
goodness

gracious

me!

surviving a surprising story called Life

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goodness-gracious-me!



for the sake of IT

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This little book has been designed to be printed on both sides of the paper – like a regular book –
the page numbering is correct for the printed-out version.
When reading on-screen, you will notice that Acrobat uses a different page numbering system.
Simply use the Acrobat Table of Contents to browse the book.

goodness-gracious-me!

about the title:

goodness gracious me! (pronounced *giddnissgrayshusmee!* in New Zilland-speak) is one of those common phrases trotted out without consideration of what it actually says.

Usually it comes out spontaneously when one's surprised or amazed or awed by something.

No doubt it came to the colonies from mother England. Perhaps it had its roots in an ancient incantation for protection against an event perceived to be evil or harmful.

I've always been fascinated by the way the three words – goodness, gracious, and me – are strung together. They imply a relationship between little old *me* and two qualities that most folk aspire to. Why the connection with awe and amazement though?

I don't know. But whatever its origin, every time I reflect on the fact that just about everything Life has taught me has been a contradiction of just about everything everyone else tried to teach me, "*goodness gracious me!*" is my inevitable response. I often feel that I'm here to *unlearn* rather than to learn. Maybe that's what creative learning really means?

Maybe that's why it's so difficult to teach another the things that really matter. Maybe one's body and brain have to work it out for themselves. But just in case that's not true I'm putting it down here. To survive in a story as surprising as Life's, all the clues one can get one's hands on are necessary. I write, lest I forget to remember ...

INTRODUCTION

FOR at least three decades I've been threatening to create a little book for myself that would serve to re-mind me of what I've learnt – and am learning – from Life. I'm a slow learner and my memory has a mind of its own. It remembers what it wishes to and forgets the rest. And it's usually the rest that is important to my sanity.

In hindsight it's obvious that those three decades were necessary in order to even get close to what was important for me to understand and remember. It took such a long time to understand the difference between concept and Reality; to sort helpful concepts from red herrings; to find the right questions and maintain a death-grip on their tails so they didn't slip back into their black holes.

And it took a lifetime to understand myself – not according to the stories others hold about me, but according to my own mix of pre-wired genetics and life experience. Part of accepting what I am involved honoring my lifelong preoccupation with wanting to know the Truth. Not the truth *about* anything, but the Truth that never changes, the Truth that is the bedrock of my being. This preoccupation has meant that most folk – including N&D – have been at a loss to understand my life-path.

It would be fair to say that I've often been at a loss, as well.

*There is a life-force
within your Soul.
Seek that life.*

*There is a gem in
the mountain of
your body.
Seek that mine.*

*O traveller, if you
are in search of That
don't look Outside,*

*look Inside Yourself
and seek That ...*

*To be One with the
truth for just a
moment*

*is worth more
than the world and
life itself ...*

Rumi, translated by
Shahram Shiva

I'm a question-mark on very small feet. Insatiably curious about everything, I drove my family nuts with my "Yes, but . . ." responses. As I matured, I came to understand that ingenuous curiosity is probably the key catalyst for creativity.

Little by little I began to suspect that if the universe had a purpose it would resemble a dynamic, unfolding question of infinite and eternal proportions – a wondrous "*What-if . . . ?*"

I envisioned creation as a woven web:

The warp? *Wonder*. The weft? *Wondering*.

My little book is woven from the same threads. The chapters are formed by my Seven Very Important Impossible Questions*, and those questions fell – as phenomena often do – into a trinity:

in-sourcing

in-seeing

in-being

When I began to write my list I was tickled to find that my questions fell neatly under the number that turned out to offer a symbol, a hint or a clue-cue to their meaning. Well *goodness gracious me!*

*Why impossible?
Because both questions and answers are only concepts and concepts aren't the Truth of the matter.

Apart from #ONE, there's no particular hierarchy or order of importance. Everything constellates around #ONE.

IN-SOURCING

1

and *only One*

what am I?

IF I abandon the common concept that discovering Truth is difficult – or even impossible – for someone like *me*, it's surprisingly easy to find out.

Stop and do research. Look IN. Find the looker that cannot be looked at. Stop there. Stay.

