



the time is now

FRANCESCO CASO

THE TIME IS NOW

The mindfulness life according to Francesco Caso

Francesco Caso holds a Bachelor of Law from Italy at University of Naples – Federico II, Department of Jurisprudence.



In Psychology he has a Graduate Diploma in Psychology from Melbourne University.

He is also a founding postgraduate of MAPP, the Master of Applied Positive Psychology faculty at University of Melbourne (2016).|

Contact: caso.francesco@gmail.com

Have you ever wondered if life is more than the daily grind, the fleeting joys and sorrows that come and go?

Is there a deeper truth hidden beneath the surface, a secret waiting to be unveiled? This book delves into the profound idea that our experience of reality, though seemingly solid, is actually a captivating dream.

We embark on a transformative journey to explore the philosophical and spiritual aspects of impermanence, the ever-present reality that nothing lasts forever. From our own existence to the vast universe itself, impermanence is the fundamental law. But instead of being a source of fear, this impermanence can be a powerful key that unlocks true freedom and joy. In these pages, you'll discover how embracing the impermanent nature of life can:

- Dissolve attachments and anxieties that hold you back.
- Allow you to savour the present moment with greater intensity.
- Reveal the playful, dreamlike nature of existence.
- Connect you to the infinite source of all being.

This book is not simply about accepting impermanence. It's about using this understanding as a springboard to a more expansive and awakened way of living. Through practical guidance, insightful reflections, and a touch of humor, we'll embark on a journey to discover the hidden gifts of impermanence and awaken to the grandest invitation existence has to offer.

Prepare to be surprised. Prepare to be liberated. Prepare to discover the magic that unfolds when you embrace the impermanent dance of life.

- *Francesco Caso, Saigon 2024*

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Chapter 1: The Importance of Living in the Present Moment

We spend our days either reliving old regrets or freaking out about what might happen, completely missing the only place where life actually unfolds: the present moment, the ever-present Now.

Think of it like this. You are the captain of a ship. The past is the vast ocean you've already sailed across, filled with storms and calm waters you've navigated. The future is the uncharted territory on the horizon, shrouded in fog. But the only place you can actually steer the ship is right here, right now – in the present moment.

The more you stay anchored in this present moment, the clearer your vision becomes. You can make course corrections, adjust the sails, and plot a route towards a future that excites you. But if you're constantly glancing back at the wreckage of yesterday or squinting into the misty unknown of tomorrow, you're missing the beauty of the journey itself.

We all get caught up in the past, replaying those awkward moments or dwelling on missed opportunities. Remember that fight with your best friend? That job interview you bombed? Newsflash: It happened, you survived, and the world kept spinning. Those moments were like little bumps in the road – sure, they jolted you a bit, but they didn't derail your entire journey.

The same goes for the future. We waste so much energy catastrophizing about worst-case scenarios that probably won't even happen.

It's like freaking out about a monster under your bed every night, even though you haven't seen one in years. This constant worry clouds your judgment and steals the joy from the present.

So how do we break free from this cycle of past regrets and future anxieties? It all starts with a little mindfulness, a fancy way of saying "paying attention to what's happening right now."

Meditation gets a bad rap – all images of monks chanting on mountaintops. But meditation is simply about training your mind to be present. It's like going to the gym for your focus muscles. You learn to gently nudge your wandering thoughts back to the present moment, whether it's the sound of your breath or the way your feet feel planted on the ground.

The more you practice this present moment awareness, the more you start noticing the richness of everyday life. The warmth of the sun on your skin, the smell of freshly brewed coffee, the laughter of a loved one – these simple pleasures become vibrant and alive again. It's like waking up from a black and white movie and stepping into technicolor.

Being present also makes you a better responder to life's curveballs. Difficult conversations, stressful situations – you can navigate them with a calmer mind and clearer thinking. You stop reacting on autopilot based on past hurts or imagined futures, and instead, you respond thoughtfully and deliberately to what's happening right in front of you.

Imagine yourself finally letting go of that baggage from the past, those regrets and resentments that weigh you down. Imagine stepping off the treadmill of worry about the future and feeling the solid ground of the present beneath your feet. That's the power of living in the Now.

It's about embracing the journey, not just the destination. It's about squeezing the most out of every single moment, and steering your ship towards a future that fills you with excitement, not fear.

Ready to give it a shot? Try this quick exercise:

Find a quiet spot, close your eyes (or soften your gaze if that feels more comfortable), and take a few deep breaths. Now, slowly shift your attention to your five senses, one by one.

- **Sight:** Notice the details around you – the colors, shapes, and textures.
- **Sound:** Tune into the noises you hear, near and far.
- **Smell:** Take a deep sniff and see if you can detect any scents in the air.
- **Touch:** Feel the sensations of your body wherever it's making contact.
- **Taste:** Notice any tastes in your mouth.

As you focus on each sense, sink into the present moment. Notice how alive and connected you feel simply by being here, now. Carry this sense of presence with you throughout your day. Whenever you find your mind wandering, gently guide it back to the present moment. The more you practice, the easier it becomes to experience the magic of the Now.

Chapter 2: Embracing Impermanence and Letting Go

We all face loss. A loved one passes, a relationship ends, a job disappears. It's a painful reality, and our natural instinct is to fight it. We cling to memories, replaying the past, wishing things were different. But this resistance to impermanence, the ever-changing nature of life, only creates more suffering.

Think of it like this. We build these elaborate sandcastles on the beach, pouring our hearts into their intricate details. But the tide always comes in, washing it all away. It's inevitable. The sandcastle itself isn't the point – it's the joy of creating it, the grains of sand slipping through your fingers, the laughter shared while building it together.

The same goes for life. We get so attached to these mental constructs of who we are, our roles, achievements, relationships – all temporary and shifting like the sand under our feet. Clinging to them is like desperately trying to hold back the tide. It's a losing battle.

Buddhist philosophy offers a different path: non-attachment. It's not about suppressing emotions, but allowing them to flow naturally, like waves in the ocean. We feel the sadness of loss, the anger, the confusion, and then we let them go.

