

## Book review: The Present

By Noel Man Nga Chan

*The Present* is one of Spencer Johnson's timeless tales that tells a simple truth, and yet inspires and changes the lives of his millions of readers all across the continents. His tale has become a tale of inspiration and practical guidance for those who receive the present. The book itself is called "The Present" and yet it is a great title, because to receive "The Present" can be the most valuable present you can get. In the book, the present means not a Hello Kitty wrapped Minnie Mouse pencil case; in fact you can't see this present, you can only use this present when you've understood the concept that the book tells. In the book, the present means the present time; not birthday presents. It is very important for us to acknowledge the present, because by learning about the present, we can do something in the present to make our dreams come true.

*The Present* is an engaging tale that guides us through a young boy's journey through his childhood and into his adulthood, with the guidance of an old man as his companion. The "young boy" discovers the present that the old man first told him about when he was still young.

The story is set out in a light-hearted way, which is one amongst the many factors that has made this book highly successful. The plot is very simple; but also very effective in imprinting its messages into the reader's minds. It also showed Johnson's points of view, allowing his readers to be persuaded into his way of thinking. It is almost like propaganda, only without the violence and with freedom- to receive the present or not to.

Reading the book is one thing, learning from the book is another; applying your knowledge into your life is a completely different thing. When I read it, I found it a very moving book which really opened my eyes to the world, out into the mysteriousness outside my little world of the usual routines. After reading this book I quickly noticed a lot of details in life that I never thought would make such a change in my life, and first off: when do I concentrate on the things I am doing? I can see clearly now how precious time is; what a valuable thing it is. It is a priceless gift. Only you have control over it. You are your own destiny, setting your own targets and achieving them. I think this is a great book.

The media world has another "version" of *The Present*, but only by a record selling celebrity, Christina Aguilera. This song (The Voice Within) is a great analogy to the story, I will discuss the lyrics and how it links to *The Present*.

*"Young girl don't cry  
I'll be right here when your world starts to fall  
Young girl it's alright  
Your tears will dry, you'll soon be free to fly*

*When you're safe inside your room you tend to dream  
Of a place where nothing's harder than it seems  
No one ever wants or bothers to explain  
Of the heartache life can bring and what it means*

*Chorus:*

*When there's no one else, look inside yourself  
Like your oldest friend just trust the voice within  
Then you'll find the strength that will guide your way  
You'll learn to begin to trust the voice within*

*Young girl don't hide  
You'll never change if you just run away  
Young girl just hold tight  
Soon you're gonna see your brighter day*

*Now in a world where innocence is quickly claimed  
It's so hard to stand your ground when you're so afraid  
No one reaches out a hand for you to hold  
When you look outside look inside to your soul*

*Chorus*

*Life is a journey  
It can take you anywhere you choose to go  
As long as you're learning  
You'll find all you'll ever need to know  
(be strong)  
You'll break it*

*(hold on)*  
*You'll make it*  
*Just don't forsake it because*  
*No one can tell you what you can't do*  
*No one can stop you, you know that I'm talking to you*

*Chorus*

*Young girl don't cry I'll be right here when your world starts to fall"*

In the first verse, the girl's thirst to learn to fly can be like the young boy in the book who tried to look for the Present. In both the sources, the young girl (in the song) and the boy (in the book) are both frustrated in the search of what they want: the girl wants to learn to fly (to be grown up) on the other hand, the boy wants to discover the present that the old man told him about, the present that will bring him happiness, the secret to enjoy his life and work.

In the second verse, it describes the nature of humans – to dream. People often dream of the person they want to be, the place they want to be in. The successes that they will have, but rarely have they face reality – the pain and to learn from the past and face the present, taking action in the present to help the future. Rarely have they found their focus in life, the type of success they would like to have at different times. People have different ways of looking into the thing called "success": At the age of six you may find being successful means that you can tie your own shoelaces or eat without spilling soup on the table.

At the age of fifteen you may find being successful means that you scored good grades in school and kept on good terms with your parents and get to know more friends, or even deep down for some girls- to be "popular"... People have different views of things, and people's views change as they get older, as they learn more about matters and as they realize the truth of this world.

In the chorus, it tells us to reflect on ourselves regularly, just like Spencer Johnson told us. Some people think they know who they are, but do they? All they are seeing is a mirror of themselves, with fog concealing the truth, the

unmasked figure. We may not know ourselves any more than our best friend knows us; sometimes even your best friend knows more about you than you do about yourself. In the book it tells us to place trust in ourselves, our hopes can be fulfilled if we have the courage and hope that it takes. When we find our confidence and our patience, "impossible is nothing". We need to believe in ourselves, even in the worst of worst situations in life.

As we move on into our different stops in our journey of life, we will face different problems every day. And unfortunately, as we get older, we are more likely to face more complex problems than we what faced when we were six. We need to be strong, believe in ourselves whenever we are facing a problem yet to be solved. Sometimes we get lost in nothingness that's within us, we feel unworthy for living. When those times have come, we need to pick ourselves up from the ground and smile at what has happened and realize that there is a reason to everything that happens. If we have the courage to do so, we will always find ourselves out side of the meandering darkness of the world, where evil overtakes the minds of the innocent.

Life is a journey; life is a stage. We are the directors of the play, we build our own stage. We cast our own play. Though we have tools to help us, we can't depend on them; though we have advisers, it's our choice to accept their advice or go our own way. We learn different techniques to help us build every aspect of our stage and play: the lighting systems, the sounds, the places the actors go on and off the stage. We change our script when it goes wrong. All we need is our faith in ourselves to be strong and proud of the person we are and be the person we want to be seen as, on the stage.

Life is short; we must take advantage of today, because tomorrow ain't promised.

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