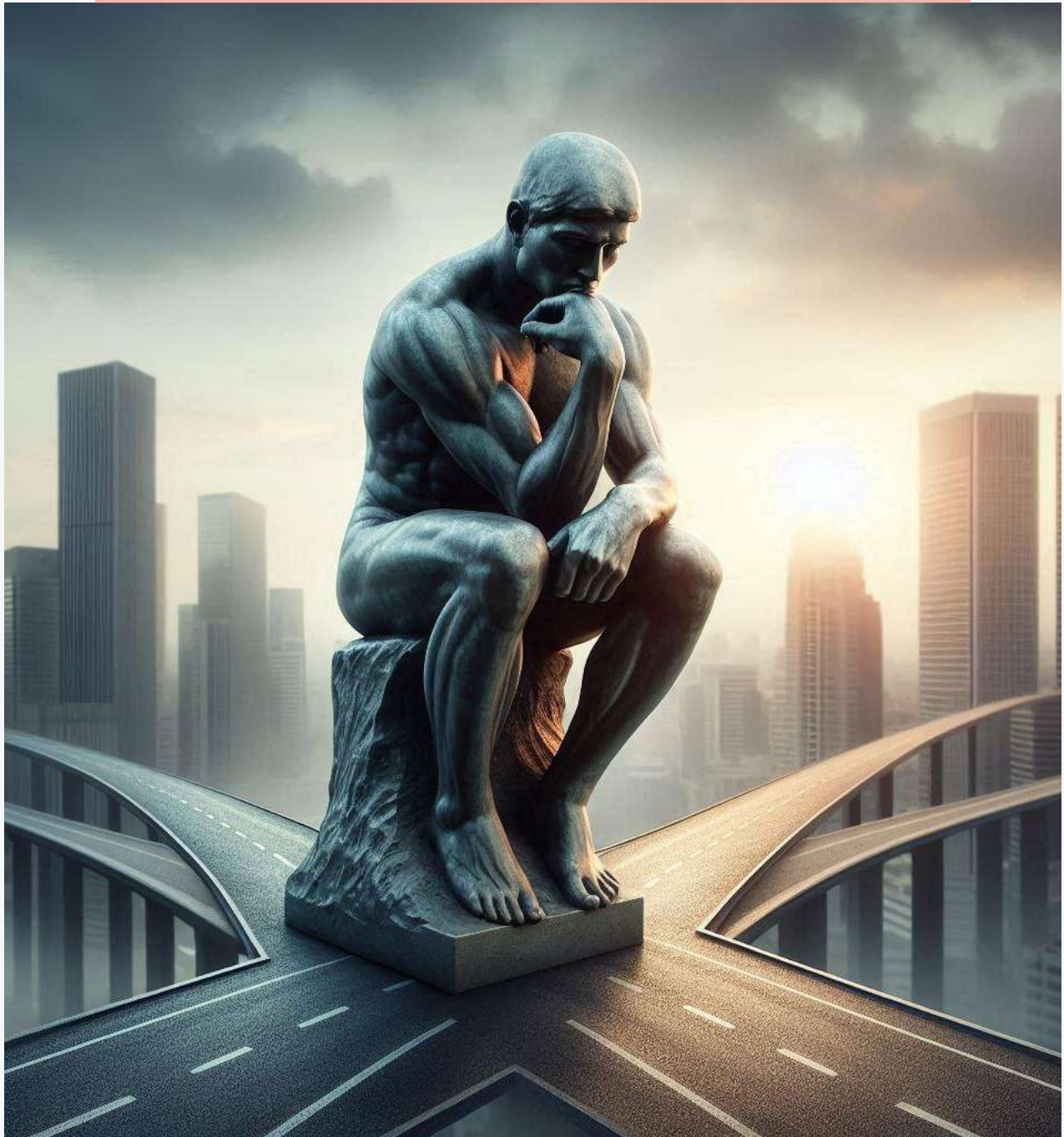


JMAD
JONATHAN M. PHAM
JMI

Q1-2025 EDITION

Making Choices in Life



PREFACE

“IT IS NOT OUR ABILITIES
THAT SHOW WHAT WE
TRULY ARE.
IT IS OUR CHOICES.”



Albus Dumbledore to Harry Potter

Credit: J. K. Rowling, Harry Potter & the Chamber of Secrets

Image source: [Pinterest](#)

A LETTER FROM JONATHAN

Good day, my friend!

Welcome to the Q1-2025 edition of my blog's newsletter series! I am delighted to continue this journey with you.

This time, I would like to invite you to ponder something incredibly fundamental (and yet often overlooked) to the human experience: **our choices in life**.

As you may have seen in the previous page, I decided to start this edition with the famous quote of Professor Dumbledore in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series: *"It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."*

For long, these words have resonated deeply with me, serving almost [as a personal motto](#). And now, as I delve into the topic of "choices in life," it seems fitting to begin my reflection with it.

Indeed, life itself is a continuous stream of choices, big and small, shaping who we become and the paths we tread. From the moment we wake up, deciding what to wear, what to eat, to the larger, more life-altering decisions about career, relationships, and values, we are constantly navigating a landscape of options.

And yet, how often do we truly pause to consider the weight and significance of these choices?

Do we realize the profound impact they have on the trajectory of our lives?

A LETTER FROM JONATHAN

Are our choices truly free, or are we swayed by fate, subconscious patterns, or even the overwhelming number of options before us?

How can we navigate the uncertainties and complexities of making choices, especially when faced with the potential for regret - as well as the paradox of too much freedom?

And ultimately, how can we strive to make choices that not only serve us but also expand and enrich the lives of other people?

This edition will explore the above-mentioned questions and many more. Aside from theories, tips and personal sharings, you will also find a compilation of insights from experts across fields - as well as a collection of inspirational stories & sayings to further illuminate the path.

Sounds intriguing? Then let us turn the page and begin the journey, shall we?

All the best!

Jonathan M. Pham

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YOUR CHOICES, YOUR DESTINY



**Life is not just a matter
of luck, but of choice.**

Seneca

1.1. WHY OUR CHOICES MATTER SO MUCH?

Just think about a typical morning: will it be coffee or tea to awaken the senses?

A seemingly trivial preference, yet even such a small act has the potential to set the course for our whole day.

From the moment we awaken until we drift back to sleep, we are immersed in a sea of possibilities, constantly navigating through branching paths.

As we journey through life, the choices we have to make become increasingly significant.

- We stand at forks in the road, contemplating university degrees that could determine our intellectual pursuits and career paths that will define our professional courses.
- We navigate the intricate landscapes of relationships - choosing partners, cultivating friendships, nurtur-

ing family bonds - decisions that profoundly impact our emotional well-being and sense of belonging.

Beyond these major life events, we are also perpetually faced with choices that sculpt our inner selves.

- What ethical compass will guide my actions?
- Will I prioritize core values like honesty, compassion, or justice?
- What beliefs will form the bedrock of my worldview?
- Will I lean towards a life of simplicity or abundance, of [introspection](#) or outward engagement?
- Will I consciously cultivate kindness over self-righteousness, understanding over [judgment](#)?
- What faith, if any, will provide solace and meaning to me?
- etc.

1.1. WHY OUR CHOICES MATTER SO MUCH?

In every life domain, we are constantly deciding what to embrace, what to reject, and where to stand. And many times, our choices are made without us being consciously aware of it.



Have you ever woken up on a rainy day? Unbidden, gloom begins to settle in. Some days, we – intentionally or not – succumb to the impact of the weather and let it dictate our inner state. And other days, we observe the rain with an inner sense of warmth and gratitude.

These seemingly automatic reactions are, at their root, choices too. Choices we can learn to recognize and, ulti-

mately, consciously direct.

The Importance of Making Choices in Life

Life is the sum of all our choices.

Albert Camus

Have you ever been in a situation like this? You are traveling when you arrive at a crossroad, where multiple paths diverge.

You choose one – only to find it leads to a dead end. Or, to end up in heavy traffic. Navigating out of it, retracing your steps, and getting back on course is a truly arduous experience, physically and mentally.

This simple metaphor reflects the very real impact of our life choices. The paths we select determine where we end up, how smoothly we travel, and indeed, whether we reach the desired destination at all.

1.1. WHY OUR CHOICES MATTER SO MUCH?

Over the years, experts across various fields, from psychology to leadership, have agreed on one crucial point: the ability to make decisions is [a fundamental life competency](#). It is the engine that drives [personal growth](#) and shapes the very trajectory of one's existence.

Our choices are the architects of our **character**. Do we choose courage over comfort, integrity over expediency, compassion over indifference? These repeated selections, both large and small, etch the lines of our moral compass and define the person we become.

In turn, character forges **destiny**. The aggregate of our daily decisions determines the opportunities [we attract](#), the relationships we cultivate, and the legacy we leave behind.

What's more, the choices we make produce a rippling effect, influencing not only us – but

also those around us, and even, in a cumulative sense, the world at large.

Let us reflect on an example. Choosing a particular university is not just about acquiring knowledge or securing a career path. It's a decision that immerses you in a specific environment – connecting you with certain friends, teachers, and professional networks. These relationships, in turn, are potent forces that shape your personality, outlook on life, and future opportunities in ways you might not even foresee.

Imagine choosing a highly competitive school driven by prestige alone. While it might ignite a competitive spirit within you, this drive potentially comes at a cost. Specifically, it might push you to prioritize external validation over inner well-being, leading to a life imbalanced, perhaps sacrificing genuine connections for the sake of

1.1. WHY OUR CHOICES MATTER SO MUCH?

fleeting accomplishments, driven by a “reputation-craving self.”
(mind you, this was what happened to me before)

Every choice, therefore, reverberates outwards, touching lives and shaping the collective landscape.

When we internalize the sheer impact of choices, we are invited to move from passive recipients of fate to active architects of our own becoming.

When we embrace such a responsibility, we minimize the grounds for regret and maximize the potential for authentic choices that pave the way for a [deeply fulfilling life](#).



**Life is a matter
of choices, and
every choice
you make,
makes you.**

John C. Maxwell

1.2. THE 2 MAIN CHOICES IN LIFE

To BE, or not to BE – that is the question.

William Shakespeare

As mentioned above, there are countless areas in life where we make decisions: career, partner, home, and so on. However, I believe they all boil down to a choice between two paths:

Growth or **Diminishment**.

Do we consistently choose actions, thoughts, and perspectives that **expand** our potential, **enrich** our experience, and contribute to **something larger than ourselves**?

Or do we, through neglect, fear, or short-sightedness, unknowingly take paths that lead to **contraction**, **stagnation**, and ultimately, a **lesser version** of ourselves and the world?

1. The Path of Growth

The path of Growth represents

an active and intentional stance toward life. It's about embracing expansion, potential, and a continuous unfolding of who you can become, both individually and collectively.

- Embracing the stretch zone – which can be intellectual (tackling a challenging book), emotional (engaging in a vulnerable conversation), or practical (taking on a new project) – so as to learn, adapt, and evolve as individuals.
- Pursuing long-term fulfillment rather than short-term gratification – by investing time in [skill development](#) instead of instant entertainment, nurturing relationships instead of fleeting pleasures, or pursuing meaning-

1.2. THE 2 MAIN CHOICES IN LIFE

ful work over solely chasing quick financial gains.

- Pausing, reflecting, and consciously choosing actions based on one's values and goals (responsiveness), rather than being swept away by circumstances (reactiveness).
- Considering the impact of one's choices on others (family, community, the world), and shifting from a purely "I" centric perspective to acknowledging the interconnected "We".
- Being vulnerable and willing to extend kindness, compassion, and [love unconditionally](#) – both [to oneself](#) and others – without caring too much about being "right" all the time.

2. The Path of Diminishment

In stark contrast, the path of Diminishment is often a more subtle and insidious journey. It's rarely a conscious declara-

tion, but rather a gradual drifting – a series of small concessions that, over time, constrict our "world" and potential.

- Seeking refuge in the same routines, even when they lead nowhere new. It's the intellectual comfort of endlessly scrolling through social media (rather than reading), or the emotional comfort of engaging in superficial small talks.
- Chasing fleeting gratification – the instant validation of social media likes, the short-lived pleasure of impulse buys, the momentary escape of endless entertainment, etc.
- Operating reactively, like a "candle in the wind", and letting all decisions become dictated by emotions, external pressures, and immediate demands, without pausing to reflect or align with one's values (e.g. snapping at a loved

1.2. THE 2 MAIN CHOICES IN LIFE

- one in anger in response to a minor inconvenience).
- Living in an “I”-solated world, building walls instead of bridges, seeing the world primarily through the lens of personal needs/ desires, and overlooking the interconnectedness of life (e.g. consistently prioritizing one’s own individual goals at work, even when it means not supporting team members or contributing to a collaborative environment).
 - Defending “rightness” at the expense of connection, and being too eager to “win” arguments instead of trying to learn from other perspectives.

Each of us has two distinct choices to make about what we will do with our lives. The first choice we can make is to be LESS than we have the capacity to be. To earn less. To have less. To read less and think less. To try less and discipline ourselves less. These are the choices that lead to an empty life. These are the choices that, once made, lead to a life of constant apprehension instead of a life of wondrous anticipation.

And the second choice? To do it ALL! To become all that we can possibly be. To read every book that we possibly can. To earn as much as we possibly can. To give and share as much as we possibly can. To strive and produce and accomplish as much as we possibly can.

Jim Rohn

1.2. THE 2 MAIN CHOICES IN LIFE



THE PATH OF GROWTH

THE PATH OF DIMINISHMENT

Approach to Challenges

Embraces “stretch zone” to learn & evolve

Seeks comfort in familiar routines, avoids newness

Time Focus & Goals

Pursues growth & long-term fulfillment

Chases instant, fleeting gratification

Decision Making

Responsive, values & goals-driven, reflective

Reactive, driven by emotions & pressures

Perspective on Others

Thinks “We”, values interconnectedness

Thinks “I”, overlooks others

Communication & Values

Values connection & kindness

Defends “rightness”, eager to “win”

THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHOICE



**Nothing is more difficult, and
therefore more precious,
than to be able to decide.**

Napoleon Bonaparte

2.1. WHAT MAKES OUR CHOICES SO COMPLEX?

The act of deciding, especially when faced with significant life choices, is far from simple. It is a process fraught with intricacies, demanding careful consideration and often wrestling with profound uncertainties.

Far too often, we are not simply presented with clear-cut options and obvious best routes. Instead, we navigate a landscape complicated by a multitude of factors (which we are going to discuss below).

Fate vs. Free will

- **Determinism**

The notion of fate suggests that humanity is governed by forces beyond individual control.

From ancient Greek tragedies where characters were ensnared in inescapable destinies to certain religious and spiritual traditions that posit either a divine plan or karmic law, the idea that one's paths are pre-

written has a long history.

In a more modern, secular guise, **determinism** finds resonance in scientific perspectives, such as [Sigmund Freud's emphasis on cause and effect in the human psyche](#). It proposes that every event, including the decisions we make, is causally necessitated by prior events.

If every action is a predictable consequence of what came before, where does that leave room for genuine choice?

Is our sense of choosing merely an illusion, a narrative we construct after the fact to rationalize events already set in motion?

- **Libertarianism**

In contrast stands **libertarianism**, championing the power of free will. This perspective asserts that we are, to some significant degree, the authors of our own actions. We possess

2.1. WHAT MAKES OUR CHOICES SO COMPLEX?

genuine autonomy, a capacity for self-determination that transcends mere causal chains.

Libertarianism highlights humanity's subjective experience of freedom – the feeling of deliberation, of weighing options, of consciously selecting one path over another. It places a strong emphasis on one's moral responsibility; if our choices were not truly ours, how could we be held accountable for them?

- **Compatibilism**

And then we have **compatibilism**, a nuanced perspective that seeks to reconcile the two above-mentioned poles. It acknowledges the myriad of influences shaping one's existence – genetics, upbringing, environment, societal pressures, chance encounters. In other words, we are not entirely unbound agents operating in a vacuum.

That being said, within the constraints of these influences, we still possess a degree of agency, a space for conscious deliberation and choice.

Even if the choices we make are not entirely uncaused – even if they are shaped by our predispositions and circumstances – **they are still our choices**, reflecting our values, desires, and intentions.

The critical point in compatibilism is not whether one's will is absolutely free from any cause, but whether one experiences and exercises freedom within their determined existence.



2.1. WHAT MAKES OUR CHOICES SO COMPLEX?

For my part, I believe that I lean more toward compatibilism, a “middle ground” that strays away from extremes and **focuses more on practicality.**

Consider, for example, choosing a career path. Are your inclinations towards a certain field simply a result of your genetic predispositions and environmental conditioning (deterministic view)? Or are you genuinely free to choose any path, regardless of circumstances (libertarian view)?

Or perhaps, as compatibilism suggests, your background and tendencies MAY play a role in shaping your inclinations, but you still possess the agency to critically evaluate these influences and consciously choose a path that resonates with your authentic self, **even if it means defying certain predispositions.**

Think about it.

In our daily routine, we practically experience and operate as if we possess free will.

We weigh options, we feel the weight of responsibility for our decisions, and we hold others accountable for theirs.

We can certainly act according to our will – we can choose to pursue a certain career, end a relationship, or embrace a new belief. **But what determines our will itself?**

What shapes our desires, our values, and our deepest inclinations?

Are even our desires freely chosen, or are they themselves products of forces beyond our conscious control?

Man can DO what he wills, but he cannot WILL what he wills.

Arthur Schopenhauer

2.1. WHAT MAKES OUR CHOICES SO COMPLEX?

After all, regardless of one's philosophical stance, the practical imperative remains: **we must make choices, and we must navigate life AS IF our decisions matter.**

It is within this space of perceived freedom, however constrained or influenced, that we construct our lives and define who we become.

Authenticity

The concept of **authenticity**, commonly associated with existentialism, essentially points to living in accordance with one's true self.

For many, the journey toward authenticity begins with **self-knowledge**. This involves a deep and ongoing exploration of one's values, deepest desires, inherent capabilities, and genuine interests. It's about realizing what truly matters to them, what ignites their pas-

sion, and what aligns with their inner compass, independent of external validation.

When we make choices that resonate with this self-understanding, we are, **in theory**, moving closer to authenticity.

However, the thing is, we live in a world awash in external influences – from the subtle yet pervasive messages of advertising that shape our desires to the curated realities presented on social media that mold our perceptions of success and **happiness**. Cultural norms and societal expectations further complicate the picture, often dictating what constitutes a “good” or “worthy” life, potentially leading us to pursue paths that may not feel genuine at all.

Far too often, the constant barrage of these external noises drowns out the quieter whispers of our own inner voice, making it incredibly challeng-

2.1. WHAT MAKES OUR CHOICES SO COMPLEX?

ing to discern our “true self”.



