

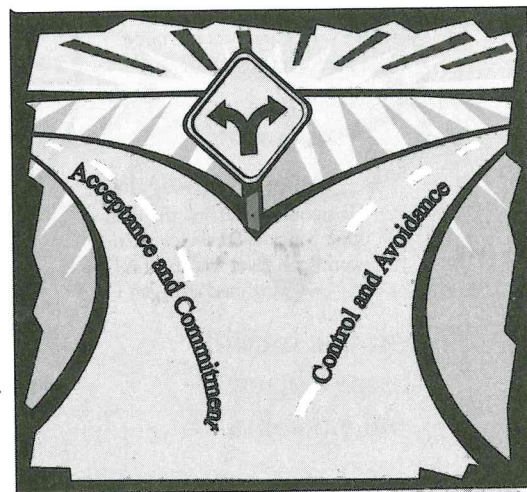
CONCLUSION

The Choice to Live a Vital Life

When you confront a core problem within yourself, you are at a choice point much like the figure below illustrates. Off to the right lies your old path of avoidance and control. This is the path the negative passengers on the bus most want you to take. It is the logical, reasonable, sensible, verbal path. Your mind will chatter on about dangers, risk, and vulnerabilities and will present avoidance as a method of solution. You've been down this path, over and over and over again. It's not your fault; you've done what any reasonable person would do. It just turns out not to be effective, vital, or empowering.

It's not your fault, but now that you know, it is your responsibility. Life can and will make you hurt. Some of that you don't get to choose: it comes regardless. An accident may confront you with physical pain; an illness may confront you with disability; a death may confront you with feelings of loss. But even then you have the ability to respond (the response-ability).

The consequences that come into your life derive from the actions you engage in, and most especially the actions we've been discussing throughout this book. No one but you can engage in acceptance or avoidance; fusion or defusion; living in your head or living in the present; taking yourself



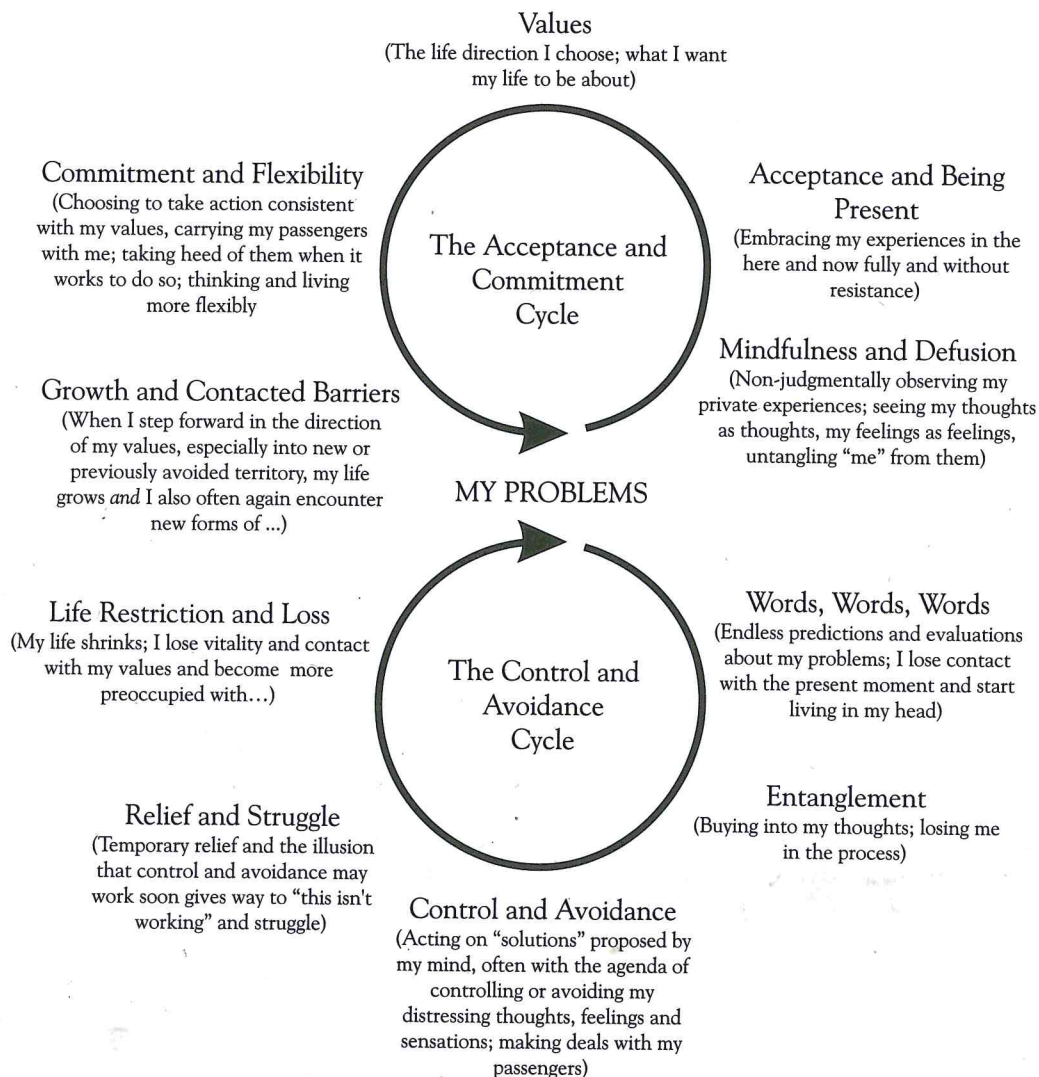
Conclusion. Figure 1: The crucial fork in the road.

