THE ESSENTIAL
WORLDWIDE LAWS OF LIFE
The Essential Worldwide Laws of Life

Sir John Templeton

With a Foreword by Stephen G. Post

Templeton Press
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Foreword

In December 1962, the message on the Templeton family Christmas card was as follows: “On the 1962nd birthday of Christ, we invite you, our friends, to ponder with us this little question: Are you in control of your mind?” While a tad unusual for a Christmas card greeting, the question is filled with wisdom. Sir John Templeton meant a control from within, a free self-focusing of mind and emotion, in contrast to anything imposed from outside. In *The Essential Worldwide Laws of Life*, Sir John applies this same wisdom in a practical, user-friendly book that teaches us how we can live better if we take a bit of time each day to concentrate on time-honored principles of human flourishing. The key ingredients underlying *The Essential Worldwide Laws of Life* are these three: (1) our thoughts are carried forward into manifestation in our daily living; (2) the thoughts that will be most helpful to us are ones that focus on the future in clear terms, and on helping, as well as on humility, forgiveness, gratitude, joy, perseverance, and other key virtues; and (3) we are each ultimately responsible as free individuals for what we allow into our minds and, hence, for creating our lives.

Sir John Templeton was a global investor who understood that the very best investment we make is in our minds, which we can determine to cultivate with thoughts that enable us to prosper and grow, no matter what obstacles and challenges we confront. Sir John worked just as hard at idea picking as he did at stock picking. He wanted ideas...
that had proven themselves by providing high dividends to those who might be fortunate enough to own them as long-term investments of the soul. He selected a set of principles or “laws of life” that he felt were truly valuable assets, like blue-chip dividend-paying stocks that expand in value regardless of the peaks and valleys of the markets. Sir John was not interested in short-term investments in fashionable ideas that do not stand the test of time. He investigated these ideas or “laws of life” scientifically; he analyzed them philosophically and theologically; he sought out expert advisors from every corner of the globe; he reflected on them at the level of everyday experience; and he took each of them into his own soul. Sir John was an investment genius who cared deeply for every client and was also a great healer who understood that the right thoughts, properly prescribed and modeled especially early in life, could replace spiritual poverty, misery, and bitterness with abundance, joy, and resilience. He knew that the best investment any of us ever make is in a mind full of the thoughts that build up our lives and the lives of others rather than tear them down. He understood that there can be no lasting freedom without responsibility and that, ultimately, each of us can enhance our futures through the astonishing influence of our thoughts.

Sir John Templeton wanted to encourage ideas that heal our lives. *The Essential Worldwide Laws of Life* is Sir John’s healing prescription for humanity. Its inspiring contents can change lives and cultures for the better and prevent the behaviors that contribute to illness, disease, and violence. Sir John read the newspapers, and he was painfully aware of how the messages in contemporary culture are destructive and self-destructive. He placed his hope in the perennial laws of life that shaped him from youth and that can do the same for the many young people today who are in desperate need of a positive philosophy for practical living.

To reach youth, Sir John put tireless energy and substantial resources into the Laws of Life Essay Competition, focusing on students in grade schools, junior highs, and high schools across the United States.
In 1987, he founded the first contest in Franklin County, Tennessee, to encourage young people to write about the laws of life and how they have influenced their lives. In twenty-five years, the contest has reached millions of youth and, today, organizations such as Junior Achievement China, Learning for Life, and Georgia Rotary Districts Character Education Program operate large-scale Laws of Life contests.

Why did these laws of life mean so much to Sir John? As a Tennessee teenager during the 1920s, Sir John discovered a truth that arches across the ages in a trajectory from the philosophers of antiquity such as the Roman Marcus Aurelius, who wrote “Your life becomes what you think,” to more recent spiritual leaders such as Charles Fillmore, who said, “Thoughts held in mind produce after their kind.” Indeed, these are both passages that Sir John cites in The Essential Worldwide Laws of Life. Could anyone seriously doubt that our thoughts have immense implications for how we focus our energies and creativity in every domain of life?

Sir John, a mainstream Presbyterian all of his life and for many years a board member of Princeton Theological Seminary, did not need to quote anything more than this beloved passage: “As he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). He saw value in many methods of focusing the mind on the laws of life, including the rituals, prayers, meditations, music, art, verse, or forms of worship that he collected from around the world in an impressive edited book, Worldwide Worship: Prayers, Songs, and Poetry (2000). Indeed, world religions at their best are designed to “prime” our minds and hearts for good living. Of course, he knew that religions can sometimes bring out the worst as well as the best in people. He wanted to see the best.

With its many branches and leading lights, Sir John’s laws of life fit loosely within the Americanist pragmatic philosophical genre known as “New Thought,” and within what is termed “cognitive priming” by contemporary psychology. This emphasis on the power of brief affirmations cultivated through daily meditation entered Sir John’s
young life through a small booklet that arrived monthly addressed to his beloved mother. *The Daily Word*, published by the Unity School of Christianity, has been inspiring people across the world since its first publication in July 1924. This handy little booklet includes an inspiring affirmation for each calendar day, followed by a paragraph of contemplative reflection and a passage from Scripture. Even a few minutes at the beginning of each day for such a spiritual exercise can set the tone of our interactions and attitudes, “priming” our responses to interactions and events, and focusing our energies on the things that matter most.