At the same time, the very notion of a fixed, essential “true self” is itself debatable. Some philosophical perspectives argue against the idea of a static, unchanging core identity waiting to be discovered. Instead, they propose that the “self” is fluid, constantly evolving, and shaped by our experiences and decisions.

From this viewpoint, authenticity is **less a destination and more an ongoing process**. It’s not about uncovering a pre-existing “true self,” but rather about **actively creating a self** through conscious and deliberate choices.

All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world.

Buddha

While the pursuit of authenticity is often seen as a positive endeavor, it’s crucial to acknowledge its potential pitfalls, how it may veer into selfishness if not handled with care.

If we become solely focused on “being true to ourselves” without considering the impact of our choices on others, we risk becoming self-absorbed and inconsiderate – thereby damaging our relationships.

If we rigidly cling to a fixed idea of who we should be, we close ourselves off to new perspectives and opportunities.

Bad faith

A concept articulated by exist-

2.1. WHAT MAKES OUR CHOICES SO COMPLEX?

existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, “bad faith” is typically seen as the opposite of authenticity. It refers to a form of self-deception, a strategy to evade the anguish of one’s own freedom and the burden of responsibility that comes with it.

At its core, it is about **avoiding responsibility for one’s choices**. Instead of acknowledging ourselves as the authors of our decisions, we [pass the buck](#) and [attribute them to external forces](#) (e.g. fate, destiny), to pre-determined roles (e.g. “It’s just part of my job”), or to unavoidable circumstances (e.g. “I know it’s not good, but my boss told me to do so”).

We engage in a kind of internal playacting, convincing ourselves that we had no choice – that our actions were dictated by something outside of our own volition.

Another manifestation of bad

faith lies in **blindly following societal norms or expectations WITHOUT personal reflection**. Specifically, we adopt career paths, relationship models, or lifestyles simply because they are deemed “normal,” “respectable,” or “expected” by our family, culture, or society.

In bad faith, we convince ourselves that we are simply fulfilling our designated roles – “being a good son/daughter,” “being a responsible professional,” “being a conforming member of society.”

We relinquish our individual judgment and critical thinking, embracing pre-defined scripts rather than actively authoring our own lives.

No doubt I do act in ‘bad faith’ when I deliberately avoid facing an honest decision and follow the conventional pattern of behavior in order to be

2.1. WHAT MAKES OUR CHOICES SO COMPLEX?

spared the anxiety that comes when one is... thrown into seventy thousand fathoms.

John Macquarrie

The allure of bad faith is understandable, as it offers a kind of **comfort in conformity**. After all, the responsibility of choosing, of potentially making mistakes, of bearing the full weight of our decisions – this may be daunting for many of us. Bad faith provides an escape route, an illusion that alleviates this existential anxiety.

However, such comfort comes at a cost – at least in certain situations. Our choices, made in bad faith, may lead to careers that are soul-crushing despite external success, or relationships that are hollow despite fulfilling societal expectations.

These are decisions made to appease others or to conform to

external pressures, rather than those that resonate with one's own core.

Uncertainty

Early in my career, I found myself [in a workplace](#) that, in many ways, was ideal. The environment was supportive, the team collaborative, the company culture genuinely positive, and even the compensation was adequate. In many respects, all of my subsequent roles have paled in comparison to this one.

Yet, the work itself was... static. It offered little opportunity for skill development or intellectual growth (you can learn more about [my experiences with it here](#)).

After two years, a dilemma arose: should I remain in this comfortable harbor, content with the pleasant surroundings but intellectually stagnant? Or

2.1. WHAT MAKES OUR CHOICES SO COMPLEX?

should I venture out into the uncertain seas, seeking challenges that would stretch my abilities, even if it meant leaving behind the known comforts?

I believe that most of us have been through situations like this before. Every decision, no matter how well-thought it is, essentially requires us to make a **leap of faith** into ambiguity – which is, most of the time, not comfortable at all.



Human beings have a natural inclination to **fear the unfamiliar**. Our minds are wired to seek patterns, predictability, and control. Uncertainty, by its very definition, disrupts this

desire for order. It evokes anxiety, because it threatens our sense of security and the ability to foresee/ manage the consequences of our actions.

When faced with important life choices – career changes, relationship commitments, geographical moves – we are confronted with a daunting array of unknowns. Will this new path lead to fulfillment or disappointment? Will this relationship bring joy or heartache? Will this change enhance my life or destabilize it?

These questions cause many to become mentally paralyzed, making the act of choosing feel like navigating a maze in the dark. As a result, many **CHOOSE** to cling to the status quo, even if it is unsatisfying or even subtly painful.

We may **DECIDE** to remain in a state of quiet desperation due to a deep-seated **fear of poten-**

2.1. WHAT MAKES OUR CHOICES SO COMPLEX?

tially making the “wrong” choice and facing unforeseen negative consequences. The discomfort of staying put, while real, is still perceived as less daunting than the potentially sharper, but unknown, pain of venturing into the uncertain.

The paradox of choices

This concept, popularized by psychologist Barry Schwartz, challenges the seemingly straightforward notion that more is always better. It reveals a surprising truth: an abundance of choices can, paradoxically, lead to **decreased satisfaction, increased anxiety, and even paralysis in decision-making.**

The modern world, particularly in developed societies, is characterized by an unprecedented proliferation of options. From the mundane choices of which coffee to order or which streaming service to subscribe

to, to the significant decisions of career paths, relationships, and lifestyles, we are bombarded with possibilities at every turn. This explosion of options is typically lauded by social media as a triumph of freedom and progress.

And yet, instead of feeling empowered, many of us find ourselves feeling burdened, stressed, and [ultimately less happy with our choices.](#)

We succumb to a phenomenon called **decision fatigue**. The sheer cognitive efforts required to evaluate and compare a vast array of options deplete our mental resources.

By the time we actually come up with a decision, particularly for less consequential matters, we may find ourselves mentally exhausted, less satisfied with our eventual choice, and less motivated to engage in further decision-making.

2.1. WHAT MAKES OUR CHOICES SO COMPLEX?

This fatigue can spill over into more important life domains, leading to rushed, impulsive decisions, or even complete analysis paralysis – the inability to make up one’s mind.

With fewer options, our expectations are naturally lower, and we are more likely to appreciate the paths we take. However, when faced with a plethora of alternatives, our expectations, naturally, become inflated. We begin to imagine the “perfect” choice, the one that maximizes every possible benefit.

When we finally do choose, we are often plagued by “what if” thinking. Did we make the best possible choice? Could we have been happier with another option?

This constant comparison and counterfactual thinking diminishes our satisfaction with even good choices and fuels post-decision regret.

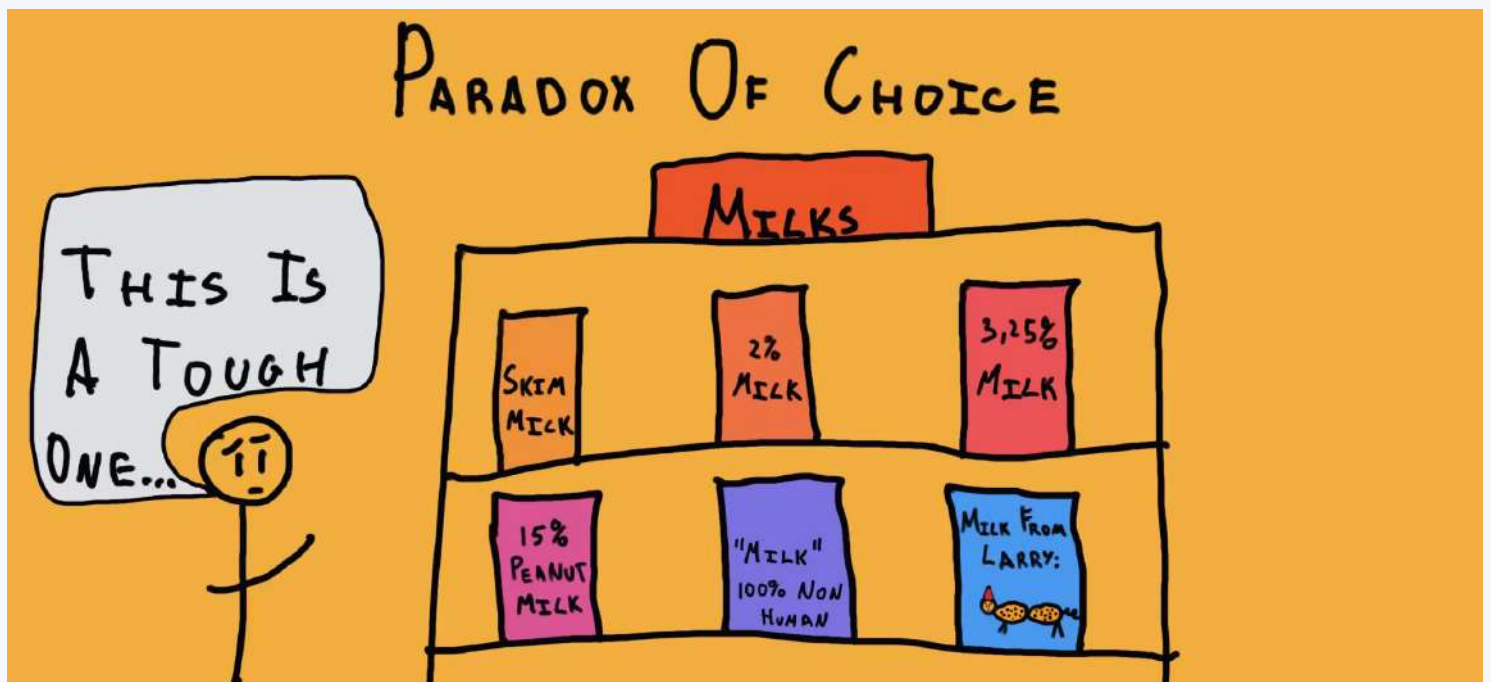


Image source: [The Decision Lab](#)

2.2. DO WE HAVE A CHOICE OR NOT?

I've told you two stories about what happened out on the ocean. Neither explains what caused the sinking of the ship, and no one can prove which story is true and which is not. In both stories, the ship sinks, my family dies, and I suffer. So which story do you prefer?

Piscine Molitor Patel – “Life of Pi”

As we've journeyed through these various layers of complexity – the enduring tension between fate and free will, the elusive pursuit of authenticity, the subtle trap of bad faith, the daunting presence of uncertainty, and the paradoxical burden of overwhelming choice – it becomes undeniably clear that making meaningful life decisions is far from a simple, linear process. Given all these forces at play, **do we truly have a choice at all?**

I myself believe that the answer itself is **a matter of perspective, a choice IN ITSELF**. Specifically, we can CHOOSE to believe we

are mere puppets of destiny, or we can CHOOSE to believe in our capacity to shape our own paths, even amidst the currents of external forces.

To illustrate this complexity, let us turn to a powerful narrative from popular culture: the saga of **Anakin Skywalker in Star Wars**.

For those unfamiliar, Star Wars is a sprawling epic set in a galaxy far, far away, where a mystical energy field known as “The Force” connects all things. Anakin Skywalker is introduced as a young boy believed to be “The Chosen One,” prophesied to

2.2. DO WE HAVE A CHOICE OR NOT?

bring balance to the Force. Endowed with extraordinary abilities and potential, he is brought into the Jedi Order, an ancient order of peacekeepers who wield the light side of the Force.

However, despite his immense promise, Anakin's journey takes a tragic turn. Plagued by visions of loss and driven by fear of losing loved ones, he is manipulated by a sinister figure, Emperor Palpatine, and ultimately succumbs to the dark side of the Force, becoming the infamous Darth Vader – a figure of tyranny and destruction.



Image source: [Game Rant](#)

Anakin's story is rife with the tension between fate and free

will. His initial designation as “The Chosen One” suggests a predetermined path, a destiny seemingly laid out by the Force itself. His visions of future suffering further reinforce this sense of inevitability.

And yet, his journey is also punctuated by countless moments of choice. He chooses to act on his fears, to distrust the Jedi Order, and ultimately, to embrace the dark side.

To what extent were these decisions truly free?

Was Anakin merely fulfilling a tragic prophecy, or did he actively author his own downfall?

Recently, while exploring discussions on this topic, I happened to come across a [Quora post](#), in which I found some pretty interesting analyses (which I am going to share with you in the following pages).

2.2. DO WE HAVE A CHOICE OR NOT?

Did Anakin Skywalker have a choice in his fall, or was it fated by the Force?

Star Wars is all about free will and giving in to your passions or resisting them. Anakin was tempted just as Luke would be many years later. Luke chose differently even at the risk of losing his life. Anakin however gave in to his fears. Could he have chosen differently? Most likely, yes. There were many factors contributing to Anakin's fall, not just his weaknesses.



So was it fate? Possibly. There were hints even in Clone Wars that Anakin's destiny is to become Darth Vader:

But I see it as potential. Everybody saw his darkness but no one saw his redemption. His return to the light.

Becoming Vader was the most likely choice considering all the circumstances. But I do believe he could've done it differently.

2.2. DO WE HAVE A CHOICE OR NOT?



Dan B

Author has **23.4K** answers and **286.9M** answer views · 1y



Look. On a very basic level, both per Lucas's words and per the literal structure of the story, beings in the Star Wars universe have agency. Star Wars —like all good fantasy^[1]— also acts as an analogy for aspects of the human experience. One of those aspects roughly maps to “we all have a choice in doing good or evil, taking the quick path, or the slow and steady path”.

Since “choice” is the case for us (best as we know, obviously within certain limitations), it's really the foundation of the whole Skywalker Saga. “The Battle of Fates” was about the choices Qui-Gon made. Its sequel was about the choices Anakin, Padme, and Obi-Wan made. And lastly, the fall of Anakin Skywalker and the rise of Darth Vader is about the choice that Anakin made, fully knowing what he did.

What he did not have a choice in was how the deck was stacked against him. These are not “either/or” things. Despite how badly the deck was stacked against Anakin, he still chose to kill infants and toddlers. Nothing excuses that. Nothing excuses him choosing to become a Sith —literally dedicated to killing anything that gets in your way— instead of simply walking away and saying, “Nope. You're both wrong.”

Anakin's fall is certainly Palpatine's fault. It's certainly Yoda's fault. It's certainly Mace Windu's fault. It's certainly Obi-Wan Kenobi's fault. It's certainly Count Dooku's fault. It's certainly Ahsoka Tano's fault. It's certainly many, MANY Jedi's fault. None of that comes at the expense of Anakin's fall also being 100% Anakin's fault in the choices he made both throughout his life and ultimately, the biggest choice he made at the end of his Jedi career.



2.2. DO WE HAVE A CHOICE OR NOT?

Now was it the Force's fault too? No. The Force itself shows constantly that it will not dictate what beings should do. It calls them to a path. If they choose that path, that is the light side of the Force. If they choose another path, that is potentially the dark side. The Force made it very clear to Anakin throughout his life what it absolutely did not want him to do: murder with impunity. Perhaps his calling in the Force was confusing.

Anakin could've replaced The Father which was probably his first calling. After that, the Force probably provided a path to either—

1. walking away from the Jedi Order with other Jedi who were not fond of the way the Order had gone, waited until Sidious acted from outside the Order, while likely keeping their prescience since they were not literal warmongers subsumed by a Sith Lord.
2. staying in the Order and becoming the Grandmaster and changing it from within, using Qui-Gon's and Obi-Wan Kenobi's teachings and beliefs to guide him in that path.

—which he did not take. There were probably dozens of paths before Anakin Skywalker to serve the Force and do good for the universe. He alone chose to commit evil acts by joining the Sith.

As the two fans above argue, while Anakin's path to Darth Vader might have seemed "likely" given his circumstances and weaknesses, it was not necessarily predetermined. There were external factors that contributed to his downfall – the flaws of the Jedi Order, Palpatine's manipulation, the failings of his mentors – but ultimately it was Anakin himself who chose to join the dark side. To commit

evil acts, particularly the horrific act of killing children.

Anakin Skywalker's saga, as tragic as it is, serves as a powerful mirror reflecting our own internal struggles with choice.

Returning to the question: "Do I have a choice or not?", again, I would like to assert that the very act of answering is, in

2.2. DO WE HAVE A CHOICE OR NOT?

itself, a decision to be made.

We can choose to see ourselves as puppets on strings, predetermined by fate or circumstance, or we can choose to embrace the belief in our own agency, our capacity to shape our paths even within the currents of influence. Indeed, the choice to answer “yes” or “no” to this question is, ultimately, ours.

Just as in ‘Life of Pi’ we are presented with two different stories and asked which we prefer to believe, so too with the question of choice – we can choose the story we tell ourselves about our own agency.

We can choose to believe – or disbelieve – in our own power to choose.

And for me, the empowering path lies in choosing to believe in one’s agency. To look INWARD rather than OUTWARD.



2.3. BETWEEN “IN HERE” AND “OUT THERE”

In traditions like Buddhism, there is a concept called “[dependent origination](#)”, which, in its essence, speaks to the interconnectedness of all things. Accordingly, while each being possesses individual will and agency, our existence is fundamentally interwoven and interdependent.

We are individual actors, yes, but we operate within a vast web of interconnected causes and conditions. As such, we need to realize (and aim for) a delicate balance between individuality and collectivity, between personal agency and the larger forces that shape our reality.

No man is an island.

John Donne

Many times, life throws us detours, unexpected incidents that seem to veer us off course, guided by these larger, inter-

connected forces. However, these detours **do not negate our agency.**

Even when forced to take a different route than initially envisioned, the underlying direction, the core values and aspirations guiding us, can remain constant.

The path may twist and turn, becoming vastly different from what we initially expected, but the compass setting – our inner direction – can still hold true.

To me, it is, in many ways, just a matter of perception. Often, due to ignorance and a lack of self-awareness, we may not fully grasp the forces at play, nor understand our own inner compass clearly. As such, we may misinterpret detours as failures, or external influences as absolute dictates.

However, with deeper self-knowledge, we can learn to see

2.3. BETWEEN “IN HERE” AND “OUT THERE”

events with greater clarity, to **accept reality as it is** – a complex interplay of agency and influence – and ultimately, to transcend the binary of fate versus free will altogether.

It’s about finding agency **within** influence, freedom **within** constraints. About focusing energy on what lies within our sphere of control, while leaving the rest – the external influences, the “dependent origination,” the currents of “fate” – to unfold as they may.

This, I believe, is not passive resignation, but rather a strategic allocation of one’s mental and emotional resources. In doing so, we channel our agency into the realm where it is most effective: our own thoughts, actions, and responses.

Or, as Stoic philosophers have put it, to “[practice dichotomy of control](#)”. To focus on one’s intentions, efforts, and responses

to events, rather than fixating on outcomes or external circumstances.

