

On Towards and Avoids
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Very recently--like the last couple weeks--I've been dividing everything in my life—activities and people—into two categories. Something or someone is either a Toward or an Avoid. And it's been working out well for me.

I'll explain.

I set out three criteria. On balance, does this, whatever it is, whoever it is: 1) build me up; 2) energize me to get good things done; and 3) make me content and happy. If the answer is yes, this whatever/whoever is a Toward. That is to say, I go toward it/him/her, give it my time and attention and effort. If the answer is no, it/he/she is an Avoid—I go the other way.

Notice I said if *on balance* it/he/she builds me up and so on. Life's complicated; it's rarely either/or, always this way rather than that way. A one-pound bag of pita chips eaten in a single sitting is tasty, yes indeed it is; and it kills time, and it deadens anxiety and frustration and anger. But it also bloats one's stomach, makes one--oh, of course I'm talking about me--makes *me* feel dopey and sick and wiped out and depressed and thinking that the only thing worth doing in life is perusing ESPN.com one more time today; and it leaves my pants feeling tight and me looking like James Corden, the talk show guy. Therefore, pita chips are an Avoid.

Am I never going to eat another pita chip? I can't say that. But they are in the Avoid category, I know that, and they are going to get very little if any play from me from now on. I haven't had the slightest inkling to "hit the chips" all day long today. Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, free at last!

Earlier today (it's late at night now), someone in the Avoid category laid some harsh criticism on me. I considered it uninformed and uncalled for. Always before, that occurrence pushed my button: I stopped whatever I was thinking and doing at that moment and went right into my number. I gave this person all

kinds of energy. I defended, I refuted, I explained, I stewed, I plotted revenge. I had to get straight with this person, be OK with this person, win out over this person—not later, *now*.

This time, however--and it was so easy, effortless really--I flashed in my head, in my whole being, “This person is an Avoid.” And I didn’t do a damn thing in this person’s direction. I watched the 1964 movie “Dr. Strangelove” (classic old films are Towards). And then I made dinner. It’s now eight hours later and I feel really up, and yes, free.

So, the point: these days, as much as I can manage it, my life is made up of Towards. Avoids can go wherever they came from; they are on their own.

It’s getting close to bedtime and I’m figuring out what to do tomorrow. I’m retired and don’t have to go to work; and even if I weren’t retired I wouldn’t have to go to work, because there’s a gigantic COVID-19 virus panic going on at the moment and life in America has been put on hold--nobody is to do anything except be sure to wash his or her hands and stay at least six feet from every other human being. I hope this insanity has passed by the time you read this. Anyway, I’m asking myself, what are some Towards I can do tomorrow? Let’s see, there’s a cheese omelet for breakfast, and the Nietzsche biography, and an email to my daughter about her research project in her high school AP history class, (which is being taught online, remote they call it), and I can do my exercises, and . . . you get the idea.

One exception to the Towards/Avoids dichotomy. If there are children in your life or in my life, they are Towards, period. I wish I would have seen things this way earlier in my existence, but at least I do now.

Actually, writing this site thought was a Toward, and now I’m done and I feel built up, energized, and content and happy. Putting this on the computer screen has turned out to be better than pita chips.

