

December



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December 1

Know the Season

Know the season. It is critical to your mental and emotional health as well as your well-being. In the United States, as we enter the Holiday Season with Thanksgiving behind us and Hanukah, Christmas and New Year's following suite, you must know the seasons and adjust your expectations accordingly.

The Holiday Season brings in a rush in business and life. Quite often, the two collide and leave a wake of unhappiness and a lack of fulfillment in life.

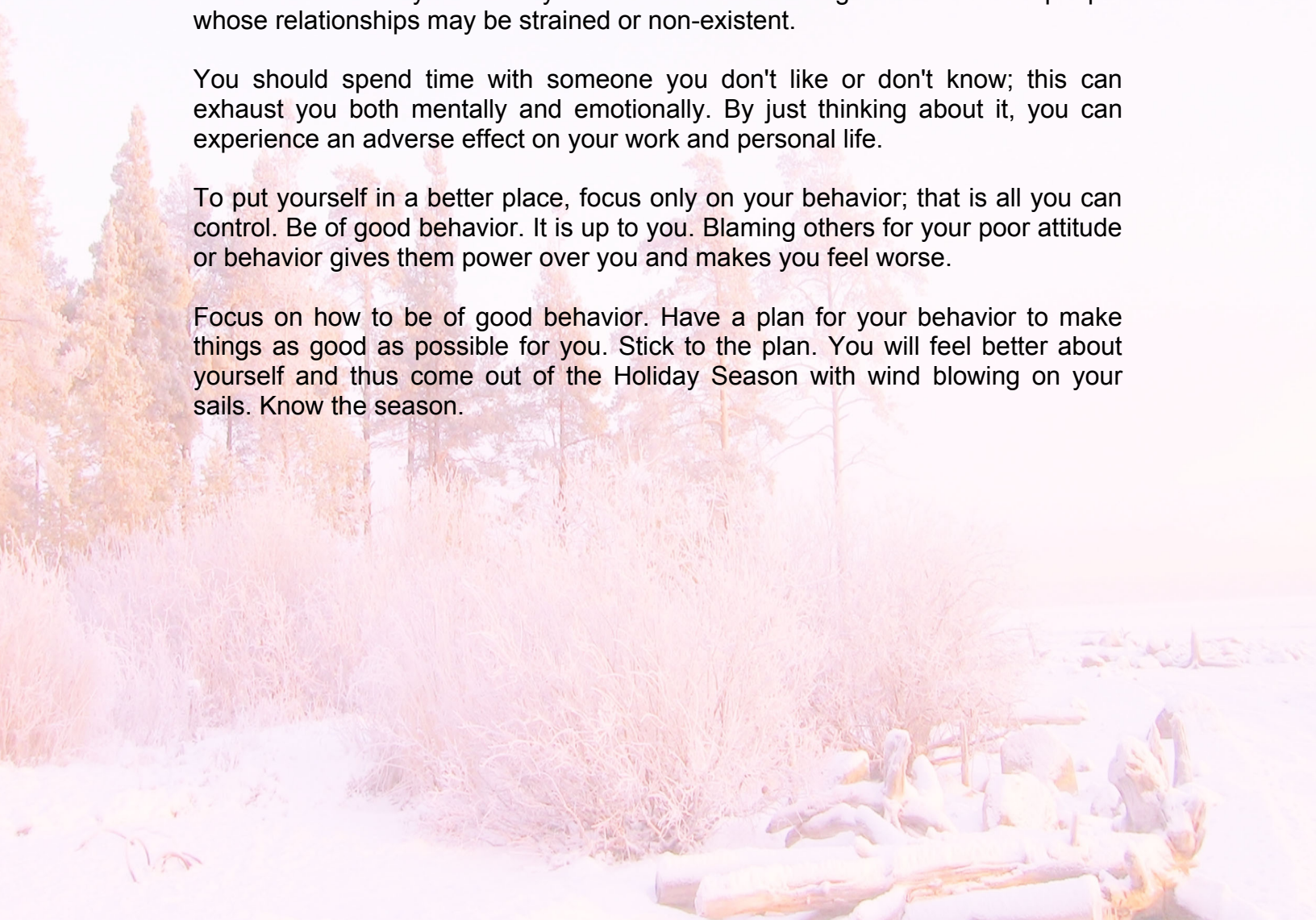
There is that final push at work to get things finished or reach goals by the end of the year. There is the pressure as to what gifts to buy. There are budget considerations. On top of it all, there is an increase in social gatherings with Holiday parties. However, the biggest pressure doesn't have anything to do with work, gifts, the budget, or parties. The greatest pressure comes in with people and your relationships with them.

This is the time of year when you need to be thrown together with those people whose relationships may be strained or non-existent.

You should spend time with someone you don't like or don't know; this can exhaust you both mentally and emotionally. By just thinking about it, you can experience an adverse effect on your work and personal life.

To put yourself in a better place, focus only on your behavior; that is all you can control. Be of good behavior. It is up to you. Blaming others for your poor attitude or behavior gives them power over you and makes you feel worse.

Focus on how to be of good behavior. Have a plan for your behavior to make things as good as possible for you. Stick to the plan. You will feel better about yourself and thus come out of the Holiday Season with wind blowing on your sails. Know the season.



December 2

Overcoming Challenges

Overcoming challenges is part of life. You have to overcome challenges to live, let alone exist. The quickest path to overcoming challenges is to be a learner.

The more you learn, the more option you will have to successfully overcome challenges. Many people never overcome challenges because they are usually unwilling to learn.

Learning takes time. Learning takes effort. Furthermore, learning has a cost. The reason most people don't learn is because of one of these three obstacles or all of them combined.

To move forward, you must be learning. You can learn from your own experiences. Sometimes you succeed, sometimes you don't. I guess you can call that a positive-negative.

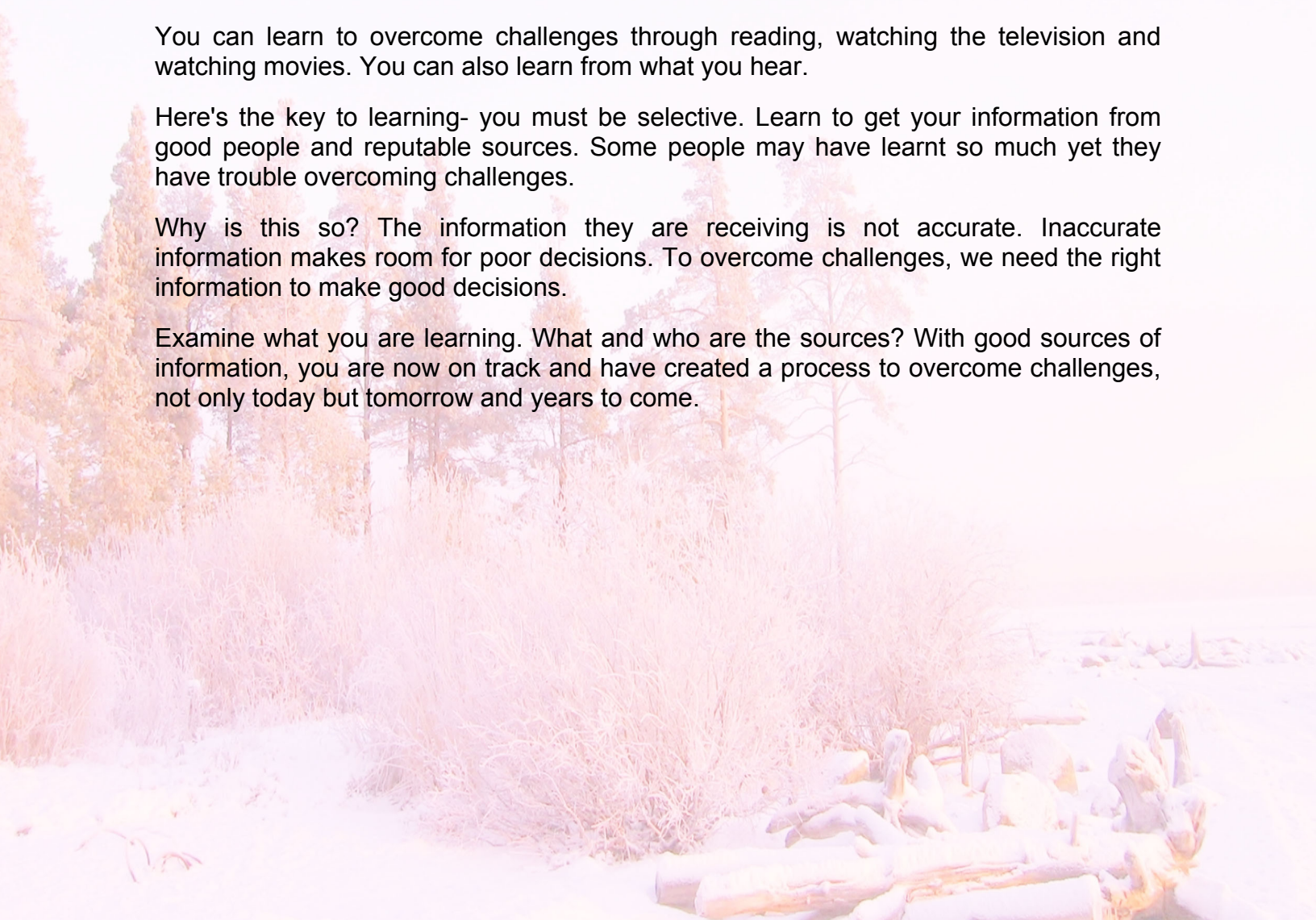
You can learn from the experiences of others, both positive and negative. This is a great way to learn about overcoming challenges in life. It involves less time. Also, the emotional drain as well as cost is minimal.

You can learn to overcome challenges through reading, watching the television and watching movies. You can also learn from what you hear.

Here's the key to learning- you must be selective. Learn to get your information from good people and reputable sources. Some people may have learnt so much yet they have trouble overcoming challenges.

Why is this so? The information they are receiving is not accurate. Inaccurate information makes room for poor decisions. To overcome challenges, we need the right information to make good decisions.

Examine what you are learning. What and who are the sources? With good sources of information, you are now on track and have created a process to overcome challenges, not only today but tomorrow and years to come.



December 3

Opportunities for Success

People who have the desire to move forward are always seeking new opportunities for success. Some people encounter these more often than others. Take for example two people, who on the surface, appear to be equal, yet one person receives more opportunities for success than the other.

How come? There are many answers. The first reason for more opportunities for success is attitude. Do you have an attitude that makes you a more attractive person? Do you have an attitude that fosters collaboration and support? Do you have an attitude that says 'I will keep developing my skills'? One that says 'I will strive to improve my discipline'?

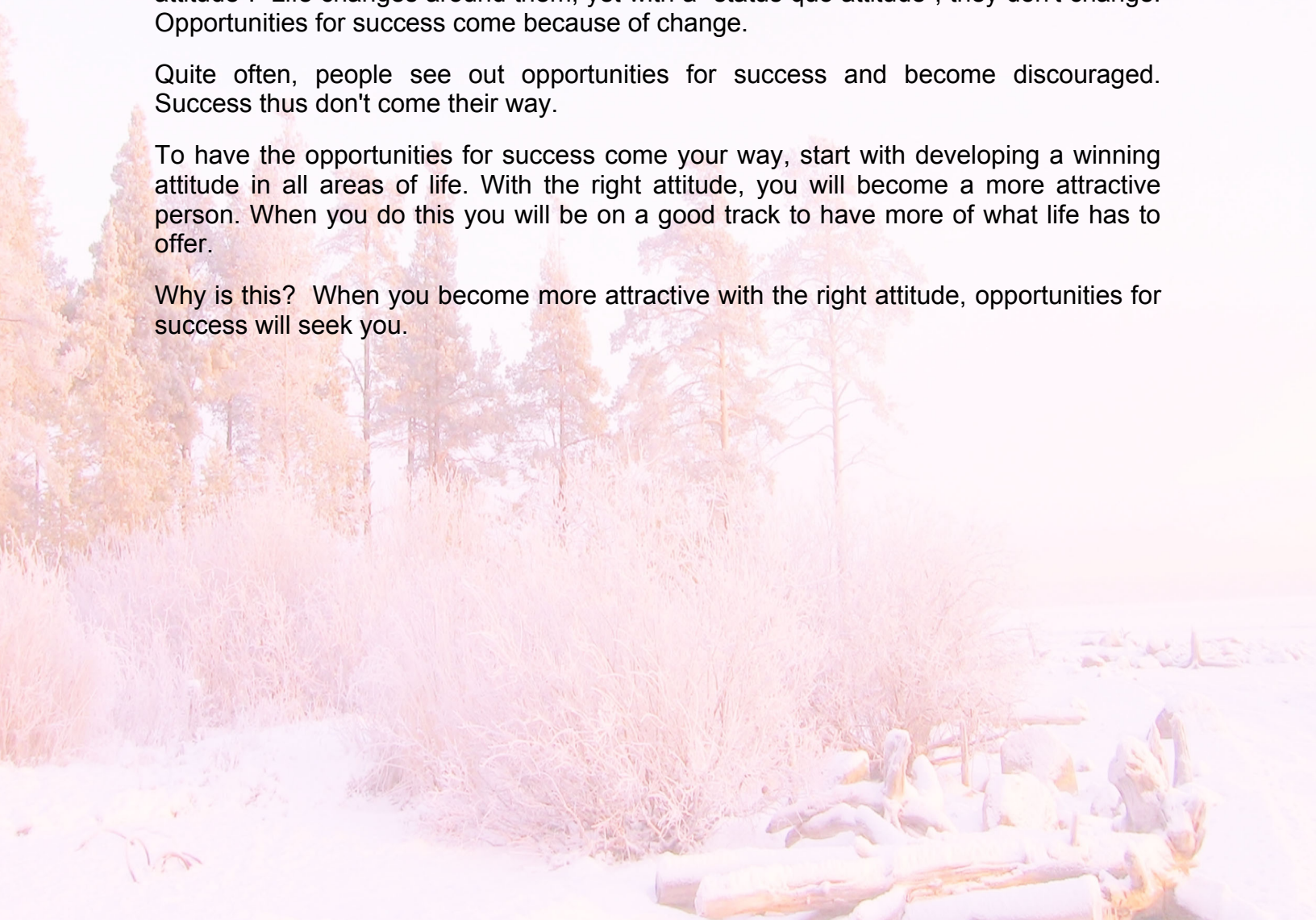
What's your attitude about yourself? Do you seek good health? Are you refining your character to improve build trust? When you seek to become more in all these areas you become more attractive.

Sadly, many talented people never develop their talents. They have a "status quo attitude". Life changes around them, yet with a "status quo attitude", they don't change. Opportunities for success come because of change.

Quite often, people see out opportunities for success and become discouraged. Success thus don't come their way.

To have the opportunities for success come your way, start with developing a winning attitude in all areas of life. With the right attitude, you will become a more attractive person. When you do this you will be on a good track to have more of what life has to offer.

Why is this? When you become more attractive with the right attitude, opportunities for success will seek you.



December 4

Checkup

When you need an appraisal, examination, or analysis, you get a checkup. In the case of health you go to a doctor to have a checkup. When we need to get a checkup on many things we bring in someone else who has some expertise in that area.

Who do you go to when you need a checkup in the other areas of your life? Usually, this is self-administered. There is nothing wrong with that but it does tend to lead to a distorted view on yourself. Why? You have a tendency to enlarge or diminish disproportionately your abilities and shortcomings.

It's not intentional. You are human. The value and perception you have of yourself is one thing. The value and perception others have of you can be an entirely different matter.

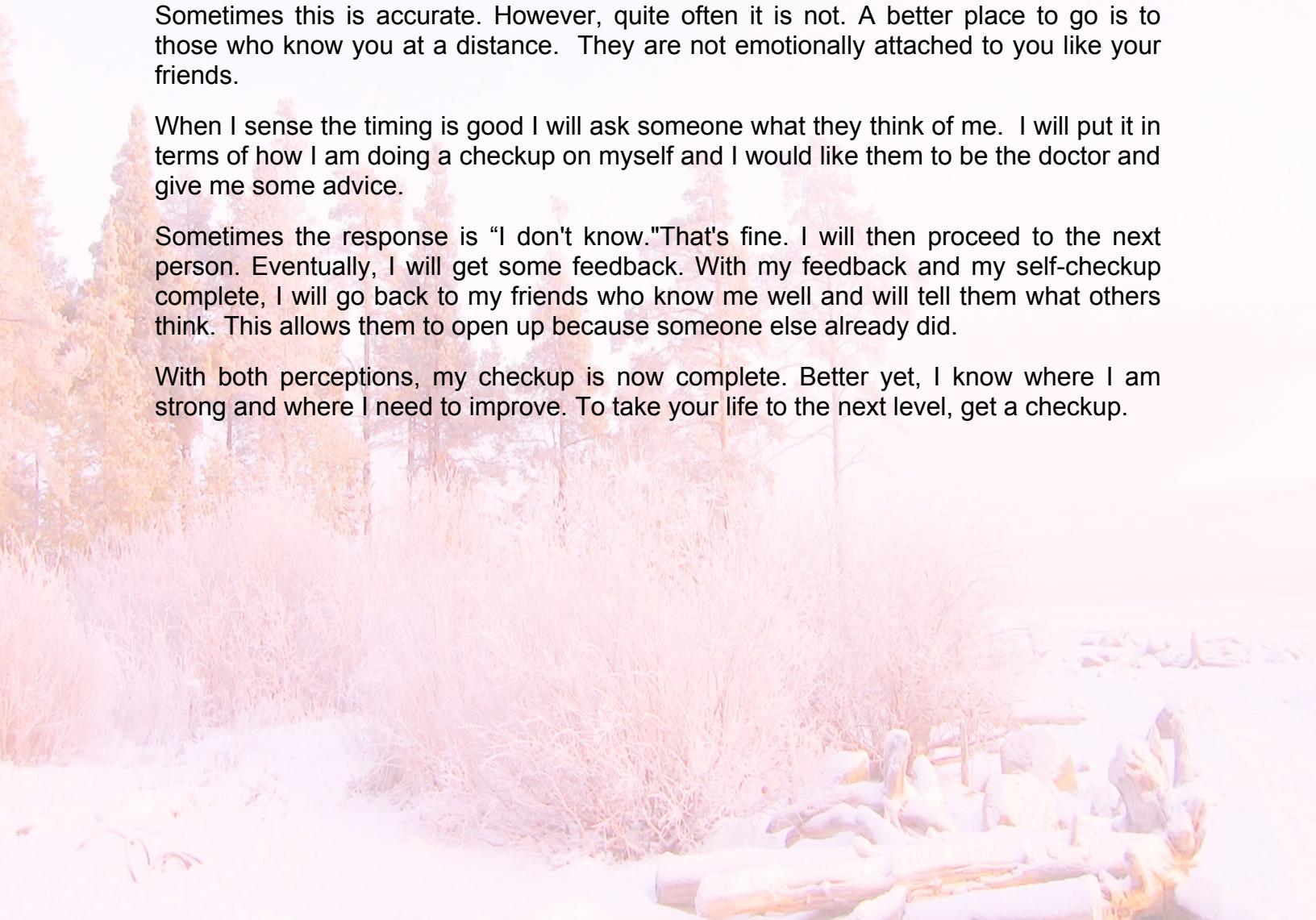
In your world, how others perceive you will determine much of what happens to you. That's why it is critical to your success and moving forward to know how others see you and the value you bring.

