Spiritual Anarchist Handbook

Zen and the Art of Dealing with Idiots

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Introduction

Examine the present-day landscape of mindfulness, spirituality and adjacent topics, and you'll notice something peculiar.

The dominant majority of what's happening there is pretty much an anaesthesia-grade copium. Like, it's 8:45 AM, you're sitting in your car, and you're about to go to work (that you hate). Not going there isn't an option. That's because you and your spouse (who bores the hell out of you) are planning to have children (that you don't want), and you need enough money for a down payment on a two-story house in a suburb (that is sad and boring as fuck).

You're pretty much one awkward conversation away from going postal.

And what you do is you fire up an app on your phone, which tells you to take a deep inhale through the nose, and exhale through the mouth, and inhale through the nose, and exhale through the mouth, and do it until you're capable of surviving one more day without doing something violent to yourself or people around you.

Repeat that for two months, and you'll be rewarded with a week of a mountain lake retreat where you'll do asanas, eat vegetarian stew, hike in the forest, fuck the yoga instructor, and chant mantras.

Really, it's a whole industry of books, apps, trainings, retreats, lectures, all that aiming to help you adjust to your shitty life, so you're happy just enough to not change anything about it. Also, to help you be more convenient for the people around you. And, of course, to explain that if you're pissed off by your neighbours shouting at each other at 3 AM and by your arsehole colleague telling the same dirty sexist jokes over and over again, that's your fault because you don't emanate enough positivity and understanding.

And then there's hardcore shit. The likes of Carlos Castaneda, Alan Watts, Meister Eckhart, Josemaría Escrivá, Zen stories, Sufi teachings, just to name my personal favourites. That's the real deal: a plethora of wisdom on how to fix your life by first fixing your perception of reality. The problem with these is that the learning curve is nearly vertical. I mean, like, The Gateless Gate is stunningly beautiful, but integrating it into your daily life is the opposite of trivial. It's a real journey of discovery, very much unlike "take a deep breath through the nose and out through the mouth until you stop hating your boss."

And then there's virtually nothing in between.

Everything potent is hard to grasp. By the way, "hard to grasp" doesn't necessarily mean super cryptic. Oftentimes, it means too subtle. "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho and "Illusions" by Richard Bach are two great examples. Those are excellent books if you know what to look for. And if you don't, they're very convenient to discard as wacky fairy tales. And yes, to "know what to look for," you need prior exposure to the spiritual, so indeed, there's a chicken-and-egg problem going on here.

So, everything that's potent is hard to grasp and easy to dismiss. Whereas everything that's easily accessible for a curious outsider is a variation on the "fitter... happier... more productive... comfortable... not drinking too much..." theme and/or is an advert for a retreat in a picturesque location (sex with a yoga instructor may or may not be included, please confirm that beforehand).

For quite some time, I've been convinced this is just how it's meant to be. If you want to change your life, you must truly commit to it, and wrestling your way through something like "The Journey to Ixtlan" + "The Tales of Power" duology is your rite of passage. If you don't want to truly commit and instead are looking for

something easy, entertaining, and not challenging you in any way… Well, it means you're just wasting your time, and I'm not interested in wasting my time to help you with that.

That's why I didn't even want to write this book. It felt redundant. It felt like I could just jot down a reading list of the books I liked and be done with it. Just read those instead, they have everything you need to know, and it's explained better than I'll ever be able to.

And I wouldn't write this book if only my lovely wife weren't getting increasingly annoying with constant reminders that there are plenty of good people out there who have commitment and motivation to learn, but also have no idea where to begin and what the fuck is going on.

Full disclosure, I'm not a prophet, I'm not a scion of a hundred-generation lineage of seers, and I'm not privy to the mysteries of secret societies. I'm just a mediocre forty-year-old bloke from Amsterdam who works in FinTech, runs marathons and drinks a lot of wine. I myself have only a limited idea of what the fuck is going on, and so you have every right to dismiss my book too.

Now, let's get to the technicalities. This book is structured as a series of "lessons," each being a somewhat

self-contained rant about a particular topic or concept. If you have the luxury of being able to wrap your head around the mycelium of a two-hundred-page self-referential text in one go, that's great. If you don't, that's totally fine too, just read this book one chunk at a time.

The lessons are ordered to provide some semblance of chain learning, but they're also heavily interlinked, so you can choose your own adventure if you want.

Now, let's get going.

Lesson #1. All, Nothing, and Just One Beer

Weirdly enough, this chapter was one of the last to be written. I wrote about 75% of this book before I managed to understand where it was supposed to begin.

And so, the first lesson is about an idea that implicitly underlines everything that I've got to say. Which is why we have to cover it first, so we can set the tone right and avoid confusion further on.

The idea goes like this: **it's perfectly good to be slightly above average.**

I know this sounds underwhelming for The Great Wisdom to Open the Book With. Let me explain what I mean. A lot of people...

And look, I'm not a sociologist, so when I say, "a lot of people," I don't really know if that's a majority, or if that's a notable minority, and also how does it differ between countries and generations.

Also, it doesn't really matter. All I know and all that matters is that there's enough of those people to bump into their crap on a regular basis.

So, a lot of people out there want you to choose whether you're a farm pig or you're a Messiah.

Being a farm pig means one munches on fodder, shits, fucks other pigs, does what the farmer tells them to do, and eventually becomes a delicious mortadella. It's a way of living without any agency or self-consciousness to speak of. They just do what they're told to do, either by the other people, or by their bodily instincts, or by the definition of "normalcy" in the society around them.

In return, they get what we can call the immunity of ignorance. These people are well known for being a lost cause. Thus, nobody really bothers arguing with them and convincing them to become better. In some circumstances, you can **force** them to improve if that suits your interests. But you don't appeal to their natural strive for self-improvement, that's a waste of time.

It's like when your dishwasher is malfunctioning, you don't argue with it, and you don't try to convince it to work properly. You just get it repaired or replaced, and the same thing with the farm pig type of people.

Now, once you get a tablespoon of agency and self-consciousness, and you strive to become a slightly better version of yourself, it's only a matter of time until

you run into a certain type of people who we can call zealots.

Zealots want you to choose if you're a farm pig or a Messiah, where being a Messiah means you have to be a shining paragon of perfection. And perfect, very surprisingly, means you 100% match the criteria they pulled out of their zealotic arses. If you're not a Messiah, it means you're a fraud. You're just like all those farm pigs, except you're also delusional. You're an enemy.

Say, if you eat the cheapest junk you can find in the supermarket, that's fine, nobody cares. However, if you decide to eat slightly healthier and make a nice spaghetti carbonara from high-quality ingredients and then dare to mention it online or at a party, then some idiot will be very excited to lecture you that gluten is a poison and pork is a crime, and proper healthy food is unsalted quinoa with soy cheese.

If you don't care about any social issues whatsoever, that's okay. But if you actively support organisations fighting poverty and let others[1] deal with climate change, then a cohort of activists will find you and tell you that you're basically worse than Stalin.

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[1] See also **Lesson #3. Not My Problem**.

If you do anything spiritual, you'll regularly hear that your flavour of spirituality is all wrong, heretical, useless, and will lead you straight to hell. Also, if your flavour of spirituality has some kind of a leader or leaders, they're all horrible human beings because they're too rich, or too poor, or too secretive, or too public, or they have sex too often, or they don't have sex often enough, or they eat certain foods, or they don't eat certain foods, or whatever. And therefore, you must urgently switch to the favourite sect of the zealot you're talking to.

For crying out loud, I've been once told that Zen meditation is all bollocks, and I must drop it and switch to… Yoga, of all things.

In general, if you don't give a fuck about others' opinions, they will begrudgingly respect that. Once you open up for criticism, you'll regularly get blamed for not being open to criticism **enough.**

Besides that, a lot of farm pigs out there just want you to be a farm pig. So, your pasta carbonara is not only unhealthy, but it's also pretentious and fake posh. Just eat the microwaved deep-frozen cheeseburgers, they're the best food invented by humankind. Your so-called spirituality is unscientific bigotry and mental

sickness. Your social activism is obviously nothing more than virtue signalling.

And don't even get me started on anything related to creativity. There are ten thousand ways for people to tell you you're garbage.

You wrote a song, and it's not on a Top 20 chart? It's not a proper song, and you're not a proper songwriter.

You wrote a song, and it doesn't match their idea of a perfect song? Oh, there's so much wrong with what you wrote.

You wrote a song, it's an international hit, and it's a song they wanted to write for their entire life? Now they're jealous, that's why you're definitely a horrible piece of shit who writes songs for morons that have no taste.

Well, to be fair, not every piece of criticism means a person wants to insult you. Sometimes they're genuinely annoyed and embarrassed by your lack of skill and poor craftsmanship. Some of those are even willing to help you, and it will be very arrogant and foolish to dismiss their help.

Now, what should you do about all this wisdom?

One, you have to embrace the idea that **it's perfectly good to be slightly above average.**

Do your best. Do it today. Push yourself to do better. It's all that matters, and if the result is "mediocre" according to some made-up standards, don't let it get into your head.

Maybe you'll never be a Michelin-star chef, and that's fine. But today you can cook a yummy fish soup.

Maybe you'll never be an elite ultramarathoner, and that's fine. But today you can put on your shoes and go for a thirty-minute run.

Maybe you'll never win a Nobel prize in literature, and that's fine. But today you can write down a story you really want to share.

Maybe you'll never be a saint, and that's fine. But today you can pray. In fact, you can pray right now.

Two, you have to embrace the idea that **it's perfectly okay to be bad,** especially in the beginning or when you don't particularly care about perfection.

This will give you the fortitude to handle people telling you "***you suck at it, and thus you must stop.***" Yes, I suck at playing piano, but I started learning a month ago, and I think I'm making good progress. Or else, yes, I suck at playing piano, but I can play my favourite songs, and I don't have ambitions above that.

And this will give you the humility to appreciate the positive criticism. Like, if you're new to writing, **you want to know** that your essay is an incomprehensible mess. You don't want to shield yourself into an idea that you're an unrecognised genius and they're all jealous haters.

Three, don't lock yourself in a closet. Don't avoid sharing things that matter a lot to you merely because you're afraid that some fuckhead will roll his eyes and insult you.

You deserve so much better.

Four, when you get criticised, pull an aikido manoeuvre and let them talk. Politely ask them for opinions and practical advice.

If they suggest something interesting, that's fantastic. Listen to them carefully and don't forget to thank them. Afterwards, give it a try and see if their suggestions work for you or not.

If they suggest something, and it's clearly bullshit, that's okay. You don't have to agree, you don't have to commit, you don't even really have to listen. People love to be heard, and you want to defuse the situation more than you want to prove them wrong.

And if they struggle to give positive input… Well, then you both know they're not even bothered to pretend like they wish you well. They simply want to insult you. Politely hear out everything they want to tell you, then find a way to destroy that person or to eject them from your life.

Also, in some rare circumstances, their "practical advice" might involve joining a dodgy organisation led by a bloke with a funky title like Grand Vizier of Nibiruan Diaspora, donating all your belongings and getting raped by strangers. In this case, the optimal course of action is to extract as many names, addresses and phone numbers as you can, then hand them all over to law enforcement.

Pretty much every chapter of this book ends with some variation of the phrase "you're awesome." I know it's gimmicky, but it's also something I believe in. I'm sure you're an amazing person with great potential, even if you don't believe in yourself yet.

So, do your best, do it today, push yourself. You're awesome!

Lesson #2. The Death Zone

The Death Zone is a place where you can't stay. It's a situation to which you can't adjust. If you act as if you can, you'll die there.

This concept comes from mountaineering.

Ascending Mount Everest and other mountains in that height range is very difficult. Shocking, I know, but it really is. Besides climbing the ice-covered rocks, which is hard by itself, you also need to deal with extreme cold, you have to avoid avalanches and snowstorms, and on top of that, there's simply less air to breathe.

The strategy to deal with the latter is to be slow and methodical. First, you hike to the base camp (at about a five-kilometre altitude). That part takes a couple of weeks by itself. Once you get to the base camp, you just hang out there for some time. Ascend to the advanced camp, stay there for a few days, then return to the base camp and take rest. Ascend to the more advanced camp, stay there, return, rest, repeat.

This whole process takes weeks, and the purpose is to let the body acclimate to the low-oxygen conditions, for instance, to produce more red blood cells.

So, you gradually adjust to higher altitudes… That is, until you reach the eight-kilometre threshold. It's called "the death zone" because at such an altitude a human body can't acclimate any further. There, it just burns through the reserves and then shuts down. When it shuts down, it's very much game over as emergency helicopters can't reach that height, and every person you might have around you is too concerned with their own survival to bother about yours.

From then on, your objective is essentially to not die long enough to get to the summit and back. If you get stuck there because of the weather or whatnot, well, that's tough cookies.

The Himalayas are not the only place where you can find the death zones. Your workplace can be one. Your romantic relationship can be one too.

If your boss orders you to work yourself into a burn-out, that's a death zone.

If your significant other mentions how much nicer it would be if you were ten centimetres taller and ten years younger[1], that's a death zone.

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[1] Assuming that you're above thirty. If you're below thirty, read this sentence as "how much nicer would it be if you were ten years **older**."

Now, not all death zones are equal. Some situations are so bad that you must drop everything and get out of there immediately. Some are good enough to accomplish whatever objectives you have and then evacuate in an orderly manner. Some used to be good enough, but you didn't handle them properly, so now you need to drop everything. But all of them share a defining property: you can't adjust to a situation like that, and you can't stay there indefinitely. If you act as if you can, you will die there. Maybe your death will be figurative. Maybe not.

Death zones exist, and that makes me uneasy about the whole mindfulness-industrial complex.

I mean, if it were possible to solve any problem in life by calming down, being grateful and appreciating that people have different perspectives… Well, even then, it'd be debatable if this is the **best** way to solve any problem, but fair enough.

But that is simply not the case. There are situations in life when passive acceptance is simply the wrong technique, and instead, you must actively change your life.

If your spouse wants to be with a different person, you have a handful of strategic options to consider. Maybe you can adjust your relationship, e.g. try out polyamory. Or maybe you can adjust yourselves, e.g. finally

give up on those arty-farty aspirations and get decently paid day jobs. Or maybe you should just admit that it's not working out and then agree on how you are going to split your lives on amicable terms without unnecessary drama.

But there's one thing that definitely won't work. That's drooling over "true love will defeat all difficulties" bullshit. A day you do that is a day you make it all worse in the long run.

Likewise, if your boss wants to force you out of the company, you have to prepare for such an event. First of all, start looking for a new job already. Second of all, get your finances ready for a few months without a salary: refill your emergency fund, spend less on nonessential items, postpone the big purchases, etc. Also, if you know how to play political games, it's never a bad idea to try to force your boss out of the company instead.

But don't expect that things will sort themselves out by some kind of magic. That's because they won't. Well, maybe they will, and your boss will get sacked by a fortunate coincidence, but don't bet the house on that.

So, what should be the action plan?

One, if you're in a dead zone, you need to plan your way out of it. To execute that plan, you'll need personal energy, more on that in **Lesson #9. Personal Energy**.

Two, if you're not sure whether you're in a dead zone or not, you need to clarify that first. Ideally, you should stop the world for that, more on that in **Lesson #22. Stopping the World**.

If you don't yet know how to stop the world, that's perfectly fine too. Just find yourself a quiet place to think and ask yourself: *for how much longer can I handle this shit?* Ignore the sunk costs. Ignore all the difficulties of getting out of this situation. Focus on a singular question: *for how much longer can I handle this shit?*

If your answer is "indefinitely," then you're fine. "For a few more months" means you're not fine and need to act. "For a few more days" means you're very not fine and need to act urgently.

Oh, and there's one more thing that's really important. The thresholds for the death zones are individual and personal. If your friends or your colleagues are happy to tolerate the degree of abuse that drives you crazy, it doesn't mean you're weak and they're strong. It means you should get the hell out of there, and your friends and colleagues can waste their lives however the fuck they want.

Oh, and one last thing. Working your way out of a death zone can attract criticism from certain kinds of moralists, more on that in **Lesson #23. Moral Principles**.

When anyone is trying to shame you for taking control of your life because ***"how dare you when others have it so much worse,"*** or whatever other nonsense they invent, it's totally straightforward. Don't think. Don't doubt. Just tell them to go fuck themselves in the most commanding manner you can muster.

You'll make it through this mess. You're awesome.

Lesson #3. Not My Problem

I'm not gonna sugarcoat it. The world is big and full of shit happening on every possible level of scale and intensity. The climate is changing. Multiple wars are raging at any given moment. Children are starving. Inflation is soaring. The park next to your house is crowded with junkies. Newly released music is crap. Newly released films are crap. Your boss is driving the company into the ground. Your new hire is an incompetent snowflake. Your spouse is regularly having "sleepovers with friends." Your niece wants to study philosophy at the university.

You are small and full of awesomeness, and that's not enough. You can't solve every problem. You can't help everyone who needs help. You're not Jesus and you're not Buddha, so you've got to pick and choose...

In fact, even Jesus and Buddha would focus on those who embraced their teaching and let the rest of the world do whatever it pleases. Satan even offered Jesus to rule the entire world, and Jesus was, like, nah, thanks, I'm good. Just like you should do next time you're in a pub with friends and it's time to do shots.

Saving the entire world is the stuff of comic book superhero power fantasy legends. In reality, even if

you're a great leader with an immense amount of resources available to you, you still have to choose your battles.

That's why you have to be strategic. Pick opponents that you can defeat. Pick battlegrounds that favour your style of fighting. Pick issues where you can make a real difference, and not just spend some time fucking around.

And that's why it's perfectly fine[1] to say **_"yes, it's <u>a</u> problem, but no, it's <u>not my</u> problem."_**

It's fine if you don't jump headfirst at every hurdle you see.

It's fine if you don't help every needy human being.

Of course, you can help them if you want to, or if there are some gains to be had. You want to volunteer with troubled teenagers? That's noble. You want to join a struggling project because you smell a promotion opportunity at the end of it? That's smart. But you don't have. It's okay if you step back and let someone else deal with it and focus on something else instead.

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[1] Except for certain specific cases when problems are clearly yours. Such as your own health, when your underage children are in trouble, or when you signed a contract to consult a shitshow project, just to give a few examples.

It's fine if you politely ignore people telling you that you must fight their battles instead of your own.

It's perfectly normal to admit there's a problem, and you're not doing anything about it, without concocting intricate *"actually it's not a real problem because blah-blah-blah reasons"* denial aimed to justify your inaction.

Do what you want. You're awesome either way.

Lesson #4. The World is not Binary

Once upon a time, I made a model[1] for deriving one's personality "type" based on whether or not one has or doesn't have certain personality traits.

For that, I took two similar models that I knew pretty well as starting points. One was the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator system, and the other was the alignment system from Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.

The latter is (a part of) the extensive rulebook for role-playing games about ragtag bands of hobbits and dark elves raiding werewolf villages. The former… Well, calling it "serious psychology" would be a bit of a stretch. Nonetheless, it's widely used for analysing team dynamics and whatnot. I mean, it'd be **much less weird** to find oneself in the middle of a corporate training that's based on MBTI rather than one featuring hobbits and dark elves.

When I compared the two side by side, I noticed something very peculiar.

One of these two systems is effectively trinary. That is to say, you can be either X, Y, or Z, where:

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[1] If you're interested, **https://medium.com/@geekyfox/on-reality-2a3327c96754**.

- X means having a particular personality trait.
- Z means having a personality trait opposite to X.
- And Y is somewhere in between, i.e. you're neither strongly X nor strongly anti-X.

For example, you can define X as "I like to go to the seashore," and Z as "I like to go to the mountains," and Y as "both" / "neither" / "prefer not to answer" etc.

The other system is binary, so you must be either X or anti-X, with no grey area in between.

And if you don't know which is which, well, I will tell you right now. The MBTI is binary. AD&D alignments are trinary.

In AD&D, when you're inventing your character, you've got to choose if your character can be best described as:

- "*I hate to make people suffer,*" which is called "Good."
- "*I love to torture for funsies,*" which is the definition of "Evil," and
- "*I hate to make people suffer, but if that's the most practical way to move forward, then I guess you'll have to scream in agony while I'll be sawing off*

your left leg," which in AD&D parlance is called "Neutral."

In MBTI, you get to be an Extrovert or an Introvert, and that's it, there's no in-between option. Whether you score 54% or 91% on the extrovert/introvert spectrum doesn't matter much, you get an "I" either way.

Now, I won't pretend like I know if this was Myers' and Briggs' original intention, and I also won't pretend like I care. What I know and care about is that there are hordes of homegrown psychologists out there who are keen to fit everyone they meet into neat boxes of E/I, N/S, F/T and P/J dichotomies.

And as we're discussing enforced dichotomies, we can't skip the biggest of all: male and female.

Look, I'm very much a heterosexual cisgender man with no interest in jumping on any activism bandwagon whatsoever. And yet I declare my gender as "***prefer not to answer***" whenever this option is available. That's because my gender is not relevant for 95% of the things I'm doing.

Being an anatomical male means that:

- I don't need a bra[1] when I'm running.
- I can urinate standing.
- I have to trim my facial hair somewhat regularly.

That's it. When I'm applying for a job as a software engineer, it's irrelevant. When I'm buying plane tickets, it's irrelevant. When I'm shopping...

Well, when I'm shopping, it's kinda relevant because at 177 centimetres of height and over 85 kilos of weight, I've a rather unconventional body plan for a female. But if I wander into the female aisle and find a nice pink sweater with Billie Eilish on it, and it fits on my beer belly, I'll happily buy it, and nobody will stop me.

So, my point is: we are all very complex human beings, and we don't always fit into neat two-option boxes. Even when describing your dwarf-paladin high fantasy alter ego, you want to have more than two choices.

Pretty much **every binary opposition is prescriptive rather than descriptive**. That is to say, its purpose is not to provide an accurate description of the world, but to make you behave in a certain way. When they force you into a binary choice, **force** is the keyword.

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[1] Obviously, I don't have first-hand experience here, but I've been told that it's very unpleasant when breasts are shaking up and down during physical exercise.

You're being manipulated, and you should be conscious of both the fact of manipulation and the potential pragmatics behind it.

I mean, it's not always a bad thing. In some circumstances, it's good. For instance, any properly functioning society requires a dichotomy between legal and illegal activities. Like, breaking into people's houses and stealing things is a crime, period. There are no "***but what if they don't really need those things anyway***" grey areas, and that's good.

Other uses of the dichotomies may include some combinations of the following:

- The illusion of choice.
- Forced identity.
- Erosion of balance / Fake questions.

The illusion of choice is precisely what it says on the cover. Let's say you've got elections, and there are two candidates. One of them is liberal conservative, so he's pro-business, anti-gay, and likes dogs. The other is conservative liberal, so she's anti-gay, pro-business, and likes cats. So, you can expect fierce debates about cat people being vastly different from the dog people, and polite silence over the fact that both candidates are homophobes.