Stay!

Mind that gap! The millisecond-movement into an idea, a concept, a story or a vision of what I am creates the gap between what I am and what I cannot possibly be. Why? If I am some-*thing* (an independent entity or object), what is the subject of that object? What's aware of it? What watches it?

Can what I'm observing be separated from what observes?

Whatever *I* actually am, must be whatever is *aware* of the imagining and the observing.

J Krishnamurti,
when asked for the
most important
conceptual pointer in
his teaching,
replied:

*The observer is the
observed.*

Stay!

Stay!

This is called awakening to pure Awareness.

Not mine, not yours, not God's.

One Awareness, shared by the lot of us.

With infinite, inconceivable heaps left over.

Resting there – in non-stop Oneness – is what the Buddha did.

He realized that everything that appeared to be happening was happening *within* the consciousness which embodied him, which *lived* him.

I can too . . . and so can every sentient being. It's just a matter of going IN and taking a long hard look.

How simple is that?

If this is wholly apperceived
– if the penny really drops through the works
the rest of these words will be superfluous
I can quit and simply rest – as peace

No-thing-ness, of course, is the ultimate simplicity.

But before and after nothingness, simplicity is not so simple.

There's water to fetch and wood to chop . . .
Leonard Koren, in Wabi-Sabi

Which is why one is compelled to consider in-seeing and in-being ...

IN-SEEING

2

apparently

if there's only One, what about good and evil?

WHAT IS, *is* – it simply IS. And it includes everything, because it's happening in One Awareness, remember? It's good and it's evil; it's yin and it's yang; it's form and it's emptiness. It's both and it's neither.

The instant *I* moves from Oneness into the apparent world, it begins to conceptualize. Once a concept is applied, One must accept the *duality* that comes by default. How can I know what 'hot' means unless I also know 'cold'?

Think of a spinning coin – sometimes this side shows, sometimes the other. Depends upon my perception, and perception is an acquired, learned phenomenon.

When I understand that what I see depends on what I expect to see, the possibility of observing my habitual, reflexive pattern of perceiving opens up. I can peek sideways. That way I can sometimes see directly.



Ever wondered why
the symbol for
infinity has **two**
loops?

*The reach of your
compassion is the
reach of your art.
When you disting-
uish between good
and evil, you've lost
the art.*
Joseph Campbell

It's a bit like the symptom of macular degeneration: what's directly in front of your field of vision is obscured, yet if you use your peripheral vision you can 'get the picture'.

Buddha-babe can easily lose the plot here if the thinking machine gears up; if she believes in appearances; and worse, if she identifies with them!

Should this happen, she's dumped in *dualism* – the belief that objects perceived or imagined *exist* in an independent, 'real' way.

Zen saying:
*If you meet the
Buddha on the road,
kill him.*

What? Why?
Because he's an
apparition. He's
only a projection of
your very own
Buddha-being ...

(Actually, I'd give
him a cuddle, poor
dear.)

She needs to remember that dualism's duality includes *non-existence!*

A sly sideways peek is called for.

If it works, she merrily lives and operates in the world of manifest *duality* (apparent *me* + apparent *others*) while utterly oblivious to *dualism*.

It gets easier.

3

three quarks – always three!

is the Universe friendly?

EINSTEIN reckoned that this was humanity's most crucial question.

The answer is yes and no and depends. Is it moral, immoral, or amoral? It could be either or all or none. It all depends . . .

The Universe, as far as our science can tell, is composed of One energy. Infinite amounts of it. Which is infinitely incomprehensible to this tiny dust-speck of a brain.

Energy moves and in moving, it makes, it creates. And energy is responsive: it responds to the energy emanations from the dust-speck brain it has created. And what science has shown us is that energy is entirely amoral.

Movement, responsiveness, and amorality. A tidy threesome.

But there's more.

Two monks were observing a flag fluttering in the wind. They were arguing about whether the flag was moving, or the wind.

Hui-neng wandered by and said:

Neither, boys.

Mind moves.

Pronoia is the belief that the universe is plotting to make you happy and there's nothing you can do about it. With scientific studies proving that happy people have more resistance to heart disease, diabetes, hyper-tension and a host of immune disorders, pronoia is the healthiest mental disorder around.

