

# Pause

This is about suicide.

But don't close it too quickly

because it is also about life.

My friend,

We have not yet met. Perhaps we might someday.

I'm not sure what has brought you to the place you are right now. I can't know the path that you have left in front of you. If you have begun reading, it may be because you are in a lot of pain, or because you have come to the end of yourself and are not sure how to continue.

My first invitation is to pause, just for a moment. Plant your feet firmly on the ground. Notice. What state are you in right now? You may be feeling in a way that has no words. Maybe you feel numb. Maybe you are not sure how you feel, or how to share how you feel. Read on for a few minutes and perhaps you will find that you are not so alone.

One of the most amazing things that I ever heard came a little bit later in life. After I had already done a lot of racing and chasing:

*"You are already everything that you need to be."*

We'll come back to this quote.

For now, I want to tell you that it's okay to have dark thoughts. Right now, yours have been about suicide.

The fact is, dark thoughts are inside most of us. Just as there is air in your lungs right now, there are difficult thoughts in your head.

We're only taught to express positive thoughts, feelings of happiness, joy, the niceness, the “acceptable” things. But what about the others? We’re not taught to recognize and acknowledge the presence of anything inside of us that is considered “negative”; to look at the scary places. So, naturally we recoil from them when they arise. Those are the parts of our mind that remain locked away from any kind of light. But what if we acknowledged them?

What if we said, you know, it’s okay to feel messed up and confused and angry and tired and anxious?

Under certain circumstances that *is* the normal way to feel.

In a screwed-up place, under all the pressure that we find ourselves, how can we feel any other way?

If you are here reading these words and inside your mind are some terrible things, that's okay. They're in mine too.

Sometimes I feel like I must have missed the classes at school that taught me how to navigate my way through life. Where were the lessons on grief, loss, and failure? It is as if I was taught that they were never going to happen - the grief, the loss, and the failures. I never knew so many people I loved were going to leave. I was very unprepared to deal with all this. I was taught that my life was always going to go up and up and up. Is that what you were taught?

That is not the way life works, as you well know.

Things rarely work like that: only going up. Sound waves don't work like that. Waves in the sea don't work like that. **Only simple human expectations take that shape.** It's a lie that we have told ourselves that things will just get better and better and go up and up. They won't always. We all have temporary setbacks. Sometimes permanent ones. Shit turns, failures, bereavements. With action always comes the risk of error. Terrible things happen to us. We have been hurt and assaulted and whipped emotionally and physically by some and sometimes by the people who care about us the most (or who are meant to) or the people that we care about the most.

In this moment it may feel like the one flicker of light inside of you is fading out. Accepting the dark part of us is difficult, especially when the dark part of us feels much bigger than the light part. Darkness starts to express itself and we don't know what to do with those scary thoughts. We don't know how to get them out of our heads. We don't know a healthy way to act on them. Because of that, they sit and grow and thrive on our inattention, in those shadowy parts of our minds. In the same place where shame and guilt live.

Dark thoughts can be very, very taxing. You may be tired. Tired is probably not the right word... weary. Exhausted. Burnt out. Those are probably more like it. Imagine having a problem in your head. A problem that you're trying to solve, and you put all of yourself into it. You think and you think, and you think so hard and yet the answer does not come. It's like wandering around the airport with all the luggage of your life and you can't find the check-in counter. Heavy, just so heavy.

What we are doing is recycling those same heavy thoughts over and over and looking for an answer inside the same old bags. Looking in a library for an answer in a book that has not been written yet. It's a very strange, strange way to go about solving anything. It may have served us in the past but it's not serving us now.

What can help is an outside source. We need a nudge, a slight shift in perspective. We just need that little bit to help us shift our gaze. But who could I

possibly tell these dark thoughts to? Who could I possibly tell how I'm feeling? That I want to die. That I want to end my own life. And in fact, I think it's the only way to get away from my pain. To Escape; Escape life. Escape the things that have not gone right, that have maybe damaged the image of who people believe me to be. Escape the evil things inside of me so that I can't feel them anymore. Who could I tell that to? Could I tell that to my friend? My friend, who thinks I'm so strong? Could I tell it to my children? My children who rely on me and who have always relied on me for an answer, for structure and for a way ahead? How could I tell them that? My partner? My partner, who thinks I'm the rock, that depends on me to fix the cracks in the dam that keep everything afloat? How could I tell that to my parents? Would they not worry? Who could I tell?

You can tell me, even though you haven't met me yet. I am here. I'm not far away. I'm here to support you.

When I was younger, I was prone to rash impulses, and I acted on my emotions without thinking twice. I wrapped myself up in my fear, anger, doubt, sadness and joy, and the ecstasy of just having a grip on everything in my life because it was so simple and fresh and new. I had never failed at anything, never really been tested, not the way life tests you, like a stone on a beach rolls endlessly in the waves. It certainly can feel like that; tumbling along out of control; Being worn down.

Now, I'm a little more experienced and have had that bitter strange taste of failure and have felt the pain of loss. To watch the end of someone, to see them no longer go on, to fully stop has forever changed me. I feel things differently now. My view has changed. It is more moderate in ways I never thought it could be. Life has worn away some of my sharp edges. Things feel different. I roll better. I move better. But it took the tide of thousands of waves to make that happen. I see the grey in spaces where before I saw only black and white. It is only in looking back that I can understand that now. Today, I feel the depth of what is around me more fully than I ever thought I could. All it took me was time.