If we can follow this principle, then it will become much simpler for us to make authentic choices that align with the inner compass – and not succumb to external voices.



Just think about historical figures like Gautama Buddha, who renounced a life of princely wealth and comfort to embark on a [spiritual quest](#) for truth. Born into a world of immense privilege, seemingly destined for a life of royal succession and earthly pleasures, Siddhartha Gautama, as he was then known, was presented with a

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pre-ordained path – a ‘fate’ carved out by his birth and societal expectations.

Yet, despite this seemingly gilded cage of circumstance, an ‘inner’ compass stirred within him. Encounters with suffering – the stark realities of old age, sickness, and death – ignited his inherent yearning for wisdom and liberation. Eventually, he chose to see beyond the confines of his immediate, comfortable reality – despite protests and pleas from his family.



His renunciation was a deeply agency-driven decision. And in doing so, the prince, seemingly bound by destiny, transcended the limitations of his birth,

becoming the Buddha, the awakened one.

To round it out, let us consider this example. Imagine you are doing a workout. When fatigue sets in, the body – the “out there” – sends signals of weariness, suggesting you stop. These are very real physical limits.

However, within you – “in here” – lies the agency to choose. You can heed the immediate call to stop, or you can push a little further.

What’s interesting is, by consistently choosing to challenge your perceived limits (in a healthy way), day by day, you gradually expand them. The external forces, those initial physical boundaries, begin to shift and no longer confine you as they once did.

This simple example beautifully illustrates the dynamic inter-

2.3. BETWEEN “IN HERE” AND “OUT THERE”

play: your “in here” (your will, your choice to persevere) directly impacts your “out there” (your physical capabilities, your expanded limits).

When we consistently exercise our agency – and align every choice with our inner compass, we create a positive feedback loop. Small acts of agency, like pushing through fatigue in a workout, or deciding to stick to our values in the face of external pressures, compound over time. They strengthen our “inner” capacity and subtly reshape our “outer” reality.



Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen.

Ralph Waldo
Emerson

NAVIGATING THE MAZE OF CHOICE



**Life is full of choices.
We don't always
make good ones.**

Ellen Hopkins

3.1. CHALLENGES OF MAKING LIFE CHOICES

1. Inertia

Inertia is an active event in which we are persisting in the state we're already in rather than switching to something else.

Marshall Goldsmith

When it comes to making life choices, inertia represents a significant challenge. It is the invisible force that keeps us tethered to the familiar, even when our inner compass yearns for a different direction. Think of it as the force that makes it so much easier to stay on the couch watching television than to embark on that challenging but rewarding new project.

Inertia is the reason we often stick with unfulfilling routines, relationships, or even career paths, simply because **the act of changing feels too daunting.**

Where does inertia come from?

There are several interwoven factors that contribute to its often-powerful grip:

- **Fear of change**

At its root, inertia arises from a deep-seated fear of the unknown and the potential discomfort of change. This fear is particularly pronounced for individuals who have experienced negative outcomes from past decisions (e.g. someone who made a past career change that ended badly), or those who were raised in overly protective environments that discouraged risk-taking.

Inertia is also fueled by a desire for **stability and predictability**, a clinging to the perceived safety of the known. In extreme cases, it may manifest as a desire to control one's environment by remaining static, even in self-defeating ways.

Have you ever heard about a

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phenomenon called “hikikomori”, when someone exhibits behavior of extreme social withdrawal?

While complex, some experts have argued that in some cases, inertia MAY play a role; the individual may stubbornly remain indoors, seemingly gaining a sense of power or perhaps even pity from others by refusing to engage with the world, rather than facing the uncertainty and challenges of “normal” life.

YOUTH: I have a friend who has shut himself in his room for several years. He wishes he could go out, and even thinks he'd like to have a job, if possible. So, he wants to change the way he is. Except that he's afraid to leave his room. He wants to change, but he can't.

PHILOSOPHER: What do you think the reason is that he can't go out?

YOUTH: I'm not really sure. It could be because of his relationship with his parents, or because he was bullied at school or work. I just don't know.

PHILOSOPHER: So, you are saying there were incidents in your friend's past that became the cause of trauma, and as a result he can't go out anymore?

YOUTH: Of course.

PHILOSOPHER: So, if the here and now of everyone in the world is due to their past incidents, wouldn't things turn out strangely? Everyone who has grown up abused by his or her parents would have to suffer the same effects as your friend and become a recluse.

If we focus only on past causes and try to explain

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things solely through cause and effect, we end up with ‘determinism’. Because our present and our future have already been decided by past occurrences, and are unalterable.

In Adlerian psychology, we do not think about past ‘causes’, but rather about present ‘goals’.

YOUTH: Present goals?

PHILOSOPHER: Your friend is insecure, so he can’t go out. Think about it the other way around. He doesn’t want to go out, so he’s creating a state of anxiety.

YOUTH: Huh?

PHILOSOPHER: Your friend had the goal of not going out beforehand, and he’s been manufacturing a state of anxiety and fear as a

means to achieve that goal. In Adlerian psychology, this is called ‘teleology’.

Ichiro Kishimi – “The Courage to be Disliked”



- **Procrastination**

When we consistently postpone decisions and actions, our accumulated choices will gradually turn into a habitual state. For example, delaying the decision to leave a toxic relationship, repeatedly postponing the start of a needed exercise regimen, or constantly putting off career planning – these acts of procrastination strengthen the grip of inertia, making it progressively harder to initiate change.

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- **The illusion of unlimited time**

Especially prevalent amongst younger generations, the feeling that “there’s always tomorrow” can paradoxically lead to a paralysis of action in the present. Time is frittered away on trivial pursuits – endless scrolling on social media, binge-watching frivolous content, or engaging in passive entertainment – with the underlying assumption that there will always be ample time to address important life choices “later.”

This deferred life, however, will soon solidify into a pattern of inertia, making it harder to shift to a more intentional and purposeful way of living.

One day you will wake up & there won't be any more time to do the things you've always wanted.

Paulo Coelho

- **Obligations & excuses**

Life is filled with obligations – family responsibilities, social commitments, etc.. And far too often, we resort to them as convenient excuses to avoid making challenging choices.

“I can’t change careers now, I have a family to support.”

“I can’t pursue my passion, I have to take care of my aging parents.”

While these commitments are indeed valid, they may also become shields behind which inertia hides, preventing us from honestly assessing our decisions and seeking authentic paths within or around such responsibilities.

However, inertia is not solely a force of stagnation. In fact, it can be harnessed for good.

When we consciously cultivate

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productive habits and routines, inertia becomes our ally. Think of establishing a consistent morning exercise routine, preparing a healthy breakfast each day, or optimizing your commute. Once these actions become ingrained, inertia works for you, keeping you grounded and consistent in these positive behaviors.

The key, therefore, lies in initiating movement. Overcoming inertia requires a conscious effort to take that crucial first step – to start the exercise, to begin the career research, to initiate the difficult conversation. Once in motion, the principle of inertia will work in our favor.

Like a snowball rolling down a hill, momentum builds. Small, consistent actions, fueled by initial effort, create a positive feedback loop, making it progressively easier to continue moving forward. Inertia, once an obstacle, can become the

very force propelling us towards authentic choices and a more fulfilling life.

When we develop productive (rather than destructive) habits or routines – for example, exercising first thing in the morning, eating the same nutritious breakfast, taking the same hyper-efficient route to work each day – inertia is our friend, keeping us grounded and committed and consistent.

Marshall Goldsmith

2. Subconscious programming

Reflecting on my own experiences, I recall how, early on, my mother envisioned a specific path for me: that of either a doctor or an engineer. In the prevailing societal view at the time, these professions were lauded as paragons of prestige, promising financial security

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and social recognition.

While I ultimately diverged from this prescribed route, the influence of my mother's early programming lingered. I found myself making academic and career choices based on criteria that weren't truly my own – selecting universities based on competitive admission scores, seeking career paths that promised rapid promotions and higher salaries.

The underlying, often unacknowledged, motivation was not genuine passion or deep-seated contentment, but rather a desire to impress others, to “earn” respect and validation through external achievements – echoes of that initial programming subtly shaping my decisions.

This personal anecdote, I believe, touches upon a fundamental aspect of human experience: **we are all, to varying de-**

grees, products of subconscious programming - the beliefs, values, patterns of thought, and emotional responses imprinted upon us from a young age, whether by childhood experiences, parental messages (both explicit & implicit), cultural norms, societal expectations, repeated exposure to certain narratives, etc.

From the moment we are born, we are absorbing messages about ourselves, about the world, and about what is considered valuable, acceptable, and desirable. These “ideas”, repeated and reinforced over time, become deeply embedded in [our subconscious](#), forming a kind of internal operating system that silently guides our perceptions, reactions, and ultimately, our choices.

Most of the time, we are not aware of how our subconscious is at play every day. We may believe we are making rational

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decisions, carefully weighing our options, when in reality, we are only acting out pre-scripted programs, responding to deeply ingrained patterns of thought and feeling.

This programming plays a major role in shaping our preferences, desires, fears, aspirations, and even the perception of what options are available to us in the first place. It limits our perceived options, steers us towards decisions that align with it, and leads us down paths that, while perhaps externally successful, may ultimately feel hollow or unfulfilling.



Examples:

- **Beliefs about self-worth:** Programmed beliefs about one's inherent value ("I'm not good enough," "I need to prove myself") may drive choices aimed at seeking external validation rather than internal fulfillment.
- **Limiting beliefs about capabilities:** Ingrained notions about one's talents and limitations ("I'm not creative," "I'm not good with people") may discourage the pursuit of paths that genuinely resonate but seem "out of reach".
- **Preconceived roles and expectations:** Societal or familial programming about gender, career, or relationship roles ("Women should be caregivers," "Men should be providers," "Success means climbing the corporate ladder") is a common cause of choices that conform to these scripts rather than authen-

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tic desires.

- **Conditioned responses:** Subconscious programs around how to react to achievement and setbacks (fear of success, fear of failure, self-sabotage, perfectionism) can significantly impact the ability to make decisions and pursue meaningful goals.

Becoming aware of one's subconscious programming is the crucial first step in navigating this challenge. We should recognize the ingrained patterns that may be subtly directing our choices, often without our conscious knowledge or consent. Only then can we begin to question these assumptions, evaluate their validity, and actively choose to rewrite the scripts that no longer serve us.

3. Weak emotional regulation

Let us revisit the tragic saga of Anakin Skywalker – specifically,

how it presents a stark illustration of how unchecked emotions can derail even the most promising of destinies.

While his story is complex, a key thread running through Anakin's downfall is his struggle with emotional regulation. His turn to the dark side wasn't a sudden event, but a gradual erosion fueled by:

- A consuming fear of loss, amplified by past trauma;
- A simmering distrust of authority, born from perceived betrayal;
- The intoxicating allure of forbidden love, creating internal conflict; and
- An underlying emotional instability, leaving him vulnerable to manipulation.

Reflecting on the story of Anakin, I can see how fear, especially the fear of loss, has the power to distort judgment, and how emotions, when left un-

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controlled, make one susceptible to destructive decisions.

Every day, our choices are driven by a myriad of fears.

- **The fear of failure** prevents us from pursuing challenging but potentially rewarding paths. For instance, being afraid of not succeeding in a new venture might keep someone stuck in a dissatisfying job, even when their inner compass points towards entrepreneurship.
- **The fear of missing out (FOMO)**, particularly amplified in our hyper-connected digital age, is a major cause of impulsive decisions. When we are anxious about being “left behind”, we are tempted to accept commitments or purchases that don’t truly align with our priorities, simply to keep pace with perceived social trends.

- **Regret aversion** also distorts our choices in the present. Driven by the desire to avoid future regret, someone might stay in a comfortable but stagnant situation, even if that stagnation is itself a source of deep-seated unhappiness.

When we consistently fail to pause, reflect, and regulate our emotional responses, our choices become reactive rather than responsive. As a result, we become susceptible to:

- **Impulsive decisions:** Overwhelmed by immediate emotions, we might make rash choices without considering long-term consequences. For example, anger in a conflict makes us utter harsh words that damage a valuable relationship; anxiety about finances might trigger a hasty, poorly researched investment decision.

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- **Avoidance:** Anxiety often drives us to avoid uncomfortable situations. The fear of vulnerability might lead to intentionally avoiding intimate relationships; while the fear of [public speaking](#) might prevent someone from pursuing a job that requires presentations, even if they are passionate about it.
- **Manipulation susceptibility:** As seen in Anakin's story, weak emotional regulation makes us vulnerable to external influences – whether it's manipulative marketing preying on our insecurities, or charming individuals exploiting our fears.



4. Self-denial

Another formidable obstacle in the path of making authentic life choices is self-denial – the often-unconscious unwillingness to confront uncomfortable truths and deal with their consequences. It's a subtle form of evasion, a way we shield ourselves from realities we'd rather not face, even when those realities are crucial for our growth and well-being.

In his bestseller “[What got you here won't get you there](#)”, world-class [coach](#), Dr. Marshall Goldsmith discusses our self-denial tendency as follows:

I am in my late 50s. At my age, the most important feedback I need is called an annual physical examination. As feedback, it's literally life-or-death information. I managed to avoid this feedback for seven years. It's not easy to avoid

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a doctor's visit for seven years, but I did it by telling myself, "I will get a physical after I go on my 'healthy foods' diet. I will get the exam after I begin my exercise program. I will get that exam after I get in shape."

Who was I kidding? The doctor? My family? Myself?

Have you ever avoided a physical exam and told yourself the same thing?

How about a trip to the dentist? After putting off the appointment as long as possible, do you orchestrate a frenzy of dental flossing two days before visiting the dentist's office?

Admittedly, a little bit of the impulse behind this behavior is our need to achieve. We want to score well in the doctor's or dentist's 'test', so we prepare for it.

*However, a much bigger reason for this behavior is our need to **hide from the truth** – often from what we already know. We know we need to visit a doctor or dentist, but we don't because we might not want to hear what he has to say. We figure if we don't seek out bad news about our health or teeth, there can't be any bad news.*

We do the same in our personal life. For example, when I'm working in a large sales organization, I always throw a spot quiz at the sales force.

"Does your company teach you to ask customers for feedback?" A chorus of yeses.

"Does it work? Does it teach you where you need to improve?" Another yes chorus.

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*Then I focus on the men:
“How many times do you do
this at home? That is, ask
your wife, ‘What can I do to
be a better partner?’ ”*

No yes chorus. Just silence.

*“Do you men believe this
stuff?” I ask. Back to the yes
chorus. “Of course!” they
say in unison.*

*“Well, I presume your wife is
more important to you than
your customers, right?”
They nod.*

*“So why don’t you do it at
home?”*

*I can see their collective
wheels turning as the truth
dawns on them: **They’re
afraid of the answer.***

*It might hit too close to
home. And, worse, then
they’d have to do
something about it.*

*We do the same with the
truth about our interper-
sonal flaws. We figure if we
don’t ask for critiques of our
behavior, then no one has
anything critical to say.*

*This thinking defies logic. It
has to stop. **You are better
off finding out the truth
than being in denial.***

I have to confess, I myself am no exception to this tendency towards self-denial. I often find myself engaging in a similar kind of pre-emptive “good behavior” before facing external evaluations. For instance, the frantic flossing ritual before a dentist visit – a burst of dental hygiene after months of neglect.

The ugly truth is: I care less about genuine care for my health and more about wanting to “pass the test,” to present a façade of responsibility, to avoid the discomfort of facing

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my own lack of consistent self-care.

This unwillingness to face uncomfortable truths poses a significant challenge to making authentic life choices. It operates as a subtle form of procrastination, not just delaying action, but **delaying awareness** itself. It manifests when we:

- Avoid confronting a difficult career decision, a strained relationship, or a health issue by staying busy with less important tasks, or simply distracting ourselves.
- Create elaborate stories to explain away inconsistencies between our actions and our values, or to justify choices that are driven by fear or comfort rather than genuine desire. “I’m staying in this unfulfilling job for the stability,” even when the real reason is fear of change. “I’m not

prioritizing my health right now because I’m too busy with work,” even when the real reason is a lack of self-discipline.

- Resist introspection, dismiss constructive criticism, and surround ourselves with people who only offer validation.
- Make decisions based on **how we wish things were**, rather than **how they actually are** (e.g. staying in a failing business because of wishful thinking and denial of market realities).

5. Greediness

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood.
And sorry I could not travel both.*

Robert Frost

Life often presents us with diverging paths, and the very act of choosing one inevitably

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means forgoing others. Yet, a significant challenge in making authentic life choices stems from our tendency to resist this reality, from a subtle voice that whispers we can – and perhaps should – try to travel all roads, to achieve all goals, to become, impossibly, “perfect.”

This insidious form of greediness is often amplified by the curated realities of social media, which bombard us with images of seemingly flawless lives and endless possibilities. In this environment, it’s easy to succumb to the affliction – or [klesha](#), as it is known in Buddhist philosophy – of wanting more, of feeling perpetually inadequate, of chasing an ever-receding ideal of perfection.

We begin to believe we need to excel in every domain, to embody every desirable attribute, to become the “perfect” version of ourselves, a mirage constantly fueled by external comparisons

and idealized online personas.

Dr. Marshall Goldsmith offers a grounding counterpoint to this perfectionistic trap as follows:

*You can’t be and don’t have to be all things to all people. If there were a list of 39 successful attributes for the model executive, I would never argue that you have to be the perfect expression of all 39 of them. All you need are a few of them. No matter how many of the 39 attributes you don’t embody, the real question is, **how bad is the problem? Is it bad enough that it merits fixing?***

If not, don’t worry about it. You’re doing fine.

I take great comfort in the fact that Michael Jordan, to many the best basketball player to ever play the game, was a mediocre

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baseball player in the minor leagues and, as a golfer, would have a tough time keeping up with at least twenty golfers who live within an 800 yard radius of my home in San Diego.

If Michael Jordan, a preternaturally superb athlete and competitor – in fact, the benchmark for other basketball players – could only excel at one sport, what makes you think you can do better?

It's crucial to recognize the absurdity of this perfectionistic tendency. Accepting imperfection isn't an excuse for mediocrity or for poor choices; it's just an embrace of reality – an acknowledgment of our finite nature, limited time and energy, and the simple truth that we cannot be all things, do all things, or have all things.

For example, accepting imper-

fection in career choices does not mean settling for a job you **ACTIVELY** dislike. Instead, it means realistically prioritizing what truly matters to you in a career – perhaps meaningful work, [work-life balance](#), creative expression, or intellectual challenge – and internalizing the fact that you might not find a role that perfectly fulfills every possible criterion (high salary, ultimate prestige, minimal stress, complete creative freedom, etc.).



