

Three promises

Or

“What to do after an ego death?”

By

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Part 1

Introduction

This book is based on my firsthand experiences, so in a loose way, it might seem less unique to say I had an “**ego death**”, because it’s not my own term, but instead, it’s Timothy Leary’s. However, my experience stemmed from the same roots as within those he studied.

Timothy and others (such as “Ram Dass”) explored the possible outcomes of extreme psychedelic drug usage. They focused predominantly on LSD (lysergic acid diethyl amide) and psilocybin. In truth, the ego death concept must stretch far into our major religions, and it is also synonymous with Carl Jung’s earlier term, “psychic death.”

These names warranted drama because they describe a total loss of subjective self-identity. Whilst nervous breakdowns and psychosis sound

less sudden, and therefore milder, they have large overlaps; even if the former are more nebulous, as well as having slower progressive onsets.

Near death experiences, and anything to match them in terms of their potential to seed post-traumatic stress, may be likely examples of rapidly damaging extremes.

There are people who actively seek an ego death. The Buddhist's Nirvana and yogic Samadhi are related states. I have been in neither, as I do not practise traditional meditative methods. However, my own meditation is to study and play classical piano, especially relevant, is the music of J.S. Bach or Mozart. Frankly, I'm sceptical as to whether pedestrian routes to ego death, can lead to a point on such a path that a person can confidently know, that a transition has occurred, because they might count a term like "death", or any other finality, as being variable by degree, and not absolute. At the same time, I recognise that everybody's lives can

involve experiences such as divorce, bereavement, unavoidable serious physical illnesses, bankruptcy, redundancy, imprisonment, and more, and there are no ways to measure how any individual will be affected by any one or more of these misfortunes.

Psychedelics

LSD is synthesised from ergot, whilst psilocybin occurs naturally in certain mushrooms. Both have similar effects, but the gram for gram potency of the two is hugely different. LSD is effective in the minutest of amounts.

In 1986, aged eighteen, I inadvertently ate at least 150 liberty cap mushrooms. I had fallen into a trance by watching an old 1950s movie in an automatic fashion. I'd become fixed in treating my mushrooms like popcorn. Eventually, realising I had almost none remaining, I became mortified. I had certainly not intended to "do" so many. My experience suddenly turned bad. Within minutes I

was physically feeling my brain within my skull, and in little more time, I had a hallucinatory near-death experience. It felt so perfectly and undeniably real, that my flight or fight response triggered a gigantic, and total, emergency adrenaline release to help me out.

The next few years of my life were difficult, with catastrophic social and occupational damage, and characterised by chronically high stress levels, which led to my schizophrenia diagnosis when I was twenty-four.

The following **William S. Burroughs II** quote suggests he understood my years between 1986 and 1992, and therefore countless other psychotics too.

“A paranoid is someone who knows a little of what’s going on. A psychotic is a guy who’s just found out what’s going on”.

I will add, that suddenly knowing too much is stressful for anyone, but I don't relate this to the macroscopic, such as world politics. I attribute it to the thousands of microscopic ideas, which are suggested as trivial questions focusing on people's body language and dissections of their every word, that place everyone under suspicion, or worse.

Life crises

Midlife crises can feel huge, with roots that are hard to define. That's because they don't necessarily begin via a "kneejerk". Instead, they're often rooted in festering problems. Perhaps a job or a relationship should have been ended ten or fifteen years ago? However, if they are distilled, it's often and plainly time, at the core: how much is left, and how has it been used so far.

Few people consider, or even mention, the existence of the **quarterlife crisis**, but my case is quite illustrative. I was unemployed at 24,

diagnosed schizophrenic. On top of that, my peers and contemporaries were building careers and social lives, having satisfying sex lives and/or forming close relationships. Some were married and/or buying houses, and a small number had children.

For me, my “schizophrenia” label was in fact a plus, because in that position, by not having a label, even when the label has the potential to social isolate, there was no excuse for my problems. And either way, I was a higher risk of suicide than most people. With today’s compulsive engagements with the internet, I think suicide is even more likely today.

How do you recover? Is it possible to catch up? In a way you can “overtake” many people, because as in the metaphorical message of the film “The Matrix”, lots of people are lost. But vitally, and most strictly, it is not a competition. It’s about

working out your personal priorities, what matters to you in life, hence the subtitle.

