

# Meaning of Life

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# 1 Meaning of Life

## 2 License

2015-2017, 2020



Figure 1: icon for the cc-by-sa 4.0 license

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## 3 Formats

- Multi-page HTML web
- GitHub page

- PDF
- epub

## 4 Introduction

My theory does not have to be objectively flawless because I mostly use it from my subjective point of view. However, it should be good enough to withstand confrontation with reality for the rest of my life.

I borrow most of my ideas from other people, since there are far greater minds with far greater wisdom and knowledge than mine. The listed quotes are an integral part of the theory.

Just as the availability of information on the Internet helped me in the pursuit, I freely publish the ideas back on the internet to inspire others. If one other person's mind is enriched, it will have been worthwhile.

## 5 Personal Take on the Meaning of Life

I can't definitely know whether there is god and what god is on all levels of meaning. I know there is wind, and trees, and stars, and whole lot of matter in the universe. I'm just a small lump of matter. I'm just a small lump of matter that is somehow special in its arrangement from the majority of matter in that I am aware of something. I have my own priorities and will and I find my own meaning in the existence. I have some information already encoded in me, and also in other people, probably by the way I (and we) came into existence. How that came to be, I don't know and I will probably never know.

In nature at large, there is no evil, no vanity, no good, no bad. Nature just is, as the matter just is. In one nature's aspect of its many aspects — people — these concepts apparently exist. It is debatable how those concepts came into existence, or where from.

Any human-understandable concept of God is too small and restricted, including the following one, but I can try. If I think about everything known in reality, and of everything we know that is unknown, of any frame of reference, there is something outside of it, that cannot be perceived, cannot be described, cannot be conceptualized, cannot be comprehended by humans. There is nothing I can do about it, but it is a part of this reality, and might underpin something — or everything — that is or happens. And for me, that is God, and I believe in it. I've realized that much of my (and others') behavior is denial of the sheer incomprehensibly large part of reality we cannot understand and an attempt of bending one's view of reality into something concrete and mentally manageable; but that is not reality, that is not an acceptance of reality; it causes repeated clashes between what one thinks should happen and what happens, and that doesn't help with finding peace of mind and embracing reality as it is. In

between much thought, meditation, and appreciation of the present moment, there are glimpses of how everything is connected, what a wonder it is that anything exists, and what incredible beauty and complexity can be found in anything, if studied closely enough or sincerely enough, without preconceptions, with a child-like appreciation, as if everything is seen for the first time.

We can think, yet don't understand much of the mind and consciousness. We are, yet we don't understand much of why we are. I believe in whatever there is, even though I can never understand it. After realizing this, these experiences stick, changing my perception of everything.

There's no way we can explain the Internet to an ant. I see ourselves as ants before something much bigger that we would be unable to see even if it was right before us.

In my opinion, any amount of humanely attainable knowledge can only be the ever-starting point for more and more thinking and learning.

The answer about the meaning of life is probably nothing concrete yet probably nothing complicated either. I think it's partly something that has existed with us and in us longer than our civilizations, ideas, or the concept of god, and partly something that is outside the realm of existence — a purely theoretical construct.

There are two levels to the answer. The first deals with everything, and the second with humans. At the first level, there's no other meaning in nature than the exact way of its existence which is its only meaning. (It can then be considered merely a label, a word, a construct.) There's no need for much else since the concept of "meaning" is anthropomorphic. At the second level, there's us — humans — whose brains work in such a way that we need a meaning, or answer, or explanation. A lot of our actions are just a coping strategy of being on terms with the fact that ultimately we have no definite answers.

Since humanity came to no satisfactory conclusion so far, by an improvised induction I infer that it won't come to one in my lifetime. And since I need an answer, a coping strategy, and none of the existing answers so far fully satisfies me, I need to find one myself, just for me. Some people came very close to with what I identify with, and their work helped me immensely on my journey towards the answer.

There is no single concrete goal to pursue. I want (or need?) to be happy and to do things that I feel are good and right. As indescribable a soul is, as indefinable is the definition of the good action. From there, everything else unwinds.

## 6 Free Will

There is a great deal of literature about free will and so I tackle it from a different perspective. Our free will is predetermined by the whole physical process of the

universe we are a part of, and hence is not entirely free in all conceivable ways, since we are merely limited humans. Each human is a part of the process and their actions are part of the process and change the process. Each human then has a domain in which their will is free and makes a difference. Outside of the domain, the free will doesn't exist.

## 7 Reality, Things, Events

- Reality is one whole interconnected process, there are no parts that are fully separate and independent of it.
- We recognize some parts of reality as being independent or separate, and we call them things or events.
- Some things or events are so interconnected and dependent we still see the connection intuitively. For others though, we don't intuitively see the connection and think of them as wholly separate or independent.

## 8 The Word “Meaning”

- Meanings of “meaning”
  - Purpose, significance, end, causal connection between facets of reality we call events.
  - Intention of an agent.
  - Information ordering, relationship between pieces of information, relationship between events and information.
- Meaning is a human word and a human concept. Other life forms may have a different concept of meaning or may not have it at all.
- Quotes about meanings of “meaning” from Flow (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi):
  - “Its first usage points towards the end, purpose, significance of something, as in: What is the meaning of life? This sense of the word reflects the assumption that events are linked to each other in terms of an ultimate goal; that there is a temporal order, a causal connection between them. It assumes that phenomena are not random, but fall into recognizable patterns directed by a final purpose.”
  - “The second usage of the word refers to a person's intentions: She usually means well. What this sense of meaning implies is that people reveal their purposes in action; that their goals are expressed in predictable, consistent, and orderly ways.”
  - “Finally, the third sense in which the word is used refers to ordering information, as when one says: Otorhinolaryngology means the study of ear, nose, and throat, or: Red sky in the evening means good weather in the morning. This sense of meaning points to the identity of different words, the relationship between events, and thus it helps to clarify, to establish order among unrelated or conflicting

information.”

## 9 The Concept of Meaning

- Meaning is not governed only by conscious and intellectual processes, it is largely governed by feelings, emotions, and unconscious mental and physical processes.
- Meaning can be an emotion, e.g. when felt in a near-death experience.

## 10 Difficulty in Describing the Meaning of Life

- Making intellectual sense of brain, matter, universe, and therefore of the true meaning of life on all levels of meaning of “meaning”, is impossible.
- General all-encompassing meaning of reality is isomorphic to *that* reality, and therefore cannot be fully described inside *that* reality.
- General all-encompassing meaning of life is exactly *that* life; anything less is an imprecise simplification.
- Moreover, the general all-encompassing meaning of life depends on the reality in which it exists.
- Inability to describe the meaning of life is the inability to agree with a simplified description, or a disagreement about what level of simplification is the correct one.
- Consensus and resolution can be reached for each mind only inside that mind, and hence can be truly reached only for one’s own meaning of life, and only falsely as a delusion reached for one’s understanding of the meaning of the lives of others and of the general meaning of life.
- Conscious intelligence cannot fully comprehend and describe the reality of life and therefore all its meanings, for feelings, as an example, are wholly different when felt by the I-feeler than when intellectually thought about.

## 11 Meaning of Life in General

- “Meaning” is a human concept used to show a relation between facets of reality we call “events” or “things”.
- The term “meaning of life” has little sense unless the meaning of the term is further specified.
  - E.g. what meaning of the word “meaning” is to be used, what level of understanding it describes.
- “Meaning” is the seeking of the answer for “why?”.
- The meaning of something can be found on many levels.
- The question makes sense only when it is clear on which level it is considered.
- Example: I see beautiful leaves in the sunset.
  - I see the leaves because I have eyes.

- I process the information because I think and because of the way I think.
- I find it beautiful because of evolution and a multitude of other events and properties of my body and mind.
- The leaves are there so that the tree can breathe.
- The tree is there because life evolved so.
- Life is there because molecules combined into self-propagating structures.
- The molecules exist because of the ways elementary particles and interactions work.
- Some levels need a lot of work so that an explanation can be found, some can't be explained by the human mind, some can't be discovered or comprehended by the human mind.
- The reality in general doesn't have the concept of meaning; humans as a part of reality do. We might mistakenly try to look for meaning where there may be none.
- Language allows such a construction as "meaning of life", so we mistakenly try to understand even those meanings of the construction that do not describe anything.

## 12 Possible Locations of Meaning of Life for a Conscious Mind

- External — outside of the time of the mind's existence.
  - Side effects of one's existence - something outside of one's mind changed as a result.
    - \* E.g. something changed in the world.
    - \* E.g. others' memories.
    - \* The term "side effect" is used in the meaning from computer science - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Side\\_effect\\_%28computer\\_science%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Side_effect_%28computer_science%29).
- Internal — during mind's existence.
  - E.g. achieving goals.
  - E.g. seeking happiness.
  - E.g. interbeing with others.
  - E.g. imposing one's will on the world or other people.

## 13 Reality After Death is an Illusion

- I see people die and I'm still here, still thinking, so I think about what it is like being dead.
- My reality is in my mind. It ceases to exist when my mind stops existing. However, the realities of the living keep on existing.
- Hence the illusion.
- It is difficult to imagine nothingness, to imagine not being. Imagining an

eternity of consciousness in a void is the wrong idea but it is the readily available idea (there is no consciousness in not being).

- “In unconsciousness all times are the same brief instant.” (Alan Watts)

## 14 Existence After Death

- The closest to having a continuing mental existence after death is in the thoughts of others.
  - It shares some qualities: it is in the minds of other beings of the same species, it is a mental process, it affects decision making.
  - The original I-feeling and the original I-feeler are lost and new ones are there instead.
- It can provide meaning during life.
  - Let it be good thoughts.
  - I can't judge or see it after my death. But I judge myself during my life in relation to the predicted effects of my life, and that is a part of my metrics of what is good and bad during my life.

## 15 Discovering Personal Meaning of Life

- If every life has only the purpose of one's goal being finished and the goal only being done for the (living) others, then it is circularly purposeless.
- If every life has only the purpose of one's goal being finished, without regards for one's own happiness and feelings during life, then it is in conflict with its nature (seeking happiness, avoiding pain and death, among other things).
  - Generally life is purposeless except for the goal of continuation of life; because at some level of understanding life is only a self-propagating process beginning with very simple structures.
  - At the level of decision making in live agents, there is not only the sole goal of continuation of life.
- The personal meaning of life is to pretend there is a goal, to make that goal mean or do something for self or others, and to take actions based on feelings.
- The personal meaning of life is to pretend there is a goal, to make the pretense so good it becomes meaningful in one's life, and to integrate it with one's nature, so that one's physical nature and mental state are in harmony
- It cannot be a universal truth, a universal meaning of life for everyone. There is always someone who works differently and this description is a simplification that misses the point entirely for some individuals.
- If my life has only the purpose of seeking happiness, it feels empty, and is therefore incomplete.
- The meaning of my life is to be happy (in the various intricate senses of



the word), to have a goal, and to go towards or fulfill or continue in that goal, and to make the path towards the goal more important than the end.

- Upon the end of my life, the only thing left are the side effects of my life; I will lose everything (except for the pure reality of not being).
- Ignoring the path and looking only at the end here, whatever I will have obtained by the end of my life will lose all value of its own for me (relationships, knowledge, things, money, etc.), but it might be important for my goal (e.g. some people being happy, something being better).

## 16 Difficulty in Describing Personal Meaning of Life

- Even when I have discovered the meaning of my own life, it is difficult to write it down.
- Such a description would then be a simplification of the sum of all mental and nonmental processes that form my meaning of life.

## 17 Hell

The more I read literature and resources on spirituality, mind, God, universe, morals, good, evil, and other metaphysical and philosophical topics, the more I think that hell, purgatory, heaven, and maybe other such places are real, but real in an out-of-ordinary sense, that most of the population got the idea wrong. The religions are just a metaphorical vehicle of delivering ideas and they failed in pointing out that it is only a metaphor. Perhaps prophets saw them in altered states of consciousness and thought them to be real outside of mental phenomena. These places are all facets of consciousness and of sensing. Some might appear in what would resemble a mental illness, some might appear under the influence of drugs or in various situations prompting chemical reactions in the brain, some are the chemical result of the processes in a dying brain, some are delusions about thoughts and reality. Humans are creatures that need, seek, and create meaning; there is no intrinsic meaning in the universe. This is one of the aspects determining how these places appear to be — each person links meanings of events they are aware of in a different way. So, for example, for some hell might have very different forms, for others hell might be a nonsense that cannot exist and there's something else instead.

*“Have you ever traveled, beyond all mere metaphors, to the Mountain of Shame and stayed for a thousand years? I do not recommend it.”* — Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014, Chapter: The Spiritual Uses of Pharmacology

What if prophets had visions of heaven, hell, purgatory, of moral principles, and of other worlds through a somehow altered consciousness? I think that it doesn't matter whether heaven and hell are objectively physically existing places

or whether they exist only in mind, since through mind we perceive everything. Just as time can be perceived differently in altered states of consciousness, I think it is possible that heaven or hell can be perceived for an eternity even though the person processes this in only a short span of physical time, and it is still real, for this is what the person really perceives.

*“Long-term meditation practice is also associated with a variety of structural changes in the brain.”* — Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014, Chapter: Chapter 4: Meditation

Maybe this is the way we can liberate ourselves. Buddhism describes existence after this life and how it is affected by this life. Maybe all the perceived existence after this life is just a process of the dying brain and maybe the process can be so subjectively better by changing the way the brain works. As the dying brain loses a large part of the normal consciousness, being at peace and mindful is probably very hard. Perhaps, this can be aided by practice-induced changes in the brain that are much deeper than just the contents of the normal consciousness that are lost in the dying process.