Ruth Ostrow

The direct route is: "God is everything; God is good."

Byron Katie

Come up with a concept and you get default duality.

Add your belief - which is your habitual choice set in concrete – and you get a trinity.

You also get to experience – *whatever you believed you would*.

If I believe the universe is my friend it acts like one.

Apparently.

The Buddhists speak of it as a formless field of benefaction.

(Note how Buddhists tend to be happy people.)

I'm not a Buddhist (or any-thing else), but I too believe in the benefaction of the Universe.

I put my bet on goodness because it seems intelligent to do so. Because, from the perspective of manifest-**me**, it generates happiness and wellbeing. I'm all for that.

And because it's all One energy, that means this little **me**-manifestation is goodness too.

That covers my (apparent) bases nicely.

4

humble truths (with respectful apologies)

how do things "happen"?

i **ENERGY** moves: *Life* moves.

This has to be the most obvious of observations. If in doubt, go outside and take a look.

Buddha's Noble Truths:

1 Suffering IS: fact

2 Suffering always has a cause.

3 Causes can be modified by applying intentional antidotes.

4 Get clear about intentions and apply them.

ii It moves because it must. Moving is its nature. It obeys a kind of non-negotiable law, which we conceptualize as causality - meaning that what happens only happens because of what happened before. But because concepts can never be Truth, we have to admit that we haven't a clue how or why things happen. We just make up good stories.

Whether we posit a causal or an indeterminate universe, we have to admit that one thing always *appears* to lead to another, somewhere down the track.

That's why Life is complicated and small-speck brains like mine need to know why, why, why?

- yes but ...
exactly who gets clear?
and who applies antidotes?

Oneness, silly.

- iii** What happened back down the track can't be changed. But if I'm in the brain-place I call Lifeⁿ - Life to the *nth degree*: right *now*, just *this*, right *here* – then I can see what's happening here and now, without any 'it-should-be-different' shadows clouding my perception.

I notice that even a tiny adjustment in speck-brain's reflex system (called conditioning) creates a different interior experience of the present moment.

- iv** The present moment, in turn, creates what comes next. Somewhere along the conceptual continuum.

(NB: This is the extent of my free-will, which is neither mine nor free really because *I*, too, is just another concept scooting along that same continuum.)

"All the stress we feel is caused by arguing with what is," says Byron Katie, bless her.

- yes but ...
exactly who feels stressed?

Oneness, silly.

Exactly *what* do I want to happen next?

*I want all beings to be happy
and to be free from suffering
and to know perfect peace.
(Including me, of course.)*

That'll do for starters.

IN-BEING

5

points on da Vinci's pentacle

what is genuine creativity?

CREATIVITY arises from questions. It's fueled by unconstrained curiosity, dissatisfaction, discontentment.

If contentment and satisfaction are my goals – whether material or spiritual – I'll never be creative. I'll just be seduced by desire.

To desire is to want to possess, to own, an object, a place or person – or a particular state of being. (A blissful one, naturally.)

Since there are no *others*, including states of being – Oneness being One, after all – that would be fairly futile. I'm not interested in perpetuating futility. I'm passionate about radical creativity.

Everything that exists came into being because Life – or Life's sentience (also known as *me*, and *you*) – wasn't quite satisfied with the status quo. It moved its mind, and in doing so, it created a different version of the quo.

Why do witches use the pentacle (or pentagram) to symbolize creative energy?

Why did Leonardo da Vinci draw a man within the pentagram?

How come we "fit" so perfectly inside it?

Would it have anything to do with our awesome power to create?

*... just as the health
of the body
demands that we
breathe properly, so,
whether we like it or
not, the health of
the mind requires
that we be creative.*

David Bohm

Creative brain is never contented brain or satisfied brain.

It's brain that is free to move and make.

It's brain that loves to wonder, and is in constant wonderment at
the world it's creating.

It's brain that knows how to make fun of play.

It's brain awake, aware, happy, thankful, and totally dissatisfied.

