

2000: Eating Out

Life may be a banquet, but the search for the meaning of life is an unpopular repast. We're offered a fast-food menu of meanings to choose from in this add-meaning-and-mix world we live in. The ingredients most commonly employed to make meaning out of life are fame, fortune, healing, codependency, illegal drugs, legalized addictions, and let's not forget religion. The short list is neither filling nor nutritious, but planet Earth has never been a destination planet for philosophic gourmets. Earth is the EATS of the universe. At best, you must be ready for a bad case of existential indigestion.

The pursuit of fortune is the fried hamburger of life, cancerous over time, but tasty at first bite. A life in pursuit of money molds the mind and soul like Jello. To stimulate our appetite for money we may nibble at a variety of jobs we hate, like cold hors d'oeuvres at a party. Madison Avenue persuades us with little effort that money will displace our existential angst, encouraging us to believe that money is the only thing that will produce the sweet smell of success. The rich can testify that money will not put spiritual meat on your bones.

Fame, like Olestra, may be less fattening, but the side effects are horrendous. Celebrity in one's own lifetime looks as enticing as cake, but "consumer recognition" is more what people really crave. Like in any fast-food hamburger joint, fame offers a greasy spoon sustenance in which the packaging is no more nourishing than the food.

Health, like health foods, is outrageously overpriced. In America, *health* has been substituted with *healing*. Through an I.V. drip of fear and intimidation, the American Medical Association feeds us the belief that they're the French chefs of healing. The A.M.A. isn't enticed to explore good health since they discovered that healing is so much more profitable. Most, if not all, illness is spiritual indigestion not remedied by our medical model of Doctor Knows Best.

Co-dependency is the leftovers of life. Settling for half eaten scraps stolen off other people's plates is no answer. The attraction of codependency is the presumption that the milk and honey of others is better than the spinach that lies within. One pandemic consequence of codependency is cheerfulness, but being nice instead of being real is akin to trying to bite off and swallow the smell in a bakery.

Street drugs are the Crisco of the mind – Add the least bit of heat to your life and drugs will fry your brain. But who needs a mind anyway when most of our opinions are manufactured for us. Still, drugs are a handy snack for those who have found no greater meaning in their lives. Drugs are most popular with babes who haven't learned how to feed themselves yet.

Addiction to societally sanctioned substances such as food, alcohol, cigarettes or sex are sanctioned suicide. While the Food and Drug Administration spoon-feeds us lies about what we're really consuming, we're busy gagging ourselves on excess, a topic they're happy not to touch.

Religion works well for those so starved for meaning that they're ready to gnaw on the bare bones of obedience. Those who choose to think independently – i.e. order a la carte – will find religion very costly. Religion can be described as the dessert of existentialism; it deadens the appetite for life and causes cavities in your soul. A steady diet of religion is spiritually fattening. Nibbling at an assortment of religions, like a smorgasbord of sweets, is not nutritious either. Cults, sects and denominations are half-baked and just as toxic.

Life is a banquet at which a spiritual diet of bread and water is recommended for numinous nourishment. Don't ask me why there's so much to order on the menu, but why so few dishes will truly satisfy for the soul. In my next lifetime, I'll endeavor to choose a soul food establishment where love is the specialty of the day.

I spent the first twenty-five years of my life wanting to die from the pain of mental illness, and the second twenty-five years half dead from psychiatric medications. At last, I was able to separate from the authority figures I embodied as a child. Today, I'm off all drugs, sound of mind and courageous enough to want to move. I feel empty and distant from the shame and remorse of how I've spent my life knowing full well that I did what I could to survive a bad start. I had poor training in listening to my heart and acting in a way that I could approve as authentic. Instead, I straightened out years of mind-bending brainwashing techniques that were used against my full knowledge. Now I know better, but I see myself today as "crippled," mangled, not by disease or an act of God, but by the best of intentions.

There is a conspiracy of denial around the search for meaning in our lives.

The next phase of my exploration will involve shedding light on what is. My philosophy of change proscribes seeing it like it is *without* doing anything about it. I once thought doing nothing about something was anti-American, that it even defies common sense. But I now have experience which shows that doing nothing works.

