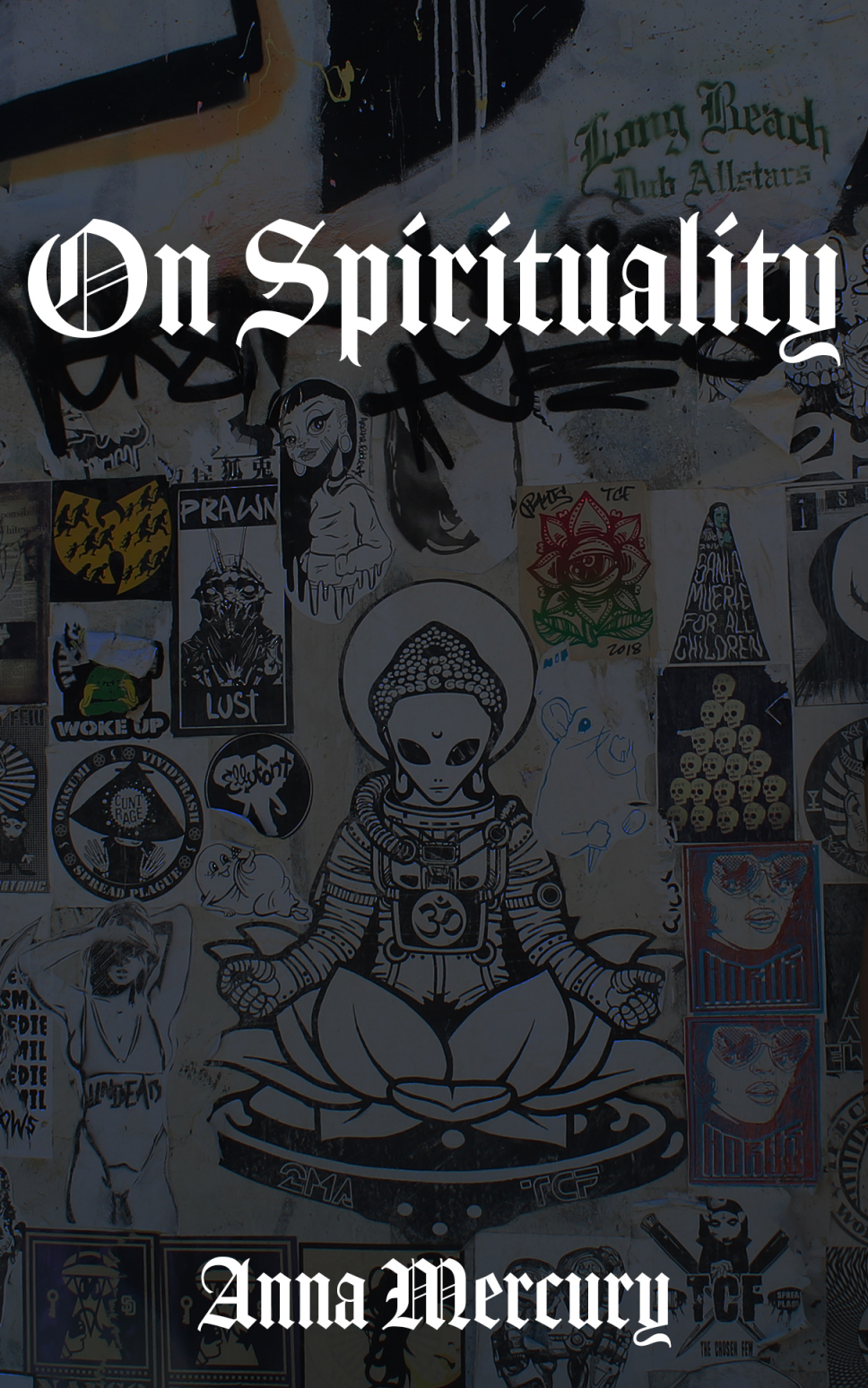


On Spirituality



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Contents

- Effortless Order (p. 1)
- My Secular Religion (p. 15)
- Four Noble Truths About Suffering (p. 20)
- How to Transmute Suffering (p. 25)
- We Are Nature Learning to Be Itself (p. 33)
- The Trap of Spiritual Luffing (p. 37)
- So You Had a Spiritual Awakening and Can't Relate to Your Life Anymore (p. 40)
- How to Manifest (p. 50)
- Source Does Not Speak in Form (p. 55)
- How to Trick the Ego into Dissolving Itself (p. 59)
- Is Our Awakening the End of our Storytelling? (p. 65)
- Which is More Important: Spiritual Awakening or Changing the World? (p. 70)
- What We All Have in Common (We're All Trying to Reach Heaven by Understanding It) (p. 76)
- Twelve Bits of Advice (p. 81)

Effortless Order

Life has its Order. There are no rules but the rules of Order. There are no laws but the laws of Order. Order prevails, in all things.

Order has been called the Way. It is not the Way of a road, but the Way that flowers bloom. The Way that rivers flow. The Way that trees sprout and grow and burn and fall. The Way we are. The river carves its way through rock for centuries on its course to reach the sea, for no purpose but this: that is just what rivers do, because that is just what rivers are.

It is the process of organic emergence – all things coming to be organically from what all things are. Order is harmonious. There is harmony within and between all things. All is in balance. Order is effortless, every part of existence finding its way, filling its place, following its course.

All is Order. Order is that which is. It has no beginning and no end. Nothing is outside the bounds of its harmony, its balance, its Way. When we know Order, we know this is true: all is in balance, all is in harmony, all is in Order.

But most of the time, our experience of life feels nothing like that. So, why the fuck not?

Oh, dear human. Welcome.

We humans have this pesky little thing called the Mind. You can call it the Ego, if you like. It's been called the Separate Self. There are variations on the applications and uses of each term, but for the purposes of this book, they all mean the same thing: the self that is aware of itself as a self.

The Mind believes itself to be separate. The self-aware Mind created with it a new dimension of being, from which things look different than they are.

Order made the Mind so the Mind could understand Order. Through everything that is, Order shaped the Mind. Everything has a hand in shaping the Mind. The Mind is not separate from any of it. The Mind is inseparable from all of it.

But the dimension of the Mind is the dimension of perceiving separation.

In Order, all is one and in harmony, and this is Truth. In the Mind, all is separate and in conflict. This is perception.

No, I'm not going to tell you that the Mind's perception is incorrect. It isn't. That doesn't make it True. The Mind's perception is correct within the bounds of its perception, but that does not stop Order from being Truth.

To bring the Mind into alignment with Order – or, to realize Order within the Mind's perception – is the path to Truth. When the Mind aligns with Order, action becomes effortless. Being becomes authentic. What it does emerges organically from what it is, and the inseparability of the two is realized.

The two are never separate – being and doing, but they can appear to be to the Mind. Within the Mind, all things are separate, as though each blade of grass were not the field. The Mind draws lines through and between what is, creating distinctions that are only there in the Mind.

Fortunately, the situation is not hopeless. Order can be realized in the Mind – that is to say, it can be understood as real, and it can be made real – by the very facets of the Mind itself. Like all that is, the Mind does what it is. And what it is, is conscious.

The Mind may take action that seeks to contradict Order – in fact, it must try, if it is to fulfill its function of understanding Order. But Order prevails, in all things. When the Mind aligns with Order, it consciously takes action in line with Order. All becomes illuminated. All that is possible becomes possible.

To understand the possible, the Mind must become aware of what it doesn't perceive, that it does not perceive everything, and expand to fill every opening it comes across. The Mind is like the current that flows the river: it does what it is. The more it understands what it is, the more it can do. The more it can choose what it does, the more it can align what it does with what it is.

Consciousness is the awareness of ability to choose. It is the experience of discernment and will. Consciousness only exists within the dimension of the Mind, where things are

separate and can be chosen between. To align the Mind with Order is to expand and understand the possible.

The Conscious Mind is aware, and aware that it is aware.

When the Mind becomes conscious, the second dimension of the Mind folds back on itself into a third. And so we have three dimensions: The dimension of Order, in which all is. The dimension of the Mind, in which there are divisions between what is. And, the dimension of the Conscious Mind, in which the Mind is aware of itself as the creator of divisions, and may choose what and how to create.

When we pass from the Mind into the Conscious Mind, we cease to work against Order. We become aware that we are never separate from Order, and that we are Order. In the Conscious Mind, the experience of harmony can be realized. What is Truth can be made perception. Perception becomes aligned with Truth.

Look, I know – that was a lot. A lot of Capitalized Nouns and lofty proclamations about what is and what's possible. If it felt disconcerting to read – well, it felt disconcerting to write.

No part of this essay will be spent convincing you that what I've written is True. I'd guess you already perceive that it is, in some form, or we wouldn't be here. Perhaps not. Perhaps you have different language you use to describe it, or different points of consciousness through which you access it. I can't speak to your experience – I can only perceive what I perceive.

The rest of this essay will contain a guide to navigating the perceived space between Mind and Order, and bridging the gap through coming into Consciousness and aligning perception with Truth. It is the beginnings of a guide to union, to yoking, to yoga – from the psoas to political sociology. I've chosen a particular linear flow for how to convey the information, but Order doesn't work much like a line.

The point of this is to help your Mind to realize Order – both to understand it and to experience it as reality. I cannot guarantee that it will do that. So sit tight, do what feels right, and we'll go through it together.

To pull from the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, “Atha yoga anushasanam” – Now, let us study the union between Mind and Order together:

Mind and Order

The Mind perceives itself as separate. It perceives time as linear. It perceives self, other, difference, past, future, and uncertainty rather than unity. From this perception, fear can arise. From this fear comes the drive to control, to exert force, to act with effort.

In Order, there is no distinction between what it does and what it is. There is no distinction between what it is and why it is, or how it is. What shapes it is no different from what it is, and what it is has no difference from what it shapes.

Change and Acceptance

In response to any situation, there are only two options: to accept and allow, or resist and change. Most of our perception is accepted and allowed without much consciousness. Some things in our experience arise and cause us to choose between accepting what is, and changing what is.