## 18 God

- In the last hundred years or so, language and science developed concepts that would be ungraspable in the past.
- Technology of the last hundred years would be considered magic in the past.
- Those things would be even more unimaginable, ungraspable, 2000 years ago.
- Maybe god the father doesn't have the looks of an old man, maybe its nature is wholly ungraspable to us.
- Maybe god — or our creators or whatever there is — is as unimaginable to us as we are for a hypothetical being in 2D space or as existing in a non-euclidean space or 4D space would be for us, (maybe even more and utterly unimaginable since some people can at least imagine some 4D situations).
- I can't decide whether what is in Bible truly happened, whether it happened and metaphors were used or whether very insightful person/people became enlightened about the nature of existence and wrote it (and if that happened, I can't even decide about the nature/source of the enlightenment).
- I do believe Jesus lived, but I can't decide whether he was a human who understood reality deeply or whether he was god rather than a human.
- Metaphors had to be used — limited language, limited imagination, limited comprehension and intelligence all limit what can be conveyed.
- I can't know what mind or consciousness requires or is composed of: does it rely on quantum effects and quantum states of the particles? That would make it uncopiable. Is it fully composed of regular matter and

electrochemical signals? Is it of a wholly different nature and brain is just an interface? I know I can't know.

- With the technological advances and rising possibilities of simulations, we see that there can exist simulations within which the consciousness cannot reach beyond the limits of the simulated environment and cannot know the nature of the environment in which the simulation is run.
- Nowadays, physicists simulate universes with properties different from ours to test hypotheses such as having a different number of dimensions. The equations still work but the simulated universe can be very different. A theoretical being in such a universe might find ours incomprehensible. Therefore I can't know what is possibly outside our universe and whether there can even exist a concept of "outside our universe".
- I believe we are a part of the universe, we are all "one" - the same matter, part of the whole interdependent process.
- I believe there is SOMETHING that governs this universe and therefore our existence.
- I don't know what the properties of that SOMETHING are.
- I don't know in which way that SOMETHING governs the universe.
- The more I think and study, the less I am certain of what I think I know.
- I believe that there is an overwhelming probability there is SOMETHING governing the universe rather than nothing.
- I don't know whether that SOMETHING knows about us, can know about us, can comprehend us, has a concept what we are, is conscious, ...
- This SOMETHING is what I can't ultimately learn about, what is unreachable to me via any scientific method.
- Even if there happens to be a divine intervention, revelation, or something like that, I can't know whether I'd comprehend it or whether I'd even become aware of what is happening; I wouldn't be able to know what is behind it because of my limited senses, imagination, and intelligence; therefore, I wouldn't be able to fully grasp the nature of that SOMETHING even if it reveals itself to me.
- I consider that SOMETHING to be God.

## 19 Knowing my God

I do not fully know the nature of God. I don't know whether it will ever be possible. I can learn certain minutiae and have a little better idea. Maybe I can learn something new and crucial that changes my beliefs. I am open to change and to learning. This is the way I came to this point and I think this is the way I can learn more about everything, and appreciate everything fully. There is no place for dogma. To be willing to change my beliefs as I learn more is to be receptive to moments of sincere gratefulness and wonder.

## 20 Distributed Mind and Existence After Death

- I believe that one's mind exists also outside of one's body. However, the "self" is not aware of that (a person can't perceive from outside the confines of their own body, can't communicate telepathically). That is, my belief is compatible with the perceptions I have and people have (we feel to be located inside our heads). Yet it is a consolation for death and a topic of my meditations to extend my concept of self beyond my self and thus looking through the illusion of a "self". I believe that the parts of a person's mind that are outside their body continue to exist after the death of the person. I believe that a person's mind can partly exist in other people which there was enough interaction with.
- Consciousness is the sharing of information between information processing centers; it is not a result of it, it is it.
  - *The Self (and its surrogates, the Cartesian res cogitans, the Kantian transcendental ego, among others) is not to be located by subtraction, by peeling off the various layers of perceptual and motor "interface" between Self and World. We must reject the traditional "sandwich" in which the Self is isolated from the outside world by layers of "input" and "output." On the contrary, the Self is large, concrete, and visible in the world, not just "distributed" in the brain but spread out into the world. Where we act and where we perceive is not funneled through a bottleneck, physical or metaphysical, in spite of the utility of such notions as "point of view."*
  - Daniel Dennett — Are we Explaining Consciousness Yet? 2000 [retrieved on 2017-06-16]. <https://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/dennett/papers/cognition.fin.htm>
- The behavior of split brain patients hints on the possibility of dividing one consciousness into two, and each one still thinking "I am I, I am not aware of being split".
  - Sam Harris — Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion
  - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dual\\_consciousness\\_\(neuroscience\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dual_consciousness_(neuroscience)) [retrieved on 2017-06-16]
- There are hypotheses that consciousness is an emergent property of several simpler processing centers communicating with each other, or that the communication and availability of information is itself consciousness.
  - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergentism> [retrieved on 2017-06-16]
  - Daniel Dennett — Are we Explaining Consciousness Yet? 2000 [retrieved on 2017-06-16]. <https://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/dennett/papers/cognition.fin.htm>
  - I know I can't know what makes a mind, whether it is the state of matter (brain), whether quantum states matter or play any role, or whether it is or interacts with a yet undiscovered substance. I am inclined to think that mind is an emergent property of complex interactions of matter (mainly the brain), and that it is as deterministic as

the matter. If we had all inputs and an exact computational model, I am inclined to think that then we would be able to predict the behavior and flow of the mind. But it is so computationally infeasible, with so many possibilities, that we perceive us as having a free will and being non-deterministic. I also think that the computation is unfeasible also because of high sensitivity to input conditions, just as a CSPRNG in computer science is deterministic but computationally so complex we regard its output as random and mostly uncorrelated to its inputs as far as most applications of the concept go (it is usually enough to not know the exact state of only a small part of the inputs for CSPRNG output to be unpredictable), and just as a double rod pendulum is perfectly deterministic but very difficult to measure, compute, and predict.

- I regard as a wonder that matter (if the hypothesis is correct) can think, have feelings, or love.
- There is a hypothesis that brain performs distributed information processing in several places concurrently and the information are retrospectively assembled into one coherent whole, and this is what we are consciously aware of (we are aware only of the result, not about the intermediate work in progress versions).
  - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free\\_will#Neurophilosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_will#Neurophilosophy) [retrieved on 2017-06-14]
  - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free\\_will#Neurology\\_and\\_psychiatry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_will#Neurology_and_psychiatry) [retrieved on 2017-06-14]
- There is a theory that awareness is a representation (caricature) of attention, and that awareness is computed for other people and when it is computed for self, it is consciousness.
  - Graziano MSA, Kastner S. Human consciousness and its relationship to social neuroscience: A novel hypothesis. *Cognitive neuroscience*. 2011;2(2):98-113. doi:10.1080/17588928.2011.565121. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3223025/> [retrieved on 2017-06-16]
  - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael\\_Graziano](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Graziano) [retrieved on 2017-06-14]
    - \* *Graziano[42][43] proposed that specialized machinery in the brain computes the feature of awareness and attributes it to other people in a social context. The same machinery, in that hypothesis, also attributes the feature of awareness to oneself. Damage to that machinery disrupts one's own awareness. The proposed "attention schema theory" was motivated by two sets of previous findings. First, certain regions of the cortex are recruited during social perception as people construct models of other people's minds.[44][45][46][47][48][49][50][51] These regions include, among other areas, the superior temporal sulcus (STS) and the temporoparietal junction (TPJ) bilaterally but with a strong*

*emphasis on the right hemisphere.*

*Second, when these same regions of cortex are damaged, people suffer from a catastrophic disruption of their own awareness of events and objects around them. The clinical syndrome of hemispatial neglect, or loss of awareness of one side of space, is particularly profound after damage to the TPJ or STS in the right hemisphere.[52][53]*

*The conjunction of these two previous findings suggests that awareness is a computed feature constructed by an expert system in the brain. The feature of awareness can be attributed to other people in the context of social perception. It can also be attributed to oneself, in effect creating one's own awareness. The conjunction of these two previous findings may though merely mean that these regions of the cortex deal with the same problems.*

*Why construct the feature of awareness and attribute it to other people? In order to understand and predict the behavior of other people, it is useful to monitor other people's attentional state. Attention is a data handling method by which some signals in the brain are enhanced at the expense of others. According to the attention schema theory,[43] when the brain computes that person X is aware of thing Y, it is in effect modeling the state in which person X is applying an attentional enhancement to signal Y. Awareness is an attention schema. In that theory, the same process can be applied to oneself. One's own awareness is a schematized model of one's own attention.*

- The fact that “self” refers to the continuity of changes, as opposed to something unchanging, is relevant to the idea of distributed mind, as it too is connected not by an unchanging quality or thing, but by the continuity of interaction.
  - Tim Urban — What Makes You You? <http://waitbutwhy.com/2014/12/what-makes-you-you.html> [retrieved on 2017-06-16]
- Psychological practice in dealing with PTSD in people who were abused as children accepts that the mental voices in the victim's head belong to their abusers - e.g. in case of abusive parents, “parent-voice internalization”
  - Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents: How to Heal from Distant, Rejecting, or Self-Involved Parents — Lindsay C. Gibson
  - Toxic Parents — Susan Forward
  - I don't think such victims get a second mind proper, just that some of mind's properties exist alongside their own mind as a second partial instance, a set of processes, modelled after their abusers; and that the victim's mind itself is partly molded by the abuser's thought patterns.
- Satanic possession as described by M. Scott Peck
  - People of the Lie — M. Scott Peck
    - \* *Overnight the patient regressed to severe life-threatening illness,*

and shortly began to hear “the voice of Lucifer.”

- \* *The spirit I witnessed at each exorcism was clearly, utterly, and totally dedicated to opposing human life and growth. It told both patients to kill themselves. When asked in one exorcism why it was the Antichrist, it answered, “Because Christ taught people to love each other.” When further questioned as to why human love was so distasteful, it replied, “I want people to work in business so that there will be war.” Queried more, it simply said to the exorcist, “I want to kill you.” There was absolutely nothing creative or constructive about it; it was purely destructive.*
- \* *For the sake of clarity I have possibly talked about Satan with too much definitiveness. I described the greater part of both exorcisms as a process of separation. Yet even at their clearest moments it was often impossible to fully distinguish whether the voice talking was that of the patient’s unconscious or one of a true demon. Perhaps it will forever be impossible to totally discern exactly where the human Shadow leaves off and the Prince of Darkness begins. It is appropriate to conclude by focusing on the supernatural mystery of Satan. The evidence of the exorcisms was sufficient for me to become a believer in its existence, and I cannot deny the reality of the healing that occurred, but I am left with many more questions than before—too many even to detail.*
- I think that if possession is a purely computational process in the brain, it is an instance of the distributed mind — someone else’s mind(s) having their processes there. If possession is a spirit that entered the person, it would mean that consciousness and mind is not explainable purely as a computation, or that, again, the computable mind/spirit/soul/whatever is distributed.
- Victor Frankl’s thought processes connected with his wife
  - Maria Popova — Viktor Frankl on the Human Search for Meaning <https://www.brainpickings.org/2013/03/26/viktor-frankl-mans-search-for-meaning/> [retrieved on 2017-06-18]
    - \* *In examining the “intensification of inner life” that helped prisoners stay alive, he considers the transcendental power of love:*
      - *Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meaning in his spiritual being, his inner self. Whether or not he is actually present, whether or not he is still alive at all, ceases somehow to be of importance.*
    - \* *Frankl illustrates this with a stirring example of how his feelings for his wife — who was eventually killed in the camps — gave him a sense of meaning:*
      - *We were at work in a trench. The dawn was grey around us; grey was the sky above; grey the snow in the pale light of dawn; grey the rags in which my fellow prisoners were clad, and grey their faces. I was again conversing silently with my wife, or perhaps I was struggling to find the reason for my*

*sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious "Yes" in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant farmhouse, which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the miserable grey of a dawning morning in Bavaria. "Et lux in tenebris lucet" — and the light shineth in the darkness. For hours I stood hacking at the icy ground. The guard passed by, insulting me, and once again I communed with my beloved. More and more I felt that she was present, that she was with me; I had the feeling that I was able to touch her, able to stretch out my hand and grasp hers. The feeling was very strong: she was there. Then, at that very moment, a bird flew down silently and perched just in front of me, on the heap of soil which I had dug up from the ditch, and looked steadily at me.*

- I think that his experience was not just an imagination of his wife; it was the processes belonging to his wife's mind (residing in his mind) interacting with the processes of his mind.
- Sogyal Rinpoche — The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, Part One, quoting Lama Tseten before his death
  - *With the master, there's no such thing as distance.*
- I believe my mind is distributed through interactions.
  - Terminology as I understand and use it: mind = the software part of information processing machinery (or an illusion thereof, if it is all hardware), with memory, being able to perceive; self = the illusion of being a separate entity in the world, having my own one point of view, being located in one place in my head, and memories, perceptions, feelings, emotions, largely overlapping with the mind; consciousness = a quality of being aware of being aware, a feeling of being conscious and having a free will, a feeling of existing
  - my thought patterns are observed by others who reconstruct them (not necessarily identically) in their minds, and through repeated interactions learn more of them to a greater precision
  - the changes I cause in the world act as a feedback, as I perceive them back. On a primitive scale, a note taking system augments my mind and changes my thought patterns. On a more complex scale, I interact with people whose behavior is partly modified by thought processes that mimic myself (as they learn to predict my own behavior). In a long term relationship, my self (and to an extent my mind) relies, among other things, on those thoughts in the partner that originate from their interactions with me and their observations of me, and vice versa. In this situation, not only that our selves are partially fused together, as known by many (Peck, Hanh), my mind



also exists in my partner's and the partner's mind in mine.

