

The Orange Umbrella

A Practice for Life

The Orange Engine School for Life

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There is always wisdom available at any given time for whatever situation we are in. Sometimes that is just the wisdom to sit still.

God is beyond our comprehension. Whatever God is knows our way. That is crafted for us, for our challenges, our nature, our time and place. To cling to any notion of God is like clinging to water. Life is a thing of following wisdom, not clinging. Our greatest challenge, and reward, is in listening to the wisdom of life. How do we become good listeners?

Our greatest wisdom is familiar. It is not amazing, or new, nor unheard of. It is following wisdom that is the challenge.

There are many paths to the top of a mountain. Anyone that tells you otherwise has never gotten to the top. At the top we see, we were just on one. We need to choose one. That is the best way, the simplest way. Some paths are straight upward and grueling, others long and slow. Some more complicated than they need to be. Only the top reveals the secrets of the mountain which, spoiler, is simply that life is what it is. Only the challenge of the journey upward gives life meaning and context.

We are always shaped by two hands. One of the things we are and the other of things we are not.

Umbrellas

We all know what an umbrella is. I have come to see all religions and philosophies as umbrellas of sorts, things we use to help protect our minds from the overwhelming reality of existence. We can't comprehend everything. Some things are just beyond comprehension. And then we have things we can define, but they can be difficult to accept for many, even with our definitions, or myths and stories. Death, suffering, our human drama, these are all front and center issues our "umbrellas" seek to help us with.

Umbrellas are good things, useful things, but so is the rain. All of our umbrellas leave things out, they protect at the expense of hiding something. I know of no umbrella that does not push something meaningful to the side in favor of another, including my own. We have religions that favor the father and the son, very important archetypes of the divine nature of life. They are meaningful, worthy of reflection, and yet the mother is sidelined. She is over in the corner and yet our souls know, they just know, there is something very important, very meaningful in this still and strong woman over in the corner.

To judge others take on life is like judging the color or size of the umbrellas people carry around. We are all walking through the weather of life, in its stillness and beauty, in its chaos and, sometimes, merciless cruel expression. We can only choose our own umbrellas. We want wise umbrellas. A story that comforts us in dealing with death? Absolutely. I have mine. One that pushes away thoughts and ideas that only waste our time and energy? All day long. That's a good umbrella. One that separates us from the wisdom of others? One that denies the greatest wisdom lies beyond our little umbrellas? That is an option, not a requirement.

And so, I present this practice. One more umbrella. It is an orange umbrella as it very driven by Eastern philosophy. The observation of nature. The yin and yang. Respect for all the forces of life be they creative or destructive, as they all have their place, not only in existence but in our very lives. While some umbrellas beckon us to quickly find our place in shelter, our orange umbrella asks us to set it down from time to time. Not in shelter, but to feel the rain come down. To realize we are much more resilient than we may think we are. And to embrace that just because we have an umbrella, that doesn't mean we should live our lives in fear of rain.

Finally, I will add, as all people I admire know, all wisdom is as old as dirt. At least almost. We share wisdom. Carry the torches of others. Individuals,

through great sacrifice and effort, have uncovered and made peace with the workings of life in all of its light and shadow. These are men and women through history. If you want some profound wisdom that is shiny and new, you are headed in the wrong direction. That is why we have fashion. Shiny and new is something we put on the surface of things. What has changed in the fundamental desires and expressions of humans in the last 3 thousand years? Essentially nothing. We are driven by the same things, only the circumstances change.

What we want to feel like under our umbrellas is our timeless souls. New clothes, fancier gadgets, new set of parents, for better or worse, but the same story of being human. Not only does this unlock our greatest wisdom and perspective on life, it helps us deal better with aging and death. Our timeless soul does not fear age. It looks forward to age because it knows what is important is not on the surface of life. It knows this when we are 13 and it knows when we are 80. Our timeless soul wants to live wisely so it does not suffer in age due to ignorance, or needless self destruction. It knows each phase of life has a gift if we can unlock that gift.

