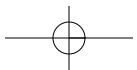
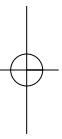




Virtuous Life Enlightenment

Naji Cherfan



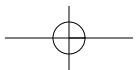
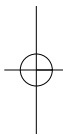
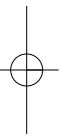
Virtuous Life Enlightenment

Another Point of View



**Conceived by Karen Solomon
and Naji Cherfan**

**Text written by Naji Cherfan
Artist: Elena Chirdaris
Edited by Karen Solomon
Publishers: CCM International
5 Konitsis, Maroussi, 15125, Athens, Greece
Art Director: Dora Stavropoulou
Typesetting: Naji Cherfan**



Prologue

Imagine going to sleep and waking up two months later in a new world. Imagine your family and friends speaking to you and making plans while you lie there in silence. Your mother knits a sweater; your girlfriend shares all the news from high school and your father tells you three things every-day: patience is a virtue, there is time for everything and fear not. They never doubt you will wake up, even though the doctors say that if you do, you won't walk, talk or see.

Now imagine that on your 18th birthday you open your eyes for the first time in eight weeks. You're in a hospital room with everyone around you ready to celebrate the day you were born. For a young man living in Athens this was not his imagination...it was his reality.

On November 20, 1978 the third son of George and Sana Cherfan was born. They named him Naji, which in Arabic means "prayer to God". Seventeen years later, Naji suffered a traumatic brain injury after a motorcycle accident in which his friend, the driver, was killed instantly. Naji fell into a coma and doctors realistically informed his family that chances of recovery were very limited. Perhaps they didn't know about his name or believe in prayer.

Naji's family had friends in many parts of the world and those friends had faith that he would wake up and start living again. On November 20, 1996 he opened his eyes and moved his toes. He was blind, deaf, mute and paralyzed. He later remarked that he had been a baby twice: once when he was born and once when he came out of that deep, silent sleep.

I was introduced to Naji Cherfan in late 1997. Physiotherapy in Greece and Germany had miraculously restored his ability to walk and talk, but he needed to improve his speech and breathing patterns. A teacher at his university suggested my name to his mother who was looking for someone to work with Naji's voice. The day we met was the beginning of a collaboration, a friendship and a journey. Nine years later, Naji still inspires me and opens my mind to the possibilities of life. He charms and woos me with his sense of truth and humor. This is what he seeks in life...truth at any cost. Someone told me once that the truth will set you free but first it will make you angry. Maybe anger is a catalyst for change. Maybe grief is the turning point for appreciating what is important in life. Maybe we lose some things in order to receive others.

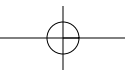
Life for Naji Cherfan is a challenge and an exercise in patience for himself as well as others. Naji's determination to rebuild his life is described in a book he dictated to me called "Virtual Patience". It documents the beginning of a journey from an event that could have been considered a tragedy. However, man has the power to choose and Naji Cherfan chooses to look at things from another perspective. He says that any two second flash can change your life forever. He should know...it happened to him. He looks at the world with an eye for honesty, searching deeply the meaning of existence.

Since coming out of coma in 1996, Naji has been motivated and inspired to write about the changes in his life as a result of the accident. Recent research shows that people who write about traumatic events that they have experienced have a faster rate of recovery and heal better emotionally. In the first few months of Naji's rehabilitation, he knew he wanted to share his story. Maybe he was not totally aware of his motivation, but he persisted, first by dictating it and later by writing

everything himself.

The years between 1997 and 2003 produced three small books. The first, "Virtual Patience" is a description of the events leading to his accident in 1996. It includes the stages of recovery that led him to rehabilitation centers in Greece, Germany, Canada and the United States. He writes from his heart and from absorbing the words of others. These writings have assimilated into a life philosophy. The summer of 2003, he edited pages and pages of this life philosophy and turned it into something he calls "Little Book of Inspirational Thoughts and Writing". If all this sounds a bit serious, well, you must know that Naji has a sense of humor too. His latest book, "Virtuous Life-Enlightenment", is based on a cartoon character that looks a lot like Naji. It contains quirky observations and ideas that he wants to pass along to others in hopes that they will see the brighter side of life, no matter what. He tells us that life is like a bottle of milk...a small drop of poison can spoil the whole bottle. What we have to remember is that "there's a lot more hope out there". Finally, Naji encourages us to find the light within and let it shine. "We all have a handicap. We all have something to overcome".