Unity was founded by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1903, although the informal beginnings of Unity go back to the 1880s when the couple, struggling with economic and health challenges, found solutions in spiritual currents of the time, such as the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg and Ralph Waldo Emerson as well as in Theosophy, Hinduism, and Quakerism. Fillmore believed that spiritually progressive individuals should welcome relationships with people of all religious persuasions, and that they should accompany creeds with simple “spiritual principles.” He recognized a phrase found in the Hindu Upanishads, a sacred text: “What you think you become.” If we think good, we become good; if we think bad, we become bad. Thought has always been held to be creative, and may even be as real as matter—a point suggested these days by quantum physics. But such speculation aside, mastery of one’s thoughts is mastery of one’s soul and fate. It is by practicing concentration (*Dhārana* in the Sanskrit) that we achieve control over our thoughts and a deeper unity with them. This unity enables us to unleash more energy in actualizing our vision for a meaningful and generous life.

The interface of the laws of life and science fascinated Sir John. The influential national and international research initiatives that Sir John initiated through his eponymous philanthropic foundation on love, forgiveness, gratitude, joy, self-control, character, hope, humility, purpose, and prayer are all well identified in the laws of life. He
often sought out premier scientists who might be able to make “spiritual progress” by learning more about one of these laws, which he sometimes described as the “invisible realities” that are so influential in each of our lives. One can connect Sir John’s fascination with the benefits of bringing science to spiritual principles and laws of life to Unity. As one of Sir John’s close associates, Unity minister Glenn R. Mosley, notes in his book *New Thought, Ancient Wisdom*, “Fillmore believed that an appropriate understanding of and belief in Scripture did not preclude embracing scientific research” (p. 30). Indeed, in 1933 Fillmore gave a major address at the World Fellowship of Faiths entitled “Unity of Religion and Science,” in which he asserted that as science progresses, we must refine our beliefs accordingly. Sir John’s diligent, deeply loyal, kind, and tireless son Dr. John M. Templeton Jr. continues this astonishing legacy of spiritual progress through scientific discovery as president of the John Templeton Foundation today.

Sir John freely pursued his dreams for improving the world. He knew that many philanthropists did marvelous work in contributing to needy organizations that tend to the weak, infirm, and vulnerable. He too was generous in helping others. But his bright and creative vision was to help all people, without exception, by slowly bringing the world to greater knowledge and practice of the laws of life. Sir John knew that with these principles of living planted in each of our minds and practiced in our daily lives, we could flourish at every level—interpersonally, emotionally, physically, economically, and spiritually. He felt that engaging the laws of life is crucial to human well-being and progress, and that their expansion into lives and culture is absolutely imperative for the future of civilization.

Were any objective observer to review the portfolio of research the John Templeton Foundation has funded in its twenty-five year history, it would be clear that most of the major initiatives are extensions of *The Essential Worldwide Laws of Life*. These laws constitute the backbone of Sir John’s life work, and he clearly saw fit to investigate them with diligence. He was always seeking to strengthen our
understanding of these laws as human assets in living well. They are the essence of “progress in religion,” or “spiritual progress,” and of the “invisible realities” that shape our actions. These are our human strengths, but they are laid out in the context of a spirituality that relates them not just to living better, but being closer to God.

The overarching principle of *The Essential Worldwide Laws of Life* is that our minds and thoughts are tremendously powerful in shaping the reality around us. This principle and spiritual discipline made its way from New Thought into Protestant Christianity through Norman Vincent Peale, whom Sir John knew personally for many years. It made its way into the business world through the writings of Napoleon Hill. It resonates with the mainstream “rational emotive therapy” movement of Albert Ellis. Sir John especially invited youth into this way of life. Indeed, in 1997 he handed me an autographed copy of *Worldwide Laws of Life* to give as a present to my then fourteen-year-old daughter Emma.

Sir John—and New Thought generally—have always stressed the centrality of agape love. A contemporary example of this core aspect of New Thought can be found in Dr. Michael Beckwith’s Agape International Spiritual Center in Culver City, California, and throughout other entities loosely associated with Unity. This emphasis on agape love is not only central in Fillmore’s work, but also in another New Thought pioneer, James Allen, who understood agape love as the chief source of happiness. Allen, in his 1903 classic *As a Man Thinketh*, articulated a line of thinking central to Sir John as follows: “The heart that has reached utter self-forgetfulness in its love for others has not only become possessed of the highest happiness but has entered immortality, for it has realized the Divine” (p. 122). Allen continues, “Lose yourself in the welfare of others; forget yourself in all that you do; this is the secret of abounding happiness” (p. 125).

