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what does it

MEAN

that your life is

PERFECT?

Dear Reader,

The short reflections in this manifesto were forged through a year and a half of conscious and unconscious processing, after my diagnosis and surgery for testicular cancer last year.

I found that I didn't really try to write these words. . . the words just came to me, from some deeper place within me, the source of which I do not know.

Many people who read them told me they were moved by them, and encouraged me to put them together so other people could have the benefit of them. I have done so here.

If you got value from these words, it would mean a lot to me if you let me know how they impacted your life. Please leave a comment on the [manifesto's homepage](#)—I'll read everything posted there, and respond to as much of it as possible, though I may not respond to everything personally.

With appreciation,

—Michael

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You Don't Get to Choose What Happened. You Get to Choose Whether it Was Significant.

Recognizing that your life is perfect right now hinges on making a very crucial distinction. It is the distinction between what you would have chosen in your life, versus what ended up being significant.

It is the distinction between what you would have chosen, versus what ended up playing a crucial role in building character, teaching you important lessons, helping you clarify your mission and purpose, giving you street cred, and gifting you with the necessary battle scars that made you the person you are, the person you will be.

In foresight, things often look like horrible tragedies that we would try anything to avoid.

In hindsight, we often see that these very same things (even though we *still* would not choose them if we could press “rewind” on time) taught us crucial lessons, gave us

confidence to serve and help others better. Made us who we are. The leaders we were meant to become.

Take almost any great leader, or any great achiever in this world, and you can see this distinction in action.

Nelson Mandela would have not *chosen* to be imprisoned at Robben Island, had he any say in the matter. Of course not.

But is there any doubt that his imprisonment contributed significantly to his ability to give his great gift to the world once he got out? Would he be the Nelson Mandela who galvanized the world, had he not undergone this ordeal?

The Dalai Lama would not have *chosen* his exile. But is there any doubt that his exile contributed to his massive leadership around the globe as a voice for peace and compassion?

The hero's journey always involves struggle. That's what makes it a hero's journey, and not a fat suburbanite on

his way to the air-conditioned mall in his air-conditioned minivan's journey. Without struggle, there are no heroes.

How is *your* struggle making you into a hero? How is your struggle *perfect*?

Fear, Death, & Purpose

Most fear stems from fear of death. It is a root fear.

Even small, everyday fears are often fear of death in disguise:

Fear of rejection, for example. In our ancestral times, we roamed savannahs in bands of thirty or fifty. Rejection literally meant being left behind to the snakes and leopards to die. Our bodies code rejection as death.

You cannot live your purpose until you get over your fear of death; you cannot give your gift to the world unless you get over your fear of death.

Because, if it is truly a gift, that means it is new. (Are you giving a gift that's already been given?)

If it is new, it will be rejected.

If it is truly a purpose of significance, it goes beyond what is safe and comfortable for others. (Are you living a purpose that fits well into prevailing mediocrity?)

If it is significant, you may be vilified. Left out to die—metaphorically speaking—as others laugh.

Or, you may just be ignored. It may be that no one cares about your “gift,” no one accepts it.

You cannot serve someone—truly serve someone—until you are willing to risk rejection. Because part of them might not want to hear what you have to say.

Until you accept these as very real possibilities (that is, until you get over your fear of death) some part of you will always be looking out for what’s safe and comfortable, what allows you to fit in, what allows you to merely stay alive, not what allows you to live your purpose and give your greatest gift.

What would you accomplish if you were willing to die for it? What purpose would you live if you no longer feared death?

Once you are living your purpose, what is there to fear?

You will either achieve your purpose, or die trying. Either is fine.

Your Life is Perfect, Not Other People's Lives.

I am very careful about calling *other people's* struggles “perfect,” for a simple reason.

This concept of “perfect” is not some objective property of events. It is not the View From on High. I don't have access to God telling me someone else's hardship is “perfect.”

Viewing hardship as perfect, as a blessing, is a *perspective* you must take towards the events in your own life. It is not a true or false statement. It is an attitude, like being loving towards someone. The love isn't “true” or “false”—imagine trying to argue with someone about why you love someone else in your life, with all kinds of facts and supporting reasons and statistics. It would be absurd. Love just *is*, if you choose to feel it.

Likewise, perfection just *is*, if you choose to feel it. (You don't have to. You can choose to view your life as shitty, full of misfortune, and view yourself as the victim of

circumstance, if you want. Fine. Go ahead. I'll be right here, waiting to welcome you back to happiness and inner peace once you see that's a dead end and snap out of it.)