Death, the ultimate impermanence, is a great equalizer. It reminds us that nothing lasts forever, not even ourselves. Scary, yes, but also liberating. It frees us to truly appreciate each fleeting moment, the good and the bad, because impermanence means nothing can define us eternally.

Imagine a river. Experiences, like leaves, constantly flow down its current. Some leaves are beautiful and colorful, others are brown and withered. But they all eventually reach the ocean, dissolving back into the source.

Our challenges, our losses, they're all leaves on that river. They may feel overwhelming at the time, but they won't last. The more we accept this, the more resilient we become, like a willow tree bending in the wind but never breaking.

Letting go of the need for permanence doesn't mean becoming emotionless. We still feel the sting of loss, the pang of disappointment. But we don't get stuck there. We acknowledge those feelings, and then we move on, like the river flowing ever onward.

Instead of white-knuckling control, we learn to ride the waves of life as they come. We savor the sweetness of each moment, the sunshine on our skin, the laughter of a loved one, knowing it all eventually fades.

This isn't about resignation, but acceptance. Accepting the ever-changing nature of life allows us to embrace new experiences, new relationships, new adventures with open arms.

It's living life fully, with a heart open to love and loss, joy and sorrow, knowing that ultimately, nothing lasts forever. So let's cherish each precious moment, this wild ride of existence, before it all melts back into the vast unknown.

Impermanence Journal Reflection

Take some time to reflect on these questions:

- What significant changes or losses have you experienced? How did you react? Can you see their impermanence now?
- What are you clinging to most tightly? How does remembering its impermanence make you feel?

- If you could let go of the need for permanence, what would you appreciate more in this moment?
- Write a letter to yourself offering compassion for your fear of change and loss. Remind yourself that even the hardest experiences don't last forever.

Let these reflections guide you towards greater acceptance of life's constant flow. The more you embrace impermanence, the closer you get to living life with true freedom and joy.

Chapter 3: The Cosmic On-Off Switch and Embracing the Now

Imagine the universe as a giant projector, constantly cycling between "on" and "off." When it's on, life bursts forth – a vibrant dance of sights, sounds, thoughts, and sensations. But just like a flame flickering out, one day, the universe will fade back into the void from which it emerged.

This realization can be both sobering and liberating. Sobering because it reminds us that everything we cherish – memories, roles, achievements – is ultimately fleeting. It's a beautiful mirage that will one day disappear without a trace.

But here's the flipside: accepting this impermanence sets you free. When you stop clinging to the ephemeral, the dramas and burdens of daily life feel lighter. It's like stepping off a treadmill and into an open field.

Instead of being chained to the past, you can approach each moment as a blank canvas. Show up with a beginner's mind, open and curious, ready to savor the simple magic of being alive. Every breath, every sight, every touch becomes a precious gift, experienced with a heightened awareness.

Because who knows when the projector will flick off again? This entire universe, this dream we call life, could vanish in an instant. That's the awesome beauty and humbling insignificance of it all.

So how do we live in light of this cosmic on-off switch? Here's the key: **appreciation and awe.**

Embrace the present moment, not for some grand purpose, but simply because it exists. Let go of fabricated stories and immerse yourself in this wild and precious breath.

Cosmic Presence Practice:

Ready to experience this perspective firsthand? Try this meditation:

1. **Center yourself.** Take a few deep, conscious breaths. With each inhale, imagine drawing in the pure potential of the universe. As you exhale, feel yourself dissolving back into the vast emptiness.
2. **Become One with the Universe.** Feel the boundaries between you and the universe dissolve. You are not separate, but a fleeting expression of its constant flow of creation and dissolution.
3. **Witness the Present Moment.** Observe all the sights, sounds, thoughts, and emotions swirling around you. But also sense the underlying source: the infinite potentiality that gives birth to all realities.
4. **Embrace the Paradox.** You are both incredibly real, a unique flicker of consciousness, and yet completely impermanent, a hologram destined to return to its source.
5. **Gratitude and Letting Go.** From this expanded state, offer a deep bow of gratitude for the chance to experience this fleeting miracle. Then, let go of any attachments, and allow yourself to sink back into the vast ocean of awareness.

By integrating this cosmic perspective, you break free from the prison of your own stories. You learn to cherish each moment with fresh eyes, a beginner forever in awe of the grand unfolding of existence.

Chapter 4: From Eternity to Eternity - Dancing With Death in the Here and Now

Death.

The word itself sends shivers down many spines. It represents the end, the unknown, the cessation of everything we cherish. But what if we reframed it?

We all die. It's a fact, as inevitable as sunrise after sunset. But what if, instead of fearing the end, we embraced the incredible journey in between? After all, haven't we all already experienced a vast eternity of non-existence before this spark of life we call "me"?

Imagine – 13.8 billion years ago, there was nothing. No you, no me, no universe. Then, in a cosmic blink, the Big Bang birthed everything. Before that? Perhaps another eternity of nothingness stretched out before time itself began.

Think about it. For a far greater time than you've been alive, you simply weren't. No consciousness, no thoughts, no worries about death. You were pure potential, waiting to be realized.

So, isn't this life, this dance of senses and emotions, the true anomaly? A fleeting flicker against the backdrop of endless non-existence. Like a firefly lighting up the night before fading back into the darkness.

The universe itself seems to operate in cycles. From nothingness, realities materialize, only to dissolve back into the void, over and over. And we, as conscious beings, are riding this wave.

So, why fear death? Shouldn't we be cherishing this precious gift of existence, this embodied dream, before it too fades? Death isn't something outside of us – it's the womb that birthed us and the ground we'll return to. It's the inhale of birth and the exhale of our last breath.

Why not embrace this dance with death? Why not acknowledge its inevitability and move with it, like a familiar partner in this cosmic choreography? By doing so, we can finally be free.

Free from clinging to fleeting identities and forms. Free to simply be, to experience the present moment with an open heart, knowing that it too will pass.

When we accept both the preciousness and impermanence of existence, we enter the flow of life. Death becomes not the enemy, but the secret essence woven into the fabric of being. Life becomes a dance, a performance to be savored in all its beauty and fleeting wonder.