"All or nothing mentality" that we covered in **Lesson #1. All, Nothing, and Just One Beer** is a good example of such an illusory choice. When people tell you that *"you should strive to become an elite athlete, or else just stay on a sofa,"* or *"you should strive to become a Michelin-star cook, or else just stick to microwaved hotdogs,"* they virtually always mean you should stick to the sofa and microwaved hotdogs.

Forced identity is when they make you inflate your personal history (I will explain what it is in **Lesson** #11. Detachment).

So, you're not only expected to choose if you're on Team Loud / Team Quiet, or Team Lean / Team Fat, or Team Homo / Team Hetero, or Team Balls / Team Boobs, but also to commit to it. Like, if you're on Team Balls, then you must also have manly hobbies, and wear manly clothes, and have a manly haircut, and be ready to go to war and die there, and no Billie Eilish sweaters for crying out loud!

Erosion of balance is when they demand a single choice in a situation when the correct answer is **"all of that."** Should you spend smartly, or should you earn a lot? Both of those. Should you exercise or diet? Both! What's more important, theory or practice? They're

both important!!! We'll explore that further in **Lesson #12. Balance.**

Likewise, **fake questions** are when they demand a single choice between multiple answers, where one answer is **just** wrong, and all others are **very** wrong. The idea here is that you pick the "just wrong" question and then commit to it.

One fake question that the mindfulness-industrial complex loves to ask is, ***"If I don't get along with certain people, is it because of me or is it because of them?"*** When it's phrased like that, both options are wrong, but "It's my fault" at least gives some semblance of an action plan... But then you get tricked into saying it's always your fault, so you must be some kind of a saint who is all too ready to forgive others' fuckups. We'll explore this further in **Lesson #6. Some People are Morons**.

Choosing between diet and exercise regimen is akin to clapping with one hand... And Zen Buddhists are ridiculously good at dealing with fake questions, it's pretty much their main schtick. In Zen, they have this concept of "Mu", which is basically a fixed idiom for "there's no meaningful answer to your question because the question itself is flawed." So that wisdom is to be gained not from looking for the answer (which

doesn't exist anyway), but from contemplating the flaws of the question.

After you're done with this chapter, go read some koans, and keep in mind they're not just some quirky nonsense, but a powerful technique to train your brain to always question the assumptions you're making.

And, of course, don't try to fit into every binary choice they throw at you. You're too complex and too awesome for that.

Lesson #5. Make Up Your Mind

In **Lesson #4. The World is not Binary** we discussed the type of situations when a continuum of options is mistaken for a discrete set of choices, such as extroverted-introverted, masculine-feminine, theoretical-practical, and such.

In this lesson, we'll cover the opposite type of situations when a discrete set of choices is mistaken for a continuum of options.

Let's say you have two job offers. One job is better paid, but also more stressful and demanding. The other is more laidback but doesn't pay as much as the first one.

Or let's say you have two potential romantic partners, one is more attractive and fun, while the other is more reliable and trustworthy, and all three of you are too busy with other stuff in your lives to do polyamory.

What should you do?

Well, as the title of this lesson says, you should make up your mind.

If one person is so ugly and dull that you dread your nights out, and the other is so chaotic that you're tired of picking them up in the shady parts of town, and

there's no pressure against you staying single, then it's easy. Dump them both and move on.

Likewise, if you realise that one job you've been offered is so stressful it'll wreck your entire life within a year, and the other is so underpaid it'll wreck your entire life within a year, and you have the luxury to reject both and keep looking, do just that.

If it's not easy… I'm sorry to say that, but you still have to make up your mind.

Compromises are nice when you can have them. No radical decisions made, no bridges burned, everybody is somewhat happy, that feels nice.

But you can't always have them. When a compromise isn't available, and you're acting like it is, you're making a tactical mistake.

Say you have a colleague. Let's call him Clive. So, you and Clive are working on a project together, and now you're arguing about the specifics of how it should be done.

If you can work through your differences and find some middle ground, that's nice. However. This assumes both of you are looking for some middle ground, and that's not a given.

It could very well be that Clive doesn't want to hear your opinion and only wants to shove his opinion down your throat. Both of you want to do the right thing. But your idea of "the right thing" is the synthetic amalgam at the end of a thorough discussion with all options considered and no stones unturned. While Clive's idea of "the right idea" is what Clive says, period.

When you find yourself in such a situation, there are a variety of things you can do. If Clive is going to get himself in trouble, and he's aggressively rejecting your help, go to his boss, tell her that her subordinate is a bloody moron, and discuss what can be done about that. Or else just declare it as "not my problem" and let it slip.

If Clive is going to get **you** in trouble, go to **your** boss, tell her that Clive is a bloody arsehole, and plan what you are going to do about that.

If nothing is at stake worth elaborate backroom politicking, simply agree with Clive and move on.

Or else, if nothing is at stake, but Clive is fuckin' annoying, get him fired.

But, for the love of Jesus Christ and his glorious mom, don't argue with Clive. There is no compromise availa-

ble, and if you act as if there's one, you're making a fool of yourself, and you're wasting everyone's time.

Or, say, you have a job, and it's nicely paid, but the environment is borderline toxic, and this is how leadership likes it to be. What can you do there?

Well, you can ride into the sunset. Or you can admit that you enjoy being paid for eating shit cookies and stick there indefinitely. Or you can stick around eating shit cookies until you have X grands on your bank account, and ride into the sunset the next day after you have it. These are all legit, respectable options. If you pick one and then commit to it, that's perfectly cool.

But, for the sake of your own self-respect, don't invent stories about **"thin red lines I won't let them cross,"** and **"warm places safe from harm,"** and **"it all has deeper meaning."** At best, all these are effectively **"I like to eat shit cookies for money,"** except with extra emotional fluff around it.

At worst, they all have the potential of hiding a death zone.

Oh, and by the way, if you think that this chapter and the previous one somehow contradict each other, you're just missing the point. If you think about it, an idea that you must always seek a compromise, no mat-

ter the cost... It's very idealistic, and therefore it's very uncompromising.

Okay, let me recap and summarise.

Sometimes you must decide between a small number of radical alternatives. When you do, first you have to think.

Middle-ground compromise might be an option. It also might be one of the radical alternatives, except wrapped in pain and bullshit. Also, it might be unavailable altogether. The same goes for postponing the decision and for choosing one alternative while keeping options open to backtrack later.

Once you've figured out all available options, make up your mind. Choose what's best (or what's least bad), commit to it, and don't look back.

You're awesome.

Lesson #6. Some People are Morons

As we discussed in **Lesson #4. The World is not Binary**, one question that folk psychologists love to ask is, ***"If you don't get along with people, is it because of you or is it because of them?"***

When phrased like that, it's an absolutely horrible question.

First of all, it downplays the depth and the severity of the conflict you might be having at hand. It kinda implies that we're living in this hippie paradise where every man is your brother, and every woman is your sister, and every non-binary person is your non-binary sibling, and we all love each other, and nobody means you any harm. So that if you don't get along with someone, you just need to sit down, and smoke magical plants, and talk through your misunderstanding, and it will be great.

This is simply not true. We're not living in a hippie paradise, however unfortunate that is. You can have actual enemies. There might be people out there who want to fuck you up. There might also be people whom you want to fuck up because of whatever reasons you've got. It is what it is, but force-framing such a

situation as "lack of understanding" simply misses the point.

In fact, enemies are... Well, I wouldn't say they're "easier" or "simpler" to deal with, but they're more straightforward. At the end of the day, it comes down to your enemy attacking you and causing you harm because they've got something to gain from it. Then it's up to you to choose between attacking and harming them back, giving them what they want, or running away, whichever option is least bad. Intentional malice always has some kind of logic at its base.

While unintentional idiocy when people attack you solely because they're morons... Yeah, that can get much more diverse and multifaceted.

Going back to the original question. It suggests choosing between two options, and both of them are atrocious.

If you say, **"I don't along with people because <u>they're all trash,</u>"** then you get to play a victim, a coerced free spirit, a guardian of normalcy, a misunderstood genius, a defender of truth, or whatever the fuck you want. You may claim as much moral superiority as you wish, and some people around you will even buy your bullshit. But tactically, you're stuck in a "you make the first

step – no, you make the first step" standoff until people around you start to treat you as a problem.

If you say, **"I don't get along with people because <u>I'm trash,</u>"** then you don't get stuck. You always know who has to make the first step and who has to absorb all the rudeness and unfairness. **That's you.** But that comes at a cost of self-assigned stigma of being "asocial," "uncommunicative", "bad with people", "unlikable", "awkward", "weird", "rude", and so on. This can also lead to cathartic moments when you talk to sane well-mannered adults who don't require you to put constant effort into containing their crap, and you realise you're not the only problem.

There are plenty of trainers, therapists and authors out there, some of whom are not particularly smart, and some not very honest. They absolutely love these two archetypes. That's because these archetypes are very simple and very easy to cater to. It's never your fault, let me give a warm hug, let's talk about your parents. Or else, it's always your fault, you're a garbage communicator, here are seven tips on how you can improve. They don't have to untangle the specifics of your situation, and they always have sharp things to say, and they don't risk getting out of their depth, and it's all very convenient. For them, that is.

Oh, and of course, if being fucked up in one way isn't good enough for you, you can combine the two and play a saint apostle with **"I don't get along with people because they're like ignorant children, and my mission is to bring them the truth."** Meaning, you don't just call people difficult, but you hand out instructions on how to address their personality flaws.

I mean, look, if you bulk-order a thousand copies of this book to give out to every idiot in your organisation, I'll just shut up and take your money... Nevertheless, I want you to understand that this is an edgy move, and it can backfire horribly. You know, there are reasons why many saint apostles got martyred.

Although when you manage to pull it out, it can be extremely gratifying, so give it a try if you want, but you've been warned.

Anyway, going back to the original question. The proper answer is **"it depends on what you want from them."**

If a random bozo in an airport is shouting at you for no apparent reason, just tell whatever they need to hear to fuck off. Doesn't have to be polite, doesn't have to be empathetic, doesn't even have to be true. Nobody cares, you won't see this person ever again in your entire life.

Or, say, you have a cousin-in-law whom you meet twice a year at the family gatherings. You don't particularly like her, and she doesn't particularly like you either. You two just want to have a nice tidy chit-chat on the topics that neither of you finds particularly sensitive, and so you do exactly that.

Or, say, you have a colleague and you're working together on a project. You don't have to be friends, you don't have to be lovers, you only need to get along well enough to work together. If you develop a closer relationship, that's great, but it's by no means obligatory.

I mean, let's admit it: you can't become good friends with every person you meet. Likewise, you can't become lovers with every sexually attractive person you meet. This goes against the caveman instincts screaming that you must be close with every member of your little tribe, but this is how our modern post-industrial world functions.

Most of the time, adults have no problem reading the cues and maintaining a respectful and polite distance. I'm full of nonsense, you're full of yours, we're all messed up, but let's keep it to ourselves for now, okay?

Well, except that some are morons, and they demand more intimacy than the others are comfortable giving. Which can get increasingly tiresome when they also

don't offer it back, which is the topic we'll explore further in **Lesson #24. The First Symmetry**.

To be clear, this isn't, like, The Pattern for every single non-intentional conflict possible. But it applies to plenty of situations, nonetheless.

Also, *"intimacy"* here isn't limited to the *"inserting body parts into others' body parts"* variety, but a broader concept, let me give you an example.

Let's say I have a teammate. And let's say this bloke has a habit of throwing tantrums and screaming obscenities at me every time I give him a task he doesn't like or a piece of feedback that's less than flattering. So, he pretty much just dumps all his unhappiness on me without any filter. Which essentially means, he expects me to accept his emotional openness, and he also expects me to deeply care about his well-being.

And that's a lot to ask because I don't give a fuck. I'm not his bloody mom, and we're not even friends. If he dumps his shit on his loved ones, that's cringe, but also not my business. But when he screams at **me**, well, that's outright unprofessional.

Being emotionally open is intimate. So is being intuitively understood without having to explain everything. So is being accepted as you are with all your

quirks and traumas. It's a great gift when you can have it, but don't expect every random stranger to give it to you.

So, let me wrap all this up with an action plan.

One. You have to internalise that you're not "bad with people" and you're also not "good with people." You're good and bad with individuals, don't overgeneralise.

Two. If you're lonely, find like-minded people who enjoy your company. Don't offload your crap on innocent bystanders. Likewise, if you want to get laid, find people who enjoy sexing with you. Don't rape innocent bystanders.

Three. If a person is being very friendly with you (and, as we discussed in this lesson, calling you at 2 AM piss-drunk to complain about their spouse is very "friendly"), consider reciprocating. If that works for both of you, that's a win-win scenario.

However, keep in mind that certain people demand intimacy, but don't want to give it back. In other words, they want to be friends, but strictly on their own terms: you must laugh at my weird jokes because they're so funny, but I don't have to laugh at yours because they're so weird and so on. Consider if this is still appropriate for you.

If you don't want to befriend them, tell them you're uncomfortable with their behaviour. If they apologise and admit they've misread the cues, that's nice, crisis averted.

If you don't want to befriend them, and they don't want to back off, eject them from your life by whatever means necessary. If that means getting them fired or incarcerated, go for it. There's nothing to be ashamed of.

Especially when it happens online: don't hesitate, don't empathise, just block the arsehole, report them to the customer support and move on. Offline, people generally know that there's only so much they can say before you'll start hitting them in the face with a piece of rebar. Online, they're very safe behind their shiny screens, so they can go way overboard with sharing their precious opinion. However, online, it's also very easy to ignore people, and you shouldn't be ashamed of that as well.

You've got nothing to prove to them. You're too awesome for that.

Lesson #7. Willing and Able

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: I'm just an average bloke. I've been learning to control my emotions for years, but I'm still far away from total mastery.

For instance, I still reliably get pissed off when people talk about "talent" in black-and-white terms, i.e. as if talent is something that one either has or doesn't have. This is wrong on so many levels that there's a dedicated lesson specifically to address that.

I mean, of course, there's a genetic lottery aspect of talent, and it would be weird to ignore that. Take myself. I'm slightly above average when it comes to logical reasoning and pattern recognition, and that enabled me to become a competent engineer and a decent communicator (especially when writing). On the other hand, my motor skills and my pitch recognition are relatively unimpressive, so playing tennis or violin is pretty much off-limits for me.

But even the genetic lottery isn't black-and-white but a sliding scale. If little Timmy is a natural-born musical genius, and he can play Bach by the age of nine, I admit that's pretty cool. But if little Bobby can't play Bach by the age of nine, it doesn't mean he's worthless. No, Uncle George, he isn't worthless, you are worthless, go

fuck yourself with a shovel, you piece of shit! Little Bobby is musical enough to play Bach by the age of fifteen if he puts work into it.

And this brings us to the aspect of **work**. Natural affinity is only the starting point. Then it takes years of consistent effort to travel the path from "very bad, but promising" through "slightly better, but still very bad" and "halfway decent" to "excellent" and "superb."

Even if one wins a prize in the genetic lottery, they still have to learn the craft, refine their skills, figure out what works and what doesn't, and, ultimately, find their own unique voice and make their work look easy from the outside. And this applies to everybody: musicians, authors, teachers, doctors, bridge designers, pizza chefs, and everybody else. Show me twenty people who were successful in their twenties and I'll show you twenty people who worked their arses off in their teens.

Then there's the purpose aspect. Purpose is, like, what's your point? What's your goal? Why are you doing this? What do you want to give the World?

If little Timmy can play Bach on a ukulele with his nose, it's not music. It doesn't serve any musical purpose. It's a freak circus. Okay, I admit, it might serve a certain freak circus purpose, but it still isn't music.

Whereas if little Bobby picks up the same ukulele and sings the song that he wrote to express how he feels about waking up in the morning to go to bloody school, that can be naïve, and unrefined, and even cringe, but that's the real deal.

Hard work is what people often disparage, but at least understand. The purpose they often don't get at all. That's how they end up making statements that *"well, actually, by the standards of classical opera, Lana Del Rey is an awful singer"* without even realising how stupid it is.

Finally, there's the aspect of just doing stuff. Like, what's the deal with that Ed Sheeran lad? Cousin Jake can sing and play guitar much better! And that may very well be true, but Ed Sheeran gets on the stage in front of arenas with thousands of people, and Cousin Jake doesn't. And that makes all the difference.

People are lazy. And I obviously don't mean every person on this planet, but a substantial chunk of the population is bloody lazy. They don't like to be reminded about the importance of hard work.

People are arrogant. They don't like to be reminded about the importance of humility needed to go from "quite bad" to "a bit better, but still quite bad."

People are cowards. They don't like to be reminded about the importance of making decisions and of getting themselves in harm's way.

People are passive. They don't understand the concept of purpose altogether.

That is why they like the stories about the natural-born prodigies so much. It's because those stories leave plenty of margin for ***"oh, I didn't have <u>a single chance</u> to succeed like that,"*** and many find this comforting. For the same reason, they also like the stories about nepotism and blind luck.

Now, the reason why this rant is the lesson #7 is because in lesson #8, we will be discussing awareness and intent.

Awareness is the ability to see the world as it really is, and intent is the ability to set direction for your life. Both of these are very much learnable skills.

Which means gradual improvement from "quite bad" to "halfway decent" over time as you learn and practice. There's no magical way to get you from zero to full Buddhahood overnight, so don't expect that to happen, and also don't doubt yourself if you're "just not fit" to master those skills.

You are awesome, it just takes some time.

Lesson #8. Awareness and Intent

I've a bit of a love-hate attitude towards the Zen Buddhist tradition. Well, it's not really love-hate. It's more like love-cringe or love-confusion.

Some days, I'd read the Zen texts and admire them as the most profound and most beautiful wisdom available to humankind.

And some days I'd read a story about a bloke who sits on his arse in a remote monastery, meditates, munches on gratis grub, and that goes on for thirty years. Then the punchline arrives, where he jumps up and screams, ***"Aha, now I know how a fart of a fish sounds!"*** and everybody around applauds, congrats, mate, you're now enlightened.

And I'm like, for crying out loud, what the fuck does this have to do with **my** life?

I mean, I don't sit on my arse in a monastery meditating on fishes and their farts. I've a family, I've a job, I've got bills to pay, and I've got stuff to do.

And this is why I want my spirituality to be my weapon.

Not a holiday destination, when I go to a church for Christmas and Easter, and the rest of the year, my life

is indistinguishable from that of my atheist neighbour. Not an anaesthetic to soothe the pain of existence. Not a weirdo hobby to brag about at the cocktail parties. A weapon. A source of power for my everyday life.

That's why when a technique or an idea sounds like a lot of fun, but I don't understand how to integrate it into my daily life in a beneficial way, then it is what it is. Maybe I'll get back to it later, maybe I'll look for alternatives, and that's pretty much it. I won't be bashing myself for being such a brute, unable to appreciate this piece of mystic poetry, or whatnot.

It's like, if I want to eat a lasagna, and I don't know how to cook an edible one, I will either eat out or settle for a dish I know how to make. But I won't be drooling over The Ancient Mysterious Forbidden Art of Lasagna-Making, that'd be silly.

This leads us to the concept of **Intent.** The idea of intent is that you are conscious and, well, intentional with why you are doing the stuff you're doing. Intent is crucial for every aspect of your life. Why do you keep dating that person? What kind of job do you really want? Where do you actually want to live? Why are you even reading this book?

If you don't know what you want to achieve, you'll still probably achieve something. If you don't know where

you're going with your life, well, you'll definitely get somewhere eventually. But you can do better than that.

For the reasons that I'll explain before the end of this lesson, intent is especially critical when it comes to your spirituality, your mindfulness, your personal development and those aspects of your life.

You have to be very clear about why you are getting into all woo-woo shebang, and what you want from it. Oh, and, by the way, the **"I will not decide, I will let God guide my way"** option is sort of there, but it doesn't work the way you expect. God doesn't have much of an opinion, and They[1] will be happy to guide you wherever you want to go.

You want to regain control over your life, and you want your life to have meaning and purpose? You can have it.

You want a weirdo hobby, so that you can impress your buddies with stories about cryptic teachings of Zhuangzi? You can have it too.

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[1] Even though the standard stylistic convention for marking God is "He," the idea that an eternal, omnipotent God somehow has a fixed gender is preposterous.

You want to shit at random people online, calling them "sinners" and "heretics" and other mean words? Easy-peasy.

You simply want to get into those tight yoga pants of the chick[1] doing the Warrior Pose next to you? Say no more, The Lord has you covered.

Intent matters a whole lot. Angela reads a quantum chemistry textbook to learn about the subject matter. Brian reads a quantum chemistry textbook to win the bragging rights of a sophisticated chap who reads books that mere mortals can't understand. In the end, both get what they wanted: Angela knows more about quantum chemistry, and Brian is more annoying than before. But it feels an awful lot like they read completely different books.

The concept of intent is deeply intertwined with that of **Awareness.** Awareness is understanding what is happening around you and inside you.

To give you some rough idea of what you can be aware **of.** First of all, there's simple sensory and factual stuff. It's Thursday, it's raining, you're thirsty, your pants are very comfy, etc.

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[1] Or those loose yoga pants of the lad next to you, if that's your fancy.

Then, there are things that we touched upon in the previous chapters. A realisation that your job is slowly killing you. That your sister-in-law is a nice girl, but don't you ever mention climate change or Mexican food around her. That you can wear a Billie Eilish sweater no matter who you are.

And then there are many other categories of awareness we'll cover later or not at all. We just need to start somewhere, and I don't want to pull out an arsehole move, like, you must gain awareness, but I won't tell you what it is, go meditate on how a fart of a fish sounds.

By the way, I don't even like the word "awareness" here. I find it a tad pompous and clunky. I'd love to call it "mindfulness," but that word is already appropriated by... A certain group of people.

I remember going to a mindfulness seminar the other day. And a guy there said something along the lines of, *"I've been regularly meditating for weeks, and eventually I realised that I should quit my dead-end job, and that's what I did."* When the teacher heard it, I kid you not, she had the body language of an attacking cobra, like, *"No! You were not supposed to realise <u>that!</u> You must've realised that you love your job!"*

I mean, I'm totally not against the mindfulness industry. I'm sure there are many great people doing fantastic work, and I admire them a lot. However, a "you were not supposed to realise that" for me is a line in the sand, a bridge too far, and a hill on which I'll proudly die if I must.

I digress.

So, the way to gain awareness is via the practice of meditation. How the two are related is a big topic in itself that we'll explore in **Lesson #20. Description of Reality**, but in a nutshell, it goes like this.

There's reality as it is. And then there's your idea of what reality is. And the latter can get out of touch with the former. Which smells like a bummer, but it's actually normal. That's because you're a normal human being and not a cyborg with a whole AI chipset implanted into your buttocks. You simply don't have the cognitive capacity in your brain to process everything you see and hear without compressing it into compact patterns and narratives.

Actually, it's even too normal: a whole lot of people around you prefer to live in their imaginary narrative and ignore reality altogether.