To get an accurate checkup on yourself, who do you ask? You can start with friends. Sometimes this is accurate. However, quite often it is not. A better place to go is to those who know you at a distance. They are not emotionally attached to you like your friends.

When I sense the timing is good I will ask someone what they think of me. I will put it in terms of how I am doing a checkup on myself and I would like them to be the doctor and give me some advice.

Sometimes the response is "I don't know." That's fine. I will then proceed to the next person. Eventually, I will get some feedback. With my feedback and my self-checkup complete, I will go back to my friends who know me well and will tell them what others think. This allows them to open up because someone else already did.

With both perceptions, my checkup is now complete. Better yet, I know where I am strong and where I need to improve. To take your life to the next level, get a checkup.



December 5

Add Value to People

To make your life smoother and your relationships better, add value to people. How do you go about doing that?

Quite simple; make the other person feel important when in your presence. Be interested in them first. When someone feels that you are truly interested in who they are and what they have to say, then you have added value to them.

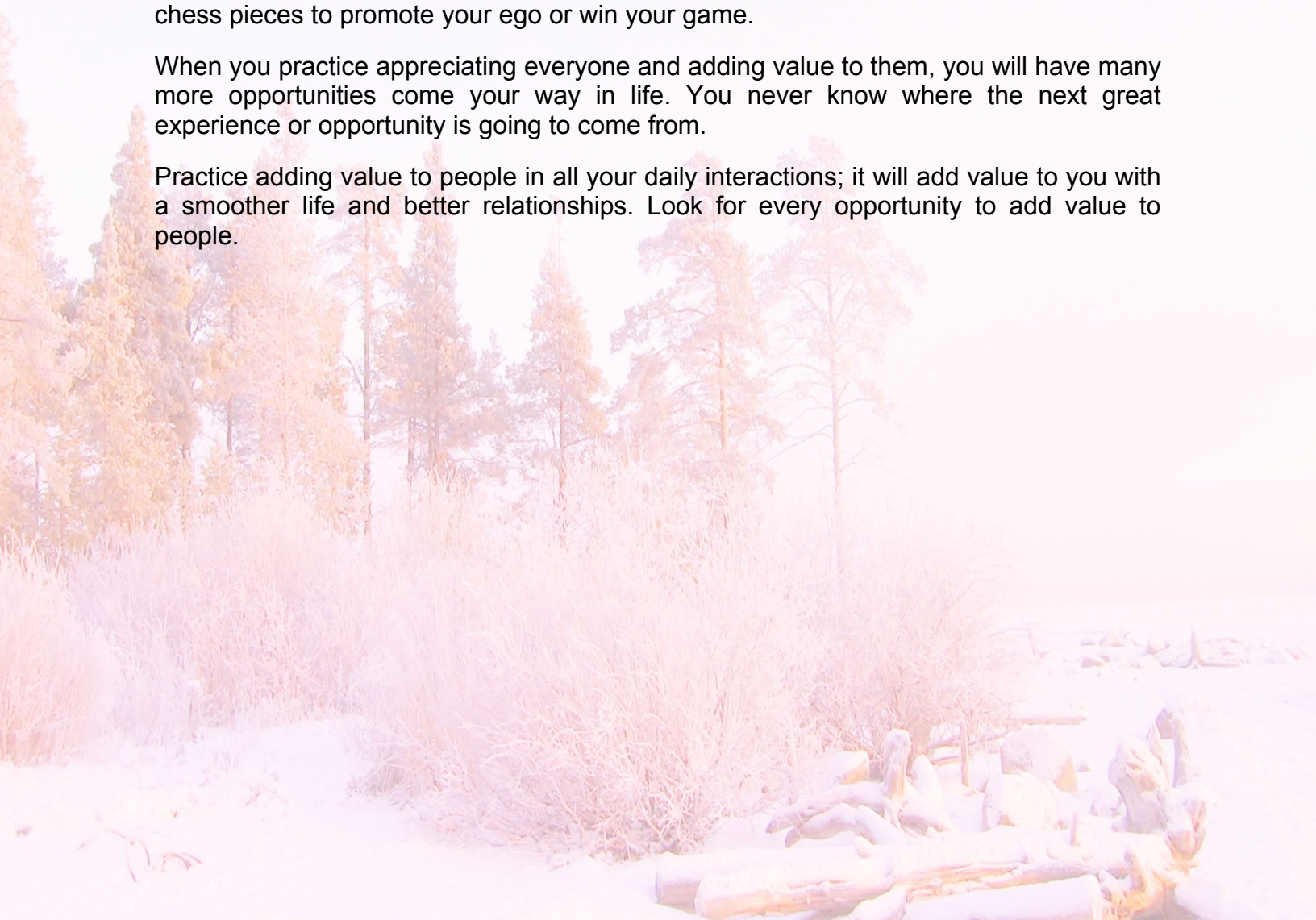
Here's the best reason for adding value to others; when you add value to them, they are more likely to be receptive to you and likewise add value to you. All of us enjoy the feeling of being valued.

What can hold us back from adding value to others? It is how you see other people. Are people potential recipients of value you can give or do you see them as nuisances along your path to success?

Where you can miss out is not treating everyone with appreciation even if they do nothing to benefit you. Regard everyone as human beings, not as sounding boards or chess pieces to promote your ego or win your game.

When you practice appreciating everyone and adding value to them, you will have many more opportunities come your way in life. You never know where the next great experience or opportunity is going to come from.

Practice adding value to people in all your daily interactions; it will add value to you with a smoother life and better relationships. Look for every opportunity to add value to people.



December 6

Give Others Energy

Give others energy. What if you don't have energy? Mark Twain once said, "If you want energy go out and give it to someone else." First you have to put some energy in to have a reasonable hope of getting some energy back.

When you give others energy they have a more favorable view of you. You have brought them some energy and they will feel more productive or fulfilled. If you are in a leadership role, it is important to bring energy to those you are responsible for. With energy as part of your team you are much more likely to accomplish your goals.

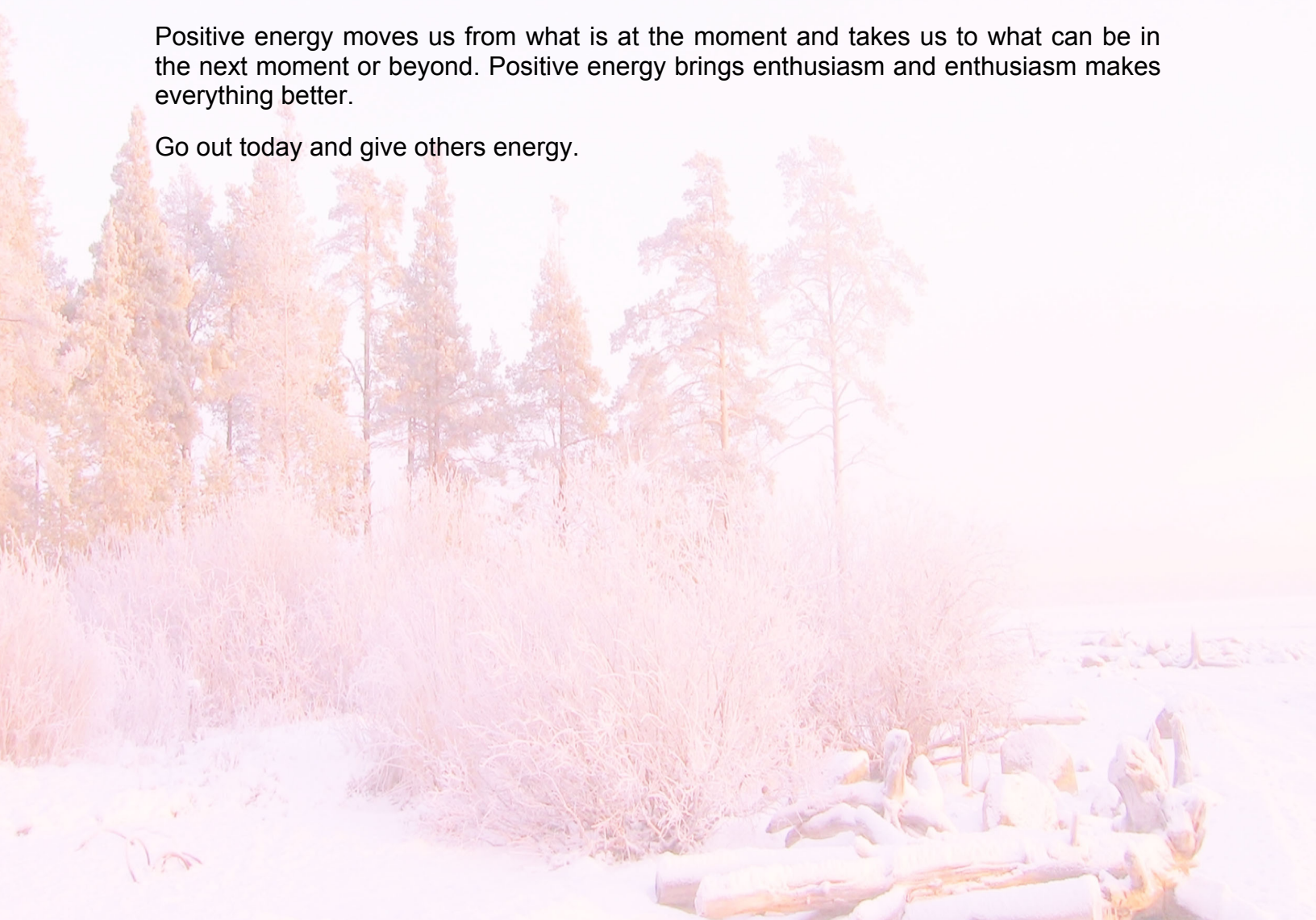
Energy also creates interest. Energy doesn't have to be excitement. It can come from your steadfastness of purpose and your commitment to succeed.

Another by product of giving energy to others is that you create interest. Look at your words and actions; are they bringing energy to others?

However, there is one thing in giving others energy that makes it worthwhile for you and those in your life. Make sure that as often as possible you give others positive energy.

Positive energy moves us from what is at the moment and takes us to what can be in the next moment or beyond. Positive energy brings enthusiasm and enthusiasm makes everything better.

Go out today and give others energy.



December 7

Conquests

In history, conquests are about military triumphs. In your personal life, your conquests are the victories you have over yourself. In order to lead your life where you want to go you must have accomplishments; conquests over the obstacles in front of you.

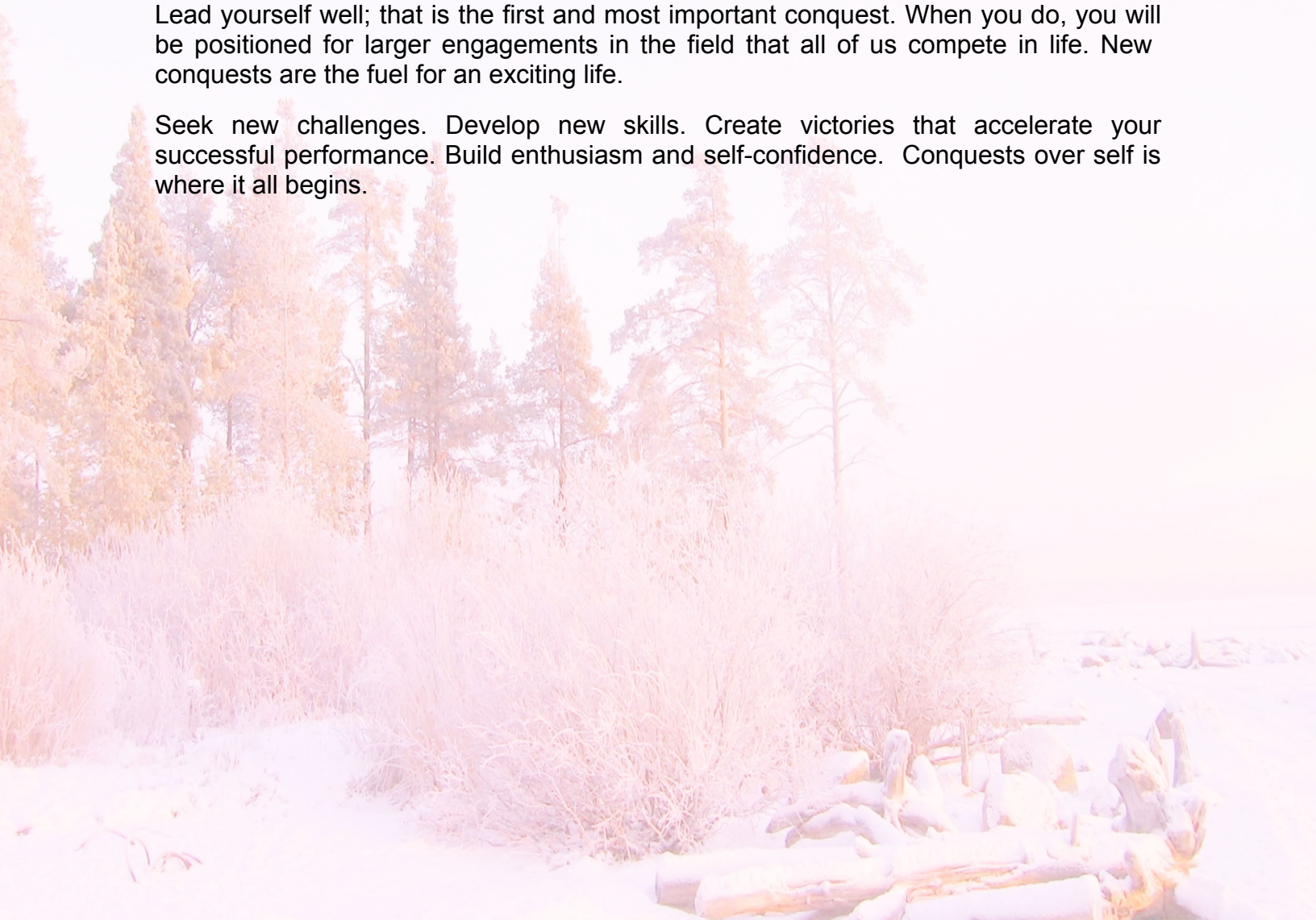
Conquests may be large or small. You can't have a large conquest without first having victories over small things. A small thing may be a new habit. Then, you will have developed one new skill.

However, without a small change in attitude which says "Yes I will develop a new habit or skill" then you have not set the field for larger victories in your life. Napoleon said, "The only conquests which are permanent and leave no regrets are our conquests over ourselves."

Where would a small conquest or victory today make a difference in your life? Start having many small conquests over time and you will have mastered the most important fundamental to leadership. You will have learnt to lead yourself.

Lead yourself well; that is the first and most important conquest. When you do, you will be positioned for larger engagements in the field that all of us compete in life. New conquests are the fuel for an exciting life.

Seek new challenges. Develop new skills. Create victories that accelerate your successful performance. Build enthusiasm and self-confidence. Conquests over self is where it all begins.



December 8

Unlimited

Unlimited is a word that stirs up imagination. You think of what you and your life can be. It is inspiring. It's about visions and dreams that you have and wish to make a reality. Unlimited is about a desire to go farther.

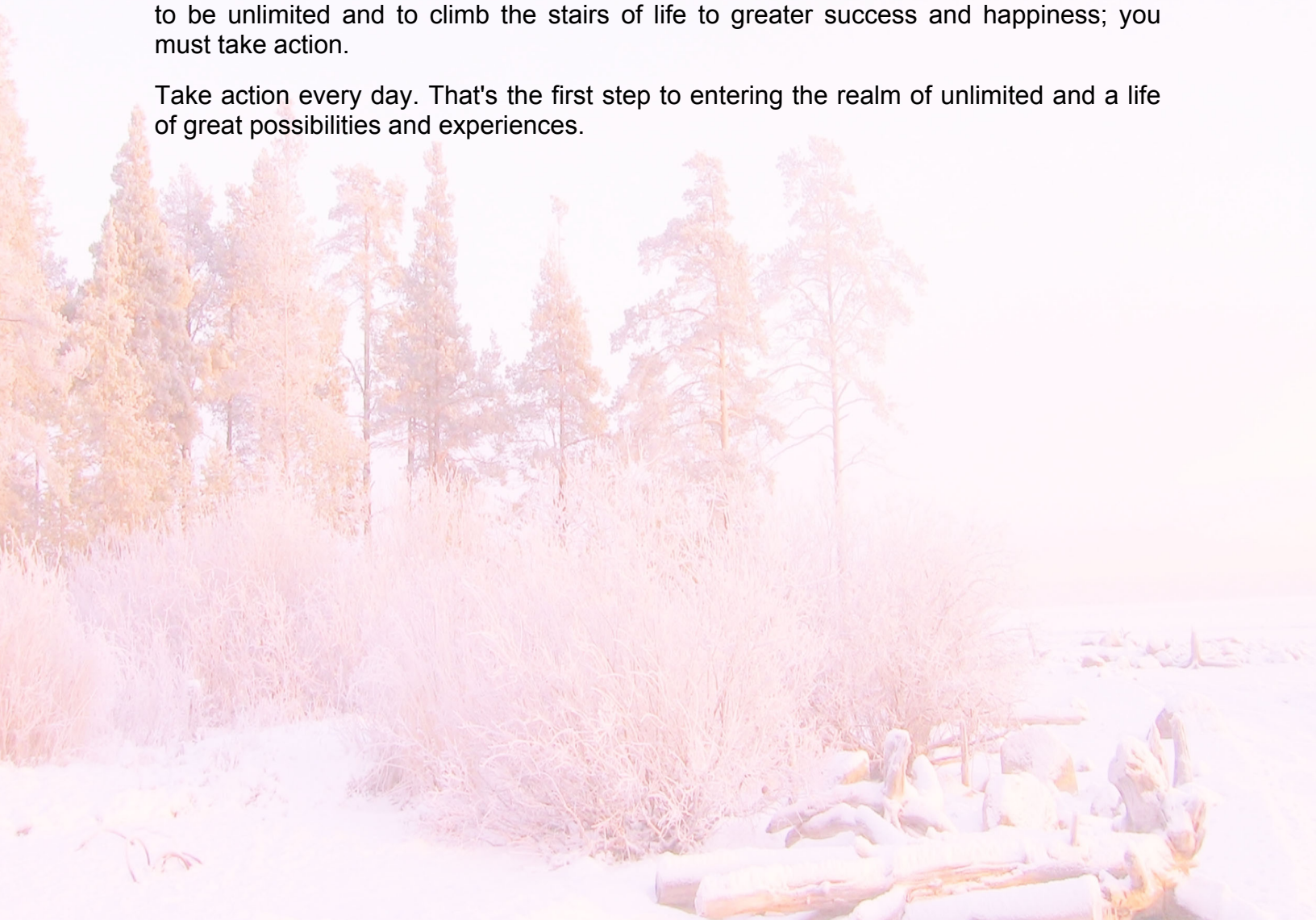
To go farther, to be unlimited, you cannot take an average approach. Average comes from limits. Average is about ordinary. Average is good.

