

Sun King Vibes

One thing I've struggled with, and sometimes continue to struggle with, is dreaming big. It's pretty easy to be shy about asking for truly huge things in life, all those things that would make us truly, hugely happy.

We believe the myth that fulfilling lifestyles and extra-steady finances are reserved for a very lucky few. We uphold our self-deprecating habits and inner commentary -- *I'm just no one, and who is no one to have all that?* We slip into seeing from perspectives of lack and guilt, as if asking for more than enough is rude or wrong, when, really, we're all living each day as co-creators in this abundant universe. Specific desires don't make you evil, they help the cosmos clarify how you'd like things to play out.

Personal experience has taught me, as it's likely taught many of you listening to or reading this, that our thoughts and attitudes hold great sway over our state of being. If we carry on seeing ourselves as insignificant and incapable, we limit ourselves and can blame nobody for it. However, you can *choose* to see yourself in a much grander light. To see yourself as the highly evolved spiritual being you are, a uniquely talented piece of that all there is. Our souls are vast and wise beyond comprehension, it's our fragile egos that continue to thrive on petty judgements and self-esteem crushing comparisons. So, in the name of pursuing our highest potential, let's practice thinking, and dreaming, a whole lot bigger, shall we?

And, oh, man, do I know of someone who had no problem conceiving of things, and their person, on an immensely colossal scale. Louis the XIV of France, the Sun King himself.

Louis Quatorze, Louis le Grand, or le Roi Soleil, as he's known in the land he utterly subjugated over his seventy-two-year reign, is known to history for embodying magnificence and France itself. He's remembered as the most sovereign sovereign in modern Europe, and remains particularly famous for his feats in constructing the Château de Versailles and practicing seventeenth century self-care on the most major of scales.

I know, *I know*, he's also particularly famous for lots of unsavory stuff -- for epitomizing the divine right of kings and absolute monarchy; for bleeding infinite resources from a very finite treasury; for booting all Protestants out of Catholic France; for his pipedream war mongering against the Spanish, Dutch, and a league of their associates; for sidestepping his queen in favor of his parade of noble and obscure mistresses; and for granting the occasional dukedom to the by-products of his extramarital doings.

We recall him for virtually holding high-ranking nobles hostage; for concocting frivolous hierarchies to keep everyone else in their lower spheres; for delighting in exorbitant fashion trends that stuck bluebloods in crushing debt only he could bail them out of; and for having no great love for or real cognizance of his overtaxed, hungry peasantry.

Whew, yeah, I know. I'm not here to encourage a single inegalitarian structure, or to defend the past. However, I'm well aware it is what happened in the past, we must be mindful of it without applying too many of our modern judgements so we can learn from it nonetheless.

I'd say, for the most part, thankfully, that human consciousness has evolved to a high enough degree to recognize all the aforementioned is pretty gross for society. I reckon that means our consciousness can also be discerning enough to pick out some good bits from the dazzling,

golden dumpster fire that was the *Ancien Régime*. In regard to manifesting our desires, I happen to see room for inspiration in Louis' visionary attitude and how he relished feeding his senses.

Born on September 5th, 1638 and named Louis Dieudonné, that's quite literally "Louis the God-Given," he was perhaps destined for such a temperament. And he was somewhat miraculous. His parents didn't have an easy go of producing a dauphin of France; they were married some 23 years before the happy event, suffering several miscarriages and a mutual incompatibility. The Sun King was even born on a Sunday, and it was predicted that the new heir, like the sun itself, would be the happiness of France and her allies by his warmth and light.

His father died from tuberculosis when he was only four and a half years old, leaving him under the guidance and, after a little bribery of councils and ministers, the sole regency of his mother, Anne of Austria, and her right-hand man, the Italian Cardinal Mazarin. There's a fair chance he never had a solid memory in which he wasn't already king.

Louis was close to his affectionate mother. Anne of Austria (who was actually a Spanish Hapsburg), didn't nurse her son according to custom, which was lucky for her, as the boy had a hearty appetite and two teeth at birth. Though she did break protocol and kept Louis with her at all times, eventually with his younger brother Philippe, until age seven. Anne was beautiful, proud, pious but high spirited; she loved balls and gambling, large portions of fine cuisine, and the theatre -- all traits she passed on to her eldest son, who would later claim to have loved her not just for the blood they shared, but because they were two kindred spirits.