When faced with an experience of disunity between the Mind and what is, we can either seek to change our perception, or seek to change what is. In the dimension of Order, these are no different, though they feel different to the Mind. Neither option is wrong, and the two are inseparable.

Dynamic Equilibrium

All is, and it always is. It is in harmony. It cannot be created or destroyed, but it is still always changing: in motion, in flux, from the perception of the Mind. All that is changes through movement towards equilibrium or balance, through the act of realizing the experience of harmony.

Realization

Realization is the act of both understanding that something is real, and bringing something into reality. In the

dimension of the Mind, there is a perception of difference between the two.

The Mind can experience realization as either creation or understanding, as causing something to happen or becoming aware that something is happening. In the dimension of Order, there is no difference between the two. The realization of Order in the Mind feels to the mind as a twofold process of making Order real, and becoming aware that Order is real.

Consciousness

Consciousness is awareness of ability to choose. When the Mind feels unable to know and make choices, the experience of autonomy does not occur. The conscious Mind perceives Truth, and thereby, realizes Truth. It realizes Truth by making Truth real, and by coming to know that Truth is real. Its experience of authenticity and autonomy is no different than its experience of understanding Order.

From Assumption to Awareness

The conscious Mind knows. The unconscious Mind does not know that it does not know. The unconscious Mind experiences knowing where there is none. It fills the gaps in its awareness with assumptions. The conscious Mind deconstructs the unconscious Mind.

The conscious Mind chips away at assumptions with questions. It chips away at unknowing with curiosity and attention. It chips away at denial with acceptance. It comes to know as the Mind knows - through difference - by learning to distinguish between fiction and reality.

From Denial to Truth

Truth is the point of unity between perception and reality. There can be no harmony in the Mind without Truth. When perceptions are out of step with reality, the Mind experiences harm. A reality being denied or not seen, misunderstood or assumed, is the source of disunity between Mind and Order - it is the disunity. What it does is no different than what it is, and from what caused it to be.

The opposite of Truth is not only lies. The opposite of Truth is also denial, ignorance, pretense, assumption, misconception, refusal to understand, and inability to understand. To know what it is while denying why it is, is not to know at all.

Truth requires awareness and consciousness. If the Mind is not aware of itself, it cannot perceive its Truth. If the Mind is unconscious, its choices will not create harmony. Truth requires authenticity and honesty, first within the Mind, and then between the Mind and all that it perceives as Other.

From Thought to Need

A need is only ever a state of being. The Mind often confuses thoughts with needs, mistaking a possible strategy to meet its need for the need itself.

As Order is balance, the Mind's alignment with Order is the Mind's experience of balance. Therefore, a need is always the opposite of the Mind's current state of being; only in moving towards the opposite can the Mind come to center. A need is met when the opposite state of being is experienced.

A need is met more easily by the Mind focusing on the need itself, and broadening its perception of possible options to get to it, rather than fixating on only one option. When the Mind confuses thought and need, thoughts limit options. When the Mind understands need, thoughts expand options.

From Fault to Ability

Fault exists only in the Mind, not in Order. In Order, all is. In the Mind, separations and distinctions are drawn, and specific causes are perceived. The Mind equates responsibility with fault rather than ability, but responsibility is nothing more or less than ability to respond.

The Mind's ability is a product of power and awareness. The experience of ability requires having the power to

choose a possible action, and having the awareness of what actions are possible. When the Mind seeks to increase its power, it realizes ability by making ability real. When the Mind seeks to increase awareness, it realizes ability by coming to know that it is real.

From Obligation to Consent

When the Mind becomes conscious, all actions become choices. Obligation, like fault, exists only in the Mind. The unconscious Mind does not perceive that it is always choosing. Always choosing does not mean always choosing from an absolute infinity of options; there still exists an infinity of numbers between the numbers 1 and 2.

When the Mind and Order meet, choice becomes consent - a choice that is experienced as a choice. Consent only exists where the Mind experiences freedom. Consent is the cause of harmony between the Mind and reality. In Order, there is no cause; all simply is. Therefore, consent is not only the cause, but the actuality of harmony between the Mind and reality.

Non-consent is the cause and actuality of disharmony between the Mind and reality. Non-consent is what transforms the Mind's experiences into harms and violences. The experience of domination, disempowerment, force, manipulation and coercion inhibits the experience of consent. To realize choice in the Mind is to both to make it real - by dissolving perceived

hierarchies of power - and to come to understand that it is real.

From Performance to Autonomy

Consent is experiencing autonomy; it is caused by and comes from autonomy. Autonomy is the Mind's experience of Order. Ultimately, the Mind does not perceive separation because of a distinction between self and other. The Mind perceives separation because it views itself as though from the outside. There is no independence in Order; all is. There is autonomy in Truth.

The Mind's experience of autonomy is hindered not only by force and hierarchy, but by calcified identity, by codified role, by proscribed position. The Mind that is not authentic is not autonomous. The Mind that is not conscious is not authentic; it is not perceiving Truth.

The Mind perceives separation, and therefore, causality. The Mind that defines what it is by what it does reaches equilibrium by defining what it does by what it is.

From Control to Safety

Control comes from fear; if we did not fear, we would not control. Control is a false experience of power that exists only in the Mind. Control gives us the perception of safety, but control is the opposite of safety. In fact, the freer we all are, the safer we each are.

There is no faith to this argument, it is pure logic: the more options we each have to meet our needs, the less need we would perceive to harm others to get our needs met.

From Structure to Harmony

Understand your needs, and your many paths to get there. Understand the needs of others, and the many paths to get there. Find the paths that lead to both, and act in mutual aid.

Create community authentically, allowing all relationships within it to arise out of authentic need and consent. Associate freely. Reject calcified order, power hierarchy, role and rule, and create in your perception the experience of Order: effortless, emerging organically, consensual, harmonious, balanced.

From Fear to Trust

The Mind's drive to control comes from fear. Control therefore is fear, and creates fear. In Order, there is no difference between what shapes it, what it is, and what it shapes. Control can only seem real to the Mind; it is not reality. In Order, there is harmony. All is, and can never cease to be. There is no cause for fear. There is no creation of fear. There is no fear.

To realize Truth in the Mind is to trust. In the Mind, trust can be earned and it can be given, caused by self or by

other. In Order, trust is. To trust is to live in Truth. From the Mind's perspective, trust is both given and earned. Causality exists only in the Mind.

The Mind's experience of trust comes from faith and from action. Faith without action is mere hope, an expectation of difference in the future while there is no difference in the present. Faith without action is disunity between the Mind and reality. Action without faith is mere control, an expectation of difference in the present while there is no difference in the future.

The distinctions of past, present and future exist only in the Mind.

Realizing Truth

In realizing Truth, Truth and perception are no different. Being and doing cannot feel different, for in Truth, they are not different. Ends and means do not appear different, for in Truth, they are not different. Community emerges out of authentic relationships through free association and mutual aid. Action is experienced as authentic. Relationships are experienced as harmonious. Choices are experienced as autonomous and consensual. Deconstruction, curiosity and questioning are always present. Information is not ignored. Shadows are illuminated.

In Truth, what is moral is what is correct. All violence is a denial of Truth, creating in the Mind's experience a

disharmony between the Mind and reality. Morality is the spacelessness between experience and reality, when the reality of autonomy, consent, authenticity and consciousness are experienced. To realize Truth is to know morality by reality, and realize morality in reality.

Everyone is on this path, and everyone is chipping away at a piece of the wall between Mind and Order. Everyone is building the bridge between Truth and perception. From politics to the body, from psychology to relationships, we are never not doing this. In becoming aware of what it is that we are doing, we can act all the more consciously towards our goal.

My Secular Religion

I believe in God. I believe God is — and that's the end of the sentence. In the words of the Abrahamic God itself, "I am who am," or to put it more intelligibly, I am that which is.

To me, God is. God is that which is. God is everything which is. God is everything. Everything is God. Therefore, nothing is God. Therefore, there is no God. And yet, God still is, because things that are still are.

This is a story we choose how to tell.

My religion is wholly secular. I have found resonance in certain teachings of Taoism, Buddhism, non-dual Hinduism, neo-Paganism and Christianity, probably because they're what I've been most exposed to. My spiritual practices include Dialectical Behavioral Therapy and conditioning, anarcho-syndicalism and dual power, class consciousness, Christ consciousness, allowing and changing. Dialectics are my gospel.

My disciple is myself. My guru is the totality of my experience. My God is existence. My practice is learning, and passing on. Internalizing, and externalizing. Inhaling, exhaling. It is all sacred.

Writing is my prayer. Everything I love to do is my prayer. Life is a story we choose how to tell.

Call it pantheism or atheism — in truth, they are two ways of looking at the same idea: God is that which is.

I choose to call myself spiritual, perhaps to the detriment of being taken seriously by others. I put faith in a universal order that some would call the Tao and others would call Ecology. The nature of nature, the Way things are and how they change, how we feel and are: these are my holy text. I sum it up as the fact that needs need to be met, and there are always paths to them. Those paths can lead to harmony or discord, and what is chaotic from one view is harmonious from another.

I am a preacher and a follower, a teacher and a student. We all are, always, in our own ways.

My idea of “Let go, let God” is to give up your idea of what your needs being met has to look like, and allow them to be met. Both are ways of saying the same thing.

I believe in the Law of Attraction in so far as I believe that where we put our focus directs our action. I am not big on crystals, but I am big on chakras, because I don't think mind, body and spirit are separate. I feel knocks to my self-worth in my stomach, and heartbreak in my chest, and hypomania in my forehead. I like Jesus because he was a dirty homeless drop-out rebel anti-imperialist community organizer who got crucified for trying to ignite a revolution of Love.

My spirituality is not separate from this earth and everything that inhabits it. My spirituality is rooted in the

belief in the sacredness of all life, because there is nothing beyond all life, and so this is as sacred as it gets. What we say about it is a choice. What we have is the power to choose.