You need to become you. That's my first promise. Broadly speaking, that means you've realised that you already have everything, and not only that, but you found it right under your nose.

First-hand words versus second-hand words

Having an acquaintance with my previous books, or my website, www.HellisOnEarth.org, might have made you familiar with my assertion that I don't read, and that I describe myself as functionally illiterate. Nothing's changed regarding my reading skills, but I hope that it is patent that my writing has improved. The big implication of me having poor reading skills, is that the words I share, must stem more from my firsthand life experiences, rather than any interpretations or summaries of the literature. Having said that, my exposure to snippets of Carl

Jung, promoted me to purchase a basic book about his work, because I grew to feel it would be truly relevant. I eventually got round to reading it, and by copiously underlining words and phrases (defacing the book), my focus got enhanced enough to finish it. Furthermore, those feelings I'd had about Jung's work, proved both reliable and profitable, because my understanding of his core topics came easily, because they mirrored much of what I had learned within my own life. Some things he said were in opposition to me. They included his broader thoughts about dreams, and his interest in divination techniques, such as the I Ching and Astrology.

Sigmund Freud

I want to touch on Freud because he was a big part of Jung's life. Sigmund Freud had already laid down ideas about the "ego" and its desire to do what it wishes. However, he suggested there were two other parts to the psyche in the way of that: the "id" and "superego." He said, that the first was an unconscious and instinctual force, and that the latter stemmed from conscious hinderances of a self-critical nature, rooted in societal rules and norms. He also believed that repressed memories were the key to understanding neuroses, and for that reason, he focused heavily on people's childhoods when in analysis. Jung on the other hand, went on to consider the unconscious sub-personalities of the psyche, which he considered to be of much greater relevance.

Ego death

There's at least one viewpoint about the mechanics of an ego death. This book moves on to cover life after one, and the "how" is not relevant here. In fact, Jung too, focused on present and future positions, whilst viewing the past as history (unlike Freud).

Around the time of my own ego death, I remember very clearly one special night. It was one of the most enigmatic of my entire life. **I burst out of sleep with the profound, clear, and accurate realisation, that I did not know who I was at the deepest level.** My mushroom experience put me on the track to that point, but it's hard to measure the degree to which it played, as life of course plays a part in everything.

Dropping out

You must instinctively desire life, because it is easy to feel sorry for yourself and to enter forms of self-abuse. So many people go straight to drugs, drink, and other addictive behaviours. Dopamine, the reward chemical, is a part of them all. The alternative is to go through Hell and emerge at the other side. Hell makes the best version of you, and probably a better one than the version that might have stemmed from your hypothetical life without your ego death. That last statement does have at least some backing. It's evidenced by the fact that many people, particular around the 1960s, consciously and purposefully chose to have ego deaths, through psychedelic drug routes, for example, the early mentioned Timothy Leary, and his associates, who were members of the prestigious Harvard University.

Just as every experience of severe mental illness varies, so too will every ego death, but letting go

of your sense of identity can be liberating. I had a personal journey from a state of mental obliteration and extreme vulnerability, to loving myself, loving my life, and loving others. **I will not “kid” you though, it took twenty years.**

Carl Jung

As a hospital psychiatrist Jung specialised in psychosis, and it fostered his interest in personality development. This makes sense, because a psychosis, especially one involving negative symptoms as in schizophrenia (i.e., the symptoms that take from the personality, as opposed to positive symptoms which add, such as delusions and hallucinations), will steadily strip all remanence of gregariousness and extrovert behaviours, from a once more socially active person.

Whilst extraversion and introversion are Jung's terms, through their widespread and continued

popular usage, a misunderstanding grew, specifically, that whatever a person's position on a hypothetical personality spectrum, from a nauseating celebrity to a quiet hermit, everybody *has* a personality, but the trait of introversion is often, and unfairly, suggested to mean that someone lacks a personality all together.

Aged 18 to 19, I was a popular member of my university college, but I suddenly started deteriorating, in fact, all the way to my schizophrenia diagnosis. Between the ages of 19 to 21, or my second year and my final year at university, I was reclusive. Jung witnessed long-term patients in psychiatric hospitals, and at their severest stages of illness, they would have presented as near "clean sheets", who hopefully grew into new versions of themselves as they got better.

Today, out-patient settings can provide more clinical data beyond the impressions gained in

hospital, because “care in the community” involves CPNs (community psychiatric nurses) visiting patients in their homes.