Karen Solomon



No Doubt



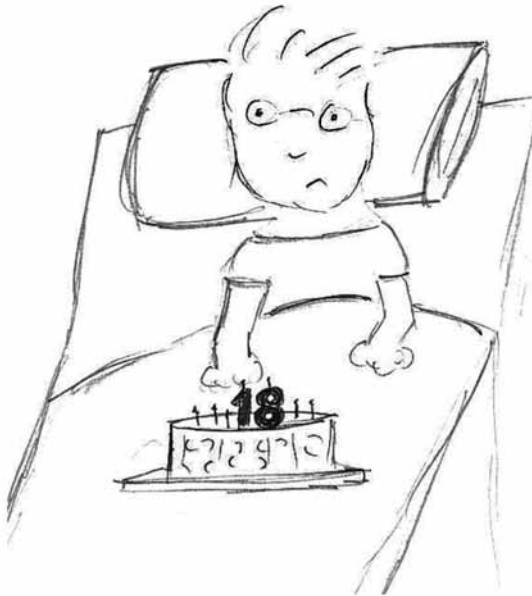
Once upon a time a boy named Naji ran through the streets of Athens with a cigarette in one hand and a mind that worked overtime. He knew no limits and had no shame. His interests in life were fast cars, fast bikes and beautiful girls. One day as he sped through the streets of his neighborhood, he fell off the bike and hurt his head.

Deep Sleep



He was rushed to the hospital where he lay sleeping in silence and darkness for eight weeks. On the "in coma scale" of one to six, Naji's deep sleep was a six.

Birthday



Finally, on his eighteenth birthday, he woke up. Things had changed in his world during that deep, quiet sleep. His eyes were open, but he couldn't see. His feet and arms were in the right place, but he couldn't feel them like before. He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out.

Travel



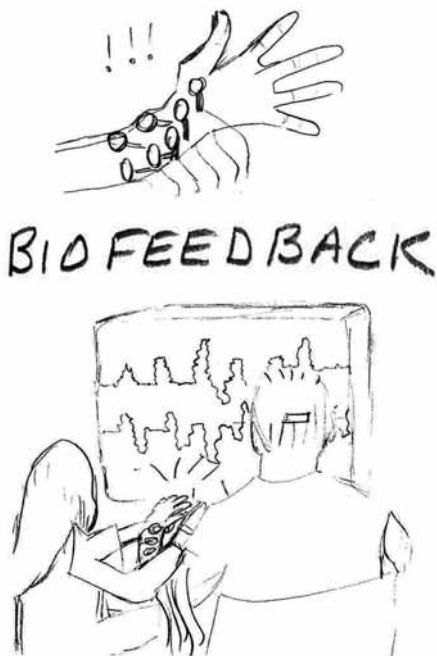
He realized that he had a lot of work to do so he packed his bags and started on a trip to find himself. As he traveled around the world to different rehabilitation centers, Naji concluded that one center should be chosen so that he would not become a jack of all trades and a master of none. He met friendly people everywhere. Many offered help and wanted him to play on their team.

Healing



As he became a better player, he realized that only perfect practice makes perfect. Perfection will happen, but it needs time to happen correctly. One of his best exercises was walking on a treadmill, thinking of only the first step and proceeding automatically while watching the news. In this way he retrained his muscles and became better informed in world events. He believed that if he accomplished this it would be like hitting two birds with one stone.

Biofeedback



Naji had to reeducate his muscles, so in 1999 he enrolled in the Biofeedback Laboratory at the University of Miami School of Medicine, developed by Dr. Bernard Brucker, the director of the laboratory. Naji enjoyed the biofeedback treatments because it was like playing a game with graphics. The movements of his hands and legs were seen as different colors on the computer. This game taught his brain how to give the correct commands to different parts of his body. His muscles learned well and when he finished biofeedback, they were much more well-behaved and obedient.

