

To Be
Human

To Be Human

A perfectly imperfect contemplation
on human life

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From my heart to yours

I'm not gonna lie: when I read through the manuscript for this book for the last time after having worked on it for so many years, I had to cry a little bit. Which is far from a typical thing for me to do, seeing as I'm generally not a very emotional person. My life has always revolved around observing, studying, uncovering the deeper layers of it all. I call myself a philosopher, my aunt calls me an alchemist. Whatever the name for it may be, the point is that you can't let emotions cloud your judgement when you try to unravel the truth of things, and so, I'm not one to let tears drop.

Except for this. These pages are an expression of all that I've been keeping in my heart over the years. This book truly means everything to me. In a way, it has always has: it's the product of the mission I devoted myself to from day one.

Yeah, from the day I first understood something about life, I had to understand more. Every moment of every waking day, I spent looking around at the trees, the flowers, the birds, the clouds in the sky, the people around me, everything. I embarked on a quest to understand all things, to learn where all things came from, what they were, where they were going and what it all meant. It was a quest without end, that I understood very quickly: the moment I thought I got it, things changed and I would have to start all over again. That didn't matter to me though, because I rejoiced in the practice itself. And yet, the first time I held a book about life in my hands, I just knew: one day I have to write a book like this too. This quest and the book you're holding right now were my silver lining throughout the first 20 years of my life.

About 3 years ago I opened a new Word-document and started typing. Throughout the following years I would work on what I have come to call 'my baby'. It was an off and on process, but never did my resolve waver. Although these words you are reading now represent the final moments of that journey, this is not the end of my quest. Like I said:

things are always changing. Therefore, this book also does not conclude an absolute truth. I decided to call it 'a perfectly imperfect contemplation' because it is just that: imperfect, unfinished, raw and real. Which you may be uncomfortable with at first, since humans tend to seek 'the ultimate truth'. We want for things to be perfectly structured and to make perfect sense, but unfortunately, life does not hold the same standards. If I was going to write a book on human life, I was not going to perfect it. I refused to replace what things are, for what we want them to be. So, this book has mistakes in it. Some theories are flawed and the spelling is probably off in some places. I have tried my best to keep it as true to real life as possible. I hope you can see past these imperfections and honor human life for what it is.

Keep in mind that this book will not give you all the answers. You are not holding a guide to life in your hands, nor does it conclude anything. Let this book be an invitation to find out what it means to be human and how to live as such, in every moment of this ever-changing life. Contemplate on it yourself. Perhaps you'll discover I was completely wrong about some things. If so, please, talk to me about it, talk to others about it. Throughout each chapter, you'll find this symbol: ♦. When you do, put this book down for a second to consider what you just read. Digest it before you continue reading.

This book was born from my thirst for understanding. For understanding the world, you and myself. I have set none of this in stone, and I hope you won't either. I am still learning as I go, and it is my wish for you to join me on this quest. So that I may grow to understand more through you, as I hope that you'll grow to understand more through this baby of mine.

Namasté,

Sylvana

Chapter 1

Essence

Part 1

Life

To Be Human

My long term memory is remarkably limited. You know how people can reminisce about the past sometimes? Family gatherings, birthday parties: when humans come together, events from the past are a much discussed topic. To me it often felt like I was at a very big disadvantage, having such a limited recollection of such events. It seems like I have this strong inability to hold onto the past, while everyone around me seems to value the ability to do so. I regularly questioned whether there was something wrong with me. With time and life though, I learned to see my bad memory as a strength. You see, the thing about not having too many memories is the knowledge that, the memories you do have, must be extremely important: why else would your subconsciousness decide to keep only those? So now, on the rare occasions I do have a strong recollection of a past event, I know I have to do whatever I can to learn the lesson that is bound to be hidden in there somewhere.

The strongest memory I have is one from when I was very young and I was lying in bed thinking about death. I don't know if you've ever experienced something like this yourself: this wave of fear and unanswered questions wreaking havoc in your mind. I remember how my head was spinning, considering what dying meant, what would happen to me, where I would go. Chills were going down my spine, and my heart was pumping large amounts of adrenaline through my young veins. Absolute panic had struck my little self and I cried myself to sleep that night.

And yes, I am well aware that this is a very 'morbid' way to start off the first chapter. But still, I feel this is too important not to tell you. After all, isn't that the most remarkable thing? In my strongest memory, I remember my fear of death. There must be a lot to learn from that fear...