So, your inner description of reality naturally tends to diverge from reality itself, and meditation is a tool to synchronise the former with the latter. If you already have a favourite meditation technique, and you understand how to align it with the right intent, just go for it, use it regularly, it will be alright. If you don't have a favourite meditation technique, consider the sitting meditation, also known as Zazen.

Zazen is pretty much the vanilla ice cream, the pepperoni pizza and the lager beer of meditation techniques. It's not necessarily the best technique for you, and you might discover something that fits you even better. But it works okay for everyone, hence it's a good place to start. Also, it's one of those things that takes fifteen minutes to explain the theory, and fifteen lifetimes to perfect the practice, but that applies to pretty much every other meditation technique as well.

The theory of Zazen goes like this.

- Place your buttocks on something soft like a pillow, or a sofa, or a thick carpet, or whatever you've got.
- Make your back straight.
- Arrange your legs into whatever pose feels intuitively comfortable: you can lotus, you can kneel, you can do whatever, nobody cares as

long as you can keep this pose for ten to twenty minutes.

- Close your eyes. If you begin to fall asleep, that's perfectly fine: get a nap, then continue. Also, if it helps, keep your eyes open and focus on an object in front of you.

- Breathe in for about five or six counts. Hold your breath for about five or six counts. Breathe out for about five or six counts. Breathe in. Hold your breath. Breathe out.

- Focus on your breath. If random shit thoughts pop up in your head, that's perfectly fine, don't fight them. Gently allow them to say whatever they want to say. Once they're done, return your focus to your breath.

- At the beginning, do this for about ten minutes. As you get more experienced, you might want to go longer and deeper, that's up to you.

The purpose of this exercise is to attain awareness that **you are not** your thoughts. Your thoughts are merely what you **do.** If you stop thinking, you don't dissolve into thin air. If you begin thinking about something completely different, you don't morph into a nine-headed forty-four-armed creature from the Aztec pantheon. You remain your old self.

As you learn to detach from your thoughts in general, you also learn to detach from your thoughts about your sexual partner and your job. And this is where the magic begins to happen.

As a conclusion of this lesson, I can't possibly stress it enough, but **your awareness massively depends on your intent.** If you meditate with the intention to sit comfortably on a nice pillow and look kawaii, your wish will be granted exactly. To develop your awareness, **you must want to** discover your true self and the true reality around you.

However, your intent also massively depends on your awareness. And that is very natural: as you get a better and better idea of what you can possibly do with your life, you adjust your intentions according to that.

As I mentioned in the previous lesson, both intent and awareness are learnable skills. Which also means it will be a gradual learning process. There's no magical way to get from zero to full Buddhahood, and no point in shaming yourself for being unable to pull that off.

You'll get there eventually. Just like you've got to the end of this long and complex chapter that I wasn't able to split into pieces.

You're awesome.

Interlude. Spiritual Anarchy

Well, since this book is called "The Spiritual Anarchist Handbook," I must explain what I mean by "spiritual anarchy," and sooner is better than later. So, here it goes. In principle, I could've put it at the very beginning, but I didn't, and that's because I wanted to set the tone first, before diving into trickier topics.

As you might've started to notice, I intend to keep this book fairly grounded, devoid of ***"...and then a Miracle happened, and Archangel Gabriel walked down from Heaven, and handed me the keys to the orange Lamborghini, and you can do the same..."*** woo-woo, and with every advice still making general sense even if you reinterpret it in terms of 100% materialistic psychology.

It's not necessarily how I learned these things, and it's not always an organic way for me to explain them. But if such reframing helps you, go for it. It's supposed to work all the same.

That said. Some sections of this book cover my personal beliefs. Those sections, such as this one, are marked as "interludes" rather than "lessons."

The difference is that when talking about something like the use of shamanic techniques to advance one's

business career, I'm speaking from practical objective evidence. I can explain why I think I'm right and why it's relevant for you. The worst-case scenario is that we can have a constructive disagreement.

Whereas when talking about something like my idea of God or the afterlife… I mean, I can share what I believe in. But then I'll be the first one to admit that this is a hodgepodge of mystical experiences and memorable synchronicities and cool ideas from various sources and logical deductions and good old wishful thinking.

I'm not interested in selling it as objective evidence. If my beliefs resonate with yours, great. If you find them inspirational, terrific. If you think it's all bullshit, I'm cool with that too.

Also. I know I might be horribly wrong. I know that I might end up bitterly regretting my current beliefs at some later point in my existence. That's the risk I'm knowingly running.

With all that out of the way, I can finally explain what the deal is with the spiritual anarchy.

Actually, it's pretty easy. It's just a handful of ideas.

Idea #1 is that ***I believe that all people are equal, and nobody is inherently better or worse than another one***.

We are all human beings. It means that every one of us is created in God's image, and each one of us is a beautiful, amazing soul with infinite potential for perfection.

Remember, you are beautiful. You are amazing. You have infinite potential.

Compared to everything that unites us, the minute differences are pretty much negligible. You read twice as many books as I did, and you grew up in a city that had a theatre? Yeah, that's cute, but compared to all the beauty and all the wisdom in this world, it's nothing.

If you're a few steps ahead of me on the road to perfection, fair enough, but it's not a reason to be proud. If anything, it's a duty.

Did you read twice as many books as I? Cool. Teach me and the other brutes what you have learned from those books. But don't boast about how much you read. It's only adorable before your eleventh birthday. Afterwards, it's just cringe.

Do you have a knack for writing? Fantastic. Get your arse on the chair and create something that matters, something that makes this world a better place. Don't just brag about how in eighth grade you read your poem to the class, and your teacher got multiple orgasms

from it. I mean, if that's all you want, that's up to you, but then I find it sad.

Of course, your responsibilities can be very rewarding, I'm not saying it must be a chore. Like, if you're very good at running a big corporation, your C-level responsibilities come with a lot of respect and a neat paycheque, sure thing. Nonetheless, it's still a duty towards the shareholders, employees and clients, rather than a privilege to do whatever crazy shit you want.

So, the point is, when someone says, *"I'm better than you,"* that's just narcissistic bullshit. The right thing to say is *"I'm better than you in this very specific niche, and I'm here to help you where I can."*

Idea #2 is that **I believe in God[1], but I don't believe in the devil.**

As I said before, I might end up bitterly regretting this belief, but it greatly simplifies the spiritual practices.

Essentially, this means that when I pray, there are just two options. Either nothing happens, or I receive a response from God.

Oh, and just to make it clear. By "I receive a response," I mean I pray to ask for help, and then things begin to

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[1] What kind of God do I believe in is a separate topic.

happen around me. Or maybe I pray to ask a question, and then I see an omen which would be completely arbitrary for a bystander but makes perfect sense in the context of the question. Or maybe I pray to ask for something I shouldn't have, and then nothing happens except for subtle signs that my request was received and denied. Stuff like that.

Oh, and by the way, if you pray and then you hear literal voices in your head... I mean, obviously, it's not impossible that God replies to you in such a direct manner, but nonetheless I advise seeing a doctor. You know, just to be on the safe side...

On the contrary, if you believe in the devil, this makes your spiritual practice a lot more complicated. That's because if you pray the wrong way, then your request can go to the devil rather than God. Then you're fucked.

To avoid such unfortunate consequences, you need a sophisticated gatekeeper complex that can determine the right way to pray, spread the truth, fight off the falsehoods, and re-educate the confused. If that sounds a lot like organised religion, well, that's what they do.

To be clear, I'm not against organised religion as a whole, I think they do a lot of good stuff and generally

make this world a better place. I'm just not interested in being a part of any particular organisation or any particular tradition.

At the end of the day, all you need to do is practice. Just pray. Just meditate. Just fast. Just take a forest bath. Just be grateful for what you've got. If you practice, you'll figure it all out.

On top of that, you can get inspiration from whichever traditions you find inspiring. They're all telling the truth in their own way, so it's fine to mix-and-match as long as you put effort into maintaining a coherent picture inside your head.

As for myself, I really like Christianity, in a mystical non-denominational[1] sense; when it comes to splitting hairs between different denominations or when it comes to social doctrines, I very quickly lose interest. I really like Zen Buddhism; other forms of Buddhism don't excite me as much. I really like (whatever is left of) pre-Christian Norse and Slavic mythologies. I don't know nearly as much about Sufism as I'd like to, but I think it's stunningly beautiful. And, last but not least, I

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[1] When I say, "non-denominational," it means I don't align with any particular organisation or tradition, including the self-titled "non-denominational" folks running megachurches in the States.

really like whatever ingredients Carlos Castaneda had chopped and sauteed to make his delicious burritos.

Finally, idea #3 is that **I believe it's not very hard to be a good person.**

We are all human beings. It means that every one of us is created in God's image, and each one of us is a beautiful, amazing soul with infinite potential for perfection.

But it also means that each of us is a fucked-up mess with infinite potential for depravity, and each of us has complete individual freedom to choose between light and darkness.

None of us is so good as to be incorruptible. None of us is so bad as to be lost. And yes, indeed, this adds a pinch of gravity to the idea that nobody is inherently better or worse than the others.

There's a nasty question dangling in the previous subsection, the question of **"you say 'just meditate', but what if someone meditates and then realises that he wants to steal cars and sell drugs to bored housewives?"**

I've got not one, not two, but three answers for you.

The first answer is disgusting. The disgusting answer is that religious people also do horrible things. And so

do agnostics. And so do atheists. Technically[1], I was born in the Soviet Union, and that's why I find the argument that ***"you just need to overthrow the religious bigotry, and then everyone will be a cuddly bunny"*** quite laughable[2].

In fact, no organisation and no ideology possess infinite ability to contain evil. They provide certain guardrails, and that's a great job, that's much more than nothing. But ultimately, a sufficiently deranged individual will always find a way to circumvent, subvert, or bypass it, and just do whatever evil shit they want.

My second answer is technical. If you meditate, or pray, or do whatever you do, and you realise you should steal cars, **keep meditating** until you get to the bottom of **why?**

I mean, of course, if stealing cars is the only way to make a decent living in your social environment, you have to get out as soon as possible, and you don't need me to tell you that. If, however, you don't have to steal cars out of desperation, but you find it fun, exciting, empowering and impressive for your pals... Then I

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[1] I was six when it disintegrated.

[2] I mean, of course, you can say that communism is a "religion." But then I can say that this round thingy on top of your shoulders is an "arse." And I'll be less wrong than you.

must say, you and your ego got some work to do, start today.

My third answer is hopeful. The hopeful answer is that if you do have a functioning moral compass that isn't impeded by the macabre zoo of social fantasies and hallucinations that we will be discussing throughout this book, that's all you need to be a good person. At least, that's what I believe in.

If you decide to walk this path of spiritual independence, then you **must** commit to both being a good person and to becoming an even better one. If you don't want people around you to tell you to be good, that's okay, but then you have to do it yourself.

Which is quite an anarchist idea, if you think about it... Well, there are different meanings of the word "anarchy." There are the likes of the "Mad Max: Fury Road" film and such. Also, there are folks who bombed high-ranking officials in the late XIX and early XX centuries. And then there are the likes of Robert E. Heinlein, Ayn Rand, and Petr Kropotkin, whose idea of anarchy is basically that if you just leave reasonable and responsible grown-ups to their own devices, they will figure it all out between themselves, without the need for a coercion apparatus to govern and micromanage them. And this is the kind of anarchy I support, not the

one with bombs or driving trucks through a post-apocalyptic desert.

I'm sorry if I disappointed you.

Lesson #9. Personal Energy

The concept of personal energy in this book is heavily inspired by the concept of personal power in "Journey to Ixtlan" by Carlos Castaneda, except I made two slight improvements.

One improvement is that I'll give you a compact definition of what I actually mean. In "Journey to Ixtlan," Don Juan is very insistent that Carlos must amass personal power, but also quite vague about what it actually is, so it just gets comical at times. And the fact that in one chapter you can gain personal power by suppressing your ego, and then ten pages later you can also gain it by eating the breast of a magical duck, that doesn't really help either.

Another improvement is that it doesn't make the physicist in me cringe. I mean, for crying out loud, you can't store power: power is a rate of change of energy over time. Energy is what you can store, not power.

So, the definition goes like this. **Your personal energy is what enables you to act**. A tad vague still, but bear with me.

Let's say you want to start a business. Then your personal energy is what enables you to start a business.

For that, you need to know the market where you want to operate, you need connections, you need some money to get going, and you also need the willpower to overcome all the hurdles. The more of it you have, the easier it will be for you to act.

If you want to get promoted, the same thing. If you want to find and marry the love of your life, the same thing. If you want to ascend to the astral plane of existence, it's still the same thing.

Once you wrap your head around this concept and learn to assess everything you do in terms of personal energy, all the stuff you've learned about personal development will click into place.

Pretty much everything you do falls into one of three categories:

1. Using your personal energy to achieve your goals.
2. Acquiring personal energy.
3. Wasting personal energy.

I admit, "pretty much everything" here might sound overambitious, but bear with me, this model stretches surprisingly well.

Also, the term "using" is a bit fuzzy too, but that's intentional. Personal energy might take a variety of

shapes and forms. Some are like money: you use it, and then it's gone. Some are like knowledge: you use it, and then you still have it. Some are like time: you use it, and it's gone, you don't use it, and it's gone anyway.

You might ask, but what about "just doing nothing"? How does such a pastime fit into such a "model"?

The answer is that it depends. High-quality rest gives you energy. Low-quality rest saps it away. Doing what you enjoy, spending time with people you like, that empowers you. Doing what you don't enjoy and spending time with people you dislike[1] makes you weaker.

Now, different people enjoy different things, so I can only give so much generic advice here. I love hiking in the forest and abhor nightclubs, but it might be the other way around for you, and that's totally fine.

That said, watching reality TV is universally bad. So is doom-scrolling on social media and posting angry comments. Alcohol and soft drugs are okayish when enjoyed responsibly and in moderation, but going overboard is universally bad.

On the other hand, getting seven to eight hours of un-interrupted sleep is universally good. If anybody tells you otherwise and, for instance, preaches the virtues

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[1] These two tend to coincide...

of waking up at 4 AM, hitting the gym at 4:45, cold showers, and caffeine-free breakfasts... Then clarify when they usually go to bed. If they say 8:30 PM, that's okay. They have a fucked up circadian rhythm, and they're hyped about it. Which is silly, but not dangerous.

If, however, they say 1:00 AM, and they don't seem to be lying... Slowly, very slowly sneak away until you get out of their field of vision. Then, run for your life. This person is crazy, and you don't know what to expect.

Now, what about the actions when you convert one form of personal energy into another? Say, buy time for money and hire an assistant to do chores for you?

The answer is, again, it depends. If you're short on time and have spare cash, and buying time for money enables you to reach your goals faster, then hiring an assistant is a gain. Otherwise, it's a waste. No generic answers here, not gonna lie, but on a case-by-case basis, it's pretty straightforward to figure out if it's a worthy exchange or not.

Also, a less obvious example: breaking the law is generally bad for your personal energy. That's because you'll eventually get caught, and being imprisoned seriously compromises your ability to act, which is what personal energy is all about.

Personal energy is deeply intertwined with intent, so much so that one doesn't exist without the other.

Personal energy without intent is not personal energy, it's just an amorphous blob of stuff. All your resources, all your knowledge, all your connections are worth fuck all if you don't use them to achieve your goals. It's only after you've decided where you want to go that this mess of stuff will become your personal energy that'll enable you to get there.

Also, your intent affects what available resources form your personal energy... Oh fuck, this is super-abstract, I'm sorry, let me cook up an example for you.

Say, Larry knows a whole lot about the anatomy of marine mammals, especially seals and dolphins. If Larry wants to do research in that area, all this vast knowledge would be the centrepiece of his personal energy. Whereas if Larry wants to be a CFO of a factory that makes toilet paper, not so much... Yeah, I know, it's one of those things that are blatantly obvious if you take time to think about it, but you usually don't.

Likewise, intent without personal energy is not intent, it's just daydreaming. I mean, if you have a dream, but you don't do shit to make your dream come true, then it's not a dream, it's just a fantasy... However painful this might sound to you, I'm sorry.

So, to wrap up this lesson, here's a bunch of tips to help you maintain your personal energy balance.

One. You need to decide on the goals. If you don't, everything gets wobbly and flaky.

Also, **"you need to decide on the goals"** doesn't mean you have to pick something and stick with it for the rest of your life on this plane of existence. This would actually be pretty stupid because it effectively means you never accomplish anything.

Adjusting your goals (and ticking off the completed ones) yearly is perfectly fine. Tweaking them quarterly is okayish. Rethinking them after an external crisis makes a lot of sense. Changing your mind every other week stretches it too far.

Two. Work your way backwards from the goals to the resources you need to how you obtain them.

Be intentional: allow things to develop naturally, appreciate when it happens, take direct control when it doesn't. Say, if you can successfully learn by doing, that's very neat. If not, admit it's not working, then learn by learning (e.g. enrol in a class or find yourself a mentor), then do by applying what you've learned.

Three. Take good care of your mental stamina and overall well-being. Sleep well, eat well, take enough

rest, hang out with good people, don't drink too much, do what you love. No matter what you want to achieve, these are at the centre of everything you do and everything you are, so prioritise them appropriately.

Four. This is where I really hope my book will be helpful. Don't dissipate your personal energy on meaningless bullshit. Don't try to impress your imaginary friends. Don't masturbate your ego. Don't try to set morons on the righteous path. If you just stop doing mindless stupid shite, you will be shocked[1] how much difference does that make.

It's gonna be great. You're awesome.

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[1] Look, I don't claim to be extremely original, so you obviously might've experienced the liberation shock before encountering my book. If so, that's bloody fantastic, let's hug.

Lesson #10. The Power of Negativity

When I'm mentoring or advising someone, it always starts with an uncomfortable and sometimes painful moment. For some, this moment gets so overwhelmingly painful that our work ends immediately, as there's simply nothing I can do for them.

Let's say... And full disclosure here, this isn't a 100% real-life story, although I pieced it together from a handful of actual situations throughout my career. But, with a modest suspension of disbelief, let's say, I've been asked to advise on improving the productivity of a department. I observe how they work, and soon enough, I notice a poorly camouflaged elephant in the room.

To be specific, I notice that every employee spends some four to six hours per week in meetings where a Designated Spreadsheet Operator will be updating some kind of a Very Important Spreadsheet, and everybody else will be yawning, fidgeting with their phones and trying their best not to die of boredom.

So, I talk to the stakeholder who asked me for advice, and I suggest a no-brainer win: let's just trim those meetings, you'll get a +15% productivity boost on saved

time alone, and perhaps up to +10% extra on fewer interruptions of the daily rhythm.

And the stakeholder goes blah-blah-blah, those meetings are absolutely off-limits because blah-blah-blah reasons. Then more blah-blah-blah, the management team expected me to introduce even more meetings that will magically improve the situation, and now they're very disappointed with me. And finally, even more blah-blah-blah because they're very proud of their shit sandwich technique and can't just express their dissatisfaction without covering it in a deep layer of fluffy bullshit.

And then I'm wondering, like, I can probably carve out some minor gains here and there across your organisation, but since that clearly isn't your top priority, then why should I even bother?

And then you're wondering, like, I thought this book was about spirituality and healing crystals and shit, why are you telling me all this stuff about office space politics? And I am going to explain that to you right now.

When you're **at the start** of your transformation journey, **your first priority shouldn't be the cool new ideas to embrace**, the cool new rituals to adopt and the cool new activities to start doing. Instead, **your first priori-**

ty must be the dumb old habits to overcome and the dumb old ideas to leave behind.

If you want to lose weight, start by eating less junk food. Once you've fixed your diet and you see the progress from that, start looking into what kind of exercise would suit you best. Until then, don't bother. If you're stuck, hire a nutritionist to consult you, but even then, don't rush into a gym before you're eating properly.

By the way, I might sound a tad preachy and aggressive here… But then I'm a slightly overweight ultramarathoner with a habit of grabbing a handful of cheeseburgers and a handful of beers after my long runs. I know your pain.

If you're overworked, start by having less work on your plate. Figure out what's least important, then learn to reject, redirect or delegate it. Once you've mastered that, start looking into various productivity tips and techniques to get better at doing the work that's actually relevant.

If you want to make a career in a corporation, start by abandoning the idea that anyone besides you cares about your success. Others have their own objectives that might align with yours in some circumstances, but it only goes that far.

If you're underpaid... Yeah, that's less straightforward, but at least consider doing less of the underpaid work. Like, I mean, if you want to make a living playing ukulele and teaching Sumerian poetry, I see an obvious problem here.

So, the point of this whole rant is that learning the new tricks is a lot of fun. There's novelty, there's early progress, there's hope, and there's no prior history to worry about.

Overcoming old habits is a lot of pain. There are reasons why you got there in the first place, and there are reasons behind the reasons, and it's turtles all the way down, and you have to accept and then untangle this whole mess.

Perhaps you have those stupid meetings because it's the only way you know how to run the company, and you're scared of losing control.

Perhaps you're eating junk food because your mom was a housewife who spent her entire life in the kitchen, and you don't want to be like her.

Perhaps you made yourself a solid reputation as a nice bloke who's always there to help and take on more work, so just quitting your job and starting anew would be easier than retraining your colleagues.

Perhaps you're socially ill-equipped to handle being thrown under the bus by your own colleagues.

Perhaps your so-called "friends" will ridicule you if you accept that "perversely well-paid" job at an export-import firm instead of barely scraping by doing "properly intellectual" work.

Being positive is nice and sweet and very convenient for people around you. Take on yet another project. Order yet another "lose weight while you sleep" potion. Go to yet another productivity-and-communication training. Introduce yet another weekly meeting that is as useless as the other five, except in this one your subordinates must sing their weekly reports while standing on their left foot.

Being negative gets you on a collision course with people's expectations, so it's very much not sweet and not nice.

And so, you have to embrace the Power of Negativity early on in your Journey of Transformation. You don't have a choice. You have to declare to yourself, to people around you, and to The Universe as a whole that you commit to the path in front of you and not going to fuck around a bit and call it a day.

Stop doing useless shit.

Stop pleasing unworthy people (including your imaginary friends and your own inflated ego).

Stop wasting your personal energy on crap that doesn't bring you closer to your goals.

Stop being so nice and so sweet and so honest.

You're awesome, I'm sure you can do it.

Or rather, you're very awesome, I'm sure you can stop doing it.

Lesson #11. Detachment

Detachment is a very tricky and sensitive topic. This is where plenty of seekers get confused and lost even before they properly start the journey.

They hear this idea that *"in order to attain enlightenment, you must detach yourself from the world."* And then they begin to make an account of all the things they can think of as their attachments. Like, I'm strongly attached to my family. To my friends. To my job and my profession. To the city where I live. To my house, where I really feel at home. To all the nice stuff that I own… And the second they think *"am I supposed to abandon all this?"* is when sirens and alarm lights go off in their head, screaming *"Danger!! Danger!! Destructive Cult Detected!!!"* and then they run away and never come back.