The king survived smallpox in his youth, and experienced the calamities of the Fronde around age ten. The Fronde is a handy name for a complex series of civil wars in 17th-century France with several root causes: proud nobles, royal relations salty over the succession of a toddler, the long process of centralization of power under the Crown, and the sheer wretchedness of the poor among them. Seeking bodily control over the king, parliament members in Paris began plotting his abduction, and Louis had to secretly flee his capital twice during the night. Upon a third occasion, finding themselves barricaded into the city, the Queen Mother decided it was best to allow riotous citizens into the Palais-Royal to look upon their angelic boy king asleep in his bed. It's safe to say he was pretending to sleep, wide awake in terror.

These traumas likely impressed upon him that life can be brief and treacherous at a very young age. Even as a child he didn't forget small slights or courtiers who fled his presence during his illness. After reaching his majority, and the death of his mentor, top statesman, and friend, Mazarin, Louis declared publicly that he would take all government into his own hands, all of it. There was not a passport to be issued or a seal to be placed upon a document without his direct approval. And he did, in fact, work diligently and daily on his kingdom's affairs over the course of his entire reign.

Louis also began frequenting his late father's hunting lodge in Versailles as a young buck himself, becoming tantalized by an opportunity he saw to strengthen his, and France's, glories like no monarch before him.

Let's rewind for a sec. Versailles as a settlement sort of owes its existence to the nearby royal residence Saint Germain-en-Laye, which dates back to the Renaissance. The idolized patriarch of the Bourbon clan, Henri IV, eventually spent lots of time on the estate and it was also favored by later generations of the family. It happens to be the palace where Louis XIV was born.

His father, Louis XIII, grew fond of the marshy nowhere that was Versailles, and bought up land for a game reserve from other nobles. No one quite knows why this particular rural place pleased him so, but he was notoriously zealous about sporting and avoiding the ladies of his court, whom he found senseless and impertinent. When he did form a crush on the fourteen year-old Marie de Hautefort, who tolerated him, she claimed he only bored her with talk of dogs and the hunt.

Louis XIII commissioned a plain house with just a few large rooms and a drafty hall for brief visits with small entourages. The king's forresters ensured the woods stayed well stocked with deer and other prey, as Bourbon hunting habits decimated local populations and human intervention was required. The house underwent upgrades in Louis XIII's reign, and morphed into a stylish, medium-sized country chateau with pale walls, decorative red brick panels, and blue slate roof tiles echoing the colors of the king's livery.

It became his favorite hunting lodge, and Louis XIV was raised to some extent on stories of his father's love of the chase. It follows that Versailles wasn't a totally lackluster retreat to begin with, when Louis took a serious interest in the site himself at age twenty-three in 1661. It's said he first went there to more easily cavort in private with his mistress at the time, Louise de La Vallière. Though lingering memories of the Fronde had already left the young king acutely aware of the advantages offered by a seat of power slightly removed from the center of Paris.

He began by overhauling the stables, kitchens, and interior of his father's lodge. It was around then the king became enchanted by, if not ragingly jealous of, Vaux-le-Vicomte, the otherworldly classical chateau of his superintendent of finances, Nicolas Fouquet. Louis' big vision was forming, for he hired the same architect, gardener, and painter to turn their attention to Versailles. In good time, Fouquet was caught embezzling from the treasury and duly imprisoned. *Le Roi Soleil* then duly helped himself to much of the furnishings, fruit trees, and art held at Vaux-le-Vicomte.

Louis' first priority was the park at Versailles, and owning France's most admired grounds. One visiting noble described the area as a reeking sinkhole of excrement and animal carcasses, but the king saw what could be. He purchased more land and straight up demolished the old village for a new town and better views. André Le Nôtre, landscaping extraordinaire, was employed to conquer the landscape in the geometric, ultra-regimented style of the day. Don't we all love a good topiary?