- Perceptual and thought states are not conveyed in their entirety outside the confines of a physical person, only a small sliver is communicated through physical actions like words, gestures, action, and non-action. These internal states are of course not duplicated losslessly to other persons or things as part of the distributed mind.
- This leads to another hypothesis — that the distributed mind also contains non-conscious parts. And that, I believe, is correct. There are many unconscious processes in the brain and the neural system (breathing, some emotions, unconscious thoughts, reflexes (which often enter consciousness after they happen)); consciousness is aware only of some of these processes, and of that set only a subset can be changed by consciousness, the rest is only observed after the fact. By the same principle, some parts of my mind which are located outside of my body are not conscious. And those parts that are conscious are separated from my current self, not connected by direct conscious thought, telepathy, or feeling, yet I believe they do exist.
- Yet I know I don't have answers for everything and that I might be utterly wrong despite my beliefs. For instance, I do not yet comprehend whether and how an ant colony thinks, and whether there is an emergent consciousness consisting of the individual ants, and whether the individual ants (who do pass a mirror test) have consciousness and what it is like. I welcome these challenges and they are a part of my wonder about the reality and everything.
  - Cammaerts Tricot, Marie-Claire, and Roger Cammaerts. "Are ants (Hymenoptera, Formicidae) capable of self recognition?." *Journal of science* 5.7 (2015): 521-532. [http://www.journalofscience.net/File\\_Folder/521-532\(jos\).pdf](http://www.journalofscience.net/File_Folder/521-532(jos).pdf) [retrieved on 2016-06-16]

## 21 Prayer

While prayer might not necessarily change anything external directly, I think that some forms of prayer deepen my understanding and compassion, changing my behavior, and the ripple of this change propagates and changes the world a miniscule bit at a time.

## 22 Not Running Away

Wherever I go, my memories and thought patterns go with me. Whatever activity I choose to do can be so chosen (possibly subconsciously) as to muffle the sound of those thoughts I don't want to hear; but that can be only temporary.

This is related to living this one life and not cramming in multiple lives at the same time (next chapter).

Necessary things to realize:

- The problems I subconsciously escape from.
- I can allow myself to not like certain things, places, situations. (And that this is orthogonal to avoiding them.)
- I can allow myself to have the freedom to shape my life.
- I can allow myself to not force myself to endure things I don't really have to.
- I am free to enter psychotherapy (and free to choose the therapist).
- There is no running away from uncertainty.
- My mind shapes my view of the world.
- My thought patterns, mental problems and healthy parts of my mind determine how I interact with the world and filter the people I (can) interact with.

Last but not least, a special way of running away — running away while staying at the same place — is the act of ignoring a crucial part of reality (e.g. a responsibility) and is toxic to the people around me.

## 23 Living This One Life, Not Cramming in Three Lives at the Same Time

### 23.1 Year 2016

This is related to not running away from this place, reality, thoughts, people, feelings, by occupying myself through frenetic activity.

I tend to be hyperactive, have many things to do, try to do many things in a short timespan, try to touch as many things as possible. The result of this is that I don't do anything properly, that I lose lots of time on context switching, that I forget a lot of small random details I randomly realize walking somewhere or doing something else because by the time I can implement them I am already on another task. And so I become dissatisfied with my low productivity and ramp up my eagerness to do as much as possible, ad infinitum, ad nauseam. It's like trying to live three lives while a day still has only 24 hours.

I think that there are three steps to being content and successful with living just this one life.

First, learning to do and manage tasks effectively. Second, having the will to give up some activities or wishes or preferences to make room for what matters. Third, learning to be at peace with whatever limited amount of things I manage to do, with the added consolation that by doing it so much more effectively than before I manage to do much more in less time, and with the consolation that by structuring my life like that I can have time to be with my loved ones and to not have too much stuff preventing happiness or relaxation.

As for the first step, I deem the books *Getting Things Done* by David Allen

and The Checklist Manifesto by Atul Gawande inspiring for creation of an all-encompassing system and set of habits of doing, completing, and tracking all things that have or have not have to be done, and having reference materials. (One day, I might also read Zen to Done.) In short, my task management system and habits allow me to have an empty head with the soothing knowledge that everything I will have to do (or at least consider) is noted and that I will find that note at the right time. It allows me to concentrate on one thing, safely forgetting everything else, and then come back and still manage my responsibilities.

The second step — having the will to give up some activities or wishes or preferences to make room for what matters — has the prerequisite of already knowing my priorities and my meaning of life and is related to the growth framework described in the next chapter. It seems really easy — just don't do those things that would prevent me from having a good balance between high-value activities and rest. But it is very difficult. I still can't put a finger on what exactly is necessary for a break-through, so there's not much I can write about. I consider the book *The Road Less Travelled* by M. Scott Peck to be a good inspiration for this. Also, when an activity is suggested by someone else, my ability and courage to say “no” is important.

The third step (learning to be at peace with whatever limited amount of things I manage to do) might require additional work which at beginning might seem irrelevant. For me it is going through psychotherapy and much thinking about (and work on) how maladaptive emotional schemes from childhood shape my current emotions, reactions, relations, and activities.

All in all, learning to be at peace with this one life and with my limited abilities and time fits into a nice feedback loop with the search for a meaning of life — having found some meaning of life is necessary for me to be at peace with it and being at peace frees up energy to pursue meaningful activities.

## 23.2 Year 2020

So far, I like this path.

Staying for some time in the state of hyperactivity, yet purposefully withholding from any action, just observing emotions and mental constructs arise, *seems* torturous for a moment, and then an answer is unveiled: whatever there is, pushing me faster and faster, I can bring it under my conscious attention and work with it. Pain can be healed, not through unrelated activity, but by feeling the pain and going directly into it and through it, perhaps with a therapist for some parts of the way. Joy can be consciously realized, felt in the conscious awareness, and perhaps nurtured. Both intellectual desires and emotions, be them describable or not, can be integrated with a hierarchy of values, that with time and practice transcends the realm of concrete intellectual concepts and fuses into the whole act of being and feeling. (Still, it's good to think about it intellectually and with purpose from time to time.) Saying *no* is crucial — as that's a *yes* to something else. With enough *nos* comes a temporary emptiness

that is creative and gives space to the truly important endeavors. With less *yeses* comes the power of a more resolute *yes*. An endeavor that is started and undertaken without interruptions and incursions, calmly if that is fitting, resolutely, and purposefully, can be meaningful, and sometimes even enjoyable, joyful, and satisfying. The lesser the pressure to find something, the easier it can be found.

## 24 Growth Framework

Inspired by Tim Urban’s article <http://waitbutwhy.com/2014/10/religion-for-the-nonreligious.html>, I created my growth framework. I use it to track wishes, needs, and progress on my path on and towards my meaning of life. It is highly personal and personality-specific. These categories work for me:

- meaning of life
- spiritual growth
- mental growth
- long-term planning
- parenting
- finances and living
- personal IT skills growth
- work skills growth
- practical life in general
- personal connection

For each category, there are these sections:

- Overview of my goals and of the spirit of the topic
- Relevant books
- Relevant Firefox bookmark folders
- Relevant Pocket tags
- Relevant Woolnote tags
- Long-term goals
- Yearly goals
- Short-term tasks

My motivation was inspired by this paragraph of the article:

*“When I dove into this topic, I thought about my own situation and whether I was improving. The efforts were there—apparent in many of this blog’s post topics—but I had no growth model, no real plan, no clear mission. Just kind of haphazard attempts at self-improvement in one area or another, whenever I happened to feel like it. So I’ve attempted to consolidate my scattered efforts, philosophies, and strategies into a single framework—something solid I can hold onto in the future—and I’m gonna use this post to do a deep dive into it.”*

## 25 How to Meditate

This is my own take on meditation, I'm not saying this is the best way.

- Integrate meditation into the whole day, into walking, sitting, waiting, working, even into times around problem solving, into times of stress, into times of happiness.
- Main ingredient of meditation is mindfulness - perceiving whatever there is, whatever emotions I have, without categorizing, without judging, without trying to change it.
- Another ingredient of meditation is the kindness to emotions, memories, myself, people
  - Self-compassion by Kristin Neff
    - \* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IvtZBUSplr4>
    - \* <http://self-compassion.org/>
  - An article by Thich Nhat Hanh about self-compassion
    - \* <https://www.mindful.org/healing-the-child-within/>
- A stressful moment is a reminder to meditate
  - *“While you are driving your car, you might notice the tension in your body. You are eager to arrive and you don't enjoy the time you spend driving. When you come to a red light, you are eager for the red light to become a green light so that you can continue. But the red light can be a signal. It can be a reminder that there is tension in you, the stress of wanting to arrive as quickly as possible. If you recognize that, you can make use of the red light. You can sit back and relax—take the ten seconds the light is red to practice mindful breathing and release the tension in the body.”* — Thich Nhat Hanh, <https://www.mindful.org/five-steps-to-mindfulness/>
- I can meditate about a certain thing, trying to comprehend or realize the thing deeply, which can give me an insight and give me ideas to make something better. Or I can meditate just to be in the here and now, to be with my emotions and thoughts, to be here to cherish the moment, e.g. to enjoy the moment with a loved one, to really live it and live it through, to fully perceive and fully listen, to be thankful, to be happy for the many things I find good, to realize the nature of things I deem bad, to realize my judgements, to try to free myself from seeing in old ways, to try to see through child's eyes, as if it is for the first time, with a child-like wonder, to let up things that preoccupy me and just be present in the moment.
- Core articles
  - <https://www.mindful.org/five-steps-to-mindfulness/>
  - <https://www.mindful.org/the-three-minute-breathing-space-practice/>
  - <https://www.mindful.org/5-ways-to-bring-mindfulness-home/>
  - <https://www.mindful.org/healing-the-child-within/>
  - <https://www.mindful.org/free-from-self-stories/>
- Additional articles

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindfulness>
- <https://www.mindful.org/compassionate-boundaries-say-no-heart/>
- <https://www.mindful.org/a-five-minute-breathing-meditation/>
- <https://www.mindful.org/the-path-is-peace/>
- <https://www.mindful.org/the-top-5-myths-about-mindfulness-meditation/>

## 26 Finding Peace

I find peace through the realization of the impermanence of everything, of my and everyone's mortality, of uncertainty of whatever happens in the future, through the realization that there is ultimately nothing to be gained from life, except for the experience itself and for the chance to give, nurture, and receive love, through the realization that similar experiences to mine and the I-feeling that illusorily seems special to me will again and again spark in newly born children, as they exist in other people, and again and again love, wonder, and happiness will be rediscovered; I find peace in the hope that in the future more and more people might realize this connectedness and work towards understanding and peace with love, not with war; last but not least I find peace in knowing that I, just as any other being, have a certain amount of power to help peace, and in knowing that things I did wrong or could have done better in the past were done with an older set of knowledge and skillfulness, yet today are judged with today's knowledge and skillfulness, and this will repeat.

## 27 Thanks

At first, this document was a purely private effort, but over time, inspiration from other people poured in and helped me. I am grateful to you who we talked about some of these topics with: I.G., E.K., M.J., J.R., I.E. You know who you are.

## 28 Quotes

“Imagination cannot grasp simple nothingness and must therefore fill the void with fantasies, as in experiments with sensory deprivation where subjects are suspended weightlessly in sound- and light-proof rooms. When death is considered the final victory of Black over White in the deadly serious battle of “White must win,” the fantasies which fill the void are largely ghoulish. Even our popular fantasies of Heaven are on the grim side (...).”

- The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are, by Alan Watts, 1966

...

"The sole means now for the saving of the beings of the planet Earth would be to implant again into their presences a new organ ... of such properties that every one of these unfortunates during the process of existence should constantly sense and be cognizant of the inevitability of his own death as well as the death of everyone upon whom his eyes or attention rests.

Only such a sensation and such a cognizance can now destroy the egoism completely crystallized in them."

- The Book: *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, by Alan Watts, 1966

. . .

"The point is only to know, beyond any shadow of doubt, that "I" and all other "things" now present will vanish, until this knowledge compels you to release them—to know it now as surely as if you had just fallen off the rim of the Grand Canyon. Indeed, you were kicked off the edge of a precipice when you were born, and it's no help to cling to the rocks falling with you. If you are afraid of death, be afraid. The point is to get with it, to let it take over—fear, ghosts, pains, transience, dissolution, and all. And then comes the hitherto unbelievable surprise: you don't die because you were never born. You had just forgotten who you are."

- The Book: *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, by Alan Watts, 1966

. . .

"In death we doff the persona, as actors take off their masks and costumes in the green room behind the scenes. And just as their friends come behind the stage to congratulate them on the performance, so one's own friends should gather at the deathbed to help one out of one's mortal role, to applaud the show, and, even more, to celebrate with champagne or sacraments (according to taste) the great awakening of death."

- The Book: *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, by Alan Watts, 1966

. . .

"Yet graduation day is a very temporary fulfillment, for with your first sales promotion meeting you are back in the same old system, being urged to make that quota (and if you do, they'll give you a higher quota) and so progress up the ladder to sales manager, vice-president, and, at last, president of your own show (about forty to forty-five years old). In the meantime, the insurance and investment people have been interesting you in plans for Retirement—that really ultimate goal of being able to sit back and enjoy the fruits of all your labors. But when that day comes, your anxieties and exertions will have left you with a weak heart, false teeth, prostate trouble, sexual impotence, fuzzy eyesight, and a vile digestion.

All this might have been wonderful if, at every stage, you had been able to play it as a game, finding your work as fascinating as poker, chess, or fishing. But for most of us the day is divided into work-time and play-time, the work consisting largely of tasks which others pay us to do because they are abysmally uninteresting. We therefore work, not for the work's sake, but for money—and money is supposed to get us what we really want in our hours of leisure and play.”

- The Book: *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, by Alan Watts, 1966

. . .

“Money alone cannot buy pleasure, though it can help. For enjoyment is an art and a skill for which we have little talent or energy.”

- The Book: *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, by Alan Watts, 1966

. . .

“Here, as we have also seen, the “nub” problem is the self-contradictory definition of man himself as a separate and independent being in the world, as distinct from a special action of the world. Part of our difficulty is that the latter view of man seems to make him no more than a puppet, but this is because, in trying to accept or understand the latter view, we are still in the grip of the former. To say that man is an action of the world is not to define him as a “thing” which is helplessly pushed around by all other “things.” We have to get beyond Newton’s vision of the world as a system of billiard balls in which every individual ball is passively knocked about by all the rest! Remember that Aristotle’s and Newton’s preoccupation with causal determinism was that they were trying to explain how one thing or event was influenced by others, forgetting that the division of the world into separate things and events was a fiction. To say that certain events are causally connected is only a clumsy way of saying that they are features of the same event, like the head and tail of the cat.”

