


There is nothing but patterns and frames.

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THE MANUAL



What follows is the essence distilled from the course of my own life which I have written to help myself keep in mind some important things. I used to search for a universal method, for the Philosophers' Stone, something to provide me with a source of meaning to everything, with an everlasting source of purpose. I have walked many paths both bright and dark. At a certain point, I realized that if there was anything like that, it was me. That there would be no purpose to my life unless I generated it. There would be no meaning to things unless I supplied it myself. And that it cannot be made once and for all. I have to do it continuously. Every single day.

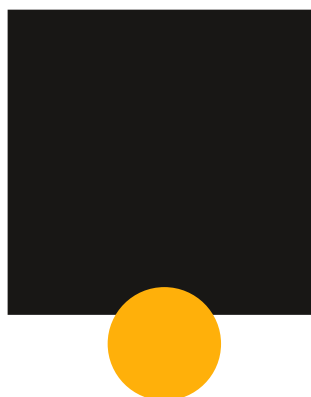
Saying so, I am far from denying God or Karma or Heaven or Hell. I have only come to a simple conclusion that freedom we are provided with is somehow bound to certain duties. Religions are not quite sure about whether that freedom of ours has been

meant as a kind of acknowledgment or punishment. Science, which I understand as a special case of a powerful religion, is not even sure whether there is such a thing. Sometimes it all feels just like a joke. But I figure it does not matter at all. It is what it is. If there is no freedom after all, I just had to write the book anyway and you have to read it so what's the big deal, mate? However, should there be a thing like freedom in our lives what directly follows is that you are fully responsible for how you are dealing with it. Me too, naturally. And them? Forget about them. They are just logs in flooding rivers.


This is not a therapist's book. It does not provide you with encouraging cases of miraculous cures that have solved the matter once and for all. It is more of a summary of a journey that has not finished yet but has passed some wild regions already and is heading towards the shore of a welcoming sea, or land, in peace.

Do you know the story of a Paris dustman who earned his bread by sweeping the small shops of artisans?

„At the end of the day he threw out all the refuse he collected, except the sweepings from the jewellers. These he sifted carefully for he knew that they contained gold dust from the jewellers' file. After many years, he found himself in possession of a sufficient amount of gold dust to make a mould of it and to shape it into a golden rose. Every minute, every chance word and glance, every thought, profound or flippant,



THE TALE



At the beginning, all was one.
There was no weight and no worry.
Only mild waves.

There was no space and no separation.
No longing and no expectation.

Until something happened.
Something unutterably horrible.

Pressure occurred. And Weight.
The All squeezed.
The All crushed.
The All ground.

The All disappeared.
Instead:

Dazzling Light and Piercing Noise.

Big Bang.

Space. Coldness. Separation.

Horror. Fear.

Then:

Breath.

The All split into Sky and Earth.
Only One Way remained to hold together:

Breathing.

Yet,


when breathing stops
Sky and Earth
become whole again
All the same.

But until then:

It must have been the worst experience of your life.
And yet. Can you remember?
And yet again. You managed! You survived!
How did you do it?



EPIPHANIES



As a little boy, I was afraid of death. I could not stop thinking about it. I kept trying to imagine how the world would be without me, and it felt funny. On the other hand, I suspected that it must be somehow possible, as, apparently, there was a world without me even before I had turned up in it. So I tried to imagine both: the world before me, as well as the one after.

Once I almost got it. But mostly I just cried at night. I never shared my thoughts and feelings with anyone. I did not know how to and could see no one who might understand a bit of it. Adults were always concerned with different things, as well as other kids.

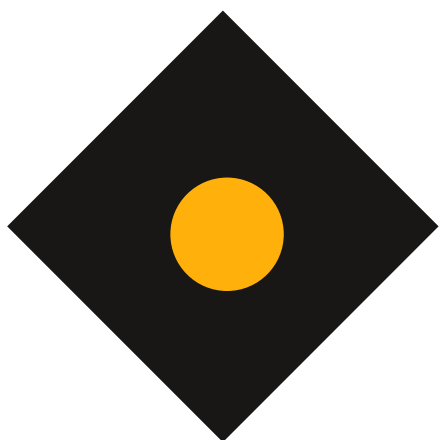
I also tried to figure out where and how the world ended, and wondered what was beyond that end. And as if it was not enough to crack, I tried hard to find out how the world had begun and what was before that. It all scared, puzzled, and fascinated me at the same time.

At those times, the world was the most frightening, lustrous and interesting place to be. I had a mission, my thoughts were mine, and my feelings were clear. Then it all turned into a blurred chain of worries. I cannot remember when.


Fear and Contempt

I grew up in the 1960s in the Czech cities of Prague and Tabor. In Prague with my parents, in Tabor with my grandparents. I spent more time in Tabor and liked it better there. The apartment we stayed in covered the top floor of a three-storey villa overlooking a valley with a creek at the bottom and a medieval fortification with a towering church on the other side. Our part of the valley was wild, full of bushes, trees and grass, and a waterfall a little bit further upstream where the creek started from a big pond called Jordan. I loved the place.