If you choose not to take the perspective of the perfection of your life—if you happen to view your hardships and difficulties as horrible “misfortunes” and “tragedies” with sad endings, rather than perfection—then someone else telling you that horrible tragic unfortunate thing that happened to you is “perfect” would feel offensive, repulsive, even abusive.

Think of all the incredibly difficult, sad, challenging things that happen to people all around the world each year. Things that none of us would ever in a million years *choose* for ourselves or anyone else. This year: the earthquake in Haiti.

If you were living with the aftermath, trauma, and ongoing pain of these events, imagine how shocking it would be to hear someone else saying to you “Yeah, your mother,

father, brother, wife and two children being buried under a collapsed concrete house was perfect for you.” You might even want to *kill* that person, it would feel so disrespectful to the memory of your beloveds.

Which is why we simply never say someone *else's* hardship was “perfect” for them. It is just not a useful, respectful or compassionate frame.

Viewing your hardship, difficulties and challenges as perfect is a *choice* you must make about the events in your own life. It is not a judgment to be passed glibly on other people's lives. They might just hate you for it.

The only time I tell someone that their hardships are perfect are when they come to me seeking advice on how to deal with them. Then, I figure, “OK, you asked for it. . .” and I give them an earful. . .

“That horrible relationship that just crashed in flames? Perfect. In the future you will come to see it gave you exactly

the experience you needed with which to create a much better, more loving relationship in the future.”

“Your cancer? Perfect. I know the diagnosis is shocking right now—I’ve been there myself—but there may come a time when you view your cancer as one of the great blessings in your life, the alarm clock that woke you up.”

Remember, I’m not saying I would *choose* cancer or a relationship self-combusting, for myself or anyone else. I would work quite hard to avoid these things in my own life if I saw them coming.

But, once they’ve happened, you can adopt a frame around them in which they were absolutely necessary occurrences for your future development, growth, learning, and leadership.

Are the challenges that the protagonist of a movie faces at the beginning of the movie “horrible tragedies” and “terrible misfortunes”? At the beginning, sure, it seems that way. But by the end, they are the greatest gift that guy or gal

could receive. Without them, there'd be no movie. She wouldn't be three stories tall projected in front of hundreds of strangers. Without them, she wouldn't be a heroine.

Gratitude

Until you understand this point, you will never truly “get” gratitude: you can be grateful for things you would not *choose*. I would not choose having lost my left testicle to cancer. But I’ve come to be grateful for it.

Gratitude is a lens through which you view the past. Through this lens, you can choose to see *all* the events in your life as crucial for becoming the person you are, and the person you will be.

Perfectionism

We cannot talk about perfection without mentioning *perfectionism*.

Perfectionism is the inability to see that what you're working on, however important it seems to you now, is but a small part of a grander story whose meaning hasn't fully revealed itself to you yet.

Finish whatever you're working on, do a great job, but then move on.

Otherwise, you'll be stuck with an ever-more perfect Chapter 1, but an imperfect life—because you won't ever get to Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and on. . . .

Comfort & Purpose

How many people spend their lives seeking comfort, instead of seeking greatness?

Comfort is a wonderful thing if it is accompanied by living your purpose. It's a horrible thing if it "keeps" you from living your purpose.

Which category is your current comfort in?

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Is there something you'd be willing to die broke to have accomplished?

Work on that and you'll be living your purpose. (And you'll probably be happy doing so.)

Figure out how to make money while doing it and you'll be living your purpose, happy, and living comfortably.

Anxiety

Anxiety is the mistaken belief that something could go wrong. But the concept of “going wrong” is meaningless, if you are committed to making sure every experience you have—no matter how miserable in the moment—eventually contributes to the fierceness and openness of your heart, and the power of your leadership in helping others.

“Bliss Ninnies”

Not everything will *feel* “perfect” in the moment. Far from it.

Trying to force yourself to feel the perfection of some terrible event, in the moment and its immediate aftermath, can be a form of dissociation, disconnecting from your body and your emotions.

In California, they have a term for this: “Bliss ninnies.” People who refuse to feel the pain in their lives. People for whom life is all happy, happy, joy, joy.

Bullshit.

Life has pain. Feel it.

You've Been Given the Gift of Love. Are You Sharing It With Others?

As I was saying, not everything will *feel* “perfect” in the moment.

