

Contemplations for Sensing the Sacred

“Wisdom begins in wonder” Socrates.

The following contemplations counter habituation and remind you of the sacred truth of things. Read through the following contemplations slowly, one my one. Take a few minutes with each one to rest on it in your mind and mull it over. Make an effort to be still and present as you absorb these contemplations. Anchor on your breath. Let the mind quiet as much as it can.

These contemplations use concepts as pointers. They work best when pondered slowly and carefully in a meditative state. While you can read through them now, get the most out of them by contemplating then one at a time for several minutes. I recommend staying with one thought a day.

- Consider our place in the vastness of space. Note there are 100 thousand million stars in our galaxy alone, and two trillion galaxies in the observable universe. That is about 1 billion trillion stars in the universe. To put that into perspective, there are more stars in the universe than there are grains of sand on earth. Now consider the estimated size of the universe—93 billion light years across. (one light year is about 6 trillion miles).
- Now consider our place in the vastness of time. Note that the universe is about $13 \frac{3}{4}$ billion years old, the earth is about $4 \frac{1}{2}$ billion years old, and life on this planet is perhaps 4 billion years old. We humans have existed on this planet for only about 150,000-200,00 years. We have thus existed as a species for only about 1/20,000 of the time of life on this planet. And each of our lives is about 1/40,000,000 of the time of life on the planet.

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- Now reflect on your place in the vastness of humanity. We are the latest of about 7,500 generations of humans. You are one of about 100 billion people who have lived on earth. There are about 8 billion people on the planet. About 300,000 babies are born each day and 150,000 people die every day.
- Consider Life—your life and all of life. See life for what it is--a self-organizing and self-perpetuating process of the Universe. Consider the miracle and natural genius of Life—of this dynamic process that continues to grow ever-more complex with the flow of energy from the sun through our planet. Note the gift we are each given to be part of the dance of life. Consider your senses to perceive life, your organs to take in air, water, and sustenance from other life forms. Consider your capacities to keep going and protect yourself and to reproduce. Sense the primal urge of life within you to live and to perpetuate Itself. Tap into the wordless wonder of Life and of your life.
- Now consider the vastness of all of life on this planet. Consider the mind-boggling interconnecting system of all life forms on earth. We share this planet as part of a web of an estimated almost 9 million to possibly a trillion species that all need each other to survive. Sense the vastness of life on this planet—and the very small part we are of it.
- Note that all your experiences arise from your mind. Note that you are experiencing a representation of Reality that the brain constructs for you to experience. Take note of the fact that you cannot and will never experience Reality directly. Note therefore that Reality is an eternal mystery. Note the ultimate inconceivability of Reality. Marvel at this.

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- Note sights, sounds, tastes, and smells. Note how the brain constructs a dynamic, real-time, three-dimensional, multisensory experience. Marvel at this.
- Note that your brain—the most complex structure in the known universe—also constructs feelings, thoughts, urges, understandings, and sensations in the body. Note the brain’s capacity for conceptualization, visualization and imagination. Note the processes of remembering, planning, and reasoning. See that all this is constructed for you to experience and happens automatically. Somehow the brain does this with about 100 billion neurons and more potential connections—trillions of trillions—than there are atoms in the known universe. Marvel at this. How amazing.
- Note that in addition to sensory experiences, thoughts, feelings, urges, and mental images, there is the awareness of these mental events. Note the still and unchanging nature of awareness. Note also that there is awareness of awareness. Note the mystery of awareness. Note the inconceivability of awareness. Marvel at the mystery and miracle of consciousness.
- Reflect on the workings of the brain. What happens to awareness when neurons stop transmitting electrical signals, such as under anesthesia? Consciousness momentarily ceases to exist. See that awareness is like the dynamic, organized sequence of sound waves of a symphony. See that awareness is mysteriously generated by a neural symphony, or perhaps transmitted by that neural symphony. When you inquire closely, you will see that you are like a wave in that the wave is a dynamic organized process of matter and energy. The wave is not the water, but requires the water to exist. See that you are the same. You are not your brain, but the workings of your brain. How wondrous and mysterious.

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- Now ask yourself, “Who am I?” Reflect on this. Note that you are not your thoughts, for thoughts come and go. Note that all sense experiences constantly change. See that you are none of these experiences. As you attend closely to your experience, note a felt, coherent sense of “I.” Ask yourself what this is. Note that this experience too is constructed by the brain. When you look closely enough and long enough, you will see that the sense of self and everything else you experience is constructed. As you see this, you will begin to not take yourself personally anymore, because there is actually no one to take personally. This is profoundly liberating. In particular, note that shame, self-hatred, and judgment are also products of brain activity, triggered by prior events such as trauma and neglect. When you truly see this, compassion for the experience of pain will naturally arise. Note this as well. How amazing.
- Look closely and you will see that the essence of consciousness is compassionate. Note this with appreciation. How wonderful that Nature generates this quality of consciousness.
- Reflect on your experience of Nature and Life. See if you can sense a sacred life force that flows through all of life. Sense it in the animals, the plants and trees, and in others. Sense the whole vast dynamic process of life on this planet. Sense yourself as one minute but sacred part of this sacred life process. Sense your profound dependence upon this vast life process. Sense your interdependence with it. Sense the force of life within you. Sense that this life force is both personal and impersonal. Sense that life is about life, and that you have been gifted with the experience of life. As you reflect on this, you may notice profound feelings of reverence, humility and gratitude arise. Note that from this a calling to love the one life of which you are a part arises.

