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Brief quote from p. 10 ["We're all going to die....eaten up by nothing."] from THE CAPTAIN IS OUT TO LUNCH AND THE SAILORS HAVE TAKEN OVER THE SHIP by CHARLES BUKOWSKI. Copyright (c) 1988 by Linda Lee Bukowski. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

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II

Compassion Practices

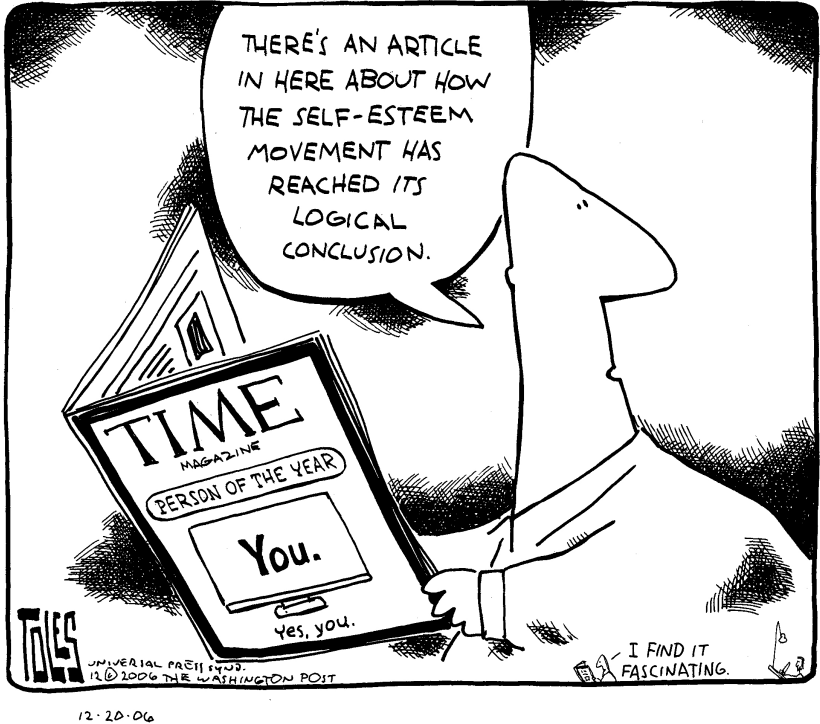
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Why Me?



The Oxford Dictionary defines self as “a person’s essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially when considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action.” This self sounds fairly harmless, and this book does not aim to obliterate all aspects of self. When we say *transcend the self*, we mean to move beyond certain thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, ways of perceiving, and properties of mind. The phrase *transcend the self* does not mean to upload your brain into a computer and leave

	Dissatisfied Self	Being Mode
	Self-conscious Self-focused Self-absorbed	Mindful Aware Experiencing
<u>Situation</u> Viewing a sunset	“This is the best sunset.” “This would be better if I was with ____.” “I better enjoy this; it might get cold soon.”	Experienced, not described. “Beautiful”
At a party	“Do I look good?” “They are cooler/ less cool than me.” “I’m missing a better party.”	Immersed
During the game	“How am I playing?” “I must play better.”	Letting the body take over = <i>Flow</i> “Ball.”
Making love	“How does my _____ look?” “Am I doing this well?”	Pleasure “Yes!”

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Shiny

For what shall it profit a man,
if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

-Jesus

The self is a bling addict. Bling refers to light that reflects off shiny objects such as diamonds. Shiny is not bad in and of itself. Shiny can be beautiful, and appreciating beauty can be one method of transcending the self. But bling obsession is a harmful type of materialism. We will define materialism as a desire to boost the self, to increase the value of the self both in one's own mind, but more importantly in others' eyes by acquiring money, power, and possessions.

Materialism has not paid off. The scientific data from the field of positive psychology reveals that bling provides no lasting satisfaction. The research now solidly reveals that once you have met the basic needs including food and decent housing, which most readers of this book probably already have, then increasing your wealth will not raise your happiness. Pursuing more money than one needs for the basics will not raise your happiness.

Not only will chasing money not raise your happiness, materialistic values may decrease well-being, your sense of life satisfaction, and even your health. The data reveals that those with materialistic values show lesser well being, lower quality relationships, more antisocial attitudes, and have less concern over protecting the planet.

The time you spend chasing resources above the minimum required to achieve the basics, drains your

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Nothing Unites Us Like Them

If you go back in time you will find tribes that were essentially only concerned with their own tribal members.

If you were a member of another tribe,
you could be killed with impunity.

- Peter Singer

Us versus Them (UvT) is the tendency for humans to bond cohesively into groups and to have favorable biases for their ingroup and negative biases against the outgroup. We see the ingroup members as being more similar to us than they actually are, and as having desirable qualities such as charm, talent, or morality. We see the outgroup members as more different from us than they are, and as lacking desirable qualities and possessing negative qualities. UvT examples abound and include cliques, teams, and national rivalries. UvT thinking is powerful, often pleasurable, and potentially lethal.