A tragedy befalls you: you feel rage, disbelief, anguish, heartbreak. It may feel completely meaningless. Or perhaps you feel a desire to kill others in return, those who perpetrated this. (Only a bliss ninny will deny such feelings in the moment.)

For the rest of your life: you would give anything to turn back the clock, to prevent the tragedy, to go back to how things were.

And still: your heart grows.

One definition of “meaning”: playing a crucial role in something beyond yourself, which you value. (My love for Jena feels meaningful, because it plays a crucial role in her life, which I value far beyond my own.)

One definition of “perfect” is “whole and complete.”
Nothing missing, nothing extra. Nothing needs to be added or subtracted.

It doesn't feel perfect or meaningful now. It feels like hell—meaningless hell. Feel it; don't dissociate from the pain.

Over time, however, you may choose to appreciate that the horrible thing that happened to you—abuse, violence, victimization—turned out to be profoundly meaningful. It played exactly the role it needed to play within the unfolding narrative of your life.

If you allow it to be so, this event can serve as your great teacher in how to keep your heart open in the face of adversity.

And who needs to know how to keep their heart open in the face of adversity?

Leaders. People who rock the world. People who light the world afire with their passion, care, and fierce love.

If loved ones died in the past event that haunts your heart, you would do anything in the world to bring them back. Of course you would. But, you can't bring them back.

And so, you may begin to see that their legacy lives on; they played exactly the role they were meant to play in the larger narrative of your life. Their love is the electricity that fuels your heart beating as you charge forward into this narrative. Their life was perfect, because they loved.

Which narrative will their love fuel?

You decide. It can be as small as your bitterness and resent. (Infinitesimal.) Or as earth-shattering as your open heart.

One day, you will be gone too. And you will have played exactly the role you needed to play. Within the lives

of those you love and who love you. The simple fact that you loved them is enough.

Any one of us could die tomorrow. And we will have already had all the impact we needed to have, in the lives of those whose hearts our love touched. Love is infinite; people don't need to experience it for a lifetime to be impacted by it. One second of pure, present, focused, attentive love brands itself into the soul more than all the idle chatter and fluff in the world.

Your loved ones gave you their deepest love. For a reason. What is that reason?

Outrage & Spirituality

The world gives us plenty to get outraged about.

Simplistic interpretations of spiritual philosophies tell us we shouldn't get outraged, that we should live in peace and equanimity at all times.

This is spirituality-lite, spirituality as a drug.

True spirituality is about opening the heart. An open heart feels pain, heartbreak, anger, rage.

Too often, those who go around saying “everything is perfect” aren't just talking about their own lives (which are always perfect, if you choose to see it that way)—they use it as a way to avoid thinking about all the horrible, brutal, ruthless things that humans do to each other on the planet.

As we've said before, “everything is perfect” is a lens through which you choose to see your *own* life, not other people's lives. And, even your rage and anger is perfect.

Failing to feel outrage in a world of abomination,
brutality and injustice is failing to feel your own pain. It is
moral weakness, bliss-ninnyism.

Feel the pain, feel the anger.

Feel gratitude that you hate injustice, unfairness,
brutality with all your open heart.

Then work like hell to stop it.

That is the spiritual life, full of rage as well as love.

Rage and love are two sides of the same coin, of caring.
The enemy of love is not rage, it is indifference and apathy.
You cannot truly feel love without the capacity for rage—
rage against anything that would harm the object of your
love. And all rage, however hardened, metastasized, and
disconnected, stems from love—love for whatever has being
violated, abused, or desecrated.

Spirituality is the process of living life more intensely.
Spiritual yearnings begin when you realize how dull and
anaesthetized most people around you are, and you vow to

awaken from the anesthetic properties of your own life and habits. Then you vow help to awaken others from their own self-imposed anesthesia.

The spiritual life is full of passion, not some feel-good elevator music.

Safety

The fundamental feeling you will have, once you begin to adopt the perspective of perfection, is safety. Far fewer things will feel dangerous to you (as in possessing the potential to harm you), as you will walk around knowing that every experience, no matter how painful or difficult in the moment, is contributing to your growth as a human being.

The point is not that you'll "learn valuable lessons" from the adversity. "I was late—therefore I learned not to be late again." That's tying a neat bow on what is in fact a much more unsettling—and more valuable—process.

Rather, by going through the challenges and difficulties of life, you may develop the sense, over time, that *you're the kind of person who can handle these things*. You're bigger than you think you are. *That's* unsettling.