At the end of August 1968, my parents drove me from Tabor to Prague. It was the end of holidays and the school was about to start soon. Our country was freshly occupied by the Soviet Union, and tanks and soldiers swarmed all over the place. Occasionally, shooting could be heard here and there. We cruised the road bravely. However, just when passing a long line of tanks, a big shot had burst right next to us and our car started bumping funnily. As it turned out, no one fired a gun, we only blew a tire. But the fact was not that obvious to the Russians. As we were getting out of the



OBSERVATIONS



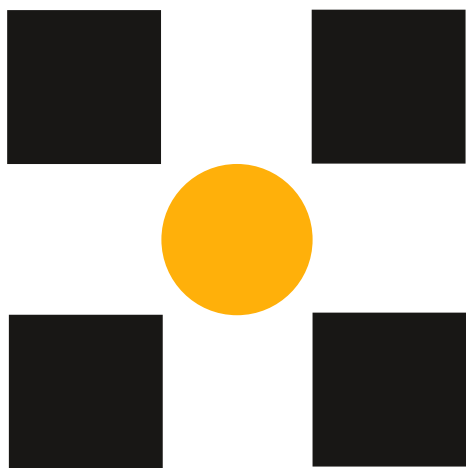
Once upon a time, there were two men wandering the Earth barefoot. Often, their feet got so sore that they could not wander any more. Once, fed up with frequent pain, one of them suggested: “How if we kill all cows and cover the ground with leather? Then, we could wander freely everywhere and get hurt no more.”

His fellow-wanderer pondered the suggestion carefully and, really, the idea of walking soft grounds seemed appealing. But then something occurred to him and thus he answered: “It seems like a lot of work to me, mate. How if we kill just one cow and use the leather to cover our feet?”


Do you also feel the satisfaction of the right solution? Think twice. These are but two basic problem solving patterns. Look around. Look inside. Which one do you find prevailing around you? And within?

Fear

Fear does not call for attention, it prefers to operate under cover. Still, it is a very efficient and relentless builder. Brick by brick, it is building its maze of a base. A little decision here and another there. You cannot turn this way because there is too much risk involved and you definitely need to put up a wall over here to prevent people peeping in. There is a little secret here so you need a convenient stash for it and some secret path in case you want to pick it up. And put it all under one roof so that you keep control over it. There is another secret there but that needs to be accessible to some, so you need to keep it separate from all yet still under the roof. People should see you this way, so raise a tower here and some turrets, too, to make it look attractive. There is a nice room for stuff here but it surely must stay closed, so that the stuff does not overflow. You call that order and build barriers to maintain it. Some stairs here and a ladder there so that you can pull it up in case of danger. An invisible fortress is being built around you, until it becomes really difficult to find a way out. One decision leads to another. Link by link a chain is forged. And then one day you say: I simply have to do this or that, there is no other way. With growing age, the barriers and corridors and halls and rooms and turrets become numberless. A ground plan does not exist and the only one who knows about all the passages is lounging about in the control room in the basement.



PRACTICES



Disillusions and disappointments never come from outside. They are discrepancies between what you expect and what you get, and you can fine tune only one side of the equation: the expectation. The rule of disappointment is one of few unbreakable limits of the world, similar to a horizon. Which is why it needs to be simply accepted.

You've been programmed to make unreasonable expectations all the time so you definitely should not expect that you'll quit once you have realized. You should accept that, too. Make ready for more disappointments. Only each time remember they are not failures, just stepping stones in white waters. And carry on.

Find the Fear

Find it. Lose it. Find it again. Lose it again. Repeat.
The losing part never means that you've got rid of it.

It only means that you've lost sight of it. So find it again. Get used to it. Make it your companion. Never make important decisions before you have touched the grounds of the fear involved. Never run from it.

Imagine yourself a teenager who beseechingly wants to join a forbidden party. Parents are not at home so there is a good chance they won't find out. Should you stay or should you go?

Find the fear and make it real. Imagine that parents are going to find out. Then consider the other part. Is it worth it? Are you ready to accept responsibility for breaking a rule? Are you? Go. Are you not sure? But maybe they won't find out after all... Forget it. If you can't do it face to face with your fear, don't do it at all. Accept. Because if you don't, you'll have to lie. You'll have to cover. You'll have to do many things you didn't mean to. You'll be building the maze of Fear's base. You'll become a prisoner in it. And you won't enjoy the party either.

You do not have to be a teenager and the issue might be different, yet the pattern stays the same most of the time.

Sometimes the fear is stronger. There is no shame in acceptance. It is the excuses that enslave you in the end, not the fear itself. The fear of fear.

You can't build or change habits overnight.

Try. Fail. Try again. Repeat.

This is a lifelong program, nothing for next week, month or year. Accept that.