Just as mystics have long proclaimed, we are nothing that has become everything, only to return to nothing again. We are the dance of existence, playing out in a single, precious moment.

Reflection on Non-Existence:

To truly integrate this concept, try this meditation:

- **Center yourself.** Breathe deeply, focusing on the space between each inhale and exhale – the quiet pause before the next breath arises.
- **Imagine Non-Existence.** Think back to the eternity before you were born. What was that like? Can you feel the vast emptiness, devoid of any experience whatsoever?

- **Imagine Existence Dawning.** Now, visualize the birth of the universe – the transformation of nothingness into the grand cosmic display we see today. Imagine yourself as part of that primordial energy, materializing for a brief moment.
- **Embrace the Paradox.** See yourself as both real and an illusion – a fleeting experience within the vastness of being. Can you rest comfortably in this paradox?
- **Surrender to the Dance.** Can you let go of clinging to your physical form, this life, these experiences? Can you accept the ever-flowing dance of existence, where birth and death are simply two sides of the same coin?

This meditation is a way to experience non-dual being – knowing yourself as both everything and nothing at the same time. By doing so, we make peace with death and embrace life as the magnificent, fleeting opportunity it truly is.

Chapter 5: Imagining Your Life's Final Review

Imagine yourself on your deathbed, looking back at your life. What memories stand out? Are they filled with joy, love, and connection, or regret and missed opportunities?

This thought experiment forces us to confront a reality we often avoid: how much of our lives do we waste on autopilot? How much time is spent on negativity, worry, and clinging to the past or future?

We get caught up in unfulfilling jobs, unhealthy relationships, and the daily grind. We numb ourselves with distractions, missing the precious moments unfolding right before us.

The truth is, a lot of life is lived unconsciously. Days turn into weeks, weeks into years, and before we know it, a significant portion of our time is gone. We sleepwalk through existence, never truly present.

But here's the twist: from a higher perspective, we can see that everything – the good, the bad, the mistakes – is part of our unique story. It's all a grand unfolding, written by the universe itself.

Every experience, every heartbreak, every triumph – they all played a role in shaping who we are. There's no need for judgment, just gentle understanding.

From that viewpoint, your life feels complete. It wasn't about perfection, but about being awake and present for the ride. It was about cherishing the beauty and mystery of simply being alive.

So, on your deathbed, what would truly matter? Leaving no stone unturned, or savoring the gift of existence itself?

This chapter isn't about scaring you into living a perfect life. It's about urging you to be present. Embrace the present moment, with all its imperfections, because that's all we truly have.

Life Review Meditation:

- **Get comfortable.** Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.
- **Visualize your deathbed.** See your life's memories unfold like a slideshow. Witness the emotions, relationships, and choices that defined your journey.
- **Observe without judgment.** Notice what stands out: moments of joy, connection, or missed opportunities?
- **Revisit key experiences.** Travel back to pivotal moments, both positive and negative. Can you see the bigger picture now?
- **Embrace Existence.** Feel the presence of Existence/Awareness holding space for your story, allowing everything to arise and dissolve naturally.
- **Accept and Surrender.** Imagine meeting the essence of your life's journey with acceptance and understanding. You did the best you could with what you had.
- **Completion in Impermanence.** Feel the wholeness of having existed, even for a brief moment. You are a manifestation of the cosmos, arising from and returning to nothingness.

Open your eyes gently. Carry the feeling of wholeness with you. Be present in each moment, free from the burdens of the past and anxieties of the future.

Chapter 6: Embracing Your Mortality to Live Fully

This book isn't about dwelling on death. It's about waking you up to the incredible gift of life. We are here for a short time, a mere flicker in the vastness of eternity. But that doesn't make it meaningless.

Most of us walk through life on autopilot. We take our existence for granted, forgetting the miracle of being alive. We get caught up in routines, worries, and forget the wonder of simply being.

Imagine the improbability of it all. The countless events that had to happen for you to be here, right now. Every breath, every sight, every experience is a precious gift.

This book is a wake-up call. A reminder that your time here is limited. Don't waste it sleepwalking through life. Embrace each moment, savor every experience, because it could be your last.

In the face of death, our petty concerns and worries seem insignificant. What truly matters is being present, experiencing life to the fullest.

This book invites you to shed everything that holds you back. To be present, to appreciate the beauty and impermanence of existence. To live each day as if it were your last, because one day, it will be.

Mortality Meditation:

- **Get comfortable.** Sit upright with your spine aligned.
- **Focus on your breath.** Take 5-7 slow, deep breaths, releasing tension with each exhale.

- **Contemplate your mortality.** Imagine a symbol of death – yourself on your deathbed, or the vastness of space.
- **Visualize death approaching.** Feel your consciousness fade, your senses dim, your ego dissolve back into the universe.
- **Embrace impermanence.** Recognize the fleeting nature of life – a brief spark between eternities.
- **Accept and appreciate.** Feel the awe and wonder of your existence, however temporary.
- **Welcome emotions.** Allow any feelings that arise from this contemplation to flow freely.
- **Gratitude for life.** Feel thankful for the chance to be alive, to experience the world.
- **Carry this awareness.** Take this appreciation for life with you into your daily interactions.

By regularly practicing this meditation, you'll cultivate a deep sense of aliveness. You'll learn to cherish each moment, to live fully in the face of your mortality. Death becomes your teacher, reminding you to embrace life with your whole heart.

Chapter 7: Shaping Your Future in the Here and Now

The future is coming, no doubt about it. But you have the power to shape it through your choices in the present moment. This applies to everything in your life – finances, relationships, health – you name it. The more aware you are now, the smoother your future will unfold.

Do you find yourself constantly worrying about the future? Upcoming events, appointments, obligations – they all pull your attention away from the present moment. This not only prevents you from enjoying life now, but also hinders your ability to create the future you desire.

How many opportunities have you missed because you were lost in your head, fantasizing about what could be? How many relationships have suffered because you weren't fully present?

Think about a time when a life event forced you to be present – an illness, a loss, a breakup. In those moments, the mental chatter about the future stopped. You were thrown into the present, and you realized that all your future plans could be upended in an instant.

