

Chapter 22

Bobby McGee and Freedom

Janis Joplin sings about freedom being just another word for having nothing left to lose. This is a thing. If you find yourself in a place where you never have any money and the bills always seem to overwhelm, I know that the message of acceptance in the last chapter is difficult. I nevertheless would not be honest if I failed to note that your humble state in life may afford you freedoms that wealthy people lack.

I have a very wealthy friend, and let's call him Joaquin because my friend values his privacy. Joaquin manages his family's wealth, but he still is answerable to a board of trustees from whom he is duty bound to take direction. I perceive that Joaquin's behavior in life is somewhat restricted. He told me how his board pays attention to things he does and how he represents their family's interests in his day-to-day life. In some ways, his life may be scrutinized like the life of a member of the British royal family. As a middle-aged man now, he has more freedoms, and they understand that he is a human being. It seems like he has a great deal of freedom of expression generally. Let's also say that Joaquin is one of the most respected medical

professionals in his field. His family can hold him up in a place of great honor because he has demonstrated professional excellence (outside of his family's wealth) that is undeniable by the world.

Joaquin bears his responsibilities admirably. I know that he feels the weight of his responsibilities and sometimes wishes that he could simply unburden himself because he gets tired just like you and me. I know Joaquin listens to and obeys his family members in humility. It is an amazing thing to hear him talk about this relationship because it is incomparable with most people's ordinary experience. Joaquin's role is not different from the president of a corporation being answerable to his board of trustees. The board of directors for sure might fire the president, but I don't know anything about the termination provisions related to Joaquin's position, whether he can be fired or resign. It is a mystery to me and I do not pry into his affairs.

Joaquin must manage his family's wealth not only for himself but also for their benefit (and with their help, advice, and supervision). Consequently, they must inform him of how they perceive his life affecting his responsibilities to manage the wealth and make decisions about how it should be deployed. This is Joaquin's

community. He is deeply ingrained in this community, he serves his community, and they serve him as well. His community is a central focus of his life and identity, and again, Joaquin is a person whom I would describe as truly wealthy by any measure. Because I know him personally, I know that Joaquin knows how to enjoy his life. He's a wealthy man despite his bank account (of which I have no specific knowledge), but his freedom is constrained because of his family's oversight of his life.

If you have limited resources, think about this. Lawsuits in business are common but no one will ever bring a lawsuit against you if they do not think that they can recover on a judgment. A poor defendant is not a good defendant. We can possibly identify with The Notorious B.I.G.'s assertion that

I don't know what they want from me
It's like the more money we come across
The more problems we see

If you are asking for more money, then anticipate more problems. I am not discouraging you from asking for more money but make sure that you're developing skills that allow you to deal with problems. Here again I emphasize that you should meditate. Meditation can be used as a tool to calm yourselves in moments of high

anxiety where you are trying to come up with solutions for problems. The solutions may be revealed to you over time or from the counsel of your community. If you ever are uncertain about how to act, the best thing that you can do is wait and meditate and look inside yourself. The goal is to answer the questions of The Task. Ask for more money, but simultaneously consider Solomon's prayer to God. Before he asked for riches, he asked God for wisdom. God told Solomon that because he asked for wisdom before wealth, God would give him both as a reward.

When I was young and wanted money, I prayed the same prayer thinking that I had found the loophole. I didn't ask God for money since I doubted his goodness. Because he probably wasn't good, he would never give me what I wanted. I attempted to deceive God suggesting to him that my sole desire was for wisdom. Do you think he knew the truth? Do you think the universe enables its intentions?

Solomon is described in the Bible as the most fabulously wealthy man in history. I love Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon, for the reasons I've described so far, but also because of the words that he writes about how "everything is meaningless" and that all we can do

“under the sun” is enjoy our life and give Glory to God. Remember how I described the Westminster confession?

Solomon was connected with the myth of Sisyphus in the sense that he recognized the absurdity of our actions and efforts, and meaninglessness of everything that we do here in this life because it all ends in our deaths. Yet he said that the best thing we can do is enjoy our lives. That's the central premise of The Offer.

This challenges many people's notion that they need to be productive in their lives. That is probably true because we all must eat, and we all might have somebody in our lives that we're responsible for feeding (at least for a short time). Also, it is true at least to a degree that our personal productivity is related to how we can best serve. What was hardest for me to think about was the concept of rest and the necessity for rest in order to work hard. I was very challenged by the notion that my sole purpose in life is to enjoy it.

I am a *Streber*, a gunner, a try hard. In German, it is not a complimentary term. It describes a prideful person who always thinks that he can achieve everything through his own actions. He grates on people's nerves because all he can think and talk about is how he is

ambitious and how he will achieve everything. We all know people like this. I have been that person and I still am to a large degree. The most important thing I had to learn was the notion of rest and trusting in process. Acceptance was a difficult lesson for me, and it is for most people.

We should never forget our essentially free natures. I know that Joaquin does not feel so constrained by his family that he is completely unable to express himself. He accepts the minor limitations they may express towards him and he moves forward in the confidence that at the heart of his community, centered around his family, are the ideas of love and service.

Take advantage of the time when you may be poor to explore all the possibilities. This is a time where you are not confronted with the types of problems that are associated with wealth: how to invest it; and how to make sure that other people may be blessed through your wealth. Begin to contemplate these principles so that you can go on and create wealth for yourself and your community.

A great tragedy occurs when someone becomes wealthy, but they do not know how to use their newfound wealth responsibly. This circumstance is best

illustrated by the lottery winner who is bankrupt after a year of profligate spending and succumbing to solicitations for cash from friends and family.

Meditation is a tool that can bring you rest even in those moments when you are at your most economically challenged. I understand those challenges and I want to have compassion. There are many people who may be reading this that I will never be able to help other than with my words. I hope that somehow you will be driven to your source of creation, your source texts, or other philosophical works like Camus', all of which can provide hope for people who are discouraged or even suicidal.

As a wealth advisor, I would commend gratitude to you. Even at our poorest moments financially, we frequently still can find things to be grateful for. Cultivating gratitude can be a key factor in developing life satisfaction, but gratitude requires mental discipline just like turning away from anger.

As a wealth advisor, I would commend to all my clients those things in life that provide deep meaning but that are FREE. In my life, poetry costs me only the expense of a pen and paper. Meditation is free. Yoga is nearly. Ecstatic dances are inexpensive to attend, but

sometimes, I dance to music in my kitchen, another free activity. A walk in your neighborhood, a conversation with a friend, a game of chess, the joy of participating in a community activity all are things that you can do to improve your life condition, and all these things are free or nearly free. I also understand that growing cannabis and mushrooms is relatively simple and inexpensive, and can be done indoors, even in closets. Check out your local library. There are abundant reading and educational materials available for checkout for free. (Of course, the internet is a bottomless well of “free” information, some of which is valuable.) Enriching your mind makes you wealthier by any measure and prepares you for when you will have greater material wealth in the future.

The main takeaway from this chapter is that even though you are poor, think about your blessings of freedom. Please know that I would never commend freedom to someone who is homeless or hungry. The only good news for people in those conditions is that they may be at their extreme low point, and many people identify their bottom as the place where they finally were able to begin making true change. I identify with this.

Last, there is a relationship between the cultivation of freedom and rest. When we are at rest, we are free from our burdens. When we are on vacation, we are not working. For me freedom means rest. Consequently, connecting myself to the notion of freedom has allowed me to rest better, and further, to work harder. That is a blessing to me, because I confess, I can be lazy.