

## 2-4 Adapting to an Alien Landscape

You are walking in the Valley of Darkness, surrounded by the Phantoms of War. Their haunting eyes pierce your soul, bringing back the horrors of the battlefield. You feel so terribly alone.

Desperately looking for a direction in which to move forward, your eyes detect a glimmer of Light at the summit of a distant mountain... silhouetted in the blackness of this bleak and desolate world.

Moving on instinct, you head toward the Light, your spirit guiding you toward what must be hope. Your voice rings out...

“Please God! There must be a way out of this horror!”

Stumbling and falling in the darkness, your eyes remain fixed on the Light. Slowly you move forward with unfaltering determination. Step by step, the Light becomes brighter. It becomes a beacon. Your pace quickens.

The pain in your heart lessens as the Light becomes brighter. You feel strength return to your aching body, and then you realize...

“The Light is my Honor! It is my Duty! My obligation to the living! It will guide me as a beacon through my life ahead! I am a Warrior!”

**I will not yield!**

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My young Brother and Sister Warriors, as I see it, life is like a trail, winding upward to the summit of a great mountain. Each of us has our own backpack to carry on this journey.

The weight in each backpack is the same for all of us. The only difference is that the stones we carry are different

colors, different experiences.

Each day, we move forward and upward under the weight we carry. Yet each day, we must always remain vigilant, not only of our surroundings, but of who we have now become as well.

At times the trail is unclear, shrouded with illusion and uncertainty. There are many people on this path and many choices ahead of us. Some lead us closer to the summit. Some lead us into the bed of thorns and even more pain in our lives.

Along the path of our Life Journey there are clearings in the trail, vantage points to catch our breath, to gather our thoughts. These clearings allow us to look back down the mountain and up toward the summit.

At these times, we are able to see the network of choices we've traveled and perhaps gain some insight, maybe even wisdom, in those choices that lie ahead.

In these brief moments of awareness, we are also able to see others on the path. Some of our fellow travelers are ahead of us, some stand by our side, and some are just beginning their journey upward.

There are also those at the summit of the Journey, cheering us on, offering us hope for success. And when we reach our objective, they will welcome us home, that we may all stand together overlooking the Valley of Darkness, remaining always focused in the Light.

“So what's the point?” you ask with quivering doubt.

The point is this: Life can be a shit bath for everyone; or if we have the brass balls (or ovaries) to never quit, it can be a damn good experience. The choice is ours and ours alone.

And don't be blamin' your misfortune or “lack” on

God! Hell! If you want wisdom, do you think God just dumps it into your thick skull, like fillin' up a canteen? Or does He give you the opportunity to learn to be wise?

If you want to feel warm and fuzzy about all living beings, do you think a big ass syringe drops out of the sky, sticks you in the ass, and there ya go? Don't think so. You learn to love by taking chances, letting your guard down, and practicing love. God gives us the opportunity to learn to love through compassion.

You don't go to one of those fancy colleges for a day. You know, walk in the door, take a pill, and become a brain surgeon or a sniper. It takes hard work, practice, and lots of experience.

And I don't want to hear a bunch of whining about...

"But what about if it hurts when I lose someone I love?"

Sure, if you never open up your heart and love anyone or any being, you're never gonna feel the pain of losin' a damn thing. What a selfish, shitty life that is. You may as well check out right now.

You know, take your ain't-lovin'-nobody-self up in the Shasta Mountains and hang out till you check out. As in pay the Boat Keeper a silver coin to carry your selfish ass across the River Styx to Hades... in other words, die.

Isn't it better to feel "something" about living beings, and maybe lose those precious souls, than to never feel shit about anyone? And every living thing in this world dies. So deal with it. I know full well that losing someone you love ain't easy, but isn't that part of life?

Sure it hurts when they leave. But wasn't your life better off by having shared the Journey of Life with these beautiful, loving beings? When someone dies who you love, or leaves you for other reasons, you're still alive,

right? Well if you're still alive, and there are billions of others on this planet, then what's the problem? Adapt. Love again.

Well anyway, let's get back to this mountain topic.

Some folks, through good fortune or by trial and error, have moved up the mountain ahead of us. (Marines: They've got their shit together.) Some of us in this Community of Humanity have just begun to glimpse a little wisdom. You know, figure out where our place is in all this life stuff. Sorta like gettin' your MOS (military occupational specialty) in the military... you know what you're supposed to do.

It's been said that life leads us forward with gentle nudges; or it drags us kickin' and screamin'. So why not accept the gentle nudge up the trail and stay focused on the summit?