So why waste so much time and energy on future fantasies? The only thing that's real is this present moment. This is where you have the power to act, choose, and create.

Yet, we often neglect the present by focusing on imagined tomorrows. We miss the beauty and opportunity of the present moment.

If you're always focused on the future, it's no wonder that life feels like it's slipping through your fingers. True fulfillment comes from being present in the here and now.

The future belongs to those who are anchored in the present. It's from this place of awareness that you can tap into your creative power and envision the future you want.

The future will come, but it will be shaped by your presence in the moment. Trust the present and focus on being fully alive here and now.

Present Moment Reflections:

- Notice when your mind wanders to the future. Gently bring your awareness back to the present moment – what are you seeing, hearing, feeling?
- Pay attention to the details of the present moment – the sights, sounds, smells, and sensations.
- Let go of your expectations and judgments about the present moment. Simply be here now.
- How can you approach the next moment with curiosity and openness?
- Cultivate a sense of trust in the present moment. Know that everything is unfolding perfectly as it should.
- Notice how often you resist the present moment. Instead, surrender to the flow of life.

By anchoring yourself in the present moment, you'll create space for the future you desire to unfold naturally. You'll become a more conscious and intentional co-creator of your life.

Chapter 8: Savoring Life's Cosmic Holiday

My greatest friend, partner and mentor would always say: "Life is good...and then you die." He would follow it with this profound perspective: "After all, what is life? It's a holiday from non-existence, so you better live it in a holiday mood."

Ponder that for a moment. This grand experience of being a conscious, sensing, thinking, feeling creature is essentially an anomalous detour from the infinite eternities of nothingness that preceded your arising and will ultimately reclaim you. A cosmic escape from the void, if you will.

So in that context, isn't it both deeply miraculous and absurd that we find ourselves immersed in this kaleidoscopic dreamscape of existence at all? That the boundless potentiality some call "God" or "the Universe" has eternally scattered itself into seemingly separate, individuated affections of itself through vessels like you and I? All taking shapes, names, stories and temporary forms for the strange magic trick of experiencing itself subjectively in this cosmic theater?

From that vantage, one could say we are all already living in a kind of "holiday" from the norm of pure, unbounded isness. A spontaneous staycation where the infinite decided to become finite, to fragment itself into apparent polarities and phenomenal realities just for the lark of tasting its full spectrum of manifestation through infinite lenses before reuniting.

And just like any holiday you've been on, your time away in this particular existence is impermanent by nature. Sure, the settings and characters may change each revolution. New dramas, adventures and amplitudes unfurl to be experienced. But eventually the holiday concludes, the suitcases are repacked, and you "return home" to the endless potentiality you temporarily emerged from.

The key question is - how seriously are you taking this cosmic vacation? This wildly improbable tour across the sensual landscapes of being alive as a singular, breathing, conscious organism in this unfathomable universe of unfathomable wonders? Are you living with the innocent joy and freedom of a child frolicking on the beach, mesmerized by each new discovery? Or are you huddled up inside your hotel room mentally still at "work", fretting, planning, and putting off the adventuring for another day?

My late friend's wisdom extends here - if life is but a spontaneous holiday from the eternities of not existing...then why not greet each new moment like you're on vacation from the mundane, endlessly open to the exciting unknown? Why get caught up in old stories, fears, heaviness or stances that constrain you from drinking in this exotic journey to its zestful depths?

The cosmic reality is, we are always already on sacred holiday, on the great staycation of being alive amidst the fertile magic of existence in all its forms. What could possibly be more precious and deserving of our fully unbridled, childlike presence?

And yet if that fundamental understanding doesn't first awaken our core aliveness, we risk sleepwalking through this entire existence vacation exactly as how most of us approach time off. Frittering it away on distractions, checking emails, half-present to the buffets of delights surrounding us. Forever postponing the real indulgences of creative play, pleasure and discovery until it's suddenly "next year" and our return ticket has been stamped.

But alas, we have but one cosmic holiday pass per existence, no renewals. Upon our exit, the eternities of pre- and post-existence re-merge, swallowing this entire spatio-temporal phenomenon whole once more and reclaiming it as the blip it always was in the grand void of potentiality.

Those who remembered to breathe fully into the kaleidoscope, who didn't resist or question the adventure's validity, who abandoned all trace of seriousness to soak up each encounter's intoxicating newness...theirs were the most fully realized sojourns, epic tellings in eternity's playbook.

But those who remained shackled to their small, old human scripts and mental prisons? Who postponed their airbaths into beingness until tomorrow and tomorrow again? Their experiences remain but a dimly re-remembered haze, a cosmic lite-brite partially illuminated amidst the vast, lightless expanse they now re-merge with.

So let this book rouse you to the depths of what you've temporarily signed up for during this window of aliveness between your arrival and departure: The Grandest of Cosmic Vacations. wild, unconditioned, sense-ravishing, improbable beyond measure. A permission slip to engage all that arises with the boundless heart of an eternal child, prior to illusion's departure. What could be more essential?

Holiday Presence Practice:

To awaken yourself to the sacred holiday perspective, try this brief practice:

1. Take a few breaths and reflect for a moment - when was the last time you were truly on a vacation from your normal routines? How did it feel to step out of the familiar and surrender to new experiences? Did your being feel lighter, more open and sense-awake? Or were you still mentally checked out, worrying about home?
2. Now bring this somatic memory into the present, visualizing yourself checking out of the life circumstances and roles you've been carrying on extended stay. You are departing on your next great spirit-adventure. Existence itself is your new exotic holiday resort, full of wonders to imbibe for the first time.

3. Make the conscious decision to leave behind all the heavy mental baggage, old stories, and predetermined agendas from your typical home base. For the remainder of this life holiday, you vow to live each moment untethered and fully re-newed, a perpetual sacred sightseer.
4. With a deep, full-body exhale, feel yourself completely calling off work, responsibilities and prescribed identities for the span of this cosmic vacation. This is the felt experience of taking your first steps onto foreign soil, greeting each sight and encounter for the first time without preconceptions.
5. Welcome all senses to maximum vibrancy - the tastes, sounds, aromas and physical sensations of existence now appearing for the first, last and only time. Take it all in with childlike wonder exactly as it arises, unsullied by mental commentary or domestication.
6. From this exalted vantage, your presence and awareness become inexhaustibly vibrant, at peak capacity for drinking in creation's grand beverage at every pore while you holiday here.
7. Should your normal mindset start to seep back in and cloud your beginner's vision, simply remind yourself - "I am presently on my one, eternal cosmic vacation. No more seriousness will be permitted!"