Once you come to that realization, you begin to see the challenges that open you to the hugeness of your soul as perfect. You begin to feel less threatened by these challenges.

You begin to feel safe in the universe. The universe is no longer a place that hurls daggers at you; it's a place that hurls at you opportunities for expanding your heart, opening your love, and growing your leadership.

Abundance & Manifestation

I do not believe in cosmic x-rays that emanate from you whenever you “think of what you want,” calling forth the object of your thoughts to your life as if by magnetism—and all that stuff from *The Secret*.

And yet, I have found, when you adopt the perspective of perfection, *amazing things* start happening in your life, at a surprising clip.

When you view every challenge as an opportunity to learn, every setback as a chance to grow, you start letting down some of your defenses towards the world around you. You become softer, more open to possibility.

You know those bubble machines that spew out bubbles at children’s carnivals? You become a serendipity and synchronicity machine—generating opportunities and amazing experiences like bubbles floating around you wherever you go. Perhaps because you start seeing opportunities to love more and serve more, which were

already all around you, yet which in your former bitterness you hadn't noticed before.

A sense of flow begins to pervade your life. On the day-to-day level, you still might find yourself frustrated, angry, sad, or tired. But looking at your life from a larger perspective, nothing feels out of place.

Even as challenges remain, your life begins to feel full and abundant. Full with learning, full with growth, full with love, full with service. No matter what the material circumstances of your life are—your cup runneth over.

From this state of abundance, you will literally become more attractive. Meaning, *one who attracts*. Not in some cosmic-quantum-x-ray way as in *The Secret*. But for the simple reason that people are attracted to people who are learning, growing, and full of love, and giving to others. And these people bring opportunities to you. As you attract more people and opportunity into your life, you will feel even more

abundant, and share this abundance even more—a positive spiral.

A positive spiral upwards into light, which also has all room in the world for the darkness.

Perfect Imperfection

(Or, “Don’t Start Playing the Perfection Game Unless You’re Comfortable With Paradox”)

After you begin seeing your life as perfect, you will still get angry... you will still lose your temper... you will still wish things in your life were different... you will still gossip and complain... you will still fantasize about revenge towards those who have slighted you... In short, you will still participate in all the human drama.

There is a Zen proverb: “Before enlightenment; chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment; chop wood, carry water.”

So, if you partake in all the drama before, and you still partake in it after, what’s the difference? If things are fundamentally the same before and after you adopt this perspective, why bother with all this philosophical crap?

Why not just stick to the good-old pre-philosophical drama, rather than the post-philosophical variety?

There is a difference. But it's a subtle one.

Here's an analogy. Let's say you've never been in love before. You argue with people, you get into fights, you feel slighted, hurt and rejected, you lash out at people from time to time. The normal human stuff.

Now, let's say you fall in love. What happens when you fall in love? Do you persist in a state of total drama-free bliss for the rest of your life?

You still argue, get into fights, feel slighted, hurt and rejected, and lash out at your beloved from time to time.

But somehow, in a way that's difficult to explain, it's different doing these things with someone you love.

Love is oneness.

When you argue and fight with someone you love, there is still—beneath all the turmoil—a fundamental sense of

deep connectedness, which is absent arguing with someone you don't care for at all.

The sense of perfection is very much like the sense of love. Perhaps it is the same thing. Universal love. It is the underlying sense of connectedness and oneness with all experience, even as you struggle against certain aspects of your experience.

Love what you struggle against, and love that you are struggling against it. Love that you defeat what you are fighting. Or love that it defeats you. Love that you get up after defeat, dust yourself off, and keep fighting.

Love—love only. Even love the hate.

Perfection doesn't change that you're going to have to fight a lot in this life. And yet, it changes everything about the fight.

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If “your life is perfect,” then why would you make the effort to change anything about your life? If you’re broke, or overweight, or addicted, or miserable, or suffering from abuse, isn’t that supposed to be just “perfect?” In fact, if you didn’t view these problems in your life as *very imperfect*, why would you even bother to expend energy to try to change them?

Why not just sit on the lawn chair and drink margaritas all day? If everything is just perfect as it is, the lawn chair sure seems to beat being out in the world, huffing and puffing, sweating and busting ass to try to improve something that is just “perfect” the way it is. Margarita, anyone?

Well, leaving the lawn chair and sweating and busting ass to improve things is perfect too.

But wait a minute—if *everything* is perfect, then why bother to try to change anything?

Because your desire to change it is perfect too. . .

And on and on. . . Into the house of mirrors.