Being above average is about being extraordinary. To be extraordinary, you must take a superior approach. A superior approach to be unlimited says several things. First, unlimited says that you believe in abundance and not scarcity. That you believe there is an abundance of opportunities and possibilities.

Being unlimited says that you want to climb higher. When you climb higher you are saying that you are not comfortable with your comfort zone. You are committed to expanding it or even stepping outside of it.

Unlimited is about many things. There is however one characteristic that you must have to be unlimited and to climb the stairs of life to greater success and happiness; you must take action.

Take action every day. That's the first step to entering the realm of unlimited and a life of great possibilities and experiences.



December 9

Standing outside the Fire

In the song "Standing outside the Fire", Garth Brooks sings the following refrain:

Standing outside the fire
Standing outside the fire
Life isn't tried
It is merely survived
When you're
Standing outside the fire

Life is fashioned in the crucible of challenges; in the furnace of heat where there is disagreement, pain and suffering.

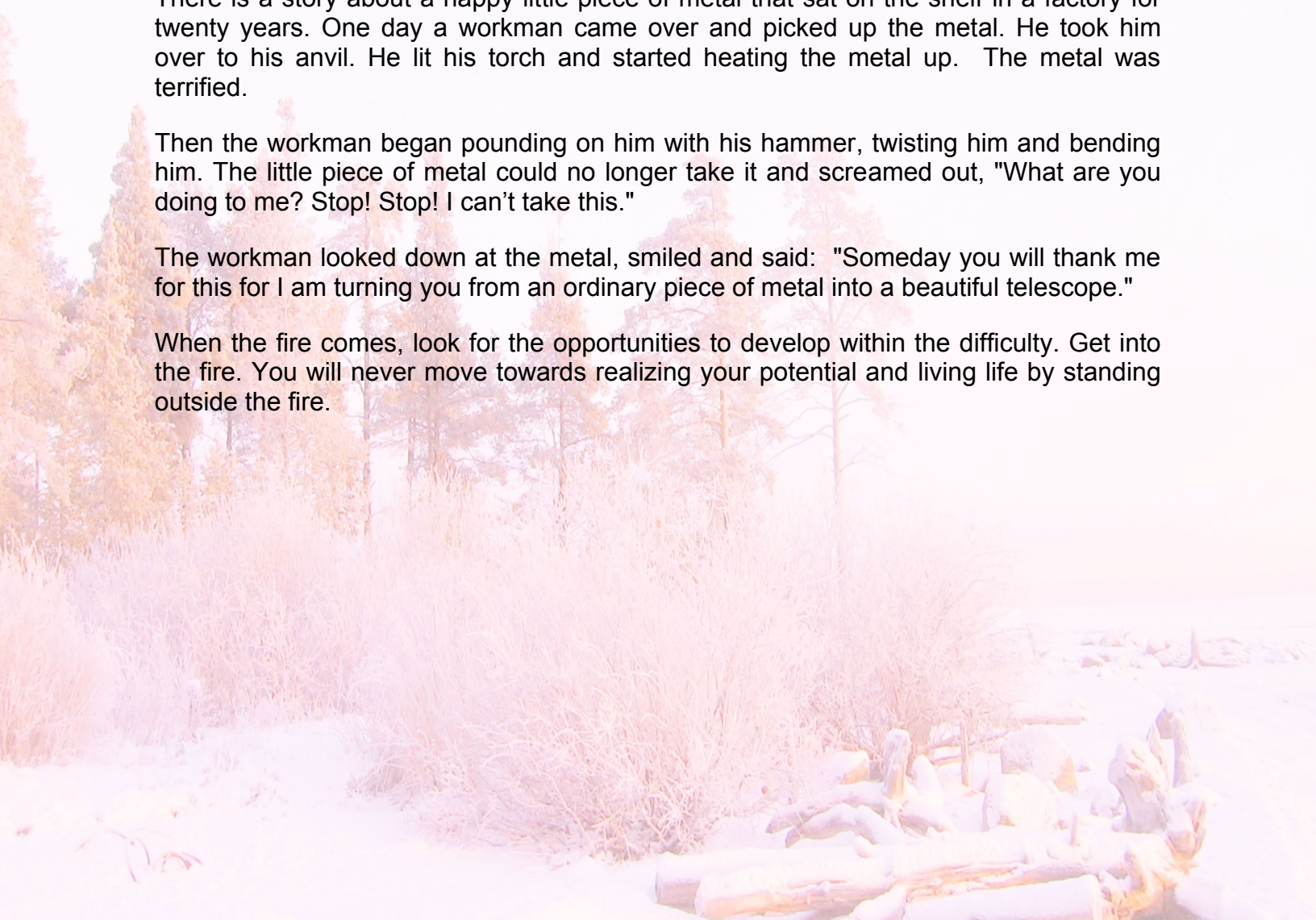
To rise above and succeed, we must welcome our time in the fire, the furnace. Only in the furnace are we tested, molded and shaped. In the process we can bend ourselves to become more and move toward true and lasting achievement.

There is a story about a happy little piece of metal that sat on the shelf in a factory for twenty years. One day a workman came over and picked up the metal. He took him over to his anvil. He lit his torch and started heating the metal up. The metal was terrified.

Then the workman began pounding on him with his hammer, twisting him and bending him. The little piece of metal could no longer take it and screamed out, "What are you doing to me? Stop! Stop! I can't take this."

The workman looked down at the metal, smiled and said: "Someday you will thank me for this for I am turning you from an ordinary piece of metal into a beautiful telescope."

When the fire comes, look for the opportunities to develop within the difficulty. Get into the fire. You will never move towards realizing your potential and living life by standing outside the fire.



December 10

The Sycamore Tree

The sycamore tree, *ficus sycamorus*, is an interesting tree in many aspects. In his book, "Born Beating the Odds," Dr. Kozhi Sidney Makai talks about the lessons we can learn from the sycamore that comes from the African and Mediterranean regions.

The sycamore tree can grow up to 150 feet in height with a 12 foot diameter. Its timber is impervious to water. They can live to be between 500 and 600 years old.

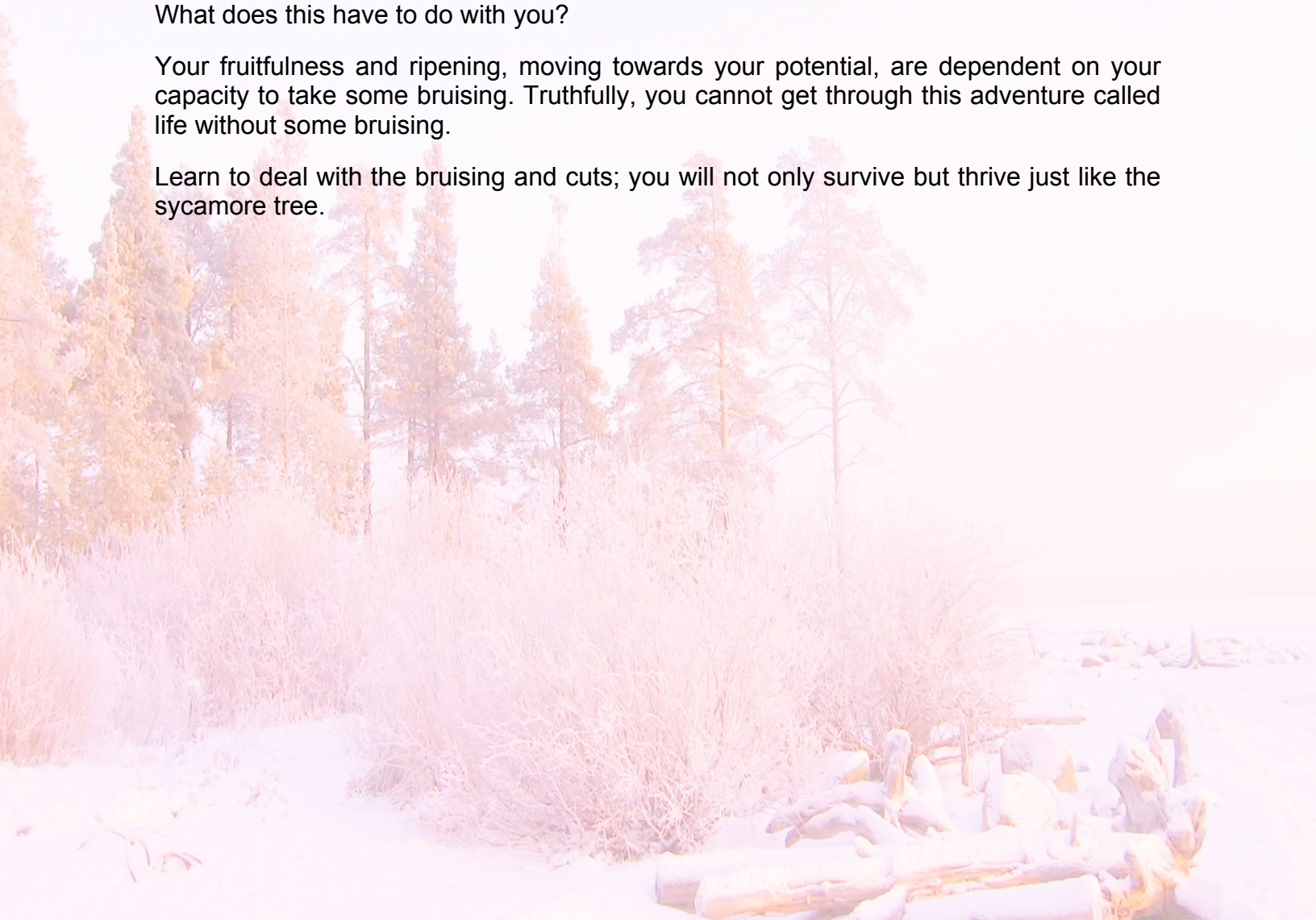
It produces several crops of fruit each year. The fruit is bitter and does not ripen naturally. For the fruit to ripen and be sweet, it must be bruised or have an incision. Small wasps make this incision by laying their eggs in the "eye" of the fruit. Without this incision or bruising, the fruit would rot and fall to the ground.

If the wasps did not do their job to ripen the fruit, it would not produce good seed. The sycamore tree must have the incisions and bruising from the wasps. It is incapable of reproducing itself. The greatest importance is that without the incision and bruising the tree would not grow.

What does this have to do with you?

Your fruitfulness and ripening, moving towards your potential, are dependent on your capacity to take some bruising. Truthfully, you cannot get through this adventure called life without some bruising.

Learn to deal with the bruising and cuts; you will not only survive but thrive just like the sycamore tree.



December 11

Disappointments

Disappointment is a strong emotion. We feel disappointment when our desires, expected or unexpected, are not met. We may expect a poor outcome in advance but we still get disappointed. In other instances, we may expect something good to happen and it doesn't, causing disappointment.

Disappointment, whether it is expected or not, comes from our desires which are based on our expectations. We are guaranteed of disappointments by our family, friends, co-workers, the weather and much more.

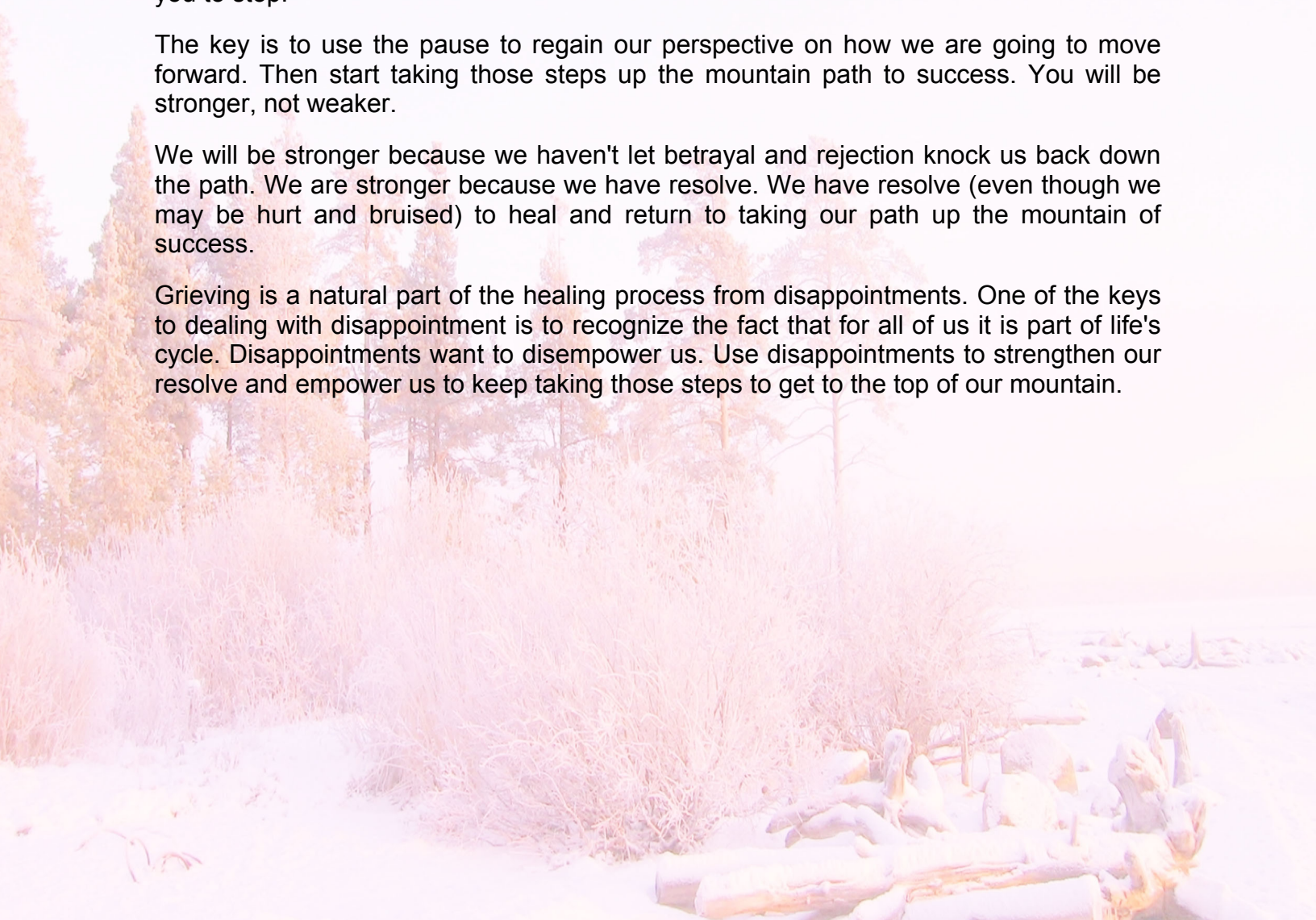
To make the ascent up the mountain of success, we must come to fact that it will not be a straight path. Where the path takes twists, turns and even some steps backward is where we have encountered disappointments.

The greatest disappointments have to do with people and our relationships with them. Some people will betray us and leave us deeply hurt. Others will reject us. Disappointments can throw us off the path and make us pause. Don't let them cause you to stop.

The key is to use the pause to regain our perspective on how we are going to move forward. Then start taking those steps up the mountain path to success. You will be stronger, not weaker.

We will be stronger because we haven't let betrayal and rejection knock us back down the path. We are stronger because we have resolve. We have resolve (even though we may be hurt and bruised) to heal and return to taking our path up the mountain of success.

Grieving is a natural part of the healing process from disappointments. One of the keys to dealing with disappointment is to recognize the fact that for all of us it is part of life's cycle. Disappointments want to disempower us. Use disappointments to strengthen our resolve and empower us to keep taking those steps to get to the top of our mountain.



December 12

Jealousy

Jealousy has many definitions and none of them are good. Jealousy can embody a combination of emotions including anger, resentment, inadequacy and disgust. It is a typical experience in human relationships.

With jealousy you are worried that someone is trying to take what you have. They could be trying to steal your relationship with someone else. They may be making efforts to degrade your self-esteem.

Envy is different from jealousy. Envy is when you want something that someone else has. Quite often, you don't even know the person. You don't have a human connection but you do want what they have. Very often jealousy and envy are used interchangeably but there is a difference.

Jealousy is not a condition. It is a disease. It is a disease that will, if you don't do anything about it, devastate your relationships and leave you with a fire of anger on the inside. Jealous people are blind to doing positive things in relationships. They are resentful. They are sarcastic.

Jealousy is never about building someone up. It is always about taking them down. The sad truth is that jealousy may or may not take down its target but will always take down the person who is jealous.

Jealousy will stagnate your growth and development. It leaves no room for happiness except at the expense of others. To look at jealousy from another angle; have you ever had someone who is jealous of you? Most human beings have experienced jealousy either giving it or receiving it at one point of their lives.

What can you do when that jealous streak strikes? If you are the jealous one, you have to reach out to become bigger than the problem. It will be painful. It's not fool proof. If you don't take the challenge of jealousy and let it remain bigger than you, then mediocrity wins.