I mean, sure, eventually you might decide to leave it all behind and become a monk or an ascetic. But that's a very advanced stage of the spiritual journey and not where you're supposed to begin.

A good place to start is to detach yourself from your **Personal History,** which is another concept I've creatively borrowed from Carlos Castaneda.

Essentially, personal history is when your identity becomes prescriptive… Which sounds vague as fuck, let me use myself as an example.

I identify myself as an eternal luminous spirit that has been inhabiting this physical body for a few decades. This physical body happens to have certain biological features that allow me to pee standing and would earn me a label of a "cisgender male" from the people who are obsessed with assigning labels.

This is a purely **descriptive** fact, and this is the extent of my so-called "masculinity." Or at least this is what I strive for my so-called masculinity to become once I fully master the detachment from my personal history.

On the contrary, for the vast majority of this planet's population, "being a man" means not just some rather insignificant anatomic details, but so much more. It also means dressing in a particular "manly" way, so that grey and dark green are the best, light blue is on edge, and pink is totally unacceptable. It means eating "manly" foods, so grilled meat is fine, and flowery desserts are highly suspicious. It means drinking "manly" booze, which is either vodka or lager beer, depending on reasons. It means behaving in a particular "manly" way, which is often defined as aggressive and cheeky until push comes to shove, and crying for mommy's

help afterwards. It means watching "manly" films and listening to "manly" music and a metric shit ton of other **prescriptive** stuff that has absolutely nothing to do with their anatomic details.

It's a lot of work to properly follow the societal expectations, and make sure that people around you know that you're properly following the societal expectations and be informed when the expectations get updated.

And when you compound what's expected of your gender, what's expected of your ethnicity, your social standing, your education level, your place of birth, year of birth, the bands you liked when you were half your current age... Yeah, it gets ridiculous. It's like a full-time job now.

Essentially, attachment to your personal history is when people around you have very sophisticated ideas of who you are supposed to be and what you are supposed to do, and you're working hard to prove them right. It's a bottomless pit. You can put all the personal energy you've got into it, and it still won't be enough. It works the other way around as well. Once you stop wasting resources on fulfilling others' expectations, you'll have plenty more to achieve your actual goals.

Detaching from your personal history isn't so much about great skill as it is about great courage. Just stop

being defined by your past or what strangers declare to be your "past."

Just do what you want, do what you like, do what you enjoy. And when others aren't happy with that, just let them go fuck themselves with a rake, it's none of your problem.

And yes, I know, it's **much easier** said than done.

The painful thing about this whole attachment and detachment shite is that attachment is like drug addiction. It's like a toxic relationship. It's like being drunk in the middle of a snowstorm. It's like hallucinating a whole barrel of ice-cold pineapple juice while critically dehydrated in the middle of a desert.

It feels **good**.

Yes, it's also a lie, fundamentally. And yes, it's killing you. But it feels good.

Say, personal history makes you feel like you belong to a group of individuals who are similar to you in some way, and that's a very powerful feeling.

Of course, this "group of individuals" is mostly fiction made up for some political or even commercial reasons. And, I mean, let's go for the big game here. Take the concept of masculinity. Remove the rich guys sending you to a war when you're twenty. Then remove

the rich guys selling you fancy cars when you're forty-five. See how much of the concept is left.

But it doesn't matter. It's a very warm and cosy feeling of belonging to multiple larger groups, and it gets very lonely and sad when you realise that all those groups don't really exist as cohesive groups.

But this solitude is the price you have to pay.

Pretty much throughout this book, the idea is that you can do whatever you want as long as you're conscious and intentional about it. If you want to commit a crime, I think it's a terrible idea, and I don't recommend that in any shape or form. However, if you're cognisant of all the damage it can cause you and all the reasons why you want to do it, then, well, it's your decision to make.

Detachment from personal history and similar social fictions is a sort of exception here... Look, I just realised one thing that should be obvious from the context, but let me write it down to be certain.

Nothing, **absolutely nothing** in this chapter says that **you have to** behave in an asocial manner. Any, **literally any *"you have to"*** means you're now adopting the personal history of a counter-cultural punk, and that's the same shit from a different arsehole. You can comply

with any social norms you find practically useful or just entertaining, that's all perfectly fine.

But you must always be aware that all those norms are made up. Simply because if you decide to be aware, then you have to be aware of everything. You can't pick and choose, it doesn't work like that.

Now, another good place to start is to detach yourself from your feeling of **Self-Importance**.

I'll give you another personal example to explain what I'm talking about here. It's a tad silly, but bear with me.

So, with all my long-distance running, I somewhat regularly end up, well, running between villages in the Amsterdam area. And in many places, you don't get a dedicated pedestrian road, there's just one road that's shared between cars, tractors, lorries, bicycles, runners, and an occasional horse rider. Which means, when running there, you can't lose yourself in a deep meditative state. You have to keep track of your surroundings, so you don't get hit by fast-moving metal thingies. And you can imagine how extremely annoying this gets.

Then I solved the problem, and now I'm no longer annoyed by the farmers driving past me.

I solved it by realising that I'm an idiot. I solved it by realising that it's not like this road is built exclusively for me to have my deep meditations, and those pesky farmers are driving their stupid tractors to hurt my fragile feelings. It's quite the opposite: they are doing their work growing food or whatever they do on their farms, and I'm just fucking around here.

So, self-importance is when a person believes that Reality is built around them. When they have an opinion, it has to be... No, there's no "has to be." When they have an opinion, it just **is** correct. After all, they're the Princes of Reality.

When they know something, it's The Ultimate Truth, and anybody who dares to disagree is just a moron who is wasting their precious time.

When you confront them, or disappoint them, or somehow else don't meet their expectations, it's 100% your fault. Your only role is to be the supporting cast in their lives, and you're not doing it particularly well.

When things don't go as planned, it's not just a usual "shit happens" situation that needs handling. It's a Cosmic Drama because Reality itself had failed them and didn't live up to their great expectations. Well, either that or someone is to blame, and they're looking at you.

And when they're proven wrong… Oh, this is as beautiful as the birth of a star.

Look, if you demand the World to be precisely how you envisioned, everything in your life will be either confusing, disappointing, or boring. I think you're too awesome to live your life like this.

Let go of your pretence to control everything. Allow yourself to be surprised. Allow surprises to happen to you.

Let go of being offended by what wasn't meant as an attack. Accept that you're too insignificant for people to bother about your feelings.

Let go of your need always to be right. Allow yourself to be wrong. Allow yourself to learn. Allow your learning to be a transformation and not just gathering anecdotal facts.

Let the miracles happen.

Lesson #12. Balance

I always get confused by the concept of "healthy food" and what it means exactly.

I mean, obviously, some foods are poisonous, inedible or rancid. Also, some foods are edible for the general population, but you personally have some kind of an allergy or intolerance, and that's fair enough. These foods will make you sick straight away, and eating them is clearly not healthy, I can't argue here.

Aside from that, some foods are delicious when enjoyed occasionally and modestly, but eating them every day for breakfast, lunch, and dinner will lead to health issues. Like, if you try to subsist on Cabernet and chocolate cake, your own body will get unhappy pretty quickly, don't get surprised about that.

But then, if your diet is 100% kale and cucumbers, you won't last long either. I know it's a shocking thing to say, but a proper healthy menu should be diverse, well-balanced, sufficiently nutritious, moderately portioned, and not overly indulgent in either direction.

No food is so "unhealthy" as to kill you on the spot (unless it's a poison or you're allergic, then surely don't touch it).

Also, no food is so "healthy" as to sustain all your bodily needs by itself without anything else to complement it. At the end of the day, for hundreds of thousands of years, my (and perhaps also your) hunter-gatherer ancestors have been eating whatever random edible stuff they could find on African and Eurasian plains, and I see no point in changing that.

Now, some people would say that a given food isn't bad per se, but it contains "empty calories." To which I must say, it depends on your lifestyle.

If you enjoy hitting a gym, jumping into a swimming pool, or going for a long run, those calories are not "empty." On the contrary, they're quite helpful to get you through the workouts. If, however, you're living a very much inactive lifestyle that forces you to choose between undereating into avitaminosis, and overeating into obesity... Then I'd be delighted to advertise long-distance running as the panacea, at least it worked for me in my late twenties and early thirties!

So, the point I'm trying to make with this long culinary introduction is that for people who are leading an essentially healthy lifestyle that isn't too sedentary, too devoid of activity or too stressful, eating healthy isn't that much of a trouble. Don't eat too much, don't eat

too little, don't eat low-quality garbage, don't get overly indulgent on comfort food, you're gonna be fine.

Whereas, if one's overall lifestyle is fucked up, and they want to fix it solely by eating well... Look, I've got shit news for them, it's not likely to happen...

Now, the **real** point I'm trying to make with this **obscenely** long and **very much** culinary introduction is that people **absolutely love** to ignore the whole concept of balance. They **absolutely love** to pick one thing and then run a bloody ultramarathon with it.

I'm very sure that by the time this book crosses a humble mark of a thousand sales, there will already be a bunch of readers who'd go through the previous chapter and be, like, this bloke sounds legit, and he says I should starve myself to lose weight, so that's what I'm gonna do.

And I'll be, like, no! You're as stupid as the concrete slab at the foundation of my apartment complex! Except that you're twice as dumb as the piece of concrete! Don't starve yourself, hear me out first!

To lose weight, you need to eat properly, **and** to exercise, **and** to live a generally healthy lifestyle. You can't out-diet the lack of exercise. You also can't out-exercise the bad eating habits.

The same goes for personal finances. To have a healthy personal budget, you have to earn well **and** spend smartly.

If you habitually spend all your money on luxuries you can't afford, it doesn't matter if you earn ten times more, you'll still be broke. Likewise, if you're clearly underpaid, it doesn't matter how ruthlessly you cut all the little pleasures[1] from your life, you'll still be poor.

The same goes for organisations. You can't out-innovate the lack of efficiency. If your subordinates waste half of their time on doing meaningless shit, it doesn't matter if they do it using the fanciest technologies available. You can't out-optimise the lack of innovation. You can't out-motivate the lack of structured processes. You can't out-structure the total indifference.

Once you reach the diminishing returns with one aspect, that's perfectly natural. Stabilise that aspect and give more attention to the others. But don't expect that obsession about one thing, for instance, hyper-

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[1] For the record, every time I read some arsehole suggesting that *"stop buying lattes in the mornings, stop brunching out with your friends on weekends, you'll save SO MUCH MONEY!!!"* my blood begins to boil.

motivating your personnel, will somehow neutralise the disregard for everything else.

Fundamentally, this applies to all sorts of personal energy. Make sure you get enough happiness, rest, money, new knowledge, new connections, and other resources you need. And make sure you use that on goals that matter.

I admit, this is an awkward chapter to have in a book about spirituality. Typically, you'd expect a section about balance between Yin and Yang, or between Kundalini and Pranayama, or between Turquoise and Crimson, or between Sound Baths and Energy Crystals, or shit like that. But then I've been telling all along that this is a highly practical book, so you get what you get.

Also, I admit this is an awkward chapter to have in any book.

On a logical intellectual level, pretty much everybody understands the importance of balancing various things they do in life. So much so that the ideas in this chapter are too obvious and too banal to even bring them up.

But then, so many of those people don't internalise the importance of balance into their intuition and deci-

sion-making. Then they end up obsessing about the things they like to obsess about and neglecting the things they don't like to obsess about. And then, when called out, they'd say their situation is special because blah-blah-blah reasons, and not subject to normal rules. That, or they just don't understand the problem altogether.

You're awesome, I'm sure you can do better than that.

Lesson #13. Theory and Practice

There's one type of balance that is so crucial that it deserves its own chapter, and that's the balance between theory and practice.

Look, I can't possibly overemphasise it. Both theory and practice are absolutely crucial, and neglecting one in favour of the other won't do you any good.

Some people, often academically (or quasi-academically) minded, tend to believe (or at least declare) that theory is the king, and practice is trivial. Basically, you need to get the theoretical ideas right, and then the practical skills will come to you, sort of automatically. Oh, and if they don't come to you automatically, that's because you're an inept piece of shit, see **Lesson #7. Willing and Able**.

Look, I'm not gonna claim that's 100% bollocks. I'm ready to accept that in some specific areas, you only need ideas without any practical application, even though I can't think of a single example.

However, most of the time it's still bollocks.

Think of playing a musical instrument. You can learn all the musical theory in the world and be a great expert on modes and harmonies and chord progressions

and the whole shebang. However, it won't automatically make you a virtuoso player. You still have to develop all the mechanical skills required for playing whatever instrument you want to play, and more so if you want to perform in an ensemble.

Or think about survival within an organisation. Many of those books will tell you that if you have a problem, you should "just" go to your boss and talk it through. Which makes perfect sense, I'm not arguing with that. However. If your body doesn't know how to handle the cortisol rush and process the non-verbal cues of your collocutor, the conversation can become pretty miserable pretty fast.

By the way. You might run into people who insist that theory is everything and practice is trivial. Let me go on a tangent here.

There are three ways to make art. Any art: paintings, books, films, music, everything.

The first way to make art has the audience as the primary force who orders entertainment, and the artist as personnel whose job is to make the audience happy. It's a bit like, you wanna have a quiet cosy evening at home. So, you order a yummy-yet-predictable four seasons pizza, and you open a bottle of yummy-yet-predictable supermarket Chianti, and you put the new

episode of a yummy-yet-absolutely-predictable series on your telly. In this paradigm, the artist is a respected and (somewhat) rewarded craftsman. And if they push their artistic vision to the place where the audience gets bored or confused or annoyed, it means they have failed at their job.

The second way to make art has the artist as the primary force who fulfils their artistic vision, and the audience as the guests who are welcome to visit and share that vision. Yes, the presence of the audience sets the quality standards. Meaning, there's only so much sloppiness you can get away with before people will begin saying, **"I love the premise, but execution is atrocious."** It also means you can't get too ambitious (or too weird and idiosyncratic) if you don't have the craft and the resources to make it work. But, at the end of the day, the artist is the one who calls the shots, and if a member of the audience doesn't like it or doesn't get it, they're welcome to walk away and enjoy something else.

And then there's the third way to make art, which has the critic as the primary force who defines what art is good. Then the artists are mere blue-collar technicians who assemble the art to the critic's blueprints, while the audience is the herd of brutes who consume what

the wise men told them to (more on that in **Lesson #18. Philosophy is Propaganda**).

That's why I always get suspicious when a film or a book has won a ton of awards. Is it because it's genuinely good? Or is it because it was engineered to tick all the boxes on that year's award-winning checklist?

Anyway, so my point here is: when people say the right ideas are everything and the application is trivial, there are two options. Either they're idiots parroting someone else and they have no clue what they're talking about.

Or else, they're politicking themselves into a position where they get to make decisions without getting their hands dirty with practicalities or taking responsibility.

Here's how you must run your department. Here's how you must do your work. Here's how you must play the cello. Here's how you must cook lasagna. Here's how you must train for a half-marathon.

If you succeed, they'll get a sliver of credit for "guiding" you. If you fail, it's all on you. Also, if you succeed against their "guidance," you'll still get punished because blah-blah-blah reasons.

Naturally, every variety of bullshit has an equal and opposite variety of bullshit, and this one is no excep-

tion. Some people tend to believe (or at least declare) that practice is the king, and theory is either trivial or irrelevant. Basically, you need to learn a bunch of applied tricks, and the overarching ideas behind them either will come to you by osmosis or don't matter anyway.

Think again of playing a musical instrument. Sure, you can learn to press the keys or pluck the strings in a particular order, and you can get quite dexterous at that. However, if that's all you know, and you don't really understand how the music works, you'll be a severely limited player who gets totally lost when having to improvise a bit or adjust performance on the fly.

Think again of communication. Sure, you can memorise a handful of tricks to trigger sympathy in people, like mirroring and whatnot, and they'd work more often than not. However, you run into a person who knows how to pick those tricks out, and now they think you're insincere and dishonest without you even realising that.

Remember, **practice without theory is shallow**. Knowing how to do "your thing" isn't enough, you also need the big picture.

Don't just memorise a bunch of recipes and call it a day. Look into how the food "works." Research how

different ingredients interact when you cook them. Try out different cuisines.

Don't fixate on completing your tasks at work. Look into how your company functions in general. Look into the general craftsmanship in your field of work.

Don't just meditate. Think about why you are doing this.

Oh, by the way, when people insist that the experience is everything, and the ideas are irrelevant, this time there are three options. Either they're idiots parroting someone else, and they have no clue what they're talking about.

Or else, they aggressively don't give a fuck about developing their craft beyond cooking a few yummy soups, somewhat accurately playing a bunch of pop songs, or what would be an equivalent in their field.

Or else, they're superb at "learning by doing" without realising it. Some people are simply very good at figuring out the big picture by osmosis, without studying it formally. Say, they'd carefully listen to a lot of music, and from that they'd develop an intuitive understanding of music theory without ever holding a textbook on that subject in their hands.

These people are naturally dismissive of formal learning, they see it as a waste of time. But that's not necessarily how you function, so you might have to explain, politely but firmly, that you aren't as good at learning by doing, and you need to learn by learning instead.

Likewise, **theory without practice is useless**. Without the hands-on experience, it's just content.

Don't just learn about stuff. **Do stuff**.

Try things out, learn from your mistakes, figure out what works best for you.

Talk to other professionals in your field, ask them to share their secrets.

Teach your body to perform under pressure. Learn how to remain calm and observant even when you're confused, enraged, or overwhelmed.

If you struggle to learn all by yourself, find yourself a teacher, a mentor, or a study buddy, that's a perfectly reasonable thing to do.

As a matter of fact, this is also why this book is structured the way it's structured, with long and borderline philosophical rants next to "step 1, step 2, step 3" checklists. That's because I believe that concrete practical suggestions are crucially important, but so is the broader context behind those suggestions.

I'm sure you'll figure it all out. You're awesome.

Lesson #14. Validation

If you're looking for social validation, you need to do two things. You need to learn how to walk the astral plane, and you need to buy yourself a Porsche, or what would be an equivalent of a Porsche, given your level of disposable income.

If a person you're trying to get approval from isn't impressed by either your Porsche or your ability to walk the astral plane, stop trying. They're not worth the hassle. Just make them do what you want them to do.

Also, don't try to impress anyone with smart books you read, or your fancy job title, or your romantic conquests, or shit like that. It only indicates that you're cheap and lazy.

That's pretty much all I've got to say on the topic of social validation.

Lesson #15. Conformity

Remember yourself in school.

Remember your teacher saying something dumb.

Not outrageous crazy shit that climate change is caused by the reptilian conspiracy[1] or that Aleister Crowley… That Aleister Crowley is relevant to literally anything in the school curriculum. Just plain old cringey stupidity. Trees aren't alive because they don't have blood, they don't move, and they don't eat. Switzerland is the wealthiest country because they have all the banks. Stuff like that.

What did you do? What did your classmates do?

How many of you thought that since The Teacher says it, it must be correct, and whatever I heard before must be wrong?

How many of you were, like, whatever, I don't give a fuck, I'm not here to learn anything valuable anyway, I'll just parrot this crap during the exams and be done with it?

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[1] As a matter of fact, reptiles are ectotherms, and they rely on external sources of heat. That's why they naturally do better in warmer climates. Just saying.

How many of you stood up and challenged the teacher on their bullshit?

How many of you stood up to defend The Teacher from being called bullshit by those weirdos?

The topic of this lesson is that there are two opposing ways to see reality based on one's idea of interaction between the concept of Truth and the concept of Power.

One is that **Power is absolute**, and truth is something that the powerful entities can mix and match however they see fit for their needs.

The battalion of soldiers is marching into the battle as a cohesive unit because their officers made them do so, not because they all mystically agree on some cosmic woo-woo.

Your schoolteacher has authority. Therefore, everything they say is correct, and you're not supposed to doubt or question any of that.

Your head of department has authority. Therefore, their decisions are **obviously right,** and their opinions are **obviously correct**. That is, unless they get overridden by the C-level executive. Then the C-level's decisions are **obviously correct**, and those of the head of department **have been** **obviously wrong** **all along**.

The opposite way to see reality is that **Truth is absolute**, and power is what you gain by aligning with Truth and lose by straying away from it.

The aeroplane is flying because the pilots and the designers respect the laws of aerodynamics, not because the captain sufficiently "motivated" or "harassed" the machine to operate. When pilots or designers disrespect aerodynamics hard enough, aeroplanes fall to the ground and passengers burn alive.

There's the objective body of scientific knowledge, and that is the Truth. If your schoolteacher is good at conveying knowledge, that makes them a good teacher. If they don't know the material well, or they struggle to explain it, or if they make up shit, that makes them a bad teacher. And then you, as a good student, have the duty to help them get back on track.

Likewise, there's a proper way to lead people, whether it's a team, a company or an entire country. A good leader follows the Tao and keeps their ego in check, and that makes them a good leader. A bad leader abandons the Tao and allows their ego to run amok, and that makes them a bad leader. Then your duty as a good subordinate is to help them understand and address their mistakes. Or else, when they refuse, your duty is to get them replaced.

Note, when I say, *"you have the duty"*, I don't mean you must jump into the fire every time, no matter the cost. As we discussed in **Lesson #3. Not My Problem** and will explore further in **Lesson #28. Rebel is a Career Choice**, you should only do it when it makes practical sense. Nonetheless, it's your duty.

Now, at this point of the lesson, it would be handy to give a compact guide on how to separate the "power people" from the "truth people," but sadly, it's not that straightforward. Few people are so idealistic as to be **consistently** 100% "pro-truth." Likewise, few people are so nihilistic as to be **consciously** 100% "pro-power." Most would be drifting somewhere in the middle, like, I'm a strong advocate of the objective truth, it just so happens that what they say on my favourite news channel is correct literally all the time.

In addition to that, it's important to note that the same person can combine different mentalities on different scale levels. Say, one can be "pro-truth" when it comes to global politics, but "pro-power" at work. It can be hilariously ironic when the same person is freely criticising the world leaders but doesn't dare to speak up against their line manager.

Nonetheless, there's a reasonably reliable heuristic. And that is to see how easy or how hard it would be for

a given person to be proven wrong by an outsider. Ideally, you'd want to pit a subject of your inquiry against an actual person outside of the power hierarchy. Practically, such an option isn't always available, so you might have to resort to a thought experiment.

Proving a "truth-centric" person to be wrong is hard. And I mean, **hard**. They have a lot of experience, they have a lot of knowledge, and so the opponent has a lot of proving to do. But at the end of the day, these folks don't have much of an emotional stake in it. For them, being proven wrong is a natural part of the process of discovering The Truth. So, if you manage to accomplish that, they'll heartily thank you, they'll update their description of reality, and they'll move on.

Proving a "power-centric" person to be wrong is pretty trivial when you're above them in the hierarchy. Otherwise, it's a car crash in the middle of a shit show while you're ascending Annapurna wearing nothing but panties. For them, it's not just about the content, it's about an intricate picture of who is allowed to say what, and who is permitted to challenge whom. If you're outside the picture, fuck off. If you're inside the picture and not high enough, fuck yourself, then fuck off.

