

## Outline of my beliefs

Here is a basic summary of my beliefs in my own words. My beliefs can be subdivided into three categories: the importance of good models, agency and morality, and living well.

### The Importance of Good Models

1. I believe that the universe operates under certain principles that appear to be inviolable.
2. I believe that the more accurately our internal model of reality aligns with reality, the greater our ability to comprehend and either adeptly control or peacefully accept the world around us. I believe that those who care about being moral beings should also care about the accuracy of their models of reality.
3. I believe that scientific investigation is the most powerful method we have available to us for discerning what *is* (although it is not able to directly answer questions of what *should* be).
4. I believe that our feelings are culturally and biologically conditioned and are strongly biased to our own self-interest, hence our feelings sometimes misrepresent reality to us and should always be checked by rational thought (specifically, tests of generalizability).
5. I believe that nihilistic (nihilism: we will die so nothing matters), hedonistic (hedonism: the only thing that matters is pleasure and pain), and reductionistic (reductionism: we are mere bags of molecules hence morality does not really exist) philosophies ignore important data about our existence; hence, I am *not* a nihilist, I am *not* a hedonist, and I am *not* a reductionist.
6. I seek and welcome additional data and criticism of my beliefs so that they can be refined and serve me and those around me better. Good beliefs (i.e., models of reality) should be able to withstand scrutiny.

If my beliefs are incorrect or based on insufficient or faulty data, please do not hesitate to correct me or offer me your perspective.

### Agency and Morality

1. I believe that we are largely free-agents—we control the contours of our destiny via the decisions we make.
2. I believe that moral agents (all beings with certain properties of self-reflection, awareness, and agency) are duty bound to act according to basic moral principles in their relationships with other conscious life.
3. I believe that any time beings with properties of a moral agent exist, then morality exists also (i.e., if a silicon based life-form had all the properties of humans but had evolved or was created independently of biological life, then moral principles would apply equally to them).

4. I believe that our ethical duty to other living entities is in some way proportional to the extent that they are conscious or have potential for consciousness (i.e., it is unethical to torture monkeys or dolphins, but it is not unethical to eat bacteria just for fun since they undoubtedly are not conscious and have no capacity for consciousness).
5. I believe the core moral principles include: caring, fairness, liberty, and loyalty.
6. I believe that acting morally tends to bring us and those around us happiness. However, even if acting morally did not generate feelings of content, I believe we would still have a rational obligation to act morally.

If my actions are immoral or fail to align with the highest standards of morality, please do not hesitate to offer me correction or your perspective.

## Living Well

1. I believe that life is worth living for its own sake.
2. I believe that our minds are capable of integrating thoughts, ideas, and information in ways we don't fully comprehend consciously, and hence meditation, self-reflection, and intuition are all valuable tools available to us in acting wisely and living well.
3. I believe that expressions of love (in word and deed) bring us (those giving and receiving) happiness and joy. Even if these acts did not generate a biological reaction in us, I believe they would still be satisfying and worthwhile to beings capable of rational self-reflection.
4. I believe that individuals in positions of power have a duty to defend weaker individuals insofar as they are able and to wield that power in fair and responsible ways.
5. I believe that when we make mistakes that we ought to communicate our regret, make amends insofar as is possible, and alter our behavior in order to avoid inflicting harm on others (or avoid shirking our duty) in the future.

If I am living poorly or failing to live well, please do not hesitate to share your perspective with me of how to live a good life.

## Beliefs in Resonance

I share many basic beliefs with the conscientious, moral citizens of our world.

## The Universal Moral Code

I believe in the Universal Moral Code which is a list of morals found throughout the world, compiled by Dr. Kent M. Keith.

**Do no harm** (the proscriptive version of the code):

- Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you.
- Do not lie.
- Do not steal.
- Do not cheat.
- Do not falsely accuse others.
- Do not commit adultery.
- Do not commit incest.
- Do not physically or verbally abuse others.
- Do not murder.
- Do not destroy the natural environment upon which all life depends.

**Do good** (the prescriptive version of the code):

- Do to others what you would like them to do to you.
- Be honest and fair.
- Be generous.
- Be faithful to your family and friends.
- Take care of your children when they are young.
- Take care of your parents when they are old.
- Take care of those who cannot take care of themselves.
- Be kind to strangers.
- Respect all life.
- Protect the natural environment upon which all life depends.

## The 6 Pillars of Self-Esteem

I believe in the [6 pillars of self-esteem](#):

1. Living consciously — “When we live consciously we do not imagine that our feelings are an infallible guide to truth.”
2. Self-acceptance — “Accepting, compassionate interest does not encourage undesired behavior, rather it reduces the likelihood of it recurring.”
3. Self-responsibility — “There is no one coming to our rescue, individually or collectively; no one is going to save us.”
4. Self-assertiveness — “unleashing our personality, intellectual abilities, talents, etc., whether other people, including family members and friends, like it or not”
5. Living purposefully — “we have the right to establish goals for ourselves based on what we think and feel is right and good”
6. Personal integrity — “It takes courage to act with integrity to the truth, particularly one’s inner truth that others may dislike, negatively judge, and even condemn.”