And what if someone is jealous of you? If at all possible, limit or delete the relationship. Regardless of the situation, don't let jealousy in either form snuff out your ability to grow and develop. Overcome jealousy and you will move to improved relationships and a better life.

Jealousy often consists of a combination of emotions such as anger, resentment, inadequacy, helplessness and disgust. In its original meaning, *jealousy* is distinct from *envy*, though the two terms have popularly become synonymous in the English language, with *jealousy* now also taking on the definition originally used for envy alone. Jealousy is a typical experience in human relationships. It has been observed in infants five months and older.

Envy is when you want what someone else has, but *jealousy* is when you're worried someone's trying to take what you have.

December 13

Discouragement

Often just before the big achievement comes apparent failure and discouragement. Most visions of great achievement never took place without some discouragements along the way.

Discouragement, if we let it in our lives, can steal our hopes, dreams and the joy from our lives. Discouragement literally means we have lost courage; we have lost the courage to continue moving forward; we have lost heart. Yet, discouragement, which comes from failure, is a part of the path to success. Failures are some of the necessary stepping stones along the path to success. All of us will step on a few of them. The discouragement that comes with stepping on a stone of failure is a natural human emotion.

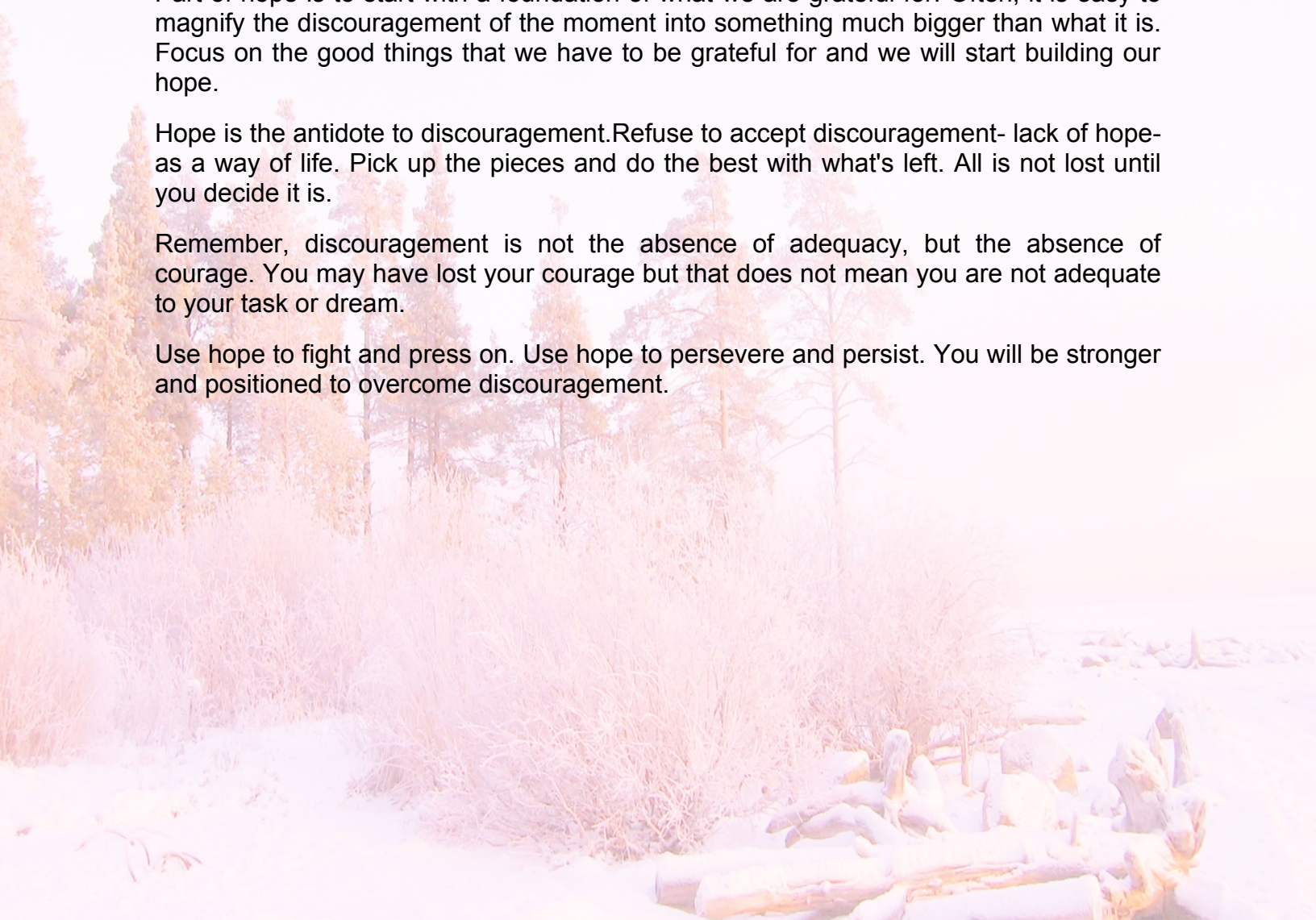
How do we overcome discouragement and keep moving forward? We must be dealers in hope. If one vision fails, create another. The promise of hope brings us out of the wilderness of discouragement.

Part of hope is to start with a foundation of what we are grateful for. Often, it is easy to magnify the discouragement of the moment into something much bigger than what it is. Focus on the good things that we have to be grateful for and we will start building our hope.

Hope is the antidote to discouragement. Refuse to accept discouragement- lack of hope- as a way of life. Pick up the pieces and do the best with what's left. All is not lost until you decide it is.

Remember, discouragement is not the absence of adequacy, but the absence of courage. You may have lost your courage but that does not mean you are not adequate to your task or dream.

Use hope to fight and press on. Use hope to persevere and persist. You will be stronger and positioned to overcome discouragement.



December 14

Be Approachable

Be approachable. If there is one characteristic that will start the process of connecting and building relationships it is to be approachable. With these new relationships, your world will be opened up to possibilities you never could imagine.

Being approachable will bring opportunities for better business and life. These opportunities won't stop by if you aren't approachable. One person is told about an opportunity that gives him a competitive edge. Why? He was approachable.

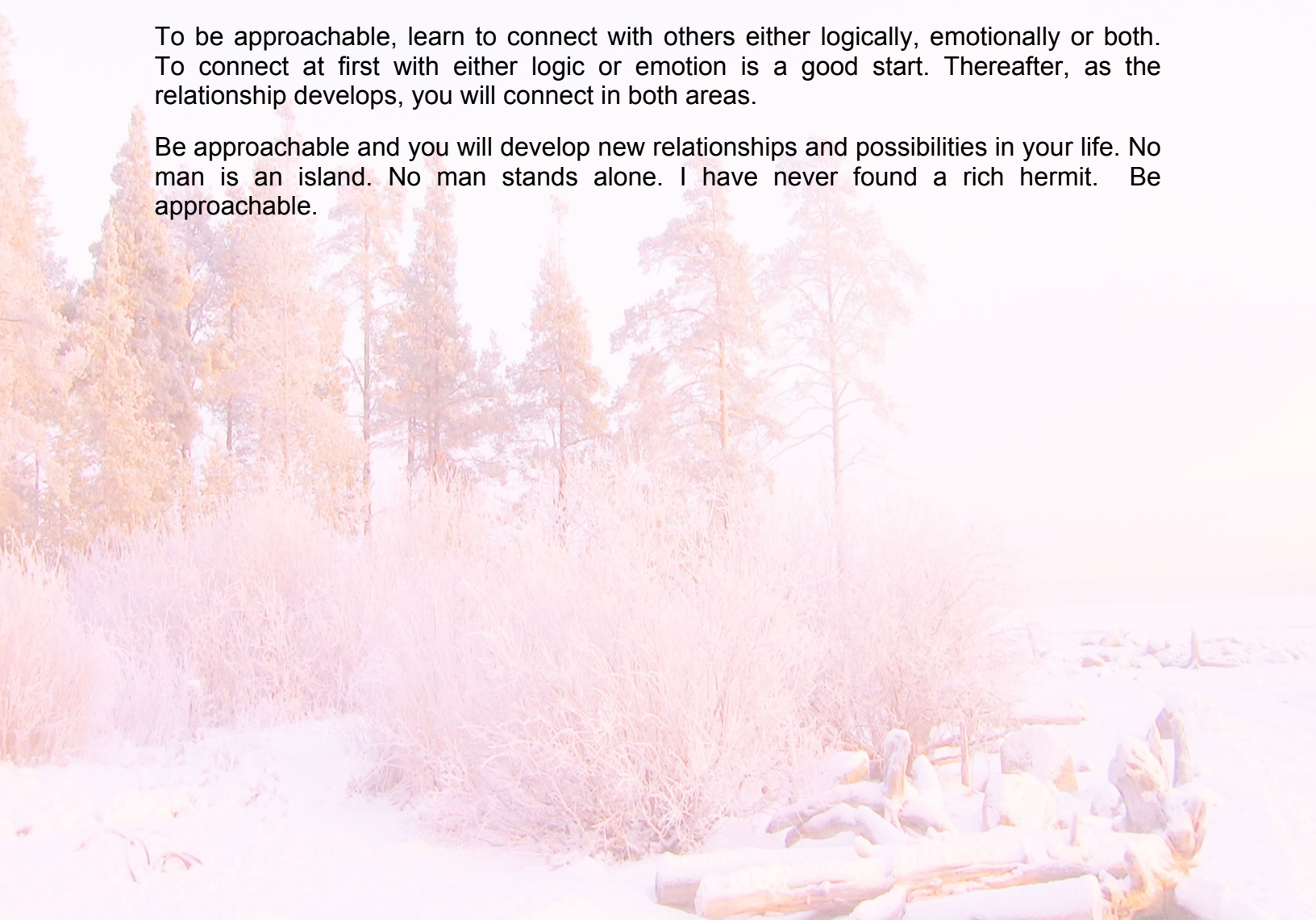
The more approachable you are the greater the opportunities that will come your way. I've never met a rich hermit. Hermits aren't approachable.

How do you become more approachable? Some people think that they have to become extroverts. That can help. However, you can be an introvert and very approachable.

Ask others questions and then just be quiet and listen. When people feel, through your questions, that you are interested in them, then you will have become more approachable.

To be approachable, learn to connect with others either logically, emotionally or both. To connect at first with either logic or emotion is a good start. Thereafter, as the relationship develops, you will connect in both areas.

Be approachable and you will develop new relationships and possibilities in your life. No man is an island. No man stands alone. I have never found a rich hermit. Be approachable.



December 15

Manipulators

All of us are manipulators. Every encounter we have is a manipulation to accomplish some end.

Good Manipulators

There are good manipulators. Those are the people who are looking for win-win relationships. They also want to understand you. They realize that to build trust, they must understand you. Then it will be more likely that you will be ready to understand them.

Negative Manipulators

Then there are the negative manipulators. They are always looking at relationships through the prism of how they can win. It doesn't matter to them whether it is win-lose or just win, as long as they win.

Also, these people do not want to understand you. It is all about them. When they ask for your opinion, they only want to know it to give them the ability to tear it down or mold it into their way of thinking.

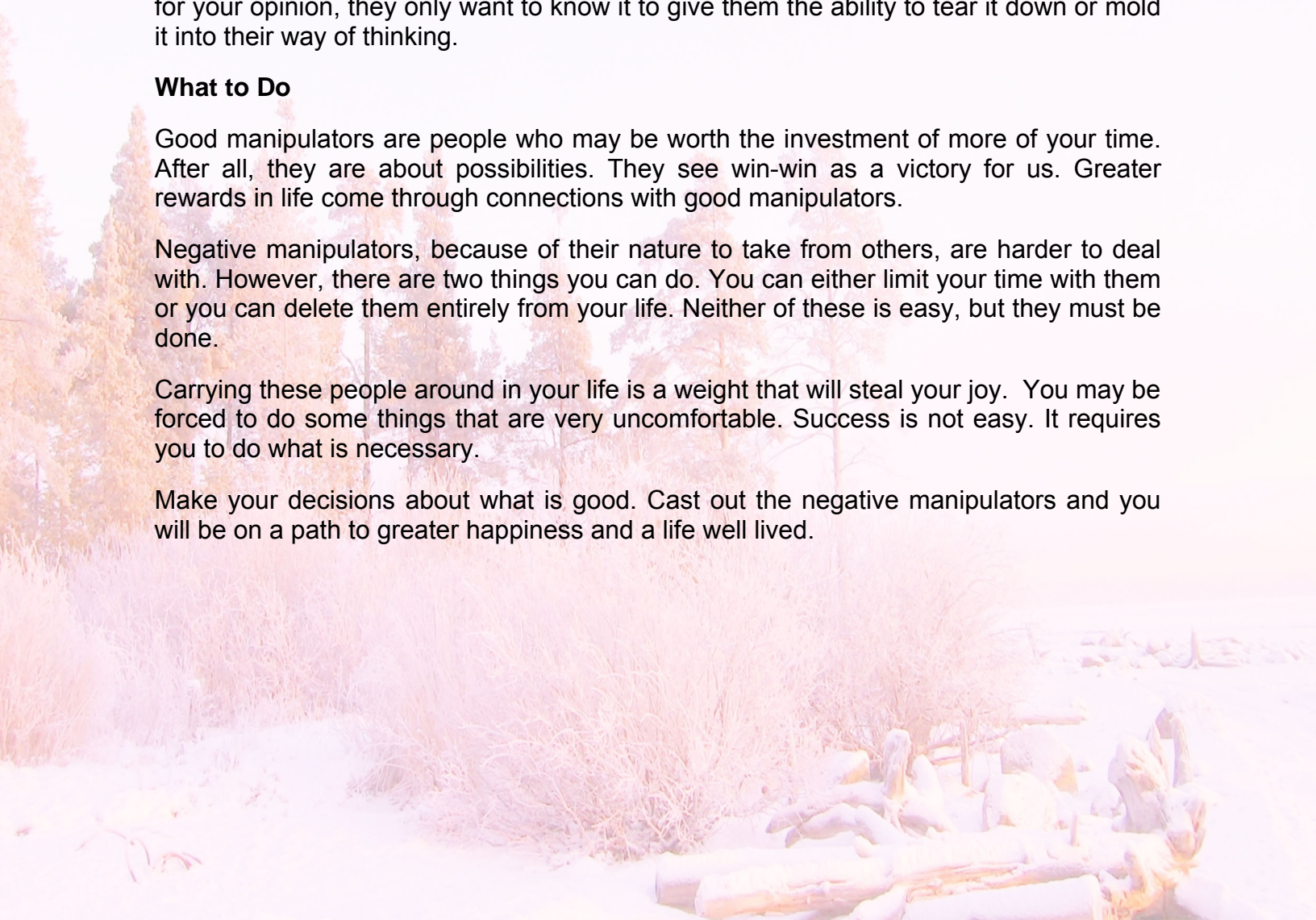
What to Do

Good manipulators are people who may be worth the investment of more of your time. After all, they are about possibilities. They see win-win as a victory for us. Greater rewards in life come through connections with good manipulators.

Negative manipulators, because of their nature to take from others, are harder to deal with. However, there are two things you can do. You can either limit your time with them or you can delete them entirely from your life. Neither of these is easy, but they must be done.

Carrying these people around in your life is a weight that will steal your joy. You may be forced to do some things that are very uncomfortable. Success is not easy. It requires you to do what is necessary.

Make your decisions about what is good. Cast out the negative manipulators and you will be on a path to greater happiness and a life well lived.



December 16

Be a Leader of Good Character

Be a leader of good character. Great leaders have it. There are many people who are leaders yet don't have good character. In today's personality-driven world, major character flaws are overlooked.

Why are they overlooked? Maybe the leader has exceptional talent in one area. We see this in companies which promote people to leadership positions because of their talent. In the long run, they fail and drag down an organization because of character deficits.

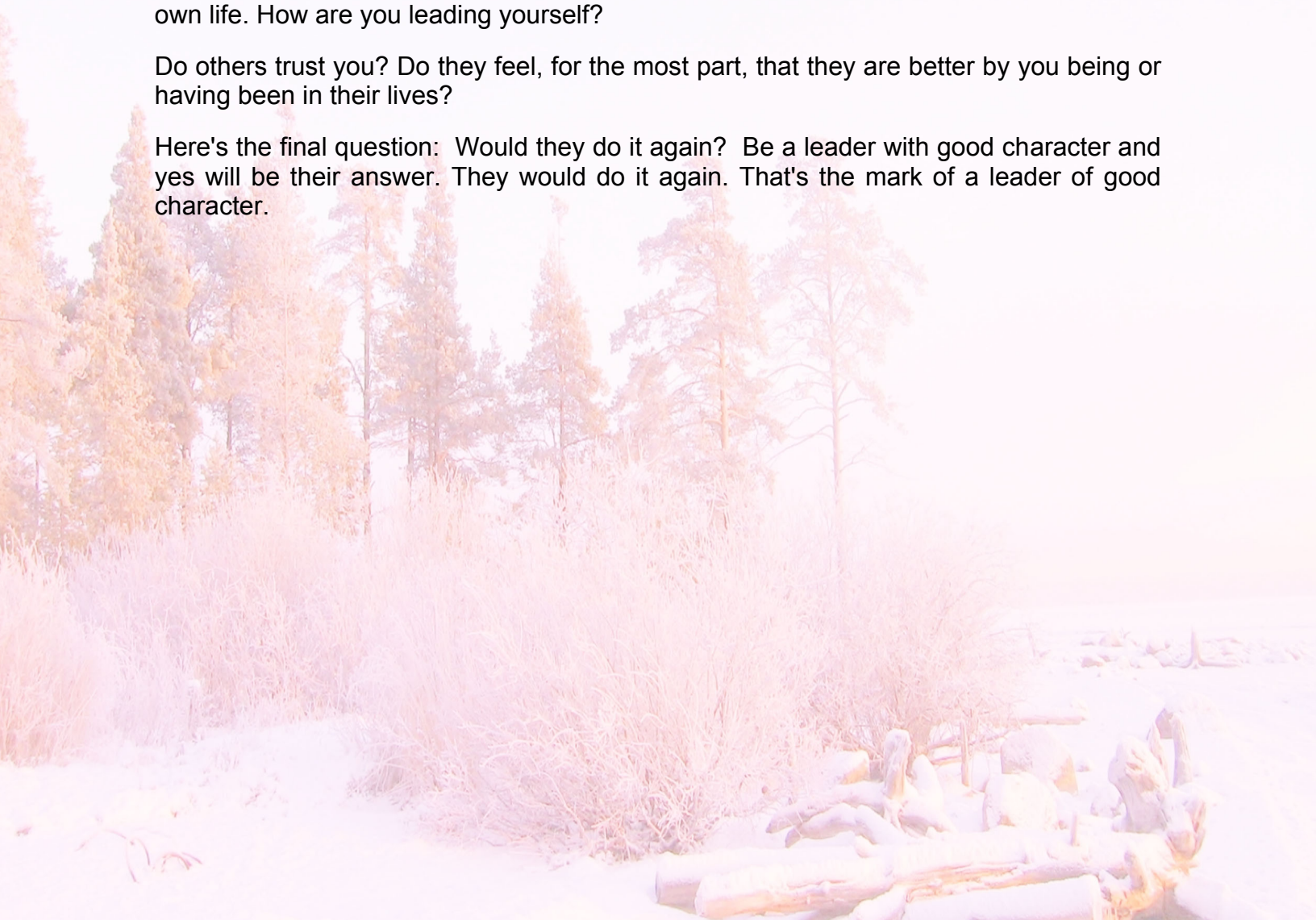
In politics, we see character deficits overlooked or excused regularly. The stories never end well, not just for the individuals, but also their constituents and possibly the whole country. Immense damage can be done by a leader without good character.