Now. If you happen to be a "powerful" leader and you've got the "truthful" subordinates, you should remember that those people are inherently unreliable. They won't do your bidding simply because you happen to have a fancier job title and a higher pay grade. They want to be treated as intellectual peers, and they want to be convinced.

The best thing you can do about those folks is to assemble them into your Secret Council. They have good ideas and good intentions, so give them a place to speak up and be heard. At the same time, make sure you don't get the "power-centric" parts of your hierarchy confused by all this ongoing freethinking shebang, and keep it confined. Admit that *"it's a lie, but it's a useful lie to keep the peasant troops cohesive."*

If any of them is too idealistic to accept the concept of the useful lie, or if you're too much of an idiot to propose it, the next best thing you can do is to get rid of them on reasonably good terms. Let them ride into the sunset without grudges or desire for revenge.

The worst thing you can do is do nothing. They will stab you in the back when you least expect it, and all that will be purely on you.

Symmetrically, if you happen to be a "truthful" leader and you've got the "powerful" subordinates, you should

remember that those people are inherently unreliable. They don't necessarily agree with you because you're objectively correct. They agree with you because you're the boss. If you give them the wrong order, they'll happily turn a slip-up into a shit-fest.

Establish a one-strike policy. Make sure that a single dishonest fuckup guarantees being thrown under the bus. No leniency, no "understanding the circumstances," when you're forced to choose between being despised or feared, go for the latter. On top of that, make sure you have a handful of "truthful" people in the ranks, so you know what exactly is happening on the ground.

I'm not gonna lie, this was a tough lesson to write. As you can infer from the rest of this book, I'm leaning heavily towards the "Truth is absolute" mentality. So, I had to fight my biases hard, and I've even considered making this chapter an "interlude" rather than a "lesson."

However, at the end of the day, I don't really care about what kind of person you are. What matters is that you're conscious of who you are, and you use that awareness to your benefit.

As long as you do that, you're awesome.

Lesson #16. Good Death and Bad Death

When discussing spiritual matters, we can't afford to stay away from difficult unpleasant topics, or else we risk falling into the trap of lukewarm sweetish mindfulness that I've been bitching about all along.

That's why in this chapter, we'll be discussing your ex.

I'm sorry, this is a horrible joke.

In this chapter, we'll be discussing death.

On the most fundamental level, **death is an irreversible transformation**.

There's a special case of death when your physical body ceases to function and your soul advances to whatever comes next.

But it's not the only way you can die.

Let me give you an example. When I was in school, I had my friends, and crushes, and beefs, and successes, and setbacks, and conflicts with some teachers, and good rapport with some other teachers, and all that stuff was vitally important for me. It was pretty much the centre of my life at the time.

Then I graduated. And that was it. All the glamour, and the trauma, and the fuckin' melodrama[1], it was just over[2]. The arguments with my geography and geometry teachers, and the awkward cautious talks with the girls I fancied, all that was irrevocably in the past. In fact, it was so much in the past that now I'm making up stuff to fill the gaps between the details I didn't even bother to remember.

I've stayed in touch with a handful of classmates who enrolled on the same electronics engineering department of the same university as I did, but that was it.

The secondary school pupil me died. The university student me took his place. The secondary school pupil me could've died in a "physical body ceases to function" sense a month after graduation, and for many people I knew it wouldn't make a difference, except for maybe a one-off "oh fuck!" moment.

So, yeah, there are many ways you can die. When you break up with a person you loved, when you move from one place to another, even when you do something as

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[1] Please be aware that my right to express my feelings by randomly dropping snippets of my favourite songs' lyrics out of context is protected by the International Bill of Rights of the Millennials.

[2] On a serious note, the metaphor of "life as a school, death as a graduation" is further explored in **Interlude. Life After Life.**

mundane as switching jobs, a bit of you dies, and most of the time another bit of you emerges.

When you undergo a mystical initiation, you cross a bridge that burns behind your steps, so you can't "un-cross" it and "un-initiate" yourself. The only option you get is to be a fool who knows the truth full well but pretends like he doesn't.

The same happens when you get a child. You don't get an option to revert to the solitary self. You only get to choose between being a caring and loving parent, and an arsehole who fumbles their obligations.

The same happens when you just naturally grow older, more experienced, and, hopefully, wiser, except you're walking the burning bridge very slowly and don't always notice the bits of you getting in and out of existence. But imagine running on a street into someone who knew you well when you were 2/3 of your current age. Would they even recognise you now?

I love Norse mythology. In fact, I love it so much that one of the early working titles of this very book was "Jotunheim Survival Guide". And, of many, many reasons why I love it so much, one is because it's pretty chill when it comes to one's mortality.

Odin knows he's going to die fighting in Ragnarök. Mind you, in Norse mythology, Odin isn't a full-on omniscient omnipotent capital-G God. Nonetheless, he is a very wise and knowledgeable chap, and **he really doesn't mind** bending the rules when he wants. But even then, he knows that when the whole world will fuck down into **The** Final Battle, he's going to die fighting in that battle, and that's it. You live a good life, and you die an honourable death, and that's what you get. Even if you're bloody Odin, you don't get an option to cheat yourself into some kind of immortality.

But where it gets really cool is when Odin decides to gain wisdom, so he pins himself to the World Tree Yggdrasil with a spear, and he dies. And then he hangs there pinned to the World Tree for nine days, after which he un-kills himself, and as a result of this process, he becomes that super-wise and super-knowledgeable bloke.

By the way, here I must admit that even though I love the Zen Buddhist tradition a lot too, given a choice between gaining wisdom by sitting in a monastery and chewing a weird-ass koan for many years or by hanging dead from the World Tree for about a week, I'd go for the latter no questions asked.

Anyway, so the idea here is that you don't simply accept dying as the natural course of events, but you purposefully prepare for it, you die[1] on your own terms, and you extract the most out of it.

There are multiple important ideas here, let's unpack them one by one.

The first idea is that change is natural. Note that the choice of the word is crucial here. Most of the time, you can avoid or delay the changes. That's why, strictly speaking, very few of them are "mandatory" and very few are "inevitable." Typically, you pass the milestones of "this is impractical," "this is irresponsible," and "this is goddamn stupid" safely before you hit the wall of "okay, now this is properly impossible."

Can you avoid graduating by purposefully failing the exams? Yes, but don't. Can you avoid becoming a proper parent by refusing to take care of your newborn child? Yes, but don't. Can you behave like a moody, uncompromising teenager well into your thirties or forties? Yes, but don't.

So, change in life is not mandatory, and in most cases it's not inescapable either, but it's natural in a sense

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[1] If this sounds unbearably morbid for you, feel free to replace "death" with "change." As established earlier in this lesson, those are all the same anyway.

that this is how things are meant to be, so if you embrace this idea, then reality will be on your side, and that's a highly practical thing to do.

Look... I'm just a fool who likes to waffle about ancient myths from all over the globe. I've no right nor intention to judge anyone, and I know that everyone fights their own unique demons in their own unique way... That said, I know a bunch of people who keep going to therapy for literally years, and to me, this just feels odd. I mean, like, if you have a problem, then you figure it out, then you fix it, and move on.

If it takes years to solve... I mean, of course, it can be "just" a severe complex problem that demands a lot of work. But it can also it can very well be that the solution means personal transformation, and the person in question is too attached to their old selves, more on that in **Lesson** #11. Detachment.

Alright, so the second idea is that you don't necessarily have 100% control. That's why I keep repeating "you die" even though it's creepy as fuck.

I mean, like, if you enrol in a yoga class because sweaty women in tight pants are so sexy, and then over the course of a year you become a calmer and more relaxed person, that's a change, fair enough. But so is the situ-

ation when your spouse decides to divorce you, and you're struggling over what to do next.

The third idea is that you die purposefully and on your terms. Even though you don't have full control, you still have plenty, and you utilise all of it. This might be as mundane and specific as having a clear idea of what you will do next before you resign from your job. And this might be as poetic and general as living every day as if it's your last because you don't know if it isn't.

When you do it like, that's a good death. Otherwise, not so much.

Think of it this way: there's only a limited extent to which you can preserve your "self." If you step on the path of self-improvement, in three years' time, there will be no you. There will be a different person with the same taxpayer number and similar facial features.

And I'm sure that other person will be awesome too.

Lesson #17. Death is an Advisor

Death is a very serious topic, that is why this book has not one, not two, but three chapters to cover it.

In **Lesson #16. Good Death and Bad Death** we discussed death as a metaphor for the change in life. In this one we'll discuss death in a more conventional sense of your physical body becoming a lifeless pile of flesh and your eternal soul advancing to whatever comes next. It's a short one, so we'll go straight to the action plan, and there's just one item on it.

You must accept your own mortality.

Don't see your Death as your greatest enemy. See it as your trusted advisor who is always there to remind you that you've only got that many days left on this plane of existence, and you should use them wisely.

Did you spend the whole of yesterday sitting in traffic jams and filling out meaningless forms to appease your arsehole boss? For an immortal creature, it wouldn't matter. You can waste a day, a year or a century doing some dumb shit. Doesn't make any difference when you have eternity in front of you. I mean, if you're actually immortal, then sure thing, take your time, you have it in spades.

Otherwise, learn to ask yourself, if yesterday was your last day on Earth, would you regret spending it the way you did? And if yes, what do you need to do about it? What do you have to change?

Stop doing meaningless crap. You **don't have time** for it.

Of course, some moral guardians will happily jump to an assumption that ***"live every day as if it's your last one"*** means robbery, hard drugs and wild orgies, while respectable people don't "seize the day" but behave respectably.

This tells a whole lot about those moral guardians. I mean, essentially, if the only thing that stands between you and wild orgies is a long list of what society wants from you, and then the whole pretence of this long list making any sense hinges on an illusion of your immortality... I see a problem here.

I mean, like, if you take care of your children because you love them, that's beautiful. If you go to work because you're proud of your craftsmanship and you love to help good people, that's amazing. If, however, you only take care of your children and you go to work because you're forced to, and otherwise you'd happily smoke weed all day long... Either stop being such a cynic, or stop being such a coward. You don't have much

time left here on this plane of existence. You **don't have time** for either variety of those crappy thoughts.

Your Death is right there behind your left shoulder. Look around and say "hi!" It's always there to advise on whether you're doing something that matters, or if you don't.

As for me, my personal idea of a proper last day on Earth is actually pretty boring and also quite selfish. It consists of

(a) Appreciating the beauty of the world, such as being in nature, visiting an art museum, or eating a juicy steak.
(b) Sharing whatever little wisdom I have, such as writing this book
(c) Avoiding various boring crap as much as possible.

You can go as wild or as tame as you want, as long as you're conscious and intentional about it.

Whatever you choose, you're awesome.

Interlude. Life After Life

In **Lesson #16. Good Death and Bad Death** I mentioned the metaphor of "life as a school, death as graduation." In fact, this metaphor is one of the core ideas of my entire personal belief system.

And as we're talking about personal beliefs, this section is marked as "interlude" rather than a "lesson." So, all usual disclaimers apply. I don't have first-hand experience of being dead, at least **not yet**. I might end up horribly regretting everything I believe today. And, if you think it's all bullshit, fine by me.

All that said. I believe there's an afterlife.

I believe that the afterlife is substantially richer and more exciting than this plane of existence where you and I reside now. Just like being an accomplished adult is substantially more exciting than going through puberty.

How exactly does the afterlife look like, that I don't know. Nirvana, Valhalla, Jannah, reincarnation as an angel, reincarnation as a cat, something else entirely, I'll learn it when the time comes. For now, I'm not very concerned about it.

I also believe that each of us will get there eventually, and there's generally no need to speedrun it. Which also means… Let me put it this way: once you've attained the Enlightenment and accomplished your Spiritual Mission, and you've got nothing else to do on this plane of existence, then you'll know full well if taking your life is a good idea or not. Much better than I do now anyway. Until then, taking your life is not a good idea.

One consequence of this whole concept is that it answers the millennia-old question of **why God permits evil**?

And the answer is, well, that's because They[1] don't necessarily see it as evil. Whatever horrible suffering you might experience in your life, from the point of view of the Awaken Eternal Souls with whom God usually hangs out, it's basically nothing. It's akin to being bullied by a classmate or getting a "C-" on a test. Unpleasant? Sure. Capital-E Evil? Nah.

When you keep this idea in mind, Gospels come together into a story about how God struggles to relate to how miserable human life is, so They incarnate as Je-

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[1] As I said before, even though the convention is "He," the idea that an eternal, omnipotent God somehow has a fixed gender is preposterous.

sus, and eventually learn that getting nailed to a wooden plank, and slowly dying in a horrible pain, and having no certainty over what will come next is really not fun, and that's why humans are so edgy.

Oh, by the way, if you really want to know, how come Jesus is uncertain over what will come next despite being literally God, read up on the interpretation of the Gethsemane episode and take it from there. There are nearly two thousand years' worth of Bible study, and I'm very sure I won't break any new ground.

And then the whole point of Buddhism becomes very clear too, namely that the ultimate goal is not to have top grades or to win a popularity contest, but it is to remember that you're really an Eternal Soul who got overly immersed in a role-playing game.

Also, you might have a question: **Is it okay to inflict horrible suffering on people if God doesn't see it as evil**?

In principle, yes, it's okay to inflict horrible suffering on people. However, it must be consensual, and one must be a Boddhisatva to give such consent, but also to accept it. So, if a couple of kinky Buddhas are doing crazy shit like chopping off each other's legs for funsies, that's totally fine.

In other situations, no, it's not okay to inflict horrible suffering on people.

Lesson #18. Philosophy is Propaganda

Once, I went into a session of deep meditation, and some three hours[1] later, I came back with the realisation that the Universe wants me to start producing psychedelic trance and release it under the alias *"Philosophy is Propaganda."*

I've spent about two weeks fidgeting with music production software. Then I realised that I don't have enough innate talent to make awesome tracks straight away, and I also don't have enough patience to build up my competence gradually. So, I decided to give up and stick to things I know and love, such as drinking beer, drinking wine, running at an embarrassingly slow pace, and working in FinTech.

However, the phrase "philosophy is propaganda" was too good to discard, so it stuck[2].

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[1] For the record, I was running laps in Oosterpark in East Amsterdam, where I used to live. For three hours, that is.

[2] In a quirky way, the same happened with this very chapter. It was one of the first I wrote while I was still figuring out what exactly this book would become. That's why it's a tad odd one out in terms of tone and explored ideas. But also too good to discard, so it stuck.

Actually, it took me almost two decades to figure it out. Back when I was in my late teens and early twenties, I was pretty much a pure techie who knew a fair amount about coding and physics, but very little about philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, and the like, and I was quite embarrassed about my ignorance. Over the years, I've been haphazardly filling the gaps in my education by reading books, listening to lectures, and hanging out with academic historians and philosophers, both online and offline.

And the more I did that, the more often I'd stop in my tracks and fold my hands and raise my eyes to the sky and say, ***"Dear Lord. I just want you to know that I'm so fuckin' happy to be a techie with a proper, well-paid job. Thank you so much for carefully guiding me to where I am in life."***

First of all, let me clarify what exactly I mean when I say "philosophy." Philosophy is a human activity that matches three criteria:

- It's a gated community.
- They claim knowledge of a wide range of topics.
- They use some sort of metaphysical reasoning to justify their claims.

All three are mandatory. An open community without gatekeepers is not philosophy, that's an online forum or a functional equivalent of one: everyone is allowed to join, everyone may have an opinion, and nobody's opinion is inherently better because of a person's credentials.

A gated community of niche specialists is not philosophy, that's science, or something similar like law, medicine, engineering, etc.

If you try to use Schrödinger's equation to design a room-temperature superconductor, that makes a lot of sense, and you're pretty much guaranteed a Nobel prize if you succeed. Whereas, if you try to use Schrödinger's equation to derive the "proper" sex life[1] for modern-day Europeans, you'd be laughed out of the physics department.

And a gated community with a wide range of claims that doesn't rely on metaphysics can be a coercive dictatorship or a charismatic cult or something else, but it's also not philosophy.

Essentially, if you come across something akin to *"blah blah blah, **consider post-neo-Platonic interpretation of***

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[1] There's an obscure joke buried in this paragraph: by the standards of 1940s physics nerds, the sex life of Erwin Schrödinger was pretty wild.

Adorno as a quasi-feminist emanation, *blah blah blah,* **it would be ridiculous to deny the epistemological decoherence of Kaiserschmarrn-Topfenstrudel debate,** *blah blah blah,* **it's totally fine to fuck thirteen-year-olds,"** yeah, that's philosophy.

Now, the reason why I'm talking shit about philosophy in a book that's mainly about mindfulness, spirituality and personal development is because I've lived in the cultural West[1] for my entire life, and academic-style philosophy is a big fat cornerstone and reference point in Western culture. Pretty much any Westerner who wrote or spoke on these topics over the last century had metaphysical treatises as the foundational blueprint of "how things are meant to be done." You can bend the rules, you can break the rules, you can subvert the rules, but you can't forget that the rules exist.

That's why a lot of things you'll find in mindfulness/spirituality/personal development categories are really philosophy, just slightly diluted and somewhat disguised.

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[1] Not to be confused with the political West. An Eastern European country can flirt with anti-US/anti-EU/anti-NATO sentiment for as long as they want, but culturally they'll remain vodka-flavoured West no matter what. Sort of like how a teenager from an affluent suburb can go to hardcore punk concerts every Saturday night…

Now that I have defined what I mean by philosophy, I can explain two problems that I have with it, one more fundamental and the other more practical.

The fundamental problem comes from my belief that everything you need to know in life you can figure out by yourself...

Oh, and when I say, "everything you need to know," I mean stuff that can have a tangible effect on your life. Nominalism and realism of the universals is a very fun intellectual puzzle to grapple with, especially in good company and with a satchel of fine weed to pass around. However, it won't get you laid, it won't buy you a Porsche, it won't earn you an entry to Shambhala, and it won't help you to dart past the Eagle.

Anyway, so I believe that you can figure out everything worth knowing by yourself, given enough time, effort, curiosity to look and courage to see things that don't fit your prior preconceptions.

Books[1], lectures, and all that jazz, can at best be convenient time-saving shortcuts. Which is nothing to frown upon. Your life is short. If you can save months or years by internalising others' ideas instead of developing them first-hand, that's great. But that's about it,

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[1] Including the one you're reading now, obviously.

others' thoughts aren't strictly necessary, every piece of wisdom you can learn from them you can also learn from processing your own life experiences.

That's why I feel very tense when a self-appointed caste of "professional wise people" declares a monopoly on wisdom. When they proclaim that you must study for many years, and read thousands of pages of incomprehensible prose, and be accepted by the other "professional wise people" until you're permitted to have your own opinion.

And until then, **you must shut the fuck up and listen to what the wise people say, you dumb, dirty peasant.**

Which is precisely what I mean by "propaganda." Propaganda is when you're expected to wholesale accept whatever the central authority tells you, and you're very much not welcome to engage in any kind of dialogue or criticism.

I mean, even if those philosophers were all-wise prophets in ivory towers, I'd still rebel against the idea that they hold a monopoly on understanding how the world functions, and I'll proudly die on this hill if I must.

But they're also not all-wise prophets in ivory towers, and that's where my second issue with philosophy comes from, the one of a more practical kind.

First of all, philosophers are humans, and humans make honest mistakes. This very book probably contains quite a bunch of those, and I'm embarrassed about those upfront, but I've been honestly doing my best.

Second of all, philosophers are humans operating in a society, and because of that...

Well, let's just say that delivering objective truth in a most concise way isn't necessarily their first and foremost priority.

They might have their own agendas and their own reasons to tell you a "heavily biased" truth, or outright lies, or complete gibberish. Maybe to please their benefactors, maybe to pledge loyalty to their academic environment, maybe something else, I don't care, it doesn't really matter.

What really matters is that they might be being dishonest, and you must be cognisant of that.

Now, I'm not saying you should discard all philosophy and all the bookish knowledge in general like some kind of a noble savage. A lot of very smart people dis-

covered a lot of very smart things over the centuries, and it would be foolish not to tap into this reservoir of knowledge.

I'm saying you should read critically and don't take what you see on a page as The Words Of God, but rather as a conversation with a smart yet fallible human being[1].

The mnemonic rule I use is *"it's better to be an idiot than a slave."*

If I come across an idea that I can't accept, then I just don't accept it. Maybe I see logical flaws. Maybe the author comes across as a bloody arsehole. Maybe the idea doesn't chime with my personal experiences.

Maybe the language is so dense, and the prerequisite context is so thick, that I struggle to get the slightest clue of what the actual fuck is going on here.

Maybe I'll get back to it a few years later and have an "aha, now it makes perfect sense" moment, but until then I just don't accept it.

If it makes me an idiot, that's fine, I can live with it. It's much less bad than the ***"I don't understand it,"***

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[1] Look, even the Holy Bible comes with an asterisk that it was written by God-inspired humans, but it's not what God said verbatim.

therefore, **_"it must be written by people much smarter than me,"_** therefore, **_"I must accept it wholesale"_** credo quia absurdum line of thinking, which enables philosophy to act as, well, propaganda.

Look, you're not just awesome. You're so awesome that you can treat the likes of Nietzsche or Sartre like your drinking pals. Especially when they're shitfaced and are mumbling some incoherent nonsense and clearly need help to get home.

Lesson #19. Telling Lies

I find it noteworthy that in The Bible there's no commandment that says you must not lie. Sure, there's one that says you must not bear false witness. But that one is open for interpretation, and its meaning slightly differs across the denominations.

In certain circumstances, you're explicitly obliged to tell the truth, such as when you're in the court of law or under an oath. Then you must not bear false witness, full stop, no space for interpretation, everybody agrees on that.

Also, in certain circumstances, you're allowed or obliged to keep secrets. Then you can say that you "can't confirm nor deny," and that's widely accepted as a proper thing to do.

Outside of those boundaries, it depends. Some denominations would say, don't lie under oath, and otherwise it's up to you.

Some would say, you're obliged to tell the truth all the time throughout your entire life, and any kind of lying is a sin. Some would take a step further and say that keeping your mouth shut and passively agreeing to

someone else's lie is a lie in itself, and therefore a sin too.

And some would be, like, mate, strive to tell the truth whenever possible, but when doing so is highly impractical, just bullshit your way through, The Lord is cool with that.

The latter is also how I function, and that's the standpoint from which this lesson is told. If that's not what you believe in, that's totally fine by me. However, you might want to skip this chapter or read it as less of a lesson and more as an insight into the lives of people who are less moral and/or less pragmatic than you. That's up to you.

Now, wildly overgeneralising, there are three categories of reasons why you might want to conceal the truth.

Category one is when **people want to know the truth, but you don't want to tell it**.

This one is relatively straightforward. You did something nasty and want to hide it. Or, your friend did something nasty and you don't want to spill the beans. Or, decisions were made behind closed doors and are now shared on a need-to-know basis. Or, there's some kind of conspiracy going on. Or anything like that.