Le Nôtre shifted earth to form a terrace with two large basins and groups of bronzes before the chateau, and smoothed ponds and a mighty canal into sheets of watery glass. Thanks to the expertise of hordes of sculptors and artisans, and hundreds of laborers digging to divert all the water possible to the site, Le Nôtre oversaw the creation of splendid flowerbeds, lawns, fountains, grottoes, mazes, as well as outdoor theatres and ballrooms that became the setting for even more splendid musical soirees and al fresco banquets for courtiers and dignitaries.

Louis and Jean-Baptiste Colbert, his chief advisor and savvy minister of the arts and finances, saw scenes of these outlandish outdoor entertainments engraved, bound in calfskin, and sent home with ambassadors as party favors. As his cultural propaganda spread, so did Louis' desire to expand the chateau and gather more stars into his orbit. This is when the Versailles that we recognize today began to emerge, as the architect Louis Le Vau absorbed the original house into his Italianate three-wing facade, all gold and cream stone, around a vast courtyard patterned with black and white marble.

The baroque architect Jules Hardouin-Mansart carried on after Le Vau's demise, and Versailles would see the installation many new features. A king-sized potager, or vegetable garden, fed the court. The resident gardener, Jean-Baptiste de La Quintinie, was famous for producing early vegetables and greens; like asparagus and sorrel in December, radishes, lettuce, and mushrooms in January. The potager also boasted "fruit walls" that bore peaches, pears, cherries, plums, apricots, grapes, and a great deal of figs.

Additional cubby-hole lodgings for lesser nobles were built into the chateau's upper stories, fanciful pavilions and trianons popped up around the park, along with sumptuous guard rooms, grand staircases, and anterooms for circulation.

The royal family occupied first-floor suites for sleeping and showing off collections of rarities, and the king and queen also had state apartments for stunning everyone into submission. Each room of the King's State Apartments is linked to Roman solar mythology. There's insanely opulent rooms dedicated to Apollo the sun god, obviously, and his divine relations. His twin-sister the huntress Diana, and his half-siblings warlike Mars, loving Venus, Mercury of the winged feet, and half-mortal Hercules. There's also a salon dedicated to Abundance, and abundance was in no short supply. Marble paneling and columns in most colors of the rainbow abound, along with finely patterned parquet, gilded stucco and boiseries, and painted scenes by Le Brun, Veronese, Van Loo, and whole bunch of art history's other biggest hits.

There's the orangery, which still serves out freshly squeezed juice to tourists. It boasted more than 3,000 orange trees in Louis' day, for he loved everything about them, their perfume, fruit, flowers, and dark glossy leaves. He imported or acquired more trees from other countries or his nobles whenever he could. The royal menagerie was graced with its very own micro-chateau for supper parties. It boasted the most exotic aviary in France, and visitors admired caged savannah and rainforest animals divided into their own "courts" by species.

The two-storey chapel was completed towards the end of Louis' reign, and there's no escaping mention of the Grand Gallery, with its lofty halls of War and Peace, and the 73 meter-long Hall of Mirrors. The arches of *galerie des glaces* shine with 357 mirrors, with marble pillars and bronze motifs of gallic roosters and fleurs-de-lys between them. All that glass is astonishing, considering any mirror was a luxury back then, and it acted as a most fabulous way of sticking it to the Venetians, who had a virtual monopoly on glass production. Louis' France was prosperous and her manufacturers could hang.

It's GRANDEUR on a scale that's barely fathomable even when you're looking straight at it. Versailles today has a whopping 2,300 rooms covering 63,154 square meters. It's been estimated that it all cost 116,438,892 livres to build in Louis' day, give or take about seven million of that spent on other residences. I have no clue what that sum would equal today, and there's no real way to tally the total cost of human lives and limbs during construction.

The matter of upkeep, given the vastness and the thousands of courtiers, officials, servants, animals, and guests that spent their days at Versailles, is a very chilly, smelly something else. Fireplaces proved ineffective, as the court froze in magnificence during wintertime. The bodily needs of others didn't much phase the Sun King either, and proper facilities were scarce. Tales of people relieving themselves behind curtains qualifying as waste disposal come to mind. As does the Princesse d'Harcourt, a grand dame whose dignity wouldn't allow her to stoop to the use of a closed toilet and who tended just let loose as she trailed along.