My quest to understand what it means to be human began at a very young age. After having felt this deep fear of death, I came to search for recognition in others. I listened to other humans talking about life and I observed our dogs as they came and went from life, to death. I quickly learned that there are major differences between the human approach to death, and the way our dogs approached it. With humans I always sensed there to be this taboo, or bad energy hanging around the word death, whereas our dogs always seemed so neutral and at peace with it. This appeared to not just be the case in our dogs, but in all other life forms as well. Looking at the trees in our backyard, I noticed how they didn't cry or scream, nor did the flowers as their petals fell to the earth when autumn came. There had to be something inherently different about us humans, and I made it my mission to understand this difference.

Going to high school one of my favorite classes was biology. I wasn't into all aspects of it (I mean, calculating the population, no thanks), but whenever we discussed subjects like the functionalities of a body, or the mind, and particularly the evolution of life up until this day, I was all-in. Sure, those of you who know me are probably familiar with my moving around in the more 'spiritual' community. But actually, I generally prefer to contemplate spiritual questions using a more 'grounded' approach. I always need to know 'why'. Practical questions like that are really prominent in my overall vocabulary. So, as a child with many such questions on my mind, I looked around at the trees while on a forest walk, or at the dogs I've grown up with,

or other children trying to cross the road near school, and I began to connect the dots between my spiritual questions and the science-based information I learned in class.

Something I quickly understood was that, to understand what makes a human different, you have to first understand the larger aspects of that human, not the small things that make them different. You have to define the default state, before you can determine where in the system there is something off. As for humans, this is easiest to do by determining what we have in common with other forms of life. After all, we are all largely the same. Now, as you probably know quite well, these similarities are not in how all these different life forms look. They are more so in intention: what they do and what drives them to do so.

And so, I came to wonder: what drives a human?



In order to understand what ‘drives’ a human in its existence, you may think one should simply ask people what matters most to them. When you have to make an important decision in life, you keep some sort of value or belief in mind as a guiding line. We choose to act in accordance to what we believe in, to remain true to what we think of as right and just. Or we choose to act as a way of defending what we value most. Often these things overlap: we value our beliefs, or we believe in something in accordance to what we value. Sometimes it’s not so much about defending anything: we may also act to gain (more of) the things we value, such as money, or happiness. So, the question here is not what ‘drives’ us. It is easier to understand by questioning

what we value most.

As for most people when you ask them what they value most in life, you will get a pretty standard set of answers: freedom, love, harmony, balance, happiness, making a difference, occasionally people will even say they value themselves and their existence most. What's interesting about this is that, when you ask these people why they value these things, you will get a fairly rational explanation as to why these things are so important. Usually these answers are quite personal and have to do with a past experience. Values such as these are well thought out and filtered through the perspective of how an individual has felt, and now feels, about past events in their lives. For example, we come to value freedom when we have felt caged for part of our lives. Or we value love when we have felt unloved by people we wished cared for us.

So, the answer to this question only tells us what that specific person has learned to be of the highest value. Being an individual, a human can only answer from their own unique perceptions: it doesn't really answer the question as to what is most important to 'a human'. To answer that question, I think you have to read between the lines, into a place that isn't all that personal. Somewhere that isn't filtered through perspective, somewhere where the individual human is not.



I have had my fair share of struggles in life. And although I do not like to reference my past too much, I would like to talk to you

about a rather valuable lesson life tried to teach me throughout my teenage and young adult years.

I tend not to listen to my body very well. This became very noticeable when my relationship with food became rather complicated. I won't bore you with the details. All you need to know really is that I did not give my body what she needed, and this had a profound effect on my mental clarity. Malnourishment destabilizes all bodily functions, including those of the brain. Hence I was not able to think straight whatsoever. The people around me tried to reason with me, to make me realize that starving yourself is not good and I should stop treating myself this way. But I was no longer reasonable. Many say our brain is the engine of human reason, so how I could be reasonable when my engine wouldn't run? No, reason certainly couldn't save me.

What eventually got me back in proper shape was not that: where reason fails, other forces have to take over control. Being on the edge like that, you become quite well acquainted with your primordial desires, because those are the only ones strong enough to offer you the truth that can save you from the lies in your toxic ways of thinking. You then find your deepest value, that drives you to forget about your other more rational values, and see yourself for what you really are.

Looking back after my physical and mental state finally improved, I realized that what got me back on my feet, was a version of me beyond mental reason, beyond thought-out value and belief. In a strange way, life had done me favor. Because through this experience, for the first time, I had gotten a very clear look at a human, not an individual.