Find your umbrella or create your umbrella. Better yet, let it come to you. Let it evolve and grow into something forged by your wisdom and experiences.

What should a good umbrella do?

Give you ability to feel deeply loved sitting alone under your umbrella.

Allow you to fearlessly put down said umbrella and let the rain of existence fall upon you without the need to figure any of it out.

Give you the ability to see and accept the common purpose of all umbrellas.

Permit you to employ your intelligence to the highest degree possible understanding that intelligence does not solve all of life's challenges.

Give you the ability to adapt to circumstances at hand, even if that necessitates that you contradict your ideal life practices.

Allow you to laugh and play purposefully from a place of wisdom not reckless insecurity or the need for attention.

Give you the ability to see, be open to, and grateful for those wiser than you who come into your life and often become bridges to your personal evolution.

Remove the burden of having to change anything or anyone and allow you to affect things only as you feel inspired to.

Thoughts on the Mystical Nature of Life

Under this particular umbrella, we follow the course of my most admired teachers and the lineage of my spiritual mentor. It is something referred to as practical spirituality. This is the acceptance that everything we learn and do, regardless of how lofty or earthly, brings us back to our humanness. To this, we can have out of body experiences. We can have our meetings with angels and demons. We can have our visions and premonitions, even experience some profoundly unusual things in which we question the nature of the physical world.

This is all fair game. And yet it is critical to put all things into proper context, especially the mystical things. This is because our minds love to take experiences and run with them. And where do they usually go? Straight to our fears, desires and expectations. One of our most powerful desires is not money, sex, or fame, it is escape. The world of mysticism opens a doorway to a fine line separating a window to wisdom and a powerful trap in which we can seek to escape what cannot be escaped.

To the wise, what is just is, regardless of how mystical or unmystical that may be. The challenge is all in our humanness. The mystical nature of life embodies all things, and so we will not find less of a challenge in running off to any mystical world. In fact, we will find a much greater challenge in which, if we are ill equipped, can wreak havoc on our sanity and ability to navigate the practical worlds we all must live in.

Life is mystical. Part of the joy of life is in savoring its mystical nature. But we do not need to get lost traveling in other dimensions, summoning aliens or obsessing about all the frequencies affecting our minds. What we want is things to lift us, guide us and ground us. If we give that some thought, we will know that what lifts us is above us, not below us. It is not for us to control or decide how something beyond us operates. That is just foolishness. It is to pay attention to what it means to live wisely. What purpose do things serve in our lives?

Some people are very logic driven. There is no call to attach themselves to any mystical experiences in life. Sometimes, it is very much the opposite. Some people, whom zen folk might refer to as people heavily influenced by the element of water, are constantly affected by the energy of things in a way that gives them visions. These are highly sensitized people, who must craft a good language for their experiences in order for the sensitized mind to put things in context. We know who we are, and we do what life requires

us to do to serve our wisdom relative to our nature. Our goal, our challenge, will always be to be wise humans. Whatever is mystical must become practical.

The Purpose of Life?

I have come to believe the search for a purpose in life is highly over rated. This is because such a thing so easily becomes a burden. What we do is small, all of us. What I do is small. Very small. I write, I speak, I try to comfort people when I can, but it is all small. And I am just as easily discarded in my existence as anyone. Forgettable. Washed away amongst the thousands and thousands of teachers that speak to life.

Our best purpose in life is first to feel comfortable in our own skin. That is number one. This should take us through a process of self healing. One that often requires courage and persistence. If we find our selves calm and comfortable in our skin, the next step os let go of the burden of life. It is all in what we bring to what we do. I am a lofty person. I spend a fair amount of time in lofty places but, truth be told, I look up to craftspeople. Woodworkers, skilled upholsterers. Even skilled fighters, sure. It is all discipline and physical expression which are the ultimate testimonies to our efforts.