I shed as much light on a subject as I possibly can and observe what I find. Like a modern-day Charles Darwin, I journey to the far corners of my world and record my observations. But unlike, Darwin, I don't draw any conclusions about the evolutionary forces of life. I simply scrutinize my world with the gentle light of truth. Then, I sit back and watch the truth heal me. I don't get in and try to force change. The body can usually heal by itself quite nicely if we get out of its way. The soul is no more complicated than the body.

So, step one is to observe and step two is to *do* nothing. Step three is act from within. Another word for that is prayer. Perhaps, dear reader, prayer is a bitter pill you'd rather not have to swallow. After all, you ask, "What has God got to do with existentialism?"

I find the meaning of my life to be a daunting task, to say the least. And when I'm faced with large projects that I've never tackled before, I find that calling on God for assistance can be very valuable. I never ask God for anything other than help in seeing opportunity for increasing my awareness. This, I feel, is a legitimate request of Him, the only vocation I see Him willing to accept, like some psychologist in the sky who doesn't charge for a fifty-minute hour. My God/Therapist is usually able to help me slow down, observe myself and face the facts as I see them.

Step four is taking action. I'm all in favor of taking action after going through steps 1-3. That said, wisdom is the key.

My present-day responsibilities are that of a house-husband. I cook, clean, shop, do the laundry, balance the check books and organize our social life. These are all enjoyable tasks, but I feel they are, in and of themselves, insufficient. I still feel a need to be more of the driver in my life and less of a passenger.

But my mother insisted that she drive my life, so for almost fifty years I've passively acquiesced to authority and to the forces of others, taking the road of convenience less traveled instead of the thoroughfare of design that all my heroes journeyed. Huck Finn, Beethoven and Oprah didn't do what their mothers planned for them. They acted alone. Yet, I have no experience with self-intimacy. I don't know what it means to be alone. Mother dearest is still there beside me, like some angel on my shoulder, conducting the themes of my life. This is an observation of my life that I now see and diligently declare that I will no longer react to. I'm determined to observe this phenomenon and do nothing about it. For once, I will not act by trying to change my life from the outside to make it better. I want to move from the inside out.

The particulars of my story began before my birth. My mother was a German immigrant who believed that her children were a work of art, hers, rather than God's. She spent the greater part of the first seven years of my life replacing my natural instinct for self-preservation with her desire for me to please her. I became a lonely 8-track recording of her messages in a world of compact discs – obsolete, odd and unwanted. It took all the dedication of motherhood for her to accomplish her misguided goal to immortality. She wanted a respectful child who would know when to say please and thank you. But, how will I pray to God if I don't know how to ask for help from myself?

No human touch substitutes for the touch of one's self, a concept so odd that it is usually perceived as pornographic rather than existential.

Our country is founded on the taboo “no thyself.” What good is a guarantee of peace when the world is grasping for a piece?

Existential angst drips onto our heads from the roofs of our S.U.V.’s and oozes onto our hands from the remote controls of our T.V. sets. Our angst brands us as fugitives from ourselves with every trademark we carry on our clothing. It pierces our eyes and ears through architecture that houses emptiness, and schools that teach nothing about values. Our roads take us everywhere but lead us no where. Our angst never touches our non-stick Teflon-coated souls. You think our environment is polluted? Look inside! We are cuckoos living in a filthy, gilded cage.

Although we know that nothing can substitute for the touch of another human being – not even the half-naked talking heads of the advertising world – there is always a sweet, new product that claims it can.

Healing is a detour, not a destination. Health is a component of a meaningful life, not the big Kahuna.

Although society offers many condiments to a life based on money, the standard relish is conformity and greed.

Escape from life through bodily sensation will only lead to disassociation from the mind.

Religion reduces God and self to a least common denominator, forcing mediocrity on our self when diversity is called for.

Nibbling from other people’s spiritual portion may fill your own needs for a time, but it doesn’t decrease the portion on your own plate.