My divine power is the power to choose what I say about existence, and to choose my experiences accordingly. My divine power is the power to influence those around me simply by changing how I act. I am not separate from them, though I am distinct. Oneness with all of life is as about genetics and eons of conditioning and what I ate for dinner last night. Oneness is secular. It is also spiritual.

My spirituality is entirely logical. It accepts that the only logical understanding of the world is that we have a unique and limited perspective, so there is no way to ever prove the objectivity of anything. Therefore, everything is taken on a degree of faith through our personal interpretation. We have power over how we interpret things, but sometimes, we don't have complete control.

My answers are political and social, universal and spiritual, interpersonal and psychological. None of these realms is separate from any other, though they are distinct, just as none of us is separate from one another, but we are distinct. My philosophy is total, encompassing how I view myself, my society, my universe, my existence, and my life. I grow more enlightened through learning from every moment. There is no end.

I wish people would stop looking for an origin point, though I understand the impulse to. It is all in your head, and it is all around you. The two are distinct, but not separate. You create your own reality, and your reality creates you. It's choice and it's victimhood. It's structure, and it's agency. The two are distinct, but not separate. All you have is the power to choose what to say about it, to change yourself, and through that, to change everything around you.

The glass is just a glass and there's water in it. Whether you call it half empty or half full does not change what it is, but it does change you: changing your perspective changes the impact something has on you. Taking action can also change something's impact on you, and you can change your impact on it. If I drink from the glass, it is emptier than it was before, and I am fuller. When I pee, when I exhale, and when I die, I pass on my fullness to the fullness of everything beyond me. This is the Way.

I am me, and I am that which is. You are you, and you are that which is. We are one, and we are each us. We are. God is. We are God, and God is us.

We all are, always, in our own ways.

As within, so without. All is distinct, but not separate. What we have is the power to choose. There is no map to making that choice, there is only ever a compass, and that compass is your experience itself. You, in this moment, now, and every other time you have been. You, where you are, here, and everything around you. We search for harmony like we

search for justice, all because we search for equilibrium.
Everything is dynamic and in flux.

For me, having the power to choose meaning means more
than any objective meaning ever could.

Four Noble Truths About Suffering

The root of all suffering is addiction. We can end suffering by healing from all addictions. Simple, right? Ha. This is a work of logic, not psychological or medical science, and I am writing it in the order it came to me:

Truth One: Desire rules. All other rules are made up.

All morality is unscientific. Every moral judgment you have is based on an assumption you can't prove is correct. If you think something is morally wrong, you can keep asking "Why is that wrong?" again and again. Eventually you'll hit a question you can't answer, and realize that you actually don't know. The only explanation you'll be able to give is "Because I don't want it."

We don't do things because they are morally right. We don't avoid doing things because they are morally wrong. We do things because we want to do them, and we don't do things because we don't want to do them. This is the entire science of reward, punishment, and behavioral conditioning: condition behavior you want by associating it with reward, and eradicate behavior you don't want by making the subject associate the behavior with punishment. Because they want to avoid punishment, they'll want to avoid the behavior.

The act of punishing something is ultimately an act of judgment: Behavior A is judged as worthy of reward, Behavior B is judged as worthy of punishment. You can ask “Why is Behavior B worthy of punishment?” continuously, and eventually you’ll hit a question you can’t answer. You’ll realize, once again, that you actually don’t know. The only answer you’ll be able to give will again be “Because I don’t want it.”

You reward things because you want them, and you punish things because you don’t want them. Why? Because you want to. There is nothing more objective or moral to it than that. This is why the truth of all society is ultimately anarchy.

The problem is that sometimes, people want to do things you don’t want them to do, even more than they want to avoid the possible punishment for doing so. What you want most always wins out. This will always be true, no matter the act or the punishment. You cannot eradicate unwanted behavior with punishment eternally or always. Even the threat of violence or death does not stop humans universally or always; if it did, the world would have no martyrs and no murders.

Truth Two: Safety comes from freedom and abundance.

The only way to fully eradicate an unwanted behavior is to make it universally unwanted, meaning that no one would

ever have any reason to do it. This is why freedom, counterintuitively, is directly correlated with safety. We typically think of safety as imposing necessary limits on freedom and vice versa, which is an understandable miscarriage of logic.

Rather, the freer we all are to meet our needs, and the more abundant the satisfaction of our needs is, the less need we each have to harm one another in order to get our needs met. The less need we have to harm one another, the less we'll want to.

The only way to eradicate the behavior of humans harming one another is to create a world of such abundance and freedom that no human would have any need to harm anyone else, for everything they needed would be available. This is why a peaceful society is one in which everyone's material needs are met, and no society that lets needs go unmet can ultimately be peaceful.

Truth Three: A need is not a craving.

The devil is in the details, and that detail is the word "need." A need is only ever a state of being. When you are cold, you need warmth. Every possible strategy to attain warmth is just that: a strategy to meet your need. Confusing the strategy with the need itself will create suffering. This is true of more nuanced or "non-physical" needs as well: when you are isolated, you need connection.

When you are disempowered, you need empowerment. When you are hurt, you need healing. When you are imbalanced, you need to be in equilibrium.

When we believe we need a particular strategy to meet our needs, we enter a state of craving (what Buddhism calls *tanha*) and our relationship to this strategy becomes addictive. On a philosophical level, that is what an addiction is: the belief that a strategy is a need. This is true of addictions to heroin or exercise, sex or coffee, individual people or status, money or fear. An addiction is always to a "form." A form is something we define conceptually, such as an object, substance, action, role, identity or thought.

We can tell we have a craving when we experience suffering without a particular form, or when we have an inability to experience a state of contentment and homeostasis without believing we have that form. The continued craving for the form will invariably (though not immediately) produce suffering. From this, we get the Buddhist Noble Truth that craving is the cause of suffering.

We typically think that suffering is the cause of craving; this is not so. Being in a state of need is the cause of need. Craving is the misidentification of need: the conditioned association that a need can be met only through a certain form. A need is only ever a state of being.

Truth Four: Detachment from craving is the path to abundance.

The less we attach to particular forms to meet our needs, the easier our needs are to meet. We will be able to achieve our state of equilibrium more easily when we have more options to meet our needs. We have more options to meet our needs when we are able to reach contentment and homeostasis without requiring particular forms. Satisfaction becomes abundant.

When we release attachment to the forms that meet our needs, and act only towards a state of need-satisfaction through all available forms, we can live in what Taoism calls “flow.” Needs arise to create satisfaction, and satisfaction arises to create needs.

How to Transmute Suffering

Unless you've already reached some eternal dynamic bliss state of perpetual Nirvana (if you have, how is it?), you likely suffer sometimes. You likely don't enjoy suffering — in fact, by definition, that's what makes it "suffering." Because you don't enjoy suffering, you probably want to minimize the amount you have to suffer. Right? Cool, me too. You've come to the right place.

While I cannot yet say from experience that suffering is curable (I'll have to take Buddha's word on that for now), I can tell you that it is healable. Its symptoms can be addressed at the root cause, and the cause can be transmuted into a source of joy and satisfaction, rather than pain and suffering.

Without further ado, here is a simple, but comprehensive, five step process for transmuting suffering:

Step One: Water — Feel and Allow Your Emotions

Our first step is about emotions, and learning to work with them rather than letting them work against us. Emotions flow like water flows. An emotion that is not flowing is merely waiting to, increasing in pressure until the time comes that it causes an emotional burst like a busted water pipe.

To reduce suffering, you first let your emotions flow. That means: you feel your emotions. You allow yourself to feel

them. You open yourself to them, rather than wall your experience off from them. You let them come in with no judgment.

This is easier said than done. Why? Because feeling negative emotions isn't exactly fun. It can be daunting, terrifying, at times even overwhelming. Still, like jumping into water, the longer you wait to jump, the scarier it seems. Take a deep breath, and take the plunge. Just let yourself feel awful, and do nothing. Your feelings are valid. Show them that they are valid by letting yourself feel them.

Please remember that feeling your feelings does not mean reacting to them. In fact, it means not reacting to them at all until they have been felt. Pause all actions until after you have let yourself simply experience the emotion, unhindered. Until you have fully allowed and felt the negative emotion, do not do anything to change your emotions. The only way out is through, which means that at first, the only way out is in.

When we experience a negative emotion, and we take immediate action to escape the emotion, we create addictive patterns and increase our own suffering. To reduce suffering, we must first resist the urge to react immediately, and instead allow our feelings to be felt.

Once we have opened ourselves to them, then we can begin to study them more thoroughly, but that self-study cannot occur from a place of repression, resistance or denial. Feeling the emotions must come first.

Step Two: Air — Question and Challenge Your Thoughts

Our second step is about thoughts and beliefs. Thoughts will appear and swirl and expand to fill the confines of whatever belief system they are given. Beliefs function kind of like an atmosphere, holding the thoughts in place, seemingly rigid but ultimately permeable. We often cannot perceive our belief systems because our thoughts appear too “cloudy,” so to speak.

Once we have allowed ourselves to feel our emotions (and only after!), we can begin to question the thoughts and beliefs that caused our emotions to swirl.

To do this, notice the thoughts you have about the situation. Notice that they are thoughts. Try thinking different thoughts about the situation, and see what happens to your emotions. Try thinking different thoughts about the situation, and notice which new perspectives you can easily believe, and which you can't.

Now that we've started parsing out the thoughts, we can begin to see the beliefs we have at play. What are those beliefs? Approach them with innocent curiosity. Is this belief rigid, or flexible? Porous, or solid? Do I like it? Do I want to keep believing it? What would happen if I believed something else? What else could I believe? What other thoughts would I think if I believed something else? What is holding my belief in place?

Step Three: Fire — Uncover and Explore Your Opposing Desires

Our third step is about desires. Like light, when we focus our attention on something, we illuminate it into conscious awareness, and we cast a shadow on whatever it is we aren't focused on. In order to fully move through our suffering, we must turn the light of our attention to the parts of our experience that remain in the dark: ignored, repressed or denied. This is the step that often gets called "shadow work," or working with our unconscious mind.