Another facet of greediness that hinders authentic choices is our often-insatiable desire for **immediate gratification**. Given that we now live in an era of instant access and on-demand ful-

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fillment, it's easy for this conditioning to seep into our approach to life decisions. For instance, we may embark on a fitness journey expecting rapid transformations, and become discouraged and give up when progress is slow and requires sustained effort.

Or, someone pursuing a dream of becoming a writer might abandon it after facing initial rejections, unwilling to endure the prolonged process of honing their craft and navigating the inevitable setbacks.

This impatience, this craving for instant rewards, stems from a kind of greediness – **a desire to reap the fruits of our choices without fully investing the necessary time, effort, and perseverance.**

6. Lack of boundaries

Recently, an old friend of mine recounted her struggles with a

direct report – a talented but cynical individual who consistently clashed with colleagues, convinced that everyone, especially the general manager, was self-serving and held personal animosity towards him.

After listening to her account, I suggested to my friend that perhaps it was simply her direct report's choice; hence, she need to accept and work around it. However, my friend immediately recoiled at the idea.

“I can't just let him be like that,” she insisted.

I could not help but reflect on a shared human inclination: the tendency to believe, often unconsciously, that **we are the center of our own, and sometimes even others', universes** – that we have a responsibility to intervene, to judge, to meddle in matters that may not actually be ours to control or even influence.

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This inflated sense of self-importance, this confusion about the boundaries of our own roles, can significantly cloud our judgment and complicate the decision-making process.

Back in the day, I came across [this story](#) shared by pastor Carey Nieuwhof:

Before ministry, I was a lawyer. In first-year law, I remember having a crisis because I couldn't imagine representing a client I believed might be guilty.

I stayed after class one day to talk to my criminal law professor about it. He assured me of a few things. First, if your client tells you he's guilty, you can't ethically enter a non-guilty plea.

That made me feel better.

But then he told me that almost every client says

they're not guilty.

I got nervous again.

"Well, what if you think he's guilty but he says he's not ... doesn't that put you in a horrible bind?"

I'll never forget his answer.

"You're confusing your role, Carey. You're not the judge. You're his lawyer. Your job is – ethically, morally and legally – to give him the best day he can possibly have in court. The judge will decide whether he's guilty or not."

I felt like the weight of the world was lifted off my shoulders.

When we are unclear about where our responsibilities begin and end, when we overstep our boundaries or neglect our actual duties in favor of mis-

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placed ones, we inevitably **invite judgment** – both of ourselves and of others. We judge others for not living up to our expectations, for making choices we wouldn't make, or for simply being different. And then we judge ourselves harshly for perceived failures, for not meeting unrealistic standards, or for not controlling outcomes that are inherently beyond our control.

At the same time, believing we are responsible for fixing others or controlling situations that are outside our purview, we are likely to become **overly involved in others' lives**, offering unsolicited advice, imposing our opinions, and blurring healthy boundaries.

We become fixated on controlling external factors while neglecting the internal work of self-discovery (thereby coming up with decisions that we regret later).

7. “What if...” thinking

A few days ago, I happened to stumble upon [this post on Reddit](#):

I'm just a year shy of 40. I'm lucky enough to live in a city I love, I have a partner that I love and that loves me back. We have our challenges but for the most part, we enjoy our lives and it seems to work great 80% of the time. I have a job that pays well, considering I'm in a field I like, though that too has it's challenges (and it's definitely more intense than I want right now and I'm dealing with a very difficult set of circumstances.) And I have friends and a decent social life. I kept waiting for the urge to have kids, and it has yet to emerge. Though of course the doubt that comes with not doing something that many seem to do as the default

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comes up sometimes.

I say all this to say that by all objective measures, life is good. Not perfect, but better than I deserve (after all, having a good life is just about as pure dumb luck and circumstances of birth as anything else.) And yet ...some days, like today, I find myself devastatingly sad, grasping at straws, unhappy about an unarmed cause of unhappiness that makes me question if I just made some bad life choices. What if I'm wrong about everything? What if I was supposed to be living a totally different life?

It feel so pathetic to feel this way at this age, like a cowardice of sorts having built a life and question it. Or is questioning just a side effect of being an adult where we pick a path and walk on it and hope it's the

right one?

Do others ever feel that way? Or am I being entitled and ungrateful?

The persistent hum of “what if...” thinking is, indeed, one of the most pervasive and subtly corrosive challenges to making peace with one’s life choices. It is a form of mental counterfactualizing where we endlessly replay past decisions and project ourselves into alternate realities, questioning whether we chose the “right” path, whether we missed out on better opportunities, whether our lives could have been different, and perhaps, *better*.

What if I had taken that different job offer? What if I had stayed in that past relationship? What if I had moved to a different city? What if I had pursued that other passion?

Such thinking, if done repeat-

3.1. CHALLENGES OF MAKING LIFE CHOICES

edly, erodes contentment with the decisions we did make, fuels anxieties about the past and future, and distracts us from fully engaging with the present. It erodes confidence in our inner compass, making it harder to trust our judgment and commit wholeheartedly to the paths we do choose.

Challenges of Making Choices



Inertia & procrastination



Subconscious programming



Weak emotional regulation



Self-denial



Greediness



Lack of boundaries



“What if...” thinking

3.2. HANDLING THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY

*Where your treasure is,
there your heart will be
also.*

As a kid, I first came across this quote in the novel *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. However, I didn't quite get what it means, partially because of a somewhat ambiguous translation in my local edition, one that likely missed the quote's true origin and significance (I assume that the translator was not familiar with it at all).

Years later, I discovered that it is a Biblical quote (Matthew 6:21), that it is also featured in other literary works (e.g. Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*). And that there are layers of very deep meaning embedded within it.

For those who are not familiar with the Harry Potter series, this quote is [inscribed by Professor Dumbledore on his mother and sister's grave](#). Young Dumbledore, brilliant and am-

bitious, forged a bond with Gellert Grindelwald, a charismatic but ultimately dangerous wizard. Consumed by a shared vision of wizarding dominance, Dumbledore, in his youthful desire for recognition, allowed himself to be swayed by Grindelwald's ideology.

The choice to align himself with Grindelwald, to prioritize the allure of power and fame, came at a devastating cost to his family. His sister, Ariana, tragically died during a three-way duel involving Albus, his brother Aberforth, and Gellert. After the incident, Grindelwald fled, while the chasm between Albus and Aberforth deepened and became nearly unmendable.

And Dumbledore, for the rest of his life, lived with profound regret over his decision – how his act of prioritizing ambition and power over love and responsibility has cost him everything. It was this regret that drove him

3.2. HANDLING THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY

to inscribe the quote above onto his mother and sister's grave – as a reminder of the price of his choices.

I was her favourite – not Albus, he was always up in his bedroom when he was home, reading his books and counting his prizes, keeping up his correspondence with ‘the most notable magical names of the day.’

Abeforth Dumbledore

As you may see from the story of Dumbledore, our choices, especially significant ones, are never made in a vacuum. They ripple outwards, impacting not only ourselves but also the lives of those we cherish and the world around us.

In the immediate rush of decision-making, far too often, we neglect this weight of responsibility. And yet, being aware of it

is a crucial facet of navigating life's complex choices authentically.



Have you ever heard about a phenomenon called “[the butterfly effect](#)”? Originating from chaos theory, it speaks about how seemingly small initial conditions are capable of triggering vast and unpredictable consequences in complex systems.

Imagine a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil, and theoretically, this tiny action could contribute to the formation of a tornado in Texas weeks later.

While perhaps an oversimplification, the core principle reso-

3.2. HANDLING THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY

nates deeply with the nature of life choices: **our actions, however insignificant they seem in the moment, can set in motion chains of events that ripple outwards in ways we can scarcely foresee.** This is particularly true for life-altering decisions, where the stakes and potential repercussions are significantly magnified.

Perhaps no story exemplifies the idea more profoundly than that of [J. Robert Oppenheimer](#). Often hailed as the “father of the atomic bomb,” Oppenheimer was a brilliant theoretical physicist who led the Manhattan Project during World War II.

Driven by the urgent need to end the war and fearing Nazi Germany’s potential to develop nuclear weapons first, Oppenheimer and his team embarked on a monumental scientific undertaking. They succeeded in creating the atomic bomb, a technological marvel that

fundamentally changed the course of history.

However, the immediate aftermath of their success was devastating. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki resulted in unimaginable death and destruction, instantly obliterating cities and leaving lasting scars on generations.

Beyond the immediate tragedy, Oppenheimer’s creation ushered in the nuclear age and the chilling reality of the Cold War, a decades-long standoff fueled by the threat of global annihilation.

Oppenheimer, initially driven by a sense of duty and scientific urgency, was deeply unprepared for the sheer magnitude of these consequences.

As he witnessed the horrifying power unleashed by his creation, a profound moral dilemma took root. He famous-

3.2. HANDLING THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY

ly quoted the Bhagavad Gita, lamenting:

*Now I am become Death,
the destroyer of worlds.*

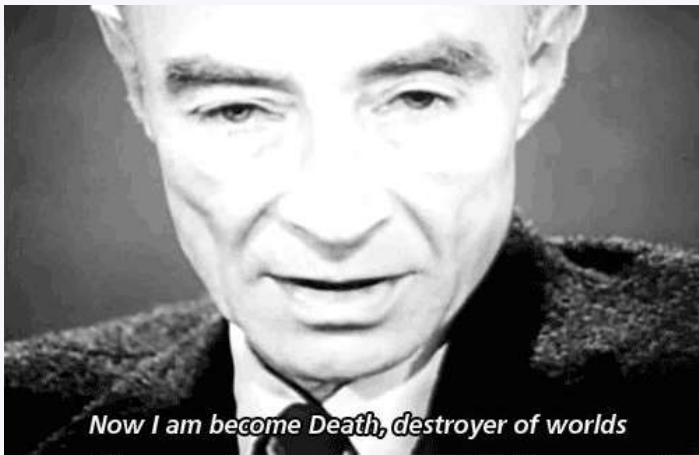


Image source: [Pinterest](#)

Oppenheimer came to realize the immense weight of the responsibility he & his team bore. In the years following the war, he became a vocal advocate for international control of atomic energy and against the further development of even more destructive weapons like the hydrogen bomb. He denounced the bombing of Nagasaki, expressed deep regret for the devastating consequences of the technology he had unleashed,

and worked tirelessly to mitigate the very dangers he had helped bring into existence.

From Oppenheimer's story, we can see how a decision made within the confines of a laboratory has unleashed a chain reaction of global proportions, impacting millions and shaping the geopolitical landscape for decades to come. A very vivid demonstration of the impact of certain life-altering decisions, particularly those made on a grand scale with global implications.

But the butterfly effect and the weight of responsibility are not confined to world-altering historical events. They are at play in our personal lives as well.

For example, let's say you decide to start a new business. While seemingly a personal endeavor, it creates jobs, impacts families, influences local economies, and potentially introdu-

3.2. HANDLING THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY

ces new products or services into the world.

Or, think about choosing a life partner. A seemingly personal decision – yet it has profound ripple effects, shaping not only your own future but also that of your partner, your potential children, and your extended families.

Even seemingly trivial choices, like how we treat a colleague, raise a child, or engage in our communities, contribute to a complex web of interconnected consequences.

How then, do we navigate life with this awareness, without becoming paralyzed by fear or overwhelmed by the potential for unforeseen outcomes?

The key, I believe, lies not in avoiding responsibility, but in **embracing it consciously and thoughtfully**. In other words, we need to be mindful in the

process of decision-making – taking the time to consider the potential ripple effects of our choices, both intended and unintended, to the best of our ability.

It's about acting with **consideration for others**, acknowledging our interconnectedness, and striving to make choices that contribute to a more positive and responsible community, **within our sphere of influence**.

And ultimately, it's about **accepting the inherent uncertainty of life**. We cannot foresee every consequence, nor can we control every outcome. But we can control our intentions, efforts, and commitment to making choices with integrity.

Just as Dumbledore, burdened by his past, dedicated his life to protecting the wizarding world, and Oppenheimer, grappling with the legacy of the atomic

3.2. HANDLING THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY

bomb, worked for peace, we too can strive to do the same. To live responsibly, not like an isolated “island”.

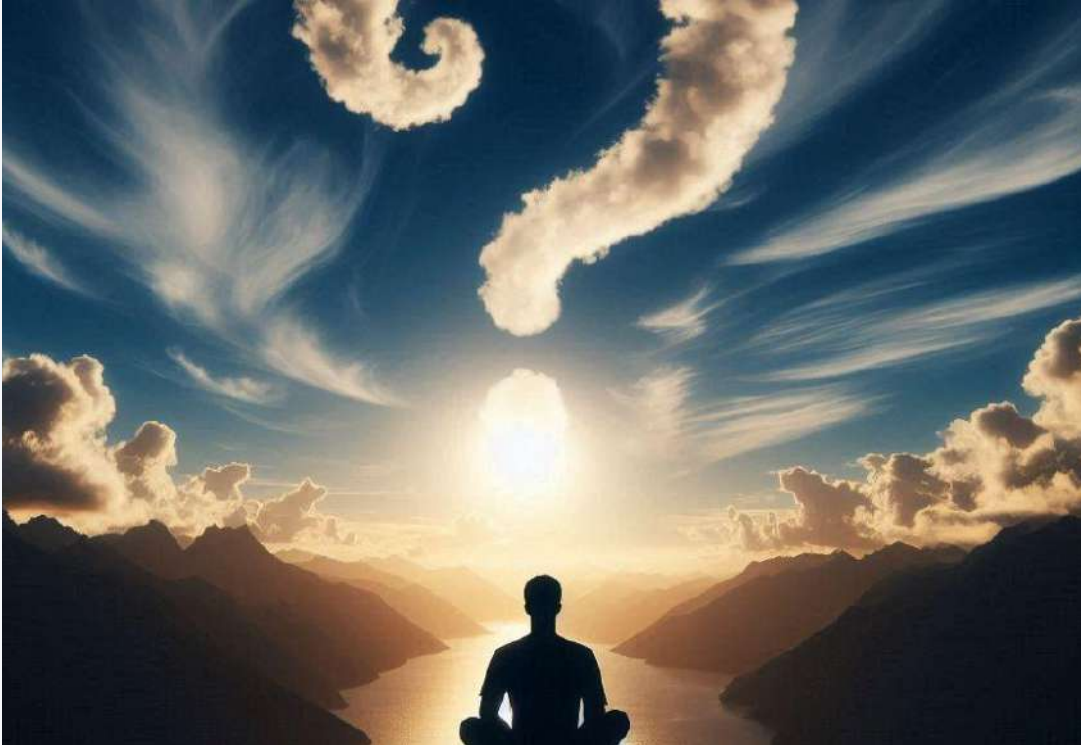
**Life is about choices.
Some we regret, some we're proud of.
Some will haunt us forever.
The message: we are what we chose to be.**

Graham Brown



“He chose poorly” – Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade
Image source: imgflip.com

THE ART OF CHOOSING



**To make the right choices
in life, you have to get
in touch with your soul.**

Deepak Chopra

4.1. HOW TO MAKE BETTER LIFE CHOICES

1. Carve out time for self-reflection

Navigating the labyrinth of life choices, as we've explored, is fraught with complexities, from internal inertia to external pressures. The first step to making better decisions, therefore, lies in cultivating a mindful awareness of ourselves, our inner landscape, and the direction we truly wish to travel.

What got you HERE?

Consider spending time examining your internal landscape – i.e. your values, beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses. Take stock of your current situation, including both the positive foundations and the limiting aspects that have shaped your path. Try to deduce the principles that have been inherently guiding you, as well as any potential subconscious programs/ troublesome habits that might be steering you away

from the paths you wish to take.

Now, let's say you reflect on your career path and realize the following things:

- **Core values:** “Helping others and making a tangible positive impact on the world are really important to me. I see this thread in my volunteer work and even my hobbies.” (Guiding principle)
- **Positive beliefs:** “I've always believed in my ability to learn new skills and adapt to challenges. This has allowed me to take on different roles and grow.” (Strength-based belief)
- **Limiting beliefs:** “Deep down, I sometimes believe I don't deserve significant financial success. This might be why I haven't aggressively pursued promotions or higher-paying opportunities, even when I was qualified.” (A

4.1. HOW TO MAKE BETTER LIFE CHOICES

potential subconscious program – stemming perhaps from childhood messages about wealth)

- **Weaknesses/habits:** “I tend to avoid conflict and difficult conversations. This has sometimes led to me staying in uncomfortable situations longer than I should, rather than addressing them directly.” (A potentially [troublesome habit](#) – conflict avoidance)

What will get you THERE?

With a solid foundation of self-understanding, we can then turn to the next question:

“What do I truly want, and why?”

Think about your genuine desires, beyond external expectations or ingrained programming – as well as the underlying motivations, whether they stem from authentic needs or fleet-

ing whims/ external validation seeking.

After that, assess the necessary steps, resources, and commitments required to bridge the gap between your current reality and your desired future. This is not about crafting an elaborate five-year plan, but rather gaining a clearer sense of direction and the realistic effort involved in pursuing it – translating abstract desires into actionable steps.



Let's continue with the career example above. Having reflected on “what got you here,” now it's time to consider “what will get you there”:

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- **“What do I want?”** => “I realize I’m no longer fulfilled in my current corporate role. I yearn for work that directly helps people and aligns with my value of making a positive impact.” (A genuine desire beyond current reality)
- **“Why do I want it?”** => “Because I feel a deep sense of purpose and satisfaction when I’m helping others directly. External validation and high salaries don’t bring me lasting contentment. I want to feel like my work matters in a meaningful way.” (Authentic motivations beyond external markers)
- **“What will it realistically take?”** => “To transition to a more purpose-driven career, I’ll need to research non-profit organizations, perhaps take some courses in social work or counseling, network with people in those fields, and realis-

tically accept a potential initial salary decrease. It will take time, effort, and a willingness to step outside my comfort zone.” (Translating desire into actionable steps and realistic considerations – acknowledging effort and potential trade-offs)

Ask basic questions

For those new to the practice of [self-questioning](#), starting with ‘basic questions’ is an incredibly powerful move. As executive coach [Marshall Goldsmith](#) [has pointed out](#), while grand [existential questions](#) like “What is the [meaning of life?](#)” are indeed valuable, effective self-reflection for immediate choices often boils down to simpler, more focused inquiries.

For example:

- Do I love my partner?
- Who are my stakeholders?

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- Is this approach realistically workable?
- Where have I gone astray in similar situations before?

These ‘basic questions’ aren’t simplistic; instead, they are direct, pointed, and demand honest introspection.

While seemingly straightforward, they require a deep and honest assessment of facts, abilities, and intentions, eliciting the “hard-core truth” about our feelings and aspirations.

Let’s say you are considering a new job offer in a fast-paced, demanding environment, similar to past roles. You wonder “Should I accept it or not?”