- The Book: *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, by Alan Watts, 1966

. . .

“It would be sentimental and impossible to go back. Children are in touch with paradise to the extent that they have not fully learned the ego-trick, and the same is true of cultures which, by our standards, are more “primitive” and—by analogy—childlike. If, then, after understanding, at least in theory, that the ego-trick is a hoax and that, beneath everything, “I” and “universe” are one, you ask, “So what? What is the next step, the practical application?”—I will answer that the absolutely vital thing is to consolidate your understanding, to become capable of enjoyment, of living in the present, and of the discipline which



this involves. Without this you have nothing to give—to the cause of peace or of racial integration, to starving Hindus and Chinese, or even to your closest friends. Without this, all social concern will be muddlesome meddling, and all work for the future will be planned disaster.”

- The Book: *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, by Alan Watts, 1966

. . .

“But I define myself in terms of you; I know myself only in terms of what is “other,” no matter whether I see the “other” as below me or above me in any ladder of values. If above, I enjoy the kick of self-pity; if below, I enjoy the kick of pride. I being I goes with you being you. Thus, as a great Hassidic rabbi put it, “If I am I because you are you, and if you are you because I am I, then I am not I, and you are not you.”

(...)

Consider it also on a much vaster scale—the death of the universe at the time when all energy runs out, when, according to some cosmologists, the explosion which flung the galaxies into space fades out like a skyrocket. It will be as if it had never happened, which is, of course, the way things were before it did happen. Likewise, when you are dead, you will be as you were before you were conceived. So—there has been a flash, a flash of consciousness or a flash of galaxies. It happened. Even if there is no one left to remember.

(...)

And if I forget how many times I have been here, and in how many shapes, this forgetting is the necessary interval of darkness between every pulsation of light. I return in every baby born. Actually, we know this already. After people die, babies are born—and, unless they are automata, every one of them is, just as we ourselves were, the “I” experience coming again into being. The conditions of heredity and environment change, but each of those babies incarnates the same experience of being central to a world that is “other.” Each infant dawns into life as I did, without any memory of a past. Thus when I am gone there can be no experience, no living through, of the state of being a perpetual “has-been.” Nature “abhors the vacuum” and the I-feeling appears again as it did before, and it matters not whether the interval be ten seconds or billions of years. In unconsciousness all times are the same brief instant.”

- The Book: *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, by Alan Watts, 1966

. . .

“If, then, you ask me how to get beyond the ego-feeling, I shall ask you why you want to get there. If you give me the honest answer, which is that your ego will feel better in the “higher spiritual status” of selftranscendence, you will thus realize that you—as ego—are a fake. You will feel like an onion: skin after skin,

subterfuge after subterfuge, is pulled off to find no kernel at the center. Which is the whole point: to find out that the ego is indeed a fake—a wall of defense around a wall of defense ... around nothing. You can't even want to get rid of it, nor yet want to want to.

Understanding this, you will see that the ego is exactly what it pretends it isn't. Far from being the free center of personality, it is an automatic mechanism implanted since childhood by social authority, with—perhaps—a touch of heredity thrown in. This may give you the temporary feeling of being a zombie or a puppet dancing irresponsibly on strings that lead away to unknown forces. At this point, the ego may reassert itself with the insidious “I-can't-help-myself” play in which the ego splits itself in two and pretends that it is its own victim. “See, I'm only a bundle of conditioned reflexes, so you mustn't get angry with me for acting just as I feel.” (To which the answer could be, “Well, we're just zombies too, so you shouldn't complain if we get angry.”) But who is it that mustn't get angry or shouldn't complain, as if there were still some choice in the matter? The ego is still surviving as the “I” which must passively endure the automatic behavior of “myself” and others—again, as if there were some choice which the witnessing self can make between putting up with things and attacking them violently. What has happened is that the frustrated ego has withdrawn into its last stronghold of independence, retaining its identity as a mere watcher, or sufferer, of all that goes on. Here it pities itself or consoles itself as a puppet of fate.

But if this is seen as yet another subterfuge, we are close to the final showdown. A line of separation is now drawn between everything that happens to me, including my own feelings, on the one side, and on the other, I myself as the conscious witness. Isn't it easy to see that this line is imaginary, and that it, and the witness behind it, are the same old faking process automatically learned in childhood? The same old cleft between the knower and the known? The same old split between the organism/environment and the organism's feedback, or self-conscious mechanism? If, then, there is no choice in what happens to me, on one side of the line, there is equally no choice on the other, on the witnessing side, as to whether I should accept what happens or reject it. I accept, I reject, I witness just as automatically as things happen or as my emotions reflect my physiological chemistry.

Yet in this moment when one seems about to become a really total zombie, the whole thing blows up. For there is not fate unless there is someone or something to be fated. There is no trap without someone to be caught. There is, indeed, no compulsion unless there is also freedom of choice, for the sensation of behaving involuntarily is known only by contrast with that of behaving voluntarily. Thus when the line between myself and what happens to me is dissolved and there is no stronghold left for an ego even as a passive witness, I find myself not in a world but as a world which is neither compulsive nor capricious. What happens is neither automatic nor arbitrary: it just happens, and all happenings are mutually interdependent in a way that seems unbelievably harmonious. Every this

goes with every that. Without others there is no self, and without somewhere else there is no here, so that—in this sense—self is other and here is there.

When this new sensation of self arises, it is at once exhilarating and a little disconcerting. It is like the moment when you first got the knack of swimming or riding a bicycle. There is the feeling that you are not doing it yourself, but that it is somehow happening on its own, and you wonder whether you will lose it—as indeed you may if you try forcibly to hold on to it. In immediate contrast to the old feeling, there is indeed a certain passivity to the sensation, as if you were a leaf blown along by the wind, until you realize that you are both the leaf and the wind. The world outside your skin is just as much you as the world inside: they move together inseparably, and at first you feel a little out of control because the world outside is so much vaster than the world inside. Yet you soon discover that you are able to go ahead with ordinary activities—to work and make decisions as ever, though somehow this is less of a drag. Your body is no longer a corpse which the ego has to animate and lug around. There is a feeling of the ground holding you up, and of hills lifting you when you climb them. Air breathes itself in and out of your lungs, and instead, of looking and listening, light and sound come to you on their own. Eyes see and ears hear as wind blows and water flows. All space becomes your mind. Time carries you along like a river, but never flows out of the present: the more it goes, the more it stays, and you no longer have to fight or kill it.

You do not ask what is the value, or what is the use, of this feeling. Of what use is the universe? What is the practical application of a million galaxies? Yet just because it has no use, it has a use—which may sound like a paradox, but is not. What, for instance, is the use of playing music? If you play to make money, to outdo some other artist, to be a person of culture, or to improve your mind, you are not really playing—for your mind is not on the music. You don't swing. When you come to think of it, playing or listening to music is a pure luxury, an addiction, a waste of valuable time and money for nothing more than making elaborate patterns of sound. Yet what would we think of a society which had no place for music, which did not allow for dancing, or for any activity not directly involved with the practical problems of survival? Obviously, such a society would be surviving to no purpose— unless it could somehow make a delight out of the “essential tasks” of farming, building, soldiering, manufacturing, or cooking. But in that moment the goal of survival is forgotten. The tasks are being done for their own sake, whereupon farms begin to look like gardens, sensible living-boxes sprout interesting roofs and mysterious ornaments, arms are engraved with curious patterns, carpenters take time to “finish” their work, and cooks become gourmets.

A Chinese philosophical work called *The Secret of the Golden Flower* says that “when purpose has been used to achieve purposelessness, the thing has been grasped.” For a society surviving to no purpose is one that makes no provision for purposeless behavior—that is, for actions not directly aimed at survival, which fulfill themselves in being done in the present and do not necessarily

imply some future reward. But indirectly and unintentionally, such behavior is useful for survival because it gives a point to surviving—not, however, when pursued for that reason. To play so as to be relaxed and refreshed for work is not to play, and no work is well and finely done unless it, too, is a form of play.

To be released from the “You must survive” double-bind is to see that life is at root playing. The difficulty in understanding this is that the idea of “play” has two distinct meanings which are often confused. On the one hand, to do something only or merely in play, is to be trivial and insincere, and here we should use the word “toying” instead of “playing.” But if some woman should say to me, “I love you,” would it be right to answer, “Are you serious, or are you just playing with me?” After all, if this relationship is to flourish, I very much hope that she is not serious and that she will play with me. No, the better question would be, “Are you sincere, or are you just toying with me?” Sincerity is better than seriousness, for who wants to be loved gravely? Thus, on the other hand, there is a form of playing which is not trivial at all, as when Segovia plays the guitar or Sir Laurence Olivier plays the part of Hamlet, or, obviously, when someone plays the organ in church.”

- The Book: *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, by Alan Watts, 1966

. . .

“Once you have seen this you can return to the world of practical affairs with a new spirit. You have seen that the universe is at root a magical illusion and a fabulous game, and that there is no separate “you” to get something out of it, as if life were a bank to be robbed. The only real “you” is the one that comes and goes, manifests and withdraws itself eternally in and as every conscious being. For “you” is the universe looking at itself from billions of points of view, points that come and go so that the vision is forever new. What we see as death, empty space, or nothingness is only the trough between the crests of this endlessly waving ocean. It is all part of the illusion that there should seem to be something to be gained in the future, and that there is an urgent necessity to go on and on until we get it. Yet just as there is no time but the present, and no one except the all-and-everything, there is never anything to be gained—though the zest of the game is to pretend that there is.”

- The Book: *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, by Alan Watts, 1966

. . .

“As it is, we are merely bolting our lives—gulping down undigested experiences as fast as we can stuff them in—because awareness of our own existence is so superficial and so narrow that nothing seems to us more boring than simple being.”

- The Book: *On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, by Alan Watts, 1966

. . .

“So if you were to draw one essential message from the fact of reincarnation, it would be: Develop this good heart that longs for other beings to find lasting happiness, and acts to secure that happiness. Nourish and practice kindness. The Dalai Lama has said:”There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; my philosophy is kindness.””

- The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, by Sogyal Rinpoche, 1992

. . .

” A human being is part of a whole, called by us the “Universe” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest— a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty”

- [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Albert\\_Einstein](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Albert_Einstein)

. . .

- The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, by Sogyal Rinpoche, 1992

. . .

“We often wonder:”How will I be when I die?” The answer to that is that whatever state of mind we are in now, whatever kind of person we are now: that’s what we will be like at the moment of death, if we do not change. This is why it is so absolutely important to use this lifetime to purify our mindstream, and so our basic being and character, while we can.”

- The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, by Sogyal Rinpoche, 1992

. . .

“Our human existence is not the only kind of karmic vision. Six realms of existence are identified in Buddhism: gods, demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hells. They are each the result of one of the six main negative emotions: pride, jealousy, desire, ignorance, greed, and anger. Do these realms actually exist externally? They may, in fact, exist beyond the range of the perception of our karmic vision. Let’s never forget: What we see is what our karmic vision allows us to see, and no more. Just as we, in the present, unpurified, and unevolved state of our perception, can only be aware of this universe, an insect might see one of our fingers as a whole landscape in itself. We are so arrogant that we believe only”seeing is believing. ” Yet the great Buddhist teachings speak of innumerable worlds in different dimensions—there may even be many worlds very like, or just like ours—and several modern astrophysicists have developed theories about the existence of parallel universes. How can we

possibly say definitively what does or does not exist beyond the bounds of our limited vision?"

- The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, by Sogyal Rinpoche, 1992

. . .

" There is a famous Tibetan saying : "Do not mistake understanding for realization, and do not mistake realization for liberation." And Milarepa said: "Do not entertain hopes for realization, but practice all your life." "

- The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, by Sogyal Rinpoche, 1992

. . .

" All the spiritual teachers of humanity have told us the same thing, that the purpose of life on earth is to achieve union with our fundamental, enlightened nature. The "task" for which the "king" has sent us into this strange, dark country is to realize and embody our true being. There is only one way to do this, and that is to undertake the spiritual journey, with all the ardor and intelligence, courage and resolve for transformation that we can muster. As Death says to Nachiketas in the Katha Upanishad:

There is the path of wisdom and the path of ignorance. They are far apart and lead to different ends. Abiding in the midst of ignorance, thinking themselves wise and learned, fools go aimlessly hither and thither like the blind led by the blind. What lies beyond life shines not to those who are childish, or careless, or deluded by wealth."

- The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, by Sogyal Rinpoche, 1992

. . .

" Human beings have come to a critical place in their evolution, and this age of extreme confusion demands a teaching of comparably extreme power and clarity. I have also found that modern people want a path shorn of dogma, fundamentalism, exclusivity, complex metaphysics, and culturally exotic paraphernalia, a path at once simple and profound, a path that does not need to be practiced in ashrams or monasteries but one that can be integrated with ordinary life and practiced anywhere."

- The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, by Sogyal Rinpoche, 1992

. . .

Let me tell you a story I was told by Sister Brigid, a Catholic nurse working in an Irish hospice. Mr. Murphy was in his sixties, and he and his wife were told by their doctor that he did not have long to live. The following day Mrs. Murphy visited her husband at the hospice, and they talked and wept all day long. Sister Brigid watched as the old couple talked and frequently broke down into tears, and when this had gone on for three days, she wondered if she should

intervene. Yet the next day the Murphys seemed suddenly very relaxed and peaceful, holding hands and showing each other great tenderness.

Sister Brigid stopped Mrs. Murphy in the corridor and asked her what had taken place between them to have made such a great change on their behavior. Mrs. Murphy told her that when they found out her husband was dying, they looked back over their years together, and many memories came back to them. They had been married almost forty years, and naturally they felt enormous sorrow, thinking and talking about all the things they would never be able to do together again. Mr. Murphy had then made out his will, and written final messages to his grown-up children. All of this was terribly sad, because it was so hard to let go, but they carried on, as Mr. Murphy wanted to end his life well. Sister Brigid told me that for the next three weeks Mr. Murphy lived, the couple radiated peace and a simple, wonderful feeling of love. Even after her husband died, Mrs. Murphy continued to visit patients at the hospice, where she was an inspiration to everyone.