This step in the process is where I most recommend seeking help from other people, both because they will likely be able to see aspects of you that you don't see, and because it is often the most challenging step, the "trial by fire." Seeking external support can be helpful and necessary to the process. Please be gentle with yourself through this whole process, but especially through this step.

After allowing our feelings, and exploring our thoughts and beliefs, we can begin to look at the oppositional forces that are holding our current beliefs in place. Those forces are, quite plainly, energies pulling us in opposite directions. One of our desires conflicts with an equal and opposite desire, which we aren't always conscious that we have. By becoming aware that it is there, it ceases to be unconscious, and we can begin to study it.

Suffering arises when we are "pulled" in two contradictory directions: we want one thing, but we also want something else that pulls us elsewhere. By studying the illuminated desire, we immediately know a good deal about the

shadowed desire: it is always a perfect mirror, in some ways identical and in some ways exactly the opposite.

Once we become aware that our desires are there, we can enact steps two and one in reverse. We begin by probing each desire with innocent curiosity, and without judgment. We ask questions. We come to understand them in our thoughts. Then, we look to the feelings underneath those thoughts.

What is it that we expect these desires to make us feel?
What are the actual needs underneath the wants?

By the end of this step, we have the lay of the land when it comes to our suffering. We know now what our suffering feels like. We know what we think about it, and what we believe. We know what desires we have, and what desires are in opposition. From this place, we can synthesize the two experiences into a combined set of needs, and begin to meet them.

Step Four: Earth — Take Steps to Meet Your Actual Needs

Our fourth step is all about practical steps. Like building in the material world, we now take the understanding we have built from the previous three steps and turn it into concrete changes to our experience. We now know the multiple desires we have at play that are creating internal conflict, and can take steps to meet the needs that lie beneath them.

What we need is only ever a state of being, either physical or emotional. Anything we think we need that is not a

physical or emotional state of being is simply a strategy to reach our need. One of the main causes of suffering is equating a strategy to meet a need with the need itself.

When we understand our needs this simply, they become much easier to meet. It becomes obvious that we don't have to bulldoze one need in favor of another, nor do we have to compromise any of our needs. We can hold both needs as precious and broaden our awareness of possible strategies that meet them both.

From this place, of understanding what it is we actually need to experience, our actions need not create conflict. This is true of balancing conflicting needs within ourselves, and conflicts between our own needs and the needs with others. We can almost always find numerous strategies to meet our needs when we focus fully on the needs themselves, rather than fixate on only certain strategies to meet them.

From this place, we can start taking actions to meet our needs, conscious of what we actually need rather than wedded to certain limited concepts of what we want. We've now shifted our actions in the world to be more conscious and harmonious, and healed a part of our own suffering.

The first time you go all the way through this process, it will likely feel triumphant... until you have to start the process over again with another aspect of your psyche. This is a

practice. It's a process that gets faster and easier with time and repetition.

Bit by bit, we actually begin to chip away at our suffering, transmuting an experience of pain into an experience of acceptance, learning, knowledge and power.

Step Five: Spirit — Little by Little, Dis-identify from Concepts

Our final step is about release: the evaporation of the need to go through the suffering and transmutation process. The further we get into the transmutation process, the less we find ourselves fixating on oppositional desires, and the more we find ourselves experiencing harmonious needs.

Our identification with concepts begins to dissolve, and we begin to put ourselves in right relationship with our experience of life.

Rather than judge or repress our feelings, we understand that they must flow like water, and allow them to. Rather than believe all of our thoughts as though they were truth, we understand that they must be explored and looked at from new perspectives. Rather than act upon a desire unconsciously, we understand that desires are like trumpeters that alert us to what we actually need. Rather than repress, deny or bulldoze our needs, we understand that needs are only states of being, and we broaden our possible actions so that all of our needs can be met more seamlessly.

As we do this, our experience of life begins to shift from primarily perceiving forms, to primarily experiencing... experiences. What I mean is, by understanding ourselves, and treating different aspects of our decision-making process appropriately, we find ourselves fixating less on what we think we want, and understanding better what we actually need. We identify less with what we think we are, and understand better how we actually are. The oppositions within us synthesize into a more harmonious experience of living. Need arise to create satisfaction, and satisfaction arises to create need, and the whole process can be embraced and enjoyed, rather than becoming a source of suffering.

We Are Nature Learning to Be Itself

Nature evolves. That is what it does.

Nature shapes itself to fit the conditions it creates, as automatically as a river winding its way towards the sea. There is no effort in such an action. This is just what rivers do, because this is just what rivers are. So too does nature evolve.

To call anything in this universe “unnatural” is to miss the point. There is nothing beyond nature. Everything around you has come from nature, is made by nature, is made for nature. All of it evolved along with you, being conditioned by you or conditioning you, as nature irrevocably does to itself. This can be said of the forests and the ocean, your dog or your iPhone or your false eyelashes. There is nothing unnatural about any of it, because you, too, are nature.

In each new way we shape our surroundings, we are contributing to evolution, actively. While applying false eyelashes may not seem as natural as a river finding its way to the sea, it is —it’s still the process of nature shaping its surroundings. Evolution created self-aware sentience, consciousness in a being that is aware of itself as itself.

If that was confusing at all, think about yourself. Were you able to do so? Congratulations! You are consciousness aware of itself. To say “I am” is to be self-aware.

Consciousness becoming aware of itself is nature becoming aware of itself. What does nature do? It evolves.

Even if you are a theist, you can't argue that nature evolves itself. If God exists, God is a part of existence, and is therefore natural. Like rivers flowing to the sea, nature simply evolves — its pattern is written into what it is. Whether or not you view that action as written in by chemicals or compounds or by a divine consciousness named God, the result is functionally the same: nature's capacity for shaping itself is inexorable from what it is.

What we can likely all agree on is the following. 1) Nature evolves. 2) We are nature. 3) We are aware that we are nature. 4) We are aware that we evolve. And now, 5) We are aware that nature evolves itself.

What we are coming to understand is that we evolve ourselves. We have the capacity to evolve, consciously. We can create and catalyze evolution, as nature always has. Everything we create — from technology to art to relationships to experiences — evolves us. We create it as it creates us. It shapes us and is shaped by us.

Just as we are consciousness becoming aware of itself, we are evolutioneers becoming aware that they are evolving and are catalyzing evolution.

Naturally, we are reckoning with having that power, and with learning how to wield it. Of course our early attempts at self-aware and conscious evolution are sloppy and lurching and rough. Of course we're nearly killing

ourselves in the process. Of course we are playing God, or, playing Mother Nature. That is what we are. Being nature is our birthright, inexorable and inalienable. Nature evolves itself. We evolve ourselves.

Nature was always going to get here. We know that because it happened, through no influence by anything but nature. No part of this is unnatural.

Does that mean we should keep polluting the planet until we have to #OccupyMars? Of course not. Does that mean we should tolerate genocide? Of course not.

Just as we are nature learning that we have the power to shape itself, we are learning what shapes actually fit us. We are learning what is healthy for us, and what is harmful. We are learning what we like and what we don't like. We are learning what we feel and what we think, as a collective. In becoming aware of each other, we are learning that what we call other is still us, because we are nature. Only nature, aggregated together into an inseparable whole, knows what's truly best for it.

I can't tell you what that is. I am not aware of the totality of nature. The closest thing I have to an answer is that the more we talk to each other, the more we empathize with one another, and the more we make decisions cooperatively with others — the closer we are to aggregating consciousness.

But I am but one part of consciousness, and I cannot choose our best direction on my own. I need you, all of you, as you all need me too.

So, what I can say for a conclusion is this: if you find yourself asking, “What exactly should I do with the awareness that I am creating evolution in every action I take?” — you are asking the right question.

The Trap of Spiritual Luffing

If you want to be happy, don't worry about happiness.

To focus on something is to think about it. When you focus on something, your attention flows towards it, and your conscious thoughts are about it. When you think about something, it exists as a thought — a concept.

Happiness, like love, is not a concept, but like everything, it can be conceptualized. It becomes a concept if you're thinking about it. When I say the word "happiness," you are aware of my meaning. Thoughts come to mind which to you mean happiness: you have certain associations, definitions, images and ideas of what happiness is that allow you to understand me when I say the word.

When you focus on happiness, your focus is on what you think happiness is. Your mind is on the concept. Your thoughts and attention are on the definitions, images and ideas that, to you, equate to happiness. Because your focus is on the concept of happiness, your focus can't be on the things that cause you to actually experience happiness.

When we try to be happy directly, we ignore the causes of happiness. I call this phenomenon "spiritual luffing."

The term "luffing" comes from sailing. If you want to sail a boat in the direction the wind is coming from, you can't turn the bow directly into the wind. In order for the wind to carry the boat towards it, you have to sail just to the side of

the wind so it can catch your sails and work with the boat to pull you forwards. When facing directly into the wind, there's no surface area for the wind to catch and the sails will luff: the wind pushes against them rather than filling them, they start flapping erratically back and forth, and the boat goes nowhere.

When you focus directly on "being happy," your focus is on a concept of happiness, and the concept of happiness is not the experience of it. Equating the experience of happiness with the concept of it is like equating a trail map with the act of hiking. If I talk about hiking Half Dome, you might have a certain image of the route in mind. Thinking about the route is obviously not going to move your body into Yosemite and up the trail.

To most effectively head in the direction of happiness, you have turn your focus away from what you think happiness is, and instead focus on aspects of your life that make you happy. Focusing on the concept of happiness, and "trying to be happy" as a result, gives the winds of happiness nothing to work with. Your mind and emotions flap wildly around, confusedly wondering if this is what happiness feels like. It isn't.

Complete happiness arises as a lived experience when you put your complete attention on things that make you happy.