When Jung was thirty-nine, the clash between his own and Freud’s ideas, contributed to his midlife crisis. Naturally, politics must have been involved. Either way, the rift cost him friends and associates, but sadly it also triggered a depression, and Jung started turning away from the world.

His depression didn’t turn him away from study, and that included his idea of the “collective unconscious”, which was strengthened by his exposure to psychotics. Of course, his own crisis prompted thoughts and introspection, but most significantly for Jung, was his growing interest in archetypes. In fact, Jung saw archetypal forms along with basic human instincts, in the earlier collective unconscious, what’s more, mythological stories were proving to overlap much of his work.

Whilst Freud was stuck in people's childhoods, Jung was avoiding all "high-flown" language, and making sense of the paths of "heroes", and to great value. At the same time, he thought basic instincts were being removed from people, attributing it to lives in civilisations.

Consciousness

The ego is central to consciousness, it is a sense of who we are. It balances the conscious and unconscious, for identity and purpose. However, it is not the "self". In other words, it is not the outcome of individuation, and whilst it can help to balance the personality, if it's over inflated, that all-importance causes extra problems.

Jung described the **shadow** as an unconscious part of the psyche which helped to mitigate disbalance. It does it by making us face our weaknesses through projecting them onto others for us to witness. In other words, it makes the unconscious

conscious. He also suggested that whole societies can have a “collective shadow” or “Zeitgeist”. The Holocaust may have been the result of a most diabolical and severe, widespread projection, of one huge group’s hatred onto a much smaller innocent collection of groups.

To be clear, the ego is vulnerable. It creates a persona or mask to hide itself. If it gets overly dominant, rigidity and neuroses may result. Jung described both male and female, or thinking and feeling parts of the psyche, but the important thing is balance.

Jung thought everything gets opposed by equal energies. By denying our inverses, those same aspects might emerge at some point, and make us regret how we had ignored them. Thankfully though, his principle of **entropy** said opposites eventually blend. Furthermore, through his **homeostasis**, and despite the psyche’s constant development, the psyche wants to maintain

balance, but particularly if there is development going on in unconscious ways and through external influences that are outside of our control. (However, an ego death switches unconsciousness of the psyche, into increasing consciousness. That's the curse and the privilege of magic mushrooms, and other chemical, or circumstantial extremes of stress).

In Jung's opinion, individuation was humane, basic, biological, and ceaseless, and he went to the extreme of even relating it to simple inorganic crystalline forms. He viewed the gauntlet we run as human beings, keeps us headed to a complete, intended, and balanced whole, and is both complex and lasts into old age. Our "false wrappings", or collections of parental and societal conditionings, turn into refuse as the shadow continues to make work for us by projecting them onto others.

Midlife crises

When we approach middle-age, people can appear steady in terms of their development, because their personal views, social positions, and careers, are stable. However, having an increasing awareness of time (as mentioned early) can cause a panic in people. (After having had this type of experience at a quarterlife time, I began to learn the piano from scratch. I was unwittingly starting my life again. And you would hope a quarterlife crisis precludes you from a midlife one, but it's not a science nor mathematical).

Any life crisis should lead to the suggestion that you try personal changes, so that you will hopefully not have another crisis. Gradual changes in personality, interests, and a fostering of ignored childhood traits, may all help to rebalance the psyche. All of that might help you avoid stiffness and being lacklustre. Jung suggested that the second half of life, ought to be very different

to the first half. Having focused more on achievements initially, in the second half, Jung said inward reflections should take over. Thoughts might move from the societal and biological, to the cultural and spiritual.

A lifecycle

We are certainly less conscious as children, though exceptions can occur. Frankly, as children we're more problematic for others, but we should be headed towards consciousness and awareness. As we get old, unconsciousness, and a return to greater reliance occur.

It can be ugly to witness a lack of consciousness and awareness in people who are believed to be old enough, to have had ample time in life to acquire those two. In other words, they've failed to mature. Sometimes you hear expressions like "man-child" directed at people.

Throughout this lifecycle of unconsciousness returning to unconsciousness, Jung observed introversion, i.e., the turning of psychic energies inwards, and extroversion, turning them outward. He divided both with four functions: thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition, but you might suggest that shamans did similar centuries ago, with earth, air, fire, and water. The functions don't help this discourse, so they're just mentioned for people's information.