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- Reflect on all the conditions and processes that must exist for you to exist. Air, sunlight, water, minerals, earth, food, the vast diversity of life on this planet, and other people. Consider the thousands of biochemical processes in the trillions of cells of your body that must happen in a balanced, coordinated, and harmonious way for you to be alive. Think about the self-sustaining and regenerating nature of life with its incredible complexity. Allow yourself to experience wonder and awe.
- Reflect on the mystery of the origins of life and on the billions of years of evolution that led to your existence. Note the necessity of imperfection—mutations—that led to evolution. Note how mutations led to more and more complexity such that Nature eventually created the most complex structure in the known universe—your brain.
- Note that you are made of the same stuff as everything else: matter. You come from elements shed from the stars. See that you are the Universe aware of Itself. Sense if you can your rootedness in a unitary ground of being from which everything arises. Through your sensing of this you will experience your oneness with all that is. Note that from this sense of oneness naturally arises love.
- Now consider humanity and civilization. Consider how many billions of people over thousands of years contributed to the creation of this civilization that we enjoy. Think about how Nature has designed us to collaborate in the thousands of ways that we do to sustain and perpetuate our species and our civilization. See how the power of love overcomes a more primitive form of selfishness that threatens our collective survival. See the essentiality of love. Deeply appreciate this force of love.

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- Now consider your own individual life, and all that had to happen for you to be reading these words. You are the produce of 7,500 generations of humans, and tens of thousands of generations of prehuman life forms. Think of all the love and care our ancestors had to give to each other for your parents to meet and to have you. Reflect upon the tens of thousands of people who have either directly or indirectly contributed to your survival and growth. Think of all the meals others have provided for you. All the clothes and other material supplies people have made for you. Think of all the people who have cared for you and supported you directly or indirectly over your lifetime.
- Think of the odds of your coming into existence. The odds that the particular sperm cell out of about 300 million sperm cells that became part of you merged with the egg that began your life. Think of the odds of your parents meeting, of the odds of each of the 7,500 generations surviving long enough to pass on their DNA. Think of the odds of the earth existing in this exact size, composition, and distance from the sun. Ali Binazir calculated that the odds of any one of us existing are infinitesimal. Reflect on how we take for granted the miracle of our existence.
- Think about the incredibly beauty and complexity of your body, with all its tissues and organs. Consider that you grow from a single microscopic cell that contained all the instructions needed to create your body in just 46 tiny molecules—your DNA. How is it that Nature accomplished such a feat as you?
- Imagine yourself a visitor to your life from 20,000 years ago. Imagine experiencing our civilization—house, cars, plumbing, electricity, cell

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phones, computers, TVs, airplanes, etc.—as if for the first time. How awe-mazing is the human civilization we have constructed, that we so much take for granted. From this perspective as well, the ordinary is extraordinary.

- Consider the dynamic and impermanent nature of Reality. Note that the only thing that does not change is change itself. Consider the necessity of impermanence and death for there to be life. Consider the necessary and inevitable nature of your own death and the death of everyone you love. At first you will feel sadness. But you will then feel compassion for yourself and for everyone else caught in our predicament. Knowing you will soon enough die, perhaps tomorrow, you will experience the incredible preciousness of your life.
- Note that Reality consists of necessary polarities. Light, dark. Life, death. Goodness, evil. Injury, healing. Order, chaos. Growth, destruction. See that there cannot be one without the other. Appreciate them all.
- Note that your judgments of good or bad are just that—judgments. They are mental events in your mind that arises from whether what happens coincides with the mind's expectations or desires. See that the Universe is as it is, apart from the mind's judgments of good or bad. Seen in this way, judgments are revealed to be a kind of psychological violence against Reality. See that when picking a fight with Reality, we lose every time. Note if you can instead the difference between judgments and discernments of what is helpful and wholesome vs. what is harmful. When you see the destructive nature of judgments, they will fade. This will enhance appreciation.

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- Note if you can the reality of grace. Reflect on the innumerable gifts of benefit and goodness that have sustained your life to this point. Perhaps the unearned kindness and help of a stranger, or people who have forgiven you despite the harm you have caused. See that nothing is owed to us, and everything is a gift.
- Finally, consider the necessity of pain. See that without pain, we would not survive. See pain as an invaluable messenger that something is not right. See that pain is an inevitable part of life. See the value of pain in compelling us to make changes to enhance our survival and vitality. See also the value of pain in triggering growth of skill and a deepening of wisdom.

You will see that your appreciation and reverence grow with your daily contemplation of the above truths. You will reverse your current habituation to the miraculous. The goal of these contemplations is to generate awe, which triggers reverence, gratitude, and humility. May these contemplations help to awaken in you a renewed sense of the extraordinary in the ordinary—a rediscovery of the child's experience that life is truly awe-mazing.

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