- The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, by Sogyal Rinpoche, 1992

. . .

“Experimental philosophy and neuroethics research collects data about human ethical decisions in controlled scenarios such as trolley problems. It has shown that many types of ethical judgment are universal across cultures, suggesting that they may be innate, whilst others are culture specific. The findings show actual human ethical reasoning to be at odds with most logical philosophical theories, for example consistently showing distinctions between action by cause and action by omission which would be absent from utility based theories.”

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What\\_is\\_the\\_meaning\\_of\\_life](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_is_the_meaning_of_life)

. . .

” Woe to the person who wants to be excused from suffering! That apostolic expression does not indicate only the forsakenness, the suffering of separation, which is even more terrible than the separation of death, since, death only separates a person from the temporal and therefore is a release, whereas this separation shuts him out from the eternal and therefore is an imprisonment that again leaves the spirit sighing in the fragile earthen vessel, in the cramped space, in the status of an alien, because the home of the spirit is in the eternal and the infinite. Four Upbuilding Discourses, 1844 p. 337 (Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses)”

- [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Four\\_Upbuilding\\_Discourses,\\_1844](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Four_Upbuilding_Discourses,_1844)

. . .

” When the self is out of balance, i.e., has the wrong understanding of who it is because it conceives itself too much in terms of its own limiting circumstances (and thus fails to recognize its own freedom to determine what it will be) or too much in terms of what it would like to be, (thus ignoring its own circumstances),

the person is in a state of despair. Notably, Anti-Climacus says one can be in despair even if one feels perfectly happy. Despair is not just an emotion, in a deeper sense it is the loss of self, i.e., it describes the state when one has the wrong conception of oneself. ”

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy\\_of\\_S%C3%B8ren\\_Kierkegaard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_S%C3%B8ren_Kierkegaard)

. . .

” Here, then, I have your view of life, and, believe me, much of your life will become clear to you if you will consider it along with me as thought-despair. You are a hater of activity in life—quite appropriately, because if there is to be meaning in it life must have continuity, and this your life does not have. You keep busy with your studies, to be sure; you are even diligent; but it is only for your sake, and it is done with as little teleology as possible. Moreover, you are unoccupied; like the laborers in the Gospel standing idle in the marketplace, you stick your hands in your pocket and contemplate life. Now you rest in despair. Nothing concerns you; you step aside for nothing; “If someone threw a roof tile down I would still not step aside.” You are like a dying person. You die daily, not in the profound, earnest sense in which one usually understands these words, but life has lost its reality and you “Always count the days of your life from one termination—notice to the next.” You let everything pass you by; nothing makes any impact. But then something suddenly comes along that grips you, an idea, a situation, a young girl’s smile, and now you are “involved,” for just on certain occasions you are not “involved,” so at other times you are “at your service” in every way. Wherever there is something going on you join in. You behave in life as you usually do in a crowd. “You work yourself into the tightest group, see to it, if possible, to get yourself shoved up over the others so that you come to be above them, and as soon as you are up there you make yourself as comfortable as possible, and in this way you let yourself be carried through life.” But when the crowd is gone, when the event is over, you again stand on the street corner and look at the world. *Either/Or Part II* p. 195-196”

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy\\_of\\_S%C3%B8ren\\_Kierkegaard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_S%C3%B8ren_Kierkegaard)

. . .

” The question remains, however, why is it that human pathos or passion is the most precious thing? In some ways, it might have to do with our status as existential beings. It is not thought that gets us through life—it is action; and what motivates and sustains action is passion, the desire to overcome hardships, pain, and suffering. It is also passion that enables us to die for ideals in the name of a higher reality. While a scientist might see this as plain emotion or simple animal desire, Kierkegaard sees it as that which binds to the source of life itself. The desire to live, and to live in the right way, for the right reasons, and with the right desires, is a holy and sacred force. For Kierkegaard all Christian action should have its ground in love, which is a passion.”

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy\\_of\\_S%C3%B8ren\\_Kierkegaard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_S%C3%B8ren_Kierkegaard)



. . .

” Even with a spiritual power as the answer to meaning, another question arises: What is the purpose of a belief in God? Kierkegaard believed that there is no human-comprehensible purpose of God, making faith in God absurd itself. Camus on the other hand states that to believe in God is to “deny one of the terms of the contradiction” between humanity and the universe (and is therefore not absurd but what he calls “philosophical suicide”). Camus (as well as Kierkegaard), though, suggests that while absurdity does not lead to belief in God, neither does it lead to the denial of God. Camus notes, “I did not say ‘excludes God’, which would still amount to asserting.”

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absurdism>

. . .

” For Camus, the beauty people encounter in life makes it worth living. People may create meaning in their own lives, which may not be the objective meaning of life (if there is one), but can still provide something to strive for. However, he insisted that one must always maintain an ironic distance between this invented meaning and the knowledge of the absurd, lest the fictitious meaning take the place of the absurd.”

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absurdism>

. . .

” The rejection of hope, in absurdism, denotes the refusal to believe in anything more than what this absurd life provides. Hope, Camus emphasizes, however, has nothing to do with despair (meaning that the two terms are not opposites). One can still live fully while rejecting hope, and, in fact, can only do so without hope. Hope is perceived by the absurdist as another fraudulent method of evading the Absurd, and by not having hope, one is motivated to live every fleeting moment to the fullest. In the words of Nikos Kazantzakis’ epitaph: “I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. I am free.”

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absurdism>

. . .

” The absurdist is not guided by morality, but rather, by their own integrity. The absurdist is, in fact, amoral (though not necessarily immoral). The Absurdist’s view of morality implies an unwavering sense of definite right and wrong at all times, while integrity implies honesty with one’s self and consistency in the motivations of one’s actions and decisions.”

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absurdism>

. . .

” Fundamental to the concept of secular humanism is the strongly held viewpoint that ideology—be it religious or political—must be thoroughly examined by each

individual and not simply accepted or rejected on faith. Along with this, an essential part of secular humanism is a continually adapting search for truth, primarily through science and philosophy. ”

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular\\_humanism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular_humanism)

. . .

” They suggest instead that an illusion of free will is experienced due to the generation of infinite behaviour from the interaction of finite-deterministic set of rules and parameters. Thus the unpredictability of the emerging behaviour from deterministic processes leads to a perception of free will, even though free will as an ontological entity does not exist.”

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Determinism>

. . .

” By this analogy, it is suggested, the experience of free will emerges from the interaction of finite rules and deterministic parameters that generate nearly infinite and practically unpredictable behavioural responses. In theory, if all these events could be accounted for, and there were a known way to evaluate these events, the seemingly unpredictable behaviour would become predictable.”

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Determinism>

. . .

” It may be possible, then, that our intuitions about the role of our conscious “intentions” have led us astray; it may be the case that we have confused correlation with causation by believing that conscious awareness necessarily causes the body’s movement. This possibility is bolstered by findings in neurostimulation, brain damage, but also research into introspection illusions. Such illusions show that humans do not have full access to various internal processes. The discovery that humans possess a determined will would have implications for moral responsibility. ”

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuroscience\\_of\\_free\\_will](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuroscience_of_free_will)

. . .

(about terminal lucidity)

“As a nurse, I saw many, many instances of this phenomenon. It was nothing at all unusual. It seemed to us that receiving religious last rights almost assured it happening, but of course, as with premonition dreams, having had to phone a priest for a patient in extremis, we were probably just noticing it more. The other common phenomenon I witnessed with dying patients, and indeed with my own mother, was the death bed visitor. One that the patient could see, and converse with, who wasn’t there in reality. With my mother, it was her mother, dead for forty years. It seemed most prevalent in patients who weren’t heavily medicated, and it seemed to bring much comfort. The fact that these

experiences were so similar patient to patient, seemed to point out that it is a normal response on the part of a dying brain.”

- <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/bering-in-mind/one-last-goodbye-the-strange-case-of-terminal-lucidity/#comment-D2F76B7D-D269-4354-ACBB3E0B2FD9C170>

. . .

(about terminal lucidity)

“In another case study, the patient was mute and disoriented and hadn’t seemed to notice or understand when her husband, whose name was Urs, died. A few months after her husband’s death, she sat up in bed, stretched out her hand, and said, “Urs! Yes, yes, ready.” She died shortly afterward.”

- <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/930465-do-alzheimers-dementia-prove-the-soul-doesnt-exist/>

. . .

“The more you suffer the deeper grows your character, and with the deepening of your character you read the more penetratingly into the secrets of life. All great artists, all great religious leaders, and all great social reformers have come out of the intensest struggles which they fought bravely, quite frequently in tears and with bleeding hearts.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/01/30/d-t-suzuki-essays-in-zen-buddhism/>

. . .

“We cannot suspend even for a moment our life-activity for philosophy to unravel its mysteries. Let the mysteries remain as they are, but live we must... Zen therefore does not rely on the intellect for the solution of its deepest problems.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/01/30/d-t-suzuki-essays-in-zen-buddhism/>

. . .

“As nature abhors a vacuum, Zen abhors anything coming between the fact and ourselves. According to Zen there is no struggle in the fact itself such as between the finite and the infinite, between the flesh and the spirit. These are idle distinctions fictitiously designed by the intellect for its own interest. Those who take them too seriously or those who try to read them into the very fact of life are those who take the finger for the moon.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/01/30/d-t-suzuki-essays-in-zen-buddhism/>

. . .

“The ultimate standpoint of Zen, therefore, is that we have been led astray through ignorance to find a split in our own being, that there was from the very beginning no need for a struggle between the finite and the infinite, that the peace we are seeking so eagerly after has been there all the time.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/01/30/d-t-suzuki-essays-in-zen-buddhism/>

. . .

“When we feed and support our own happiness, we are nourishing our ability to love. That’s why to love means to learn the art of nourishing our happiness. Understanding someone’s suffering is the best gift you can give another person. Understanding is love’s other name. If you don’t understand, you can’t love.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/03/31/how-to-love-thich-nhat-hanh/>

. . .

“If our parents didn’t love and understand each other, how are we to know what love looks like? ... The most precious inheritance that parents can give their children is their own happiness. Our parents may be able to leave us money, houses, and land, but they may not be happy people. If we have happy parents, we have received the richest inheritance of all.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/03/31/how-to-love-thich-nhat-hanh/>

. . .

”The essence of loving kindness is being able to offer happiness. You can be the sunshine for another person. You can’t offer happiness until you have it for yourself. So build a home inside by accepting yourself and learning to love and heal yourself. Learn how to practice mindfulness in such a way that you can create moments of happiness and joy for your own nourishment. Then you have something to offer the other person.

[...]

If you have enough understanding and love, then every moment — whether it’s spent making breakfast, driving the car, watering the garden, or doing anything else in your day — can be a moment of joy.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/03/31/how-to-love-thich-nhat-hanh/>

. . .

”In a deep relationship, there’s no longer a boundary between you and the other person. You are her and she is you. Your suffering is her suffering. Your understanding of your own suffering helps your loved one to suffer less. Suffering and happiness are no longer individual matters. What happens to your loved one happens to you. What happens to you happens to your loved one.

[...]

In true love, there’s no more separation or discrimination. His happiness is your happiness. Your suffering is his suffering. You can no longer say, “That’s your problem.””

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/03/31/how-to-love-thich-nhat-hanh/>

. . .

“Often, when we say, “I love you” we focus mostly on the idea of the “I” who is doing the loving and less on the quality of the love that’s being offered. This is because we are caught by the idea of self. We think we have a self. But there is no such thing as an individual separate self. A flower is made only of non-flower elements, such as chlorophyll, sunlight, and water. If we were to remove all the non-flower elements from the flower, there would be no flower left. A flower cannot be by herself alone. A flower can only inter-be with all of us... Humans are like this too. We can’t exist by ourselves alone. We can only inter-be. I am made only of non-me elements, such as the Earth, the sun, parents, and ancestors. In a relationship, if you can see the nature of interbeing between you and the other person, you can see that his suffering is your own suffering, and your happiness is his own happiness. With this way of seeing, you speak and act differently. This in itself can relieve so much suffering.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/03/31/how-to-love-thich-nhat-hanh/>

. . .

“The greatest dignity to be found in death is the dignity of the life that preceded it. This is a form of hope that we can all achieve, and it is the most abiding of all. Hope resides in the meaning of what our lives have been.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/09/17/sherwin-nuland-how-we-die/>

. . .

“Perhaps the mere existence of things undone should be a sort of satisfaction in itself, though the idea would appear to be paradoxical. Only one who is long since dead while still seemingly alive does not have many”promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep,” and that state of inertness is not to be desired. To the wise advice that we live every day as though it will be our last, we do well to add the admonition to live every day as though we will be on this earth forever.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/09/17/sherwin-nuland-how-we-die/>

. . .

“We die so that the world may continue to live. We have been given the miracle of life because trillions upon trillions of living things have prepared the way for us and then have died — in a sense, for us. We die, in turn, so that others may live. The tragedy of a single individual becomes, in the balance of natural things, the triumph of ongoing life.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/09/17/sherwin-nuland-how-we-die/>

. . .

“The dignity that we seek in dying must be found in the dignity with which we have lived our lives. *Ars moriendi* as *ars vivendi*: The art of dying is the art of living. The honesty and grace of the years of life that are ending is the real

measure of how we die. It is not in the last weeks or days that we compose the message that will be remembered, but in all the decades that preceded them. Who has lived in dignity, dies in dignity.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/09/17/sherwin-nuland-how-we-die/>

. . .

“To my mind, it is one of the profound contradictions of human existence that we long for immortality, indeed fervently believe that something must be unchanging and permanent, when all of the evidence in nature argues against us. I certainly have such a longing. Either I am delusional, or nature is incomplete. Either I am being emotional and vain in my wish for eternal life for myself and my daughter (and my wingtips), or there is some realm of immortality that exists outside nature.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/05/22/alan-lightman-accidental-universe-impermanence/>

. . .