What everyone finds out sooner or later, is that the drama of life is overwhelming. The suffering, the hunger, the disparity. Even if someone gave you 100 million dollars, and you were to apply that to a given “purpose” you would find it overwhelming dealing with all the challenges, many of them unsolvable. The world moves fast but changes oh so slowly, in terms of forward progress. This is not a reason to avoid doing something we could do. It just means the best we can do is throw our little bucket of water on a fire that burns endlessly. And yes, the world needs our little bucket.

There is a guilt available to all of us. A sense that we owe the world something more than we can ever give. This guilt binds us to an endless sense of failure, often lingering beneath the surface, in which no one is truly to blame for. We are all dancing, walking, or perhaps crying our way through the unfolding of history, depending on where and when we are. It is what it is and this guilt can be the very thing that keeps us from pursuing something rewarding because we feel it is not enough.

Your purpose is to be you. A wise you. If you are a good soul you will do what you can, even if that is something seemingly small and forgettable. That is enough. Plenty. Be present. Be a little candle. A candle can sit on the alter of a great temple, but it can sit anywhere. It is the candles that sit outside of temples that have the most meaning.

The Importance of Self Healing

Our most important art and skill. We are all always breaking and thus, always healing. This is life. Embrace this reality. Learn how to take care of your self. Learn how to heal yourself. Your body, as fragile as it is, is also a self healing mechanism. Never take that for granted.

Know the fundamental functions of your body and organs. Know what heals them and what destroys them. Know the boundaries of your body and what physical sacrifice is not worth the result.

Health, much like religion, will supply us with the story we want to hear. We can find information anywhere to validate why we should continue to do what we do. Doctors do not agree on everything. Science does not agree on everything. There are doctors with terrible health habits who rely on medications and serve their patients accordingly, as there are healthy and qualified doctors. There is vast debate on drugs, herbs and treatments. To this, we must methodically build our understanding of health based upon our lifestyle, our body type and nature not to mention our life experience. A physician is much like a car mechanic, just for the body.

Stretch. Breathe. Keep your blood moving. Relax and learn how to calm your self. Don't be reckless with your diet or substances. 10-15 a minutes day can do wonders for anyones health. You body is on your side. It is stress, and life, and our choices that work against us.

Your greatest spiritual practice? Your health. Heal+th.

Self Evolution

We should always seek to evolve in life. But we need to recognize that evolution is also the ability to know when to let go of things, even collapse and rebuild. Not to mention being able to sustain a position that is rewarding in some fashion, even if it feels like the same thing. This is a form of evolution.

They key factors in our evolution:

Remove/minimize our self created suffering.

Accept the nature of things for what they are. The bitter and the sweet. This includes looking in the mirror.

Bow to the things we cannot change. Ask for wisdom to wisely work with them. The old lord's prayer thing.

Trade blame for ownership of our potential for wisdom.

Trade fear for understanding and respecting the forces of nature we fear.

Increase our value over time in what we bring to our work and life expressions. As we age, it is a big thing.

Uncomplicate whatever can be uncomplicated.

Learn to walk in wise circles.

Repeat.

What about enlightenment?

To seek enlightenment is not necessarily to evolve. So, we should always pursue wisdom, not enlightenment. Evolution is realized by progress, practices, knowing we all have times of regression. Sustaining any evolved version of our self is success. Enlightenment is not a finish line. Death is the only finish line. Things of the highest order have the highest responsibility. We want to own only the responsibility life asks of us.

Love

We live for love. We all do. We can lie but it is what we live for. How we define love is tied to our evolution as people. All of our understanding of love is tainted by our pasts, both personal, as well as cultural, and historical.

The greatest rewards give us the greatest challenges. They pit us against our own greatest weaknesses and blindness and they expose us to all that is deceptive in the world. Love is one of our two great rewards in life. And so it can, and will present us with our greatest challenges.