Why not keep walkin' on the Golden Path rather than bein' pissed off all the time in the bed of thorns? And if you come to a brick wall on the trail, why not climb over it or go around it rather than beat your head against it? Been there, done that. Unless you're into feelin' pain, it don't work too good.

If you're not gettin' any of what the old Jar Head is sayin' here, let me put it a bit different. You Troops listen up!

You're gonna make mistakes in the choices you are "about" to make. No way out of or around it. That's because you ain't perfect... join the club. If you don't quit, you **will** succeed... guaran-damn-teed.

It's OK to love a person (or animal or whatever) and live each day feeling good. When they die or leave, you'll have some good memories from having shared your life, feelin' warm and fuzzy. Remember the good times and not

the end of 'em.

Every damn day, and I mean fifty times a day if need be, you say...

**“I am a Warrior!**

**I will improvise, adapt, and overcome!”**

**“I am a Warrior!**

**I have the strength to overcome any obstacle!”**

Just think about that Warrior who lived way back in the old days. He said...

“Nothing is impossible. The impossible just takes a little longer.”

He went by the name of Alexander the Great. The point here is that nothing is impossible for you. Again, just don't quit! And look, everyone drops out pukin' at times. But like I've said, when you fall, fall forward... you're still gainin' ground.

“OK! OK!” You say. “I get the point of never quitting and headin' up the mountain. But what's at the top?”

Ah Yes, my fellow seeker-of-knowledge friend: When you've reached the summit, it means you've figured life out. In Eastern-type thinkin', its being enlightened. (Marines: Not standing in a spotlight.)

It simply means that you drop your backpack. It's empty! You truly know who you are and why you were put on this tiny, little planet. You understand your purpose... your mission. For you civvies, a mission ain't a little church in the Southwestern U.S. of A. It's your objective, the reason you're movin' like you've got a purpose in life.

When you reach the Summit, you're not fixated in the past; you've processed all the shit bath experiences in your life. And unless you're a real dumb ass, you now have a small measure of peace on occasion. You know, the warm and fuzzy feelings about being ONE with God and the

Universe stuff?

Like I said, this love stuff is better than adrenaline. That's because adrenaline is, pure and simple, Beast Juice; it's the shit that makes you feel the demonic emotions like hate and rage, and makes you want to kill everything. The emotions of love and compassion are the Angelic, Spirit driven emotions that help us to feel peace and acceptance of ourselves and others.

Adrenaline pumps us up for the moment. It allows us to survive War. Love and Compassion teach us to survive Life, and they stay with us till the day we die. You Warriors understand both. We live both, on the battlefield where we feel the unconditional love of our fellow Warriors, and the pulse of the Beast. We just need to separate the two when we get back from War.

So then, to summarize (Marines: Not to make it warm), we go through life making choices, some pretty damn good and some real dog shit poor. We hit some booby traps, have a few setbacks, and often carry a lot of weight in our backpacks. But if we don't quit, we all reach the summit... we figure things out.

When we understand our strength and draw into that strength in the dark times, overcoming the problems we face, then we feel better about ourselves and everyone around us. Just that simple.

If we worry about the failures along the trail in the past, or what shit we're gonna go through in the future, we ain't goin' anywhere. It's like a duce-and-a-half stuck in the mud... we're spinnin' our wheels, but we ain't movin'... we're fixated in the past or anticipating the future that isn't here yet.

All we need to do is live in the present moment. And understand that no matter what comes along down the

trail, we've got the strength to deal with it. You Warriors out there understand this completely. Because nothing in civilian life is as bad as war. Nothing. And if it ain't life-threatening, why sweat it?

You may be asking yourself...

“So how do I adapt to an Alien Landscape?”

I'll give you an example of one Soldier doin' just that...

He came back from his third deployment in Iraq and was discharged due to injuries. Having an exceptional relationship with his wife, he was still married. They were planning their lives ahead.

He'd been dreamin' of workin' on his old pickup truck that had been sittin' in his garage for years. So he and his very supportive wife went out, pulled off the covering, and took a look.

Inside the bed of the truck was a good bit of dirt and plant material that he hadn't cleaned out before deploying. And in the dirt were hundreds of snails, who had found it a perfect place to live.

His wife said...

“Kill those damn snails and clean out that mess, or I'm not helping you work on that old truck!”

The Soldier had done a lot of killing in War. He'd had enough. And you know how we discussed the sanctity of life to a Warrior... “Never take a life without just cause.” So to make his wife happy, he cleaned out the bed of the truck.