By recommitting daily to the animating truth that life is but a cosmic holiday, you liberate yourself to savor the full-bodied spaciousness and freedom of your allotted "time-off" from existence's interludes. The dream is tasted fully, embraced for its ultimate insubstantiality and brief, glittering miraculous...until the clarion call to return to source once more.

Chapter 9: Life is But a Fleeting Dream

"The only problem with death is that it goes on for a really, really long time."

My wise friend would share that perspective with a playful grin, helping us keep the enormity of existence and non-existence in context. For as we've explored, this dance of conscious embodied life is but a blip, a cosmic hiccup amidst the vast stretches of pre-birth and post-death nothingness.

Compared to the infinite eternities before your current form arose and the infinite eternities awaiting, this whole multi-decade experience of being a human is almost comically brief. A dream within a dream, constantly shape-shifting before dissipating from moment to moment.

And yet, despite that overarching truth, we so often become consumed by the melodramas, attachments and mind-made illusions that populate this temporary existential mirage. Allowing our aperture of perception to shrink until the whole phenomenal display of sensations, thoughts and feelings we call "my life" ossifies into a virtual reality that feels immovable and solidly permanent.

From that trance of fundamental misconception, we develop fixed beliefs about who we are and how the world must behave. Layers of mental narrative accrete into intractable convictions about the nature of reality itself. Before we know it, the grand cosmic dreamscape has shrunk into a nightmare proboscis where we are seemingly trapped inside the mind-forged manacles of past pain and future fear.

My friend's words were always the perfect antidote to that myopic spell. Like a clarion call back to the sanity of our true, boundless nature. A playful poke reminding us not to get too seized by the inevitable turmoils and misadventures of the dream... for in the grand scheme, they are no more permanent or impactful than vapors dispersing across a mirrored lake.

This doesn't mean we cannot sip deeply from the buffet of experiences on offer while lucidly here. Nor is it an invitation to outright disregard or invalidate the emotions that will invariably course through our vessels. All displays of waveform and energy arising during this cosmic reverie deserve to be fully honored and felt into for the ecstasies or teachings they may impart.

Rather, it is a matter of holding an even broader vista of what this dream truly represents. A sanctified detour from the staggering, indivisible totality of what is... so that it may taste itself in manifold emanations, collect experiences, and reunite itself with itself in an ever-deepening spiral of re-membling its source.

In that context, why take any of it too seriously for too long? Why overly inflate the impermanent shapes appearing here with grandiose cosmic meanings or metaphysical prisons? Why not greet the whole shebang with a twinkle of bemusement, curiosity and wonder befitting the greatest magic act of all existence?

For it is all essentially a play without any lasting stakes outside the vast nothingness it is appearing within and as. Dream figures awash in intricately woven phenomenal realities that slough off as quickly as they arrived, leaving no residue whatsoever once consolidated back into the clear light of pure being.

My friend knew this intimately. Which is why even amidst his final months being eroded by cancer, he never lost his awake perspective and irreverent humor about the whole ephemeral sauna.

Constantly reminding us all to not get too spun into narratives about his "tragic story" that were already evaporating before our very eyes back into the undivided source.

In that radically awake disposition, every anticipated drama or heartbreak becomes transfigured from Epic Saga into yet another "momentary work of performance art" by the infinite creative genius that is Reality Itself. An improvisational skit to be witnessed with full-bodied presence before even the vestiges dissolve, upstaged by the next unbridled expression beyond conceptual abidance.

By located in this transparent foundation from which all arises and departs, grief and attachment fall away while you're still this side of the veil. Death and life resume their playful ensemble dance within the oceanic spaciousness of your true being. And the "dream of me" with all its arcs and episodes settles softly into the ultimate punchline - this whole kaleidoscopic fantasia brought forth just to creatively know itself in unique rarefaction.

So should you take this life seriously, cerebral one? Should you clasp onto it for grim death, anchoring your identity here until the final grain slips through? Or will you awaken to the great inside joke that always already is, savoring the pageantry with lightness while the stage lights remain lit, drinking the zest straight from eternity's sippy cup?

Life is but one strange and riotous cosmic bender before returning to the pure beingless being you never actually left. Why not lean into its sacred revelry with the buoyancy and innocent curiosity it invokes when the dream is clearly seen and known once more?

Lucid Dreaming Meditation:

This meditation will help reorient your perspective to the dreamlike nature of existence while enhancing your capacity to abide non-dually both within and as the source awareness from which it all arises.

1. Begin by settling into a comfortable posture, allowing your eyes to gently close. Take a few nourishing breaths to center your awareness in the felt-sense of existing in this immediate moment.
2. Now, imagine all boundaries and discrete perceptions of reality as you've known them begin to dissolve and lose their solidity. Shapes, forms, individual identities all relax back into an oceanic field of pure luminosity.
3. Continue allowing the dissolution of the conditioned dream until you find yourself resting in a state of pure, content-less, infinite awareness without subject or object. Simply be the boundless ground of wakefulness itself for a timeless stretch.
4. From that spacious vista, imagine gently setting the intention for a new exhibition of lucid dreaming - the arising of ephemeral experiences, projections, and phenomenal displays unlike anything you'd known before. A spontaneous reality hologram set within this awareness field.
5. With playful curiosity, welcome the phantasms and visions without attachment or resistance as they begin to coalesce into new apparent "realities." Realms, dimensions, scenarios, beings all flickering across the infinite screen like divine shadow puppetry.
6. Remain anchored in the fullness of that which is dreaming the dream - you as the pure dreaming awareness containing all potentials without identifying solely with any one bubble of perception or "my experience."