We form groups easily. We need to belong. Recall your first day at a new school, moving to a new town, or joining a new organization. These situations can be exciting, but we desperately want to find a friend, an ally. We are social animals, and we require a tribe. If you have ever suffered a blow to one of your memberships, you realize how important a sense of belonging is. People define their selves by their groups, whether family, religion, or team.

Social psychologists have shown that it does not take much for us to form a group. The need to belong is so

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It Might Be Over Soon

We abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.

-Aldo Leopold

We may have a bigger long-term problem than violence. All of us are doomed if we cannot maintain a livable planet. Environmental degradation and climate change are real. The biosphere may have already crossed several thresholds or tipping points, which may not be easily reversible and which could threaten all human life on this planet. The level of consensus about human induced climate change is rarely found in science. Climate change skeptics typically believe that an omnipotent power can push the reset button on the planet or have funding ties to political interest groups and big business.¹ Even if we are allergic to evidence and immune to science and find a way to deny climate change, we are still in trouble from all other forms of pollution and unsustainable consumption.

We are now experiencing the sixth extinction in the Earth's history, with the fifth being the one that we all know about because of the plastic dinosaurs we play with as children. In *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, Elizabeth Kolbert summarizes scientific data and tours the globe to visit habitats and the people who live there, to explain how the sixth extinction is happening now. The

¹ See Dunlap and McCright's *Organized Climate Change Denial* chapter in The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society, or find their chart with a search for: Key Components of Climate Change Denial Machine.

fifth extinction occurred 65 million years ago after an asteroid hit the Yucatan, creating a dust cloud that blocked the sun and doomed the dinosaurs. The sixth extinction refers to the current increase in the loss of plant and animal species. Estimates are that 20 to 50 percent of all species will be lost in this century. One study predicts no fish in the oceans by 2048. Many experts predict that by the end of this century there will be no more wild large animals: elephants, tigers, rhinos, or polar bears. Maybe in five hundred years they will become beloved toys, like current day dinosaurs, romanticized creatures from a long gone age. Humans likely can use technology to hang around longer than the bears and lions, but we still may be in trouble. Hopefully, the dying species will not die in vain and might serve as canaries in the coalmine, invoking enough fear to fuel wise corrective action among humans.

Please visit www.footprintnetwork.org, input data about your lifestyle, and an algorithm will determine how many Earths it would take to support your lifestyle if all humans lived like you. For the guilty fingers typing now, it would take the resources of 2.4 Earths to support us, the humans, at the author's current rate of consumption. He hopes to improve. For now, it seems we only have one planet. We might be doomed, not the Earth itself, but us.

Save the Planet is a well intentioned slogan, yet save the planet implies that we are heroes here to do the saving, and also forgets that the planet was here before us and will likely be here long after us or whatever we become via continued evolution. We need to save us and our descendants. The cockroaches will still be here.

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Mindfulness

Student: “How can I get myself to enlightenment?”

Master: “Forget it.”

Student: “I will never get there?”

Master: “Yes.”

Student: “Darn.”

The student leaves the monastery.

Master: “Why do these students keep leaving after I tell them the way? I told her to forget her self, and there is nowhere to go as she is already here. And she leaves.”

Our minds have a mind of their own. Imagine you were setting out on a cross-country road trip, driving from Brooklyn to San Francisco. You leave N.Y., and against your will, your car drives straight north, to Canada. This never happens. Our cars go where we steer them. Our minds do not. Weird. Here we are supposedly the most advanced species on this planet, and we are not the captain of this ship, the driver of this bus. You might intend that your mind focuses on a long-term goal today, but your mind is often distracted and absorbed by unbidden self-focused thinking: from neutral chatter, “I’m hungry” to worry, “Is he the one?” to self-directives, “I should be productive” to existential terror, “Will I achieve my dreams?” or self-condemnation, “I am a loser.” Mindfulness begins with recognition of the nature of the mind, and then shifts the game by changing the way we relate to thoughts, the mind, and the self.

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Cemetery Stroll

We are all going to die, all of us, what a circus!
That alone should make us love each other but it doesn't.
We are terrorized and flattened by trivialities,
we are eaten up by nothing.

- Charles Bukowski

Many spiritual traditions have emphasized the contemplation of impermanence as a method for overcoming self-absorption and finding meaning. Contemplating impermanence can give us perspective, a sense of connectedness, and greater compassion.

The Buddhists were perhaps the most ardent explorers of impermanence. Certain Buddhist sects have a tradition of meditating for days at the charnel grounds, sites along rivers where bodies were cremated or left to decompose. While this is a good example of impermanence practice, there are other methods of contemplating impermanence that are perhaps more accessible.