”Despite all the richness of the physical world — the majestic architecture of atoms, the rhythm of the tides, the luminescence of the galaxies — nature is missing something even more exquisite and grand: some immortal substance, which lies hidden from view. Such exquisite stuff could not be made from matter, because all matter is slave to the second law of thermodynamics. Perhaps this immortal thing that we wish for exists beyond time and space. Perhaps it is God. Perhaps it is what made the universe.

Of these two alternatives, I am inclined to the first. I cannot believe that nature could be so amiss. Although there is much that we do not understand about nature, the possibility that it is hiding a condition or substance so magnificent and utterly unlike everything else seems too preposterous for me to believe. So I am delusional. In my continual cravings for eternal youth and constancy, I am being sentimental. Perhaps with the proper training of my unruly mind and emotions, I could refrain from wanting things that cannot be. Perhaps I could accept the fact that in a few short years, my atoms will be scattered in wind and soil, my mind and thoughts gone, my pleasures and joys vanished, my “I-ness” dissolved in an infinite cavern of nothingness. But I cannot accept that fate even though I believe it to be true. I cannot force my mind to go to that dark place. “A man can do what he wants,” said Schopenhauer, “but not want what he wants.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/05/22/alan-lightman-accidental-universe-impermanence/>

. . .

“Unless one is able to live fully in the present, the future is a hoax. There is no point whatever in making plans for a future which you will never be able to enjoy. When your plans mature, you will still be living for some other future

beyond. You will never, never be able to sit back with full contentment and say, "Now, I've arrived!"

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/27/alan-watts-taboo/>

. . .

"Our practical projects have run into confusion again and again through failure to see that individual people, nations, animals, insects, and plants do not exist in or by themselves. This is not to say only that things exist in relation to one another, but that what we call "things" are no more than glimpses of a unified process. Certainly, this process has distinct features which catch our attention, but we must remember that distinction is not separation. Sharp and clear as the crest of the wave may be, it necessarily "goes with" the smooth and less featured curve of the trough. ... In the Gestalt theory of perception this is known as the figure/ground relationship."

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/27/alan-watts-taboo/>

. . .

"Just because it is a hoax from the beginning, the personal ego can make only a phony response to life. For the world is an ever-elusive and ever-disappointing mirage only from the standpoint of someone standing aside from it — as if it were quite other than himself — and then trying to grasp it. Without birth and death, and without the perpetual transmutation of all the forms of life, the world would be static, rhythm-less, undancing, mummified.

But a third response is possible. Not withdrawal, not stewardship on the hypothesis of a future reward, but the fullest collaboration with the world as a harmonious system of contained conflicts — based on the realization that the only real "I" is the whole endless process. This realization is already in us in the sense that our bodies know it, our bones and nerves and sense-organs. We do not know it only in the sense that the thin ray of conscious attention has been taught to ignore it, and taught so thoroughly that we are very genuine fakes indeed."

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/27/alan-watts-taboo/>

. . .

"In immediate contrast to the old feeling, there is indeed a certain passivity to the sensation, as if you were a leaf blown along by the wind, until you realize that you are both the leaf and the wind. The world outside your skin is just as much you as the world inside: they move together inseparably, and at first you feel a little out of control because the world outside is so much vaster than the world inside. Yet you soon discover that you are able to go ahead with ordinary activities—to work and make decisions as ever, though somehow this is less of a drag. Your body is no longer a corpse which the ego has to animate and lug around. There is a feeling of the ground holding you up, and of hills lifting you when you climb them. Air breathes itself in and out of your lungs, and instead

of looking and listening, light and sound come to you on their own. Eyes see and ears hear as wind blows and water flows. All space becomes your mind. Time carries you along like a river, but never flows out of the present: the more it goes, the more it stays, and you no longer have to fight or kill it.

[...]

Once you have seen this you can return to the world of practical affairs with a new spirit. You have seen that the universe is at root a magical illusion and a fabulous game, and that there is no separate “you” to get something out of it, as if life were a bank to be robbed. The only real “you” is the one that comes and goes, manifests and withdraws itself eternally in and as every conscious being. For “you” is the universe looking at itself from billions of points of view, points that come and go so that the vision is forever new.

You do not ask what is the value, or what is the use, of this feeling. Of what use is the universe? What is the practical application of a million galaxies?”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/27/alan-watts-taboo/>

. . .

“The hard truth seems to be this: We live in a vast and awesome universe in which, daily, suns are made and worlds destroyed, where humanity clings to an obscure clod of rock. The significance of our lives and our fragile realm derives from our own wisdom and courage. We are the custodians of life’s meaning. We would prefer it to be otherwise, of course, but there is no compelling evidence for a cosmic Parent who will care for us and save us from ourselves. It is up to us.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2013/07/08/carl-sagan-meaning-of-life/>

. . .

”“If we ever reach the point where we think we thoroughly understand who we are and where we came from,” Carl Sagan wrote in his timeless meditation on science and religion, “we will have failed.””

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/15/alan-lightman-accidental-universe-science-spirituality/>

. . .

”“The notion that science and spirituality are somehow mutually exclusive does a disservice to both.” ”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/15/alan-lightman-accidental-universe-science-spirituality/>

. . .



“There are things we take on faith, without physical proof and even sometimes without any methodology for proof. We cannot clearly show why the ending of a particular novel haunts us. We cannot prove under what conditions we would sacrifice our own life in order to save the life of our child. We cannot prove whether it is right or wrong to steal in order to feed our family, or even agree on a definition of “right” and “wrong.” We cannot prove the meaning of our life, or whether life has any meaning at all. For these questions, we can gather evidence and debate, but in the end we cannot arrive at any system of analysis akin to the way in which a physicist decides how many seconds it will take a one-foot-long pendulum to make a complete swing. The previous questions are questions of aesthetics, morality, philosophy. These are questions for the arts and the humanities. These are also questions aligned with some of the intangible concerns of traditional religion.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/15/alan-lightman-accidental-universe-science-spirituality/>

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”At any moment in time, every scientist is working on, or attempting to work on, a well-posed problem, a question with a definite answer. We scientists are taught from an early stage of our apprenticeship not to waste time on questions that do not have clear and definite answers.

But artists and humanists often don’t care what the answer is because definite answers don’t exist to all interesting and important questions. Ideas in a novel or emotion in a symphony are complicated with the intrinsic ambiguity of human nature. ... For many artists and humanists, the question is more important than the answer. As the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote a century ago, “We should try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Then there are also the questions that have definite answers but which we cannot answer. The question of the existence of God may be such a question.

As human beings, don’t we need questions without answers as well as questions with answers?”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/15/alan-lightman-accidental-universe-science-spirituality/>

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“Faith, in its broadest sense, is about far more than belief in the existence of God or the disregard of scientific evidence. Faith is the willingness to give ourselves over, at times, to things we do not fully understand. Faith is the belief in things larger than ourselves. Faith is the ability to honor stillness at some moments and at others to ride the passion and exuberance that is the artistic impulse, the flight of the imagination, the full engagement with this strange and shimmering world.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/15/alan-lightman-accidental-universe-science-spirituality/>

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“One August afternoon, the two baby ospreys of that season took flight for the first time as I stood on the circular deck of my house watching the nest. All summer long, they had watched me on that deck as I watched them. To them, it must have looked like I was in my nest just as they were in theirs. On this particular afternoon, their maiden flight, they did a loop of my house and then headed straight at me with tremendous speed. My immediate impulse was to run for cover, since they could have ripped me apart with their powerful talons. But something held me to my ground. When they were within twenty feet of me, they suddenly veered upward and away. But before that dazzling and frightening vertical climb, for about half a second we made eye contact. Words cannot convey what was exchanged between us in that instant. It was a look of connectedness, of mutual respect, of recognition that we shared the same land. After they were gone, I found that I was shaking, and in tears. To this day, I do not understand what happened in that half second. But it was one of the most profound moments of my life.”

- <http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/15/alan-lightman-accidental-universe-science-spirituality/>

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If we do actually succeed in becoming richer, or more powerful, we believe, at least for a time, that life as a whole has improved. But symbols can be deceptive: they have a tendency to distract from the reality they are supposed to represent. And the reality is that the quality of life does not depend directly on what others think of us or on what we own. The bottom line is, rather, how we feel about ourselves and about what happens to us. To improve life one must improve the quality of experience.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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The kind of feedback we work toward is in and of itself often unimportant: (...) What makes this information valuable is the symbolic message it contains: that I have succeeded in my goal. Such knowledge creates order in consciousness, and strengthens the structure of the self.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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And being able to forget temporarily who we are seems to be very enjoyable. When not preoccupied with our selves, we actually have a chance to expand the concept of who we are. Loss of self-consciousness can lead to self-transcendence, to a feeling that the boundaries of our being have been pushed forward.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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One could treat these testimonials as poetic metaphors and leave them at that. But it is important to realize that they refer to experiences that are just as real as being hungry, or as concrete as bumping into a wall. There is nothing mysterious or mystical about them. When a person invests all her psychic energy into an interaction—whether it is with another person, a boat, a mountain, or a piece of music—she in effect becomes part of a system of action greater than what the individual self had been before. This system takes its form from the rules of the activity; its energy comes from the person's attention. But it is a real system—subjectively as real as being part of a family, a corporation, or a team—and the self that is part of it expands its boundaries and becomes more complex than what it had been. This growth of the self occurs only if the interaction is an enjoyable one, that is, if it offers nontrivial opportunities for action and requires a constant perfection of skills. It is also possible to lose oneself in systems of action that demand nothing but faith and allegiance. Fundamentalist religions, mass movements, and extremist political parties also offer opportunities for self-transcendence that millions are eager to accept. They also provide a welcome extension of the boundaries of the self, a feeling that one is involved in something great and powerful. The true believer also becomes part of the system in concrete terms, because his psychic energy will be focused and shaped by the goals and rules of his belief. But the true believer is not really interacting with the belief system; he usually lets his psychic energy be absorbed by it. From this submission nothing new can come; consciousness may attain a welcome order, but it will be an order imposed rather than achieved. At best the self of the true believer resembles a crystal: strong and beautifully symmetrical, but very slow to grow. There is one very important and at first apparently paradoxical relationship between losing the sense of self in a flow experience, and having it emerge stronger afterward. It almost seems that occasionally giving up self-consciousness is necessary for building a strong self-concept. Why this should be so is fairly clear. In flow a person is challenged to do her best, and must constantly improve her skills. At the time, she doesn't have the opportunity to reflect on what this means in terms of the self—if she did allow herself to become self-conscious, the experience could not have been very deep. But afterward, when the activity is over and self-consciousness has a chance to resume, the self that the person reflects upon is not the same self that existed before the flow experience: it is now enriched by new skills and fresh achievements.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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To many people activities like working or raising children provide more flow than playing a game or painting a picture, because these individuals have learned to perceive opportunities in such mundane tasks that others do not see.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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A third dimension of sexuality begins to emerge when in addition to physical pleasure and the enjoyment of a romantic relationship the lover feels genuine care for his partner. There are then new challenges one discovers: to enjoy the partner as a unique person, to understand her, and to help her fulfill her goals. With the emergence of this third dimension sexuality becomes a very complex process, one that can go on providing flow experiences all through life.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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How to keep love fresh? The answer is the same as it is for any other activity. To be enjoyable, a relationship must become more complex. To become more complex, the partners must discover new potentialities in themselves and in each other. To discover these, they must invest attention in each other—so that they can learn what thoughts and feelings, what dreams reside in their partner's mind. This in itself is a never-ending process, a lifetime's task. After one begins to really know another person, then many joint adventures become possible: traveling together, reading the same books, raising children, making and realizing plans all become more enjoyable and more meaningful. The specific details are unimportant. Each person must find out which ones are relevant to his or her own situation. What is important is the general principle: that sexuality, like any other aspect of life, can be made enjoyable if we are willing to take control of it, and cultivate it in the direction of greater complexity.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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We don't usually notice how little control we have over the mind, because habits channel psychic energy so well that thoughts seem to follow each other by themselves without a hitch. After sleeping we regain consciousness in the morning when the alarm rings, and then walk to the bathroom and brush our teeth. The social roles culture prescribes then take care of shaping our minds for us, and we generally place ourselves on automatic pilot till the end of the day, when it is time again to lose consciousness in sleep. But when we are left alone, with no demands on attention, the basic disorder of the mind reveals itself. With nothing to do, it begins to follow random patterns, usually stopping to consider something painful or disturbing. Unless a person knows how to give order to his or her thoughts, attention will be attracted to whatever is most problematic at the moment: it will focus on some real or imaginary pain, on recent grudges or long-term frustrations. Entropy is the normal state of consciousness—a condition that is neither useful nor enjoyable. To avoid this condition, people are naturally eager to fill their minds with whatever information is readily available, as long as it distracts attention from turning inward and dwelling on negative

feelings. This explains why such a huge proportion of time is invested in watching television, despite the fact that it is very rarely enjoyed. Compared to other sources of stimulation—like reading, talking to other people, or working on a hobby—TV can provide continuous and easily accessible information that will structure the viewer’s attention, at a very low cost in terms of the psychic energy that needs to be invested. While people watch television, they need not fear that their drifting minds will force them to face disturbing personal problems. It is understandable that, once one develops this strategy for overcoming psychic entropy, to give up the habit becomes almost impossible.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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A person who can remember stories, poems, lyrics of songs, baseball statistics, chemical formulas, mathematical operations, historical dates, biblical passages, and wise quotations has many advantages over one who has not cultivated such a skill. The consciousness of such a person is independent of the order that may or may not be provided by the environment. She can always amuse herself, and find meaning in the contents of her mind. While others need external stimulation—television, reading, conversation, or drugs—to keep their minds from drifting into chaos, the person whose memory is stocked with patterns of information is autonomous and self-contained. Additionally, such a person is also a much more cherished companion, because she can share the information in her mind, and thus help bring order into the consciousness of those with whom she interacts. How can one find more value in memory? The most natural way to begin is to decide what subject one is really interested in—poetry, fine cuisine, the history of the Civil War, or baseball—and then start paying attention to key facts and figures in that chosen area. With a good grasp of the subject will come the knowledge of what is worth remembering and what is not. The important thing to recognize here is that you should not feel that you have to absorb a string of facts, that there is a right list you must memorize. If you decide what you would like to have in memory, the information will be under your control, and the whole process of learning by heart will become a pleasant task, instead of a chore imposed from outside. A Civil War buff need not feel compelled to know the sequence of dates of all major engagements; if, for instance, he is interested in the role of the artillery, then only those battles where cannons played an important part need concern him. Some people carry with them the texts of choice poems or quotations written on pieces of paper, to glance over whenever they feel bored or dispirited. It is amazing what a sense of control it gives to know that favorite facts or lyrics are always at hand. Once they are stored in memory, however, this feeling of ownership—or better, of connectedness with the content recalled—becomes even more intense.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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Many people give up on learning after they leave school because thirteen or

twenty years of extrinsically motivated education is still a source of unpleasant memories. Their attention has been manipulated long enough from the outside by textbooks and teachers, and they have counted graduation as the first day of freedom. But a person who forgoes the use of his symbolic skills is never really free. His thinking will be directed by the opinions of his neighbors, by the editorials in the papers, and by the appeals of television. He will be at the mercy of “experts.” Ideally, the end of extrinsically applied education should be the start of an education that is motivated intrinsically. At that point the goal of studying is no longer to make the grade, earn a diploma, and find a good job. Rather, it is to understand what is happening around one, to develop a personally meaningful sense of what one’s experience is all about. From that will come the profound joy of the Thinker, (...)