There is one thing a leader with good character communicates in words and actions—trust. A leader will make mistakes but as long as he is truthful about them the trust that what may have been lost has the opportunity to be rebuilt.

To be a leader with good character you must start with trust. You are the leader of your own life. How are you leading yourself?

Do others trust you? Do they feel, for the most part, that they are better by you being or having been in their lives?

Here's the final question: Would they do it again? Be a leader with good character and yes will be their answer. They would do it again. That's the mark of a leader of good character.



December 17

Improvise

To improvise is to take the initiative. Leaders and people who are successful know how to improvise to move forward. They understand that they may not have all the answers. They may not have all they need for a particular endeavor. Yet, they improvise with what they have and bring a new approach that keeps things moving forward.

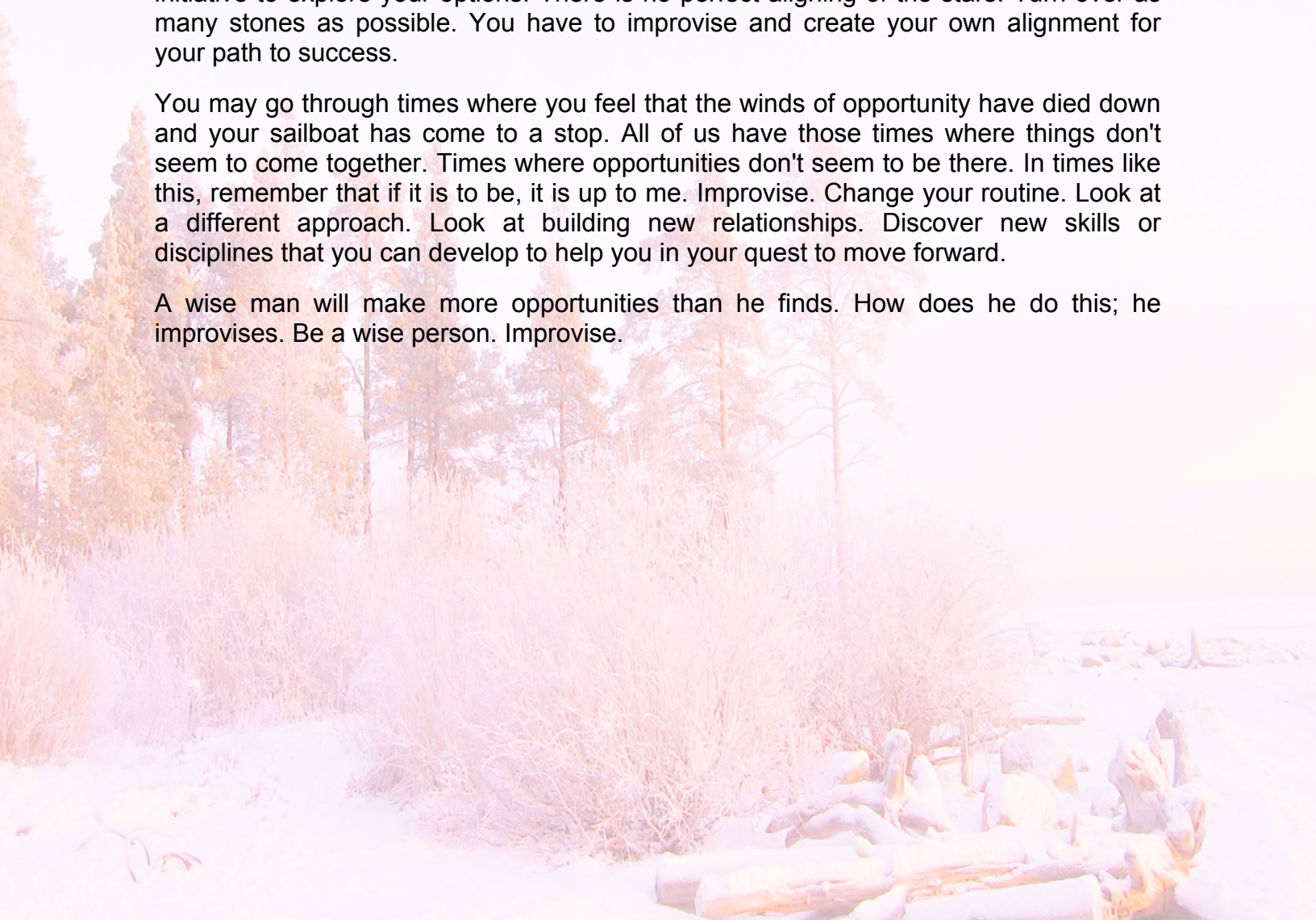
In life, you may not have what you need for your particular undertaking; that doesn't let you off the hook. You are still responsible for accomplishing your undertaking. Too often, people stop because everything isn't perfect and they ultimately become frustrated because they don't find success.

Success, more often than not, is about your ability to improvise. Where one person quits at the first obstacle the next person improvises and comes up with a solution to move forward. History is replete with stories about individuals, causes and battles that were successful because they improvised.

How do you improvise? Think first about what needs to be turned over. Take the initiative to explore your options. There is no perfect aligning of the stars. Turn over as many stones as possible. You have to improvise and create your own alignment for your path to success.

You may go through times where you feel that the winds of opportunity have died down and your sailboat has come to a stop. All of us have those times where things don't seem to come together. Times where opportunities don't seem to be there. In times like this, remember that if it is to be, it is up to me. Improvise. Change your routine. Look at a different approach. Look at building new relationships. Discover new skills or disciplines that you can develop to help you in your quest to move forward.

A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds. How does he do this; he improvises. Be a wise person. Improvise.



December 18

Kill Neglect

Neglect is like the fog. It quietly comes into your business and life. It usually comes in the dark and you don't even realize it is there until there is daylight. By then, there isn't anything you can do about it.

Neglect starts by not paying attention to the little things. The little things are off in the shadows of our businesses and lives while we shine the spotlight on other, more important things. Then one day, these little things, because they have accumulated over time, become big things.

They cast a fog of doubt and fear over our lives. We may become stuck or overwhelmed. We are in the fog and we can't see a way out. We are reaping the harvest of neglect.

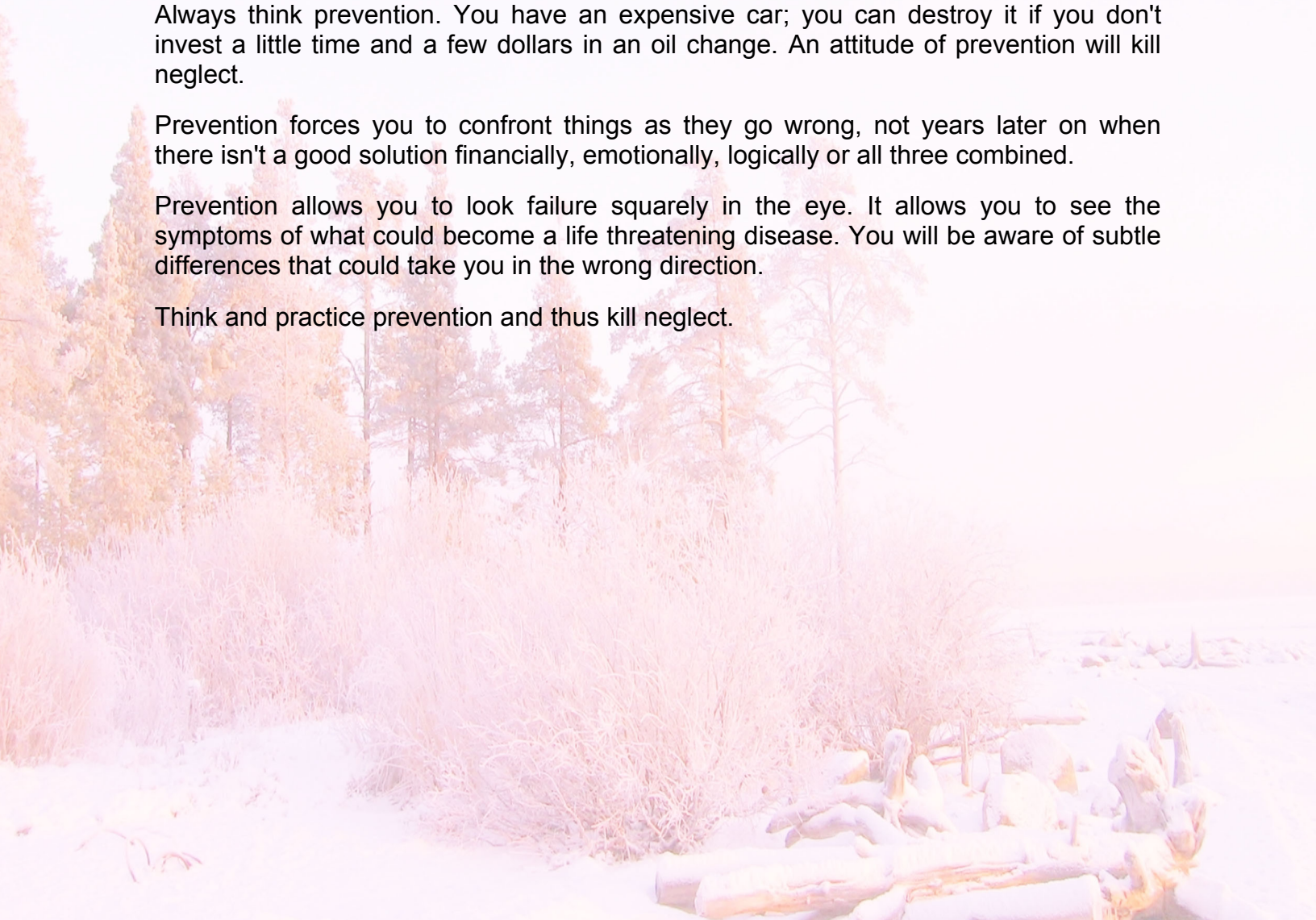
How do you kill neglect? Make it a habit to confront it every day. Neglect is the mother of failure. Great failures are not one event. Great failures are the accumulation of months and years of neglect over a period of time.

Always think prevention. You have an expensive car; you can destroy it if you don't invest a little time and a few dollars in an oil change. An attitude of prevention will kill neglect.

Prevention forces you to confront things as they go wrong, not years later on when there isn't a good solution financially, emotionally, logically or all three combined.

Prevention allows you to look failure squarely in the eye. It allows you to see the symptoms of what could become a life threatening disease. You will be aware of subtle differences that could take you in the wrong direction.

Think and practice prevention and thus kill neglect.



December 19

What's In Your Toolbox?

What's in your toolbox? A key to turning things up a notch is your skill set. What skills are you using to improvise and solve problems?

If you are using the same tools on most of your problems then that's a problem. Why? You can't increase your effectiveness let alone your efficiency. If the only tool you have in your box is a hammer then you start looking at every problem or challenge like a nail.

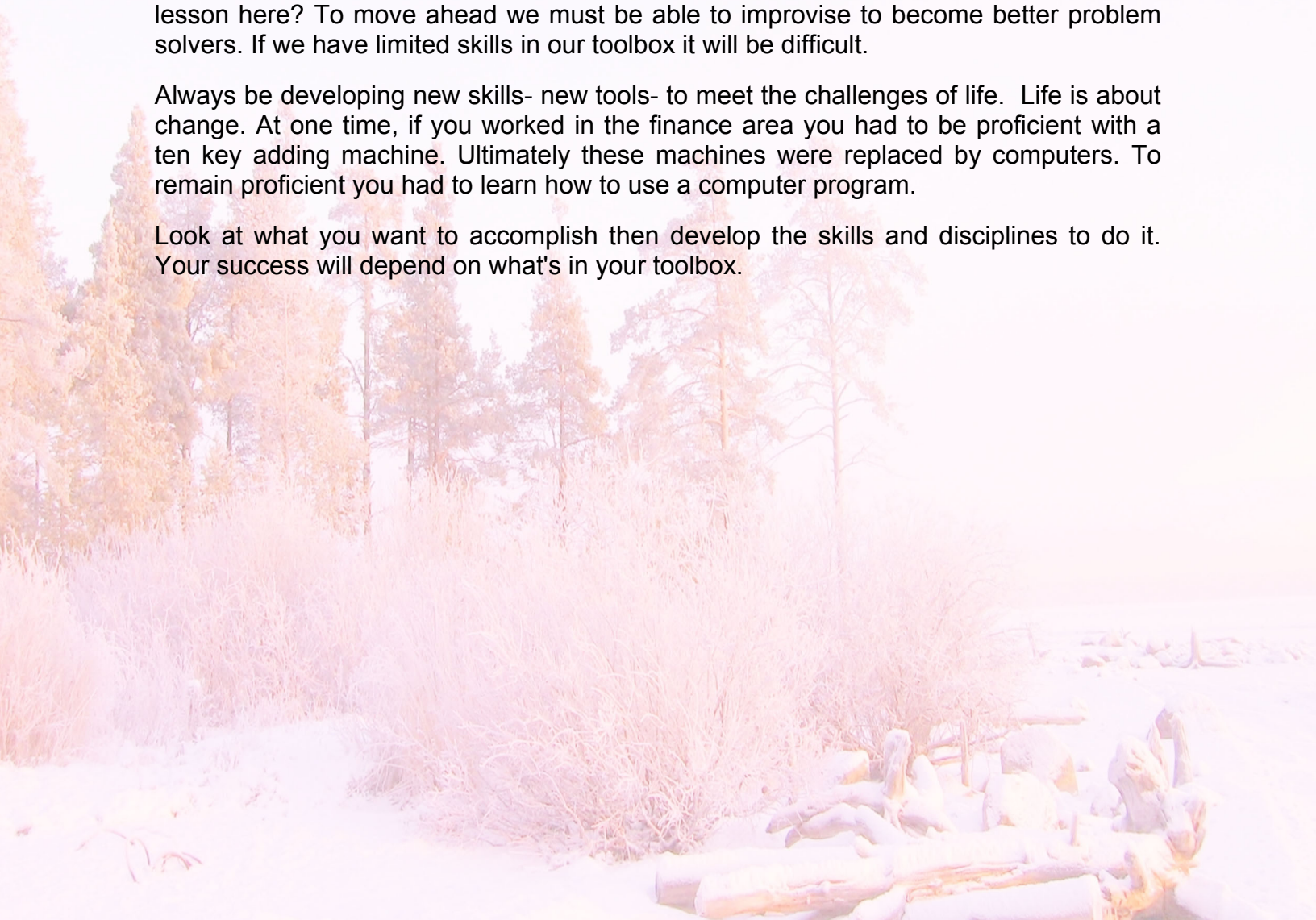
Your next challenge is to chop down a tree. You have learnt that you can earn a good living chopping down trees. Plus you like being outdoors and the tangible sense of accomplishment when the tree comes down.

You can chop down a tree with a hammer, however, depending on the size of the tree, it may take hours, days, months, or years. What if you developed a new skill of using an axe? With an axe in your toolbox, you may be able to cut down that tree in thirty minutes instead of thirty days.

What's the difference between thirty days and thirty minutes? It's skills. What's the lesson here? To move ahead we must be able to improvise to become better problem solvers. If we have limited skills in our toolbox it will be difficult.

Always be developing new skills- new tools- to meet the challenges of life. Life is about change. At one time, if you worked in the finance area you had to be proficient with a ten key adding machine. Ultimately these machines were replaced by computers. To remain proficient you had to learn how to use a computer program.

Look at what you want to accomplish then develop the skills and disciplines to do it. Your success will depend on what's in your toolbox.



December 20

Burn Your Ships

There is a story told about Hernando Cortez- the Spanish explorer, who left with a group of ships from what is present day Cuba to conquer and colonize Mexico.

Cortez and his men had been told that they would become unbelievably wealthy and that there were cities with streets paved with gold. This was an incentive for them to leave what was considered to be a comfortable existence in Cuba.

When Cortez and his men arrived on the shores of Eastern Mexico, they found no cities with streets paved with gold. They didn't find people. Within a matter of days the men under Cortez' command were very unhappy. They wanted to take the ships and return to Cuba. Sensing the imminent mutiny, Cortez ordered his lieutenants, under the cover of darkness, to burn the ships. With the ships gone and no way to return to Cuba, Cortez and his men went on to claim Mexico for Spain.

The story exemplifies the power of commitment. The men waivered and wanted to return to Cuba. Up to this point, they were only involved. But once the ships were burnt, they became committed to their original mission; to conquer Mexico and claim it for Spain.

