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## Choices

I enjoy playing various forms of the card game Solitaire, although I long ago stopped using physical playing cards and play computer versions of the game instead. In particular I like playing the double deck version of “Golf,” although I haven’t a clue why it’s called that because it doesn’t seem to have anything to do with that frustrating pastime by the same name.

The goal of double deck Golf is to transfer all the cards from its nine columns to a waste pile while following certain rules. You win the game if you make the right choices and move all the cards to the waste pile before running out choices. You lose if you run out of choices while cards remain in one or more of the columns. Fortunately, computer versions allow starting the same game over to make another set of choices. It may take several attempts to win a particular game. But losing can be inevitable thus requiring the fresh deal of a new game.

Sometimes whilst playing my mind reviews choices I have made in my life. (Apparently my brain *can* multitask on occasion!) It’s hard not to have regrets about difficult life choices but it seems unhealthy to continually punish oneself over them. I prefer “Choices have *outcomes*” to “Choice have *consequences*” because the word outcome seems less judgmental and more likely to invite an open-minded review and thus an improvement in one’s choices.

I can be surprised at winning a game after several attempts at what appeared to be a losing deal. Different choices, different outcome. But we can only just imagine (fantasize) alternate outcomes for our life choices. We continually make choices—choices about friends, education, marriage,

military service, children, divorce, religion, politics, spending and saving, jobs, medical procedures, food and drink, hair color, body adornment, happiness, etc. So many choices!

Americans cherish freedom of choice. Immigrants come seeking that freedom. Encouraging our children to make their own choices—age appropriate and within their ability and understanding—is respectful, empowering and confidence building. Needless restricting or overriding their choices has the opposite outcome.

Of course, not all choices are major life altering ones. Sometimes we are able to choose other options after experiencing unintended outcomes from earlier choices. We can trade in a “lemon” for a better vehicle, repaint a room, revert to our original hair color or just choose to turn gray, shave a beard (no thanks!), avoid a restaurant where food or service is poor, refuse to lend to someone who fails to repay.

But other choices can be very difficult indeed: paying the utility bills instead of buying groceries, working to the point of ill health to provide for family, leaving a war torn homeland, risking all to take up arms against tyranny, incurring life changing wounds while rescuing others in danger.

When I was faced with choosing the “best” medical treatment for my prostate cancer, it was daunting. All the treatments have undesirable outcomes in the form of disagreeable side effects. No treatment is a cure but some treatments offer the prospect of living in remission until something else overtakes you. Breast cancer patients face similar intimidating choices. Sometimes family members have to make life and death medical choices for a suffering loved one.

The weight and possible outcomes of these kinds of choices make the choices in a card game of Solitaire seem trivial indeed.