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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It is for this reason that television proves such a boon to so many people. Although watching TV is far from being a positive experience—generally people report feeling passive, weak, rather irritable, and sad when doing it—at least the flickering screen brings a certain amount of order to consciousness.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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Some of the most intense and meaningful experiences in people’s lives are the result of family relationships. Many successful men and women would second Lee Iacocca’s statement: “I’ve had a wonderful and successful career. But next to my family, it really hasn’t mattered at all.”

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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Unless he revises the old goals, they will be frustrated, producing that sense of inner conflict known as psychic entropy. And if he changes goals, his self will change as a consequence—the self being the sum and organization of goals. In this manner entering any relationship entails a transformation of the self.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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The increase in the divorce rate is probably more affected by changes in the labor market that have increased women’s employment opportunities, and by the diffusion of labor-saving home appliances, than it is by a lessening of love or of moral fiber. But extrinsic reasons are not the only ones for staying married and for living together in families. There are great opportunities for joy and for growth that can only be experienced in family life, and these intrinsic rewards are no less present now than they were in the past; in fact, they are probably much more readily available today than they have been at any previous time.

If the trend of traditional families keeping together mainly as a convenience is on the wane, the number of families that endure because their members enjoy each other may be increasing.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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But isn't it incredibly naive to expect life to have a coherent overall meaning? After all, at least since Nietzsche concluded that God was dead, philosophers and social scientists have been busy demonstrating that existence has no purpose, that chance and impersonal forces rule our fate, and that all values are relative and hence arbitrary. It is true that life has no meaning, if by that we mean a supreme goal built into the fabric of nature and human experience, a goal that is valid for every individual. But it does not follow that life cannot be given meaning. Much of what we call culture and civilization consists in efforts people have made, generally against overwhelming odds, to create a sense of purpose for themselves and their descendants. It is one thing to recognize that life is, by itself, meaningless. It is another thing entirely to accept this with resignation. The first fact does not entail the second any more than the fact that we lack wings prevents us from flying.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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Goals justify the effort they demand at the outset, but later it is the effort that justifies the goal. One gets married because the spouse seems worthy of sharing one's life with, but unless one then behaves as if this is true, the partnership will appear to lose value with time.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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Action helps create inner order, but it has its drawbacks. A person strongly dedicated to achieving pragmatic ends might eliminate internal conflict, but often at the price of excessively restricting options. The young engineer who aims to become plant manager at age forty-five and bends all his energies to that end may sail through several years successfully and without hesitation. Sooner or later, however, postponed alternatives may reappear again as intolerable doubts and regrets. Was it worth sacrificing my health for the promotion? What happened to those lovely children who have suddenly turned into sullen adolescents? Now that I have achieved power and financial security, what do I do with it? In other words, the goals that have sustained action over a period turn out not to have enough power to give meaning to the entirety of life.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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Activity and reflection should ideally complement and support each other. Action by itself is blind, reflection impotent. Before investing great amounts of energy in a goal, it pays to raise the fundamental questions: Is this something I really want to do? Is it something I enjoy doing? Am I likely to enjoy it in the foreseeable future? Is the price that I—and others—will have to pay worth it? Will I be able to live with myself if I accomplish it?

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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People who as adults develop coherent life themes often recall that when they were very young, their parents told them stories and read from books. When told by a loving adult whom one trusts, fairy tales, biblical stories, heroic historical deeds, and poignant family events are often the first intimations of meaningful order a person gleans from the experience of the past. In contrast, we found in our studies that individuals who never focus on any goal, or accept one unquestioningly from the society around them, tend not to remember their parents having read or told stories to them as children. Saturday morning kiddie shows on television, with their pointless sensationalism, are unlikely to achieve the same purpose.

- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

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“A man is struck in the chest with a poison arrow. A surgeon rushes to his side to begin the work of saving his life, but the man resists these ministrations. He first wants to know the name of the fletcher who fashioned the arrow’s shaft, the genus of the wood from which it was cut, the disposition of the man who shot it, the name of the horse upon which he rode, and a thousand other things that have no bearing upon his present suffering or his ultimate survival. The man needs to get his priorities straight. His commitment to thinking about the world results from a basic misunderstanding of his predicament. And though we may be only dimly aware of it, we, too, have a problem that will not be solved by acquiring more conceptual knowledge.”

(Chapter: Chapter 3: The Riddle of the Self)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

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“If my linguistic abilities happened to be distributed across both hemispheres, each of these minds might remember having written this sentence. The question of whether I would land in the left hemisphere or the right doesn’t make sense—being based, as it is, on the illusion that there is a self bobbing on the stream of consciousness like a boat on the water.”

(Chapter: Chapter 3: The Riddle of the Self)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014



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“Breaking the Spell of Negative Emotions Most of us let our negative emotions persist longer than is necessary. Becoming suddenly angry, we tend to stay angry—and this requires that we actively produce the feeling of anger. We do this by thinking about our reasons for being angry—recalling an insult, rehearsing what we should have said to our malefactor, and so forth—and yet we tend not to notice the mechanics of this process. Without continually resurrecting the feeling of anger, it is impossible to stay angry for more than a few moments. While I can’t promise that meditation will keep you from ever again becoming angry, you can learn not to stay angry for very long. And when talking about the consequences of anger, the difference between moments and hours—or days—is impossible to exaggerate. Even without knowing how to meditate, most people have experienced having their negative states of mind suddenly interrupted. Imagine, for instance, that someone has made you very angry—and just as this mental state seems to have fully taken possession of your mind, you receive an important phone call that requires you to put on your best social face. Most people know what it’s like to suddenly drop their negative state of mind and begin functioning in another mode. Of course, most then helplessly grow entangled with their negative emotions again at the next opportunity. Become sensitive to these interruptions in the continuity of your mental states. You are depressed, say, but are suddenly moved to laughter by something you read. You are bored and impatient while sitting in traffic, but then are cheered by a phone call from a close friend. These are natural experiments in shifting mood. Notice that suddenly paying attention to something else—something that no longer supports your current emotion—allows for a new state of mind. Observe how quickly the clouds can part. These are genuine glimpses of freedom. The truth, however, is that you need not wait for some pleasant distraction to shift your mood. You can simply pay close attention to negative feelings themselves, without judgment or resistance. What is anger? Where do you feel it in your body? How is it arising in each moment? And what is it that is aware of the feeling itself? Investigating in this way, with mindfulness, you can discover that negative states of mind vanish all by themselves.”

(Chapter: Lost in Thought)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

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“In the broadest sense, however, meditation is simply the ability to stop suffering in many of the usual ways, if only for a few moments at a time.”

(Chapter: Chapter 4: Meditation)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

...

“And yet it is true that meditation requires total acceptance of what is given in

the present moment. If you are injured and in pain, the path to mental peace can be traversed in a single step: Simply accept the pain as it arises, while doing whatever you need to do to help your body heal. If you are anxious before giving a speech, become willing to feel the anxiety fully, so that it becomes a meaningless pattern of energy in your mind and body. Embracing the contents of consciousness in any moment is a very powerful way of training yourself to respond differently to adversity. However, it is important to distinguish between accepting unpleasant sensations and emotions as a strategy—while covertly hoping that they will go away—and truly accepting them as transitory appearances in consciousness. Only the latter gesture opens the door to wisdom and lasting change. The paradox is that we can become wiser and more compassionate and live more fulfilling lives by refusing to be who we have tended to be in the past. But we must also relax, accepting things as they are in the present, as we strive to change ourselves.”

(Chapter: The Paradox of Acceptance)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

...

“However, it is important to distinguish between accepting unpleasant sensations and emotions as a strategy—while covertly hoping that they will go away—and truly accepting them as transitory appearances in consciousness.”

(Chapter: The Paradox of Acceptance)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

...

“But we must also relax, accepting things as they are in the present, as we strive to change ourselves.”

(Chapter: The Paradox of Acceptance)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

...

“Math is magical, but math approached like magic is just superstition—and numerology is where the intellect goes to die.”

(Chapter: Chapter 5: Gurus, Death, Drugs, and Other Puzzles)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

...

“Some people are so desperate to interpret the NDE as proof of an afterlife that even those whom one would expect to have a strong commitment to scientific reasoning toss their better judgment out the window. The truth is that, whatever happens after death, it is possible to justify a life of spiritual practice and self-transcendence without pretending to know things we do not know.”

(Chapter: Mind on the Brink of Death)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

. . .

“What is the meaning of life? What is our purpose on earth? These are some of the great, false questions of religion. We need not answer them, for they are badly posed, but we can live our answers all the same.”

(Chapter: Conclusion)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

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“As for the rest—charity, community, ritual, and the contemplative life—we need not take anything on faith to embrace those goods. It is one of the most damaging lies of religion—whether liberal, moderate, or extreme—to insist that we must.”

(Chapter: Conclusion)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

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“Happiness and suffering, however extreme, are mental events. The mind depends upon the body, and the body upon the world, but everything good or bad that happens in your life must appear in consciousness to matter. This fact offers ample opportunity to make the best of bad situations—changing your perception of the world is often as good as changing the world—but it also allows a person to be miserable even when all the material and social conditions for happiness have been met. During the normal course of events, your mind will determine the quality of your life.”

(Chapter: Conclusion)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

. . .

“Of course, the mind is as contingent as the body—and the limits of the body are obvious: I am precisely as tall as I am, and not an inch taller. I can jump as high as I can, and no higher. I can’t see what is behind my head. My knee hurts. The boundaries of my mind are just as clear: I cannot speak a word of Korean. I don’t remember what I did on this date in 2011, or the last words I read of Dante, or even the first words I spoke to my wife this morning. Although I can alter my mood and states of attention, I can do so only within a narrow range. If I am tired, I can open my eyes a little wider and try to perk myself up, but I cannot completely banish the feeling of fatigue. If I am slightly depressed, I can brighten my mood with happy thoughts. I can even access a feeling of happiness directly by simply recalling what it is like to be happy—deliberately

putting a smile in my mind—but I cannot reproduce the greatest joy I have ever felt. Everything about my mind and body seems to feel the weight of the past. I am just as I am. But consciousness is different. It appears to have no form at all, because anything that would give it form must arise within the field of consciousness. Consciousness is simply the light by which the contours of mind and body are known. It is that which is aware of feelings such as joy, regret, amusement, and despair. It can seem to take their shape for a time, but it is possible to recognize that it never quite does. In fact, we can directly experience that consciousness is never improved or harmed by what it knows. Making this discovery, again and again, is the basis of spiritual life.”

(Chapter: Conclusion)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

...

“As we have seen, there is no compelling reason to believe that the mind is independent of the brain. And yet the deflationary attitude toward consciousness taken by many scientists—wherein reality is considered only from the outside, in third-person terms—is also unwarranted. A middle path exists between making religion out of spiritual life and having no spiritual life at all.”

(Chapter: Conclusion)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

...

“Everything we take ourselves to be at the level of our subjectivity—our memories and emotions, our capacity for language, the very thoughts and impulses that give rise to our behavior—depends upon distinct processes that are spread out over the whole of the brain. Many of these can be independently interrupted or extinguished. The sense, therefore, that we are unified subjects—the unchanging thinkers of thoughts and experiencers of experience—is an illusion”

(Chapter: Conclusion)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

...

” Yes, the cosmos is vast and appears indifferent to our mortal schemes, but every present moment of consciousness is profound. In subjective terms, each of us is identical to the very principle that brings value to the universe. Experiencing this directly—not merely thinking about it—is the true beginning of spiritual life.”

(Chapter: Conclusion)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

...

“We are always and everywhere in the presence of reality. Indeed, the human mind is the most complex and subtle expression of reality we have thus far encountered. This should grant profundity to the humble project of noticing what it is like to be you in the present. However numerous your faults, something in you at this moment is pristine—and only you can recognize it. Open your eyes and see.”

(Chapter: Conclusion)

- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014

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Thich Nhat Hanh - How to Love - the whole short book is so succinct and beautiful I would have to copy it almost in its entirety here, so this is a placeholder for the entire book's contents and only a few parts have been copied.

If you pour a handful of salt into a cup of water, the water becomes undrinkable. But if you pour the salt into a river, people can continue to draw the water to cook, wash, and drink. The river is immense, and it has the capacity to receive, embrace, and transform. When our hearts are small, our understanding and compassion are limited, and we suffer. We can't accept or tolerate others and their shortcomings, and we demand that they change. But when our hearts expand, these same things don't make us suffer anymore. We have a lot of understanding and compassion and can embrace others. We accept others as they are, and then they have a chance to transform. So the big question is: how do we help our hearts to grow?