However, the top two aspects are worth returning to. Throughout the lifecycle, introverts are more reflective, hesitant, and less likely to socialise. Extroverts need to be around people and have relationships. They are both outgoing and frank. Either extroversion or introversion tends to dominate, with the psyche trying to seek ways to compensate for the hidden and weaker opposite.

Jung and God

Jung believed that sinlessness in God was a disbalance because we all have darkness in us. Without having sin, it denied there was a shadow, which he did not accept.

Jung's controversial book from 1952, "Answer to Job", explored God's shadow in the Biblical book of Job. The Devil bets God that Job will turn against him if God torments Job enough. Thus, "Answer to Job", suggests there's a fourth and evil element to the Trinity of Christian dogma. It was a highly controversial book, which even Jung called "**pure poison.**"

Jung saw Job as being both completely innocent and pious, and originally, Job was a rightfully blessed man with good fortune. Then God piled misfortune and misery upon Job to make him realise his inferior position to God. Despite that unfair treatment, Job retained his personal

integrity, and that considerably affected God. In fact, it made God take stock of himself.

Jung viewed God's omniscience as dictating his lack of self-awareness, because there is no "self" in an entity that is everything. However, by God knowing everyone's thoughts he can experience what self-awareness is through others. So, both out of that self-reflection, and prompted by his treatment of Job, a transformative process begun. Thus, God developed empathy and love, and experienced his own journey of individuation, culminating in God's incarnation as a man, Jesus Christ, on Earth, who made the ultimate sacrifice for us. Thus, a new relationship between God and humankind replaced the old one.

Viewing this as a metaphor, Jung thought we should all transform our negativity before we can hope to transform the outer world, and this is what we're trying to do in searching for the Self and our wider being, purpose, and true path. He viewed

Christ as an archetypal image that people can aim towards (whilst other religions have relevant avatars too). So, just as God sent his son (or himself) into the world, likewise we must send our egos for the lengthy and painful process of individuation.

Jung totally disagreed with all fundamentalist religious views that claimed they had the one supreme truth, and he tended toward Gnostic rather than faith-based religious ideas.

For Jung, Christianity was of central importance in the west. At the same time, he thought God was within. He believed the idea that God exists separately, was a futile and unanswerable question. However, he viewed that a spiritual life is very important, and he thought that a lack of having any spiritual dimension made people detach from the mysterious whole, such that they became overly focused on work, success, and status, and

risked developing neuroses that were typical of some of the patients or clients that he helped.

Jung emphasised that every person has a unique story to tell, but some aspects are hidden in the unconscious. They are unfolding stories that lead to a person's individuation, and they need to be lived, because life is meaningful, purposeful, and a sacred journey. And life is for now and the future. It is not about being stuck in perceived abnormalities rooted in childhood.

Part 2

Unconsciousness

As suggested in part 1, we begin life unconscious, not in a deep sleep, but rather, much less aware of the larger picture. So, for example, we figuratively fail to read between the lines, and follow implications through to meanings. It's like there could be some form of denial at a low level, that's affecting our senses.

The instinct in many young people, is to be something, or rather a something. By joining a group, they can at least find assumed commonality of thought and purpose, and it necessarily adds a safety factor for them, such that any outside detractions will dilute, because they affect the entire group's membership, and not overly on any individual. However, that reduced amount of individuality, will have to be

immediately manifested as part of those people's false layers, and confusing the true self.

Typically, young people will universally belong to at least one group through their preferences in music alone. That's especially true when the music has an associated look and culture beyond just the sound. For example, heavy rock, punk, rap, or reggae. They all offer easily gained identities, but any ease of that kind should make people question, such as motive?

By following a path of least resistance, we build an increasingly false persona. With enough belief placed in the persona, we could easily stop recognising how we've buried our real selves away from the world, especially in developed countries. Considering the number of people who may be around us, and who are living in similar manners, there's a lot of ease in drifting along in and out of things. **It's not unlike being in the fictitious scenario of the Matrix film.**

You don't need to look far, to see how a false self might completely take over, and can reach a point of no return, and especially in popular culture when a public image becomes a large source of income.

Transitioning

We're thrown out of our unconsciousness mode and into a conscious one, when we shift from being an adolescent into being a young adult. Some cultures have specific **rites of passage**, but either way, late-teenage years, or early twenties, are a time when many people are laying foundations that will dictate much of the rest of their lives.