I don't have any groundbreaking insights to offer here. If you have to do it, then it is what it is. Just be careful with all the practicalities: manage the risks of getting exposed, keep track of who heard which version of the truth, consider that people might be talking to each other too, all that stuff.

Category two is when **people know the truth, but they don't want you to tell it.**

This can be a mirror version of the first category when people do something shady and don't want to be exposed. Also, this can be a situation when people do something nasty in the open and don't want to be called out. Dynamic is largely the same both ways: if you openly speak your mind, someone can get unhappy and retaliate.

This kind of situations is why you should refrain from adopting the "always speak your mind no matter what" kind of mindset unless you've got proper awareness and willpower to back it up.

I mean, look, if you've got incorruptible clarity over what is right, and unbending will to hold your ground, and you really want to pull out a John the Baptist and preach what must be said until the bitter end when they chop your head off… That's your call to make, I'll respect you both ways.

If, however, you don't have incorruptible clarity and unbending will, you can end up very confused. Let me concoct a few examples to explain how and why it happens.

Say, you have an unpopular opinion. Your math professor is a stupid arsehole. The company where you work is a shit show on the brink of collapse. You love going to church, but your entire family are hardcore atheists. You hate going to church, but your entire family are hardcore religionists. Your spouse is an abusive crybaby. Stuff like that.

You can speak your mind. But that'll almost certainly lead to confrontation, and there might be simply nothing to gain from such confrontation, except wasting a lot of time and getting a reputation of a fool, bigot, heretic, arrogant piece of shit, etc.

Or you can keep it to yourself and tell them whatever bullshit they want to hear, and then work the situation behind their backs. But that makes you a dirty liar.

So, you have two options, and both are bad. And that's when you have to face the temptation.

There's a simple way to resolve this tension, and it's always available to you. It's to concede. To comply. To

"admit" that you were wrong all along, and to accept what people tell you as truth.

If you believe in it, it's not a lie anymore, right?

It can be such a sad sight when a person retains this moralistic zeal to tell the truth and speak their mind, but then their description of reality is warped so badly that all the "truth" they speak is utter nonsense...

Category three is when **people don't want to know the truth.**

This is where you confront people's description of reality, and this is how you get into hilariously fierce fights over petty issues.

You and your boss disagree over how to run a multi-million-dollar project? This is gonna be a tough fight, but it's winnable if you play it right.

Aunt Mary thinks cow milk is a poison because of some random article she read on the Internet? Yeah, forget about it, it's hopeless.

Look. Changing **your own** description of reality **from the inside** is not easy, it needs time, proper intent, and consistent effort.

Changing **someone else's** description of reality **from the outside** against their will is... Well, let's just say

that dropping snarky remarks over the dinner table is totally inefficient. And annoying.

So, the rule of thumb… Or should I say "the rules of thumbs" because it's multiple rules?

Anyway, so, everybody likes to hear the pretty truth. The project is ahead of schedule and below budget. You loved Aunt Mary's favourite book. Uncle Mark was in the au pair's bedroom to fix the furniture, and they were both half-naked because it was a very warm day.

When it comes to the ugly truth, nobody really likes… Well, a better word choice here would be that nobody **enjoys** hearing the ugly truth. That's what makes it ugly in the first place.

However, different people process it differently. Some might get sad, angry, disappointed, furious, and so on, but they won't deny what they heard. Like, okay, this is very unfortunate, but let's accept it as a fact of our shared reality and decide what to do next. While some will go into denial. Like, if you just un-tell what you just told, and if we all pretend that we didn't hear it, that would be best for everybody.

So, the rule of thumb is that when a person wants to hear the ugly truth, the default thing for you to do is to tell them the ugly truth. Unless you've got sound prac-

tical reasons to conceal it, then conceal it, manage the risks of getting exposed, all that stuff.

Whereas, when a person strongly prefers to hear some convenient bullshit, the default thing for you to do is to tell them some convenient bullshit.

It can be disgusting, but it's not very hard. First, figure out what they want to hear. Second, frame it in a way that gives you plausible deniability, but doesn't come across as dissent. ***"We have no strong evidence that this project is gonna be a car crash,"*** and so on. Third, say it out loud. Finally, wash your hands, done.

Of course, you can speak the unwanted truth if there are practical gains to be reaped and they outweigh the practical dangers involved.

Do you think you can convince your boss? Go ahead and try.

Do you think you can win supporters by having a debate in the open? That's plausible.

You caught wind of an ongoing conspiracy, and you'd be happy to stay quiet for a modest reward? Risky, but playable.

It's a big fuckin' deal, and innocent people will suffer if you don't bring your message across, and just you can't allow it to slip? Do what you can, but remember that

working the situation behind the scenes might be a viable option.

You want to take the last stand and die on that hill simply because you're sick and tired of this whole bloody circus? Revisit **Lesson #2. The Death Zone,** but fair enough.

You want to be The Moral Crusader Martyr, so your imaginary friends are proud of you? Revisit **Lesson #26. The Imaginary Friends** and **Lesson #23. Moral Principles**.

Now, the last, but definitely not the least thing to say on this topic is that it all works both ways.

If you don't want to hear the ugly truth, people around you will happily keep you in the dark or feed you pretty bullshit. If you don't prove you're reliable and worthy to be let in on their secrets, they'll cautiously keep you out, just to be on the safe side.

Never assume people to be honest and open. If you want them to be honest and open **with you,** make it happen. Otherwise, just leave them alone.

I know there's a lot to unpack in this chapter. But I also know you're awesome, so I'm sure you'll figure it out.

Interlude. Kindness

The previous chapter touches on a topic that sits right on the fence between practical advice and personal beliefs, so I'll mark this rant as an "interlude" just to be on the safe side.

So, here it goes. Every time I read some spiritual / self-help book or article that says **"be kind to people,"** I cringe and instinctively begin to look around for a window, so I can throw this book away immediately.

I mean, "be kind to people" is not a wrong idea per se, but when phrased like that, it inevitably becomes a piece of feel-good non-confrontational passive-aggressive lukewarm bullshit.

And to be very specific about the meaning of the words, when I say **"be kind,"** it means **doing** nice things that you're otherwise **not obliged** to do.

When being **"kind"** means feeling very warm about people but doesn't inform any of one's actions whatsoever… Yeah, that's so cute and so sweet, I feel like I'm going to puke.

Also, doing things you've voluntarily agreed to do, like paying rent or going to work, that doesn't count as

kindness, it's just honouring the contract. The same goes for not mugging random strangers on the street.

So, coming back to finding the right expressions, the right way to phrase that idea is, I believe, **be kind to people *who appreciate your kindness.***

When a person asks you to be kind but expects it to be firmly on their own terms, they're not asking for kindness. They're asking for compliance.

"I would love it if you gave me a birthday present", asks for kindness. *"I would love it if you gave me a birthday present, and here's my Amazon wishlist"* doesn't.

"I would love to hear your opinion on how we should proceed with this project", asks for kindness. *"I would love to hear your opinion, and if it doesn't 100% align with what I have in mind already, I'll laugh you out of the meeting room"* doesn't.

"You should respect the personal differences between you and him," sort of asks for kindness, but is scratching the fence already. *"You should respect the personal differences between you and him, and don't you bloody dare to challenge any of the hundred-fifty gigatons of bullshit in his head"* jumps over the fence and into the bottomless pit.

Also, when a person simply wants to be left alone, and you're forcing your kindness on them regardless, that's not kindness, that's power play.

Don't get me wrong, it can be a perfectly well-intentioned power play. Like when you intervene to stop your teenage nephew from taking drugs, or your boss from driving the company into a nosedive. But even then, let's be honest, you're not doing it out of pure kindness and altruism, you're also protecting your own interests here in some shape or form.

It can also be less well-intentioned, such as when you want to gain influence or when you imply that your un-requested help must be reciprocated sometime in the future.

Worst is when you force your wisdom on someone who didn't ask for it. Even the bloody Jesus Christ only preached to those who wanted to listen. If you want to venture further, you're not holier than Jesus, you're a bloody propagandist, and that's despicable.

By the way, with this book I'm effectively sharing with you what little wisdom I have... But I also want it to be consensual. That's why if you don't like it, you can throw my little silly book out of the window, I'm totally cool with that.

Also, an earlier draft of this chapter said, "be kind to people **who ask** for your kindness," but that's unnecessarily restrictive. At the end of the day, when a person didn't explicitly ask for it, but you do something nice for them anyway, and they love it, those can be the warmest moments of your entire life. Don't let the strict logic rob you of those.

So, to reiterate, be kind to those who appreciate your kindness. Don't bother to be kind to those who don't.

Lesson #20. Description of Reality

I've got an exercise for you. Go to a park. Take a seat on a bench. Look at a tree in front of you. Just keep looking at the tree.

Now, actually close the book and go to the park. Stop reading this chapter until you have finished the exercise.

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Alright, welcome back. Now, the question is: for how long have you been able to see the tree?

For obvious reasons, I don't know how experienced you are at meditation, and I also don't know if you're telling the truth or lying.

That said. If you don't have much meditative experience, and you actually have done the exercise, and you managed to get anywhere above five minutes, I'm very proud of you, you clearly have a knack for this. Even three or four minutes is quite impressive.

Most (unprepared, that is) people won't last that long. They'd see the tree for a bit. Then they'd notice a bird

sitting on a branch, and then they'll be looking at the bird, and they will see the bird, and they won't see the tree.

Or they'd see the tree for a bit. Then they'd notice a cloud floating behind the tree, and they'll be looking at a cloud, and they will see the cloud, and they won't see the tree.

Or they'd see the tree for a bit. Then they'd notice a junkie sleeping next to it, and they'll be thinking, oh, it should be so much fun to be a hobo and get plastered first thing in the morning and not go to my bloody work. In no time, they'll be seeing the rows of desks separating their workplace from the nearest window, and they won't see the tree.

Or they'd see the tree for a bit. Then they'd notice an aeroplane flying by, and they'll be thinking about holidays, tropical island, white sand beach, sunset over the ocean and a few Cuba Libres too many. In no time, they'll be seeing scantily dressed dancers of their favourite gender, and they won't see the tree.

Or they'd see the tree for a bit. Then they'd begin to wonder what subspecies of tree it belongs to, and who planted it here, and how big it can grow. In no time, they'll be seeing a page from the dendrology encyclopaedia, and they won't see the tree.

Or they'd see the tree for some twenty seconds, and then they'll be, like, fuck this shit, this exercise is dumb, this book is garbage, I'm going home to study ones from The Official List of Very Respectable Self-Development Books instead. Obviously, they won't see the tree.

So, to explain how all this works, let me introduce the concept of Description of Reality.

The description of reality is the story about the reality around you that you keep telling yourself (almost) every waking moment of your life.

It's a bit like when you go to a modern art museum, and your Aunt Jill tags along, and you come across this massive surrealistic picture with a lot of naked people that spans an entire wall, and it's actually very impressive. And then Aunt Jill starts talking about a true crime show she once saw, and it was about stealing artworks, and the old hen just can't stop clucking, and you're agonising over the right way to phrase ***"dear auntie, can you <u>please</u> shut the fuck up and just watch the paintings?"***

Processing the entirety of sensory information available to you 100% of the time is very energy-expensive and therefore unnatural. That's why your brain saves

itself from overwork by compressing it into compact patterns and narratives.

That's why it was hard to maintain attention on the tree. You look at the tree and you see that's a tree, it's green, it's about four stories high, it's not a spruce, it's not a willow. If you're a visual artist or a botanist, you might start looking into how it branches and how it bends when the wind blows, and so on.

But for the general population, it's a tree, it's green, it's not a spruce, and that's it. That's all there is to know about this tree. If you keep staring at it, your brain gets confused about what else to do here, and your brain doesn't like to be confused even more than it doesn't like to be overworked. So, it begins scrambling for something else to do, whether to observe, or to listen to, or to think about, and in no time, your attention is entirely elsewhere.

So, there's reality around you and there's the description of reality inside your head, and these are interacting but separate entities. And, to make it clear, there's nothing inherently wrong with that. This is how your body functions. You drink, you sleep, you fart, and you make up generalisations.

But then it gets tricky when you realise there's a feedback loop. Your idea of reality is influenced by your

perception, but your perception is, in turn, also influenced by your idea of reality.

Ehm… This sounds very pretentious, let me rephrase with simpler words. What you see affects what you think is around you, obviously. But then, what you think is around you affects what you're looking at, and that in turn affects what you see.

Say, you think there's nothing interesting about trees. But then you never stop in your tracks to appreciate the intricate beauty of the tree in front of you. But that's why you never **see** this intricate beauty, and that reinforces your belief that trees are boring and there's nothing interesting about them.

Or, say, you think that food is just fuel to give enough calories. Then you'd be leaning towards a few simple recipes with the cheapest ingredients, so you'll never eat flavourful food, and that would reinforce your belief that food is just fuel.

In fact, here's a technique for you to integrate into your daily life, and it has zero hurdles to enter. No need to eat magic mushrooms, no need to run ultra-marathons, no need to spend decades in remote monasteries or get initiated into secret societies.

Just be more conscious and aware of the events of your daily life.

Don't simply autopilot between your home and your office, take your time to appreciate what you see. Don't merely eat "meat, pork, not spicy, with some starchy crap," but appreciate the subtleties of taste, smell and texture. Don't just read the book to get dragged by the plot from Point A to Point Z, but appreciate the language, the character development and the underlying ideas.

If that will lead to you taking other routes, and cooking other dishes, and reading other books, that's perfectly fine, it means you're making progress.

However, at the end of the day, even though the appreciation for gastronomy and flora will make your life richer and more exciting, the lack of those is unlikely to fuck you up big time.

But believing that all your colleagues are kind and sweet people can get you there easily. I'm not making this shit up, I've seen people who were locked into this mindset. So, they'd take every piece of positive feedback as proof that their colleagues are indeed kind and sweet and love them. Whereas, every piece of negative feedback they'd discard as an awkward joke, or a person having a bad day.

It always ends in one of two ways. One is they get an epiphany that they've been idiots all along, then they panic-quit. The other is that they don't get an epiphany, so they end up flabbergasted to learn they're getting fired.

For that matter, I've also seen people locked into an "everyone around me is an evil idiot" mindset, and that was worse. Nineteen times out of twenty, you do your best to manoeuvre away from the confrontation, and they don't give a fuck because it doesn't fit their narrative. One time you let it slip and disagree on some minute bullshit, and that's it, narrative confirmed, you're an evil idiot and an enemy, and they will hate you.

So, my point here is that if you don't pay attention to the maple tree next to the grocery store, or to the tenderness of your steak, that's boorish, but it's not a great deal.

However, if you suck at hearing the subtleties of what your spouse or your child or your colleague is trying to bring across, and if you excel at filling the gaps with your fantasies… Well, that can end up in a shit show of epic proportions that participants will be trauma-dumping for many years after the event…

This chapter is one of the most important in the entire book, so I guess it has to be concluded with an elabo-

rate action plan. That's why, as always, I'll remind you that I'm not a prophet, but I'll give my best shot.

One, you have to overcome your self-importance, as we've explored in **Lesson #11. Detachment**. You must be able to say, ***"I was wrong, I learned my lessons, let's move on."***

Whenever reality and your description of reality contradict each other, reality wins, period, full stop, nothing to negotiate. Don't stick to your prior ideas. Admit you were wrong, update your description of reality, take it from there.

I know it's **tough.** I myself have been through a post-Prussian educational system[1] where admitting being wrong didn't just mean being dragged in front of a class and having some two dozen conformist pigs laughing at you, like, ha-ha-ha, you're wrong, what an idiot.

No, it meant being tainted for life. Drop the ball once, and **some** people will remember it for decades to come and will make snarky remarks when you want to hear them the least.

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[1] Look, I'm not a historian, even more than I'm not a prophet. But I'm fairly confident that post-Soviet education, with its focus on compliance and discipline, has a chain of succession that can be traced all the way back to Friedrich the Great.

So, yes, I understand you've been trained to defend your opinion beyond any sane reason. Hashtag me too. And yet, you must learn to admit you're wrong. How much of that are you willing to share with the people around you is a matter of strategic diplomacy that we've touched upon in **Lesson #19. Telling Lies**. But at the very least, you must be honest with yourself.

Two, pay attention.

Use the technique that I've described earlier in this chapter. Appreciate the subtleties and the nuances of what you eat, what you read, what you see, and what you hear people telling you. This will make your life richer and more fulfilling, essentially for free. Also, it will raise your baseline level of attention, and that's a generally useful skill to have.

Three, let go of your imaginary friends that we'll explore in **Lesson #26. The Imaginary Friends**. Without that, paying attention will only get you that far. Maybe you're enjoying a book because it's well written and it deeply resonates with your personal experiences. Maybe you're "enjoying" a book because it's approved by the Council of Highly Esteemed Critics, despite it being a pile of agenda-driven shlock, and you wouldn't otherwise get past page fifteen. Until you can confidently

tell the former from the latter, you're just burning your personal energy for nothing.

Four, meditate. If you don't have much experience or preference, do Zazen meditation that I've explained in **Lesson #8. Awareness and Intent**. If you feel like hiking in the forest or painting mandalas will work better for you, do what works better for you. At the end of the day, how exactly do you practice doesn't matter as much as the fact that you practice on a regular basis and with the right intentions.

The purpose of meditation is to help you detach from your own thoughts, so you can observe your mistakes and misconceptions, which is the first step in real personal growth.

I admit there's a lot to unpack in this chapter. So, if you decide to take a few days away from this book to process all you've learned, it doesn't mean you're stupid. It means you're awesome.

Lesson #21. Take It Easy

It's easy to tell a bad math or physics teacher from a good one. This rule is especially true at the school level, although it holds pretty well even for advanced-level university courses.

With a bad teacher, mathematics is akin to witchcraft. It's an arcane body of knowledge that isn't meant to be understood by mere mortals. There are no clear rules, there are no reliable patterns, it's just a bunch of tricks to memorise. Every problem has its own unique twist that you're supposed to find by repeated guessing until the teacher stops humiliating you. Every solution must be done in the most laborious way possible, or worse.

With a good teacher, mathematics is **easy**. Look, here's a compact core of fundamental concepts. On top of those, here's a handful of axioms about how those concepts interact. Then, here's a bunch of techniques for breaking down the problem into its building blocks. Yeah, that's pretty much it. Well, okay, here's a bundle of shortcuts that are handy to remember. But if you don't, that's okay too, you can always make them up on the spot.

Good teachers aren't those who know the subject better. At the school level, there's very little to really know

anyway. Also, it's not those who can explain better either. I mean, for crying out loud, just read aloud from the bloody textbook, how hard can that be.

Good teachers are the ones who can make their pupils feel at ease with their subject. Solving a math or physics problem from the school curriculum is not particularly hard, provided you know the basic ideas and you focus your attention and energy on solving the problem.

If, however, you've only got, like, ten per cent of your capacity available to do the actual math because the rest of your brain is overloaded doubting yourself, and being confused, and being scared, and being frustrated, and not giving a fuck about this stupid bullshit... Yeah, then it gets much harder.

Perhaps this was the most important thing I've learned in school. Not how to write an equation for the vibrating string or how to calculate Bayesian probability. But how to be relaxed and in control over the stuff I know and can do. How to take a step back, like, **"this is getting way too hard, I'm wondering if this can be easier,"** instead of forcing my way through by blunt determination. How to work smart rather than hard. How to look for shortcuts and not be ashamed about it.

As you've perhaps guessed by now, this chapter is about manifestations, affirmations, the law of attraction and stuff like that.

One thing I know for sure is that you can always make your life worse and harder than it already is.

To begin with, you can always buy something you don't need. Like, you're living in the city centre and you're perfectly fine getting around by metro and an occasional taxi? Doesn't matter, buy yourself a car anyway. This way, you can throw away a ton of your hard-earned cash on a device that will only make your life more unpleasant and miserable.

You bought a lot of stuff you don't need, and now you're broke? Great, get yourself an entry-level side hustle. Now you're constantly stressed out and tired, and you're still living paycheque to paycheque.

You still have time and energy left? Nice, then start cheating on your spouse. Make sure it's not some ***"honey, I'm not leaving you, I just want some variety in bed, and you can do the same if you want"*** lacklustre polyamory crap. No, make it a proper adultery drama with lies, flimsy excuses, late-night arguments and thorough abuse of trust.

Oh, and if you don't have a nervous breakdown just yet, quit alcohol, caffeine and spices, and switch to a diet that consists mainly of steamed millet, ultra-processed soy and beetroot juice.

I mean, you get the idea, right? Whatever your life circumstances, you can always make your life worse and more difficult in a fairly straightforward way.

Making your life better and easier is slightly trickier, but only slightly.

However, there's an elephant in the room, and we must help the poor beast before we may continue with our treatise.

There's a widespread quasi-Christian belief that suffering and misery are inherently and universally good. And when I say "quasi-Christian," I mean that properly indoctrinated Christians do believe that suffering and misery are good, but only under a **certain specific set of circumstances**. All while a lot of modern-day folks, both religious and secular, tend to overlook the disclaimer.

Suffering for a good reason makes sense.

For one example, there are techniques like fasting, all-night prayers, lengthy pilgrimages, and other means to channel your visceral pain and exhaustion into your

spiritual development. Like, you don't necessarily have to stay in your comfort zone 100% of the time. Sometimes you have to push through the pain to attain enlightenment. That's just how it works, and that's a topic we'll return to in **Lesson #22. Stopping the World**.

For another example, martyrs who had to fight for their beliefs and their communities, and sometimes died gruesome deaths. However... Well, I'm obviously not qualified to speak for all martyrs in history. But I suspect that many of them would prefer not to die for their principles, but rather see their enemies die for theirs.

Anyway, so my point here is that misery and suffering for sound practical reasons is reasonable and, well, practical. However, plenty of folks overextend this idea and declare that any misery and suffering is inherently good and will be automatically rewarded by some kind of magic.

Bland foods are automatically healthier than the tasty ones. Use of inefficient tools and technologies automatically makes you a better professional, while the opposite makes you a fraud. Boring books are proper art, and so is incomprehensible music. A toxic relationship full of violent drama is true love, while quiet and cosy mutual respect is not even worth living. Oh,

and being imprisoned is clearly better than walking free, because reasons.

I mean, look, if you lived your whole life based on an idea that all your pain will be rewarded, and that's why all your pain makes sense... I'm very sorry to spoil your party, but it's not how it all works. Most of the time, pain comes alone, and it's up to you to figure out how to avoid it or how to give it meaning.

As a sidenote, I sometimes find myself thinking that the whole secularisation of Western society was a bloody scam. For centuries, the deal was that you handle as much discomfort as your local priest deems reasonable, and then God will take you to Heaven. Which is fair enough. But then it turned out that God is a superstition, and Heaven is a superstition, and the local priest is a fraud, and the new deal is that you absorb as much pain and misery as you can handle, and then you die.