Symbols of impermanence that we can contemplate include the hourglass, each grain passing from top to bottom representing a week, day, or moment in our ever-shrinking supply. We also can use the lens of science, pondering the second law of thermodynamics, the principle of entropy, which dictates that energy always dissipates. Examples of entropy include the fact that every animal dies and that a leaf on the ground is no longer a leaf after several months. No energy is lost, but

the leaf loses its leafness; its energy has dispersed into other forms.

The Buddhists have a lovely concept of ‘already broken.’ Everything, including all living things, our bodies, and our possessions are (in terms of cosmic time) heading toward dust and are thus ‘already broken’. It is not as easy to get upset about a scratch on your car when you realize the car was ‘already broken’, subject to the laws of entropy, or at least heading toward an owner other than you. Think of all the cars you have owned. How important to you are the scratches on the cars you no longer own?

Impermanence promotes peace of mind and forgiveness. Imagine someone does not return one of your books. Remind your self that the book was already broken; soon its pages will be decaying. We also can use this principle to handle insults, whether insults to our abilities or bodily insults in the form of a creaky knee, with more equanimity, realizing our bodies are already broken. Realize that the self could benefit from being more broken or more flexible, as word based insults can only touch a self that is defended, rigid, and afraid.

Impermanence is liberating. When you realize your problems are small and temporary, you are free to enjoy what is. When you understand that the grains of sand are rapidly crossing the waist of the hourglass, you seize and appreciate each one.

Pondering impermanence, especially pondering death directly, may sound scary. You may be worried that too much pondering of death might induce hopelessness or a sense of desperation. In a paradoxical twist, for the majority of people, contemplating impermanence fosters reverence for each moment, rather than fostering

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Dice Games

Don't be too timid and squeamish about your actions.

All life is an experiment.

The more experiments you make the better.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Luke Rhinehardt's *The Dice Man*, a fictional cult classic novel, helps us realize that having one rigid, uni-dimensional identity, or true self, is as fun as racing a sailboat with its anchor down. The formation of the 'true self' begins early. The best parents try to give unconditional positive regard and praise their child early and often. The child enjoys and needs the parents' love and protection and will repeat whatever was praised. And so it begins. "That's my Sarah, she's a champion."; "Aaw, Johnny, he's so sweet."

This is not so terrible, but the other potential selves wither and shrink. The identity develops momentum and becomes solidified. Society and our peers also reward and enforce stability. Once your friends know you are the 'sweet' or 'tough' one, they want you to stay that way in their minds, and in your behaviors. They place you in a category and lock you there, to automate their own processing, so they can move on with life's complexities. They will filter evidence and will even create situations to confirm your identity.

Once you are trapped in a uni-dimensional self, it becomes comfortable. Because true flexibility is not valued, we become afraid to change, even when it would help us. Many people choose to stay in certain misery

Roll the Dice

Dice games encourage flexibility of the collection of changing processes we call a self. Many people feel limited in the way they do things. Even wild people may not be able to embrace flexibility by being calm or obeying laws. With dice games we break out of our normal identities by giving self-control over to the dice.

Let the dice decide what route you take, what you eat, or where you go on vacation. Let the dice decide whether to begin dancing. At a party, assign each of six people to a side of the die, and then go hug whomever's number is rolled.¹ People whose primary self is reckless can experiment with timid, safe, and law-abiding selves. People who are rigid can let the die set them free in myriad ways.

1. Get a die or two dice, and decide that you are going to hand over control of your 'self' to the dice.
2. Choose behavioral options for sides of the dice, or choose two options for an even or odd roll. Ensure some of the options are challenging, forcing you to step beyond the carapace you call a self. Tight people will be challenged by adventurous options while the risk takers will be challenged by quiet, rule-abiding options.
3. Roll & embrace flexibility.

¹ Do not break laws or be unkind when playing. This practice is for compassion, not recklessness. Loosen up, even when following instructions to loosen.

Radical Acceptance

Please consider a person with whom your mind has difficulties, someone who your mind has labeled “enemy” or “ignorant.”

Realize:

If I had your genetics and experiences, I would be you.

Ponder this. Imagine sitting in the other’s body and mind for a moment. This does not mean that your mind and soul would be in their body. You would be them. Your mind would be their mind. You would not have your beliefs, abilities, or intelligences. You would have theirs.

If previously you were blessed with a high IQ and parents who encouraged and paid for education, you now might be in the cranium of someone you previously called “ignorant”, who was born with a below average IQ, and who was forced to stop their education due to poverty, family chaos, or violence. You are no longer you. You are them. Now jump back to your existence. Are you any slower to condemn the other?