## Ip Man’s Wing Chun Jo Fen

I believe in [Ip Man’s Wing Chun Jo Fen](#):

1. Remain disciplined — uphold yourself ethically as a martial artist
2. Practice courtesy and righteousness — serve the community and honor your family
3. Love Your classmates — enjoy working together as a group
4. Control your desire — stay healthy
5. Work hard and keep practicing — never let the skill leave your body
6. Learn to develop spiritual tranquility — abstain from arguments and fights
7. Always deal with world matters with a kind attitude that is calm and gentle.
8. Help the weak and the very young — use your martial skill for the good of humanity

### **The 5 Pillars of Islam (modified)**

I believe in the 5 pillars of Islam (adapted to my belief system):

1. Believe in goodness
2. Spend time in quiet contemplation
3. Give to the poor and needy (those poor in spirit and body)
4. It is good to discipline your desires
5. Expand your horizons and respect your heritage

### **The Ten Commandments (modified)**

I believe in the 10 commandments (adapted to my belief system):

1. Nothing comes before goodness
2. Do not worship that which is empty or vain
3. Respect goodness and avoid profanity.
4. Spend time in quiet contemplation. Rest from your labors.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. Do not murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. Do not covet.

### **The Great Commandments (modified)**

I believe in a modified version of the great commandments (adapted to my belief system):

You should love goodness and treat and love your neighbour as you would like to be treated and loved.

## Main tenets of Zoroastrianism

I believe in the [main tenets of Zoroastrianism](#), in slightly modified form:

1. If you wish to be happy, make others happy.
2. In proportion as we render others happy, are we entitled to similar bounty.
3. Each person should be good and beneficent in conduct towards all around them.
4. We should avoid injuring the interests of any man (or living being to the extent they share in personhood).
5. Our speech should generally be sweet and beneficial.
6. Goodness is Godliness, and we should be a ministering angel to all. We should radiate goodness throughout our life.
7. Avoid unnecessary dissension (try to see the underlying unity in conflicting view points)
8. Never force your own opinion on another.
9. Consider the welfare of others before your own.

## Basic Moral Principles of Hinduism

I believe in [the basic moral principles of Hinduism](#), in slightly modified form:

- I believe generally in karma (that which we do, good or bad, generally comes back to us in some form)
- I believe in a light-weight form of dharma — we each have duties at various stages of life and in society, and we should perform our duties well.
- I believe in the majority of the yamas and niyamas:
  - asteya (nonstealing)
  - satya (truthfulness)
  - arjhaba (honesty)
  - daya (compassion)
  - ahimsa (nonviolence)
  - hri (showing modesty)
  - dana (giving to others)
  - isvarapujana (spending time in quiet contemplation)

## The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

I believe in cultivating the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People:

1. Be proactive
2. Begin with the end in mind
3. Put first things first
4. Think win-win
5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood
6. Synergize

7. Sharpen the saw

## **Beliefs expressed parallel to the Articles of Faith**

My beliefs can be expressed in similar form to the Articles of Faith:

1. I believe in love, wisdom, and hope.
2. I believe that rational beings are responsible for their own behavior.
3. I believe that by following true principles we can find peace and joy.
4. I believe that the first principles a person should follow are:
  - Love others
  - Strive to be better than you were yesterday
  - Be humble
  - Be wise
5. I believe that authority and leadership is a duty that should be shared equally and discharged honorably and humbly.
6. I believe that the structure of our organizations strongly influences their effectiveness.
7. I believe that each individual has many gifts and these should be used to help others and experience joy in life. Our innate abilities should not prevent us from developing new skills where we might lack proficiency at first.
8. I believe we can ascertain truth through careful experimentation and rational reflection.
9. I believe there is much we have already learned that we do not take advantage of, and there is yet much that we have to learn.
10. I believe mankind should work to establish peace between nations and individuals.
11. I claim the privilege of being reasonably skeptical of God's existence according to the dictates of my conscience, and of being reasonably skeptical of all those who claim to speak in God's behalf.
12. I believe in following the law to the extent that it is good and ethical.
13. I believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; I cautiously believe all that has been demonstrated, and I hope in many things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, I seek after these things.

## **The Church of Reality**

I believe in all 26 of the Sacred Principles of the Church of Reality (even though I think there are better ways to order and derive one's belief system):

1. [The Principle of Positive Evolution](#)
2. [The Principle of Existence and Survival](#)
3. [The Principle of Exploration](#)
4. [The Principle of Curiosity](#)
5. [The Principle of Honesty and Integrity](#)

6. The Principle of Freedom
7. The Principle of Peace
8. The Principle of Courage
9. The Principle of Patience and Persistence
10. The Principle of Environmentalism
11. The Principle of Compassion
12. The Principle of Determination and Defiance
13. The Principle of Communication
14. The Principle of Justice
15. The Principle of Inclusiveness
16. The Principle of Respect
17. The Principle of Scrutiny and Doubt
18. The Principle of Humility
19. The Principle of Reason
20. The Principle of Wisdom
21. The Principle of Personal Responsibility
22. The Principle of Bullsh\*t
23. The principle of Activism and Maintenance
24. The Principle of Personal Privacy
25. The Principle of Historical Preservation
26. The Principle of Humor and Fun