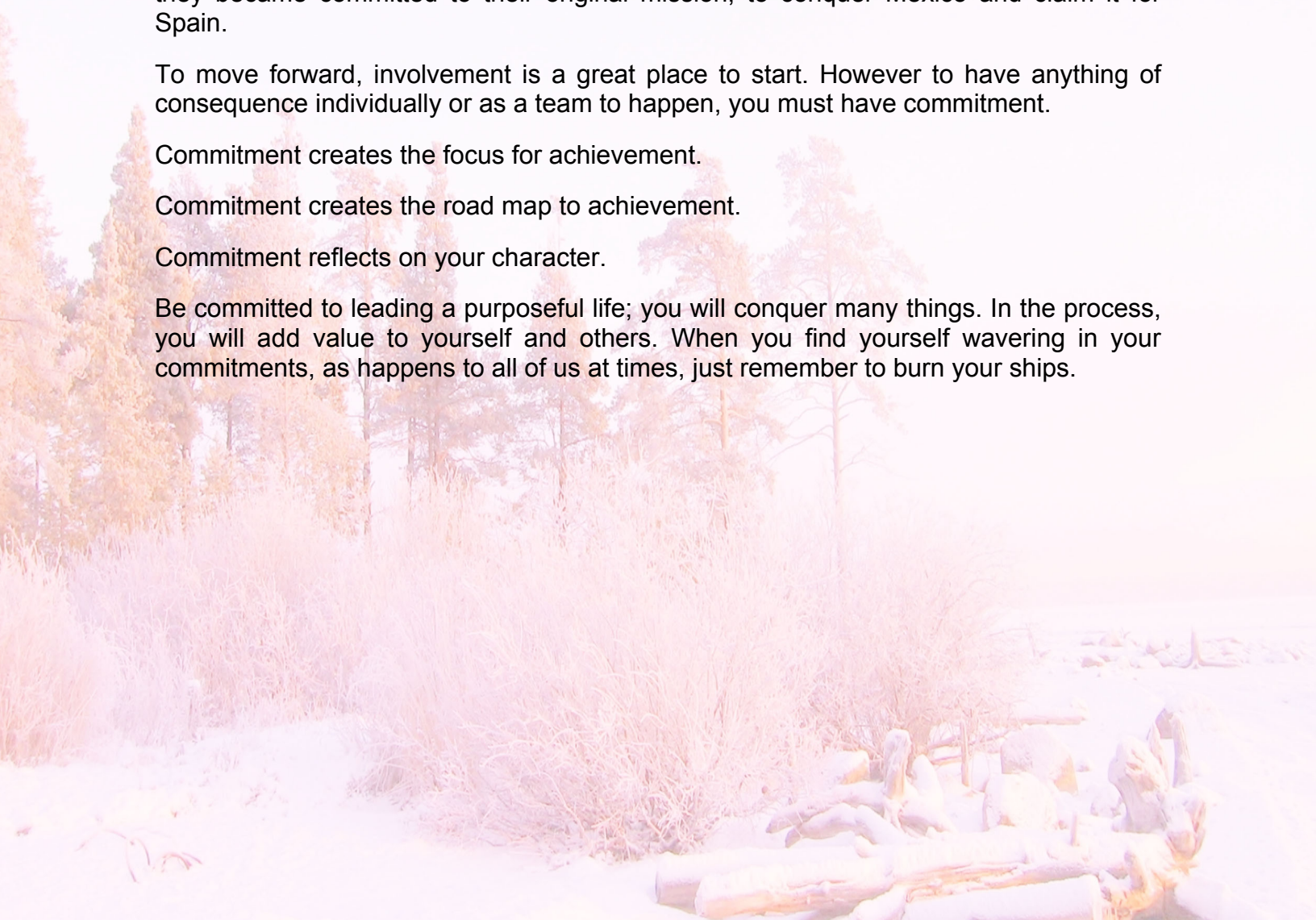
To move forward, involvement is a great place to start. However to have anything of consequence individually or as a team to happen, you must have commitment.

Commitment creates the focus for achievement.

Commitment creates the road map to achievement.

Commitment reflects on your character.

Be committed to leading a purposeful life; you will conquer many things. In the process, you will add value to yourself and others. When you find yourself wavering in your commitments, as happens to all of us at times, just remember to burn your ships.



December 21

How Tall Will You Grow?

How tall will you grow? When talking about our physical height, that is predetermined by our genetic makeup. When talking about your life, that is up to you.

How tall you grow in life is your choice. You are born with gifts and talents. How are you going to use them? What new skills and disciplines will you develop to accelerate your personal growth and development?

The answers to these questions are not immediately obvious. Life is a voyage of discovery. When we discover something that will improve us do we take advantage of the opportunity for growth and personal development?

Your answers to the questions that life pose will determine how tall you grow in experiencing what life has to offer. Just like a tree that grows, the view from the top of the tree changes as it grows taller and taller. Your view of life and the excitement it will bring will change as you grow taller.

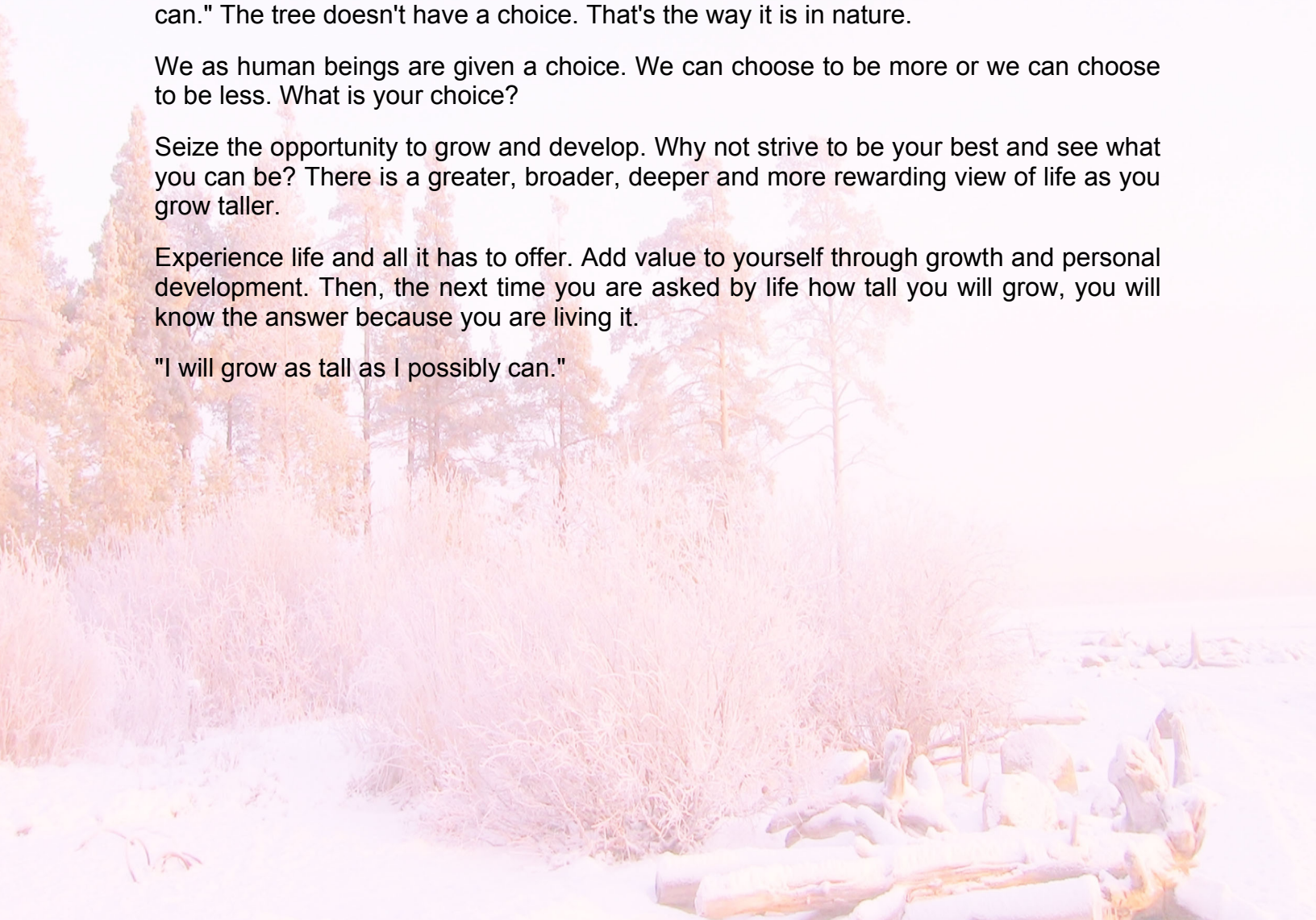
If you were to ask a tree how tall it will grow, its response would be: "As tall as I possibly can." The tree doesn't have a choice. That's the way it is in nature.

We as human beings are given a choice. We can choose to be more or we can choose to be less. What is your choice?

Seize the opportunity to grow and develop. Why not strive to be your best and see what you can be? There is a greater, broader, deeper and more rewarding view of life as you grow taller.

Experience life and all it has to offer. Add value to yourself through growth and personal development. Then, the next time you are asked by life how tall you will grow, you will know the answer because you are living it.

"I will grow as tall as I possibly can."



December 22

Competence

Competence is a common thread that runs when we have success in life. By its very definition which centers on the ability to do something well, competence is a pillar of success. It's opposite, incompetence, is about poor performance or the inability to do something well.

There is another part to competence that will ensure that success keeps coming your way. You must not only be competent, but consistent. Competence and consistency go together. You cannot be truly competent if you are not consistent.

Why? You may have the skills and knowledge to do well yet cannot be counted on. You cannot be trusted. Trust is a big part of competence.

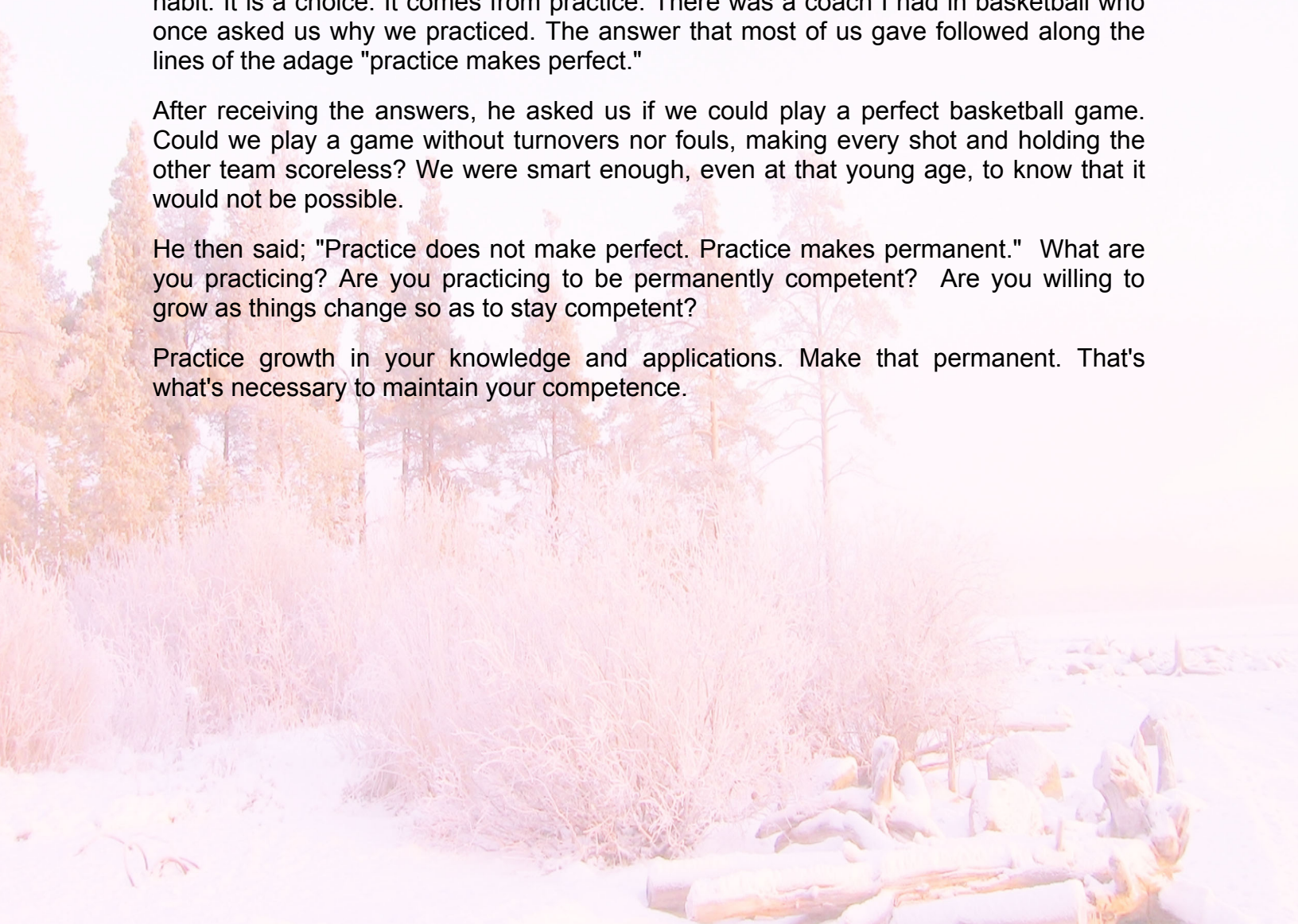
Ability is important. Dependability is critical. You may have the ability and skills but are you dependable? Competence is more than knowledge and skills to do something well.

Even with the knowledge and skills, you must practice competence. You must make it a habit. It is a choice. It comes from practice. There was a coach I had in basketball who once asked us why we practiced. The answer that most of us gave followed along the lines of the adage "practice makes perfect."

After receiving the answers, he asked us if we could play a perfect basketball game. Could we play a game without turnovers nor fouls, making every shot and holding the other team scoreless? We were smart enough, even at that young age, to know that it would not be possible.

He then said; "Practice does not make perfect. Practice makes permanent." What are you practicing? Are you practicing to be permanently competent? Are you willing to grow as things change so as to stay competent?

Practice growth in your knowledge and applications. Make that permanent. That's what's necessary to maintain your competence.



December 23

Choices

The landscape was barren; this is how it is in the desert in Arizona. As the unmarked two lane blacktop road gave way to a short concrete road that led to the prison, there were many thoughts crossing my mind.

John, the son of a good friend of mine, had made some poor choices and this particular one had him serving four years in prison. He had been driving home with his girlfriend after a day on the lakeside, and with a boat in tow. On a winding two land road, he suddenly lost control. As he tried to turn the truck right, the boat went over and onto the lane of oncoming traffic. Unfortunately, a motorcyclist showed up at the same time and died when he crashed head-on into the boat.

With law enforcement on the scene, John was given a field sobriety test which he failed. He was convicted and sentenced to four years in prison.

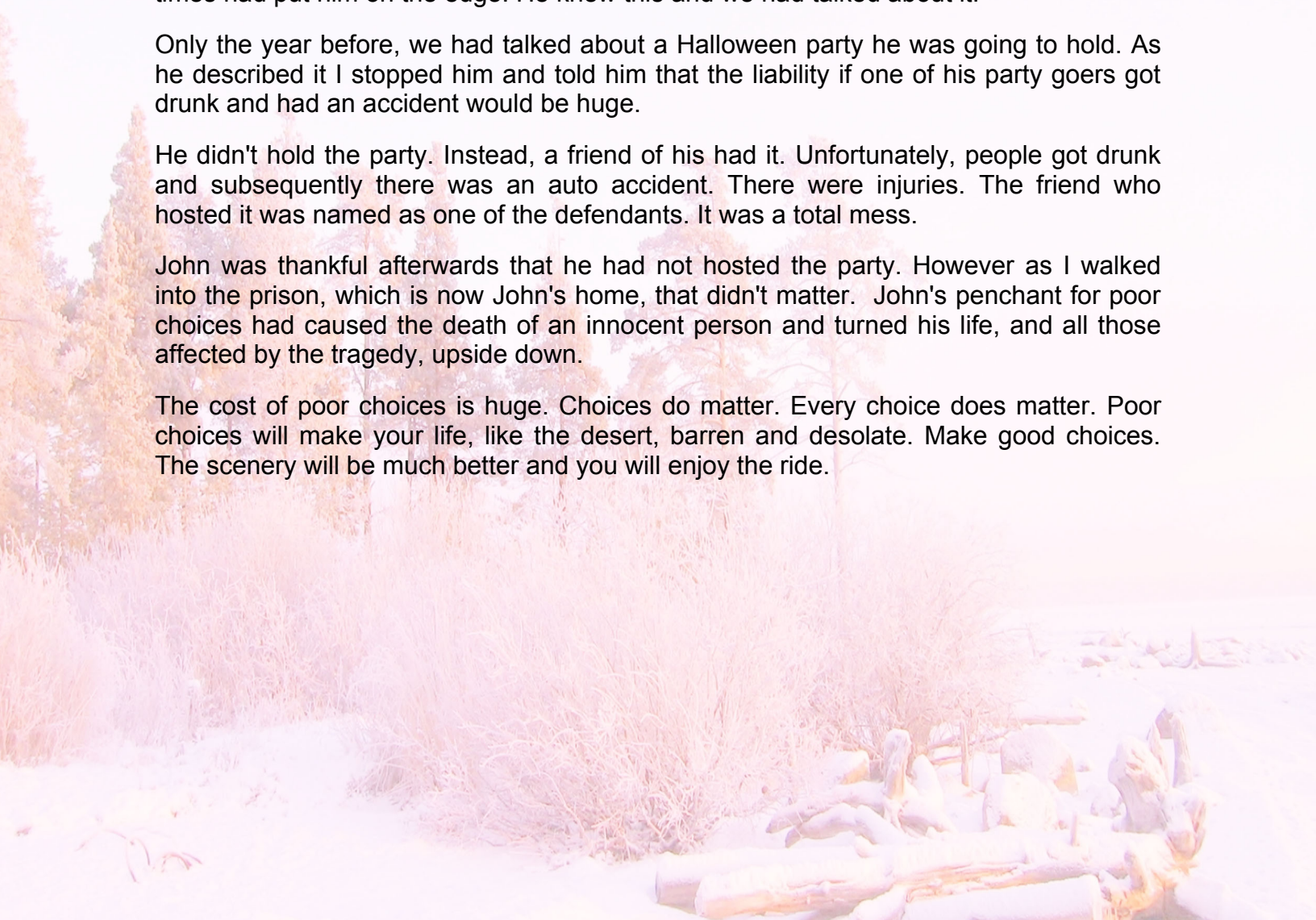
I had known John since he was a little boy. He is a nice young man who is very talented. He has done well at many things in his short life. However, his choices at times had put him on the edge. He knew this and we had talked about it.

Only the year before, we had talked about a Halloween party he was going to hold. As he described it I stopped him and told him that the liability if one of his party goers got drunk and had an accident would be huge.

He didn't hold the party. Instead, a friend of his had it. Unfortunately, people got drunk and subsequently there was an auto accident. There were injuries. The friend who hosted it was named as one of the defendants. It was a total mess.