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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Spirituality doesn't mean a blind belief in a spiritual teaching. Spirituality is a practice that brings relief, communication, and transformation. Everyone needs a spiritual dimension in life. Without a spiritual dimension, it's very challenging to be with the daily difficulties we all encounter. With a spiritual practice, you're no longer afraid. Along with your physical body, you have a spiritual body. The practices of breathing, walking, concentration, and understanding can help you greatly in dealing with your emotions, in listening to and embracing your suffering, and in helping you to recognize and embrace the suffering of another person. If we have this capacity, then we can develop a real and lasting spiritual intimacy with ourselves and with others.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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In true love, there's no more separation or discrimination. His happiness is your happiness. Your suffering is his suffering. You can no longer say, "That's your problem." In true love, both happiness and suffering are no longer individual matters. You are him, and he is you. In a good relationship we are like two

fingers of the same hand. The little finger doesn't suffer from an inferiority complex and say, "I'm so small. I wish I were as big as the thumb." The thumb doesn't have a superiority complex, saying, "I'm more important. I'm the big brother of all the fingers; you have to obey me." Instead, there's a perfect collaboration between them.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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Often, our pride stands in the way of our asking for help. In true love there is no place for pride. To love each other means to trust each other. If you don't tell the person you love of your suffering, it means you don't love this person enough to trust her. You have to realize that this person is the best person to help you. We need to be able to get help from the person we love.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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Before having a child, it would be wonderful if people would take a year to look deeply into themselves, to practice loving speech and deep listening, and to learn the other practices that will help them enjoy themselves and their children more. Bringing a new life into the world is a serious matter. Taking a year for introspection and preparation doesn't seem too much. Doctors and therapists spend up to ten years to get a license. But anyone can become a parent without any training or preparation. Parents can learn how to sow seeds of happiness, peace, and joy in the new child.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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Your good intentions are not enough; you have to be artful. We may be filled with goodwill; we may be motivated by the desire to make the other person happy; but out of our clumsiness, we make them unhappy. Walking, eating, breathing, talking, and working are all opportunities to practice creating happiness inside you and around you. Mindful living is an art, and each of us has to train to be an artist.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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Once you know how to come home to yourself, then you can open your home to other people, because you have something to offer. The other person has to do exactly the same thing if they are to have something to offer you. Otherwise, they will have nothing to share but their loneliness, sickness, and suffering. This can't help heal you at all. The other person has to heal themselves and get warm inside, so that they will feel better, at ease, and can share their home with you.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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Loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity are described as unlimited states of mind because they continue to grow and they cannot be measured. The more you practice, the more you see your love growing and growing until there is no limit. The more you practice compassion, the more it grows. The more you cultivate joy, the more joy you will feel and be able to share. The more you understand, the more you love; the more you love, the more you understand. They are two sides of one reality. The mind of love and the mind of understanding are the same.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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If you walk with true awareness of every step, without having a goal to get anywhere, happiness will arise naturally. You don't need to look for happiness. When we're in touch with the wonders of life, we become aware of the many conditions of happiness that are already there, and naturally we feel happy. The beauty around us brings us back to the present moment so we can let go of the planning and worries that preoccupy us. When you look at the person you love, if he is absorbed in anxiety, you can help him get out. "Darling, do you see the sun? Do you see the signs that spring is coming?" This is mindfulness; we become aware of what is happening now and we are in touch with the conditions of happiness that are there inside us and all around us.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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Often, when we say, "I love you" we focus mostly on the idea of the "I" who is doing the loving and less on the quality of the love that's being offered. This is because we are caught by the idea of self. We think we have a self. But there is no such thing as an individual separate self. A flower is made only of non-flower elements, such as chlorophyll, sunlight, and water. If we were to remove all the non-flower elements from the flower, there would be no flower left. A flower cannot be by herself alone. A flower can only inter-be with all of us. It's much closer to the truth. Humans are like this too. We can't exist by ourselves alone. We can only inter-be. I am made only of non-me elements, such as the Earth, the sun, parents, and ancestors. In a relationship, if you can see the nature of interbeing between you and the other person, you can see that his suffering is your own suffering, and your happiness is his own happiness. With this way of seeing, you speak and act differently. This in itself can relieve so much suffering.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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One of the greatest gifts we can offer people is to embody nonattachment and nonfear. This is a true teaching, more precious than money or material resources.

Many of us are very afraid, and this fear distorts our lives and makes us unhappy. We cling to objects and to people like a drowning person clings to a floating log. Practicing to realize nondiscrimination, to see the interconnectedness and impermanence of all things, and to share this wisdom with others, we are giving the gift of nonfear. Everything is impermanent. This moment passes. That person walks away. Happiness is still possible.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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When we love someone, we should look deeply into the nature of that love. If we want to be with someone so that we can feel safe, that's understandable, but it's not true love. True love doesn't foster suffering or attachment. On the contrary, it brings well-being to ourselves and to others. True love is generated from within. For true love to be there, you need to feel complete in yourself, not needing something from outside. True love is like the sun, shining with its own light, and offering that light to everyone.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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The notions and ideas we have about happiness can entrap us. We forget that they are just notions and ideas. Our idea of happiness may be the very thing that's preventing us from being happy. When we're caught in a belief that happiness should take a particular form, we fail to see the opportunities for joy that are right in front of us.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the author of *The Little Prince* wrote that, "Love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking outward in the same direction." But when two people suffer and look in the same direction, it is often the direction of the television! Over time, looking at each other and speaking with each other has become difficult and no longer brings joy. Disagreements have gone unresolved and tension and unhappiness have continued to grow. How can we bring love and happiness back into the relationship? First, we need to reflect on how we have contributed to this situation. Then we need to have the courage to turn off the television and take time to speak and listen to each other. As a true lover, the direction you look in is peace.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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What is the nature of joy and happiness? How can we touch true joy in every moment of our lives? How can we live in a way that brings a smile, the eyes of love, and happiness to everyone we encounter? Use your talent to find ways



to bring happiness to yourself and others—the happiness that arises from meditation is not the same as the feeling that comes from the pursuit of pleasure seeking. Meditative joy has the capacity to nourish our mindfulness, understanding, and love. Live in a way that encourages deep happiness in yourself and others. You can vow to bring joy to one person in the morning and to help relieve the suffering of one person in the afternoon. Ask yourself, “Who can I make smile this morning?” This is the art of creating happiness.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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Many of us wait until it is too late to see what really matters to us. Sensual desire can feel so overwhelming that it’s often not until later that we see the many important things that have needed our attention. Everybody makes mistakes, but you can’t keep asking people to forgive you again and again. For example, instead of just saying, “I’m sorry I shouted at you,” you can train yourself not to shout so often. Instead of a quick apology, take the time and make the commitment to practice seeing the roots of your behavior.

- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014

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Of course there is nothing new in this predicament of discovering that ideas and words cannot plumb the ultimate mystery of life, that Reality or, if you will, God cannot be comprehended by the finite mind. The only novelty is that the predicament is now social rather than individual; it is widely felt, not confined to the few. Almost every spiritual tradition recognizes that a point comes when two things must happen: man must surrender his separate-feeling “I,” and must face the fact that he cannot know, that is, define the ultimate.

- The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, by Alan Watts

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For most of us this conflict is ever gnawing within us because our lives are one long effort to resist the unknown, the real present in which we live, which is the unknown in the midst of coming into being. Living thus, we never really learn to live with it. At every moment we are cautious, hesitant, and on the defensive. And all to no avail, for life thrusts us into the unknown willy-nilly, and resistance is as futile and exasperating as trying to swim against a roaring torrent.

The art of living in this “predicament” is neither careless drifting on the one hand nor fearful clinging to the past and the known on the other. It consists in being completely sensitive to each moment, in regarding it as utterly new and unique, in having the mind open and wholly receptive.

This is not a philosophical theory but an experiment. One has to make the experiment to understand that it brings into play altogether new powers of

adaptation to life, of literally absorbing pain and insecurity. It is as hard to describe how this absorption works as to explain the beating of one's heart or the formation of genes. The "open" mind does this as most of us breathe: without being able to explain it at all. The principle of the thing is clearly something like judo, the gentle (ju) way (do) of mastering an opposing force by giving in to it.

- The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, by Alan Watts

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That there is a way of looking at life apart from all conceptions, beliefs, opinions, and theories is the remotest of all possibilities from the modern mind. If such a point of view exists, it can only be in the vacant brain of a moron. We suffer from the delusion that the entire universe is held in order by the categories of human thought, fearing that if we do not hold to them with the utmost tenacity, everything will vanish into chaos.

- The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, by Alan Watts

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But going beyond thought is not reserved to men of genius. It is open to all of us in so far as "the mystery of life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced."

- The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, by Alan Watts

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What should we make of one of Mozart's symphonies if our ears were attuned only to the music of tom-toms? We might get the rhythms, but almost nothing of the harmony and melody. In other words, we should fail to discover an essential element of the music. To be able to hear, much less write, such a symphony men had to discover new noises—the vibrations of catgut, the sound of air in a tube, and the hum of a plucked wire. They had to discover the whole world of tone, as something entirely different from pulse.

If I can only conceive pulse, I cannot appreciate tone. If I can think of painting only as a way of making colored photographs without a camera, I can see nothing but ineptitude in a Chinese landscape. We learn nothing of very much importance when it can be explained entirely in terms of past experience. If it were possible to understand all things in terms of what we know already, we could convey the sense of color to a blind man with nothing but sound, taste, touch, and smell.

- The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, by Alan Watts

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It is in vain that we can predict and control the course of events in the future, unless we know how to live in the present. It is in vain that doctors prolong life

if we spend the extra time being anxious to live still longer. It is in vain that engineers devise faster and easier means of travel if the new sights that we see are merely sorted and understood in terms of old prejudices. It is in vain that we get the power of the atom if we are just to continue in the rut of blowing people up.

- *The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety*, by Alan Watts

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In the late 1960s, a Harvard psychology professor took LSD, resigned his appointment (with some encouragement from the administration), went to India, met a guru, and returned to write a popular book called *Be Here Now*, whose central message was succinctly captured by the injunction of its title. The key to happiness, fulfillment, and enlightenment, the ex-professor argued, was to stop thinking so much about the future.

- *Stumbling on Happiness*, by Daniel Gilbert, 2006

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The second reason why we take such pains to imagine unpleasant events is that fear, worry, and anxiety have useful roles to play in our lives. We motivate employees, children, spouses, and pets to do the right thing by dramatizing the unpleasant consequences of their misbehaviors, and so too do we motivate ourselves by imagining the unpleasant tomorrows that await us should we decide to go light on the sunscreen and heavy on the éclairs. Forecasts can be “fearcasts” whose purpose is not to predict the future so much as to preclude it, and studies have shown that this strategy is often an effective way to motivate people to engage in prudent, prophylactic behavior. In short, we sometimes imagine dark futures just to scare our own pants off.

- *Stumbling on Happiness*, by Daniel Gilbert, 2006

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The surprisingly right answer is that people find it gratifying to exercise control—not just for the futures it buys them, but for the exercise itself. Being effective—changing things, influencing things, making things happen—is one of the fundamental needs with which human brains seem to be naturally endowed, and much of our behavior from infancy onward is simply an expression of this penchant for control.

- *Stumbling on Happiness*, by Daniel Gilbert, 2006

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The fact is that human beings come into the world with a passion for control, they go out of the world the same way, and research suggests that if they lose their ability to control things at any point between their entrance and their exit, they become unhappy, helpless, hopeless, and depressed. And occasionally dead.

- *Stumbling on Happiness*, by Daniel Gilbert, 2006

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There are thousands of books on happiness, and most of them start by asking what happiness really is. As readers quickly learn, this is approximately equivalent to beginning a pilgrimage by marching directly into the first available tar pit, because happiness really is nothing more or less than a word that we word makers can use to indicate anything we please. The problem is that people seem pleased to use this one word to indicate a host of different things, which has created a tremendous terminological mess on which several fine scholarly careers have been based. If one slops around in this mess long enough, one comes to see that most disagreements about what happiness really is are semantic disagreements about whether the word ought to be used to indicate this or that, rather than scientific or philosophical disagreements about the nature of this and that. What are the this and the that that happiness most often refers to? The word happiness is used to indicate at least three related things, which we might roughly call emotional happiness, moral happiness, and judgmental happiness.

- *Stumbling on Happiness*, by Daniel Gilbert, 2006

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In fact, the one group of people who seem generally immune to this illusion are the clinically depressed, who tend to estimate accurately the degree to which they can control events in most situations. These and other findings have led some researchers to conclude that the feeling of control—whether real or illusory—is one of the wellsprings of mental health.

- *Stumbling on Happiness*, by Daniel Gilbert, 2006

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Because we can feel our own emotions but must infer the emotions of others by watching their faces and listening to their voices, we often have the impression that others don't experience the same intensity of emotion that we do, which is why we expect others to recognize our feelings even when we can't recognize theirs. This sense of emotional uniqueness starts early. When kindergarteners are asked how they and others would feel in a variety of situations, they expect to experience unique emotions ("Billy would be sad but I wouldn't") and they provide unique reasons for experiencing them ("I'd tell myself that the hamster was in heaven, but Billy would just cry"). When adults make these same kinds of predictions, they do just the same thing.

- *Stumbling on Happiness*, by Daniel Gilbert, 2006

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## 29 List of Books

These books have influenced me greatly.

- The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety, by Alan Watts
- The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are, by Alan Watts, 1966
- The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, by Sogyal Rinpoche, 1992
- Flow, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990
- Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion, by Sam Harris, 2014
- How to Love, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014
- Being Peace, by Thích Nhất Hạnh, 2014
- Stumbling on Happiness, by Daniel Gilbert, 2006
- The Road Less Traveled, by M. Scott Peck
- People of the Lie, by M. Scott Peck