*The Essential Worldwide Laws of Life* is all Sir John, but is now organized thematically into chapters and reduced a bit in length by the elimination of nonessential embellishments here and there. Now the
words of his classic work flow more easily and jump right off the page to touch mind and heart with sage wisdom. *The Essential Worldwide Laws of Life* is an abridgement of Sir John’s *Worldwide Laws of Life: 200 Eternal Spiritual Principles* (Templeton Press, 1997). Though Sir John passed away in 2008, he was always looking for ways to present his laws of life more effectively, and I feel certain that he would have been ecstatic with this essential edition. Sir John knew that life can be hard and circumstances difficult, but he recognized that we each have gifts and noble purposes that can move us forward, and that we can persevere and flourish best when we can use our minds effectively.

Stephen G. Post
Introduction

What is to become of me? What does the future hold? How can I set out on my own into a world that seems filled with conflict and strife? How do I cope with day-to-day pressures? How do I find peace in the midst of turmoil? What will allow me to be in the world, but not of the world? How can my life be useful and happy?

These are questions asked by many people today. Fortunately, there are positive responses and definite guidance that can enrich the life of every individual who sincerely seeks to learn. To be a happy and useful person, it is important to understand and practice the laws of life. These laws are simply the “set of rules” by which we should live. They come from a vast array of sources—the major sacred scriptures of the world; various schools of philosophical thought, both ancient and modern; storytellers, such as Aesop; scientists, such as Isaac Newton; and from various artists and historians—to name a few. There seem to be literally hundreds of such laws, and most families and religions seek to teach the laws they were taught. Some laws are so clear that most people can agree they are true. For example, honesty and truthfulness rank high as values in cultures and societies around the world.

Our stay on this small planet called Earth is a brief one, and we have an excellent opportunity to leave the world a better place than we found it through our choice of how we live our lives. One way
to accomplish lasting improvement is to master the laws of life. The poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote:

Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time.

The truth of this statement can be demonstrated if we look to the lives of the famous as well as those of the unsung heroes of the past and present. Here we find many models for useful, happy living. And, when we examine their words and deeds, we often discover the principles that inspired and sustained their benefits to present and future generations.

The world operates on spiritual principles just as it operates on the laws of physics and gravity. It is up to us to learn what these principles are and then choose to live by them. You might ask, “What is spiritual law?” We may answer that it is an invisible law and, being of spirit, is not dictated by the laws of our physical world. Spiritual law isn’t shaped by current opinion or whim. It is not determined by people. Spiritual laws are impartial because they apply equally to everyone throughout our world. They work without prejudice or bias at all times and in all places. These laws are self-enforcing and are not dependent on human authority or commandments.

Followers of the ancient Chinese sage Lao Tzu understood spiritual law as the Tao. The simplest interpretation of Tao, or spiritual law, is “This is how things work.” One way to comprehend this law is to realize the relationship between the mind and its thoughts, feelings, and ideas and the physical activities that give those thoughts, feelings, and ideas expression. There is a relationship between the invisible thoughts and feelings of our minds and the visible actions we take as a result of them.

The Essential Worldwide Laws of Life is aimed at assisting people of
all ages to learn more about the universal truths of life that transcend modern times or particular cultures in the hope that it may help people in all parts of the world to make their lives not only happier but more useful. The laws of life that were chosen for this book are important and possible to apply in one’s life. Each quotation that serves as the title of an essay points to a particular law that holds true for most people under most circumstances. The material is designed to inspire as well as encourage you, to help you consider more deeply the laws you personally live by, and to reap the rewards of their practical application.

The laws described herein may be used as effective, practical, and workable tools. When you apply them consistently, you can draw forth the power to transform your life into a more deeply useful and joyful experience. Even if your life is already working well, it’s possible that it can work even better as you incorporate more of the wisdom contained in these pages. If I had found a book of the basic laws of life during my college years, I could have been far more productive then and in the years that have followed. Possibly one of the laws in this book may encourage you to try something that, until now, you may have only dreamed of attempting!

In my youth, I was inspired by the courage and vision of Rudyard Kipling’s poem “If.” This poem taught me to dream but also to be master of my dreams. I learned from the great English poet that the earth belongs to us all and that, with courage and enthusiasm, progress is likely to follow. The final stanza of “If” still rings in my ears:

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,
And—which is more—you’ll be a Man, my son!

Behind this book is my belief that the basic principles for leading “a sublime life,” to paraphrase Longfellow, can be examined and
tested just as science examines and tests natural laws of the universe. By learning the laws of life and applying them to everyday situations, more and more people may find themselves leading joyful and useful lives. It has been well said that “life is a tough school because the exams come first and the learning afterwards.” This book is a sincere attempt to provide some opportunities for learning before the exams arrive!

Acknowledgments

Without the help of many individuals who shared their ideas and wisdom with me, this book would not have been possible. Over the years I have employed most of these people for their help in providing ideas, writings, explanations, examples, and editing for this collection of laws. Some of these contributors were ministers and laypeople associated with religious groups; others were private individuals who share a similar hopeful outlook on life and a fundamental belief in the principle that “life works better when you play by the rules.”