Time is the gift. The only currency that really means anything. It has been gifted to me and to you.

We are constantly learning and adding to our mind and our mind has the ability to change and adapt, especially when we have time and support. There is a fancy word for that, neuroplasticity... look that up when you can. Our minds are always changing. We can transform the thought patterns in our heads and I see possibility there.

Some setbacks we never thought we would have to deal with. We don't know how to keep up with the pace of what we are facing right now. Setbacks, by definition, are temporary though, as everything is in the end.

So, is life worth all the pain that comes with it? Is the game worth the candle?

Oh yes, it is. I have been beaten down with the question, what is the purpose of life? There is none handed to us, ready-made. We must discover and even create purpose for ourselves. Life is not a machine that is built with a purpose; like an icemaker or a vending machine. It is not as simple as that. It can't be answered like that, limited like that. Life is an ability, from which all else is possible. If only for the chance to look at itself in ultimate wonder, we are here. But how do you put the meaning of life into words? It's silly to think we could. Words are only descriptions of objects and ideas... they are not things themselves. What words are needed to express the feeling of the sun on your face, a warm breeze, the laughter of a child, the pain of losing a friend, the way you feel in the arms and company of those closest to us? Human or animal. Just the memory of those special beings, even the dreams of meeting them again someday, can sustain us.

When we think about suicide, we may think about the release, the relief, no more pain, to escape it all, but we escape all, all of our life. Anything that it could be, any joy, any new relationships, any new passion, anything that it can ever be is gone then. Perhaps we want to kill a *part* of ourselves. Do we need to kill *all* of ourselves? How many layers can we dig up within our being? Which layers need to live? Which need to die? I'm telling you now: don't let your pride kill you. Kill your shame, kill your guilt. Keep the rest.

What we have been thinking about, suicide, is a very permanent solution to what may be temporary problems. And if your problems feel permanent, if you have depression, an illness, a pain that is not going to stop, then there are ways to ease it, to complete life with dignity. With beauty. As a mentor for others. Who knows what you are still to learn, what might happen in these last months and days, what revelation might find you? What might somebody say to you that you have always wanted to hear, or what might you say or do that might surprisingly change someone else's life? You could meet the person that needs *you* now more than anything else. You could meet somebody that you never thought was there, it could be a stranger on a park bench, someone sitting next to you on the bus, someone that is there just waiting to support you, someone that you didn't even know existed. A friend, a coach, a therapist, a counsellor, a doctor, that stranger, anyone. It might even be me? These people can help you and ultimately *you* will help yourself.

Suicide may be occupying your thoughts. Thoughts are just thoughts. We do not need to obey each and every thought. Thoughts can change with the tide. We are not our thoughts. Thoughts come and go, just like clouds on a blue sky. We are not our emotions. Emotions come and go, too. You are not angry. You are not happy. You are not sad. You only feel those things as they rise and then pass. Thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations evolve. If you sit still and carefully attend to what is happening inside of you, like a cat waiting for a mouse to run out of its hole, you'll notice the subtly changing nature of all of it.

My dad told me once that a problem shared is a problem halved. And I believe that. Imagine what that would feel like to take away half that burden? How would you feel then? With that, I invite you to talk to someone about what you are going through. Lighten the load. Set down some of those heavy thoughts, even for just a moment. See what happens, and see what it feels like. The hardest moment will be the moment of asking for someone else to listen. You must have courage.

I wish I could have the chance to speak with you directly. That would mean so much to me. If you would trust me with your story, help me understand all of the things that make you who you are, my life would have more meaning. We sometimes forget that asking others for help helps *them* as much as it helps *us*. All of us want to feel useful, helpful, important.

You may not feel like it now, but you are worth it. You may feel worthless, but your life has value. Even the chance of you is worth it. If you have tried before

to get better, you can try again and again until the trying is over and the living begins.

Here is something that you can say to yourself, as many times as you need to.

While I consider dying,

I do so now while my heart beats

And I can feel that.

Even though my mind has been focused on death,

I can feel my lungs fill with air,

As I slowly breath in and out.

Against this great strain,

I tighten my fists alongside it,

My knuckles become white with the strength in my arms.

As I say these words the weight of what I am carrying is less,

In this moment I pull my shoulders back,

And I feel my life as an ability,

If only just to see what another moment holds.

We must accept that suicide is a possibility, and it is also possible that I would not choose suicide if there was any other way for me to go on living. We must also accept that life is here as well. Life is a possibility. Choosing to live is just as brave as choosing to die.

Sometimes, even a fragment of light is enough to lead us toward the possibility of a new day. As Leonard Cohen says, there's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in. We are cracked, and the light will eventually find its way in.

Now remember that quote we started with: *"You are already everything that you need to be."*

What if this were true? What if you were already everything that you need to be? What if you didn't have to achieve anything? What if life was enough? Does a newborn infant need to prove herself to deserve love and life? At what age does that change?

Nobody ever told me that my life was valuable. Life is, in fact, the only thing that is of value - and you have it.

Pause to realize that you have it.