From the perspective of rational analysis, it all seems to devolve into meaningless mumbo-jumbo. In normal parlance, the word “perfect” only has meaning in relation to “imperfect.” Sort of like the concept “up” only has meaning in relation to the concept “down.” Without the concept of “down,” there is no concept of “up.” It would seem, by analogy, that without “imperfect,” there is no “perfect.” Saying “everything is perfect” seems at first glance to be as meaningless and pointless as saying that “everything is up.”

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The way out of this house of mirrors is to adopt the perspective of the *whole* of your life. Perfection, in the way I’m using it here, means whole and complete. It is choosing to see your life from the perspective of the whole—seeing your life as a whole journey over time, a journey you’re not done with so long as your heart is still beating and you’re still

breathing air. From the whole perspective of this journey, you can begin to see the perfection in the imperfections. They've gotten you to where you are now. You just might be at one of those crucial turning points in the movie. Had the imperfections not occurred, you wouldn't be here, now.

So these imperfections in your life are actually perfect. (You can't really get this stuff unless you're willing to entertain paradox.) You might as well appreciate the ones you've got, even as you work to overcome them.

Perfection is a lens, a lens which sorts for learning and growth over comfort. It is a conscious choice to see whatever life throws at you as an opportunity for learning and growth.

It is *not* a lens that makes everything in your life look fantastic. It's not "rose colored glasses"—though the blisinnies, who have co-opted and debased this philosophy in the name of their apathy and torpor, choose to see it that way.

We must not confuse viewing your life as perfect with *liking* everything about your life.

Even the things you dislike are perfect. As is the fact that you dislike them.

Perfection is the realization that, if the parts of your life you wished were different didn't exist, the part of you that is growing and expanding to *make* them different wouldn't come into being. Your life would actually be much poorer without your difficulties and challenges. For the simple reason that you wouldn't be growing into the person who can overcome them.

You may not *choose* your challenges and imperfections in life. But once they're there, they're perfect. And your desire to surmount them is perfect.

You need your challenges. You need your struggles. You would not be you without them. Or, more accurately, you'd be a much lesser and more boring you without them.

Imagine a movie with a heroine, and everything goes her way.

She gets the promotion and the raise, everyone at work loves her. The big project she's been gearing for goes off *perfectly*, as planned, to standing ovations. The guy falls in love with her, and they have a *perfect* relationship, with no drama or adversity at all. Happily ever after, the end.

Pretty boring movie, huh?

The perspective of perfection is the realization that, though we root for the heroine, there *would be no heroine* without the challenges or obstacles.

The choice to view your life as perfect involves adopting the perspective of both the hero, who wants the obstacles vanquished and the imperfections fixed, and of the author of the movie, who wants it to be a powerful movie, a movie that changes the world, delights audiences, and impacts lives.

Can you hold both of these perspectives at the same time? Can you hold the perspective of both the hero of your life, and the author of your life?

You want to overcome your challenges, to live a better life. But without your challenges, you'd be a much poorer person, living a much poorer life.

Once you can hold both of these seemingly contradictory perspectives simultaneously—in other words, once you can embrace this paradox of perfection—you will feel free.

Gratitude for My Teachers

Many of the thoughts in this book were first inspired and shaped by my teachers [Bryan Franklin](#) and [David Deida](#). Bryan has taught me much about appreciating the present state, paradox, fear, safety, and growth. David Deida has taught me much about opening my heart to love and finding purpose in life.

I have since internalized these teachings, refracted them through my own life experience, and expressed them in my own voice here.

My other great teachers have been my wife [Jena la Flamme](#), my parents [Daniel](#) and [Patricia](#) Ellsberg, the creative process of writing and publishing, several psychedelic experiences, and cancer.

Stay in Touch!

If you got value from these words, it would mean a lot to me if you let me know how they impacted your life. Leave a comment on the [manifesto's homepage](#)—I'll read everything posted there, and respond to as much of it as possible, though I may not respond to all of it personally.

I'm already working on the next manifesto. Please join my personal list [via the form under my photo here](#) to make sure you know when the next one is released. (I never give your info to anyone else, and you can remove yourself instantly at any time from this list with one click.)

Spread the Love!

If someone you love or care about is going through a hard

time right now, would you consider sharing this with them? Many people have told me this document has given them perspective on their struggle. You can send them to the [manifesto's homepage](#) so they can download it for free. There are social media buttons at the bottom of that page for easy sharing.

Love,

—Michael