214 Days



It was a lot of hard work but he always enjoyed the game. He learned to work with belief in his ability, because ability without work is nothing. He put in the effort and he said, never say never. He says only say never to what you think is negative. It's just that simple!

Coach



One day he looked at the field when it was empty and understood that it was time to play alone. He realized that we're all the same in different ways. Everyone has their special talent. He became his own coach and found something that needed only one player.

Tai Chi



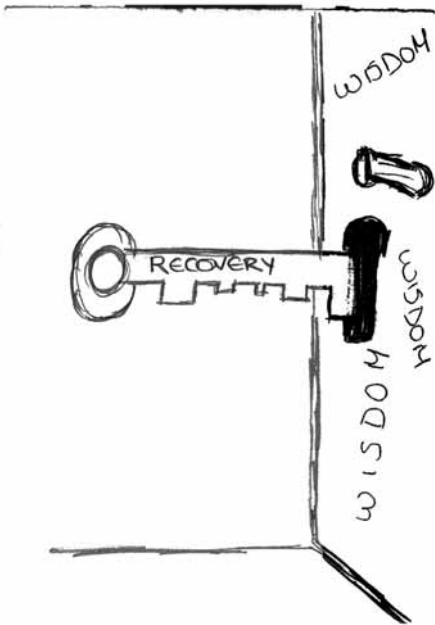
This something was tai chi and he discovered it through the Biscayne Institute of Health and Living. Tai chi became not only one of his favorite games, but also his new lifestyle. He worked with this discipline for three years and as he carefully went through the motions, his mind and body became one. This type of tai chi was called Liuhebafa; eight methods, six harmonies, one heart, one mind. He learned centering exercises which utilize breath and movement. Some of these exercises also helped transfer abilities from one hemisphere of his brain to the other.

Imagine



While living in Miami, his friends Randy and Olga would call him Rainman because he kept repeating things over and over. They also said he reminded them of Forrest Gump because he beat them so many times in ping pong. From his biofeedback exercise he imagined all the things he wanted to do and when his mind did them, his body followed. The image of water skiing stayed in his brain so much that one day he drove with a friend to a beautiful place on the sea, went into the water and actually skied slalom for the first time in seven years!

Key



This made him feel stronger than ever and now he understood that the key to recovery was therapy and patience. He no longer held onto old ways of thinking. Finally his mind was open to everything nice and wonderful, all new ideas, as he found what was best for him.

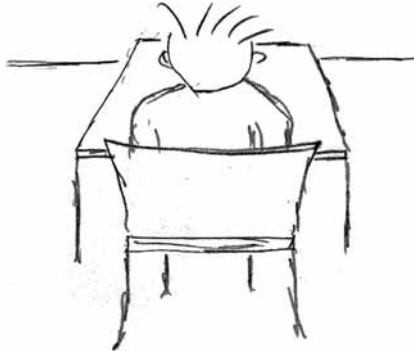
Thinking



Some nights after a long day of patience and concentration, Najj would lie awake listening to the voices in his head going "bla, bla, bla" and he would think of what not to think about. Even this required some concentration!!!

Teach

GOOD MORNING CLASS.
MY NAME IS EXPERIENCE
AND I'M YOUR TEACHER
IN THIS JOURNEY CALLED
LIFE...!



Once he dreamed that he was in a classroom looking at a blackboard. He heard a voice say, "Good morning class. My name is experience and I am your teacher for the lesson called Life". After this dream, Naji began to see things with a new attitude and a different eye.

Catch



He saw that his life was made of miracles passing in front of him. All he had to do was put out the net to catch them as they fluttered around his head.

Daily



He saw that every moment is a gift and that's why it is called the present. All he had to do was open his heart in order to receive the blessings surrounding him.

Drop



He knew that a tiny thing could ruin a good mood, but that finally, there's just so much more hope out there. Nothing beats a positive mental attitude, "PMA", no matter what. He looked at the big picture and never allowed little negatives to grow in his life.