- **Initial answer:** “This job is exciting and high-profile! I’m ready for a new challenge!”
- **Past facts:** “In the last two high-pressure jobs, I burned out within 2 years. My

health suffered, and my relationships strained.”

- **Past abilities (and limitations):** “I know I can handle high pressure for short bursts, but I struggle to sustain it long-term without sacrificing my well-being. My strength is in strategic thinking, not constant fire-fighting.”
- **Past intentions (vs. actual outcomes):** “My intention in the past was career advancement and financial security. But the outcome was chronic stress and dissatisfaction, even with the ‘success.’”
- **Eliciting “hard-core truth”:** “Deep down, I dread the thought of repeating that burnout cycle. My gut is telling me this ‘exciting challenge’ is just another shiny object distracting me from my real need for sustainable work-life balance. Am I running towards recognition again

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– away from the lessons of my past?”

This example demonstrates how reflecting on past patterns through a basic question can reveal deep-seated motivations, unmet needs, and potentially self-sabotaging tendencies.

When viewed through various lenses, a seemingly simple “yes/no” question can, indeed, trigger profound [self-discovery](#) and reveal deeper truths about one’s life.



The true value of self-reflection and questioning lies in its ability to help define one’s **personal decision criteria**. By clarifying

our values, acknowledging personal strengths and weaknesses, and prioritizing our genuine desires, we establish an internal compass to guide our choices. This compass becomes invaluable when faced with obstacles or challenges; it allows us to better stay aligned with our morals and values, ensuring that fears and doubts do not unduly sway our decisions.

For example, if work-life balance is a core value of yours, self-reflection will highlight choices that prioritize this, even if they mean forgoing a higher-paying but demanding role.

To further enhance the effectiveness of self-reflection, practices like journaling, mindful meditation, or even simply taking quiet walks in nature can be immensely helpful. [These activities](#) create a dedicated space for introspection, allowing us to detach from the immediate demands of daily life and connect

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with our inner voice. As such, we may better foster the clarity and self-awareness essential for making better life choices.

2. Contemplate potential consequences

Once we have engaged in self-reflection and begun to clarify our inner compass, the next crucial step in making sound life choices is to thoughtfully contemplate the potential consequences of each available path. This involves carefully analyzing the ripple effects of our decisions, weighing different alternatives, and considering both the immediate and long-term ramifications.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees

it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

Luke 14:28-30

This quote, despite its religious context, demonstrates a fundamental truth: **prudent decision-making requires careful planning and a realistic assessment of what each course of action entails** – the resources required, the potential obstacles, and the likelihood of achieving the desired outcome. In essence, it's about weighing the potential costs and benefits before committing to a path, ensuring one is prepared for the journey ahead.

Beyond practical considerations, we also need to reflect on the ethical and existential outcomes of our actions. This means going beyond merely personal gains and losses – to take into account the broader impact of our choices on others

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and on the kind of person we aspire to be. In other words, it's about adopting a more responsible and values-driven approach to decision-making.

“How will this choice affect the well-being of those around me?”

“Is this action aligned with principles of fairness, compassion, and integrity?”

“What kind of future am I creating for myself and others with this decision?”

“Does this path contribute to a [life of purpose](#) and meaning?”

The challenge of contemplating consequences is particularly evident in interpersonal interactions. For example, recently I found myself frequently visiting my sister's home to offer support as she navigated the demanding realities of caring for a newborn while juggling house-

work and a demanding office job. The immense stress often led to outbursts of anger and frustration, sometimes seemingly without direct cause.

In those moments, I faced a choice: react with my own frustration and anger – after all, her responses often seemed irrational and unfair – or choose to [remain calm and offer a silent, supportive presence](#).

While the first choice might feel momentarily justified, the long-term repercussions would be detrimental. It would escalate conflict, damage our relationship, and ultimately offer no constructive solution.

On the other hand, choosing instead to stay calm and silent, though initially challenging, preserved harmony and offered a space for her emotions to subside without further escalation.

And as I reflect on this experi-

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ence, I cannot help but realize another simple truth: **while negative emotions are often intense, they are also IMPERMANENT and will eventually pass.**

The consequences of our actions, however, particularly in interpersonal contexts, are not so easily undone.



As Wayne W. Dyer has stated:

If you have the choice between being right and being kind, choose being kind.

Prioritizing kindness over the fleeting satisfaction of “being right”, as it happens, often leads to more positive and enduring outcomes.

Making such a choice is not an easy feat though. It requires patience, emotional maturity, and a willingness to confront potentially uncomfortable truths about ourselves and our situations. This is why [spiritual practices](#) that cultivate inner stillness and self-awareness, like meditation, journaling, thoughtful reflection, or prayer, are invaluable aids.

We can let the circumstances of our lives harden us so that we become increasingly resentful and afraid, or we can let them soften us and make us kinder and more open to what scares us. We always have this choice.

Pema Chödrön

3. Limit your life options

As we explored earlier with the Paradox of Choice, an abundance of options, rather than li-

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berating us, quite often leads to problems such as analysis paralysis, increased anxiety, and decreased satisfaction.

Therefore, a surprisingly practical approach to navigating life's crossroads is to **consciously limit the available options**.

Limiting options is not about self-deprivation or settling for less; rather, it's about **strategic focus and intentional simplification**. It means consciously filtering out choices that are trivial, distracting, or misaligned with our deeply considered direction.

For example, if self-reflection has revealed that meaningful work and work-life balance are core priorities, you should consciously limit your career search to roles within non-profit or purpose-driven organizations, even if higher-paying corporate positions are technically "options."

This also means letting go of the tyranny of minor decisions. Do you truly need to spend excessive time agonizing over which outfit to wear each day, or which brand of coffee to buy? These trivial questions, while seemingly insignificant, may significantly contribute to decision fatigue and distract us from more meaningful considerations.

This act of conscious limitation aligns perfectly with the wisdom of Stoic philosophers, who long advocated for focusing one's attention and energy on what truly matters and what lies within one's reach.

You always own the option of having no opinion. There is never any need to get worked up or to trouble your soul about things you can't control. Leave them alone.

Marcus Aurelius

4.1. HOW TO MAKE BETTER LIFE CHOICES

Worrying excessively about fleeting social trends, comparing ourselves endlessly to others' curated online lives, or fretting over hypothetical "what ifs" about paths not taken – these are examples of mental energy spent on things largely outside one's control and often of little true consequence. By consciously choosing to disregard these distractions, we free up mental space and emotional bandwidth for more worthy considerations and deliberate action.



At a deeper level, limiting life options fosters a detached mindset – a release from the grip of greediness. It cultivates a recognition of the imperma-

nence of all things and the importance of fully engaging with the present moment – rather than chasing every fleeting possibility.

When we intentionally reduce the constant clamor of endless choices, we lessen the pull of insatiable desire and create space for wisdom to flourish.

Long ago, philosophers like Lao Tzu proposed a principle called [Wuwei](#) (無為), which is often translated as “non-action” or “effortless action.” Rather than advocating passivity, it encourages individuals to act from a place of clarity and alignment, free from the frantic pursuit of every conceivable option.

For example, imagine a skilled craftsman who focuses their mastery on a specific art form, rather than diluting their efforts across multiple crafts. In doing so, they give themselves a better chance to cultivate deep

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expertise and artistry.

Similarly, in life choices, by intentionally narrowing our field of options, we create the conditions for deeper engagement, greater clarity, and ultimately, wiser decisions that we are less likely to regret later.

We do better with fewer choices, not more.

Marshall Goldsmith

4. Seek support & feedback

While one's life journey is ultimately a deeply personal one, it need not – and arguably should not – be a solitary endeavor. Just as we benefit from external perspectives when navigating complex maps, we can significantly enhance our decision-making process by [seeking help](#) from trusted sources.

As the saying goes, “Two heads are better than one”. We can,

and indeed should, confide in individuals we [trust](#) enough to offer guidance and insight, helping us avoid potential blind spots.

Those in your circle of support can be anyone: a close friend who knows you deeply, a loved one whose wisdom you value, a manager who understands your professional aspirations, or a mentor who has navigated similar life crossroads. Ideally, they should be not only close enough to comprehend your inner world – but also willing to act as your **accountability partner** (i.e. someone whose role is to offer advice, ongoing support, encouragement, and gentle reminders to help you stay committed to your chosen path).

Indeed, even experienced professionals are no exception to the need for help from a third party. [Even coaches benefit from having their own coaches](#), and it is not atypical at all for

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[psychologists to seek counsel from other psychologists.](#)

When three people meet, wisdom is exchanged.

Japanese Proverb

At the same time, it's crucial to recognize that while feedback is invaluable, it's not a replacement for one's own internal compass. We must strike a balance between external counsel and internal authority.

People, however well-intentioned, may not always possess an intimate understanding of our inner landscape – the desires, unspoken fears, and nuanced values that we ourselves hold. Besides, the quality of external advice also hinges on the depth of the connection and attunement of the advisor. For instance, a friend who is consistently present in our lives, actively listens, and is attuned to our inner world might offer

much more insightful guidance than a well-meaning family member who, despite blood ties, may be more distant emotionally or practically.

In situations involving career choices deeply intertwined with personal values, a mentor who understands your professional field and your personality might provide more relevant advice than a close friend unfamiliar with the specific nuances of your industry, even if that friend is deeply caring and supportive in other areas of life.

Furthermore, it's important to be mindful of potential biases that may influence others' feedback. This is particularly relevant when seeking counsel from older generations, whose life experiences and worldviews are shaped by different times and circumstances.

While their wisdom and experience are invaluable, we must

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also be mindful of the fact that a fear of change – or prioritization of security and the familiar – might subtly color their advice, especially when we are considering unconventional paths. For instance, explaining the nuances of a modern “nomad” lifestyle – one without a stable full-time job – or a digitally-driven, location-independent career to them often proves to be a real challenge (and is likely to end up in a “disaster”).

Objectivity does not equate to omniscience.

In case you ever find yourself caught in a labyrinth of conflicting advice or struggling to reconcile external perspectives with your own inner voice, then it may be time to rely on your **intuition**, your “gut instincts”. As hard to believe as it may seem, [various studies have found out](#) – and concluded that relying on intuition, especially

when it comes to making hard decisions, quite often leads one down the right path.

5. Learn & unlearn

Life’s journey is rarely a straight line. Often, it feels more like a meandering path, filled with unexpected turns and seeming detours.

Looking back at my own trajectory, I can see this pattern clearly. Back in the day, I began my academic path studying International Business, a choice that, frankly, was not quite authentic (I might say).

And then somehow, I ended up pursuing a career path in the fast-paced digital landscape – a field quite removed from my initial degree.

Then, recently, driven by the realization of a deeper yearning for personal growth and purpose, I stepped away from the

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digital world to pursue something different. Something that concerns the human condition (which, as I figure now, is a combination of psychology and philosophy).

To an outside observer, this might appear as aimless wandering, a series of disconnected choices lacking a clear direction. And yet, I believe that **“Not all who wander are lost.”**

Reflecting on my seemingly circuitous professional path, I’ve come to realize the immense value of each stage. My business studies, while not directly leading to my current pursuits, instilled in me skills like critical thinking, an understanding of the globalized world – as well as of the limitations of a purely business-centric perspective on life’s bigger questions.

My time in the digital industry, though ultimately unfulfilling in the long term, taught me the

importance of constant learning, honed my research abilities, and trained me to evaluate information critically and develop logical reasoning.

These seemingly disparate experiences, viewed in retrospect, were not random detours – but rather essential lessons learned along the way, each contributing to the person I am today.



The core message I would like to discuss from my personal anecdote is: **one needs to be flexible and adaptable in navigating life’s choices.**

Life is not a rigid script; it’s a dynamic, ever-evolving narrative.

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We must be prepared to change course, adapt to new information, and embrace unexpected opportunities along the way.

Crucially, we must learn to release regret and self-pity when paths diverge or initial plans falter. Instead of [being obsessed with predefined goals](#) and viewing perceived “wrong choices” as failures, we can choose to see them as learning experiences, recognizing that even the most disheartening setbacks can be transformed into catalysts for unexpected triumphs.

If a chosen career path proves to be a dead end, why not re-train for a new field, leverage transferable skills, or start your own venture?

If a relationship doesn't unfold as hoped, just learn from the experience, spend some time for healing, and be open to new connections.

Don't be afraid of being “wrong.” Mistakes are not failures – but opportunities for growth and the cultivation of resilience, a truly invaluable trait in today's rapidly changing world. Do not be obsessed with [winning at all costs](#), under all circumstances.

The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails.

William Arthur Ward

Another crucial aspect of learning is the ability to **unlearn**. As Marshall Goldsmith has noted, “*What got you here won't get you there.*”

Skills, beliefs, and approaches that served us well in one phase of life may become limiting or even detrimental in another. Just as we actively learn new things, we must also be willing to shed outdated perspectives,

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limiting habits, and rigid attachments to past identities.



Image source: [Learn Religions](#)

Have you ever heard about the [Buddha's Raft Parable](#)? It tells about a man who builds a raft to cross a river. Once he has reached the other side, would he continue carrying the raft?

Surely not. The raft has served its purpose; now, he must let it go and move on, unburdened by what is no longer needed.

Similarly, in life, we must be willing to release tools, strategies, or even identities that were of use before – but are now holding us back from fur-

ther growth.

This act of letting go, of unlearning, is essential for continued progress.

To conclude, let us reflect on the story of "[The Magic Pebbles](#)".

One night a group of nomads were preparing to retire for the evening when suddenly they were surrounded by a great light. They knew they were in the presence of a celestial being. With great anticipation, they awaited a heavenly message of great importance that they knew must be especially for them.

Finally, the voice spoke, "Gather as many pebbles as you can. Put them in your saddle bags. Travel a day's journey and tomorrow night will find you glad and

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it will find you sad.”

After having departed, the nomads shared their disappointment with each other. They had expected the revelation of a great universal truth that would enable them to create wealth, health and purpose. But instead they were given a menial task that made no sense. However, the memory of the brilliance of their visitor caused each one to pick up a few pebbles and deposit them in their saddle bags while voicing their displeasure.

They traveled a day’s journey and that night while making camp, they reached into their saddle bags and discovered every pebble they had gathered had become a diamond. They were glad they had diamonds. They were sad they had not gathered more

pebbles.

This parable beautifully illustrates the often unforeseen value of seemingly insignificant choices and actions along our life path. As we journey forward, we can never fully know which “pebbles” – which experiences, choices, or efforts – will ultimately transform into “diamonds” – valuable lessons, unexpected opportunities, or fulfilling outcomes.

Therefore, the wisest approach is to **engage fully in the present moment**, embrace each experience as a potential learning opportunity, and trust that even seemingly insignificant choices can contribute to a richer, more meaningful and rewarding life journey.

Just as the nomads couldn’t foresee the diamonds, we too must have faith that by continuously learning and adapting, even when wandering without

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a clear map, we are collecting “pebbles” that will, in time, reveal their hidden worth.

It’s not the end goal, but the efforts that matter.

Love not what you are but only what you may become.

Miguel de Cervantes

(Btw, to better internalize this point, let us revisit [the Reddit post mentioned above](#), in which another user comments as follows:

I think part of the issue is the idea that there's some kind of point of arrival. That one day we'll wake up and go, yes, I "won" life, whatever that looks like to the individual. It gets sold that way in movies and TV and general Western culture because we probably just wish it was that damn

simple. Same for all the other iterations of the happily ever after feeling. Life seldom works out the way we think at the best of times. It's called the midlife crisis for a reason; instead of the desired feeling of completion, you get this ????? feeling, of everything being fine but doesn't feel fine, or fulfilling...or "suddenly" everything looks like a miserable shit show and it's time to change.

They say your life is about ambition pre-40ish and service post-40ish. It's around the time we have a generally good sense of ourselves, what we need, like, want. If lucky such as you have been, it can be time to use that experience to build something that'll help you leave the world a little better than you found it. That can be as big as a school or simple as a series

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of paintings. Point is that you at least try to develop what's next.

The lame thing about life is we (allegedly) get one shot to figure out a complex experience around a couple billion other people doing the same thing, in a body that starts crapping out around the time you're just getting "warmed up" in life. It's the ultimate blind shot to get everything "right" by the time you're 25 and get to live your dreams for the rest of your life. I used to work in publishing, and found it crazy making how many opportunities and programs were set up specifically for writers in their late 20s and younger, when many writers with anything of real poignance and depth to say to readers of any age, would be much older than that. Not for lack of talent, but just for sheer

time on earth, witnessing, feeling, developing. Same goes in many other areas of our capitalist life, a system that wants formulas and recipes for us all to fit into. And if we don't, it gets to sell us something to make us feel better.

I'm in my mid40s and I've travelled a ton, married, divorced, have been through some insane, insane shit both my fault and random, done many of the things I've wanted to do so far, never developed any vices, been ill, been very well-off and surrounded by friends, and now -- I'm homeless, unemployed, lost friends to post-pandemic fallouts of various kinds, and trying to figure out how to take care of my mom who's on the skids with me. I am in the dead last place I thought I'd be at by now. I believe things will turn

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around, given the efforts I'm putting in for us, but I've also started accepting that I might be wrong and this is it.

All we've got is now. And maybe a couple hours ahead. You might get stuff right, wrong, neither...what those words mean are fiercely individual. Whatever you do I hope you find peace and happiness that are authentic to you. You're the only person you ever have to answer to :) You know yourself pretty well by now it sounds like, and lord knows there's always more soul work to do. See where that takes you. You might end up somewhere fantastic.

6. Consider the Life Plan Review Method

For those seeking a more structured and proactive approach

to aligning their daily actions with their long-term aspirations, I recommend you try out the [Life Plan Review](#) (LPR) method, developed by renowned executive coach Marshall Goldsmith. This technique, detailed in his bestseller *The Earned Life*, provides a simple yet powerful framework for self-monitoring and course correction in the ongoing process of making meaningful life choices.

The LPR method operates on the premise that you have, through self-reflection, already defined what you want your life to be. Unlike many self-improvement systems that focus on grand motivational pronouncements or rigid habit formation, the LPR is less about achieving perfection every week – and more about **honestly assessing your level of TRYING.**

The core principle is that while external results may sometimes be beyond our direct control,

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our effort is always within our power. Consistent effort, directed towards meaningful goals, is the key to living a worthy life.

The LPR method is built around four key steps:

- **Weekly review**

Every week, reflect on your effort using the lead-in question: “Did I do my best to...?” followed by six sub-questions assessing your effort in [setting goals](#), making progress, finding meaning, being happy, building relationships, and being engaged. For each question, assign a score from 1 to 10 to reflect your effort, not just the results achieved (e.g. scoring your effort in trying to make progress on a work project, regardless of external approvals received that week).