Pain accompanies the experience of being conscious, especially when false layers are too societally inaccurate and unacceptable. For example, in our earlier years, we may have been a real star amongst our friends and shared a socially

comfortable “scene” with them. Then after moving outward from that sphere, we experienced much that disagreed with the broader world. Do we live a parochial life, by moving backwards to protect our ego, or do we face the challenges?

Charm

As already mentioned, some people capitalise on their persona. Of course, film and television are rife with that, and even if popular culture annoys you, it is increasingly difficult to avoid. Switching the TV off is a woefully inadequate block because the influence within the population, of TV personas, is everywhere, and it’s percolating, and not just in the west. I call it **the cult of personality**. The same thing has already happened quite excessively in popular music, since the introduction of the obligatory music video, which are incredibly false.

Even small exaggerations of mannerisms within everyday life, have become rooted in the “theatrical” or “Hollywood”, and for some people, they act as competitive manipulations that are hard for others to rise over, unless they invalidate the cult of personality. Of course, if you enter the mindset of that mode of being, then it will be more complex to invalidate, too!

Imagine avoiding any theatrics, by presenting a more blank, plain, and matter of fact image to the world, whilst you are truly, still associated with the cult of personality and its implications. You’re living a double life. What’s more, you necessarily must behave in a rude stoney manner sometimes, despite an inner conflict wanting to be more personable.

* * *

There are no shortcuts to individuation. Whilst psilocybin got me going, it took me twenty years

to become genuinely happy with who I was, whilst having no way of knowing if I could be any happier? I did feel I had made some big mistakes before I got here, and the paradox, is that I made no mistakes at all, because they all had to happen for me to get to this present day!

Rumi said - **“The cure for the pain is in the pain.”**
I assert, that that quote, is correct and verified.

Ultimately, reality looks more bland and less staged, at least from the outside. With age, the sincere will gravitate toward it, because the shallowness all around us in society, will try to push us in that way.

Many false layers will have been collected by sincere people in unconscious manners, but like the great Buddha said, “detach”. The simple phrase “I am” implies the same.

However, in a world approaching eight billion people, it is implausible that their shadows can become totally redundant, even after God's example of making his own one redundant, by seeking individuation as Jesus Christ on Earth.

No pain, no gain

Shadow work is painful. It damages pride in its path to humility, or the "I am". I've already suggested this, but you cannot complete shadow work in one step. By suddenly proclaiming yourself a born-again Christian, or any other type of fledgling holy person, is, for example, like a youngster becoming a Goth overnight. Their decision to listen to morbid music, dress in black clothes, wear black eyeliner and black boots, fundamentally changes nothing. Change is not that easy. Shadow work is gradual, but it can begin quickly.

In fact, shadow work is not a one-dimensional, one directional process, and it will speed up, pause, and slow down, but importantly, without maintaining vigilance, its load can increase again. For example, just as humiliations can occur with inner benefits for the soul, so, a proud person can become less proud after losing layers of their false self, but they can also gain some layers. An example might be the building of new skills, after an ego death, in efforts to help toward actualisation. Then, proficiency in those same skills could lead back to pride. That could be in learning to play a musical instrument, or through an involvement in competitive sports or games, for example.

The subjugation of the ego

We should always aim to go beyond the ego. A transient psychiatric label can help us in our recovery from psychosis, after we've lost worldly labels to the illness. That's because navigating the world with a broken soul and no label or selflove,

is incredibly difficult, and greatly so with the overly keen consciousness and awareness of psychosis.

People in the west tend to collect those worldly labels. In our social media age, they're usually displayed rather compulsively and competitively in so called profiles. But that should not be a surprise given the increasing hold that capitalism has on the world.

People are obsessed with their identities, and how their lives compare with others, when they should care more about genuine happiness. Happiness is very much about the "I am." With a full detachment, the "I am" implies that the shadow work is over. It's an acceptance of a figurative crucifixion, but we will not reach it, as we're not avatars. However, anyone can aim to do their best.

Old age

In our old age, if we are lucky(?) enough to enter it, the unconscious state returns, after all, we become increasingly reliant on others again, and our minds may become less active, but we might ruminate on death? In the latter case, consciousness might remain, tormenting us, but what do I know? I'm not old. However, having a good soul has got to be worth it.

Part 3

Natural selection

I offer no metric of pain and damage. Individuals know the degree to which life has so far affected them, and everyone can have their own scale requiring no comparisons with other people's.