I digress.

Anyway, back to what we've been discussing. Making your life better and easier isn't very hard, you just need to follow a handful of simple rules.

One, discover your mission. It can be a capital-M Mission like solving the global hunger, but it doesn't have

to be one. Travelling the world is a fine mission. Doing a job that you love is an awesome one too. So is creating art, even if only for a handful of fans. So is helping your community with causes you find important.

The point here is that once you get out of 24/7 subsistence survival mode, you get some spare time and energy, and you perhaps want to want to spend it on something more important than smoking weed with the lads all day long.

Two, stop doing stupid shit. This applies to both internal stupid shit, such as pleasing your ego, and external stupid shit, such as buying stuff you don't need. I know, I keep hammering this point throughout this book, but that's because it's crucial. In virtually all circumstances, recovering from self-inflicted damage is less efficient than not incurring it in the first place.

I mean, of course, it might be helpful for your personal growth to fuck up and then learn from your mistakes. But even then, after all is said and done, you'll almost always conclude you wish you could've learnt from others' mistakes instead. Well, that, or you're just a closeted masochist, and you secretly enjoy being hurt and abused and humiliated. In the latter case, I'm not gonna judge you whatsoever. We're all grown-ups here, as long as you're conscious about your kinky hab-

its, it's all perfectly fine. Which also means, if you're a closeted sadist and you enjoy the powerplay and abusing others, that's perfectly fine too. Just do more of it in your bedroom with consenting adults, and less of it at the workplace.

I digress.

Anyway, so, **three, work smart, not hard**. According to the Pareto principle, 80 per cent of results come from 20 per cent of **precision-aimed** effort. That is why, if you have to rely on blunt effort and determination constantly, it suggests you're doing something wrong. To learn what exactly you are doing wrong, take a step back and ask yourself: what goals do I really want to achieve, and why is it so hard?

It could be that you're not using enough "shortcuts." Shop around for more efficient methodologies for whatever you're doing. Check if advanced technology can help. Look into getting better training for yourself and your subordinates. Consider buying an external service instead of figuring it all out in-house. Delegate. Prioritise. Manage expectations. Don't hesitate to say, *"It's a problem, but it's not my problem."*

It could be that you're collecting the diminishing returns. The remaining 80 per cent of the effort will get you the remaining 20 per cent of the result. Which is

more than nothing, but that is dirty and unrewarding work. Find a way to stop doing it.

It could be that you must work smart **and** hard because you have ambitious goals, tight deadlines and limited resources. In this case, well, you have to force your way through the crisis, it is what it is.

However, if it's a crisis after crisis after crisis, that indicates larger-scale planning and resourcing problems that are ignored thanks to your heroic execution. Which means, you've got some difficult questions to ask.

Four, make it easy. The funniest thing about the manifestations and affirmations and prayers and all that woo-woo shebang is that **they bloody work**.

Full disclosure, I don't know **why** they work. Is it because a benevolent God is looking after you? Is it because the Laws of Attraction actually work? Is it because if you vibe with the Tao, then the Tao also vibes with you? Is it because praying, manifesting, or somehow else asking for outside help makes you adjust your Description of Reality, and that in turn makes you more receptive to the hidden opportunities? Might be all of these, might be none of these, I don't know, and, honestly, I don't really care.

How they work, I know a bit. First, they're about chances rather than certainties. If you ask for something, you up your chances, but that's about it, it's not guaranteed that you'll get what you asked for. I mean, for crying out loud, you're not ordering booze online, you're pleading The Universe for a favour. Have some humility.

Second, chances are much higher when you **need** something rather than merely **want** something.

Essentially, if you say, **"Dear Lord, please send me some car, so that I can move around with less hassle,"** then there's a decent chance you'll bump into a friend of a friend who is eager to ditch his old Corolla and will sell it for cheap. Whereas, if you say, **"Dear Lord, please send me a top-specs Lamborghini,"** then there's a decent chance that The Lord will be, like, **"Hahaha, this lad is so funny. Nah, I'll pass on this one."**

Five, remember about the no man's land if you want to "monetise your hobby."

I mean, if you enjoy coding, or cooking, or writing, or sexing, or travelling, or making furniture, or playing music, or whatever else you like to do for fun, and you want to make a bit of money from it, it's not necessarily a bad idea. However, be conscious that a professional isn't simply a hobbyist who gets paid. It's a substan-

tially different thing to do. Sure, being a skilled hobbyist is a good starting point if you want to become a professional. However, you'll still have to cross that ugly desolate in-between territory where it's too much responsibility and too little freedom to be fun, but it doesn't pay meaningful money yet.

Of course, being an accomplished professional is fun in its own right. However, to get there, you'll have to go through a phase where you lose your favourite hobby, and you get a crappy job instead. Also, it isn't at all guaranteed that you'll become an accomplished professional. You might just hit some kind of ceiling, and that would be it for you.

So, as I said, "monetising your hobby" isn't necessarily a bad idea, but consider if there's an option to make better money on what pays well and then do your hobbies purely for the sake of enjoyment. Like, I mean, getting laid is a lot of fun, and working in a bank is boring as hell, but leaving a job as a credit analyst to become a sex worker is a questionable life choice, if you ask me.

Six, don't worry about "instant gratification," and generally abstain from having this concept in your vocabulary. There are two very different patterns lumped into it, one is universally good, the other is trickier.

The universally good pattern is the short feedback loop. This is when you have a big goal, and you achieve it by accomplishing one small goal at a time.

Say, you want to have a business with a hundred high-profile clients. Great idea, start with finding one client and making them happy. Whether you succeed or fail, learn from the experience and incorporate the lessons into your process. Don't overfit towards any single client's whims, remember that you have bigger goals in mind. But also, don't spend months and years building a "platform with an immense value proposition" while having zero input from actual paying customers. That won't end well.

The same goes if you're, say, writing a novel. You don't have to write the whole thing in a vacuum. You can write a handful of chapters, then ask around what works and what doesn't, then adjust where necessary.

Now, the tricky pattern is lowering the goalpost. It's when you abandon your big goals entirely in favour of small ones that you can easily and reliably achieve.

Like, I don't want a mansion, I just want a two-bedroom apartment in a decent neighbourhood, and that's good enough for me. Or, I don't want to build a restaurant empire, I just want to run one cosy café, and that's all I want. Or, I don't want to become an ac-

complished writer, I'll just write a steamy fanfic for my horny pals now and then and call it a day.

I mean, sure, there's a whole genre of overachievement advocates who'd say this is a universally bad thing because you must always aim for the stars. And fuck them all, I disagree. It can be the best decision of your entire life.

But it can also be the worst decision of your entire life, and you'll end up bitterly regretting the opportunities you missed. So, when you're tempted to aim lower, sit down and think through: what do you really want, what exactly is in it for you? You might end up realising that you're trying to impress your imaginary friends, and that's okay. You might also end up realising that life is simply too short for playing safe, and that's okay too.

Seven, go with the flow and don't force it. If something doesn't work out, take a step back and ask yourself, what am I doing wrong. Don't try to break the concrete wall with your bare hands. Look for a door instead.

If you run out of ideas, take three steps back, then take a deep sigh, then say *"ah, fuck it"* and admit that what you've been doing simply isn't meant to succeed at this point in time.

Then, pour your energy into something else.

The world is full of people who would, figuratively, try to break the wall with their forehead so hard they'd get a concussion, and then spend the rest of their lives bitching that doors don't exist. Like, I dunno, start a business without proper research, then get bankrupt and lose all your savings, then go into total denial every time someone shows it's actually possible, and not "all nepotism and money laundering."

Don't be like them, you're too awesome for that.

Lesson #22. Stopping the World

Stopping the world is one of those things that takes fifteen minutes to explain and then fifteen lifetimes to practice to perfection.

The idea is very simple: take your favourite meditation technique and then push yourself to the limit.

If your normal meditation is fifteen minutes of Zazen, do two hours.

If it's a Rosary, do four of them back-to-back.

If you do forest bathing, grab a sleeping bag and spend a night in the forest.

If you run, run an ultramarathon.

If you walk in nature, make it a multi-day hike.

If you play video games, I'm very sceptical: typically, when playing, you're 100% focused on killing monsters (or whatever is the objective of the game), and 0% focused on your inner feelings. However, if it works for you, it works for you.

If you do drugs… Well, drugs are problematic, and I generally don't recommend them.

When going on a spiritual adventure like that, you really want to be safe, and that means taking it one step

at a time as well as having an emergency exit if such need arises.

Don't go from ten minutes of sitting meditation straight to two-hour sessions. Do twenty-minute sessions until you fully understand the difference and how to do it properly. Then master thirty minutes, and so on.

Likewise, don't go from running five kilometres in a park straight to seventy in the mountains. Get comfortable running ten, then get comfortable running half-marathons, then add trail training, and so on. It might take many years to gradually build up endurance, experience and technique, it is what it is.

The same goes for any other form of meditation.

And, for such gradual progress, exact dosage is paramount. Essentially, you want to hike twenty kilometres, so you plan a twenty-kilometre route, and as a result, you'll get roughly twenty kilometres of hiking, give or take getting lost a few times.

Whereas, if you're going to eat those mushrooms, only God knows exactly how much psilocybin is in there and how your body will metabolise it...

Moreover, you always want to have an emergency exit.

Say, you plan a two-hour-long deep meditation, and then, around a forty-minute mark, you uncover a bucket of suppressed memories from your puberty, and now you're too sad and too overwhelmed to continue. That's fine, it happens, no big deal. Just open your eyes, bring your attention back to the room around you. Have a weep, then make a cup of hot chocolate and talk to someone you trust.

Or, say, if you're running a marathon, and you realise you're too exhausted to keep pushing, whether physically or mentally, that's not nice at all, but it happens too. Admit you're done, then call a cab and tell the driver to get you to a place where you can get a shower, a big pizza and a jug of beer. It might be bitterly disappointing, but at least you're not risking your health, and you'll have a chance to try another day.

Oh, and you also don't have to endure a couple of hours of chemical rollercoasters, which is exactly what you get if you use magical plants or synthetic concoctions.

I mean, look, ultimately, it's your call what kind of crap do you put into your body, I can't stop you. If you happen to have a reliable guide who can help you navigate the amazing world of magical plants and shit, okay, whatever, give it a try.

Otherwise, I strongly advise against psychedelics and in favour of more controllable (if more labour-demanding) methods.

Alright, now that we have largely covered **how** to stop the world, it's finally time to answer **why** would you do such things to yourself.

I've got two answers for you, one is boring, the other is exciting.

The boring answer is that stopping the world is the "break the glass in case of emergency" reserve for situations when you need a massive boost of awareness and personal energy on short notice. You're about to make a big decision, and you're unsure if you're thinking clearly? Do a deep meditation, then take it from there.

The exciting answer is: **aren't you curious?**

Aren't you curious to know how far you can go? And aren't you curious to know what the world looks like when you're in a hyperaware state of consciousness?

Back in the **Introduction** I promised this book won't be just about "mindfulness to survive another day in the toxic office."

Well, this promise works both ways.

Lesson #23. Moral Principles

As I mentioned earlier, I didn't particularly want to write this book. It felt redundant, it felt unnecessary, all of this has been told before by people better and smarter than me.

I especially didn't want to write this chapter. It felt redundant and unnecessary even by the lowly standards of this book.

However. Books in this genre, especially ones on the more "spiritual" side of the spectrum, often tend to get quite handwavy on "be a good person," so I wanted to elaborate on where I stand on this issue.

So, my definition goes like this: a good person is someone who does good things and doesn't do bad things. That's it. Shockingly deep and counterintuitive, I know.

I know, this definition conveniently omits explaining what exactly the "good things" and the "bad things" are, but I'm getting there.

Oh, and by the way. If your acquaintance bangs thirteen-year-olds and tortures puppies, he's a bad person, period, and I don't give fuck that deep inside his heart he's a very kind and nice guy. If someone justifies the

former with the latter, I'm very impressed by such acts of mental contortionism, but I'm a simple man and I don't buy this shit.

So, there are two sources of knowledge for what is good and what is bad. Both are imperfect, but when used in combination, they're good enough for general practical purposes.

The first source is what you can call your moral compass. That's the natural outlook that you discover by overcoming the sway of your imaginary friends[1], your ego, your self-importance[2], and other stuff that saps your personal energy and distorts your perception.

For example, let's take my all-time favourite person on this planet, which is myself.

I believe that every one of us is an immensely beautiful and astonishingly complex human being. And that's why I believe that features like one's gender, skin colour, or sexuality are all rather minor and unimportant parts of the overall complexity. At the end of the day, I believe that your favourite writer and your favourite things to do in autumn define your personality much more than what kind of people you prefer to fuck.

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[1] See **Lesson #26. The Imaginary Friends.**
[2] See Lesson **#11. Detachment**.

For that matter, I can't help but cringe when I hear about people getting discriminated against based on the shape of their genitals, or the colour of their genitals, or how they use their genitals. Like, okay, evil folks need to pick a completely arbitrary feature to justify their violence, I get it. But then, why can't they at least be honest and pick something that's clearly arbitrary, like one's favourite drink, or so.

By the way, I want to make it very clear: **I am not virtue-signalling** here. I honestly don't give a fuck if I pass this month's checklist for looking like a progressive feminist and shit. I'm just illustrating what happens after you make some modest progress in overcoming the influence of your imaginary friends.

The second source is what we can call the coercion apparatus. That's the rules, laws and regulations of the society around you, as well as means to enforce those.

I know, for a self-proclaimed anarchist, it's a lazy cop-out to base his morality on rules and regulations, but bear with me. I've got another example to explain what I mean here.

I love to hike in Western European countryside, and I've walked through a whole bunch of villages across the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium. Perhaps, when it comes to villages, these are the tamest, the

prettiest and the safest you can find on this planet. And yet, every other fence would have a sign on it that says, "**if you try to break into my house, my pit bull will bite off your leg.**" But I'm still to see a single sign that says, "**if you try to break into my house, you'll feel morally inferior.**"

When rubber hits the road, people don't build on such a flimsy foundation as moral sentiments. They install rules, regulations, and means to enforce those.

The fact that there's a rule doesn't automatically mean that this rule is fair and just, far from it. However, when there's an enforced rule, it typically indicates an important matter that's worth regulating. Whereas, if there are no enforced rules despite the fact that people fuckin' love inventing them, it's fairly safe to assume that the territory you're looking at is morally neutral.

Also important to note: I use the word "rule" instead of "law," and that's because coercion doesn't always come from the government. Like, you know, if you'll get beaten up for wearing the wrong kind of pants in the wrong part of town, it's not a law, but it's very much a rule, and you have to take it into account.

Now, if your inner moral compass and your outer environment are in harmony, then nothing to do, chill. Otherwise, if you realise that two are at odds, it's a

good moment to sit down and reflect on what exactly is going on.

Maybe it's because something's wrong with you and you're the problem that needs fixing. Like that neighbour of yours who thinks it's funny to break into someone's house, put a six-pack of dark beer into the fridge, and leave, bloody weirdo.

Maybe it's because there's some "lesser evil" at play. Like, I don't enjoy airport security checks at all, but it's a small price to pay for flying safely.

Maybe the rules are really unjust, and therefore you should campaign for changing the status quo.

Maybe the rules are unjust, but there's also not much you can practically do about it, so it's time to get yourself a new status quo, i.e. find a new job or move to another city or find yourself another circle of friends or something along those lines.

Or maybe the rules are unjust, but then it's also not really your problem, that often happens too.

But either way, if you find yourself forcing yourself to behave morally, there's something fishy going on. Sit down and think deeply about what it is exactly.

Now, the final question in this lesson is what to do when people around you have some kind of strong

moral convictions that don't resonate with your inner compass and are also not forbidden or enforced by the appropriate rules.

One rule to always keep in mind is that **when people shame you, it means they can't force you**. If they could force you, they wouldn't bother shaming, they'd just force you.

"Help the poor, or else you'll be kicked out of the community" has tangible cost-benefits and risk-rewards to it. By contrast, "help the poor, or else you're a horrible human being" is pretty much a cheeky way to ask for a favour without offering anything back. Feel free to oblige or ignore at will.

Besides that, if you want something from a specific person, it's okay to play along[1]. Like, you met this lad at the yoga class, and he's very good-looking, but also very vegan. Sure thing, meat is a crime, cars are horrible, aeroplanes must be banned, bedsheets are organic cotton, let's fuck.

Finally, when it comes to groups of moralists, take a good look at whether they're capable of actually changing the status quo. If they can, treat them as any other

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[1] See **Lesson #19. Telling Lies.**

force that you might want to support, oppose, ally with, or hedge against.

Otherwise, if they're too fringe, too stupid or too soft to get anything done, then just ignore them altogether.

You can call me cynical. I'll call myself a realist.

If you want to change the world, go for it. If you don't want to change the world, admit it. But, for the love of everything that's holy for you, don't just post three angry stories on social media, and then tap yourself on the shoulder that you've done your part.

You're too awesome for that.

Lesson #24. The First Symmetry

I've got an exercise for you. Pick a "difficult" person you had to deal with at some point in your life. It could be your colleague, your boss, or your sister-in-law, doesn't really matter who exactly, just pick one.

Say, you picked your ex-teammate Joe. Now, imagine there was another Joe on your team at the same time.

Ehm… I don't mean an exact replica of Joe, that would be super creepy and weird. I mean a bloke with personality strongly resembling Joe's and a background that's similar enough to be relatable, but not to become instant friends.

Say, Joe is a heterosexual man in his early thirties, he's a huge fan of hip-hop, he used to play tennis, and he loves to cook vegan dishes. On top of that, he's very social, he's very opinionated, and he has a habit of overcompensating for his insecurities. And then Joe #2 is a heterosexual man in his late twenties, a dedicated metalhead, irregularly hits the gym, and loves to cook steaks. On top of that, he's very social, very opinionated, has a habit of overcompensating for his insecurities, you get the idea.

Now the question is: how would these two get along?

Are they gonna be the best friends and partners in crime?

Will they be respectful to each other professionally and politely indifferent personally?

Will they fight bitterly over the issues that at least one of them finds extremely important?

Will they be constantly frustrated with each other's incompetence and irresponsibility?

Will they compete to outdo one another? Will they despise each other? Will they hate each other's guts?

Don't rush, take your time to visualise what kind of personal dynamics would be there between your acquaintance and their imaginary twin. Once you're done, pick some more "difficult" people and repeat this process a couple of times and compare the results.

I mean, this is a pure thought experiment, so don't take its "results" too seriously. But the idea here is that if Joe can be amiable with a version of himself, then at least he's a functioning adult, and you can treat him as one. It doesn't mean he's a nice, kind, good, or anything like that, but at least he's a grown-up.

Whereas, if you can too easily imagine Joe having personality clashes with another person who is just like himself, it means he's a capricious child. He doesn't

want to be treated as an adult, and you'll get in trouble if you try to do it.

The First Symmetry is between what you demand from the others and what you bring to the table.

Joe wants me to cater for his quirky personality? Sure, but then I want him to cater for mine. If we both do the work to understand each other, that's great. If we both decide it's not worth it and it's better to remain strangers, that's also fine.

However, if Joe throws a tantrum for me being "weird" and two days later he throws another tantrum for me being "unsympathetic," that's childish. "Childish" here means demanding more from the others than willing to give back, and then expecting that some kind of a benevolent parent figure will step in, wipe the snot and compensate for the imbalances.

You want my attention? Give me attention.

You want me to listen to you? Hear me out.

You want to give me orders? Earn my respect.

You want me to play by the rules? Play by your own rules, don't act as if those rules are for peasants and don't apply to unique snowflakes like you.

Thank God, for most of the people above the age of twenty-five, The First Symmetry is the natural modus operandi, and those snowflake crybabies are more of an exception.

By the way, you can also try a version of the exercise when you imagine **another you** next to you and reflect on how you two would interact.

Although I must admit, this exercise has very strong Dunning-Kruger vibes. Some people are self-aware and emotionally competent enough to understand their personal shortcomings and oddities, some aren't. If you are, then you and your equivalently self-aware imaginary twin should at least be able to keep it well-mannered and civilised, even if you two have reasons to dislike each other.

And if you aren't... Then you're an angel! And, of course, you'll be delighted to meet another angel who is so much better than all those horrible people around you!

Now, I'm gonna conclude this lesson with some tips on how to deal with those... angels.

One. Never treat one of them as a "grown-up who had a tough week." They expect you to appease them, and they will shit at you if you don't appease them hard

enough. This can get so unfair that it hurts, but they don't give a fuck, so keep your frustration to yourself and your allies.

Two. Such behaviour can be an intentional manipulative tactic, it can be a product of emotional incompetence, or it can be some contrived combination of the two. Unless you're a trained psychotherapist, don't even bother trying to understand what exactly is going on in their head, you've got no use for this knowledge anyway.

Three. Shield yourself from their bullshit. Say, if your teammate Joe is going to complain to HR that you are refusing his whims, then inform HR upfront that Joe is a tad unhinged. Not a pretty thing to do, but it is what it is.

Four. Make them someone else's problem. It's not even hard. A significant part of the population is shockingly good at developing the Stockholm syndrome. Just leave them alone, and they will invent an intricate "Joe is a pain in the neck, therefore he brings a lot of value" narrative in no time. So, if you have a "difficult" colleague, just find them a willing babysitter who enjoys being abused. Or ship them to another department. Or get them fired if that's more convenient for you.

Five. If you really can't get rid of this person, say, if it's a close relative or an employee with unique talents, I'm sorry, but you've got no choice.

I'm sure you'll manage. You're awesome.

Lesson #25. The Second Symmetry

I've got another exercise for you.

In **Lesson #24. The First Symmetry**, we did a thought experiment when you pitted your "difficult" acquaintance named "Joe" against himself. Now, let's do the same but a bit differently.

So, imagine a Joe #2… You know, let's call him Mark, or else it gives strong "Blade Runner" vibes.

Anyway, so imagine Mark, who is very much like Joe from the personality standpoint, but background-wise is different just enough to not make it uncanny when you see them together. Imagine Mark and Joe being peers, and think about what the personal dynamics between them would be.

Now, plot twist, imagine there's a difference in formal status between them. Say, one is the boss, and the other is the subordinate. Or one is the student and the professor. Or siblings with a significant age difference. Something like that. Oh, by the way, I strongly discourage imagining them as a parent-child pair, or a romantic mésalliance. It gets creepy and weird, like, really, really fast. But then it's your imagination, do what you want.

So, the question is: how much difference would it make between Joe and Mark being equal peers, and one of them being senior to the other?

And that's what The Second Symmetry is about.

The Second Symmetry is between what you demand from the superiors and what you demand from the subordinates.

Unlike the First Symmetry, which is more or less standard for functional adults, this one is actually rare. Sure, there are highly enlightened monks in far remote monasteries in unreachable mountains, and they're totally oblivious to formal status. Yet, the vast majority of the population is biased either one way or another.