- **Daily self-monitoring**

Between weekly reviews, track

your effort against the same six questions daily. This consistent self-monitoring helps identify patterns – areas where you are consistently struggling versus making progress – allowing for timely adjustments and increased self-awareness throughout the week.

- **Examine your overall life plan**

Use the weekly review to examine your overall life direction – whether you are making meaningful efforts towards it. Then, either recalibrate your efforts, or re-evaluate your objectives to ensure they remain aligned with your evolving aspirations.

For example, if you consistently score low on “making progress toward goals,” it’s time to re-view if your goals are still motivating – or if you need to break them down into smaller, more manageable steps.

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- **Don't do this alone**

Practice the LPR within a supportive community of like-minded individuals. Sharing your weekly reviews provides mutual accountability, encouragement, and learning opportunities.



7. Practice death

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life.

Steve Jobs

We will all cease to be someday. This awareness of humanity's mortality, encapsulated in the Latin phrase "[Memento Mori](#)"

(remember death) is not meant to be morbid or depressing. Instead, when embraced thoughtfully, it can become a profoundly liberating and clarifying force in making wiser life choices.

For centuries, the practice of contemplating death has been hailed in philosophical schools like Stoicism, as well as various spiritual traditions. It serves as a potent antidote to the illusion of limitless time and the distractions of trivial pursuits.

When we truly confront the reality of our limited lifespan, the relentless accumulation of material possessions, the pursuit of fleeting social validation, and the anxieties over minor social slights begin to lose their grip. These worldly concerns are, after all, impermanent and ultimately inconsequential.

Daily reflection on our mortality is key to shifting the focus from the superficial to the essential.

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To work on visualizing our vision, to prioritize what genuinely matters – meaningful relationships, purposeful contributions, qualities like courage and compassion – and to transcend this worldly existence (which can be understood from both spiritual and secular perspectives).

How to practice death:

- **Regular reflection:** Take a few moments each day, perhaps during meditation or journaling, to consciously consider your mortality. Ask yourself: “If my time were limited, how would I prioritize my day? What truly matters to me in the face of life’s finitude?”
- **“Best case/ worst case / realistic case” scenario planning, including end-of-life:** When making significant decisions, mentally fast-forward to the end of each potential path, even

considering the ultimate end. This helps clarify priorities and distinguish between fleeting desires and long-term values.

- **Visualizing your own funeral:** While potentially uncomfortable, this exercise is amazing for clarifying what kind of life you truly want to have lived and what legacy you wish to leave behind. What would you want people to say about you and your choices?

There’s something coming for all of us. It’s called death. Rather than fearing it, it can become one of our greatest counselors. So, if this was the last week of your life, what would you cherish most? How would you live? How would you love? What truth would you tell today?

Tony Robbins

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How to Make Better Choices



Spend time for self-reflection



Contemplate consequences



Limit your life options



Seek support & feedback



Learn & unlearn



Adopt the Life Plan Review Method



Practice death everyday



4.2. OVERCOMING REGRET IN MAKING CHOICES

I see it all perfectly; there are two possible situations – one can either do this or that. My honest opinion and my friendly advice is this: do it or do not do it – you WILL regret BOTH.

Søren Kierkegaard

Even with the most thoughtful and considered decision-making processes, a universal human experience remains: **regret**. Regardless of the path we choose, we are all subject to it, to a certain extent.

Where does regret come from?

Many times, it stems from the simple fact that choosing one path inherently means forgoing others – the “road not taken” often holds an allure of unrealized possibilities. We might regret career paths not pursued, relationships left uninitiated, or opportunities passed by, wondering “what if?”

Other times, regret is amplified by external pressures. As Ralph

Waldo Emerson has noted:

Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising that tempt you to believe that your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires courage.

External criticism, even when well-intentioned, can sow seeds of doubt and make us question our choices, especially when difficulties inevitably arise.

However, we need to be mindful of the fact that **nobody makes perfect choices all the time.**

4.2. OVERCOMING REGRET IN MAKING CHOICES

As discussed, life is a process of continuous learning and adjustment. Learning to deal with regret constructively, to forgive ourselves and others for perceived missteps, and to extract lessons from our mistakes are essential aspects of navigating life's choices with resilience and grace.

If a choice doesn't lead to the desired outcome, or if we find ourselves on a path we no longer wish to pursue, the empowering truth is: **we can always change course.**

What has happened has happened. Acceptance of the past is not resignation, but rather a foundation for moving forward with renewed intention and wisdom.

When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which

has been opened for us.

Helen Keller

Even in the face of significant setbacks or seemingly irreversible consequences, we retain a fundamental power: **the power to choose our attitude.**

No matter how difficult our current circumstances may be, hope for a better future, for personal growth, and for finding meaning remains.



Let us revisit Anakin Skywalker's journey in Star Wars. As you may have known by now, Anakin was a gifted individual who made a series of devastating choices, succumbing to fear and

4.2. OVERCOMING REGRET IN MAKING CHOICES

anger and causing immense suffering. Yet, in his final moments, he chose to sacrifice himself to save his son, Luke, in an act of selfless love.

His redemption, even in the face of past horrors, offers a powerful message of hope: that even those who have made terrible choices can find redemption and ultimately, choose a new path.



Image source: Fandom

Even amidst regret, the capacity for positive change and

choosing a more virtuous path always remains.

Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.

Viktor E. Frankl

A key aspect of overcoming regret is to cultivate present-moment awareness, which can be achieved by a technique articulated by Marshall Goldsmith: [**The Every Breath Paradigm**](#). Specifically, it invites us to contemplate the impermanence of life – and recognize that with every inhale and exhale, life unfolds in constant flux.

The core idea is that each breath is unique, carrying with it an unrepeatable experience. Being fully mindful in each breath allows us to let go of

4.2. OVERCOMING REGRET IN MAKING CHOICES

attachments to the past and anxieties about the future. From then, we are better equipped to make more conscious choices in the present and to savor the richness of life as it unfolds.



**Every
breath
I take is a
new me.**

Buddha

4.3. FAVORING CHOICES THAT EXPAND & ENRICH

This is a principle of decision-making that I would like to discuss in a separate section. While a little bit abstract and may appear too philosophically deep for certain people, I believe that this should be the ultimate rule when it comes to making life choices. Specifically, **to favor those that expand and enrich others, while simultaneously humbling oneself.**

It's tempting to let the self – our immediate desires, fears, and ego – [be the primary driver in our decisions](#). However, history and personal experience have demonstrated that choices solely focused on self-interest often lead to regret and ultimately, a less fulfilling life.

Think of the pursuit of fleeting fame, the relentless chase for material wealth, or the self-isolating pursuit of individual ambition at the expense of meaningful connection. While these paths may offer temporary grat-

ification, they typically leave a void in their wake.

Speaking of which, I cannot help but recall the words of Professor Dumbledore at the end of the *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* novel – following the return of the Dark Lord.

Remember, if the time should come when you have to make a choice between what is right and what is easy, remember what happened to a boy who was good, and kind, and brave, because he strayed across the path of Lord Voldemort. Remember Cedric Diggory.

(For those unfamiliar, Cedric Diggory was a fellow student, a kind, talented, and well-liked young man who, through a series of unfortunate events, found himself competing alongside Harry Potter in a dangerous tournament. In a climactic moment, Cedric, despite deser-

4.3. FAVORING CHOICES THAT EXPAND & ENRICH

ving victory, was tragically killed by the servant of the Dark Lord Voldemort)

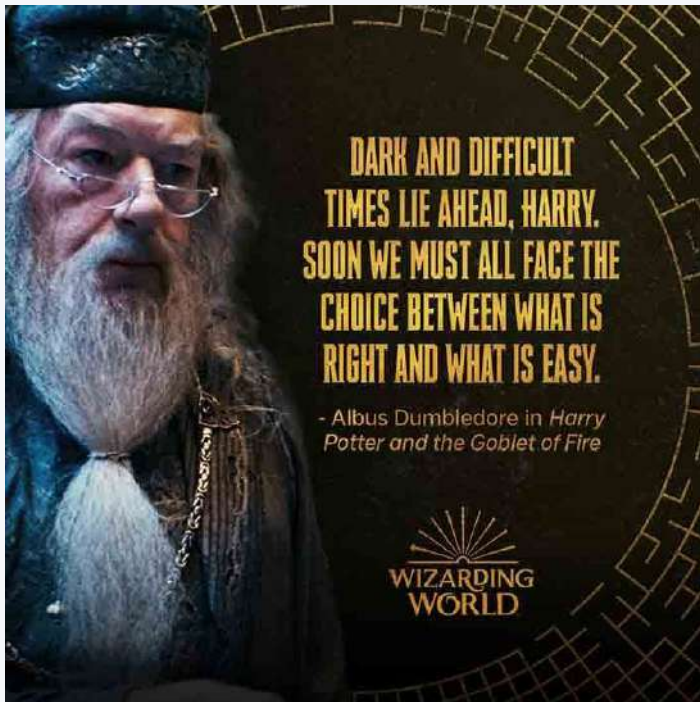


Image source: [Pinterest](#)

Dumbledore’s words were delivered at a time when easy choices – turning a blind eye to injustice, prioritizing personal comfort over moral action – would have been tempting. He asserts that choosing “what is right,” even when it is difficult, even when it carries personal risk, is paramount. Choosing “what is easy,” often for immediate self-benefit, will lead one

down a different kind of “death” – a spiritual or moral diminishment, a path that, while seemingly safe, ultimately ends at a place from which it is difficult to return, to move on with integrity and peace.

The lesson from this story is that, in light of the previously mentioned butterfly effect, we must strive to see beyond immediate, self-serving gains and consider the broader ethical and human implications of our choices.

However, here comes a tricky question: **What is “right”?**

I believe that to answer this question, we need to revisit a fundamental ethical principle – the [Golden Rule](#): “Do not do what you don’t want others to do to you.”

This principle, present in various forms across cultures and philosophies, emphasizes recip-

4.3. FAVORING CHOICES THAT EXPAND & ENRICH

ocity and empathy as cornerstones of ethical behavior. Applied to decision-making, it prompts us to ask: “Would I want to be treated this way? Would I want to live in a world where everyone made this kind of choice?”

Such simple questions can illuminate the ethical dimensions of even seemingly personal decisions. Do you desire kindness? Then choose to be kind first.

Do you wish for happiness? Then strive to bring happiness to others.

Do you long for support and understanding? Extend support and understanding to those around you.

Want to see your cynical mother embrace a more positive outlook? Demonstrate that outlook through your own actions and lifestyle, becoming the change

you wish to see!

In making life choices, particularly those with ethical or broader human consequences, we should strive to think “spiritually” – to **move beyond the self and be considerate of others**. This isn’t necessarily about religious doctrine, but rather about adopting a perspective that **transcends purely ego-driven motivations**.

The ego, by its very nature, is vulnerable, constantly seeking external validation and engaging in comparisons, building its sense of worth on shifting sands. When we base our choices solely on exalting the self, we set ourselves up for disappointment and suffering.

Inevitably, life has a way of “humbling” us, bringing us back to earth when our self-image is challenged or our inflated expectations are unmet.

4.3. FAVORING CHOICES THAT EXPAND & ENRICH

When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests.

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Luke 14:8-11

The first step to thinking for others is to realize the inherent

goodness of humanity. To realize and embrace the fact that, as Mencius has affirmed, “people at birth are naturally good”.

Believing in inherent human goodness, not as a naive dismissal of human flaws, but as a **foundational principle for action**, shifts our perspective and attitude. It allows us to approach life with **hope, humility, and empathy**, rather than with cynicism, hatred, or self-righteousness.

As idealistic as it may seem, **CHOOSING** to believe in humanity’s potential for good transforms life from something to be “fixed” or controlled into something to be celebrated and cultivated.

When you move your focus from competition to contribution, life becomes a celebration.

Buddha

4.3. FAVORING CHOICES THAT EXPAND & ENRICH

Nobody Will Remember: People Will Remember:



But again, we arrive at another question: **how do we think for others without becoming arrogant, self-righteous, or taking on responsibilities that are not ours?**

Simple. We just need to learn to **“separate tasks”**.

Back in the day, Alfred Adler proposed his theory of individual psychology, in which he emphasized that while one should strive to act with compassion and contribute to the well-being of others, they must also respect individual autonomy and responsibility. In other words, they need to focus on fulfilling their own responsibilities to the best of their ability

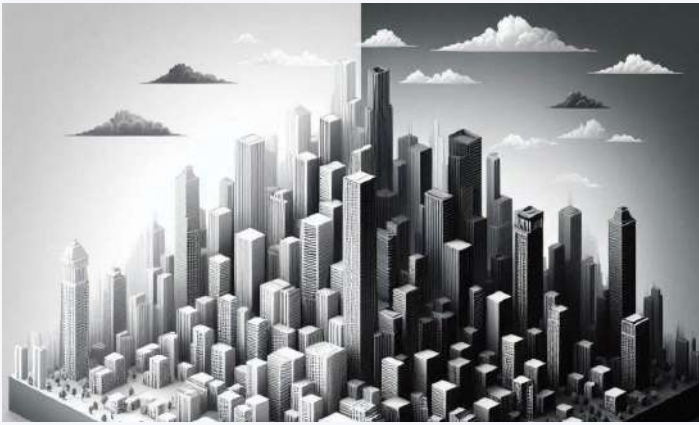
without inappropriately intervening in those of others.

For example, offering genuine support and encouragement to a friend struggling with a career decision is acting with kindness and compassion. However, dictating their career path or taking over their job search is overstepping boundaries and taking on a task that is theirs.

Similarly, advocating for social justice and systemic change is a worthy endeavor, but trying to force others to adopt your specific worldview or taking responsibility for changing everyone’s minds is both unrealistic and potentially arrogant.

4.3. FAVORING CHOICES THAT EXPAND & ENRICH

The key is to act with compassion and a desire to enrich the lives of others, while respecting their journeys and focusing on our own sphere of action.



Navigating choices, especially those with moral dimensions, is rarely straightforward. Sometimes, the “right” path isn’t immediately clear, and moral ambiguities arise.

Sometimes, the truth isn’t good enough. Sometimes people deserve more. Sometimes people deserve to have their faith rewarded.

Batman – The Dark Knight

(In the instance above, Batman,

confronting a morally complex situation, decides to take the blame for the crimes of Harvey Dent, a fallen hero, to preserve the city of Gotham’s hope and faith in justice. While the absolute “truth” would be to expose Harvey Dent’s corruption, Batman CHOOSES to sacrifice his own reputation and bear the burden of false accusations for the greater good – to maintain public morale and prevent societal collapse in the face of despair.)



Image source: [Pinterest](#)

The story of Batman illustrates that in situations of moral ambiguity, “what is right” is not always synonymous with strict adherence to factual truth or

4.3. FAVORING CHOICES THAT EXPAND & ENRICH

easily defined ethical rules. Sometimes, it involves prioritizing kindness, hope, and the broader well-being of a community, even if it requires navigating shades of gray and making difficult choices.

I myself face this dilemma as well. Many times, I choose not to share the full, potentially cynical or negative “truth” about the world or certain individuals with my own mother, who is already prone to anxiety due to her limited life experiences. I don’t mean to be dishonest or manipulative; rather, my intention is to prioritize my mother’s well-being and preserve her hope in humanity, even if it means selectively sharing information.

In these situations, “being kind,” I believe, outweighs the fleeting satisfaction of “being right.”

It’s not easy to come up with

such a choice, though.

At such times, I think we all need to remind ourselves of this powerful truth:

It’s always darkest before the dawn.

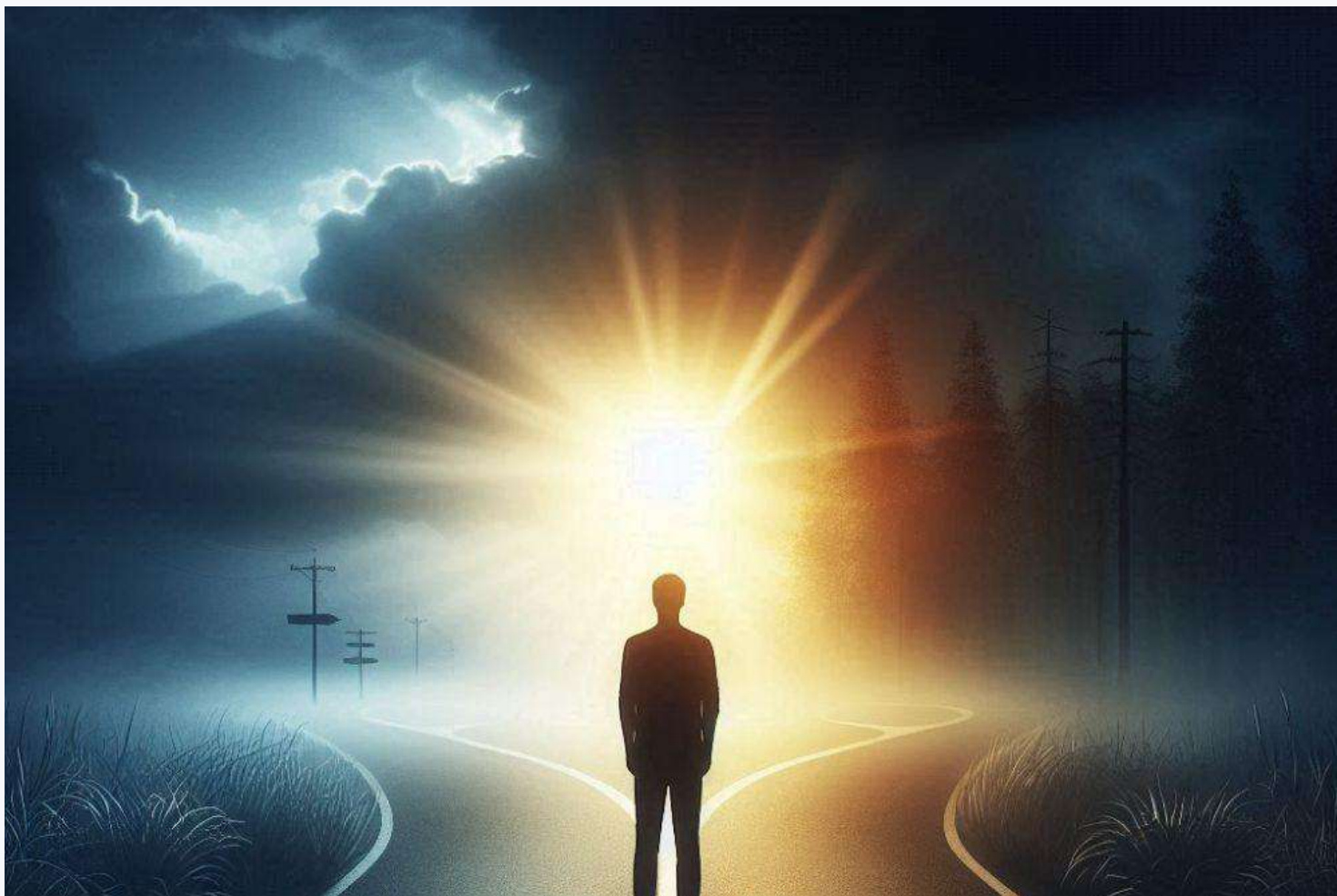
Have faith – faith in humanity’s potential for good, faith in the resilience of the human spirit, and faith that even in the face of uncertainty and darkness, life, in its myriad forms, finds a way to move towards light, towards growth, and towards connection.