MY FIVE KEYS TO CREATIVITY:

- 1 question everything
- 2 resist the familiar
- 3 befriend discontentment
- 4 relax into Beginner's Mind
- 5 abdicate and allow

*I believe that the
most important
thing for humans is
their creativity.*

HH the Dalai Lama

6

hex[!]agram

are there any 'valid' spiritual practices?

FROM the perspective of #1, no: *who could possibly do them?*

From the perspective of daily life in the world of apparent *me*-ness – or duality – yes, things can be done that cause Buddha-brain to come to the foreground of *my* awareness instead of being a buried relic. I just need to remember that if they happen, they happen because they must – not because I had any say in the matter! (Claiming 'doership' is a sure sign I need to return to my zafu and consider #ONE. Again.)

There's a clue in the number: a diagram with six equal sides is called a hexagram.

OK – it just so happens I can identify six actions that seem good for this body-mind organism. But there's another connection too.

What does 'hex' mean? It's commonly used to mean that someone has put a spell on something or someone – a nasty one at that. I've been made a victim in some way.

*There is no
difference between
the ignorant and the
enlightened.
Huang-po*

*What do you have to
do?*

*Pack your bags,
go to the station
without them,
catch the train,
and leave your self
behind.*

*Quite so: the only
practice – and once.
Wei Wu Wei*

When it comes to doing what I know is good for me I'm hexed by all sorts of things: *my* laziness, *my* astrological profile, *my* circumstances, *my* conditioning . . .

But the mother of all hexes is the notion that I am an independent entity in possession of all these hindrances, as well as the volition to change them. If that baggage is left behind and I hop on the train unencumbered, the six things that seem good for this body and brain just happen naturally. Or, they don't.

*Find that one thing
that feels
as if God is making
love to you.
Undress yourself in
the dark
to be that light.
Eric Ashford*

i **What brings me joy** - what I could do unto eternity. What I *love* to do.

I love to create, to play with color and texture. I love working with enthusiastic students. And I love to write.

(But most of the time everything else in creation has to be attended to first.)

*Let the beauty we
love be what we do.
There are hundreds
of ways to kneel and
kiss the ground.
Rumi*

ii **Fostering the unconditional happiness of *others***
– which is my version of prayer. It's actually a very selfish practice. It ensures my own happiness by keeping me out of the insidious self-preoccupation which seems to be the default setting for speck-brain's Operating System.

- iii Laughing and celebrating** - seeing the life-scenario for what it is – a parody which is happening IN me and simply cannot be taken seriously.

Yet at the same time acknowledging that it's also an amazing, awesome miracle that deserves to be toasted with fine wine daily.

Sigh. I need to buy shares in a vineyard.

*At the height of
laughter, the
universe is flung into
a kaleidoscope of
new possibilities.*
Jean Houston

- iv Being grateful** - for everything.

This is crucial. I'm a bit lucky with this one.

But I've had my moments. (See below, under Grace.)

- v Resting** - the best sabotage I know for illusions of importance. This is hard for me.

I only discovered the pleasure of leisure by being knee-capped by the universe and forced onto a zafu. Hobbled. Longtime.

But it was from that zafu that I fell into Oneness.

Which turned out to be the place of perfect peace.

*Just sit there right
now.
Don't do a thing.
Just rest.
For your separation
from God is the
hardest work in the
world.*
Hafiz, Love Poems
from God

*Resentment is like
taking poison and
then waiting for the
other person to die.*
Anonymous (and
awake.)

vi **Forgiveness** - this is where the hex really flowers. Here it wants me to believe that I've been done wrong. I'm the victim of the actions of an *other*. I don't like it one bit, so I resent them for it.

But that doesn't work; I just get sick. I have to break the spell of those actions of the past. How?

Only one thing works. I don't want to do it. That's why the hex is so powerful. But do it I must. I have to forgive. Totally. Not just a tiny bit, an intellectual bit, a grudging bit. Totally. So totally that my heart is glad when I think of that person or event. So totally that I genuinely wish them well.

And there's more. I have to lift the cup of forgiveness to my own lips as well. I have to forgive myself. If I've forgotten what *I* is, and have fallen into the illusion of dualism, this is problematic. Which *me* is doing the forgiving, and which one is being forgiven?