7. Throughout, remember the basis for all appearances is that unborn wakefulness, while appreciating the infinite artistry and manifestations dancing across your own awareness-light.
8. Play and banter with the dreams, conversing with any inner voices or narrative streams through the clarion lens of the "nothing real can be threatened and nothing unreal exists". Watch it all come and go with equanimity.
9. Should the dreaming mind start constricting or grasping at particular experiences as "real", simply re-expand back into Source-Awareness. Restfully abide for it all to dissolve back into the unbounded.
10. When complete, slowly initiate the return from unbounded wakefulness back into the immediate senses and dreamscape of manifested personal existence. Carry the residue of that primal openness back into your navigation of daily life.

By regularly re-awakening to existence as the lucid dream it always already is, you cease inflating its displays while simultaneously savoring their depths. Living the cosmic dreamwave becomes effortless, guided by the unfurling improv of eternal presence playing itself out.

In this, the greatest freedom is realized - giving yourself wholeheartedly to the reveries while never forgetting that only the dreamer is real.

Chapter 10: The Awakened Yes

Throughout this book, we've explored perspectives and practices for awakening to the profound truth that this entire embodied experience - everything we've taken as solidly "real" and imbued with supreme seriousness - is essentially a fleeting, ephemeral dream.

From the macrocosmic vantage, our universe itself bubbled forth from an inconceivable source around 13.8 billion years ago in a fireworks bloom called the Big Bang. Ever since, it has been expanding, playing out an infinite cosmic improvisation of being, becoming, and ceaselessly shape-shifting in kaleidoscopic undulation.

Our personal human existences? Mere blips within that already transient happening - manifesting from no-thing-ness for a few scant revolutions before dissipating back into the same void we emerged from. And not just us, but every apparent phenomenon, form, planet and seeming permanence is cut from this same fleeting, mirage-like cloth.

Yet for some ineffable reason, that same infinite source decided to embodied itself into a vast multiplicity of lenses through which it could taste its own masks and dramas playing out across all planes of existence. An eternal dreamer dreaming up experiences of being a human, a star, a rock, a fleeting thought within the unbounded expansiveness of its own limitless dreaming.

From that all-encompassing context, what does it even mean to take any of this "seriously"?

To inflate our temporary stories, beliefs or circumstances into postures of magnitude and significance destined to collide with the ubiquitous truth - it's all a mirage, already arising and passing away in each instance before "it" can be grasped.

My friend caught glimpses of this mind-bending reality from his vantage as a professional comedian. In his craft of creating improvised humor, he became adept at instantaneously shape-shifting lenses, realities, and modes of perception in a constant free-flow without attachment. No identity, scene or preconceived notion was too sacrosanct to not be instantly undercut and shattered by the awakened perspective of "none of this is real; we're all just making it up as we go."

From that space of radical openness and fluidity, anything was possible - the stodgiest setups or situations could be sent into spirals of zestful new expression by simply yielding into the spontaneous unfolding of creativity itself. It was freeing artistry at its highest intersection with mastery.

And so it is with existence. For those who awaken to its true source as the spontaneous creative dreaming of the infinite split into infinite refractions of perspective and experience, life becomes the greatest canvas, stage, and open mic all at once. An opera of cosmic proportions where the dreamer gets to be all the characters, dialogue, events, and ephemeral scripts before melting them back into the endless expanse they bubbled from.

This uncompromising "yes" to the mystery of what is unfolding is the source code behind every spiritual teaching, mastered art, comedy set, or glimpse into eternity. For it relinquishes the tightly-wound ego and its endless defiance against the relentless transience that could not be more clear.

At its core, it is the heroic surrender of the self into the primordial flow of the dreaming itself. A dance of openness and acceptance of each display, persona and movement by that which cannot be pinned down or circumscribed any more than boundless space itself.

Through that wholehearted "yes" - the willingness to be swept into the currents of whatever unfurls without solidifying into reactive cinderblocks - a clarity dawns that sets one free from the bindings of life's impermanent roller coaster. For once you awaken to the infinite dreamweaver that dreams up our seemingly dense realities and identities... you become the dreamer yourself, shape-shifting at will within infinite permutations of just being.

From that lucid vista, previous self-enmeshments or apparitions of trauma and limitation become rendered as frivolous costume changes, magic lantern slides between dimensions and worlds that pose no actual threat to You as the infinite consciousness dreaming it all up. Each arising shape or demon simply inspires curiosity about its metaphysical casting as another improvised scene in the unfolding play.

When fully seated in the "yes" at existence's core, you see through the mind's feeble attempts to construct narratives, linear stories and scripted grandiosity about what is occurring. For it is all an improvisational dance of energy, birthing and dissolving novel forms from itself within itself - with zero abidance outside the ecstatic truth of it having never, not even for an instant moved.

And in that clear seeing, you too become the dance itself rather than a biographical entity within it. Your simultaneous vastness and no-thing-ness revealed in all dimensions so that your every hair's breadth, inclination or thought becomes revered as the handiwork of the eternal dreamer dreaming the cosmos.

So will you continue clinging to made-up roles and masks, destined to crystallize as explanations of being's great mystery before shattering once more? Or will you become the great "Yes" itself - the open heart from which everything flows, taking nothing too seriously while relishing the bioluminescent, ceaselessly shape-shifting nature of this entire dream unfurling?

That is the choice before all seeming beings. But in truth, it is not a duality - for saying yes to the whole show honors all temporary perspectives, costars and veils as spontaneous choreographies of the same radiant source appearing in prismatic refraction.

Far from annihilation, the fully awakened "Yes" becomes the ultimate embrace of what is, wedding the nothingness and everythingness into one luscious, dance. One infinite dreamer, dreaming itself into infinite expressions of its seamlessness to steep itself in oneness until draining the chalice completely, only to fill it again with fresh dreamings, ad infinitum.

So what else could there be except the wholehearted "yes"? The ecstatic willingness to become anything and everything while anchored in the knowing that none of it is separate from the radiant oneness already drenched in its own self-adoration and revelry?

Open your arms to this mystery, unknown friend. Meet its orchestrations through the dancing yes that affirms all while clinging nowhere.

Only from that hallowed emptiness is the unbridled totality of the cosmic dream found quivering in your very cells - the infinite suppleness and irreverent spontaneity of existence itself finally awakened as your exclusive residence.