Despite the squalor, no one at Versailles would believe you if you told them they weren't posh. It was the center of their universe, and life went on in its elaborate way. Elaborate is perhaps an understatement for the complex schedules of courtly life, which still allowed the nobles to languish idly. Aside from state visits, royal marriages, and other momentous occasions, the day-to-day revolved around attending the king, mass, receptions, gaming, music, plays, balls, ambrosial buffet services called *collations*, hunting, hawking, and promenades everywhere.

Versailles marked the seasons of winter, carnivale, lent, spring, and summer, and activities did vary somewhat throughout the year. Winter was passed with comedies, gambling, concerts, parties, and sleigh rides, with every third day left free. Double the masquerade balls brought double the fun during carnivale, while lent probably brought double the hypocritical piety. Summer picked up with musical fetes on gold-fringed gondolas, gifted by the Republic of Venice, on the grand canal. *Les voyages* were yearly visits at set intervals to other royal properties -- Compiègne in spring and Fontainebleau in autumn, where a stripped back court of maybe only 600 instead of a few thousand were allowed to travel for the revered, intimate shooting parties.

Wherever Louis XIV's schedule placed him, each of his days were timed to the minute. If the king kept to his agenda, others who wanted to be sombodies had no choice but to follow suit. Louis was woken by his first valet de chambre at 8:30 in the morning. Rumor has it that his childhood nurse then dutifully placed a kiss upon his forehead. He promptly met with his physicians and surgeon, sipped sage tea, said a prayer, graced his potty chair, and got groomed before the Princes of the Blood and a few worthy others. He then breakfasted on soup while dressing before a wider audience of about 100 male courtiers for his *grand levée* ceremony. At 10, the king proceeded down the Hall of Mirrors, and the crowd could ogle him in his full state on his way to hear mass.

Depending on the day of the week, a different type of council was then held, covering finances, domestic, foreign, and religious matters, and building projects in the works. Louis' lunch hour in his bedchamber was a hot ticket event, as he opened it up to the men of the court and occasionally would hear petitions. His afternoons were spent strolling the grounds, hunting, or riding in a barouche with VIP ladies. Afterwards came a wardrobe change, then Louis usually got down to some more governing, studying documents and paperwork with his four secretaries of state.

He usually left someone else to plan evening gatherings for the court, for which the staterooms were often filled with music, dancing, and tables of wildly arranged sweets and delicacies. At 10 at night, there was a general flocking to the dinner table of the royal family for *le grand couvert* in the king's antechamber, after which Louis would greet the women in an adjoining salon, and retire to converse with relatives and choice friends. Finally came the Sun King's *coucher*, his public putting to bed ritual at which even ladies were allowed to wish him *bonne nuit*.

For all onboard, the mechanics of excruciating systems of etiquette provided much of the meaning in their existence. It wasn't just our modern notion of nice manners, but ceremonial protocol. Breaching it risked social suicide. There could be between three to ten thousand people at Versailles of all walks of life, and the grand nobles were always sure to be about. Lots of lesser hereditary nobles stayed in the provinces, but for the big guns, functions at court could be inherited or bought at great expense, and no time was wasted arranging replacements when someone died. Everyone played by Louis' rules, which he had a special talent for inventing. He must have enjoyed imagining them up, while drawing on royal precedence dating back to Henri III in the 1580s.

Deference to one's betters was the main idea. To the extent that in the absence of the king, the best of all, it was mandatory to bow and curtsy to the ever-present portrait of him being carried

around. Many were forbidden from addressing or meeting the gaze of others of a higher rank unless spoken to first, and good luck with that.

Who entered the royal apartments was determined by a fierce pecking order, as were seating arrangements once inside. Only Louis and his family sat on armchairs. Backed chairs without arms, and prized stools, called *tabourets*, allowed non-royal princesses, duchesses, and other top ladies to sit in royalty's presence. Lots of standing around and walking went on for others of less consequence, despite their age or condition. Handing royals garments and accessories during dressing ceremonies was perhaps one of the greatest and most confusing honors offered, depending on who with what title happened to walk into the room at any given point, though no small rights went unchecked if infringed upon by someone else.