Well known phrases like “the law of the jungle” and “survival of the fittest,” are real and manifesting in all societies and cultures, but in the UK at least, many people in the younger generations, Gen Zs and at least most Millennials, are trying to outlaw anxiety and stress. They will not get far, because their insistence that we all adopt the mantra, “be kind,” requires that someone is kind first, which seems utterly implausible and impractical.

Motivation

Feelings of anxiety and stress play a large part in motivating human beings to get things done, especially when the predominant societal model is capitalism. Capitalism encourages colleagues to compete with colleagues, teams to rise above teams, and companies to beat other companies. Ultimately, entire nations aim to emerge more powerful than other nations, whilst destabilising global politics, and increasing fractiousness.

The “ism” the world needs remains undiscovered. However, success in some fields is spectacular, for example, computer science and medicine. We live longer, and most people routinely carry a super connected computer in a pocket. However, the meaning of the word, “live”, may be a deep and existential one. Whereas once, and on the surface, a person was deemed successful if they drove a Ford Cortina, and they were probably a GP or bank manager, if their car was a Mercedes Benz or a

Jaguar; now, anyone is driving a Range Rover or the latter pair of marques.

The age metric

You cannot escape an age metric. For example, if life has destroyed you in your early twenties, then going straight to retirement will be harder at that age, than had things happened at an age of fifty or over.

My piano teacher retired early. He was around fifty-five. Job stresses were having an adverse effect on his heart. His early retirement was societally and medically understandable, just as it would have been if he had other serious physical shortcomings.

Mental illnesses are still attracting less sympathy. Broadly speaking, that might be rooted in a lack of a definitive blood tests for them, and there being such an enormous number of people who

are now seeing their GPs over frankly low-level related problems; those that humankind has historically always lived with. The explosion of information and communication on the internet, has doubtlessly added to both the number of people seeking help for their mental health, and the degree of public scepticism as to the severity of the average one of those cases.

Stress affects everyone in diverse ways, and whilst I am not a doctor, I will assert that that means we become physically ill, mentally ill, or both at once. If stress is both severe enough, and for long enough, its mental outcome will progress to psychosis.

Psychosis

Psychosis means “madness” and it has always been part of our humankind. The Gospels documented Jesus as “casting out demons” from people. Living even a remotely “regular life” with untreated

psychosis, like holding down a job and maintaining relationships, will be extremely challenging. Psychosis is much more debilitating than having lower levels of anxiety and depression.

Looking back at the previous words about Jung, and his ideas around the psyche, which he suggested had both conscious and unconscious elements; there is a hyperconsciousness in a psychotic episode. That means everything is noticed, and perversely, some of it isn't even there. The latter is a result of the hallucinatory aspects of psychosis. Processing all this information, adds increasingly to the burden, frankly, of the madness.

If you are not already under a psychiatrist, you should hopefully be meeting one. You are unlikely to get well on your own. Talking therapies are now ineffective, and hurting yourself is an increasing risk. You are probably already self-medicating

through the daily depressant effects of alcohol, but you don't call it "medicating", especially when the point is reached, that you, the patient, don't know you're ill. That is when insight has been lost, and you are connecting everything with everything.

Are you still with me?

The road to individuation is long. I've experienced all of what is suggested in this book. In my early twenties I earned a degree in chemistry. I then won work as a computer programmer. I wished I could have done something other than office work, but I didn't have a CV for much else. I had a tough time, which led me to receiving an initial diagnosis of schizophrenia in 1992, when I was twenty-four. (It was changed to bipolar disorder).

Vitaly, the pages of this book are inclusive. You do not have to have received a diagnosis of any severe mental illness, and it's hoped this book might flatly avert you from needing one.

Routine

Having a routine is one of the most important things in aiding recovery, and the others are mostly in the realm of basics.

Initially, I would not get out of bed in the morning. I was living with my mum at the time, and she knew it was important for me to get up, even if I didn't have much to be up for. For that reason, she would lift high one side of my mattress, to make me fall out of bed onto the floor.

Something I have never managed to do, even now, is to make my bed straight after getting up, and nowadays most of us sleep under duvets anyway; but I remember the time before they had become popular. People in the military have got to make their beds first thing, with no exceptions. And bed making is a first positive task, of an evolving day of further positives. Shaving too, is not as common these days, with beards being so popular. Thus, a

lack of a beard and a suggestion to shave, provides another opportunity to put a “best foot forward” in the day.