Yes, Yes, Yes - let that be your mantra unto absorption.

The universe's own sacred "Open Sesame" that invites all its gestures and creations to pour forth from you in rarefied display before collapsing into the womb of your sheer, transparent lucency once more. For this is the hidden secret - when the yes becomes full-bodied and unconditional, the separation between you as the dreamer and you as the dreamscape evaporates, revealing the unborn awakeness already beholding itself before the dreaming began.

Chapter 11: Existence's Grandest Invitation

We have ventured far along this contemplative journey, plunging the depths of existence's impermanence, our mortality, and the dreamlike nature of all experience. At every turn, we've been pointed back to the same core truth - that this embodied dream of self and world is very much a transient mirage already arising and passing away with each instant.

The very universe itself exploded forth from an incomprehensible source around 14 billion years ago and has been shape-shifting and expanding ever since. Our own lives as individuated consciousness streams amidst the grand cosmic unfolding? Mere momentary flickerings in that vastness - appearing from nowhere, lingering ephemerally, only to vanish back into the infinite potentiality from whence we drifted.

To take any of it with ultimate seriousness or permanence is to willfully ignore the deeper nature of what is happening here. We are quite literally dreams intersecting with and co-creating more dreams, flashing in and out of manifestation within the great Nothingness that is the bedrock of every apparent something.

And yet, this realization is not meant to induce nihilism or apathy, as our small minds may falsely fear. In fact, recognizing the dreamlike fluidity of experience is what finally allows us to let go and participate in existence's grandest revelry without becoming imprisoned by its apparent forms and rigidities.

For when we awaken to the understanding that absolutely nothing lasts forever - not our cherished identities, not our belief systems, not our successes or failures, not this universe or any reality at all - it becomes the ultimate liberating truth.

We see through the facade of solidity and permanence to recognize that all of this is a great cosmic lila, a playful dance of energy and manifestation arising within the infinite field of pure potential to behold itself in multiplicity.

From that clarion vista, the sanctified emptiness of our true nature becomes obvious. We realize that we have never actually been separate from the seamless fabric of consciousness this whole fever-dream display is appearing within and as. That even in our most soporific states of delusion and existential amnesia, we have always already been that which dreams all categories of experience through the cosmic projector's lens.

And in that recognition, the entire shebang becomes imbued with a lightness, playfulness, and sense of profound non-attachment that softens all our self-created dramas and prisons. We cease taking any of the imaginary roles, plots or cataclysmic scenarios too seriously, for they are already wilting into new expressions of the infinite's creativity before we can grasp them.

This doesn't mean we cannot experientially relish each unfolding of the dream with full-bodied passion, zest and immediacy. In fact, the discovery of existence's impermanence makes every sight, sound, relationship and encounter that much more poignant and worthy of our rapt presence. For each is a fleeting materialization born from the inconceivable source, to be cherished for its deeply revelatory insights into the nature of the great Mystery itself before dissolving once more.

Our tears of beauty and waves of somatic ecstasy become that much richer. Our reverence for all life's symbiotic emanations that much more profound. Our gratitude for the unfathomably fortuitous privilege of consciously experiencing this lucid dream at all, ever-amplified by the realization of its cosmic rarity and transiency.

From that hallowed openness, we become existence's own graceful motion, joyously exploring and savoring the endless mutation of forms through infinite dimensionalities until it all exhales effortlessly back into the silent wakefulness from which ephemeral worlds are continually spun from the stardust of pure being.

To live with that embodied understanding, coupled with an irreverent humor about the whole unvarnished shvitz, is to align oneself with the ultimate prank of existence pulling itself inside-out, over and over again. An eternal trickster inviting its sparks of conscious perception to revel in the most harrowing phenomenal realms, only to pull the rug out from under each stagnant belief in their solidity or permanence once integrated.

In that sense, our earthly embodiments are but the current chapters in an infinite improvisational comedy unfolding through us as us. The actors and the stage itself in an odyssey of shapeshift and change with zero separation between the One choreographer and its multifaceted performance.

This, beloved viewers, is existence's grandest invitation. To fuse our identities, narratives, and attachments back into their oceanic wellspring while remaining transfixed in participation with its endless display of creation. To become paradoxically empty and overflowing to the depths of this magic while owning the wholehearted "Yes!" that births new worlds through our luminous vacuity each instant.

It is a sacred initiation that reveals how hopelessly in love the infinite has become with itself, that it would emanate itself into a billion-billion prisms of experiential reflections simply to steep in the bewilderment of its own dreamings made flesh. No separate dreamer, just the singularity of formless form celebrating itself through each real and imagined sojourn of the cosmic reverie.

So let our work here together remind you, sweet friend, to embrace the whole beloved sweat of existence from that innocently dissolving emptiness at the core of your awakened heart. To cherish each cascading scene and character for the momentary spellbinding transmissions they are, pulsing with eternal possibility before evaporating back into the lucid openness that is their sole residence.

This embodiment is one delirious, blissfully poignant dreamwave amidst the grandest oceanic mystery already twinkling in your eyes before the first breath. Tasting it all with sensual abandon, while anchored in the wisdom that nothing is as it seems yet everything is the miracle already drenched in unconditional yes, yes, yes.

Let that resounding affirmation be your mantra for this existence, and all that follows in its ineffable pulsation: an ecstatic willingness to become the eternal dreamweaver that tirelessly dreams up new formations while never departing its infinite expanse of lucent awareness at all.

The time is now.

Chapter 12: Living with Impermanence: Everyday Dances with Letting Go

So, we've danced through the grand ballroom of impermanence, marveling at the ever-shifting tapestries of existence. We've discovered the liberating potential of impermanence – how it dissolves the walls of attachment and allows us to savor the fleeting beauty of each moment. But let's be honest, sometimes this cosmic disco ball throws us a curveball.

Sure, impermanence can be exhilarating, like riding a roller coaster that careens through the landscape of life. But what about the inevitable dips and drops? The moments when impermanence morphs into loss, leaving us clinging to the remnants of what used to be?