There were proper *Versaillaise* ways of coiffing hair, descending stairs, mounting a carriage, fanning oneself, removing gloves, and so on, and on. Even the most urbane Parisian could flounder in this over the top territory. Minutia and *politesse* of speech and gesture dictated everything. Cursing was abolished. No one crossed their legs, and everyone minded the correct loose, left-leg forward posture while standing. Ladies and gentlemen held hands by the fingertips only. There was no knocking at or opening doors; a left pinky nail, grown out especially for the purpose, would scratch upon the wood to beg entrance and ushers alone let people in and out.

Male visitors could rent the necessary hat and sword before entering if need be. For the permanent residents, frequent and dazzling change of costume did not just help attract attention, but was mandatory. Ladies could switch gowns up to four times a day, and many of their stunning french-made outfits were sewn to be worn just once. One didn't walk but had better learn to glide while maneuvering under the punishing weight of formal court dresses and walking backwards to avoid turning one's back on royalty.

Louis had designated greetings for those around him, touching his hat for a gentleman, lifting his hat for a nobleman, or removing his hat entirely for princes of the blood and ladies of all classes. He was also very good at suddenly just not seeing people who displeased him. It was a microverse in which respect was equivalent to rank, and paltry squabbles for status, along with a sophisticated system of spying and screening letters, kept coups d'états at bay. One downside for the king was that silence often won out over clever conversation at his meals, lest anyone let a faux pas slip.

The fussiness and building of wonders flexed France's political glories and luxury market while codifying the behavior of her people. Versailles' semi-magical transmutation from swampland to certainly one of the most sublime estates the world will ever have constructed upon it bears witness to the ingenuity, drive, and unwavering confidence of the guy behind it all. Those, at least, are qualities worth emulating.

He didn't achieve quite everything he set out to in his youth, and he faced no shortage of help doing the heavy lifting for the sequence of works and improvements that wouldn't cease until well after his death and into the reigns of his successors. Though he needed patience and faith in his vision, Louis shared it with people who could also see the scope of his fantasy. Telling our dreams to others and adding the fuel of their positive intentions to our creative fire is really powerful.

The Sun King had his crew; Le Vau, Le Nôtre, Hardouin-Mansart. Though the ally I'm particularly thinking of is the Marquise de Montespan, the fiery, longstanding mistress of his somewhat younger days. Françoise-Athénaïs de Rochechouart de Mortemart possessed charming looks, a formidable intellect, and a more ancient lineage than Louis himself. She was arrogant and

extravagant too, but the pair enjoyed a spiritual and mental bond on top of their shared appetites for fine food and perpetual sex. Montespan perhaps understood the concept of what Versailles was meant to be better than anyone else. He confided in her, and she was full of ideas and encouragement for his stratospheric plans. (Louis' second, morganatic wife, the Marquise de Maintenon, proved more spiderly and intent on saving his mortal soul.) Versailles wasn't just about intimidating others with big mirrors and symmetrical shrubberies. It was about forging an iconic cultural epicenter of gallantry, gaiety, wit, refinement, and artistic genius that would rule over all the civilized world, and to make it manifest and everlasting. And Louis XIV rather did the damn thing.

In the center of the shining galaxy of his own design, he lived gracefully as the resident demi-god of his kingdom. No one faulted him for lashing out with cruel remarks. He was said to be full of tact and pleasantries, and only cold or proud when insulted. His silence more than sufficed when displeased, though his legendarily calm veneer could break into hearty laughter around his intimates. He also knew the art of living beautifully, and I think even those of us who aren't Bourbons can take some cues to boost our self-worth and state of being.