Before losing faith in me, I do not think that debilitated people should begin their days by making a bed and shaving, or if this doesn't shout sexism, to make a bed and routinely apply make-up. Many poorly people might still be in bed in the afternoon. However, I'm offering an illustration, because even those with severe mental illnesses, can try to push themselves into doing something. That could be to have a bath when they don't feel like it, or to bother getting their shoes and coat on for a walk. I know the problem there, even extending to footwear, and the “deal breaking” situation of having to lace up shoes rather than put slip-ons on. Can you get slip-ons if that rings true?

The things above, like bathing and walking, are attemptable within your own sphere, and without

interventions from others. Whilst they may feel difficult, they offer routes to small accomplishment, if you tackle them and complete them. You might initially not feel anything positive from doing them or doing anything else. It's going to involve thousands of actions. The clichéd saying, that "Rome wasn't built in a day," is relevant. Every person is an incredible individual addition to the world, and of equal importance and relevance. It's going to take years for your complete fruition or evolution.

The Priory Hospital

When I was at my worst, I was lucky enough that my parents could afford for me to be admitted to a nearby private psychiatric Hospital. It was part of the Priory group. At the time, I didn't really understand the relevance of the therapies. I say that, because I remember thinking that I had a one-off, profound, and complex problem, which mustn't suit the generality of groups? And I was

being placed in them. How could I overlap with other people? I suppose I was expecting a more Freudian approach, and the group therapy seemed to me to be like an overly broad approximation for my “case”. I might even have viewed it as a cost cutting measure, stemming from there being too many patients, and not enough therapists.

However, I didn't appreciate how far-reaching the effects of anxiety and stress were. (Please consider the role of fear as well). The groups listed below in red, all had the goal, or more realistically the wish, that seeds would be planted, and growth might occur. Those seeds were different basic thoughts conducive to better mental health.

Anxiety management.

Assertiveness training.

Confidence building.

Art therapy.

Exercise.

As I got older and less poorly, I realised that I'd never had a transcendently complex mind at all, but instead, I'd been hopeless at managing my anxiety and stress levels, and I was scared.

Reflecting on those five groups, it's clear today how universally relevant they'd always been -

Life is less draining by **managing anxiety better**. With more energy we might do more, and greater richness and satisfaction may result.

Being **more assertive** helps you maintain personal boundaries. That reduces feelings of stress and anxiety to afford people better general wellbeing.

Confidence gives you more freedom to try things, and to not pass on opportunities. Passing on things can lead to regrets. A restricted life may worsen depressive feelings.

I remember the **art therapy** class because it annoyed me. I thought, how could paints, a brush, and a piece of paper, solve the depths of complexity, of a brain like mine? I left early!

Creativity

At that time, I was learning the piano at home, and had been doing so for three years. It was already a big part of my life. My mother insisted the piano saved my life. She was right. However, my “enormous intellect” or ego more like, didn’t click that trying to introduce artistic and/or creative aspects into people’s lives, in hospitals, was not going to be done with a room full of pianos, when few would have musical experience. But rather, you give someone a paint brush, remembering again, that “Rome wasn’t built in a day”. Or you can even offer crayons or pencils, and maybe have a good word for them. This might be a possible small step elsewhere.

Work often involves a power hierarchy. Having a **creative outlet** with meaning, can introduce a skills hierarchy into life. The mental distraction alone can be therapeutic.

The body

Looking after our bodies through **exercise** ought to help our minds, and physical problems can certainly worsen mental ones. Even our psychiatric drugs often cause weight gain and type 2 diabetes. Not only that, but the lifestyles led by people with severe mental illnesses are statistically likely to complicate things. Smoking, drinking, having too much junk food, and using street drugs, if nothing else, can negate the work of psychiatrists, who are trying to give people a best shot at being well, and by stabilising brain chemical systems which patients are constantly disrupting!

What might not be obvious about exercise, is that physical exertion helps people to burn the

adrenaline, that their “fight or flight” mechanism is releasing out of fear, daily. Of course, being physically tired helps us get a night’s sleep, but it’s associated with a level of exercise that’s very high for most people who struggle to even get out of bed in the morning.