## Major sources of beliefs, light and knowledge

I find spiritual insight and inspiration in the following (even though I also tend to disagree with aspects of each):

- The Bible and LDS scripture
- Teachings of many LDS leaders (e.g., General Conference and BYU speeches)
- The works of C.S. Lewis
- Works by Stephen Covey and similar self-help and management books
- Ideas of Brene Brown
- Tao Te Ching
- The Triple Path
- The Socratic dialogues
- Kantian ethics
- Utilitarianism
- Some of Tolstoy's religious writings
- The Church of Reality
- The Church of Spiritual Humanism
- Humanism
- Some of the thoughts of secular humanists like Bart Campolo

## Belief in the Spiritual

Although I consider the summary at the top of this document largely a complete statement of my beliefs, friends often want to know where I stand regarding particular core LDS beliefs.

I summarize my belief relative to core LDS beliefs below. I view these as positive, life and value affirming beliefs—this explication is not intended to be an attack on LDS belief (which I generally respect) but rather as a sincere description of my beliefs relative to core LDS beliefs. Again, please see the “Basic Summary” at the beginning of this document for a long list of those beliefs that I may share to a significant degree with my LDS friends and family. Please do not feel obligated to read on if a discussion of my beliefs in contrast with core LDS beliefs is upsetting.

1. I hope that a benevolent, all-knowing, all-powerful God exists and that we will continue to exist forever. The marvel of the known universe and the complexity and beauty of earth and human life provide an indirect basis for this hope.
2. I believe we are biologically related to all living organisms on this earth.
3. I believe that what LDS culture considers ‘spirit’ or ‘a Spirit’ is likely a person’s mind or consciousness.
4. I believe that my nearly 40 years of consistent, sincere prayer represent an internal dialog and was not likely communication with a being other than myself. As far as I am able to distinguish, there is no difference between the insight and communication I have when I am thinking aloud or thinking deeply to myself than when I was praying intently, and this internal dialog has not changed since I resigned from the Church or experienced a faith transition. I believe that admitting to myself that I am likely just talking to myself when I pray is morally sound and acting in humility.
5. I believe that the feelings of peace and joy in my heart should be cultivated. The feelings of peace and joy that I experience on a daily basis have not changed significantly since before and after my resignation or faith transition. Hence, at least for myself, I believe that my access to feelings of peace and joy are not modulated by ordinances administered by the Church but rather by my actions and mindfulness. I believe it is morally sound and acting in humility to admit that my feelings of peace and joy are likely self-generated (but generally when my actions and thoughts are aligned with moral principles).
6. I believe that most of those who express their spiritual feelings do so in sincerity. Hence, given the [contradictory beliefs of those who believe in spiritual truth](#), I am left believing that spiritual feelings are inadequate tools to illuminate spiritual truth with any precision. I believe that skepticism in the ability of spiritual feelings to accurately communicate objective reality is morally sound and acting in humility.
7. I believe that honestly admitting the bounds of my knowledge and experience is morally sound and acting in humility. I believe it is morally questionable for a person to lead others to believe that they have more knowledge than they possess and that we have a duty to try to distinguish between our feelings and



objective reality.

8. I do not have enough information to state with any confidence whether or not God exists nor exactly what kinds of attributes he/she/it possesses (and that extends to all the thousands of deities that have been worshipped across time [Poseidon, Bhagavathi, Aganju, etc]). I believe that through my feelings alone I have no way to distinguish between a God who loves us deeply and, say, an evil God who finds entertainment in building up our hopes only to make us suffer for all eternity. I believe it is morally sound to admit that I don't have any first-hand knowledge of God or his attributes and to be skeptical of contradictory reports of his being by those claiming first-hand experience. If God is all-knowing, then God also knows that I am a moral person of love, honesty, truth, and integrity. I have asked in sincerity for God to visit with me many times—God is free to visit or communicate with me at any time. Until that time, my sense of morality does not allow me to express knowledge of God beyond my experience.
9. I believe that if there is a God that God [does not likely intervene in a detectable or measurable way](#) in human affairs. I believe that freely expressing the belief that God does not appear to intervene (upon unbiased investigation) is morally sound and acting in humility.
10. I believe that I do not have enough information to make any certain claims about Jesus Christ, his atonement, or his resurrection. Again, I believe that refraining from making statements of knowledge that go beyond my experience is morally sound and acting in humility.
11. I believe there are many teachings and examples from Jesus's life that have value in explaining or demonstrating moral principles (I'm aware of [C.S. Lewis's trilemma](#) but reject it). I also believe there is much to learn from other individuals of great moral character (e.g., Socrates, Jorge Bergoglio [Pope Francis], many past and present leaders of the LDS Church, John Adams, Abraham Lincoln, Laozi [author of the Tao Te Ching], [Ip Man](#), Florence Nightingale, Rosa Parks, Emmeline Pankhurst, and, of course, my wife, parents, siblings, in-laws, and ancestors, just to name a few).