Louis loved food and drink of impressive quality and quantity. Hundreds worked to prep, cook, and dish out his meals which could load a table with twenty plus courses all served together. Wine, champagne, and cognac filled crystal glasses. His sister-in-law, the Duchesse d'Orleans, wrote that she often saw the king eat, in one sitting, four different soups, a whole pheasant, a partridge, a plateful of salad, mutton hashed with garlic, two good-sized slices of ham, a dish of pastry, followed by fruit, of which he liked his homegrown figs and oranges best, and sweetmeats.

It's hard to stomach caloric intake like that, and now we have less need for cupbearers and Swiss Guards to protect our platters of cold meats. We can eat well, though, and in ways that uplift us. I'm no nutritionist, but I know I feel better after eating fresh foods that still have some resemblance to nature. I find it energizing to cook and connect with what I consume, or at least say a quick thanks for whatever I'm ordering off an app. It's about treating each meal as an experience to be savored, suiting your tastes and ethics while getting enough nutrients, listening to the needs of your body, and being grateful for the nourishment that comes your way. And indulging those cravings like a royal once in a while, with joy in the moment instead of mourning your body fat percentage.

Louis also loved to feast his eyes, if that's not evident by now. Versailles dripped with visual stimuli; jewels, textiles, porcelain, chandeliers, candelabra, lanterns, and fireworks steadily twinkled, a full-fledged warship even floated in the canal. The decorative arts took a turn during his reign too. Chairs and cabinets became monumental with solid, square lines and lots of bronze gilt lions, eagles, crowns, oak leaves, and masques of Apollo. While Louis' less than ideal education was focused on statecraft, he learned to love painting and sculpture from his first, forbidden love Marie Mancini, a niece of Cardinal Mazarin. Puppylove opened him up to the virtues of fine art, and the Sun King became an allstar patron of French Classical canons. Charles Le Brun, with his mythical, historical scenes, and Hyacinthe Rigaud, with his epically flattering portraiture, were his real MVPs.

Seeking art is one of the loveliest ways to live richly in my opinion. By staring at walls in museums and galleries, definitely, if that's your thing. Such institutions do so much to promote and preserve our material heritage. But also by filling our homes with and creating it ourselves. There's tons of websites for supporting emerging artists or finding deals at small auctions worldwide, and fairs, thrift shops, and estate sales can hook it up with local treasures. Make some magic too. Sometimes it's the most cost effective and cathartic way to spiff up your space. Take photos, make collages, fold origami, doodle mindlessly, tie-dye t-shirts. Fiddle with some flowers in a vase or 3D

print something if you're that savvy. Practice calligraphy, make a papier mache mess, crochet, weave, whittle, whatever. Any artistry we partake of can connect us to the emotions, muses, and opulence of another time, while exposing us to riches and innovative possibilities within ourselves.

As for touch, I'd be constantly fondling all that marble around me, and of course the Sun King had plenty of nice things to smooth his fingers over. For one, La Montespan spent an hour daily being lotioned by her maid. Ravishing curtains, cushions, and tapestries decked the halls. Louis took the generations-old trend of plush, woolly wigs to new heights and loved sumptuous clothing. He chose vibrant shades in soft silks and velvets in his youth, finding black, though costly, too dour, too pious, and too Spanish. Ceremony found him kitted out in cloth of gold and silver with gobs of diamonds. He wore his red heeled shoes high and stockings tight to the calf to broadcast his superior machismo. As he aged, he's said to have always worn coats in varying shades of brown, lightly embroidered, sometimes with nothing but a gold button. He chose vests in red, green, or blue cloth, had no ring or jewels except on his garters, shoe buckles, and hat, which was always trimmed with a white feather, and he forever sported the *cordons bleu* sash of French kings.

These days, no one's forcing lace cravats or whalebone corsets on anyone, so dress for you. Comfortably, so you can glide, not just walk, through life with confidence. Perhaps pick fabrics that breathe and don't pollute, cut in silhouettes that give you a bit of swagger. It's important to love the feel and look of the things around you, especially of the things on you. You may also find sticking to a simple hair, skin and nail care routine to be *très bon* for your mood. Brush out, trim, exfoliate, mask, and moisturize your bits and pieces. I feel natural oils work well on the hands and face, especially during chap-tastic winter months, and drinking water a plenty helps keep it all soft from the inside. And when you're feeling extra cute, or extra stressed out, don't hesitate to indulge in some extra dolling up or manscaping at your home spa. *Feeling* pretty looks good on us all.