Whether you attribute this to a divine force, the principle of dependent origination, the power of human agency, or simply the inherent trajectory of life itself, trust that by choosing actions rooted in compassion, humility, and a desire to enrich the lives of others, you are contributing to that eventual “dawn”.

4.3. FAVORING CHOICES THAT EXPAND & ENRICH

**The night is darkest just before dawn.
But keep your eyes open;
if you avert your eyes from the dark,
you'll be blind to the rays of a new day...
So keep your eyes open, no matter how dark
the night ahead may be.**

Hideaki Sorachi



EXPERT INSIGHTS



Check out some professionals' perspectives on how to make choices & decisions in life!

5.1. WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?



Originally published at [Psychology Today](#)
Credit: Melanie A McNally Psy.D.

Clients constantly tell me they don't have a choice. They can't help how they feel, think, or behave because of their job, family, spouse, school, teachers, past traumas, financial situation, childhood, kids, lack of time, and life demands.

You name it; it's forcing them to feel, think, or act in a way they want to change but believe they're powerless. They become frustrated with me when I put it back on them and ask them to focus on what they have control over, what choices they can make today so that they feel, think, or behave differently.

Sometimes, they'll tell me I don't understand because I never experi-

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enced what they've gone through. Or they'll get furious that I even suggested that they have a choice in their situation, and how could I not possibly see what a victim they are in all of this?

When we feel stuck, it's often because our thoughts have created a well-worn pathway that reinforces whatever beliefs got us there. For example, if I believe I cannot do hard things, my thoughts will easily focus on everything I can't do.

In contrast, if I believe I can handle adversity, my thoughts will remind me of all the past times I've done so and look for solutions to my current problem. We need to believe we can put in effort to change our thoughts. We behave quite differently when we hold that belief and have those thoughts.

Life's Secret: We Do Have a Choice

We **always** have a choice, no matter the circumstances. Before you get angry and think, "Maybe others do, but I sure don't. My awful parents made me this way," or "If I just had a different boss, everything would be better," or "I didn't go to college, this is just how things are for me," pause for a moment. Notice your thoughts and mentally note: You likely feel stuck in these areas.

Viktor Frankl wrote an incredible book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, which everyone should read. He not only chronicled his experience of surviving World War II concentration camps, he came up with a form of therapy to help individuals find purpose in any situation and, ultimately, choose how to cope with their suffering.

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Frankl's theory—known as logotherapy, from the Greek word *logos* ("meaning")—states that "our primary drive in life is not pleasure, as Freud maintained, but **the discovery and pursuit of what we personally find meaningful.**"

The book is a great lesson in truly understanding the power of choice from an individual who went through one of the most horrific experiences a person can go through.

The Perceived Roadblocks of Choosing

Here's where people seem to get hung up on the power of choice: They feel that since they can't choose from an infinite field of possibilities, they don't have a choice. They see rich people, thin people, attractive people, smart people, healthy people, or famous people with opportunities they don't have, so they decide they don't have a choice. They think,

Well, she was raised with money and an awesome family and went to college so she can do whatever she wants. I was raised poor, with toxic parents, and didn't even go to college, so I'm stuck.

And that's exactly where the problem lies. It's not about having infinite opportunities to choose from (very few people truly even have that, no matter how it may seem to others). It's about **looking at your opportunities and choosing from them**, no matter how limiting your opportunities may be. We always have a choice.

Let's take an example of someone who hates their job, especially their boss. They feel stuck and can't do anything about it because (insert

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excuse here). But if we step back from the situation and consider the options, we'll find that there is a choice here.

The person could choose to transfer to a different department, apply for a job somewhere else, talk to their boss about their issues, change their attitude towards their boss, quit their job, limit the amount of time they're around their boss, go back to school so they'll have more options, focus on the things they love at their job and do more of those, or take breaks during the day to get out of the office. If they stop thinking of how stuck they are, **they'll see a whole world of possibilities.**

Bottom Line: Others Will Choose If You Don't

While you sit back in your stuckness and misery, the world keeps turning, and with those revolutions, people around you are making decisions that will likely impact you. **They're making your choices for you.**

If I have no choice in my health, my spouse will buy whatever food he wants for our pantry that I'll be stuck eating, and my doctors will prescribe whatever medications they think are best, even if I don't like the side effects. Since I'm not choosing to be healthy, my family members' demands will increase, so I'll have no free time for self-care.

I'll complain to others about how I can't help the way my body feels because I look at what my spouse makes for dinner every night. Look at these medications my doctor put me on that make me feel bad.

Look at how my family members expect me to do everything, so now I

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have no time for exercise. And all the while, I'm reinforcing the belief that I have no choice.



7 Tips: Align Your Choices

Here are some things that you can start doing today to make choices that are more aligned with what you want or with who you want to be:

- **Pay attention to your stuck points.** Whenever you make excuses as to why something can't change, and you realize (or someone points it out to you) that you're complaining about it quite a bit, these are your stuck points. These are the areas where you feel you have no choice.
- **Notice how you feel in different situations or arenas of your life.**

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When do you feel tense and anxious? When are you most irritable or frustrated? When are you snapping at others for seemingly no reason? These are likely also areas where you feel stuck and have no choice.

- **Start journaling** for 15 minutes daily for two weeks using the format from the best possible self. This exercise requires you to imagine how you want your life to be and to write about it in as much detail as possible. Not only has research shown that optimism increases for individuals who do this, but it's also a great way to get you thinking about the possibilities available to you.
- **Start with small things.** Look at the areas of your life where you feel stuck and pick out the smaller areas that will be easier to change. Brainstorm as many solutions as possible to the problem and list as many possibilities as possible (without editing or judgment) for three minutes. Once the timer goes off, look over your list and choose which solution you'll start with today.
- **Find an accountability partner.** An accountability partner is someone who knows that you're trying to change something, and they're going to hold you responsible. Choose someone you see frequently with no problem calling you out on your excuses.
- **Share with others what you're trying to change.** If you're comfortable, make your changes public. Research has shown that people are more likely to follow through when they tell those around them, whether through social media or by announcing it to the office.
- Each morning, when you start your day, **remind yourself that you get to choose** how you'll react and how you'll feel. Make "I have a choice" your mantra and repeat it throughout the day. When you feel stuck, tell yourself, "I have choices here," and

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- pause to consider what they are.

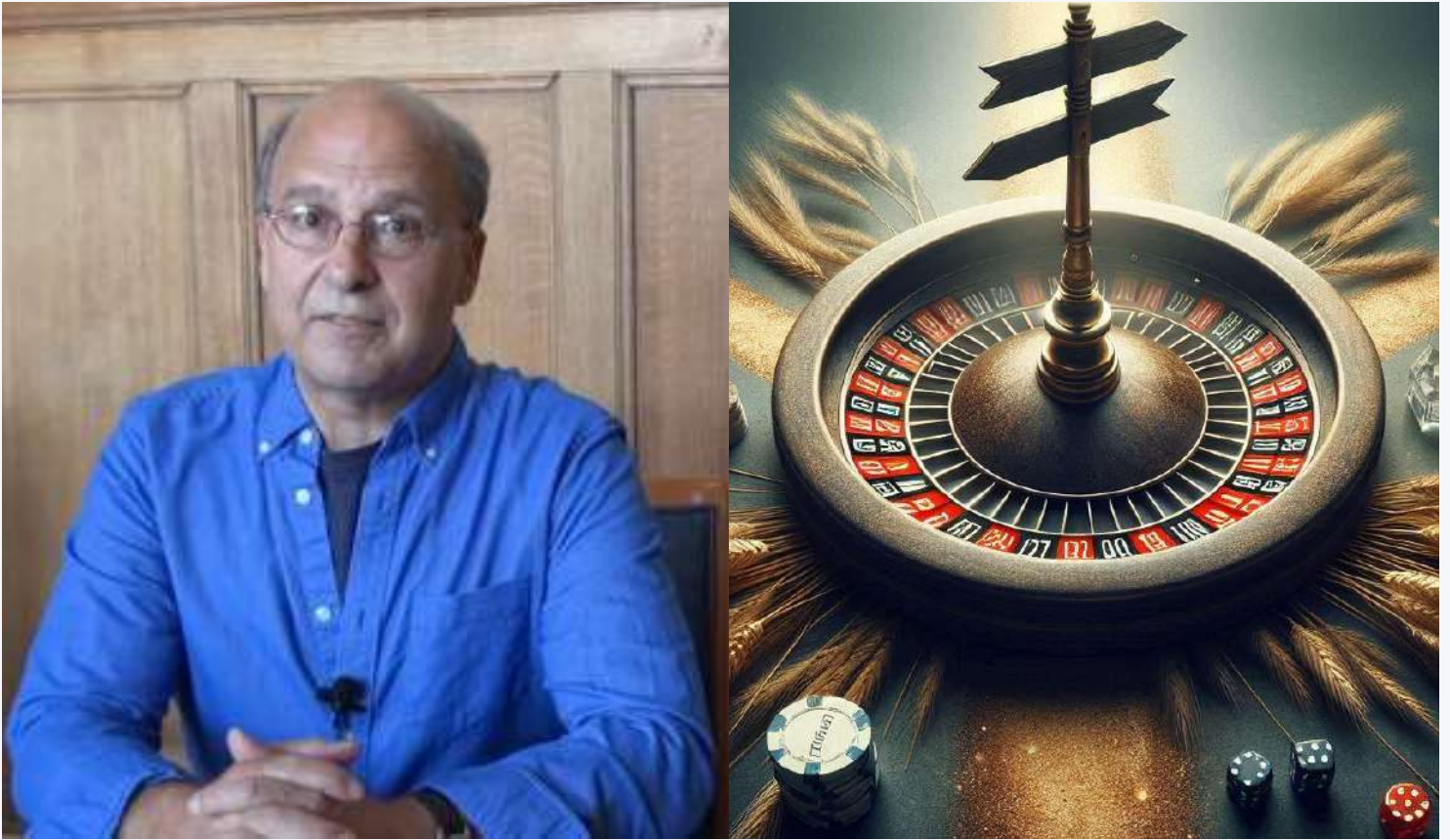
Conclusion

Life is going to happen no matter what you do. Either you'll sit back and let things happen to you or actively participate in how you live. Wouldn't you rather have a say in how you live each day? Start focusing on your choices and actively participate in your own life.

It's not about having infinite opportunities to choose from (very few people truly even have that, no matter how it may seem to others). It's about looking at your opportunities and choosing from them, no matter how limiting your opportunities may be. We ALWAYS have a choice.

Melanie A McNally

5.2. THE WHEEL OF DECISION MAKING



Originally published at [The Philosophers' Magazine](#)

Credit: Alfred Mele

You're enjoying a leisurely walk in the woods when you come to a fork in the path. You pause to think about what to do, and you decide to go right.

According to some philosophers, if free will was at work at the time, **you could have acted differently.**

Philosophers tend to be cautious about theoretical matters. Decided to go left is a different mental action from deciding to go right. But we might say that deciding a bit later than you actually did – say, deciding on the right fork after an extra thirty seconds of thought – is another way of acting differently. Other alternatives include deciding to

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turn back and deciding to sit for a while.

The main point, according to the philosophers I have in mind, is that if you freely decided on the right fork, **you could have done something else instead** at the very time you made that decision.

Could You Have Done Otherwise?

What does the idea that you could have done something else at the time come to?

According to some philosophers, it comes to this: in a hypothetical universe that has exactly the same past as our universe and exactly the same laws of nature, you do something else at this very time. In our universe, you decide on the right fork at noon. And in a possible universe that would have been actual if you had behaved differently at noon – one with the same past as the actual universe right up to noon and the same laws of nature – you do something else at noon.

Having a label for this idea will save space: I'll call it **Openness**.

Does Openness fit your experience of decision-making, at least in some cases? I predict you'll say yes.

I'm not saying that you experience other possible universes. The question is whether it sometimes seems to you that, when you decide to do something, you could have done something else instead – and not just in the sense that if the past (or the laws of nature) had been different, you would or might have done something else. Your answer, I'm guessing, is yes.

5.2. THE WHEEL OF DECISION MAKING

The Roulette Wheel Model: How Openness Works in Decision-Making

How do your decision making processes work if and when you have Openness? A simple model might help. Here's one.

When you are unsettled about what to do, your beliefs, desires, wishes, hopes, habits, reasoning, and the like all feed into a tiny neural roulette wheel in your head. The wheel has a thousand slots. The slots represent outcomes. For example, two hundred slots may represent your deciding on the left fork at noon while another two hundred represent your deciding on the right fork then. Continuing to think at noon about which fork to take may be represented by five hundred slots. And the remaining hundred may be divided among such things as deciding to turn around, deciding to sit down, and so on.

When the wheel is activated, a tiny neural ball drops onto it. The ball bounces along the wheel and eventually lands in a slot. Its landing in a slot represents an outcome – for example, deciding to take the right fork or continuing to think about what to do. Two adjacent slots represent the same outcome only when one outcome is represented by more than five hundred slots. What determines the distribution of slots are the things I mentioned – your beliefs, desires, reasoning, etc.

I'm not claiming that this is the only model of how you work as a decision maker if and when you have Openness. But it is a model, and it may help you think about the nature of Openness. The model suggests that your deciding on the right fork at noon was **partly a matter of luck**. Until the ball settled into a slot for that decision, there was a chance that it would land in a slot for another outcome.

5.2. THE WHEEL OF DECISION MAKING



Openness in Action

Openness can be frightening. Imagine a president who believes it would be best not to order a nuclear attack but is considering doing it anyway. He has Openness, the launch button is in front of him, and pressing it is represented by several slots on his wheel. Pressing the button would probably start World War III, as the president knows.

I prefer a less frightening story. Here's one. Joe is down on his luck. He was expelled from college for cheating a few months ago, and his parents disowned him. He's been struggling to make ends meet. Joe's complaints about his condition in a sketchy saloon prompt an acquaintance to offer to sell him a gun. "With this," the acquaintance says, "you can raise a lot of money in a hurry."

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Joe's wheel starts spinning. He has never committed a violent crime and he has never handled a gun, but he is open to the possibility. He decides to buy the gun. In another possible universe in which everything is the same right up to the moment he makes that decision, he declines the offer.

A couple of days later, Joe's thoughts turn to the gun. He considers selling it for a small profit. His wheel starts spinning. Joe decides to keep the gun for a while, but he could have decided to sell it. If the ball had landed one slot away, that's what he would have done.

A week later, Joe is wondering how he will pay his rent. He thinks again about selling the gun. And again the wheel starts spinning. He decides to use the weapon at a small shop on the other side of town. Joe's plan is to brandish it while loudly demanding money. He's confident that the cashier will simply comply; he definitely has no intention of firing the gun.

Unfortunately, things don't go according to plan. As Joe is speaking to the cashier in what he hopes is a very threatening voice, he sees the man reach under the counter – perhaps for a weapon. Joe thinks about running away, and his wheel is activated. He decides to fire a warning shot. But he's nervous and shaky. He accidentally shoots the cashier in the hand.

Things could have turned out very differently.

I'll return to Joe shortly, after a brief note on brain science. Some scientists have reported what they regard as evidence of indeterministic brain processes that influence behaviour. Indeterministic process-

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es, by their nature, leave open more than one outcome.

The experiments I have in mind were done with fruit flies, not human beings. But if tiny brains are indeterministic organs, big ones might be too. The tiny neural roulette wheel is a cartoon image of how an indeterministic brain might work in producing decisions. I will not speculate about the low-level mechanics of indeterministic brain processes, but I will mention an alleged possibility. In his book *The Mindful Universe*, Henry Stapp suggests that there are quantum probability clouds associated with calcium ions moving toward nerve terminals. This low-level openness can underwrite Openness.

The Weight of Responsibility in a World of Chance

Back to Joe. He had a string of bad luck. He made several bad decisions. Joe definitely isn't a hardened criminal; and he's far from thoroughly bad. He's good enough to have decided not to buy the gun, to have decided to sell it without ever using it, and so forth. And, each time, if the ball had landed just a slot away, he would have made a better decision.

Does Joe's bad luck get him off the hook? Does it mitigate his moral responsibility for his bad decisions? Or what? These questions are difficult. Some reflection on Joe's internal workings might help.

The Illusion of Magic Control: Accepting Chance

In the roulette wheel model of Openness, as I mentioned, a person's beliefs, desires, wishes, hopes, habits, reasoning, and so on all feed into the tiny wheel and determine what its slots represent (including

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how many slots a possible outcome gets). All these things are influenced by past decisions the person has made and his or her past behaviour.

People can and do learn from their mistakes and from their successes; and what they learn has an effect on how the wheel is divided up when it's time to make a decision.

Efforts at self-improvement can also have an effect on this. A person who has been smoke-free for a year is likely to have a very different distribution of outcome slots when he feels tempted to smoke now than he did a year ago. The same is true of a person who has made a lot of progress in overcoming a tendency to procrastinate or overeat.

With this in mind, we might be inclined to see Joe as having significant responsibility for how his wheel is configured when he makes the decisions I described and for the decisions he ends up making. After all, he spent years shaping his wheel. To be sure, whenever there was Openness in his decision making, some luck (or chance) was involved – but “some luck” might not be enough to absolve him of responsibility entirely.

There are people who want to have their cake and eat it too. Some such people may want to have a kind of control over their decisions that includes Openness and leaves nothing to chance. They may believe that only this kind of control – call it Magic – can make it truly up to them what they do.

But this kind of control is just as impossible as a delicious cake sitting on my kitchen counter even though I just devoured it. Why? Because

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indeterministic control in the absence of chance is impossible. If Joe decided with Openness to buy the gun, there was, right up to the moment he made that decision, a chance that he would not make that decision then.

Free Will as a Mix of Luck and Skill

Some believers in Magic may be irresistibly drawn to the conclusion that Joe lacks free will and moral responsibility. But some of us seem to be free to struggle with the question how free will and moral responsibility can coexist with Openness.

I struggle with this question in my book *Free Will and Luck* – even though I’m not convinced that free will requires Openness.

Even if Openness is an illusion, other kinds of luck may seem to threaten free will and moral responsibility. I thought about discussing a second kind of luck here (one associated with determinism), and I decided to settle the question whether I would by tossing a coin. Given the outcome, I’ll stick with Openness.