If you want to be happy, give your full attention to any aspects of your life that bring you joy, and allow those to

be what pull you in the direction of happiness. The organization guru Marie Kondo clocked it beautifully: the trick is to notice what sparks joy, keep whatever does, and bit by bit, give up the rest.

If you start feeling stuck in trying to be happy, this is a glaring sign to change course. Put your focus elsewhere, so your proverbial boat does not get stuck in proverbial irons. When you've turned out of the wind enough, by turning away from concepts of what you should be doing to be happy, and towards focusing directly on the activities, relationships and experiences that actually give you the sensation of happiness, the winds of joy will fill your sails again.

For many of us, turning away from our thoughts about happiness, or our conditioned beliefs of what we're supposed to be doing to live a good life, feels like a terrifying leap of faith. We fear that if we put our focus elsewhere, we'll careen off course, or lose the wind entirely and end up stuck. It can be a lot less terrifying when you understand that this is basic science of working with your environment to achieve anything.

Finding happiness is as simple as sailing: if you're stuck going nowhere, turn away from the direction you think you want to go. Take your focus off of where you think you want to get to, and focus on things that actually make you happy. Trust the wind to work with you. It will catch you then, and you will glide towards your destination as effortlessly as a sailboat.

So You Had a Spiritual Awakening and Can't Relate to Your Life Anymore

So, you had a spiritual awakening. A big lightbulb lit up, like revelation, a window opened from a different kind of world and everything changed.

In this new light, everything looks different. The light comes in from a different source now. You have no idea what to do with the stuff of your life anymore, because most of it no longer makes any sense. Most people in your life don't understand what's happening to you, and relating to them is getting increasingly uncomfortable.

This is uncomfortable, but don't worry — we'll get through it together.

For now, take a deep breath. Nothing is under control, but there is a pattern to it. Knowing that pattern will make the leaps of faith less daunting.

What you notice most will differ based on the details of your unique circumstance. It could be the job, the friends, the activities, the house, the partner, the lifestyle that no longer fits. What you're able to change right now will also vary from person to person. If we look at each detail, it's chaos and noise, and so, we'll look to the pattern.

What's happening now is basically that there's a new dimension to your consciousness. I'm not going to go down

any rabbit holes about quantum anything and whether or not it's actually another dimension — that's not really relevant. What is relevant is that where before, your responses were automatic and meanings were unquestioned, you're now seeing your own hand in constructing your meanings. You're realizing, bit by bit, that your responses are choices, not automatic reactions. You're learning how to choose differently, and what choices are best for you.

Step 1: Let the light illuminate the shadows.

The first thing you're going to see is how many of the choices you've made are not actually good for you. In the realm of Ego, which we both still live in right now, knowledge comes from contrast. The bright light of revelation is going to illuminate a cave of weird shadow puppets. The way the world works might start to feel disturbing or grotesque. Even people you care about will start to disturb you, as you'll start noticing how they play into the deranged addiction cycles of Ego identification.

When we glimpse a sort of heaven, we realize how much of our world is more like a hell. This is normal. It doesn't last forever.

The call of this stage is not to despair or succumb to anger and fear, but to allow yourself to be moved by these emotions all the same. There is a lot to grieve for.

Pretending you aren't grieving or disturbed by what you see in the world now is not going to serve you on your path. Trying to maintain "high vibe positivity" while denying your authentic feelings is just going to get you stuck and confused. It's okay to not feel okay.

Step 2: Let go and be flexible.

Your life direction and the paths available to you will start to change. A lot of spiritual teachers talk about timelines and frequencies, quantum leaps and whatnot — I don't know a thing about those. What I do know is that it does feel like a frequency changes, as though you were riding in one current, and suddenly, it's impossible to continue in the same way.

The trajectory of your life before you awakened fit one version of you, one set of thoughts and behaviors. As your thoughts and behaviors change, that trajectory no longer becomes viable. Your internal world is moving in a different direction now, and the external plans and roles that fit an earlier version of you will crumble. Letting go of them may be very painful. The "leap of faith," as it's often called, is the act of trusting that another trajectory will present itself that fits this newer version of you.

Be adaptable.

From this stage, many spiritual seekers start to retreat. Being “in the world” in the way you used to feels painful or impossible, and no matter how hard you try to block out what you now see, you realize you just can’t go back. And so, you go within. You’ll likely start spending less time with old friends, making more time for solitude or time in nature, and devoting yourself more directly to your spiritual practice.

Step 3: Begin to trust your happiness.

As you start releasing the aspects of your life that don’t contribute to your wellbeing, you find space for new activities and beliefs that do. What you thought you needed in order to be happy is not making you happy, and you no longer believe your own justifications for doing it. Now what? Now, you start noticing what actually does make you happy, and prioritizing those thoughts, actions and habits.

You start trusting yourself. You notice what food feels good in your body, and start eating more of it. You notice what people help you feel joyful, and spend more time with them. You notice what activities make you feel blissful and in flow, and you prioritize doing them. You notice what thoughts make the world seem brighter and more magical, and spend more time thinking them.

Your own joy becomes a conscious practice that you commit to.

Step 4: Cultivate your regular practice.

Your practice will likely be haphazard at first, as you test out what actions and beliefs serve you through a kind of trial and error. In time, you'll get more focused and consistent.

Developing a spiritual routine is extremely beneficial. Buddhist monk Nick Keomahavong stresses the importance of what he calls “gutter guards,” regular activities that draw your consciousness out of the material world and refocus it on spirit. This might look like meditation, chanting, prayer, reading spiritual texts, conscious journaling, spending time present with nature, and so on. The point of these “gutter guards” is that they keep you from straying too far from a spiritual focus. Many days, you will find yourself in extreme resistance to doing them. Do them anyway.

As you continue, it will become obvious that spirituality is a practice. Faith in the connectivity of the universe — this is an action, not an emotion. It's something you do, and continue to do regularly. Spiritual awakening must be practiced. Like any practice, it takes time and repetition.

At this point, you will still experience a lot of reactivity. Some of your responses will feel like choices, but most of them won't yet. The time you spend reflecting on yourself and your beliefs will make you more conscious, but you'll still have plenty of occasions when you're unconscious, snapping back into Ego identification, believing the world has meaning on its own. You'll get frustrated, angry, bitter, compulsive, defeated.

You are not failing at spirituality when you do this. It is impossible to fully change from Ego-identification to consciousness overnight. This process always takes time.

Step 5: Quit your addictions.

Out of recognizing the shadows in the world, you start to recognize the shadows in yourself. You'll begin to look at your unconscious reactivity, rather than feel contained within it. This will begin to change you both internally, and externally.

One of the most important things you can do in this period is to consciously quit your addictions. Addictions are not only to things like drugs, alcohol, sugar or smoking, though if you have any of these habits, now is the time to quit them. They can also be to things like shopping, sex, gambling, work, pursuit of praise, pursuit of worldly success, conformity, or even more healthy habits like exercise.

Addictions are the embodiment of unconscious reactivity. Addiction is a relationship, not a substance. When you are addicted to something, you do it compulsively, at times to your own detriment, because you fear what would happen if you didn't. With substances that are physically addictive, quitting your addiction will include a period of withdrawal, but all addictions are ultimately psychological. Addictions mask pain. The real question, to take a leaf from Dr. Gabor Maté, is not why the addiction? The real question is, why the pain?

From here, you begin to confront the pain. Fears and traumas from your past will become obvious and apparent. This time can be very painful, and seeking support from others can be crucial. You're the expert on what you need. So often, repressed trauma presents not only as triggered behavior patterns, but as physical illness. Pain is pain. Resisting your pain by repressing it or masking it with addictive behaviors is not going to heal it.

Step 6: Sit with the pain your addictions were masking.

One of the best things you can do in this period is to simply sit with your pain. Where is the pain coming from? Notice how there's always fear rolled into it. What happens if you lay down and just allow yourself to think about the worst things, without any resistance? What happens if you fully embrace fears of your death or your worthlessness, your

helplessness or unlovability, without any reaction to them whatsoever?

Delving into your consciousness is like peeling an onion. You begin shedding the outer layers first, working your way down towards the beliefs that are closer and closer to your core. The further you go, the more you identify with the layers, and the harder they are to shed. At the same time, the more you practice, the easier the shedding gets. It's a paradox — your skill increasing along with the difficulty of the practice.

Keep going.

We learn to be conscious as we learn to surrender. It's a paradox in the realm of Ego, but what is unified in spirit is always contrasted in Ego. Here, we learn by contrast.

As we allow our pain and release ourselves from the Ego's reactivity against it, we come to see that many of the "solutions" we'd come up with in the past were no solution at all. What happens is not that our problems get solved, but that they transmute. They cease to be problems, so solving them becomes unnecessary. In being embraced, rather than resisted, the drama of our pain evaporates into peace.

Step 7: Uncover the pattern, and keep practicing.

What happens, as you peel, is that you begin to see a pattern. You notice how, no matter how much it feels like the world is causing your pain, you are always mediating it with your own mind. No matter how impossible it seems to change the habits in your mind, the same practices will invariably work. There are no exceptions to spiritual truth. There is nothing outside the pattern.

Learning the truth is not easy, but it is simple.

The answer is always to surrender the most immediate layer of your resistance. From there, you shed one layer of your judgments. Then, you surrender the next layer, and more judgments fall away. What was automatic becomes a choice, and it becomes obvious what choices really serve you. The forms in your life will vary wildly, but it's always the same pattern. Even when it seems impossible that the same pattern will hold, it always does. The more impossible it seems, the more crucial it is to trust it.

As you see the pattern alive in more aspects of your life, as you see your own mind at work more in constructing your experience, as you increase your consciousness and agency, as you practice faith and surrender — the truth of it all becomes apparent in your lived experience. The understanding that shone through in your moment of awakening is no longer in contrast to your daily experience. You live awakened as you practice awakening.

This takes time, and it is not easy. What you've been awakened to is not a pleasant dream, but the truth. It lives

beyond the bounds of pleasant or unpleasant. It is as it is. As we come to see it more and more clearly, we find there is nothing to fear.