But before he did that, he picked up every single snail and carefully moved all of them to another spot in the backyard that he had prepared just for his new, little friends. He would not kill one of those snails without just cause. If you think about it, they could be trusted, they had



NO legs.

The Soldier knew he had changed and was sick of killing (anything); and he wouldn't compromise his Code of Honor... his convictions, his self-worth, for anyone. So he made his wife happy, and he sure as hell made the snails happy. He adapted to a new world; he made a real good choice on his journey to the summit. His trail led upward on the Golden Path and not into the bed of thorns.

So what does it mean to Adapt?

In ivory tower lingo, the word actually means, "To make suitable or fit for a specific use or situation." The word suitable means, "Appropriate to a purpose."

In Jar Head Speak, adapt means to adjust fire. The rounds aren't hittin' the target, so you move 'em to where they're gonna do some good. To make this even more clear... if what you're doin' ain't workin', then make a damn change so it does work!

Comin' back from down range, the world hasn't changed. You've changed. So you solve problems a bit differently now than you did before goin' to War. And you sure as hell don't solve problems like you did when you were in War. I'll give you some examples.

Let's suppose you've got a problem with your apartment landlord who doesn't like your five dogs chewin' on his drywall and shittin' on his lawn. You certainly don't need the stress or the triggers in your life. So if you can't resolve the situation peacefully, you pack your duffle bag, let loose the Hounds of War into your pickup truck and move... maybe to someplace better.

If your job reminds you of a Billy goat pissin' on his own face and your boss is an asshole (?), you find a better job that helps you move along the path to the summit.



Been there, did that seventy times in forty-five years.  
Seemed to work.

You've changed. Life is all about change. So you change with it. Do you see how normal you are by living as you are? The absolute God's Truth is that nothing ever remains the same.

So how in the hell could you possibly think you would be the same after a shit bath experience like War? You're flowing right along with the Big Plan. It's just that most of the folks around you aren't. I think that's their problem, not yours. As a Warrior, you're living in the moment (which you're supposed to do), and you're changing with the times (like you're supposed to do). So damn it, feel good about you!

And if you want to feel even better about yourself, maybe for a starter, you can do some kind of community service. You know, like volunteer at a homeless shelter for people, or an animal shelter for your little four legged friends. Or maybe pass out chow at a homeless shelter on Thanksgiving.

There's an old saying...

“The more you help others, the more you help yourself.”

Remember how we talked about practice? Well this is practice in expanding your heart, allowing you to feel more of those good emotions. It's sorta like doin' push-ups: The more you do 'em, the more of 'em you can do. You slowly build yourself up to loving other beings more and more. Pretty soon, you won't feel right unless that love is a part of your life all the time.

Could this notion of helping others be another step on the journey to the summit? You decide.

Here's something else to think about: When you

returned home from War, most likely you changed your choices about lots of things. Let's take music as one example of the many changes you probably made. Knowin' what you know about your Beasty, let's take a look at how music affects you now. Maybe this is something for you to be aware of?

Chances are, if you're feelin' a bit tense and droolin' at the mouth while sharpenin' your bayonet, you've got the appropriate tunes playin'. You know, with the base turned up louder than the afterburners on an F-16? Does this sound like your Beast? No doubt.

But if your warm and fuzzy Angelic side is at the steering wheel, the music you're playing is usually a bit more soothing. I don't really know what it's called nowadays; but a few years back, the loud stuff was called Ghetto Rap. Kinda stirred up the primal side. At least in my brain-housing-group.

Now I'm not sayin' there's anything wrong with that sorta music. Just a matter of choice. But hell, it'd be real tricky for me to concentrate on completin' my mission on the porcelain throne with music that would tend to drive me house-to-house with a K-Bar.

Anyway, think about this sorta thing if you're deciding what makes you feel better on the journey. But just as a side comment here about music, I'd bet good money that with your Angelic side at the helm, while your Beast is lickin' the family jewels in the basement, the music will tend to be a bit on the calmer side. But what do I know. It's somethin' for you Young Pups to figure out. Just watch those thorn beds!

Well anyway, let's talk about this change stuff a bit more. It kinda clogs up my old green brain when I think of how odd it is the way most people think.

Life is nothing but constant change, yet most folks seem to be scared shitless of just that. They think if they keep doin' the same old thing day to day, they're gonna keep everything just the same as it's always been. That is, if they keep low-crawlin' through life, they won't have to change anything. Don't think so.

A lot of people go through life with the "Pain Avoidance Attitude." You might also say that a lot of people go through life with the "Change Avoidance Attitude." In my black-and-white view of things, this all boils down to one thing: **Fear**. So let's look at fear and how that relates to you as Warriors and most other human-type people.

One of the Big Books of Words defines fear as...

"A feeling of agitation and anxiety caused by the presence of imminent danger."

So what is fear? Seems to me that fear is simply a lack of faith in yourself to overcome the obstacle in front of you. Don't care if it's a pissed off drunk driver flippin' you the bird, with a crazed look in his eyes; or a battalion of the enemy yellin' "Yankee Infidel Dogs!" while chargin' up the hill. This sort of thing tends to alarm us... push our buttons and set off triggers.

Warriors understand fear, but we've been conditioned to control it. That is to say, who the hell doesn't feel fear in combat, or when someone decides to send a few mortars your way, or in an ambush? Thing is, for us, we learn to use the fear to accomplish our mission. That's called controlled fear in military lingo.

Fear is what triggers the Beast into action with adrenaline. For example, a shot is fired at your ass, the adrenaline starts pumpin', the lizard brain swells like a Zodiac boat fired out of a submarine, and your Beast is

twitchin' with anticipation... Oh Boy! It's on the scent of blood, and it's lookin' for a victim.

Fear is most likely the same for all people. And if the shrinkers are right, it's only the reactions that differ. For a trained and conditioned predator (that be you Warriors), our reaction is to "fight." For someone having not been brainwashed, the reaction to fear is most likely, "Freeze or Flee." Guess the "threat-causes-fear" thing is hard-wired into all of us?

Change will often cause fear. How you respond to it depends on a few things. If you "**Adopt the Attitude of Adapting**," change can actually be a real good experience... an opportunity for growth. If you fight it, kicking and screaming, it's gonna beat your ass into the dirt, plain and simple. Been there, too.

If you believe in your own ability to solve any problem, then you have "faith" in yourself and your ability. Some people call this "confidence." And what is faith?

"Oh no! Here goes the Jar Head again with the dictionary," you say with muffled breath.

Well, my fine bedazzled friend. Just hang in there, 'cause there's a point to all this.

Faith means...

"A confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, an idea, or thing."

So how about looking at faith as the belief that **change** is part of life. You trust yourself to make the truest, wisest decisions possible. And if life presents a problem, you have faith in your strength and ability to solve it. Again, faith in yourself with a 100% effort in Life!

A way to "relax" in life is to accept any possibility that might come along. That is, any change. I'll give you an example.

After sixty-three years, I live on a ranch in New Mexico. And for the first time in my life, I feel like I'm home. No small thing for a Combat Warrior.

Even though I finally feel a little peace in my life, I accept any outcome, any change that might come along in the future. You do this by **adapting and adopting**. I'll explain.

We must continually adapt to change, and we must also adopt the attitude of acceptance of that change. Clear as mud? OK, let me put it this way: I'll use the worst/best scenario method, something all Warriors usually do without thinkin' much about it.

The Worst Case scenario is that, because of a "change" and my decisions being made poorly, I'll lose my ranch and the animals that I love more than life itself.

The Best Case scenario is that, because of "change" and my decisions being made wisely, I keep livin' here until the Angel of Death (the Woman of my dreams) takes me by the hand and gets me a permanent liberty pass in the Land of the Big BX. Maybe I'll even get to polish the boots of the real Commander-In-Big-Chief?

So you see, I'm prepared for any outcome, any change on the Journey of Life ahead. And that, my young Friends, is Peace... a peace that sinks right down into your soul. Try it. You'll like it. Actually, it's a whole lot better than adrenaline. So there's two things better than your Beast's favorite cocktail; Compassion and Change!

Now, isn't that a good place to be? Like you, as a Warrior, I'm not afraid of death, not afraid of change, and sure as hell not afraid of life. That's better than a whole case of Spaghetti and Meatballs MREs!

OK then, are you gettin' the picture of how to adapt to the new world? It ain't so bad. Fact is, it can be damn fine.

Just remember who you are and how strong you are as a Warrior. And as long as your feet hit the deck in the morning, “You are Good to Go!”

I find change exciting and wait for each new problem so I can use my military training to “Overcome” that problem. We Warriors do that with something called intestinal fortitude. That is, Guts!

### **You know exactly what I mean!**

Now let’s wrap this mission and move out to the next topic. You can be at ease on this one. Let’s see who we can piss off.

### **Wheels Up!**

**We’re headin’ back to the firebase for some real fine chow.**

**We’ve also got a hot shower and a Porta-Potty to look forward to.**

**(Play soothing music?)**