If there was one reason to justify pursuing a “spiritual” life, it would be to rewire our understanding of love. One that makes love an unconditional force not reliant on the acts of others. Affected by? Of course, but not reliant. The stories of spiritual love and the path to such a thing have been told over and over again thousands if not millions of times. Real love, wise love, rests in our hearts, not our minds and not our loins. Love does bind with the physical world, that is what makes it love, but it does so through the little things. It has been wisely said, it is our bridge between light and shadow, what can calm that conflict within us. To this, excitement is not love. It is just excitement.

What makes love challenging is that the world does not run on love. It is something that flows through life to nourish our hearts, but love does not make the rules. Maybe some, but not most. Love, even the most powerful, does not, repeat, does not win all of its battles. Nothing trumps the nature of life. Love can only do what it can do, nothing more and nothing less. The heart opens and closes. There are flowers that close in the night and open in the day. This is the heart. We do not have to slam our hearts closed, but we can allow them to be wise. Love needs to be protected. The wisdom that creates, nourishes and protects real love is a gift that requires a tremendous wisdom. That wisdom is not a heavy burden, but it is a deeply profound surrender to trust. That love knows what we do not. This brings us back to our fine art of listening.

Pursue love at all costs, but never confuse love with romance. You will be sadly disappointed. To pursue love is equally to allow your heart to retreat, to close softly and heal when it needs to. It is to be still and calm and allow your self to feel loved for no reason at all. It is to know that love will take us through pain, but love is not the source of the pain. That is the mistake, one that can keep our heart in the darkness. One we all make at some point.

The Seed, the Tree, the Bush and Blade of Grass

We are all seeds. And we become things. Anyone want to argue? Seeds come from different places. Sometimes healthy ground. Sometimes poisoned earth. We absorb things and must “detoxify” our pasts. Cleanse our seeds so to speak. We grow and we become things. Some big, Some small. Some long lived and some with shorter lives. I will talk about this a lot in this practice, because we have all the details about growing and losing branches. About being stepped on and rising up again. The metaphors go on and on.

Yet this is one of the most powerful metaphors to hold on to in assessing our lives. Where we are. What we are dealing with and how to deal with it. Just know you are seed. Within that seed is the best of you and you may not even know what that is. The best of you is not something that is. It is something that becomes. It is what rises through the shadows of the earth, pops its head out, and has to figure out how to become itself.

Some people become trees, some bushes and some blades of grass. The secret is to become. To be at peace with what we are meant to be is the gift that allows us to just keep going. Sometimes we know exactly what our path is. Sometimes we poke above the ground and we are surprised to find out what we have become. It is already set. The seed knows. And life knows. Our job is to grow. To trust. To know things work against us that demand we become stronger and wiser. And to know we are never alone in our triumphs or challenges.

Lineages

Most people do not attach themselves to the notion of lineage. Lineage is a rope. All religions are based upon lineage. If you pray to something or someone, you are praying to a lineage. The notion is simple. It is simply an acknowledgement that people sacrifice and pass through tremendous tests in order to bring living wisdom to humanity. This creates an energy that is passed down for those who choose to embrace such a thing. Lineages can be taken lightly by some, maybe dismissed by others, but spiritual teachers must have lineages. Every bit of wisdom and strength a spiritual teacher has is gifted. It is always something coming from someone greater than themselves.

Any lineage that serves healthy living and a wise life comes from the same well. They serve the same purpose and they are grounded in the same ethics and general practices. A proper lineage opens the heart. It guides the heart. It clears and simplifies the mind. There is no dictator or punisher that comes through a proper lineage. It is always asks us, what do you want to do? Up to you. I am here, but you can decide and the consequences are what they are. Lineages always have rules of engagement, practices and certain rituals.

As my spiritual mentor says, all things regarding our evolution must be organic. We don't have to force devout obedience or grab tightly on to anything out of pressure, or out of our timing of life. When things make sense, when they touch us, when our heart feels something real, we can start to say, maybe there is something here. We cannot hang on tightly to lineages anyway. As expressions of life, we can only do so loosely, still having to adapt, to bend and sway, and to do all the things we need to do in life. Forgive. Have patience. The wisdom of any lineage is not in being a magic wand. It is in the ability to expose the nature of life for what it is, and give us a sense of calm and trust in our paths and journeys.