Minimizing Bad Luck in Decision-Making

Many games involve a mixture of luck and skill. In blackjack, players compete only with the dealer, whose every move is dictated by the rules. Unlike the dealer, the players have options: for example, they can hit (request another card), stand (refuse additional cards), double their bets in certain situations, and split pairs (for example, two aces) into two hands. What cards one gets is a matter of luck, and skilled players have memorised and are guided by reliable tables about

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when they should hit, stand, and so on. Very skilled players keep track of the cards they have seen – they “count cards” – and they adjust their playing strategy accordingly.

Free will may also involve a mixture of luck and skill. According to one way of thinking about free will, just as luck is an essential part of (legal) blackjack, the kind of luck involved in Openness is an essential part of becoming a free agent. But whereas luck is an ineliminable part of legal blackjack, free agents might reasonably seek to eliminate (or at least reduce) luck in an important sphere of life.

Blackjack players who want to maximise their chances of winning (legally, of course) should learn how to minimise the potential consequences of bad luck and to maximise the potential consequences of good luck. So they should learn to count cards, memorise a good set of blackjack tables, and play accordingly.

What might rational folks do about the luck involved in Openness, given their aspirations?

One thing they might do is to try to become **so good at resisting temptation** that there is no longer a chance that they will decide contrary to what they judge best.

If you see no good reason to prefer the left path to the right, and vice versa, a wheel that gives you a fifty percent chance of each decision should be fine with you. But when you know that it would be much better to go left than to go right, a wheel that gives you a chance of deciding to go right is potentially dangerous.

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Mastering the Wheel of Decision Making

Rational folks also try to learn from their mistakes and successes, and they sometimes embark on projects of self-improvement. Again, in the roulette wheel model of free agency, these efforts shape decision wheels.

In “Gimme Shelter,” Mick Jagger warned that war is just a shot away. In a decision maker with Openness, war might be just a slot away. Fortunately, decision makers who can shape their wheels are not entirely at the mercy of luck. And with luck, free agents may be able to configure their wheels in such a way that they have no chance at all of making very bad decisions.

People can and do learn from their mistakes and from their successes; and what they learn has an effect on how the wheel is divided up when it’s time to make a decision.

Alfred Mele

A LITTLE DOSE OF INSPIRATION



A collection of stories & quotes
to illuminate the path &
spark the light within you!

6.1. THE TALE OF THE THREE WISHES



[A fictional story](#) by Jonathan M. Pham

In a land where the sun beat down like a hammer and the air shimmered with heat, veiled in the golden hues of endless desert, lived three friends – Farid, Kasim, and Omar. They possessed little in worldly goods, but their bond of friendship was a treasure richer than any jewel, forged in shared laughter and weathered hardships.

One day, while trekking across sun-baked sands that stretched to the horizon, they stumbled upon a weathered, wooden chest, half-swallowed by a whispering dune. Eager hands worked quickly, unearthing the ancient box. As they pried it open, the dry desert air crackled with energy. A plume of vibrant smoke erupted, swirling and solidifying with otherworldly grace into a majestic Genie.

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The Genie, his eyes shimmering like heat mirages on the horizon, his voice booming from his chest, resonating like a sandstorm whipping through desert canyons, declared, “You have freed me from my age-old prison! As a reward for your kindness, each of you shall be granted one wish. Choose with the utmost care, mortals, for wishes, once spoken, are like arrows loosed from a bow – they cannot be called back.”

Three Wishes, Three Paths

Farid, ambition blazing in his eyes, lunged forward, his voice eager, almost breathless. “Oh, Great Genie,” he exclaimed, “I wish for boundless **Wealth** and the Midas Touch! May everything I touch transform instantly into pure, gleaming gold!”

Kasim, the second friend, approached with a thoughtful step, saying, “Wise Genie, I wish for enduring **Health** and immortality! May illness never weaken my body, and may the shadow of death never darken my door!”

Finally, Omar, the third friend, stepped forward, his eyes calm pools reflecting the vast desert sky, his voice measured and thoughtful. “Oh, Generous Genie! I wish for **Wisdom**. Grant me the insight to truly understand the world, to guide my fellow beings, and to live a life imbued with purpose.”

The Genie nodded, a silent ripple of power emanating from him. “Your wishes are granted,” he intoned, and with another swirl of smoke, vanished, leaving the three friends blinking in the sudden, weighty silence.

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The Gilded Cage of King Farid

Returning to Farid's village, they watched in stunned silence as his humble dwelling morphed into a palace, its mud walls shimmering, instantly transformed into solid gold. He was hailed as King Farid, draped in robes that felt heavy and cold against his skin, each step echoing in chambers overflowing with silent, gleaming treasures.

But a cold dread washed over him as realization pierced through his golden euphoria. He reached for a succulent date, his stomach gnawing with hunger, and felt it harden in his grasp, becoming inedible gold. Water, poured into a golden goblet, transformed into a thick, metallic liquid, undrinkable. Every morsel of food, every drop of drink, became glittering, yet utterly useless.

Surrounded by golden opulence, King Farid was starving. A wave of nausea washed over him as he stared at the golden date in his hand. The metallic sheen reflected his own gaunt face, mirroring the hollowness growing within him. He understood, with chilling clarity, the cruel irony of his wish.

He summoned Kasim and Omar to his gilded cage. Weak and pale, his voice a rasping whisper, he confessed his folly. His golden touch, meant for joy, would deliver only a gilded death.

Kasim and Omar exchanged a look of profound sadness. The two of them offered a silent nod before turning and walking away, the golden palace feeling less like a treasure and more like a tomb closing behind them.

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Eternal Servitude: Kasim's Poisoned Immortality

As for Kasim, he journeyed far and wide, marveling at the boundless energy coursing through his veins, the vibrant health that never faltered. But fate, with its unpredictable currents, swept him into the orbit of a powerful, cruel Tyrant, whose gaze sharpened with avarice upon learning of Kasim's immortality.

The Tyrant, cunning and ruthless, discovered that while Kasim was immune to natural death, he could be controlled. A potent, slow acting poison became the instrument of Kasim's servitude. The Tyrant, with a chilling smile that promised unending torment, explained the cruel bargain: antidote every three days, contingent on Kasim's unquestioning obedience. Withdrawal, he hissed, would unleash unimaginable madness.

Kasim was ensnared. His immortality, once a source of wonder, became an unending chain binding him to a tyrannical master. Desperate, haunted by the Tyrant's cruel laughter echoing in his mind, he sought out Omar. He poured out his plight, detailing the Tyrant's insidious scheme.

Omar listened intently, his gaze unwavering as Kasim recounted his tale. A deep furrow etched itself across Omar's brow, his fingers tapping lightly against his chin, a silent rhythm of contemplation. After a long moment of silence, he spoke, his voice grave.

“Immortality in chains is no gift, my friend. A life lived under tyranny is no life at all, even an eternal one. Sometimes, freedom, even in its fleeting nature, is worth more than endless, poisoned existence.”

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“It’s not too late for everything, Kasim,” Omar countered, his voice firm despite the gravity of the situation. “But for you, perhaps, if you remain. My advice remains: stand with the people. Freedom is worth more than this poisoned eternity.”

Taking Omar’s wise words to heart, words that resonated with a truth that pierced through his despair, Kasim returned to the Tyrant’s fortress under the cloak of night. Using his enhanced vitality as a shield and a weapon, he set fire to the opulent halls, flames erupting and spreading chaos like wildfire through dry brush. In the ensuing pandemonium, he vanished, leaving behind the gilded cage of eternal servitude, choosing the uncertain path of freedom over poisoned immortality. He understood, finally, that true life, however finite, must be lived with dignity and autonomy.

Omar the Wise: A Kingdom Built on Knowledge

As for Omar, word of his profound wisdom spread like ripples in a still pond. He became known throughout the land as Omar the Wise. Kings, burdened by the weight of their crowns, sought his counsel, and common folk, seeking solace and direction, sought his guidance.

One day, a new King, young and earnest in his desire to rule justly, approached Omar. Omar, with the insight granted by his wish, advised the King not to commission grand palaces that would only echo with emptiness, nor to amass personal treasures that would only gather dust, but instead to invest in the true future of his kingdom – its people.

“Build schools,” Omar urged, his voice filled with quiet conviction,

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“Let knowledge be the greatest treasure of your kingdom. Educate the children, for wisdom passed down through generations is the truest wealth, the surest path to a prosperous and just society, a treasure that will never tarnish or decay.”

The King, his heart touched by Omar’s wisdom, listened, and established schools throughout the land, fostering a kingdom built not of gold or eternal life, but on the enduring foundations of knowledge, understanding, and lasting progress.



The Enduring Lessons of the Three Wishes

And so, the three friends received their wishes. One learned, in the starkest terms, the crushing emptiness of material wealth, another the hollow victory of poisoned immortality, and the third discovered

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the enduring power and true value of wisdom – a light that could guide not only himself, but generations to come.

Their choices, like ripples from a single stone cast into water, spread outwards, shaping not only their own destinies, but the destiny of the land itself, proving that the truest treasures are not always the ones that glitter, but those that illuminate the path for all.

**As much money and life as you could want!
The two things most human beings would choose above all;
the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing
precisely those things that are worst for them.**

J. K. Rowling

6.2. TWO MONKS & A LADY



A Buddhist parable about our choices in life & the need to let go

Two monks were strolling by a stream on their way home to the monastery. They were startled by the sound of a young woman in a bridal gown, sitting by the stream, crying softly. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she gazed across the water. She needed to cross to get to her wedding, but she was fearful that doing so might ruin her beautiful handmade gown.

In this particular sect, monks were prohibited from touching women. But one monk was filled with compassion for the bride. Ignoring the sanction, he hoisted the woman on his shoulders and carried her across the stream - assisting her journey and saving her gown. She smiled and bowed with gratitude as the monk splashed his way back across the stream to rejoin his companion.

6.2. TWO MONKS & A LADY

The second monk was livid. “How could you do that?” he scolded. “You know we are forbidden to touch a woman, much less pick one up and carry her around!”

The offending monk listened in silence to a stern lecture that lasted all the way back to the monastery. His mind wandered as he felt the warm sunshine and listened to the singing birds. After returning to the monastery, he fell asleep for a few hours. He was jostled and awakened in the middle of the night by his fellow monk.

“How could you carry that woman?” his agitated friend cried out. “Someone else could have helped her across the stream. You were a bad monk.”

“What woman?” the sleepy monk inquired.

“Don’t you even remember? That woman you carried across the stream,” his colleague snapped.

“Oh, her,” laughed the sleepy monk. “I only carried her across the stream. You carried her all the way back to the monastery.”

There comes a time in your life when you have to choose to turn the page, write another book, or simply close it.

Shannon L. Alder

6.3. WORDS OF WISDOM

May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.

Nelson Mandela

**Sometimes you make the right decision,
sometimes you make the decision right.**

Phil McGraw

**No choice is the wrong choice as long as you make a choice.
The only wrong choice is choosing not to make one.**

Jake Abel

**Every choice comes with a consequence.
Once you make a choice, you must accept responsibility.**

Roy T. Bennett

6.3. WORDS OF WISDOM

All I know today is that you can think that what you've done is only the flap of a butterfly wing, when it's really a thunderclap. And both can result in a hurricane.

Catherine McKenzie

We have the choice of two identities: the external mask which seems real, and the hidden, inner person who seems to be nothing, but who can give himself eternally to the truth in whom he subsists.

Thomas Merton

Life is not a matter of holding good cards, but of playing a poor hand well.

Robert Louis Stevenson

Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.

Thich Nhat Hanh

6.3. WORDS OF WISDOM

You always own the option of having no opinion. There is never any need to get worked up or to trouble your soul about things you can't control. Leave them alone.

Marcus Aurelius

To venture causes anxiety, but not to venture is to lose one's self. And to venture in the highest is precisely to be conscious of one's self.

Søren Kierkegaard

You don't need to know precisely what's happening. What you need is to recognize the possibilities & challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.

Thomas Merton

We are living an earned life when the choices, risks, and effort we make in each moment align with an overarching purpose in our lives, regardless of the eventual outcome.

Marshall Goldsmith

6.3. WORDS OF WISDOM

**Every morning we are born again.
What we do today is what matters most.**

Buddha

**Perform those actions you will never regret: actions that will
ripen into future joy and delight.**

Buddha

**How much better to get wisdom than gold,
to get insight rather than silver!**

Proverbs 16:16

**Whoever pursues righteousness and love
finds life, prosperity and honor.**

Proverbs 21:21

6.3. WORDS OF WISDOM

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

Therefore, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

Matthew 6:24-25



6.4. A SONG OF HOPE



“May it be” by Enya, from *The Lord of the Rings*

Image source: [YouTube](#)

*May it be an evening star
Shines down upon you
May it be when darkness falls
Your heart will be true
You walk a lonely road
Oh, how far you are from home*

*Believe & you will find your way
A promise lives within you now*

*May it be the shadow's call
will fly away
May it be your journey on
to light the day
When the night is overcome
You may rise to find the sun*

*Believe & you will find your way
A promise lives within you now*

EMBARKING ON THE JOURNEY



And here we are – the end. Thanks for having stayed until now!

As you may see, there is no simple formula, no foolproof algorithm, no guaranteed shortcut to making the “right” choices in life. Instead, the journey of wise decision-making requires a continuous process of self-discovery, critical reflection, and the courage to embrace one’s freedom and responsibility.

It is in the conscious and deliberate act of choosing, even amidst the ever-present fog of uncertainty and the inevitable possibility of missteps, that we truly assert our agency.

Each choice, big or small, eventually shapes our identities.

EMBARKING ON THE JOURNEY

The tools and frameworks we have explored – from understanding the butterfly effect to practicing present moment awareness, from defining core values to considering the Life Plan Review – are not meant to eliminate the inherent ambiguity of choice, but rather to empower us to navigate it with greater intention, wisdom, and self-compassion.

To choose authentically is to do it with the full knowledge that regret may still linger. That one doesn't have to be perfect or "right" every time.

That as long as every decision starts from a pure intention, involves little emphasis on the self, and is followed up on with efforts, eventually, life will find a way!

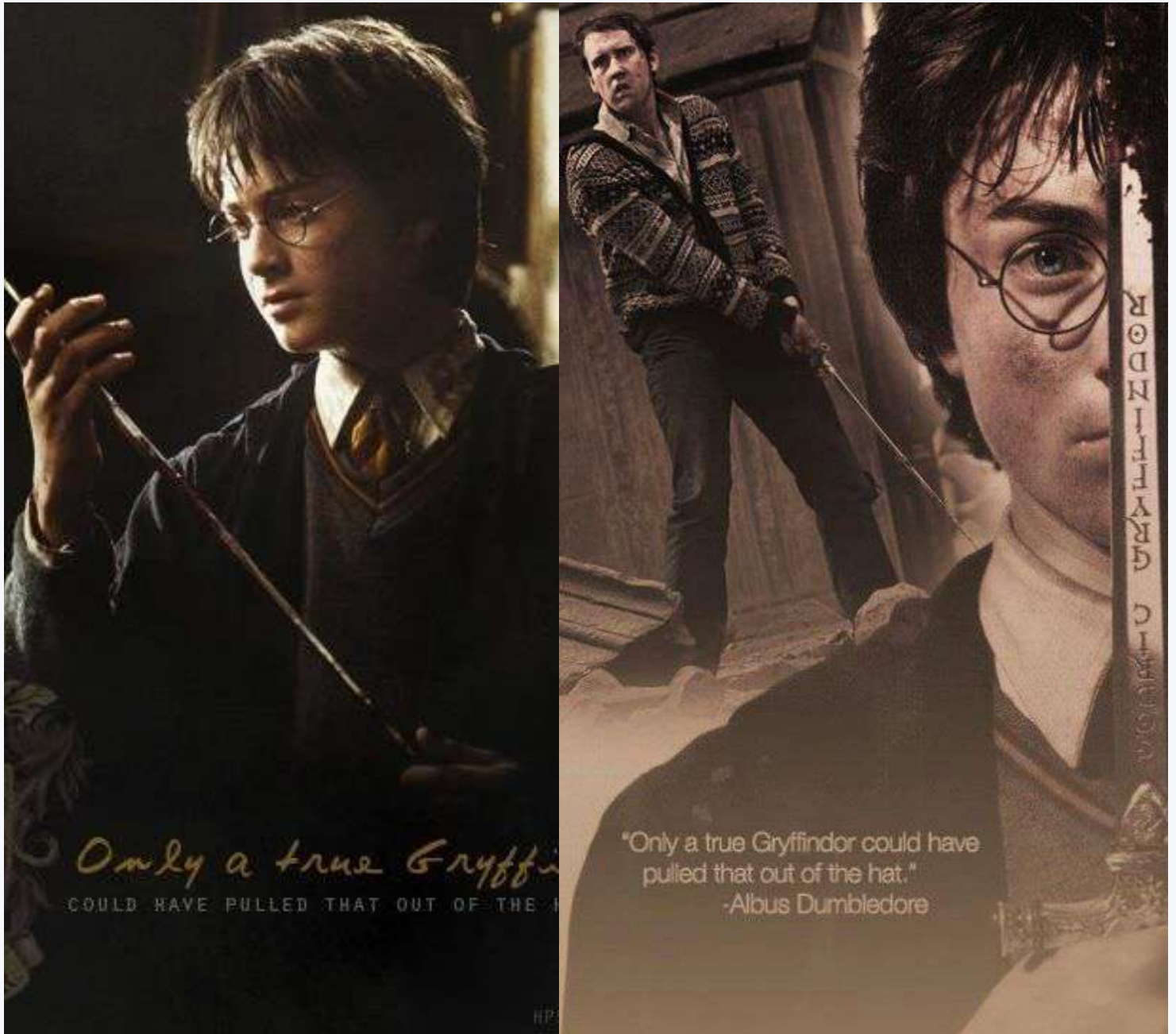
Just have faith, trust your intuition, and never stop moving forward!

Until next time,

Jonathan M. Pham



EPILOGUE



Harry Potter & Neville Longbottom with Gryffindor's Sword

Credit: J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter & the Chamber of Secrets*

Image source: [Pinterest](#)

EPILOGUE



Galadriel giving her Phial to Frodo Baggins

Credit: J. R. R Tolkien, *Fellowship of the Ring*

Image source: [Pinterest](#)

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<https://jonathanmpham.com/en/newsletter-sign-up/>



**There are two ways of spreading light: to be the
candle or the mirror that reflects it.**

Edith Warton



I'm **Jonathan M. Pham**, and I'm delighted to welcome you to my self-discovery blog!

Life, to me, is an endless expedition, and through this blog, I invite you to join me on the exhilarating journey of self-exploration and personal growth.



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