You could have been them. I could be you; you could be me. If you sit with this exercise enough, you will realize that at subtle and not so subtle levels, “you are them.” We are all connected. When they suffer, you suffer, eventually. I am you. You are me.

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Forgive

Teacher: Have you forgiven your captors?

Student: No.

Teacher: Then they still have you imprisoned.

-unknown¹

Forgiveness has long been a goal and practice of the world's spiritual traditions. Modern research on the benefits of forgiveness has grown rapidly. Forgiveness research has shown that people can learn to forgive, and that forgiving leads to health benefits.

People often resist the practice of forgiveness because they believe the transgression was wrong and the behavior does not deserve to be forgiven. Whenever we introduce forgiveness practice, we need to explain that forgiveness does not mean condoning or even forgiving specific behaviors or offenses. You can keep your belief that the behavior was wrong. You can protect yourself, enforce a corrective action such as a prison sentence, or choose to never see the person again. This is a little different than the typical lay usage of forgiveness. In lay usage, if a wife forgives a husband, the implication or assumption is that they will make amends, that all will be forgiven, including the behavior. Within this chapter, it almost seems as if the forgiveness practice could be renamed *Understanding and Letting Go*. We understand the context surrounding the situation and let go of hate that

¹ Found in Jack Kornfield's *The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace*.

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One World

Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of
compassion to embrace all living creatures
and the whole of nature and its beauty.

- Albert Einstein

If you read this book in a linear fashion, you have now done some or all of the Compassion Practices. Hopefully, the human that goes by your name received some benefit, such as enhancing your empathy, having less worries, and enjoying more of the small things that make life worth living.

While many people may have bought this book hoping to boost happiness or reach self-actualization, it is important to notice that there is a larger purpose to compassion practice. While happiness and increased performance may be side effects of this book, the intended effect is self-transcendence, which is a step above or wider than self-actualization. The exercises in this book were designed to promote perspective taking, compassion, and expansion from egocentric toward worldcentric levels of consciousness. When expanding the self beyond our own concerns, we literally develop our minds and our consciousness. This is the work and the journey of the spiritual path. Higher consciousness is about moving beyond ego to feel less separation, to feel connected to everything.

Elevating Consciousness

Levels	Focus	Thought Examples
Enlightenment ~ Cosmocentric	All levels of all people	Love for all levels of development. Zero condemnation of the cocoon that is not yet a butterfly. All levels are necessary steps that every human will go through if we are to reach global consciousness.
	The Universe	Feeling of connectedness to all of life, no boundary, ego has been transcended yet included
Worldcentric	All People	People are more similar than different. All spiritual traditions point toward the same unity.
	Our Planet	We need to teach the ethnocentric people a lesson.
Ethnocentric	My family	They are evil.
	My Tribe	Might makes right.
Egocentric	My needs	Give me candy.
	Me	What did Santa bring me?

earth, our planet. Just as you feel and care for your body, when your consciousness expands you will feel and care for the earth and its inhabitants.

There are obviously problems on our planet bigger than litter. The solutions will be complex, requiring our best and brightest minds, reason, science, compassion, and effective organizations. Some people might say consciousness expansion is less efficient than political and social action. By no means has the point of this book been against political or social action. The point of this book is to transform one's consciousness and engage. You can also alternate between the two, nurture compassion, deliver compassion, or do both at the same time. For example, practicing altruism helps others while expanding your heart and consciousness.

Higher consciousness is the foundation of wise action. Spirituality is sustenance for the soul and for soulful action, not a dreamy vision of celestial dancers on moonbeams. Compassion practice is not woo-woo crystal-rubbing fairy dust. Wider compassion frees us to solve the actual problems of the world rather than squabbling over conflicting ego stories. We need to be less tribal and more global, conscious, and moral. Having the capacity to hold more perspectives, to resonate with empathy, to deliver compassion, is the central component of emotional intelligence, maturity, morality, and wisdom that we need in effective citizens and leaders of all types. It is the key to personal satisfaction and meaningful lives as well as the basis for a co-existence with our fellow bipeds. When we understand that connectedness is the governing principle of everything, we choose strategies where more people win more of the time. Moving beyond me is perhaps the most important thing one can do to be

Recommended

Mindfulness & Compassion

The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, & Peace by Jack Kornfield

Wherever You Go, There You Are & Full Catastrophe Living by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu, translation by Stephen Mitchell

Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness by Sharon Salzberg

Thoughts Without a Thinker by Mark Epstein

Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness by Thich Nhat Hanh

The Inner Game by Timothy Gallwey

Mindful Discipline: A Loving Approach to Setting Limits by Shauna Shapiro

The Lost Art of Compassion by Lorne Ladner

The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety by Alan Watts

Seeds of Contemplation by Thomas Merton

Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life by Stephen Hayes

Radical Acceptance by Tara Brach

Field Notes on the Compassionate Life by Marc Barasch

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