There is tremendous work and courage in order to build the foundation and sustain anything in life. There is no path to wisdom that has not faced persecution, intolerance, being exiled, nor sitting right in the middle of greatest of human suffering. The practices and lineages that have retained their souls and not collapsed into corruption, to misinterpretation, these represent a history of incalculable strength.

Grace and Miracles

Some people believe in destiny. Others do not. I happen to believe in destiny but I do not see that as something constricting, confining, nor something always predictable.

Grace could be described as many things. I would argue it is anything that leads us to our best outcome. In this grace can be a seeming setback. An apparent disaster that has us changing tracks and heading somewhere new. Getting 100 million dollars in the mail can be the best, or worst thing that could happen to us. The wisdom of life knows our journeys. I have experienced every kind of grace, and yes, sometimes it is just as it sounds. It is like some fairy grabbed a magic wand and made something miraculous come to be. And yet, I have found those moments come after some great test, perhaps a feat of endurance or show of tireless commitment. One that usually leaves us tired and close to hopelessness.

I have also experienced what could be called miracles. And people could say, wow, you saw that with your own eyes? That is incredible! What a miracle! And yet I will tell you getting a job that you do not hate is a much greater miracle than seeing something levitate or disappear. A miracle could be something that softly pushes us in the right direction. The outcome of anything is far more important than the magic it may seem to have. Magical things are often fleeting. Sometimes the universe does little things to remind us that not everything is as it seems.

Miracles, if they are to have meaning, must follow the timing of life. We can pray for them all day long, but things have to align. Miracles cannot fight destiny or the flow of life. We can pray for miracles, but we can also prepare for them. In preparing we need to understand we do not always get to choose what shape or form a miracle will come in. How many miracles have we missed in our lives? A true miracle is a doorway. It allows for a path to be revealed that requires us to show up in order to make that “miracle” something of meaning.

Then we have living in grace. This is not for everyone. Living in grace is living in the constant temporariness of life. It is not a magic we can hand to others. It is a path for the courageous, people who must eventually settle into systems like everyone else. Grace is demanding of our highest wisdom and trust if we should follow it. And it will break us down, maybe even to tears, before it even allows us to live in it. This is another thing of lineages. The ability to teach people how to follow grace. .

Freedom?

Freedom is a thing we seek through life, but it does not exist. Only roles that suit us. Wise systems are better than freedom. The wise have no freedom. They are bound to systems. Grace nourishes those who find and adhere to proper systems. This is grace. Yes, we can have some freedom in our time off, but are we really free if we need to get back to a given responsibility? For those who are fortunate, you could say freedom is the ability to pick our cages. Ones with windows and doors and friends and room to find happiness. In this, if we should feel bound by certain limitations, we just say, of course. Happiness is more important than freedom.

When to think and when not to think? Knowledge vs Wisdom.

It is fitting I am closing this overview with this thought. We study, we practice, we work, but our evolution often comes when we stop trying. When we step back. Or sometimes, when we throw everything we know in the trash and start again. This is another one of those old conversations. I huge part of life is trust. Trust never comes from thinking. Think of thinking as a preparation. Not an answer. Thinking leads to knowledge. Knowledge is not wisdom. It is the potential for wisdom. Wisdom is a living, breathing thing that must come from our life experience. Through our courage. Even the wisdom of another cannot have true meaning without us living that wisdom in some way.

Forward we go. As I always say, find your mentors, your teachers. Find something that binds you on a quest to seek the best of your self. You can give, but don't empty your wallet or give your savings away to anyone. Regardless of how that transpires, make life your teacher. All of it. Especially the simple things like the ocean, tress, mountains, rivers and children. If you can't find your answers hidden in those, you are probably seeking answers too complicated because that is where all the wisest people get theirs.

Love. Strength. And Wisdom.

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