For auditory pleasure, Louis loved the theatre and music since childhood. Before and after a brief banishment, performances by companies of French and Italian players were held nearly every week in temporary theatres around Versailles, and attendance was mandatory. While he couldn't read music, Louis had good enough pitch to play what he wished on the guitar by ear. Jean-Baptiste Lully was appointed superintendent of the King's music. He solidified the French Baroque style and paved the way for future greats like Jean-Philippe Rameau and François Couperin. Opera flourished during Lully's tenure, and he composed a new piece for the royal chapel each day. Much of Europe kept tabs on the melodies debuted at Versailles, and music became another exemplary force of soft power exercised by France over international customs.

I'm more visually-oriented, but I'm not deaf to how music strikes the soul. There's few things like hearing your jam turned up, since our ancestors probably enjoyed the momentary freedom of bopping to beats since evolving into homosapiens. And singers, songwriters, and streaming services today connect minds across the world faster than ever. Play on. There's something inherently cool about knowing what to do with an instrument. Listen on; be it death metal, doo wop, singing bowls or healing frequencies, classical symphonies, raggae, or autotuned babypop. Don't let anyone say your taste in music is off if it pumps you up, chills you out, takes you back, or just makes you feel remotely alive. Little shifts our energy as instantly as agreeable sound waves do.

The Sun King perhaps remains most aligned with the sense of smell. Perfume was tied to most aspects of grooming in his day. It was combed through the hair, rubbed onto and scraped off the skin, popped into the mouth as powders and rinses, and infused into basins of water for swabbing down. Louis' obsession with fragrance for its beautifying and medicinal properties earned him the nickname *le doux fleurant*, the sweet flowery one. His doctors mixed up restorative salts and

witchy tonics of aromatics, botanicals, precious minerals, even animal organs. He adored flowers, scented gloves, and slaying bad air with potpourri smoke from showy diffusers. And his nose paid for it. Later in life he could only tolerate the smell of his dear orange blossoms, having developed fearsome allergies.

I don't suggest burning out your respiratory system with body spray, but am all for pleasant scents. Spoil yourself with your favorite soaps, lotions, and bath goods. I think fresh-smelling shampoo and conditioner bars that ditch bulky plastic bottles are best, along with items that are both cruelty and creepy chemical-free. There's much to be said for aromatherapy using quality essential oils and soy candles too. Sniffing lemon can be emboldening, while bergamot can help tackle bouts of anxiety. And hey, maybe buy yourself a bouquet of fresh flowers every once in a while. What feels like a little too much frivolity can go a long way in terms of bringing around a luxurious essence.

Louis also thrived on exercise and fresh air, as a heavenly bod worked in favor of his perceived divine right to rule. He was an exquisite equestrian, fencer, tennis player, huntsman, and, most notably, ballet dancer. He starred in court performances from adolescence, his seminal role being that of Apollo in *Le Ballet de la Nuit*. One of his first acts when he began governing himself was to establish the Académie Royale de Danse, and eventually a couple hundred other schools, to professionalize the art. Patterns of charming steps turned into complicated dogma only mastered by aristocrats with spare time and coin for lessons with a dance master.

We're free to shake it however we please, so get going any which way. To the gym rats out there, good for you. I happen to know it's easier to be a slug, but it's true, we're made for some kind of locomotion with these arms and legs of ours. I also know that chronic pain and limited mobility make that easier said than done, so never feel the need to strain yourself. I'm a notorious non-runner, but need the deep stretch of a regularish home yoga practice. There's lots of low-exertion, high payoff activities like qigong, tai chi, energy work, and twirling around the living room like a fool that gently shift us into alignment. Reading, puzzles, using logic, and meditation are wonderful for keeping the mind fit too. Find whatever your balance is between rest and flow.