Trade Off



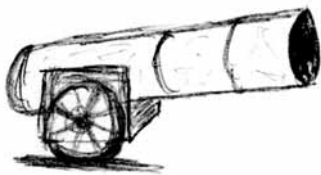
Last but not least, he understood that some things must be lost for others to be found. The boy whose name means "prayer to God" travels with patience and plays with courage. He knows his destination and goes there in style.

Inspired Along the Way



The following words and images are the result of experiences Naji had in communicating with people during his recovery. For him, it has been a rich and diverse journey with many opportunities for self-discovery.

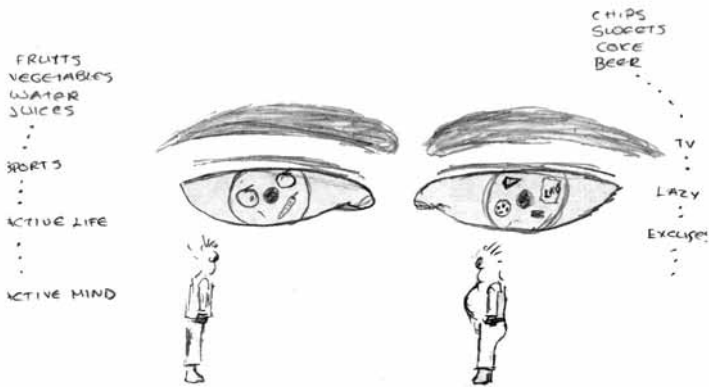
Cannon



"Wow! We sure complicate life."
By using a cannon to kill a mosquito..

He learned that life is simple and that it's just human beings that complicate things. His new slogan became "K.I.S." keeping it simple.

The Eye



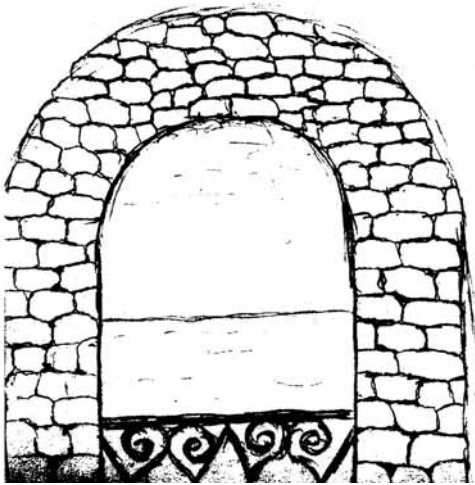
Visual therapy helped him coordinate and discipline his sight. He discovered that if one eye sees the things that make him happy, everything in life becomes more positive. But if the other eye, at the same time, sees the things that make him unhappy, only negative things come his way. He understood that discipline is even more important than sight itself.

Center



While doing therapy, Naji realized that he was not the center of the world and that existing in someone else's space and emotions is a good thing. He tried putting other people's feelings ahead of his and learned that he is not living in this world by himself. By being more understanding of others, he began looking at the world in a collective way, became a team player and gave people their own space.

Beyond

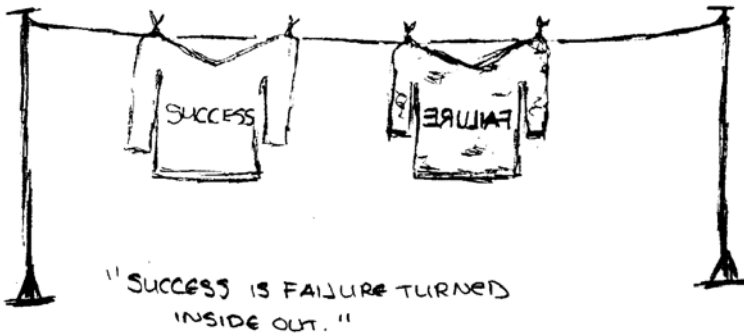


" LIFE IS
BEAUTIFUL,
YOU JUST
NEED TO
KNOW HOW
TO LIVE IT! "

-> See beyond
the wall ...