Some things that are worth repeating

As I’ve already said, if you are suffering from a serious mental illness, or you have had any form of psychic destruction, then smoking cannabis, taking cocaine, drinking excessively, or taking heroin, for example, is for losers. You will lose. I had many periods in my recovery that featured too much alcohol. At one time, I had alcoholic liver damage, and could drink 70cls of whisky or its equivalent in one night. For me, cannabis smoking caused immediate psychotic symptoms, and I stopped it in my early to mid-twenties. No doubt the drink influenced my recovery to last twenty years. I quit smoking in 2012, and I just have an

occasional beer, now, I'm not tee-total. I always do what my doctor says. They might not be perfectly right all the time, but they know more than me, so that's the best deal on the table.

Trust

There comes a time when you should trust some people, even when your instincts say “no”. “No” is probably your fear speaking. **It might go wrong, but on balance, trusting no-one at all will get you nowhere.** That's my second promise.

Activity

In her famous book, **“Feel the fear and do it anyway”**, Susan Jeffers encouraged us into doing things. What I found in life was that trying things we feel scared of makes them become less scary. To begin with, that can mean doing anything at all, so, it means standing up for yourself when you are disrespected and no doubt angry, even when

the anger is an embarrassment to you, and you will look totally over-the-top by expressing it, and you're fooling yourself that the issue is smaller than it really is; because that thinking can linger.

If you want the life you're supposed to be on the planet for, you must go through this. Having a daily routine, is not just about when you get up, and when you go to bed, and have meals. You must slowly develop mental habits to give them the chance to become personal and automatic traits. People need to know how you are likely to behave in different circumstances. You want eventually to be quite predictable, so people know what they are "dealing with". Of course, I mean that in the broadest sense.

Give yourself at least ten years to make real inroads into being you, but in all honesty even more. After an ego death, you may not seem like a person at all.

Take tiny steps! Remember, that tiny today, could mean you just have that bath, or a shower; and that skills hierarchy you hopefully found, will offer endless potential for small achievements, and without colleagues, or others, in your way.

It was colleagues who helped bully me towards my nervous breakdown, in my early twenties. Some of them mocked me for trying to learn the piano. However, a few years after I resigned, I passed grade 8 piano playing with merit, and I'm still playing today, 35 years on. It's one of my skills hierarchies. Did I not say? You're allowed more than one. If you will allow me to suggest writing, that was another big one for me. I had to learn to write. School did not teach it to me at all.

Opportunities

In my experience, life does not offer so many meaningful opportunities. For example, things on a par with meeting a soul mate. Some people may

suggest they have many, but it turns out they have a much narrower vision, for example, they are all in line with making money, and in quite specific fields. In fact, they “make” those opportunities happen. Frankly, it’s an endless track, and they often step on other people whilst navigate it.

To be in the situation of having had an ego death, or a breakdown of any kind (whatever the semantics), you are likely to have characteristics that would never have led you into such an ambitious group. Or your being in it, is why you ended up your way. I suggest those traits include conscientiousness and sensitivity, along with your overly conscious psyche.

You still need to have a go at things, even the unsuitable ones, because everything found out through experience becomes a wisdom, instead of passed on pieces of knowledge.

Ultimately, it's not what medications you are on, or your skills hierarchy. Eventually, you must go out into the world to mix with strangers and gain courage. That is life. Carl Jung could not have expressed it better in his "Answer to Job" book. Remember, he suggested that God too sought actualisation. God had to be incarnated as God the son, Jesus Christ on Earth, to die in the most hideous way the Romans could think up, crucifixion.

No

As time passes you will discern your preferences. As a shell of a person, just try things, and learn what you can from them, even if perversely it's not to repeat something. Ultimately, being able to say "no" is vital, and that also means not worrying what people think of you in accordance with your decision making, because you're mediating it by reason, and that leads to a fair sense of balance.

My website, www.michaelholme.com, has an essay on this subject, so I'll not expand more here.

Final words

Life is worth it. That's my third promise, but as Hermann Hesse said, "**wisdom cannot be imparted...**", so this book may have been a bit lost on some people, but if it was, please consider picking it up again one day. People change as experiences keep offering insights. I don't want to patronise. This book has taken my entire life experiences to write.

Right at this moment: right now, as you read, everything you need is under your nose...

~ Michael

I've spoken about us exploring opportunities. Here's me with my first rescue dog, Angel. Every Thursday I walked RSPCA dogs as a volunteer. It indirectly led to my second marriage. So, walking and adopting Angel was about much more than walking and adopting Angel!



Godspeed...