I found that stripped from our personal values and beliefs, only one primordial value remains for us to rely upon: survival.

We always, no matter what, put survival before everything else. Whether that means ensuring our own individual survival, the survival of those we care about, or perhaps even letting our own survival go to ensure the survival of our species/this world as a whole.



Looking back at older times and at nature as we can see it in animals and plants, the importance of survival is hard to miss. We see it on National Geographic, how animals spend their entire lives fighting for it. We can see it in weeds, how they somehow manage to grow in the craziest places, just to see the light of day. We see how pigeons adapt to life in the cities, just to stay alive in this ever-changing world. But we rarely take a good look at ourselves in that way. For some reason humans try to place themselves above that system, as if we are some higher form of intelligence, which we could question. When I was younger, I didn't always like to play with other kids. More so I preferred to observe them from a distance. It's interesting to see how differently children behave from us adults: the way they play, how they search the boundaries between what is right and what is wrong, how they scream, laugh, cry. Their behavior is really not that different from those little lions on National Geographic. I find that deeply fascinating, to see how pure primal behavior, based on primordial value, still drives the youngest of us, whereas we start to obscure it more as we get older. Even so, when you pierce through society's way of portraying us and see through the vocabulary we use to describe our values, those dynamics are still very much at play in

everything we feel and do. I highly suggest you look up some of the research on it, you'll get a good laugh.

This common ground in different life forms is not a coincidence of course, seeing as everything on this earth originates as a result of the same forces (which I'll get into later). These forces appear to come from one particular source. Everything around you, all forms of life, originate from this source. There are many different terms people have for it: some call it got God, some use several different Gods, some say it's love, etc. I personally feel most comfortable using the term 'nature'. But you can replace it by whatever works for you. Nature brings many different life forms into existence: lions, trees, apples, humans. Although these forms are quite different in outer appearance, you'll find that on a level much less visible to the eye, we are made of the same particles, as a result of the same natural forces. All these particles have just been arranged slightly differently from one life form to the next. If you only look at the complete movement of all those particles within a living being combined, one being may seem to move completely differently compared to another living being. But when you zoom in, you see the same particles everywhere, in everything, vibrating in a similar way.

If that is hard to wrap your head around, try picturing it in terms of art. An artist can make hundreds of different paintings. But usually the materials used are similar according to his/her preferences. And if you look closely you can see the same style in every single painting. In the same way, nature has created us with similar materials and with similar style/functionalities/behavior.

So, why does our creator make us so that we value survival so much? What's the purpose of that? What is the meaning behind survival from our creator's perspective?

Well, if you use a different set of words to describe 'survival', then this meaning becomes a lot more clear. Here we are not talking about survival so much as we are talking about sustaining life.



Carrying on with life or, in other words, sustaining life can be viewed in different ways. We can look at it from a more global perspective, as in the survival of humans as a species and maybe the survival of all forms of life (including that of other species), or, we look at it from a more 'self-centered' point of view. The second may sound more comprehensible for you, since that is something you can recognize easily in your daily life. For example: our desire for food, for medicine when we are sick, for warmth when it's freezing out. Each of these examples is based on the immediate survival of you, in the life form that you are in now. What you may not always recognize is the picture behind your individual survival.

What value drives nature to want for us to survive? With there being so many different life forms striving for survival, you probably understand that there is a greater value somewhere beyond our individual selves. Well, actually, this is not that hard to explain: for nature, our individual survival is merely a way to sustain not us, but the force we are temporarily keeping within. Sustaining life to her, is about the sustaining of life force. I'll delve deeper into what life force 'is' exactly later. For now, just remember that life force is the force that creates all living things. Without life force to create life, there is no life. So, to sustain life is to sustain life force.

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Looking at us from nature's perspective, you could say we are merely vessels of life (force). Just like a tree, or a bird, or even the weeds in your backyard. When you think about it like that, it may seem that we do not matter as individuals or as a species, and in a way, that is true: us humans are not the very center of the universe. But you have to understand that this life force has immeasurable value and meaning to nature, and that humans, as temporary keepers of that life, get a chance to be a vital aspect of the system nature has set in place to make sure that life force is sustained.