One way to be biased is meritocracy. A meritocracy-minded person sees their higher-ups as *"like me, but better"* and their juniors as *"like me, but not quite as good."* Therefore, it's natural in such a worldview to demand **more** from the higher-ups and **less** from the juniors. That's what you can typically find among pack hunting predators, front-line military, special services, aviation, organised crime, and early medieval nobility (who were pretty much organised crime and front-line military themselves).

From the meritocratic point of view, the leader **must deserve the respect** of their subordinates. The leader isn't some "inherently better human being" or "appointee of the higher powers," they're merely the first among equals. The only thing that makes them stand out compared to their peers is their ability to lead the group towards the common goal, which is why they're respected by the group and accepted as their leader. Once they begin to lose it, no hard feelings, but it's time for them to step down and let the next leader take the lead.

It's like, we are the Viking chieftains, and we get together to elect the best among us to be our queen or our king. We swear our allegiance and loyalty for as long as their rule is proper and just. Once they fuck it up, we'll remove them and get together to elect the best among us.

Obviously, this is an idealised picture. In reality, transitions aren't always smooth and sometimes involve coups and civil wars.

Also, in a meritocracy, if the subordinate disagrees with the order, the leader is expected to convince them. The *"shut the fuck up and just do what you're told"* option is there, but it's not a go-to tool, but rather the last resort measure to break the stalemate in situations

when any decision is better than none at all. As the saying goes, *"you can't supervise your soldiers to storm the fortress, you have to lead them."*

On the other hand, subordinates are expected to perform to their best ability at their stations, and they're also expected to be the best among their own peers. When they have the ambition to grow through the ranks, that's very welcome. When they don't, it's ultimately up to them.

In any case, the juniors are obviously not held to the same high standards as the higher-ups.

The mirror opposite of meritocracy is bureaucracy. A bureaucracy-minded person sees their higher-ups as *"the emissaries of the Higher Powers"* and their juniors as *"slaves who do your bidding."* Therefore, in such a worldview, it's natural to demand **less** from the higher-ups and **more** from the juniors. That's what you can typically find in big corporations.

From the bureaucratic point of view, the supervisor **is appointed** by the higher-ups, and their continuing support is literally the only thing that really matters.

Respect is a largely irrelevant concept, juniors are supposed to fear and despise their supervisors instead.

Decisions are made in the upper echelons, then orders are passed top-down, and disagreements are treated as mutiny and incompetence.

Juniors' mistakes are severely and often publicly punished. All while higher-ups' incompetence is something you should better gloss over and not pay too much attention to, for your own good.

And yes, from the choice of words, you can clearly see which side I'm on. Speaking of another lesson where I was strongly biased, yes, there's plenty of overlap between this one and **Lesson #15. Conformity**, but these concepts aren't 100% same.

Indeed, meritocracy often coincides with the truth-based worldview, and bureaucracy often coincides with the power-based worldview, but neither is a given.

For instance, a way to build a high-performance military is to make it a power-based conformist meritocracy. So that the officers are encouraged to take initiative on the tactical level, but also not supposed to ask questions about the general regulations or the reasons why they are fighting this war to begin with.

It can be the other way around as well. An example of such non-conformist bureaucracy would be a lower-

tier university where students are perfectly aware that their instructors aren't remarkably competent. But then they just play by the rules anyway, so they can obtain their degrees without much hassle, and ride into the sunset afterwards.

Anyway, so, like in several other chapters, the main takeaway from this one is awareness.

Be conscious of who you are, be conscious of the people around you, and take it into account when dealing with them.

Say, Joe doesn't like to be treated as an equal, and he splits the whole world into those below his rank (so he's permitted to shit on them) and those above (so they're permitted to shit on him). If so, don't treat Joe as an equal. Instead, go through the protocol of establishing which of you two is above in the power structure. Then either give him an order, or plead with him for a favour, or go to his boss and sort this out above Joe's head.

Works the other way too. If Joe really likes to be treated as an equal, and you don't, then at least try to pretend like you care about his respect and his opinions.

Of course, I'm very tempted to say you should strive to become more meritocratic, but I won't.

First, it would be stupid. This kind of mentality crystallises by the time you get out of puberty, and is pretty difficult to change after that.

Second, I'd be quite surprised to see many bureaucratic-minded people making it this far into my little punk rock album pretending to be a mindfulness book… Obviously, I'm not gonna judge you, you are who you are, I just find it funny.

Whoever you are, you are awesome.

Lesson #26. The Imaginary Friends

Imaginary friends come in a variety of shapes and forms, so we'll just go one by one.

The imaginary person. This is pretty much the first thing that comes to mind when you hear about people having imaginary friends. Like, you know, the usual story. You're eleven, you live in a shithole in the middle of nowhere, and you don't have any friends because everyone around you is a moron. So, you invent yourself a friend, his name is Timmy, and he's the only person who understands you.

Among all the cases in this lesson, this one is the most straightforward to deal with. Basically, if you don't have problems acknowledging that Timmy doesn't actually exist, then it's perfectly fine, even if a tad quirky. Like, sure, you can take Timmy to your favourite restaurant, and tell him everything about your love life, I'm sure he'll understand. Just give a heads-up to the waiters, so they understand the whole situation too.

And, well, if you do have problems with acknowledging that... Look, I'm sorry, but I must say it: you have to seek help from a medical specialist.

The imaginary friendship. This is when the person is real, but the friendship is not. So, it's an imaginary friend, even though it's a real person.

Say, you think that you and your boss are great pals. You've worked together for, say, five years, and you've been through a whole bunch of dead marches and shitshows. That bloke likes you a lot, he cares about you deeply, and he truly wants you to succeed in your career.

That's what you think, anyway. In reality, he's just a skilled manager. He tells you the right motivational words, and he cares about you as much as and for as long as it fits his own interests. When it'd be beneficial for him to throw you under the bus, he would concoct some almost-not-a-lie to explain why it was the right thing to do, but that's about it.

Or that chick you met in the painting class. Look, she was simply polite and social. Above that, she gave you exactly zero reasons to think that she wants to get romantically involved. Don't be such a creep.

The imaginary ideal. This is when you're not ready to go as far as inventing a whole imaginary personality to befriend, but you're still trying to cope with being surrounded by fuckheads. So, you end up with a concept of a perfect friend. Or a perfect colleague. Or a perfect

boyfriend. Or a perfect girlfriend. Or a perfect spouse. Or a perfect in-law. Or… you get the idea.

Then it gets increasingly fucked up when you try to be-friend, or hire, or work with, or get romantic with, or marry actual people.

Those actual people have to deal with you being constantly pissed off and dissatisfied because they're not nearly as good as their imaginary counterparts inside your head. That is, until they tell you to fuck yourself and leave.

The imaginary tribe. This is when having one imaginary friend doesn't cut it, and you invent a whole community of them, and then work hard to make the right impression on your imaginary friends.

Say, you're a sophisticated intellectual, and therefore you must listen to avant-garde jazz and read highbrow fiction, even though you enjoy Lady Gaga and trashy fantasy novels much better. Or you're politically conservative, and therefore you must hate gays. Or you're politically progressive, and therefore you must hate rich people. Or whatever other stupid shit you might do to impress an in-group that doesn't really exist as a cohesive in-group outside of your own imagination.

Now, to clarify, the primary purpose of this chapter is **not** to teach you how to overcome **your own** imaginary friends. As you develop awareness and keep your description of reality in sync with reality, your imaginary friends will evaporate organically.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to teach how to deal with **others'** imaginary friends.

Say, you go to a job interview. In some companies, it's almost a formality. Like, we've got work to do, you've done similar work before, you look like a decent lad, here's how much money we can offer, tell us when you can start. In some cases, they may take a deeper dive into prior experience or personality quirks, but even then, it usually doesn't take more than a handful of hours.

More often than not, companies have an intricate idea of a perfect candidate they've been seeing in their wet dreams. That's why they make you write multi-page essays and go through seven rounds of interviews to prove that you're The One. Oftentimes, this also gets intertwined with the "imaginary tribe" trope, the argument about "this is how we do things in this industry" and shit like that.

Or, say, your colleague is stalking you because in his mind you two are friends with benefits... Okay, this

one is easy: tell the HR, and if they procrastinate, then call the police.

Or, say, you go on a date. Some people are genuinely curious to learn what kind of person you are and want to take it from there, wherever it may lead. Some of those might back off if you're a really fucked up mess, but that's fair.

Some have a Golden Check List of what the Proper Spouse must look like. They got it from their parents, and it was handed over for at least fifty generations, and now you're being measured against that.

Or, say, it was a peaceful dinner with your best friend. That is, until you made an off-hand joke about some weird-ass politician you've seen on the telly, and then the new fuckboy of your best friend went thermonuclear-war berserk, and you're, like, what the fuck should I do next.

As always, it's up to you.

Do you really need this job?

I mean, if the process to get in is a train car full of bollocks, it's reasonably safe to assume it'll only get worse from there.

So, if you have the luxury to tell your hiring manager and their first lieutenant to go do a soixante-neuf, and

then you ride into the sunset, and those two are puzzled over their life choices, that's mega cool, and you have my lifelong respect.

However, if you're okay to play along for a paycheque because you've got bills to pay, yeah, that's fair enough. In this case, the trick is to gather as much information about their imaginary ideals and their imaginary tribes as you can get your hands on. Search online, ask on jobseeker forums, and also throw as many **"what kind of person are you looking for?"** and **"what methodologies are you using?"** questions at them as they allow during the interviews.

Then throw their crap back at them. *I heard you're looking for a proactive independent blah-blah-blah bullshit bingo, and I'm exactly the person you need,* even if you aren't. *I heard you're using methodology XYZ and technology PQR, and I think it's very cool,* even if you have no clue what the fuck XYZ and PQR are.

I know it feels like a fraud, and it kinda is. But then, your potential employer wants to hear pretty lies, and they will hire the one who does it best, and you've got bills to pay.

With a date, same shit. If you want to date a bloke who is full of shit, but also loaded as Scrooge McDuck, look, I'm not gonna blame you for that. Figure out what he

wants to hear, tell him exactly that, use **Lesson #19. Telling Lies** as inspiration.

Finally, with that twat you insulted during the dinner. Apologise, turn it into a joke, shift attention to something else, defuse the situation however you can. You've literally zero business in proving anything to your best friend's fucktoy, and you also don't want to deal with their breakup.

Whatever you decide to do, I want you to remember one thing. You're awesome.

Lesson #27. Be Yourself

If you read the previous chapter, and you thought that having imaginary friends is the stupidest thing one can do, well, brace yourself. Because I've got one even better.

Which is having an imaginary yourself.

And, look, to be really clear here, I'm not making fun of people with multiple personality disorders or stuff like that. I wholeheartedly wish them well, and I don't mean to offend them.

Who I mean to offend, just like elsewhere in this book, are perfectly healthy people who are also idiots.

One form of such behaviour that's pretty much ubiquitous is when you imagine yourself to be ultra-competent and mega-adaptable, but also super lazy. It's like when you say, **"Oh, I just need to motivate myself to go to the gym"** or **"I just need to motivate myself to diet."**

If you pay close attention, you'll notice a concealed assumption behind this seemingly innocuous idea. The assumption is that your body is so hypercompetent that it will excel at any kind of sport and benefit from any kind of diet you throw at it. Also, your mind is so flexible that it will seamlessly rebalance the rest of your

life to these new routines you want to introduce, no questions asked. You just need to find this elusive "motivation," and then it's smooth sailing from there.

In general, every time you find yourself thinking that all you need is motivation, you should revisit the recommendations from **Lesson #21. Take It Easy** and think how to make it all "smart, not hard." Say, if you struggle to "find motivation" to do sports, try a different kind of exercise. Maybe Pilates is just not your thing, but swimming is, or the other way around. Find a trainer you like and trust. Find the training schedule that doesn't wreck the rest of your life. And so on, and so on, and so on.

But besides that, take a minute or five to sit down and appreciate that you're not a bloody Determination Machine, but you're a warm squishy human being, and you should take good care of yourself because nobody else will.

Some people imagine themselves to be garbage. That's how they got stuck in dodgy neighbourhoods, dead-end jobs, and crappy relationships (or no relationships at all). Because that's it, that's their proper place in life, that's all they deserve, and that's all they get. Because they're talentless, unattractive, useless garbage. Or so they think, but it's all that really matters.

Look, I'm not going to sugarcoat it here. Simply deciding that you deserve better probably won't cut it. Learning to fly is an arduous process. But then the sky is the limit.

Some people imagine themselves to be ultimate geniuses. They have ready answers to every question. They know everything worth knowing, and their worldview is final. Anything they don't know is wacky nonsense that no sane person would care about anyway. Everything they ever learn either corroborates or illustrates their existing description of reality, but never challenges it.

I mean, look, being the cleverest person in the room is such a warm and fuzzy feeling, I'm not gonna lie here. However, if this happens to you constantly, it suggests you're going to the wrong rooms. Also, revisit **Lesson #11. Detachment**.

Some people indulge in power fantasies. Such as inventing a witty-talking ass-kicking smoking-hot paladin-alchemist alter ego, and then inserting them into some comic-based role-playing Viking-metal fanfiction bullshit, or whatnot.

This isn't even bad. It's just cringe and effing boring.

Some people do all kinds of crazy shit I couldn't imme-
diately think about when writing this chapter.

Now, let's wrap it up. The action plan for this lesson is
pretty straightforward.

First, learn who you really are, with all your quirks and
all your silly habits and all your unhealed traumas.

Second, accept yourself for who you are.

Three, take it from there towards who you want to be-
come.

Admit it, you're awesome.

Lesson #28. Rebel is a Career Choice

Visit a plucky fifteen-person startup and you're quite likely to find a bunch of blokes who actively hate big corporations: all that bureaucracy, and all that red tape, and all that hierarchy, and all that shit. Next to them, you're quite likely to find a bunch of lads who totally don't mind big corporations. They especially don't mind being on or around the C-level of a big corporation, and they bet that getting there by sticking at the top of an explosively growing startup is more efficient than by making their way through the ranks of an established company.

Visit a wacky fringe political organisation. You'll find some activists who are there because they genuinely support the wacky fringe cause, and some who are there to gain publicity and later use that publicity as a springboard for entering a more mainstream organisation.

Take a list of the Top 50 punk rock bands. You'll find a bunch of underground acts that made it big, and a bunch of savvy lads who are good at monetising the teenage angst and midlife nostalgia.

Visit a giant corporation. You'll find a handful of talented men and women who have made a splendid ca-

reer, and many more of those who will retire at a pay grade that's one or two steps away from that of an intern.

Take a look at all the Eurovision Song Contest participants. Notice, literally, hundreds of cookie-cutter pop performers that never stood a chance to get as big as the likes of Rammstein or Rage Against The Machine.

So, my point here is that there is no binary dichotomy between a successful rule-abiding conformist and a struggling rebel. It's not even a sliding scale. Likewise, there's no binary dichotomy or even a sliding scale between a paradigm-disrupting winner and a conservative moss-covered loser.

It's really a dual-axis diagram.

So, one idea in this lesson is that **conformity doesn't guarantee literally anything**.

Sure, ***"I'll simply follow the rules and it's gonna be fine"*** is a tempting proposition. It's very cosy and comforting. However, it doesn't work. That's because the higher-ups in charge of the rules can alter them without asking your permission or opinion, and what are you gonna do next?

If you consciously go with ***"I'll follow the <u>current</u> rules and will <u>reconsider</u> if they change,"*** that's fine. Say, you

enjoy your current job. Then, stick around while it lasts and be ready to jump ship when it's not to your liking anymore. That's a healthy strategy.

If, however, you go with **"I'll stick to the rules, whatever the rules are,"** then you're already fucked even if you don't know it yet. Remember, rules can be changed unilaterally, and not always in your favour. And you've already given up your agency, so you don't have it, tough cookies.

I mean, sure, you can claim that **"there are good people in charge, and they'll never do anything like that."** Except that such a claim doesn't hold any water. I know, it's a shocking thing to say in the final chapter of a book that has "anarchist" in its title, but there's no such thing as a "good authority."

An "authority that doesn't have reasons to fuck you over yet" is indeed a thing, and carefully manoeuvring to stay safe from harm is fair play. But blindly assuming that nothing bad can ever possibly happen is simply delusional.

So, follow the rules, but be alert to where the wind blows, and have a plan for what to do when it changes direction.

Another idea here is that **when a person says, *"I want to change the world just so I can live in a better world,"* it's either a liar, a fool, or a hobbyist.**

Let's get the hobbyist out of the way first. A hobbyist is a person who wants to change the world but doesn't want to commit to it wholeheartedly. Like, go to a corporate book club to discuss the books about alternative management techniques, but without the express intent to actually adopt those techniques. Or, like, go to a political demonstration every now and then to wave flags, shout slogans and occasionally hook up with a good-looking fellow activist of their favourite gender.

Don't get me wrong, it's a fine hobby. If you want to make the world a little bit better, go for it. It's better than nothing, however you dice it.

Next is the liar. The liar is one who says, ***"I just dream of a better world, and I don't intend to get anything for myself from it,"*** while they actually do.

A manager who wants to spread innovative techniques but also wants to get noticed and promoted. A startup founder who wants to revolutionise the industry but also wants to get rich. A political activist who wants to advance the cause but also wants to make their way into the parliament or the government.

I mean, let's not get so cynical as to say they don't care about their causes. I'm sure they do, actually. But then, let's also not get so naïve as to say they all will gladly give up their personal aspirations for the sake of the greater good.

Well, some of them will. Those are fools. I've been such a fool a few times, I know how it feels.

Look, a person who is capable of making a real change can also sort out their own life with a small fraction of the effort. Making high-quality food and healthcare available for everyone is hard. Making high-quality food and healthcare available **to you** is comparatively trivial. Making your company a great place to work is a massive undertaking. Finding **a** great place **for you** to work is much easier.

That's why, when a person accepts the trouble of forcing the change instead of just living a quiet and comfortable life... Well, it's not entirely safe to assume selfish motives, but it's perfectly legit to ask questions.

Sure, there are leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs, thinkers and artists out there who change the world around them purely out of idealism and desire to serve people. But they're few and far between. Most of the time, there's some kind of personal interest, to say nothing about ego stakes. Some want money and

things they can buy with money. Some want power. Some want influence. Some want fame. Some just want a lot of sex. Most want a mixture of all the above, and God knows what else. Different people seek different things for themselves.

And that's all perfectly fine. Being a revolutionary is hard enough. Being a totally not selfish revolutionary is an unsustainably high standard that loops us all the way back to **Lesson #1. All, Nothing, and Just One Beer**.

So, when starting a revolution, always keep an eye on what's in it for you personally. You deserve it. You're awesome.

Outroduction

I've been writing this book for about ten to twelve weeks (and, for your understanding, I was doing it essentially as my full-time job with a lot of long evenings and few proper weekends) when I began to feel that ***"Oh no, I said too much, I haven't said enough."*** And yes, picking a line from the song called "Losing My Religion" feels very appropriate, even though the song itself has nothing to do with actual religion.

I haven't yet touched all the topics I originally intended to cover (hence, ***"I haven't said enough"***), but at the same time, I felt like I'm getting a tad too repetitive and handwavy for my own liking (hence, ***"I said too much"***).

So, it was a moment to decide. If my goal was to write the **Global Compendium on Universe, God, and Everything Worth Knowing,** akin to the likes of "Sapiens" or "Atlas Shrugged," then it was the right time to smash it all to pieces and start all over again. With a different title, obviously: calling a doorstopper of rules and algorithms an "anarchist handbook" would be hilarious.

Whereas, if my goal was to write a little rowdy collection of rants that is more vibes and laughs than

groundbreaking wisdom, then it was time for me to wrap up.

The reason I'm telling all this is because I want you to understand one thing. Some books, such as the aforementioned "Sapiens" and "Atlas Shrugged," are engineered to satisfy the needs of the readers who want to read a single book on a given subject and be done with it for the rest of their lives. For that, the authors of such books take care of exploring the subject matter in its entirety, which is why those books are so bloody thick. Also, they take care of cohesion and clarity, so there's no clumsy phrasing that may come across as self-contradictory.

The total compendium, this book is not.

If you find it thought-provoking, somewhat controversial and a tad sloppy, that's by design. There are plenty of gaps in my reasoning, my explanations and my choice of topics. And now you're supposed to fill them for yourself with your own logic, intuition and imagination, as well as with the other sources.

Speaking of the other sources. These aren't really a "recommended" list of reading, but I like these a lot, so you also might find them interesting.

"Tao Te Ching" by **Lao Tzu**. This is where it all began. I read this ancient text when I was about fourteen. It blew my mind, and I haven't managed to put it together ever since.

"Illusions" by **Richard Bach**. Another great story that has been a deep influence on me since my late teens, and you can notice it all over my own book. I guess Richard Bach might be a tad underrated because he's too accessible and too optimistic. And since *"human beings define their reality through suffering and misery,"* it's a tad easy to dismiss it as "just a fairytale for adults who can't grow up."

The reference to Agent Smith in the previous paragraph segues us to the next entry, which is *"The Matrix"* by **The Wachowskis**. I mean, sure, it's not a book, it's a film. But them, come on, can you imagine a spiritually curious lad growing up in the 1990s and not influenced by "The Matrix"? Like, seriously?

"Journey to Ixtlan" by **Carlos Castaneda**. My all-time favourite manual when it comes to the practical aspects of spirituality. I've mentioned it multiple times throughout my own book, and that's because at least a third of what I wrote here either comments on or straight borrows from "Ixtlan." If this doesn't make you curious enough to check it out, it is what it is.

"Technology of Life" by **Vladimir Tarasov**. I doubt this one was ever translated into English. However, if you read Russian, look this one up, it's pretty cool. I must admit, it wasn't particularly influential content-wise. But the whole idea of a forty-something chap with a career in business sitting down to write his own interpolation of the Buddhist teachings… Yeah, that was massively inspiring.

"The Gateless Gate" by **Wumen Huikai** + essays and lectures by **Alan Watts**. There are many good Zen texts, and "The Gateless Gate" is just one of them, but it's also the one I'd pick as my favourite. However. For the unprepared reader, Zen texts can get confusing, and I really mean *"what the actual fuck is going on here?!"* level of confusing. Alan Watts is fantastic at explaining Zen to the modern audience, and his essays and lectures are a great read by themselves. However, they don't pack the same punch as the koans. That's because nothing packs the same punch as the Zen koans. That's why I suggest reading these side by side.

Rumi and **Meister Eckhart**. Not much to say here. One is a great Sufi poet, the other a great Christian mystic. Look up their writings, they're mind-bogglingly heartwrenchingly beautiful.

Okay, so I guess it's all I've got to share this time, and it's time to wrap it up.

I know it might feel like a silly gimmick, but I honestly believe it, so let me say it one last time.

You're awesome.

Oh, and if you want to get in touch or check out what else I've been doing, including the other books I wrote, head to www.geekyfox.net. It's my personal website with contact details and some noteworthy accomplishments.