For now, don't panic. Keep breathing. Keep practicing. Keep trusting. Keep going.

How to Manifest

Many of our manifestations go awry because we fixate on manifesting particular events we believe will bring us to a desired state. Almost invariably, these visions we seek to manifest either do not transpire as we want them to, or if they do, they leave us feeling nothing like the way we thought they would.

The issue, as usual, is that we've confused a thought with a feeling — mixed up a potential catalyst for a state of being with the state of being itself.

A need is only ever a state of being, and it is the opposite state of whatever unpleasant or difficult state you currently find yourself in. Moving toward the opposite state gets us to a healthy equilibrium. This applies equally to both physical and emotional states of being.

For example, if you are too cold, you need more warmth. This state of warmth could be achieved through feeling warm sunlight on your face or sitting next to a campfire or putting on a warm jacket. When you are too cold, you do not need the sun or the campfire or the jacket; you need warmth. Sunlight and fires and jackets are strategies or tools you can use to meet your need.

A Course in Miracles offers this powerful tool for manifestation: Focus on what it is you want to manifest in the future, and [give gratitude](#) for it in the present. It's quite

simple. Feel the feeling you want to manifest, and give gratitude for the fact that it is coming.

It's often hard for us to imagine and embody a particular state of being without fixating on what we think will bring us there.

But how do you feel that feeling now, given that you're trying to manifest something in the future? As we know, the thing you actually wish to manifest is not the tool or the strategy to meet your needs; instead, you are seeking the state of being you believe the tool or strategy will unlock for you.

It's often hard for us to imagine and embody a particular state of being without fixating on what we think will bring us there. If you seek to manifest [authentic connection](#) and your mind keeps imagining it will come from your crush telling you that they love you back, how are you supposed to ignore that thought? How can you force yourself to set aside the strategy to meet your need and fixate on the need itself when your mind seems to only be able to imagine reaching that state from this one particular source? And more to the point, how else can you conjure the feeling you believe the stimulus will bring you?

The answer is even simpler: Don't ignore the thought. Use the thought of what you want to happen to cause you to feel, now, what it is you want to feel in the future. Then, give gratitude for the feeling and release the thought.

Manifestation: A user's guide

Step 1: Notice what it is you want to happen.

Do you want that promotion? Do you want that ex-girlfriend to contact you and apologize? Do you want to randomly bump into that ex-boyfriend with a hotter new boyfriend on your arm? Do you want to win \$10,000? Do you want your dad to say he's proud of you and accepts you for all that you are? Notice the story you want to be told, and notice that it is a tool, a strategy, a thought.

Step 2: Notice how that thought makes you feel.

What emotions, what physical sensations do imagining it induce? In your mind, when you're thinking about experiencing this event, what is it that you feel as a result? Do you feel warmer or freer, lighter or stronger, happier or more satisfied? Do you feel a warmth spreading from your heart or a lightness in your stomach or a smile tugging at the corners of your mouth? Name it. Tell yourself what you're feeling.

Step 3: Focus on the feeling, and notice that you're feeling it now.

Go all the way into the feeling. When we imagine something happening in the future, we feel, in the present, the way we believe that event will make us feel. That confidence and radiance you feel as you fantasize about bumping into your ex with your new lover on your arm? You're feeling that, right now, as you imagine the possibility. That sense of solidity you feel when you imagine your parents finally being proud of you and accepting you unconditionally? You're feeling it, now, when you think about them saying it in the future. You could do something as simple as saying aloud or in your mind, "I am feeling ____ right now."

Step 4: Give gratitude for the feeling.

Rather than continue to fixate on how your fantasy has not yet played out, thank your fantasy for giving you the feeling here and now. Notice that you've already called that feeling into being right now just by thinking these thoughts. Consciously, whether by words or thoughts or ritual, thank yourself and the world around you for bringing you this feeling — both now and in the future. You could do something as simple as saying aloud or in your mind, "Thank you for bringing me this feeling."

Step 5: Release the thoughts.

You actually don't need that fantasy to come true. You don't need that event to take place. You've already found the feeling, reached that desired state of being even just for a moment, here and now. You've manifested it already just by noticing it, feeling it, and opening yourself to it, and in so doing, you've called it all the more strongly into your future. The feeling, the state of being, will materialize for you again and will almost certainly have nothing to do with the event you wanted to take place. You could do something as simple as telling the thought aloud or in your mind, "I release you," or waving it away with your hand.

Source Does Not Speak in Form

When we find ourselves getting repeatedly frustrated by the lack in our lives, feeling trapped by seeing none of our manifestations come to fruition, none of our desires satisfied, none of our wishes granted, it may be helpful to take a big step back out of the mind and remember: Source does not speak in form.

By form, I mean the way things appear in this material plane of existence. Individuals, locations, events, actions — these are forms. They are how energies (read: relationships) appear on the material plane. To Source (/the Universe/God/what have you), the forms are meaningless. They are like a language Source doesn't speak, a dimension Source does not perceive.

The language Source does speak is Energy, and Source functions as a mirror for energy.

Say, for example, you want to be loved. You put out the energy of love towards a particular person. But that person does not love you in return, causing you to feel anger, pain, powerlessness, and perhaps a sense of “What gives, Universe? Where's the love I put out?” Then, you're putting out the energy of powerlessness.

But here's the thing: That love did flow back to you, but Source does not give a shit if that energy flows back to you from that same person. Why? Because that person serving

as the object of your love, in Source's perception, is not even perceived. To Source, everything is, and the kinds of distinctions we see between individuals or spaces or times or objects in the material plane are not perceived at all. To Source, when you give love to a particular person, you simply give love. Likewise, when Source functions as a mirror, you receive love, but it may not come from anything like the "form" you put your energy towards.

One of the biggest barriers to the satisfaction of our needs and the lived experience of our positive energies returning to us is that we fixate on form. We are obsessed with where it appears things come from. We say we want equal give and take, but we only want that in a particular way from this particular relationship with this particular person. We want acknowledgement and credit, but we only want it from this particular sphere of our lives and these particular individuals.

But Source literally can't work in form. It does not speak form, because it does not perceive form. You receive what you give, but Source doesn't align it to your perception of where it should come from in the material plane, because Source does not have any knowledge of the material plane as you perceive it.

When we break the cycle of fixating on form, we begin to notice how the energies we put out come back to us from all kinds of directions. Maybe today, the love we put out towards our beloved was received back from a friendly dog. Maybe, from the sun shining on us just when we were

getting chilly. Maybe from a stranger, from a postcard, from a tree. The form does not matter.

The more we allow ourselves to receive our positive energies back from all directions, without constructing any mental barriers to what receiving that energy has to look like, the more time we will spend feeling those positive energies flowing towards us.

If you find yourself stuck in a cycle of feeling powerless due to a fixation on form, you could try this:

- Think through the situation that is causing you distress because your desires are not being met.
- Describe the energy you want to receive. You could identify it as a word (Love, Acceptance, Happiness, Trust, Respect, etc.) or it could come through as simply a feeling. As long as you know what you're talking about.
- Take a moment to deeply feel that energy. What does (insert desired energy) feel like to you?
- Give that energy absolutely everywhere you can, to everyone you can, in every way you can.
- Spend a day (or several) writing down every encounter in which you felt that energy flowing towards you. Be vigilant for it. Notice it even in the smallest or most unexpected places.

When we give up on our Ego-mind's fixation on things taking particular forms in this material plane, living in this

universe can begin to feel a lot more malleable, and magical.

How to Trick the Ego into Dissolving Itself

Many of us on spiritual paths have had that moment when we bury our heads in our hands and just wish our damn Egos away. All that tension and anxiety, pain and control, disconnection and isolation, resistance and resentment, we want it gone. We believe, or have faith, that an existence of radiant love, happiness, abundance and connection is possible, if only we could do away with this pesky little Ego and its inalienable thirst for its desires.

Like so many spiritual lessons teach us, we cannot begin from resistance. We can't dissolve resistance by resisting it, and we can't dissolve desire by desiring to do so. We must begin by allowing, and that means allowing the damn Ego.

The Ego is the belief that the self is a form: you as this body and this identity you've cultivated for you in this particular life, separate from all the rest of the universe. The Ego's interest is its own security. It seeks to get what it wants, which is always safety, but appears more noticeably as the following: 1) certainty about the future, 2) control over material reality, 3) to be (and be seen as) "good," which often means "better than something else." It acts up and seizes our attention most often in times when we feel uncertain, out of control, and ashamed of being "bad" or "worse than something else."

In that space of divine Source/God-consciousness, we understand that past and future don't really exist,

everything is malleable, material reality doesn't mean anything, good and bad are simply judgments, and nothing can be better or worse because all is literally One.

And the nebulousness of this space of Oneness terrifies the Ego. So how on earth do you coax it into letting you go there?

You begin by playing its game. You begin by viewing the expansion of the mind as a pathway to the desired gains of the Ego.

1) Focusing on manifesting.

It begins by focusing on manifestation, or the practice of calling desired experiences into your life. This is the realm of teachers like Florence Scovel Shinn, Joe Dispenza, the "Law of Attraction" school of thought, and so on. When it comes to the Law of Attraction, I like Teal Swan's way of calling it the "Law of Mirroring," because it works like this: the energy you put out into the universe is mirrored by the universe around you. When you give an energy of material abundance by believing that you exist in a state of abundance already, you are met with material abundance coming into your life. When you give an energy that love and connection are abundant, love and connection are received in your experience.

The same is also true in reverse. When you put out an energy of material scarcity, say, by worrying constantly about your finances, the Law of Mirroring would cause you to be met with material conditions to worry about. When you put out an energy of desperate loneliness and longing for love, you're met with more reasons to feel lonely.

Manifesting does not follow a logic of "good things come to those who wait" or "good things come to good people" or even "good things come to those who put in effort," but simply, "good things come to those who believe fully that they already have them." When it rains, it pours.