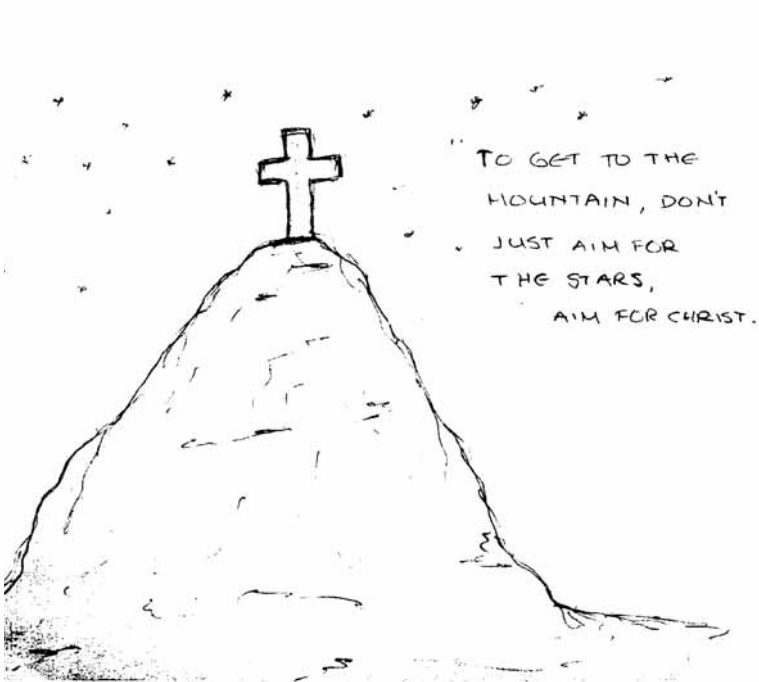
Because of the suffering he experienced during his accident and recovery, life took on new meaning and became beautiful to him. He just needed to know how to live. He saw beyond the wall of his own existence and understood that there was no reason to complain. Keeping this in mind helped him to look at the big picture and gave him a reason to move forward.

Success



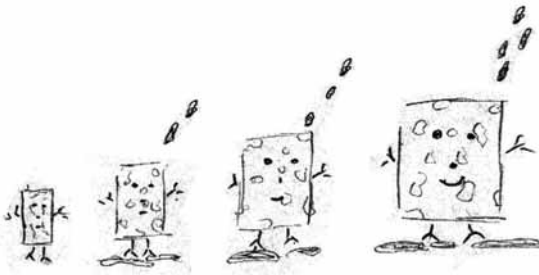
Throughout the long days of therapy, he was learning the movements and gestures that all of us take for granted. He had to think about the way his arms should move to grab a cookie and the way his legs should move for him to walk. Failure and success were his companions all the way, so he would say, success is failure turned inside out and keep on going.

Mountain



As his faith was growing, he began questioning his beliefs. He said to himself, "If you want to get to the top of the mountain, aim for the stars". When relating this to God, he said "if you want to get to the top of the mountain aim for Christ and keep your eyes on Jesus".

Sponge



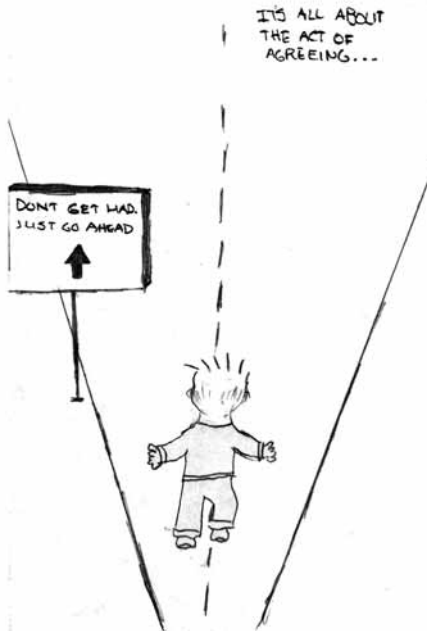
He kept in mind what one of his doctors told him about his condition: "The best analogy for a brain that is healing after a traumatic injury is a sponge. First it dries up and then it closes. Next, it becomes a little soft at the first sign of water, something like becoming conscious again. The sponge becomes wet and starts to open, the way enlightenment expands the mind. After this, the brain becomes wet and fertile. Finally, the sponge is so full of water that all it can do is go with the flow. This is a mind keen on remaining open." And so he moved on...