Total schizophrenia.

There's only one effective medication:

return to #One.

STAY

7

two clues: the seventh number in the alphabet is 'g'
and
there are seven 'graces' in the blessing of the Holy Mother
(the creative dynamic of Oneness)

what is Grace?

HERE'S my concept: it's another word for the energy called Oneness. It refers to the active creative principle, the bit that responds to speck-brain's intentions, prayers and what-have-you.

When *I* sends a psycho-pseudopodia (science's wonderful word for a prayer-finger) into the quantum field, Grace is what reaches forth to meet it. For me this is beautifully expressed in Michelangelo's painting of God reaching for Adam's hand on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

When I use the word Grace, it's in the same way as I would say Laptop. It's real, *apparently!*

Like the One energy of the universe, Grace is neither moral nor immoral; it's amoral – which means it can be either moral or immoral, depending on what's called for in the Big Picture.

G is for:

Grace
and
gratitude
generosity
gentleness
genuineness
guilelessness
goodness
go-letting

and
God
(whatever that
means to you)

Grace knows the Big Picture and it's not about *me*-satisfaction. It's about Awakening. Sometimes I think that Grace just wants to know Itself in every form possible – it's the ultimate cosmic narcissist.

Once I asked Grace to teach me about a quality I felt wasn't well developed in my character. It did. The curriculum was brutal, ruthless and entirely successful. (The sages warn us to be careful what we ask for. I say: just be ready, because Truth-fully, *you* don't do the asking anyway.)

*The wine of divine
Grace is limitless:
all limits come from
faults in the cup.
Rumi*

Can anything be done to open the gate for Grace to flow into *my* life?

If I'm resting in Oneness I don't have to do anything, because the Seven Graces are aspects of ITs natural way of being. IT's Grace on legs – whether they work or not.

If I'm not, and I'm not lucky enough to remember about Oneness and Buddha-brains, perhaps I'll remember (later) that Life simply didn't want to remember this time. Next life, maybe. (Tee hee.)

If I'm not, and if I'm lucky enough to be *graced*, I might remember to play the *as-if* game:

I *pretend* I'm AWAKE!

I activate my home-grown version of the Seven Graces.

It never fails. Instant System-Restore.

I begin with gratitude because it's such a magic remedy that there's often no need to continue with the rest – and I'm basically lazy.

gratitude

Thankfulness for everything. *Yes, the lot.* The entire this-what-is-here-now of the life of little *me*: wrinkles, grey hair and warts; weariness, pain, disappointment and anger. Immeasurable gratitude for all those who have judged and spurned and disliked and excluded *me*, for they drove me in the direction of Truth. (And gratitude for all the good times and juicy stuff and loving friends too.)

Gratitude guarantees the Grace-gate stays open.

Years ago someone said to me, "An attitude of gratitude brings altitude." In my arrogance, I thought it a trite platitude. Now I know what it means to be high on the magic carpet called gratitude. I also know what it means to forget, to "fall from Grace".

Not nice.

Why is an attitude of gratitude so transformative?

Is it because it installs default humility in the system? Because it acknowledges that something bigger than speck-brain is running the show?

Wallace Wattles says
There is a mind which knows all there is to know. And, if you have deep gratitude, you can come into close unity with this mind.

generosity

When stuck, give.

I had to experience terrible stuckness before I cottoned on to the dynamics of generosity. Giving rearranges the universe, because at the deepest level, the energetic level, there is no giver, no gift, and no recipient – there's only energy, and IT's One.

But if giving rearranges the universe, that means I need to be able to receive as well. It's much harder for me to receive than to give. Understanding the Oneness of giver, gift and recipient helps; perhaps it's the only effective mind-medicine.

One hears about the virtue of 'accumulating merit'. In view of the obvious – that there is no independent entity which could ever accumulate either merit or virtue – this makes no sense to me.

Pass it on – pronto, and guilt-edged with gratitude!

Simply recalling instances of giving is an immediate antidote to depressive states of mind, far more effective than any medication.
John Munro

Recalling instances of receiving blessings works the same way.

gentleness

For me this means desisting from bashing myself up for being such a "...insert word..." person. It means quitting the *me*-judgment scenario. And the *other*-judgment scenario as well.