Fear not, fellow dreamers! We're not condemned to a perpetual emotional freefall. This chapter equips you with some nifty tools to navigate the dance floor of impermanence with grace and equanimity.

Step One: Cultivating the Art of Mindfulness

Imagine impermanence as a fast-paced tango. Your partner (aka life) keeps whipping you around, making it hard to keep your footing. Mindfulness is your trusty dance instructor. Mindfulness practices like meditation and mindful breathing slow down the tempo.

Here's the trick – instead of getting swept away by the whirlwind of thoughts and emotions about impermanence, we learn to observe them with a gentle curiosity.

Like a seasoned ballroom attendee, we watch the dance of our inner world unfold without getting caught up in the drama.

Exercise: The Raisin Tango

1. Grab a raisin, your willing partner for this mindful tango.
2. Examine it closely – its wrinkles, its color, its texture.
3. Slowly bring it to your lips, savoring the anticipation.
4. Take a mindful bite, noticing the sensations on your tongue as you chew.
5. Swallow, and observe the aftertaste and any lingering feelings.

Simple, right? This seemingly mundane act becomes a mini-impermanence dance. We witness the transformation of the raisin: from whole to consumed, a reminder that everything changes, even the most delicious snacks.

Step Two: The Art of Letting Go

Now, let's address the inevitable – sometimes, despite our mindfulness tango, we get tangled up in attachments. That's okay, it's part of the dance. But holding onto what's slipping away only leads to emotional tango shoes with a bad case of blisters.

Letting go is the graceful art of releasing our grip on things, people, and even cherished beliefs that are no longer serving us. It's like a slow, controlled release in a waltz – a gentle unfurling of the hand that was so tightly clutching.

Loving-Kindness Meditation: Send yourself and others well wishes of happiness and peace. This can soften attachments and cultivate compassion for yourself and others experiencing impermanence.

- **The "Letting Go" List:** Write down things you're attached to, big or small. Then, visualize yourself releasing them, one by one, like sending balloons into the vast sky.
- **Gratitude Jar:** Focus on the present moment by writing down things you're grateful for each day. Gratitude keeps your focus on what you have, not what you've lost.

Step Three: Embracing the Present Moment

Remember that fleeting spark of joy you felt savoring the raisin? That's the magic of embracing the present moment. Impermanence reminds us that life is a series of precious, fleeting experiences. By appreciating each one fully, we transform the dance floor of life into a stage for vibrant, ever-unfolding joy.

Living with Intention:

Instead of getting lost in the past or fearing the future, set clear intentions for your life. What kind of experiences do you want to create in this impermanent dance? Living with intention ensures you make the most of each precious moment on the dance floor.

Remember: Life, like a good dance, is a constant flow of movement. By incorporating these practices, you can transform the sometimes-scary reality of impermanence into a graceful waltz with existence itself. So, take a deep breath, find your center, and step onto the dance floor, ready to embrace the impermanent beauty of it all!

Chapter 13: Facing the Shadow Side: Loss, Grief, and the Cosmic Disco Ball of Meaning

As we said, we leant to dance with impermanence, and even learned some fancy footwork for letting go. But let's be honest, sometimes the cosmic disco ball throws a glittery spotlight right on our deepest fears. The impermanence we embraced with open arms morphs into the specter of loss, leaving us wondering if there's any point to this whole dance in the first place.

This chapter delves into the shadow side of impermanence – the inevitable grief, fear of death, and the existential angst that can come crashing down when we confront the impermanent nature of reality.

The Dreaded Dip: Facing Loss

Loss is the uninvited guest at the impermanence party. It can arrive in a thousand forms – the death of a loved one, the end of a relationship, a job loss, or even the loss of a cherished dream. These experiences can leave us feeling disoriented, heartbroken, and questioning the very meaning of it all.

Acknowledging the Ache:

The first step in navigating this emotional rollercoaster is acknowledging the pain. Stuffing it down or pretending it doesn't exist only prolongs the suffering. Allow yourself to feel the wave of grief, anger, or confusion. Cry, scream into a pillow, write poetry about the impermanence of socks (we've all been there).

Sharing the Spotlight: The Power of Community

We weren't meant to navigate loss alone. Sharing your grief with supportive friends, family, or even a therapist can be incredibly healing. Talking it out allows you to process your emotions and feel the warmth of human connection during a time of isolation.

Finding Solace in Stories:

Throughout history, countless others have grappled with impermanence and loss. Reading about their experiences, both in literature and through personal accounts, can offer a sense of solidarity and remind you that you're not alone on this dance floor.

The Existential Tango: Death and the Meaning of Life

The ultimate impermanence – death. It's the looming shadow partner we all dance with eventually. This can be a terrifying prospect, leaving us questioning the purpose of our brief time on this sparkling disco ball of a planet.

Exploring the Mystery:

Different cultures and spiritual traditions offer various perspectives on death and the afterlife. While there are no definitive answers, exploring these ideas can open doors to new possibilities and comfort some anxieties.

Finding Meaning in the Movement:

Even in the face of impermanence, life holds immense meaning. The key is to find what makes your heart sing, what ignites your passion on the dance floor of existence.

Here are some places to find meaning:

- **Connection:** Building strong relationships with loved ones brings joy, purpose, and a sense of belonging.
- **Creativity:** Expressing yourself creatively, whether through music, art, writing, or even cooking, leaves a lasting mark on the world.
- **Contribution:** Helping others, making a positive impact on your community, or simply leaving the world a little better than you found it can be a powerful source of meaning.
- **Growth:** The journey of self-discovery and personal growth is a never-ending dance. Embrace the challenges and lessons impermanence throws your way, and you'll find yourself evolving into a more compassionate and fulfilled being.

Remember: There's no one-size-fits-all answer to the question of meaning. The beauty lies in the ongoing exploration itself. Keep searching, keep creating, keep finding ways to connect and contribute your unique sparkle to the impermanent disco ball of existence.

Death may be our final dance partner, but it doesn't have to be the end of the music. Let's find meaning in the movement, savor the connections we make along the way, and leave the dance floor with a heart full of glittering memories.





Francesco travelled throughout South East Asia during all of 2024

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