So. Louis XIV was a man with a massive plan, born in an age that conveniently still submitted to his plan. His controlled upbringing left him kind of ignorant and superstitious, and he was indeed the heir of unreal coddling and antiquated political systems. Though it's his finer traits that rendered him the most formidable monarch in Europe by age thirty and gave his country a new sense of destiny. He clearly understood how artistic appreciation and creative activity, self-expression, self-pampering, and self-belief can embellish life. And that's something I believe every one of us can relate and aspire to on some level, minus all the fanfare, authoritarianism, obscene privilege, and bizarrities of 17th-century civility and sanitation.

Cultivate your personal power, is what I want to say. No one else can do it for you. It can be as simple as walking tall, announcing well, and being honest with others about what you want or need. Energetically, it's our yellow solar plexus chakra, between the lower ribs and navel, that corresponds here. Clear it with pure yellow light, imagine bathing your whole being in yellow light while meditating when feeling low, just be sure to ground yourself after. And when out in public, beam your radiance outward, protecting your own energy field and subtly uplifting others you pass.

For other little tips, well, Louis was onto something with all that gold. Yellow energizes and boosts optimism and fortitude. Wear, accessorize, or decorate with citrusy hues. Burn a yellow candle. Soak up fifteen minutes of sunlight. Keep a favorite piece of gold jewelry close by, or tend a yellow flowering house plant. Maybe even your own potted orange tree. Try out "I achieve all with

grace and bliss,” or “My uniqueness is my sovereignty” as your new mantra when pursuing your wishes. And do remain aware that when darkness does set in, the light will always keep shining for you as if you never lost sight of its glow.

This one sounds weird, but stand with your arms and legs all spread out and pointy like a super proud starfish when alone. Close your eyes and breathe into the thrill of carving out as much space as possible just you, clinging to that expansive body language subconsciously. Rutilated quartz, tiger’s eye, citrine, amber, and yellow topaz and tourmaline are some potent crystals to aid willpower and manifestation, as well as humble pyrite, or fool’s gold, which can sometimes be easy to spot in your neighborhood’s gravelly ground. I’ve also made a Sun King-inspired guided meditation in the spirit of feeling glorious and aggrandizing our self-worth, which you can download on my website.

Though my best advice, which I can’t stress enough, and which Louis XIV knew well, is to take time to know your true self, and be your own master. Ask yourself who you are at your core, what brings you happiness and passion, what you really believe, care about, and would like to experience in your reality. Because what you want is what’s right, as long as you’re causing no harm. Your answers may come slowly, or be very different from what you were raised to expect. It can also be difficult to accept who you find inside at first, but it’s the goals and quirks pertaining to your individual qualities that you need to chase. Without listening to people who would keep you down while directing you how to act and feel. Your fundamental character is what’s most powerful, not an imitation modeled off external pressures or others’ ideals. And allowing your bare soul to radiate outwards encourages those you encounter to share their own brilliance. That’s powerful.

We all have desires to fulfill that would bring more joy and beauty into our worlds. No one, I repeat, no one, regardless of station or circumstance, is unworthy of that joy and beauty. We can all grasp what feels out of reach, because we can make a habit of living energetically, in the vibrations of dreams come true; the frequencies of gratitude, satisfaction, dynamism, play, peace, and plenty. The shitstorms of the external world have less impact when we decide to be unphased and fruitful in our hearts. We tend to make what we focus on concrete, and we can always be grateful for the smallest of pleasant sensations to feel rather regal ourselves in the moment.

Try it: what’s one tiny thing that’s wonderful right now? The way the light is hitting? Enjoying a decent hair day? Got a tasty snack planned? Can you feel a pulse in your veins today? You like that dainty touch of your sleeve against your skin? Ooh, yeah. It’s simple, and as forceful as a decree from *le roi soleil*. Just tap into and carry those majestic feelings with you for as long as you can, and know you deserve to feel them. It is a big choice, and a bigger blessing, to be able to seek and receive the small luxuries that fill each day. Doing so allows the little things to unveil much vaster horizons in our lives.

As the Sun King would, stay centered in your own peerless light, *mes amis*, and treat yourselves beyond well. Believe that your birthright is a significant, nurtured place in the divine order of things as a sliver of source energy, and stay sure of your natural capacity to command miracles of great magnitude.

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