to be nothing but your programming; or taking yourself to be your continuity of consciousness itself. Most of all, no one but you can choose your values.

There is a crucial fork in the road. You must choose which path to take. The less traveled path to the left is the path of acceptance, mindfulness, defusion, and valuing what you really care about. Down that road is vulnerability and risk, but it is about something.

These two roads lead to very different places. It's not that one leads to problems and one doesn't. It is not that one leads to pain and one doesn't. They both lead to problems. And they both lead to pain. To the right the problems are old and familiar; to the left they are new and even more challenging. To the right the pain is deadening and suffocating; to the left the pain is bittersweet and intensely human.

Imagine you are looking down at that fork in the road. From above you can see that this choice before you is part of a larger system of choices. Imagine that you start right in the center with your problems. You hit the fork in the road and if you go left, you go into the acceptance and commitment cycle. If you go right, you go into the control and avoidance cycle. Both of these cycles are illustrated below.



Conclusion. Figure 2: The Acceptance Cycle and the Avoidance Cycle.

In the control and avoidance cycle, life is all about what your mind tells you. You become entangled with verbal predictions and evaluations. You start trying to do what your mind says to do, even if you've tried these things before and found they didn't work. Your "life bus" is turned over to your mental passengers, and they drive right off into control and avoidance. For a little while it even feels better. At least it is predictable. You feel relieved.

You've been down this road before and at least you've always survived before. But, sooner or later, you are right back where you started, except now you are weakened. Life is a little bit smaller. More time has gone by, and somehow it's as if your life hasn't started. You not only have problems to deal with, they are the same familiar, deadening problems.