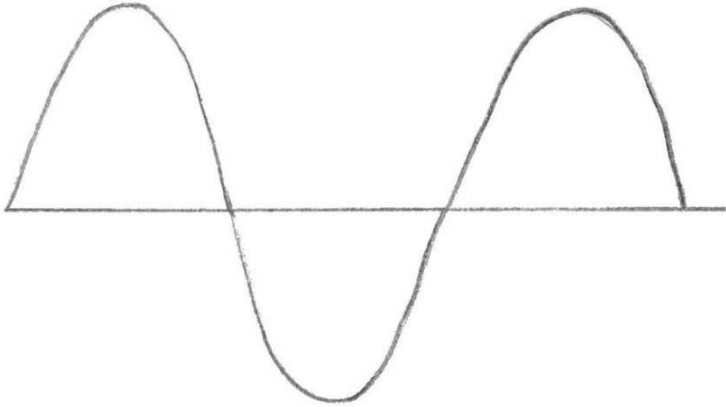
To understand how this system works, and why we are so valuable in this system, we'll have to take a look at two major aspects of survival: evolution and procreation.



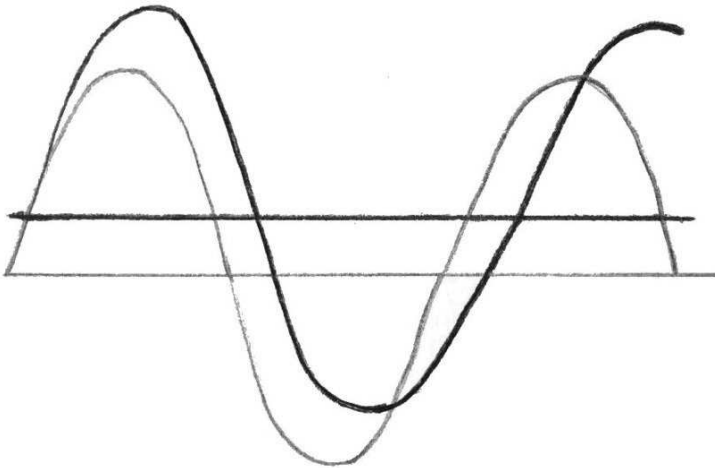
When you closely observe the earth, you'll find that everything depends on opposing forces that at some point balance each other out. Take temperature for example: within 24 hours the earth and the sky alternate between night and day, between cold and warm. When you view these alternating opposites over a longer period of time, you'll see they alternate around a middle line. You can either open the tap for warm water in your sink, or the cold one. When both taps are equally far open, the water balances itself out: you can no longer call it warm, nor can you call it cold.

Balance is math, it's a mean of ups and downs. In this world, everything is always changing, always moving up and down.

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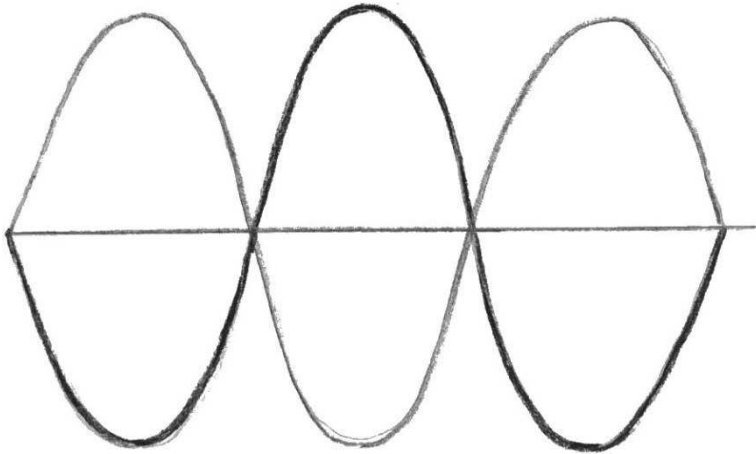


If you move too far up and avoid moving down, you'll never find yourself crossing the middle line of balance. And of course, the same goes the other way around. The world around us changes, and if you do not move along with those changes, you'll quickly find yourself out of place: you do not fit inside the world's ever-changing balance anymore. Your personal mean of ups and



downs will be in a different place from the world's mean of ups and downs.

The motions of your graph won't be line with the world around you, and you'll likely die: if you decide to sleep outside in the middle of winter and get too cold, you might just freeze to death. That is why you'll find other life forms such as trees, and coyotes, strive to try and stay in the same line, but opposing the world's graph as much as possible. Opposing? Yes, opposing. The trick is to be aligned but in exact opposition. So not getting colder when the world is getting colder, but getting warmer when it's cold out, and getting colder when it gets warmer out. When your motions are always the absolute opposite of those of the world, you'll find you cross the same mean of these opposites.



