

Guide to resuming / sustaining activity after being frozen / stuck

Post by “Julia” of July 8, 2024 at 1:51 PM

These are arguments and actions which help me stay afloat and active. While I discuss the intended meanings line by line, no one line is meant to stand in isolation. The wording is intentionally short and formulaic, such that I can easily call to mind the intended meanings, without needing too much mental paraphrasing, because for this compilation to be practical in daily life, it has to be easy to think the concepts in contains (just like a car is a car, not a "thing with four wheels and a seat and windows and ...", which would be very tedious and clunky to think every single time, instead of just thinking "car"). An alternative, more generally applicable line 3 is offered [in post #3 below](#). With that said, here we go:

1. I want you to know that we care.
2. Self-love is an act of resistance.
3. Reclaim agency by recovering.
4. Imagination is discipline.
5. Discipline is freedom.
6. Freedom is pleasure.
7. Pleasure is life.
8. Life is finite.
9. Embrace it.
10. No dread of dissolution.

1. I want you to know that we care. This line establishes that someone else wrote this little text, is talking to me, and that I am part of a group. It expresses that the group cares about me, cares for me, and that they care about what I do, don't do, how I do what I do, and how I feel the while. It offers attachment and empathy by saying "I might not know the answer, but I know that being here with you is at least part of it." (Sympathy is cognitive and disconnected, it says: "It's not that bad. It could be worse. At least there's the silver-lining of xyz." Empathy is emotional and connected, it says: "I'm here. You are seen. I feel you.") It also calls to mind my responsibilities and the expectations I have of myself with regard to the people around me, and how I would feel if I were to let them down.
2. Self-love is an act of resistance. Shame is a two-person emotion, which says "You are wrong." (It is opposed to guilt, which says: "You did wrong." Guilt also does not

require a social, interpersonal context; guilt is between the person and their conscience; not between one person and another.) This line helps me remember what the opposite of shame is self-love, and that I can act out this opposite out of defiance (against the people and circumstances which got me in my situation), even though I don't actually feel self-love yet. It also tells me that when I don't know how to love myself, I can simply act oppositional. This has the benefit of being a fight-response (of the Friend-Flight-Fight-Freeze-Fawn-Flop-Faint survival responses), which has agency (as opposed to Freeze-Fawn-Flop-Faint). Defiance is other-centric, which is theoretically bad, but an easier point to start from, because why would I be nice to myself while I'm still ashamed of myself? By being other-centric how I see myself doesn't matter. I should still do it, even though I don't think I deserve it. By being a fight-response, it also helps me repossess my own agency from those who took it. Eventually, an as-outside-so-inside fake-it-till-you-become-it effect happens and I've essentially tricked myself into actually believing I have worth, that I am worthy of care, and of my own self-love and self-compassion. By making it about resistance / defiance / opposition, my immediate dismissal and avoidance of self-care gets bypassed, and by living a self-loving life, I eventually accumulate enough experience to the contrary to mute and overwrite the previous knowledge and experience, making "I am worthy of love" not just dry cognitive knowledge, but a felt emotional knowledge. (That's the same knowledge-difference between "Speeding is risky" and "I just crashed my car.")

3. *Reclaim agency by recovering.* Not having agency, being disempowered, powerless, forced into a certain position or onto a certain track is something which can cause me to submit, accept, and make all the mental and physical arrangements to live happily in my cage, whatever it may be. At the same time, I don't want that. It's just something I do, force of habit. So this line reminds me that I can have agency now, that I can reclaim it and step into my life. I get to choose what will happen. I get to write the remaining chapters of my life. This is something which I know and don't know at the same time; it slips through my mind like sand running through my fingers. I still tend to default to a mental prison, so I remind myself that the door is unlocked. All I need to do is step outside, and only I can do that. (I need to change my own thinking, just like I need to do my own understanding of things, even when people teach them to me.) My next problem is not knowing how to do that. How do I step outside, reclaim my agency? I can do that by recovering, because luckily, I was living as though being an empowered adult at one point. While I actually had no power then, I did go through all the same motions - so all I need to do now is *choose* to do them. (With minor modifications, but they are still all fundamentally the same, and I know that I can do them, because I already did before.) I also know from fictional and biographical TV and books what being an adult entails and looks like, so I even have plenty of good and bad examples to learn from. If I do all the responsible adult stuff, if I do what recovery means for me, my life will once again be mine, and I'll have reclaimed my agency.
4. *Imagination is discipline.* This line reminds me that motivation is fleeting, and that I should rely on discipline instead. Motivation is a dreamy notion which comes when I'm in comfort and not doing the thing. Discipline is what I need to actually do the thing, even

when it is uncomfortable. It also reminds me that I should not confuse discipline with fear (such as the fear of what would happen if I don't follow through). If I work from fear, I give up my agency, and easily slip into a fawn or freeze response. At best I still try to flee - but it is hard to get to *anywhere specific* if the activity I'm engaged in is running away. Instead, I should build discipline, which is based on goals. When I see, hear, taste, feel - when I imagine having attained my goals vividly, I will remember that I actually *want* to do what I was reluctant to do a minute ago, because in the equation of hedonic calculus it'll be worth it. To be disciplined, all I need to do is to remember my goals, to imagine them, to imagine *having accomplished* them; to call to mind and keep in mind all that *having accomplished* them will unlock in my life. When doing this, it is important to mentally move to and stay in the point in time *after* the action at hand, to the point in time when the object of desire has been accomplished ([see here](#) for more on this detail).

5. *Discipline is freedom.* I can either have all sorts of freedoms or I can be free from responsibilities; I cannot have both. So I accept responsibilities as a necessary evil to gain all sorts of freedoms as a reward. For example, I drive responsibly to keep my license, and I go to work, because money buys freedom of choice (what to eat and wear, where to live, leisure activities, and so on). Accepting responsibility to trade it for freedoms-of-all-sorts is why I should establish the goal-based discipline from the previous line; eg: My goal is a road trip, so I mustn't crash my car and need to earn more money, so I have to have the discipline to drive safely and go to work, and in doing that, I gain the freedom to go on my road trip.
6. *Freedom is pleasure.* Without these freedoms-of-all-sorts my life could be free from responsibilities, but it would then also be almost devoid of pleasure. Pleasure is fun and makes me happy, so I want to have these freedoms-of-all-sorts. The freedoms-of-all-sorts include being free-from-shame (shame is the social power which limits our actions and self-expression) and the freedom brought by agency, by stepping-into life (lines 2 and 3). Avoiding responsibility leads to a loss of pleasure by leading to a loss of the freedoms-of-all-sorts.
7. *Pleasure is life.* Just because my life is devoid of pleasure doesn't mean I'm literally dead. So "life" is metaphorical in this line: Being alive, actually living my life is the same thing as seeking pleasure (because what else is there? We seek neither pain nor virtue, and if we did, that wouldn't be a play that is pleasing for very long...). Because I don't quite know what "being alive" and "living my life" even mean, it comes in handy that I can measure how alive I am by how much time and effort I spend in the pursuit of pleasure. This way I can hold myself accountable, parent myself, and have a guide to all of my actions.
8. *Life is finite.* My body is ageing, so my time is finite. I want to be able to retire with some comfort, so I need to accumulate the necessary funds while I'm still well and able. I can disappear into and live inside my mind, and I actually like it there - so no matter my outside reality, I always have some pleasures left, because they're inside of me. However, I also like to feel a breeze on my face, to hear leaves rustle, and to watch birds. Compared to physical experience, it's never quite the same when I just imagine things, no matter how good I get at it. If I want to retreat into my mind now, I ought to remind

myself that I can still do that once my body is frail, but that once my body is frail, I can no longer do many of the things which are goals of mine (imagination from line 4, alive-ness from line 7). So I should optimise my life in the outside, physical world (instead of building fancy things inside my mind) – and I should not waste any time, especially not in confusion.

9. *Embrace it.* After having been lost in thought about lines 1-8, this is to bring me back to my immediate surroundings and the task at hand. Stepping into my life means stepping up to the plate. Everything else is contrary to any number of the previous lines. Everything else is avoidance. There is no other way, and there is nothing to wait for. There is only my commitment to pleasure, and it implies a call to action. Apart from a commitment to action, this line also contains not just a mere tolerance of, not just an acceptance, but an embracing of that which is unpleasant-but-worth-it in life. Embracing life differs from enjoying life in that embracing it hints at a the more complex truth: There will inevitably be unpleasant tasks, even painful experiences, and avoiding them at all cost only leads to even greater pain. I choose not just to tolerate, not just to accept, but to embrace pain-that-is-worth-it, because the reward in pleasure will, in due course, outweigh my upfront payment in pain. This way, ultimately, I *will* enjoy life – but if I start with a focus on enjoying, rather than embracing, I end up avoiding what is unpleasant, I withdraw from the world and the inevitable pains accumulate, tainting what little pleasure might still remain.
10. *No dread of dissolution.* A memento mori – you might have heard it before 😊 – and also a reminder that I should not seek absolute security. Death is not just part of life, but it is also nothing to me. I should not stop swimming just because it puts me at risk of drowning. (I also shouldn't be reckless, but that's encapsulated in lines 1, 2 and 5: If I love myself and can thus accept that others care about me, I end up caring about myself for my own sake and for the sake of the others' feelings, which will make it easy to be disciplined and not throw away by recklessness the freedom of being able-bodied, the freedom of being financially secure, the freedoms-of-all-sorts.)

I've printed and hung those ten lines where I can see them while I write my journal and plan my next day in the evening. Whenever I get stuck or disheartened – during that evening ritual or throughout the day itself – I seem to find all I need by retracing the reasoning outlined above and by doing the actions implied in there (eg line 4: "Remember what all of this is for and vividly imagine it."). As part of the same evening activity, I write down which pleasures I work towards, as a list of less than a dozen bullet points, which came about by asking myself: "If I was dying, what would I most regret not having done or owned? If I was dying, what would I most want an honest obituary to say about me?" I re-write this little list *every* evening, even if nothing on it has changed, and I do so *after* I've journaled and planned out the next day. Journaling and planning first help me clear my mind, and re-writing my list afterwards ensures that it will be the last thing on my mind when I go to bed, such that I don't get lost in day-to-day minutiae and everyday worries, such that my brain will know which problems to solve using the dreams I'm about to have, and such that I remember why I want to get out of bed the next

morning, even though it is warm, safe, soft and cosy – such that I stay focused on pleasure 😊