Ego



As always, inner conflicts were destabilizing and while going through a critical moment of doubt, he wrote: "Sometimes I feel like a soldier. The battle involves fighting who I really am, what I feel I can do and what some doctors think I cannot do. I know I can win but it's just so difficult!! My ego gets in the way and there's always this battle between their expectations and my confidence. I always achieve whatever I put my mind to."

Road



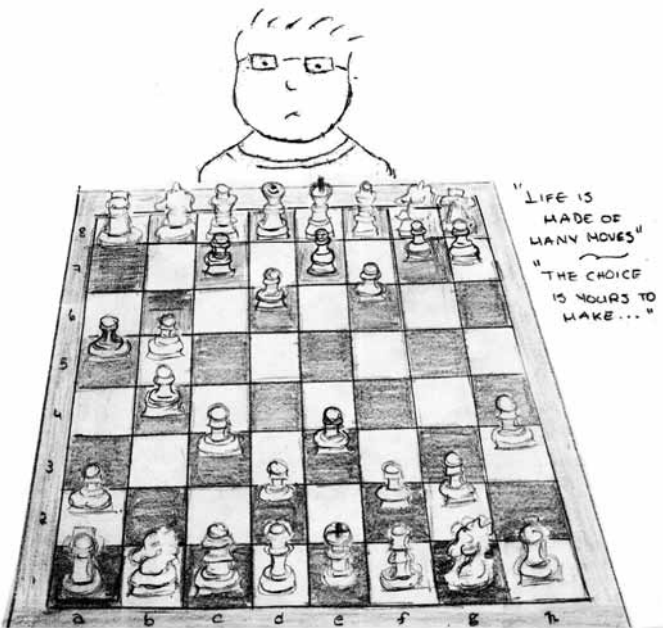
As a result of coming into contact with many different rehabilitation centers, he endured the judgment and criticism of others. When this made him angry he said to himself "Don't get mad, just go ahead." He realized that it's all about the act of agreeing and wrote, "Wherever I am, I must dance their way while holding on to my individuality."

Be Positive



By handling criticism tactfully, he became stronger and moved forward. In his journal he wrote: We are all beautiful people. Everyone around the world gets criticized. It's your response to criticism that can turn a negative situation into a positive one. Although a tongue doesn't have any bones it can break many bones.

Chess



He often played chess and with every move he decided the outcome of the game. He wrote: "Life is like a game of chess; one wrong move and everything can be spoiled. However, we keep on trying, never giving up. Life is made of many moves and choices and I am responsible for every one of them".



Finally Enlightened

Note from the author



In 2001, the author began working in the family business as a graphic designer and is currently in charge of administration and PR of the company. In May of 2005 he graduated from BCA (Business College of Athens) with an associates degree in E-BUSINESS. While living in Miami, he studied multi-media at the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale and conceived the idea for the design of his three books. *Virtual Patience* was completed in 1998 and contains the details of his accident and recovery. *Little Book of Inspirational Thoughts and Writing* was finished in 2003. In 2004 he completed *Virtuous Life Enlightenment*, a collection of images and words combining his sense of humor, experience and philosophy. This book reveals a man who lives with courage, a positive mental attitude and a personal relationship with God. He believes that people continue to grow all their lives through facing new challenges. He concentrates on quality, not just doing something, but doing something well.



To find the light within, we sometimes have to go into complete darkness.

By looking at the big picture, the character in this book overshadows his negative impulses and creates a whole new life from one traumatic experience.

Travel with Najj as he offers quirky observations on the road to mental and physical recovery after being in coma due to a brain injury. He believes that there is always a brighter side to life no matter what.