If you, much like a coyote, want to stay around as a vessel of life force, you'll have to keep moving in line (and in opposition) with the world as well. Humans, plants and animals have the unique potential to evolve and, in that way, change the direction of their

own graph to get in line with the world's graph. We have come to call this process evolution and is often defined by the saying: survival of the fittest. The use of these words sparked quite a bit of controversy back in the day. But, as with so many things when a lot of people look at it through different eyes, the literal meaning of this isn't quite as harsh. I think it's easier to understand when you explain it like this: the sustaining of life by growing, overcoming and adapting. The more you grow and adapt to circumstances that aren't initially in your favor (the better and quicker you change direction towards where the world's graph is), the more likely you are to stand the tests of time (and not get lost somewhere outside the graph). Over time we've already seen how different life forms have grown, overcome and adapted to all sorts of circumstances and changes in this world's balance: we grew a digestive tract to ensure the ability to process a variety of foods without merely depending on one single food source. The development of skills such as climbing, running, which we needed if we were to survive on land. And even the development of human intelligence itself has had a significant impact on our own life form's ability to survive, and thus keep life force sustained.

And that's where procreation plays such a big role, as there is really no other way to ensure big changes over short periods of time, than to take elements of the past and make something new and improved out of them. In the same way that most painters do not open a new tube of very expensive paint whenever working on a new piece of art, nature reuses the precious elements of the world as it is in this moment, to make new vessels. But, unlike what you may think, procreation is not just about having sex and making babies.

Nature's goal in procreation is to try and make beings that are capable of sustaining life force. What that means is that these beings need to be able to move in line with the world's balance. When we procreate in the physical sense (making babies), physical characteristics that allow us to adapt to this balance are transferred into our children. Say larger than average brain, which can be a very helpful tool to help you adapt to the world around you more efficiently. But, there is more to it than that. In nature, procreation is not merely about transferring physical characteristics into new beings: it is about transferring skill, mental capabilities and energy that allows for us to keep moving in line with the world around us as well.

The act of procreating is an act of personal evolution: you are evolving your skill within this lifetime, to transfer it into the future generation. This generation keeps evolving this skill too, and transfers it into the next one. When you teach yourself to build a house (shelter), and transfer that ability to your children, your personal evolution is a procreation, and that procreation is evolution between generations. The drive to evolve within our own lifetimes and to transfer the result of that evolution into new beings, is what makes evolution possible on a global scale.



Although sustaining life, evolving and procreating may not seem like they're of the highest value to us, and therefore cannot be the driving force behind who we are, we can't ignore them when trying to understand humans as a species. First and foremost we are and always will be creations of nature with the same purpose as all other creations of that same nature.

We have this tendency to try and define ourselves by the little things that make us different. For example, we may try to define ourselves by our personal evolution of developing speech, thinking that is what makes a human, human. In reality this tiny evolution cannot help you understand the human as a whole, because it is only a small aspect of our species, serving a far greater purpose.

Within us lies a sense of whole: our own survival, our own personal evolution, our own procreation, serves the bigger goal of sustaining life's forces in general. If we strip ourselves from our rational outlook on life, we'll see that we are willing to and should, for our own sake, give our all to fulfill that purpose. Humanity develops in its own unique way, but although the road is different for every single one of us, all life is going to the same place.

In the next part of this chapter, I will zoom in a little bit on the personal human evolution and how humans differentiate themselves from other forms of life: consciousness and subconsciousness.

Part 2

Consciousness & Subconsciousness

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Although us humans are in many ways very much the same as basically all other forms of life, us humans do have some details about us that are emphasized enough to make us seem and feel different. Although the laws of nature have caused the seeds of these details to be placed in us, they have definitely come to take on a life of their own. Growing in us like a virus, the small things that make us different, have become what we define ourselves by as a species. When we take a closer look at how this virus has spread and grown, we may just find out what it means to be human.

When I use the word virus, I am not saying there is something inherently wrong about us. Quite the opposite, I am actually talking about what has become the main player in the human survival strategy: our brain. Our brain and our 'individual consciousness' have allowed us humans to evolve into inventive creatures that build and create opportunities to survive. We can make tools, houses, we farm land, we use other species to work for us (horses, dogs, cats) so we do not have to strain ourselves with heavy labor. Dare I even say: we have made basic survival a simple task for ourselves by using our intelligence.

I think it's time we take a closer look at the inner workings of humans, so we can understand how our intelligence defines us as a species.



Let's begin by taking a look at this image: