gravy.
Gravy these past ten years.

Alive, sober, working, loving and
being loved by a good woman.

Eleven years ago he was told
he had six months to live
at the rate he was going.

And he was going
nowhere but down.

So he changed his ways
somehow.
He quit drinking! *And the rest?*

After that it was *all* gravy,
every minute of it,
up to and including when he was told about,
well, some things that
were breaking down, and
building up inside his head.

"Don't weep for me,"
he said to his friends.
"I'm a lucky man.

I've had ten years longer than I
or anyone
expected.

Pure gravy.
And don't forget it."

May it feel that way for each of us, regardless of how many moments and days we have remaining on this earth. May we take time, now, to make any changes needed To have the throughlines we most wish to have in our lives.

May we regard the past as just that.
The past.
Recognizing its place in time.
Its impact on us, and us on it.

Letting go of that which may have harmed us.
Letting go - even - of that which once was, that brought us joy and look
forward to each joy TODAY may bring.

May we face obstacles with optimism.
May we hold true to our greatest selves.

And when questioned,
*“And did you get what
you wanted from this life, **even so?**”*

May our voices rejoice:

“I did.”

“And what did you want?”

“To call myself beloved,
to *feel* myself beloved on the earth.”

May it be so for each of us.

Amen.