Manifesting is an extremely attractive endeavor to the Ego. Why? Because believing in manifestation makes the Ego feel 1) that there is a degree of certainty in the future, because what you put out will come back to you, 2) that it has control over reality, by being able to call into your experience what you want, and 3) that you can be good, and forgive yourself for being bad, because being good will call in good, and fixation on bad will call in bad.

But when you start to get real down and dirty with manifestation, the Ego finds itself unknowingly in a paradox that dissolves itself. Here's how:

- 2) Getting real with the energies.

To give the energy you need to manifest something, you have to feel that energy truly. To call love into your life, you have to focus on the love in your life. To call abundance into your life, you have to focus on the abundance in your life. To call success into your life, you have to focus on the success in your life. You have to start looking around you to all the possible sources of that energy, and focus your attention on them for what they are: sources of love, abundance, success and so on.

There's no faking the funk with manifesting; you have to start actually noticing what you want to call in already there, around you, focus on those things, give that energy and radiate it outwards, in order to manifest it further. Affirmations that are not grounded in your own understanding of what is real do not work. For example, telling yourself repeatedly, "My crush Seymour loves me back" when Seymour doesn't love you back will not call love into your life. Spending a day giving love and care to all the people you do love, and basking in the feeling of their actual love for you and giving gratitude for the love you already have — that's what manifests more of the love stuff.

In manifesting an energy, you start to recognize that that energy comes from all over the place. It's around you in so many different forms. As you manifest, you start to notice that the energy comes in to your life through extremely unexpected forms. That material abundance you thought you were calling in with a promotion? Well, it came to you

from an unexpected asset being left to you in a will. That lover you wanted to return your affections? You forgot about them, because a new lover waltzed right in and swept you off your feet.

This is where our attachment to form (individuals, events, actions, particular details of material reality) can hinder us from manifesting: we may not notice that our wish is being granted, so to speak, because it's being granted in ways we never would have thought of, through forms we wouldn't have expected. When we don't see it coming back in the form we expect, we feel powerless and scarce. But if we want to keep the ball rolling on the manifesting front, we start releasing our attachment to forms — otherwise, we won't be able to continue authentically feeling the energy we're trying to manifest.

And so, the forms we thought these energies would manifest through stop feeling as relevant, because we begin to recognize the energies for what they are: energies. Feelings. The way things are experienced, rather than the way things seem in form. The “how so” and the “what from” stop being as relevant. The form doesn't matter when the energy is received.

And bit by bit, life begins to look different. Forms matter less. Energies matter more. What we put out energetically with our being matters more. What that looks like matters less. Our relationship to life gradually changes: relationships to experiences become more important, and the particulars of the experiences themselves matter less.

3) Form fades, and the experiencer takes precedence.

As the process goes on, our identity gradually becomes more aligned with “the one who relates to these experiences” rather than the experiences themselves. We begin to feel ourselves as the giver and receiver of energies, not as caught up in the forms they come from or through. The “what” and the “how” begin to fade.

Yes, we do attract the better forms our Egos want, but it stops mattering so much whether or not we do, because we’re perpetuating a cycle where form becomes less and less necessary to give and receive desired energies. Yes, it does begin to fall into place, but the form that takes feels less relevant. It falls into place because the form feels less relevant. Because we aren’t as attached to form. Because we’re beginning to awaken, little by little, to the reality that the love and abundance and beauty and connection we want is all around us, and within us. It moves through this Ego form, from us, because we are not this Ego form. Because we are the energies that move.

And with neither a bang nor a whimper, with a simple satisfied dissolution as though into warm water, we find ourselves in the place we wanted to be: one, whole, love, clear, in the unendingly fresh expanse of selfhood beyond the Ego.

Is Our Awakening the End of our Storytelling?

The most memorable class I took in college was called “Narrative and Human Rights.” It was a literature class, technically, focused on analyzing the way we talk about human rights across time and space, and how that changes what we understand human rights to be. I remember that class because it was the first time anyone taught me about the more meta-level of consciousness: looking not at the meanings of things, but at the process by which we make meaning.

There are all kinds of ways we make meaning. The topic of meaning-making can get esoteric to the point of uselessness, but the process by which we make meaning has very important real-world impacts.

Take gender, for example. Gender is a way humans in various cultures have made meaning out of biological sex. We observe a certain fact — a baby’s genitalia at birth— and use it to assign a set of meanings about the baby’s future character, qualities and role. In assigning that meaning, we shape the baby’s future. While our collective culture is starting to understand that biology and the complex assigned meanings of gender are not the same thing, society at large still makes gender meaningful beyond biological sex, and requires us each to reckon with those meanings in some way. We can accept those

meanings, reject them, accept certain aspects, question them, subvert them, and so on.

This might still be a bit esoteric, but the point is this: meaning is not fact. It's an assumption made based on the observed facts. All the same, the meanings we make shape our lives and the lives of others. When people become more conscious, we come to understand that meanings are being assigned by us, and we grow more aware of how and why we're assigning them. Typically, we assign meaning to make the world feel safer, more intelligible, more digestible and less chaotic. Meanings make life feel less uncertain.

I don't know about you, but the main way I learned about life was through stories. Most of my earliest memories are of stories. I think back to the stories my mom would make up for my sister and I and read to us at night. I think back to the movies I watched, the books I read, the fairytales and parables I learned. Most of those stories taught obvious lessons that were similar across the board: be kind and accepting, be brave and righteous, be honest and generous, and don't hurt people.

But they also taught more subtle lessons. From those stories, I learned to view my life as a story. There was a beginning, there would be a middle and an end. I was the main character. There were side-kicks and allies, love interests and foils and villains. I saw a narrative arc to my life, complete with dramatic timing, plot twists and a forthcoming climax. That climax would be my great work,

my magnum opus, the grand test of my strength — an inevitable peak of drama, action and victory.

The thing is... life isn't a story. Life can be viewed as a story, but that's a very limited perspective of it. It's like saying that a rainbow is red. Technically, a rainbow is red, but it's also orange, yellow and so on.

I am not a main character. I'm more like an ecosystem of different personalities who sometimes conflict, sometimes support, and sometimes have no awareness of one another whatsoever. My life did not begin with exposition, nor does it have any inciting incident beyond my birth. There is no one point to my life, no specific climax to which it's building.

Like me, the other characters in my life have changed dramatically over time, shifted around in their roles, entered the story at weird moments and exited it at others. Their meanings aren't etched in stone within my life. My role isn't so fixed, either. My journey changes as I change, and my relationships with myself, my life and everything in it change too. My life, like yours, is random. If it isn't random, then the order by which it operates is better understood as a pattern, not a plot.

I'm not always the hero of my story, and my life isn't necessarily my story at all. Stories are never the whole truth of anything — they're just one linear perspective. Reality is multifaceted and interwoven. People and events are multifaceted and interwoven, arising out of

conversation between what's happening and how we interpret it. Meaning doesn't happen on its own; we make it. In writing narratives, in making meaning out of fact, we change what happens.

As I grow more conscious, and witness others doing the same, I feel like narratives don't fit my life the way they used to. There are events, rhythms and transformations, but no obvious plot. I don't really see life as my story. I see myself as a part of life's story. I see how changing the way I look at it changes what's there. It's fluid and non-linear in a way that story can't be.

And so I wonder, as more people grow more conscious, what the future of meaning-making looks like. I can't imagine the hero's journey will get us much further, not when the trajectory of human consciousness is towards interdependence, adaptability and greater Ego dissolution. To tell you the story of my life now would be less like reading you a novel, and more like showing you a Jackson Pollock painting through a variety of sunglasses.

Ours will not be linear stories of individual trial and redemption, more... un-stories. Life without narrative. Being without meanings. The attachment to character, plot and meanings begin to fade. We shed the false identities of the past and find that we are not characters, neither heroes or villains, but composites of life itself enacting an aggregate will.

I wonder then, what we will say about ourselves, or if there will be nothing left to say.

Which is More Important: Spiritual Awakening or Changing the World?

Like most spiritually-inclined people, I often argue with myself about what really is the most important use of my time and energy in this life. Is the goal of my life to awaken and transcend my attachments to mind, Ego and the compulsive actions of this illusory world? Or is spirituality really just what the material world thinks of it: a nice luxury, but a selfish waste of time because people are suffering and dying and the climate is collapsing?

If you've never delved into the spiritual world, the answer will be obvious to you. Changing the world is more important. "Self-actualization" made it onto Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, but it was the top of the pyramid, meaning it came after needs for food, shelter, safety and physical well-being. Attaining a state of perfect inner peace is great and all, but it's an extraneous step that comes after we ensure that real people aren't suffering from real world problems.

If that sounded right to you, then you have your answer. You don't need the rest of this article.

If you have had what we'd call a spiritual experience, you might doubt that answer. Even if you've only touched the nameless realm of infinite being for an instant, you recognize that, in some way, everything we see around us

in waking life is another kind of dream. Where you are in your spiritual practice will influence how much you still crave specific changes to your life or to the world, but you're likely still vacillating back and forth between allowing your awakening and pursuing your desires.

In times like these, it seems even the most devoted spiritual seeker must reckon with the chaos of the world to at least some extent. In June, the Willow Fire in California nearly burned down a Buddhist monastery, and the news told of monks gathered on the monastery roof, armed with masks and fire hoses, staring down the flames. Spiritual or not, the climate collapse comes for us all. To me, it feels that we are all being called to participate in making concrete changes to the world, regardless of whether our spiritual paths might want to detach us from judging the world's suffering as "bad."

And so, the question persists: should we be focused on transcending our judgments and false identifications, or should we be focused on stopping violence, suffering and destruction in the world? If this is all illusory, is our relationship to divinity all that matters, or does helping to change the world matter too?

I think, at last, I know the answer.

The short answer is: spiritual awakening is all that matters, but why would that possibly mean that you won't also change the world?