Gentleness wraps around me like a mink wrap when the penny drops and I know that everything – *every-thing* – that appears to happen, including *my* tantrums, faults, and my absurd need to be right and perfect is the play of Oneness getting to know ITself.

I could do with owning a mint, the number of pennies that need to drop. But that too is just the play . . .

The truth of who you are is untouched by any concept of who you are, whether ignorant or enlightened, worthless of grand.

The truth of who you are is free of it all.
Ganga ji

genuineness

Being genuine means being exactly what I am. This is tough when you've spent your whole life being told by half the *others* who you *should* be, and who you *really* are by the other half. And you've swallowed it, hook line and sinker.

The good news is that it's simpler – much simpler than we want to accept – to recover our authenticity.

Return to question #1. Stay long enough to realize that what One is, is *no-thing*.

One is *sunyata* – emptiness – upon which everyone (including your own dear self) has written a story about One's life. Those stories, and One's identification with them over a lifetime, are the *only* hindrance to freedom and peace.

The quest of a life is the journey out of One's precious stories. To me, that's what the Grail Story is really about, and what the mystical Labyrinth metaphor refers to. They aren't about the attainment or acquisition of enlightenment or the like. They are about radical immersion in utter authenticity. What is the story beneath all your stories?

How can IT be expressed?

*If you do not
express your own
original ideas, if you
do not listen to your
own being, you will
have betrayed
yourself.*

Rollo May

guilelessness

What does it mean to be without guile?

I think it means to be *innocent*. To have no *me*-serving agenda running when I interact with the world. To be fully responsive to *what-is* without cunning or coercion. That implies total transparency, ruthless honesty with oneself and the world. Which in turn implies having all senses switched ON.

One can't *do* this, because then it would be done with a motive. That wouldn't be guileless would it? Guilelessness is one of those qualities that are simply there when I'm *absent*.

I can't do guilelessness, but remembering about it reminds me of the illusion of my independent existence.

With a bit of Grace that might be enough to bring on Buddha-brain again.

If not, hey – it's not on ITs agenda at the moment.

When the senses are fully flowering, what happens?

There is no centre as desire.

You are not 'aware' of the senses – you are the senses.

J Krishnamurti

goodness

By goodness, I definitely don't mean *being* good. (Never a forte of mine – ask N&D!)

I mean holding the intention to embrace the Universe as being fundamentally good. The intention to open, to trust, to love. The intention to fall into vulnerability and simply vaporize.

I return to question #3. Remember Einstein's question. Remember that happy people tend to be those who believe in a universe that is beneficent.

Remember the Wholly Trinity:

duality + choice = experience

PS: This will only be a necessary strategy if question #1 hasn't been fully resolved. Because if it has, goodness, trust and openness won't be issues. They'll be what One actually is – without knowing it, of course!

Return to zafu.

Breathe in, breathe out . . .

*If you are waiting
for anything in order
to live and love
without holding
back, then you
suffer. Every
moment is the most
important moment
of your life. No
future time is better
than now to let
down your guard
and love.
David Deida*

go-letting

We don't have a word that begins with 'g' for this concept so I took artistic license and turned it around. As I did so, what came into mind? *Blood-letting*.

Go-letting and blood-letting are similarly difficult for me. My veins dive for cover at the sight of a needle, and the *ego-me* uses similar tactics when reminded that busy-ness is a waste of time.

Yet go-letting is the easiest way of all to ensure that Grace gets space in my life.

Some folk call this surrender, but for me it implies letting go of everything, *including* the concept of surrender.

Go-letting inevitably leads to simplicity. Not simple-mindedness, but that sweet state of simply living simply.

I think that's what it means to live gracefully – full of the Grace that *lives* me.

*Grace and gratitude
are always enough
for now. They are
immeasurably
enough, eternally
enough. Invite
them now. Gather
the folds of grace
around you and rest.*

*Drop everything and
just be.*

*Be a grace-gatherer.
Vicki Woodyard*

**There is neither creation nor destruction,
neither destiny nor free will,
neither path nor achievement;
this is the final truth.**

Sri Ramana Maharshi