John was thankful afterwards that he had not hosted the party. However as I walked into the prison, which is now John's home, that didn't matter. John's penchant for poor choices had caused the death of an innocent person and turned his life, and all those affected by the tragedy, upside down.

The cost of poor choices is huge. Choices do matter. Every choice does matter. Poor choices will make your life, like the desert, barren and desolate. Make good choices. The scenery will be much better and you will enjoy the ride.



December 24

Spinning Your Plates

I remember going to the circus when I was a little boy. It was a huge event. The acts in the circus rings were very inspiring. What the acrobats could do with their gracefulness and skill to perform dangerous acts was fascinating. Then there were the lions, tigers and elephants. To actually see those animals and watch them perform captivated my young mind. There were also the side shows. The one that I always remember is the man who had three poles. He would place the first pole upright. He would then take a plate and start spinning it on the top. The plate and pole were balanced perfectly. Afterwards, he would take the second pole and put a plate on top then get it spinning.

Next, he would pick up the third pole and plate. However, as he was doing this, the plate on the first pole started to wobble. Would he get the third plate spinning in time to come back and get the first plate spinning again before it crashed?

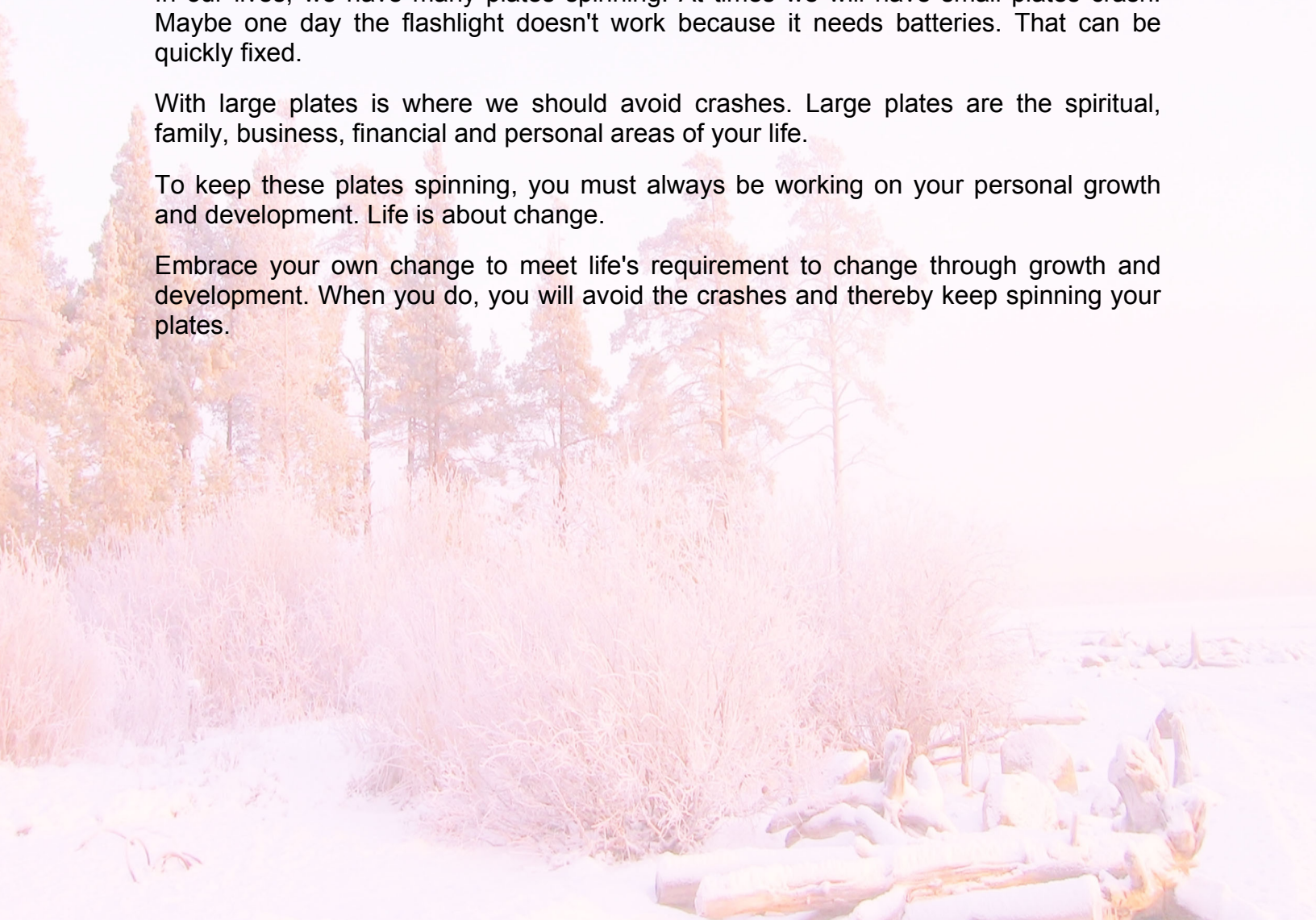
He got the third plate spinning. Hurriedly and just in time, he got back to the first plate and pole. The plate didn't crash. He was successful.

In our lives, we have many plates spinning. At times we will have small plates crash. Maybe one day the flashlight doesn't work because it needs batteries. That can be quickly fixed.

With large plates is where we should avoid crashes. Large plates are the spiritual, family, business, financial and personal areas of your life.

To keep these plates spinning, you must always be working on your personal growth and development. Life is about change.

Embrace your own change to meet life's requirement to change through growth and development. When you do, you will avoid the crashes and thereby keep spinning your plates.



December 25

What Truly Matters

At the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris, canoe racing was added as an Olympic sport. The United States team was favored at the time to win the gold medal. Bill Havens was selected to be on the team.

However, Bill had a problem. As the time for the departure by boat to Paris approached, Bill was concerned that his wife might give birth to their first child while he was gone competing for the gold medal.

In 1924, with no intercontinental air travel, Bill found himself in a difficult position. He was caught between going to Paris to fulfill his dream of winning a gold medal and being at his wife's side for the birth of their first child.

Bill's wife wanted him to go to Paris and fulfill his dream. Bill was in conflict but he decided to remain home. Bill understood what truly mattered.

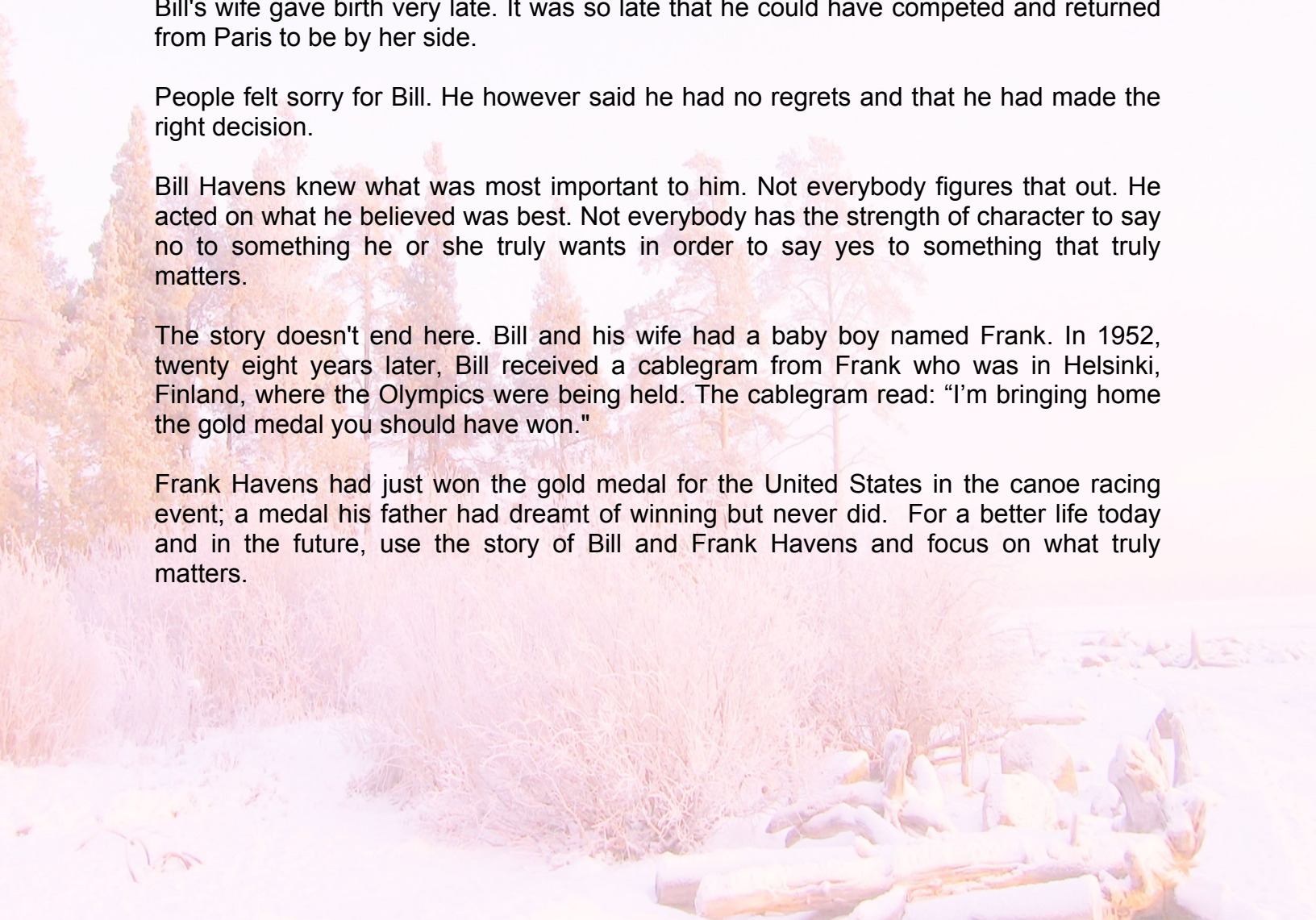
The United States won the gold medal in the four-man canoe race. It turned out that Bill's wife gave birth very late. It was so late that he could have competed and returned from Paris to be by her side.

People felt sorry for Bill. He however said he had no regrets and that he had made the right decision.

Bill Havens knew what was most important to him. Not everybody figures that out. He acted on what he believed was best. Not everybody has the strength of character to say no to something he or she truly wants in order to say yes to something that truly matters.

The story doesn't end here. Bill and his wife had a baby boy named Frank. In 1952, twenty eight years later, Bill received a cablegram from Frank who was in Helsinki, Finland, where the Olympics were being held. The cablegram read: "I'm bringing home the gold medal you should have won."

Frank Havens had just won the gold medal for the United States in the canoe racing event; a medal his father had dreamt of winning but never did. For a better life today and in the future, use the story of Bill and Frank Havens and focus on what truly matters.



December 26

Have a Plan B

Years ago when I was in the insurance business, I encountered an older gentleman named Al. Al was sixty-five at the time, had a secure retirement and didn't need to work.

Al had sold many types of insurances over the years. He sold universal life then switched to Medicare supplements. From Medicare supplements he went into annuities. At the time I met him he was selling long term care insurance. In each area of insurance, he had great success.

I was intrigued by his story. As a young man I wanted to know his thoughts on success in the insurance business. What I learnt that day from Al was and still is a valuable lesson.

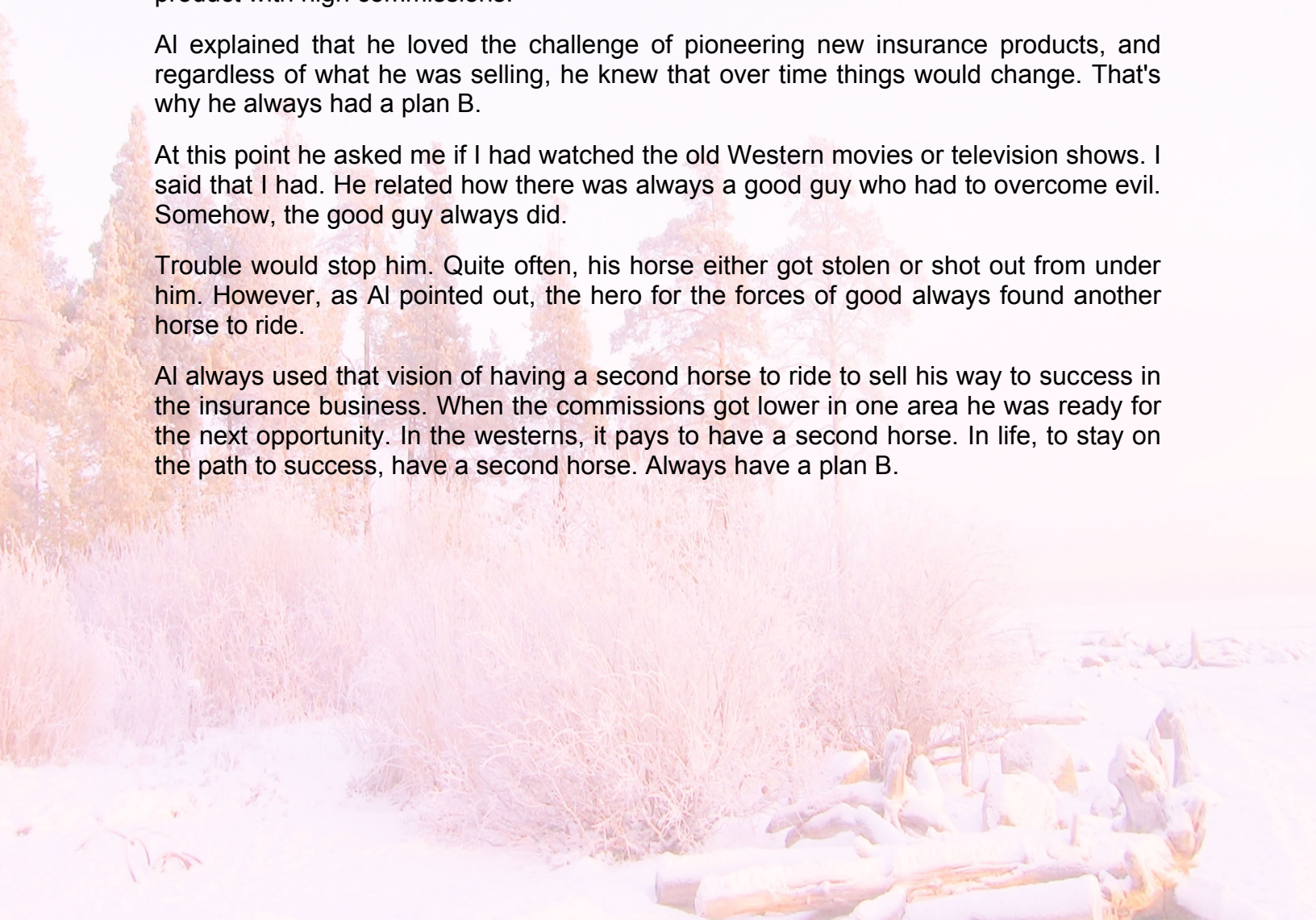
Al always had a plan B. When a new type of insurance came out, he would sell it. Why? The first year commissions and renewal commission contracts were higher on new products to entice agents to sell them. Then as the market matured, the commissions would drop. At this point, Al had his plan B. He would look for the next new insurance product with high commissions.

Al explained that he loved the challenge of pioneering new insurance products, and regardless of what he was selling, he knew that over time things would change. That's why he always had a plan B.

At this point he asked me if I had watched the old Western movies or television shows. I said that I had. He related how there was always a good guy who had to overcome evil. Somehow, the good guy always did.

Trouble would stop him. Quite often, his horse either got stolen or shot out from under him. However, as Al pointed out, the hero for the forces of good always found another horse to ride.

Al always used that vision of having a second horse to ride to sell his way to success in the insurance business. When the commissions got lower in one area he was ready for the next opportunity. In the westerns, it pays to have a second horse. In life, to stay on the path to success, have a second horse. Always have a plan B.



December 27

Kindness

Kindness counts. If you want a smoother life, be kind. If you want better relationships, start with kindness. Kindness is welcoming. It brings us inside the circle of others' lives in positive ways.

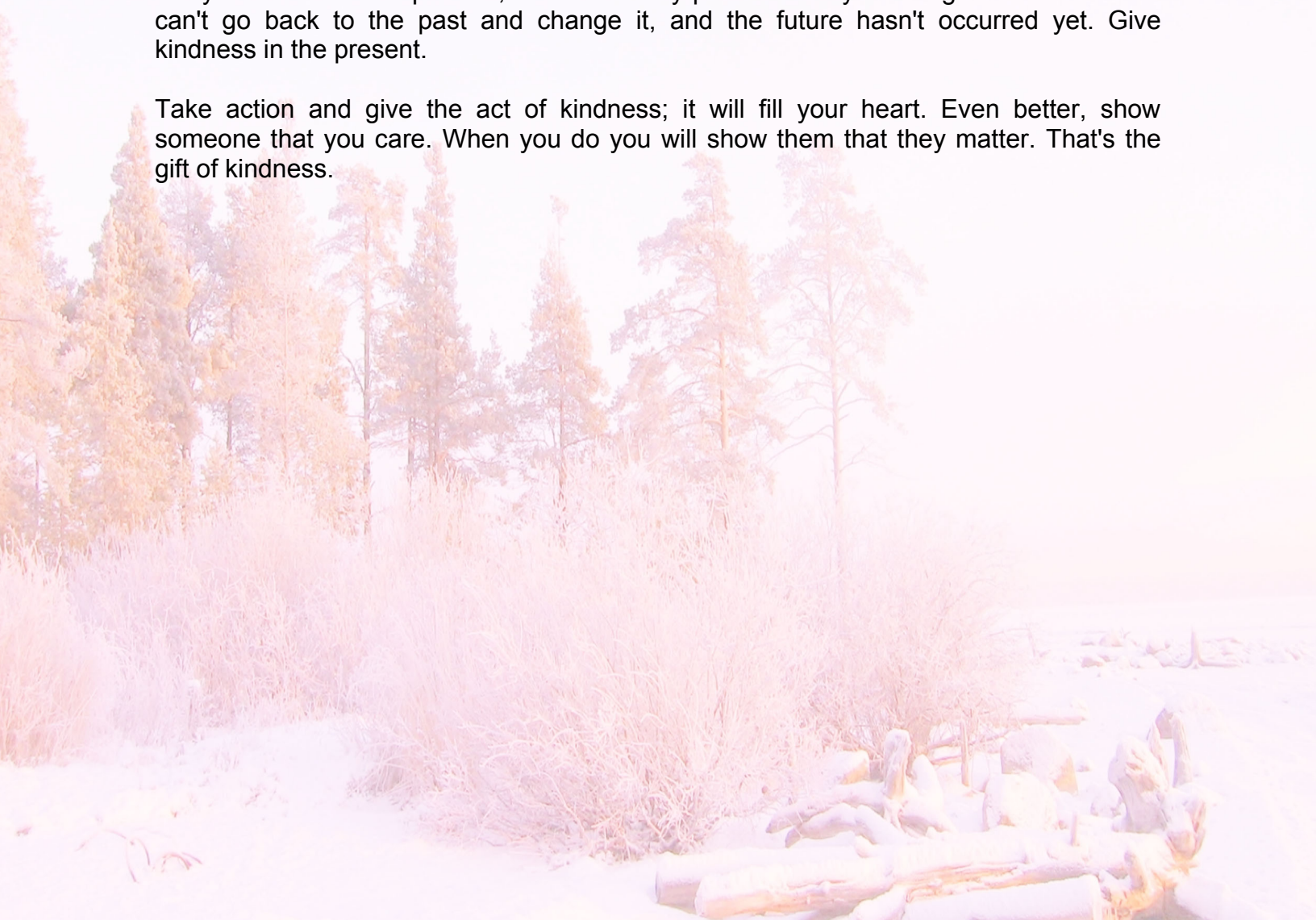
No matter what your position in life is, it pays you and the people you touch to be kind every day. Kindness will start to build your bank account of goodwill. However, kindness without integrity is a zero sum game.