The longer answer is this:

The most common mistake of an unawakened mind is to think of God as a thing. You can substitute any other word you like — Enlightenment, the Tao, awakened consciousness — though I think the most egregious errors come when talking about God. God is not a thing. God is a kind of relationship, a way of interacting, understanding and being. That way is the way of love. Love means taking something as a part of yourself — taking its needs as a part of your needs, its joy as a part of your joy, its will as a part of your will. Love is transcending the separation between you and something else.

Let's try it with the word "Enlightenment." Enlightenment is not a place you reach. It's a way of traveling. It's a method of participation, a means of engaging with the world. The object of your participation means nothing. This is one of the core meanings of that famous Zen saying, "Before Enlightenment: chop wood, carry water. After Enlightenment: chop wood, carry water."

From a spiritual perspective, the details of your life are irrelevant. The activities, people, places, events — these are merely what Plato might call "forms," shadows cast on a wall that distract our focus from the source of the light that cast them. Asking "What is the most Enlightened thing to do?" is like asking, "What does a French person do?" Well, if a person is French, then whatever they do is what a French person does. Eating a baguette and chain smoking might be stereotypical French behavior, but if the person

eating that baguette isn't French, that action has nothing to do with anything.

Because spiritual awakening is the shift in focus from forms to relationship, the unawakened mind will still preoccupy itself with form. It's apt to assume that keeping your focus on spirituality means spending all of your time at yoga retreats, Ayahuasca ceremonies or Buddhist temples. These are forms. They can be useful transformative tools, and they too can become fixations that hinder the mind from awakening just like any other form.

The desire to avoid situations that pull the mind out of an awakened relationship is a perfectly understandable desire, but it's still rooted in fear. An alcoholic in recovery will likely avoid going to the bar as long as it holds any temptation for them to return to their addictive relationship. A person who has fully transcended their addictive relationship could maintain a conscious relationship with alcohol even at a frat party. A mind that has fully embraced love can remain loving in the face of hatred and fear. A mind that is fully at peace can remain at peace in the middle of a war.

To focus on spiritual awakening does not mean "to do the things you think spiritual people do." It means to authentically change the relationship by which you live. Living with awakened consciousness is one kind of living, the kind that involves surrendering all your internal wars, ending all compulsive habits, and perceiving with total compassion, presence and non-condemnation. Whatever

you do in this relationship is what an enlightened person does.

Within that enlightened relationship, there is peace, inclusion, compassion, non-condemnation, empathy and love. It follows that actions taken by anyone living in this relationship will be peace-giving, inclusive, compassionate, non-judgmental, empathetic and loving. What will those actions be? To seek to answer that question is to miss the point entirely.

If you think that acting from a place of Enlightenment doesn't have sweeping social ramifications, you're missing the root of all the world's miracles. The authentic shifts in humanity's character emerge from an increased awareness of love. We authentically change ourselves and the world when we begin to love more and learn to act more lovingly. Once we're in a space of love and peace, the right actions to take become obvious.

Awakened action can look like counseling a friend through a hard time. It can look like rinsing the eyes of a protester who's been tear gassed. It can look like studying plants. It can look like cleaning your house with mindfulness. It can look like meditating, mediating, marching or meandering. The meaning of awakening is to stop worrying at all about what it looks like, and focus on the relationship through which you do it.

Look at the world around you. Look at all the suffering people are experiencing. Do you really think that your

higher self would guide you to hide away from it all, or keep you from those in need of your help? Or does it seem more likely that your higher self would want you to build your internal strength, dissolve your compulsive attachments and fill yourself up with infinite love so that you could extend that love to everyone you encounter?

Awakening is all that matters, because it is what changes the world.

What We All Have in Common (We're All Trying to Reach Heaven by Understanding It)

Consciousness is right now coming into the recognition that communicating with itself is a more efficient way to get to its goal than competing with itself, but competition, communication and cooperation all still exist.

Communication creates knowledge by asking the three following questions: How is it? How come it is so? How does it become?

What's true of every individual:

Each of us has faith. None of us knows everything right now. We all act according to at least some assumptions, whose truth we cannot verify with certainty. In order to act, we must act with some degree of faith. We do not always know when we are acting on faith. For example, classical physics took much on faith that it believed was fact, until some of its assumptions were later disproven by modern physics.

Each of us has a God. We all perceive some kind of fundamental force or forces that give order to existence and shape behavior within it. This force creates itself, and acts with and within everything. Nothing can truly exist outside of it. For example, gravity is a fundamental force.

Each of us is trying to get to, or towards, heaven. We all have some understanding of the best of possible worlds, where we can live in perfect alignment with whatever we conceive of as God. For many of us, this heaven is not a defined or identified goal; we simply know whether we are getting closer to it or further from it by how living feels. For example, Utopia is such a heaven. Christian heaven is another. A good life, whatever that means to you, is another.

Each of us is learning how to do get to heaven better. Like all of existence, we are evolving towards a deeper understanding of how to get towards a better life with greater efficiency. For some of us, this involves studying the fundamental force, and seeking to emulate it. For others, it involves listening to the innate guidance of that force (am I moving towards or away from heaven?)

What's also true of the aggregated whole:

All of us are working towards knowledge that transcends assumption. Whatever we do, we learn. The more we learn, the more the aggregate knows. The more the aggregate knows, the less is left up to assumption.

All of us are honing the collective understanding of what God is. As we learn, the whole comes to understand the fundamental force of the universe better. By questioning one another's understandings, proving and disproving, observing and interacting, the whole comes to know the fundamental force more thoroughly.

All of us are honing the collective understanding of how to get to Heaven. As we each learn, and move towards our own understanding of Heaven, the whole gets better at cultivating existence — that is to say, the act of living is accomplished better. The whole moves closer to Heaven, and hones its shared understanding what good living is and how to live well.

All of us are already working together towards that goal. Because the whole is always doing the above three things, and the whole is nothing more or less than the aggregate of everything within it, each individual in existence is already contributing to its common goals. None of us can ever do otherwise; even to rebel against the act of seeking knowledge increases knowledge. Even to rebel against the good life improves the whole's understanding of existing well.

Let's work together towards our shared goal, consciously:

Dolly Parton said, "Find out who you are and do it on purpose." This is what humanity is already doing, has always been doing, and will (I'd wager) always be doing. Let's not fight what is, because we can't. Rather, let's understand what is, and working with it from a place of conscious awareness that that's what we're doing.

How to do that, in my humble opinion:

Start with the truth that the whole is always in cooperation with itself. The aggregated totality of consciousness is

always working with itself, never against itself. Self-interest is the fundamental condition of the whole.

Within the whole, separations arise which can compete with one another. Whatever consciousness perceives itself as, it is in cooperation with. As soon as competition arises, it has decided that something is not itself. This dialectic of unification and separation is wholly natural, and necessary.

Everything within the whole has the whole within it. That means, consciousness is the aggregate, and everything that comprises consciousness has consciousness within it. The whole is in each part, and each part makes up each whole. That means that, in separating, we embody the whole. In unifying, we embody the whole. In competing, we embody the whole. In cooperating, we embody the whole. The idea that each of us, and all of nature, are fundamentally cooperative or fundamentally competitive are both true.

Competition between separated pieces exists to strengthen the cooperation of the whole. It always does exactly that, even when it seems to do otherwise. Competition between separated components of the whole improves the overall cooperation of the whole. Cooperation between separated components of the whole continues until it fails to strengthen the cooperation of the whole.

The goal of the whole is knowledge, of everything and itself, for it is everything. As such, the goal of every part of the whole is self-knowledge and knowledge of everything. Knowledge is increased through learning.

To know something, you must be able to answer three questions about it. Those questions are: How is it? How come it is so? How does it become? We typically ask “What is it?” and put a calcified definition on something that is an alive, present and organic process. A better question is “How is it?” We typically ask “Why is it like this?” or “How did it come to be like this?” and make up an artificial cause beyond it, and an artificial time in which it didn’t exist as it is. A better question is “How come it is so?” Last, we typically ask “How can it change?” or “What will it become?” and make up an artificial scenario in which it can stop being as it is, and an artificial time in which it isn’t as it is. Artificial concepts of past, future, and change are only relevant when you start with the question “What is it?” rather than “How is it?” This is what Lao Tzu means when he writes “The Tao that can be spoken is not the Eternal Tao.” The true essence cannot be named and understood as a concept.

To ask a question of something, you must be able to communicate with it. Communication is thus a more efficient path to knowledge than competition. Right now (like, in early 2021) is the turning point when existence is fully recognizing (realizing) that it knows this.

The whole already knows everything, but does not know it knows it. The separated parts within it must therefore communicate with one another to realize (actualize) the knowledge of everything. This is of every consciousness that perceives itself as unified. As above, so below.

Twelve Bits of Advice

1. The transformation that you cannot find without comes within. The transformation that you cannot find within comes without.
2. Notice the rare moments when everything true feels possible. Let them inspire you to create a world where they aren't rare.
3. You cannot heal the past. You can only allow the present to heal you, and in doing so, you build a future that won't have to be healed from.
4. Punishment is the act of traumatizing someone in order to alter their behavior. Trauma is the source of maladaptive behavior. Punishment makes and preserves the conditions for itself to exist. You can learn to give it up entirely.
5. Rather than declare what you want to be impossible, declare it to be possible and figure out how to get there. Trust in help when you don't know.
6. You will never learn the answer if you do not ask the question.
7. You respond to your surroundings, and your surroundings respond to you. Responsibility is the ability to respond. Let responsibility come to feel like an authentic choice.

8. You cannot build anything that lasts on a false premise. When you stop pretending, you have so much more energy for creating.
9. You have nothing, but you have your relationships to everything. Seek to purify your relationships, not what you think you're relating to.
10. The world is always exactly as free and beautiful as it feels in the best moments. Change what you can change when that feels impossible to believe, and release your expectations when you can't.
11. Without role or hierarchy, without force or fear, interacting with anyone becomes like traveling to a beautiful new land. Without expectations, there is nothing but beauty.
12. You are what you love. Give what you want to receive.