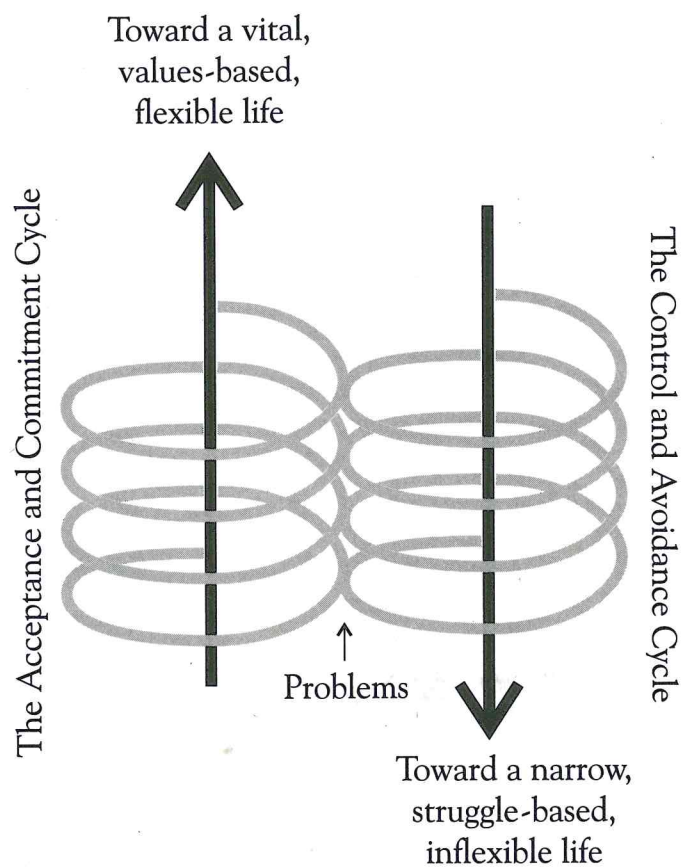
How long will this cycle go on? Think of the problems you have been struggling with. When did they start? What if the next five years are like the last five years were in this regard? The next ten years?

In the acceptance and commitment cycle, the sequence is different. You notice the chatter all right, but you don't become entangled in it. You see that there is a distinction between you, the conscious driver of the bus, and the passengers you carry. You have room on the bus for them. You accept them. You defuse from them. But then you turn your eyes back to the road and connect with that which you really value. You drive in that direction. As a result, your life grows a little, and it becomes a little more vital and flexible.

As you grow, however, you are likely to contact problems again. Often these are not quite the same old problems, they are subtly different. They are new, and perhaps even more challenging. For example, if you move in the direction of loving relationships, you now have problems of vulnerability whereas previously you may have had problems of alienation. If you move in the direction of making a contribution, you now face problems of fear of inadequacy or inability, whereas previously you faced problems of fear that you did not belong or were invalid. Sometimes, these new problems present themselves as even more fearsome than your old ones. Especially if they feel new or more intense, your mind often will scream out in fear that you've made a terrible mistake, and you are moving backwards.

And there you are. Back at the fork in the road. The whole choice gets to be repeated.

If you consistently choose to go left, life will not become any easier. It will only become



Conclusion. Figure 3: The spirals of vitality and inflexibility in life.

more vital. Progress is being made. It is like figure 3. As you keep taking that bus of life off into the acceptance and commitment cycle, you move up in a new direction. What looked like a circle in figure 2 is, in fact, a spiral. You still have problems, even big ones. They occur regularly. But progress is being created. You are living a more vital, flexible, and values-based life. When the other path is taken, you are also in a spiral, but very likely it is one that is spiraling down in a narrower, more struggle-based and less flexible life.

Noté that the presence of problems, and perhaps even their frequency or their intensity, could be the same or even greater if you take the acceptance and commitment cycle. What is different is that on the left-hand spiral you get out of your mind and into your life. You hurt, AND you are living. On the right-hand spiral you sink into the mental war of human suffering.

You've often taken the right-hand path. Haven't you had enough? By now its results are extremely predictable. Predictability makes this choice curiously "safe" but doesn't remove its deadening qualities. Acceptance and commitment offers a path with unknown ends. Its newness makes it a more frightening path but it also makes it a more vital one. To illustrate this point, we rather like the following quote:

Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and endless plans: That the moment one definitely commits oneself then providence moves, too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never have otherwise occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would come his way. Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it! Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. (Murray, partially quoting Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1951.)

Life is a choice. The choice here is not about whether or not to have pain. It is whether or not to live a valued, meaningful life.

You've had enough suffering. Get out of your mind and into your life.

(We are rooting for you).