No matter how kind someone is, if they don't have integrity, they can't be trusted. Someone who can't be trusted, no matter how nice or kind they are, is a hurtful and not a kind person.

Even though we benefit from offering kindness, we don't go out and give it as often as we can. We dwell on the past and what "could" or "should" have been.

Put your focus on the present; that is the only place where you can give kindness. You can't go back to the past and change it, and the future hasn't occurred yet. Give kindness in the present.

Take action and give the act of kindness; it will fill your heart. Even better, show someone that you care. When you do you will show them that they matter. That's the gift of kindness.



December 28

Tolerance

Tolerance is a wonderful quality required to increase your understanding and acceptance of others who are different from you. The values I have discovered in people from backgrounds different than mine has enriched my life.

Tolerance means that we are able to get out of our world. We are able to leave it behind. We are open to the existence of opinions, people and ways of doing things that are different to us. When we are open (practicing tolerance), we can get into the world of others and understand them better. Better understanding holds the potential for improved relationships.

The key to tolerance is to first seek to understand other people. It is easy to misjudge someone. When we get to know them and their situation or history, we can better understand them. We can have meaningful communication.

We understand that different isn't better or worse. It is just different.

However, there is a line that we need to draw with tolerance. That has to do with morals, ethics and character.

Lack of morals erodes the foundation for a relationship of trust.

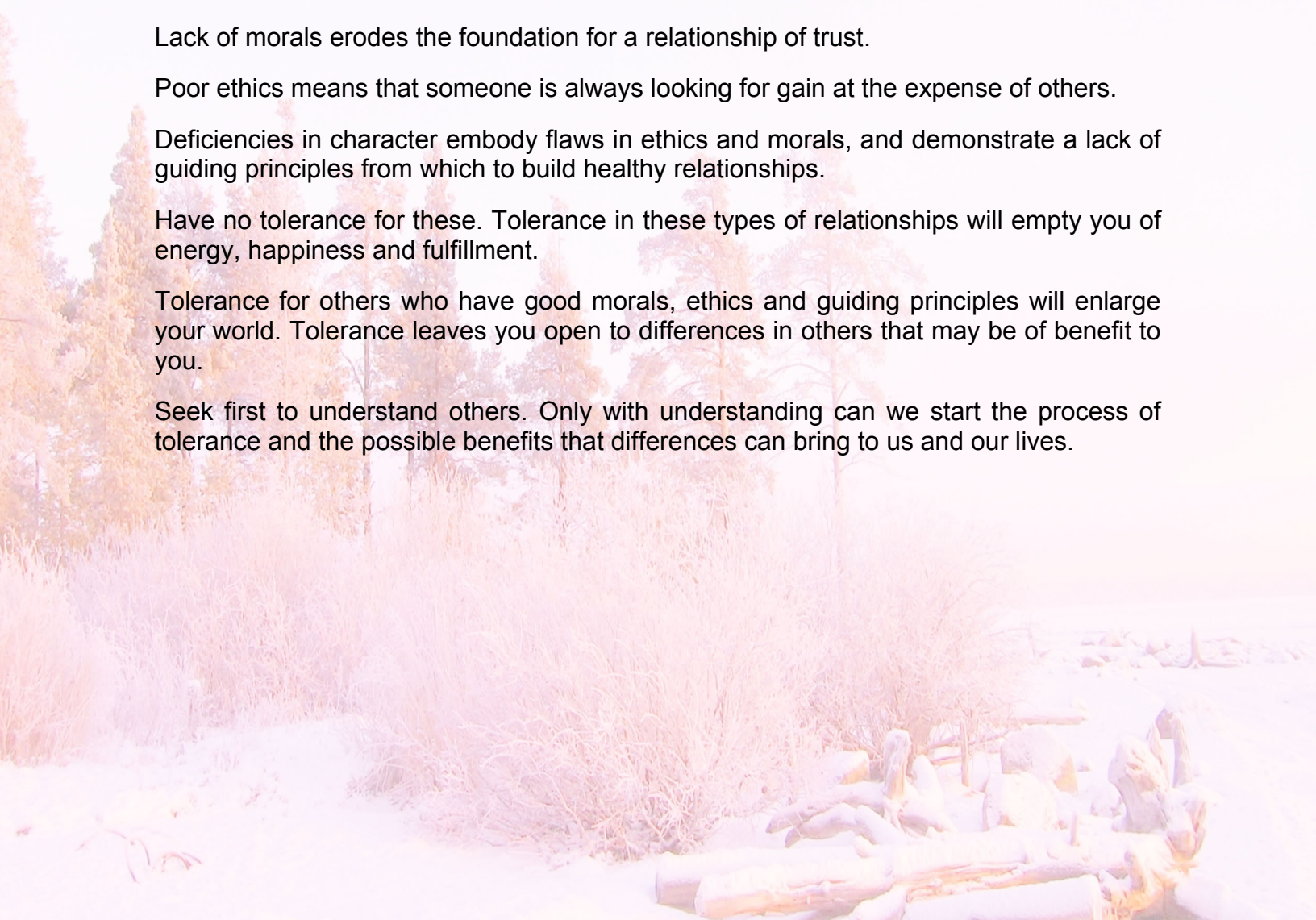
Poor ethics means that someone is always looking for gain at the expense of others.

Deficiencies in character embody flaws in ethics and morals, and demonstrate a lack of guiding principles from which to build healthy relationships.

Have no tolerance for these. Tolerance in these types of relationships will empty you of energy, happiness and fulfillment.

Tolerance for others who have good morals, ethics and guiding principles will enlarge your world. Tolerance leaves you open to differences in others that may be of benefit to you.

Seek first to understand others. Only with understanding can we start the process of tolerance and the possible benefits that differences can bring to us and our lives.



December 29

Overcome

'Overcome' is a word that conjures up and is about victory, surmounting an obstacle and gaining superiority among other things. This time of year is a good time to look back and make a list of what you have overcome. Make a list of what you have accomplished.

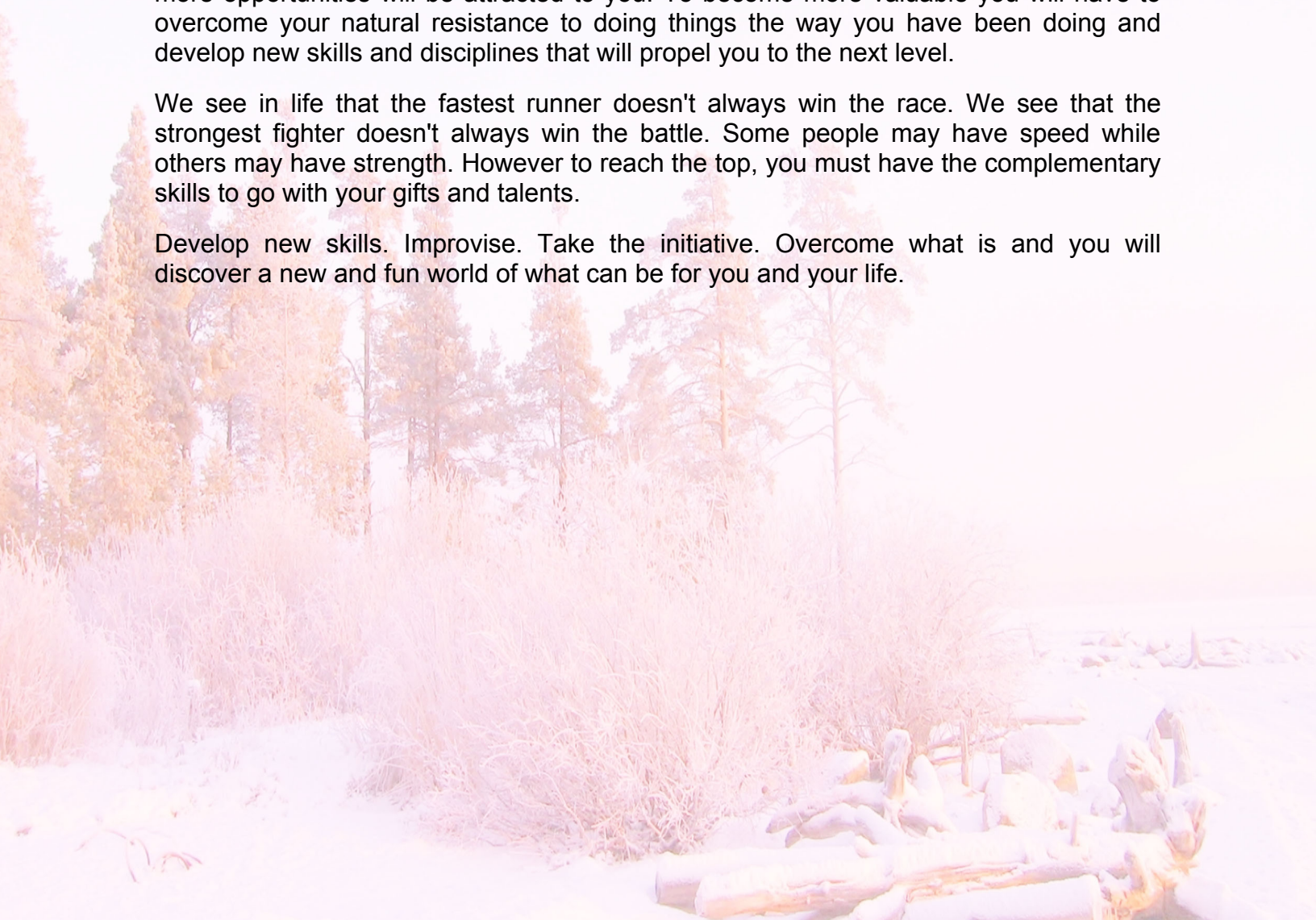
Doing this will give you a great perspective on what you have accomplished. Almost everyone who does this is surprised at the number of things he/she overcame and accomplished. Knowing what you have overcome will give you strong foundation and momentum to carry on into next year.

No one runs the race that is life to achieve second place. Every person wants one thing- first place. You want to emerge as the winner. The competition isn't necessarily against someone else. It is a competition within yourself to see what you can overcome in order to become more valuable.

The reason to overcome is to become more valuable. As you become more valuable, more opportunities will be attracted to you. To become more valuable you will have to overcome your natural resistance to doing things the way you have been doing and develop new skills and disciplines that will propel you to the next level.

We see in life that the fastest runner doesn't always win the race. We see that the strongest fighter doesn't always win the battle. Some people may have speed while others may have strength. However to reach the top, you must have the complementary skills to go with your gifts and talents.

Develop new skills. Improvise. Take the initiative. Overcome what is and you will discover a new and fun world of what can be for you and your life.



December 30

Your Best Year Yet?

As we come near the end of the year, take some time to reflect back on the year as a whole. Too often people get locked in mentally and emotionally to one thing that didn't go well and overlook all of the things that went well and for which they can be grateful for.

This is a prescription for getting stuck and not having positive momentum going into the New Year. Here are some steps I follow to increase my odds of having my best year yet.

First, make a list of your accomplishments and the things that went well. Many people are surprised, in a positive way, as to what they accomplished.

Second, make a list of your biggest disappointments. Often, you will be surprised at how few these are. Now you are starting to gain perspective on where you started and how far you have come.

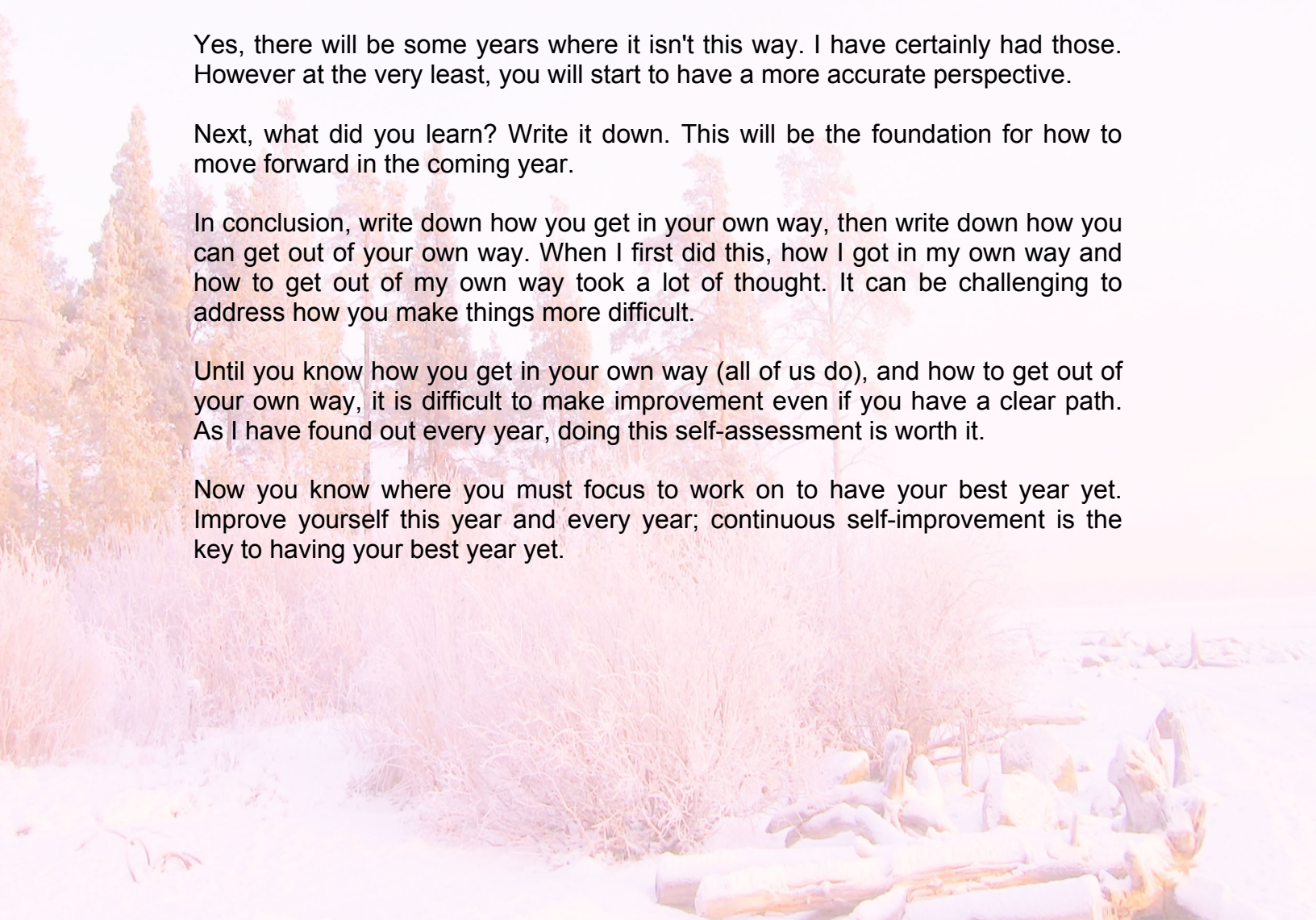
Yes, there will be some years where it isn't this way. I have certainly had those. However at the very least, you will start to have a more accurate perspective.

Next, what did you learn? Write it down. This will be the foundation for how to move forward in the coming year.

In conclusion, write down how you get in your own way, then write down how you can get out of your own way. When I first did this, how I got in my own way and how to get out of my own way took a lot of thought. It can be challenging to address how you make things more difficult.

Until you know how you get in your own way (all of us do), and how to get out of your own way, it is difficult to make improvement even if you have a clear path. As I have found out every year, doing this self-assessment is worth it.

Now you know where you must focus to work on to have your best year yet. Improve yourself this year and every year; continuous self-improvement is the key to having your best year yet.



December 31

Better Is Always Different

It's New Year's Eve. Another year will have soon passed. My hope for you is that you had a year of accomplishments. Regardless of the type of year you just experienced, it is important to reflect on what is bringing you accomplishment, success and happiness.

If you want to turn things around in the coming year, you can get started now by setting goals. Make them attainable. Make them measureable. Make them specific. A goal is a dream with a deadline.

If you had a good year and want to continue your momentum, goal setting is a great way to do that. Regardless of your situation, there is one constant to life. That constant is change.

When you set goals, you are resolving to do things differently with the desired result that things will be better. However, be careful of the four or five most dangerous words that can fool you when you want to change or move forward.

"It is different this time." "It is different here." Quite often I hear people say one of these two phrases when they set goals or want to change. The intentions are great and I applaud them for wanting to change, but here's the catch.

Different isn't necessarily better. But better is always different. We have heard that to change just for the sake of change is not a well thought-out strategy for moving forward. Change must be thought out; what are going to be the ramifications, not just the short term, but in the long term of your goals.

As you move forward into the New Year, my wish is that the coming year be positive for you in many ways. Make it different in positive ways. That will make it better for you, and in turn make it different.

Different isn't necessarily better. But better is always different.

