



# WHAT WILL YOU CHOOSE?

*Ben Depraz Brenninkmeijer*

*To Ilona*

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## Chapter 1

# What is here and now? Be there

*In improvisation, there are no mistakes.*

### **Miles Davis**

I like to be 3 steps ahead. At least I thought I did.

Before I started improv theatre I didn't even notice how much I was doing it. How much I was anticipating what may or may not happen. I was constantly deciding ahead of time what I would say, what I would do, what I believed was about to unfold or what I hoped would occur. Most of it happened totally out of awareness. This is why improvisation theatre was so good for me.

In improv, the beautiful thing is that you cannot think 3 steps ahead. You have to go with what's there. I had to learn the hard way that no matter where my train of thought is taking me, I must play with what is happening here and now.

I could choose a story, some form of idea about a scene, only to have my partner state a completely different interpretation of my opening statement. Based on that, I was no longer the grocery clerk but the father of the bride, and we were not in London but in Mumbai. In less than a second I had to choose what was given to me and build on it. It's a powerful practice of being here and now.

It also taught me that in any moment there are a gazillion options available. But to make it improvisation comedy which is the form I was studying, you need believability. We can pretend to be aliens or animals, but this loses some of its potency. The more believable, the more mundane and realistic the scene is, the funnier it actually gets.

For this very reason, some restrictions are helpful. Statements that anchor who the characters are, where they are and what is going on between them are necessary to let the audience

understand what is taking place. Simultaneously, this limits the possibilities (although there are still thousands of avenues possible).

Some choice is better than no choice. Granted. But this does not mean that more choice is better than some choice.

And let's be honest for a moment: your whole life is like an improv scene! You're not speaking a learned script when you communicate. You're not acting out a role that you've rehearsed over and over when you live.

The truth is that you have no idea what's coming next. You think you do, and you build up all of these fantastic schemes and pathways in your head, but then something occurs and you have to deal with that and let go of the rest.

Have you ever experienced this? I have.

I almost developed a professional competency at fooling myself with the idea that I design and control the path ahead of me. And sometimes it sure looks this way, for a period of time.

Funnily enough, sometimes in improv your partner will interact with you and guess exactly what you were thinking about. It happened to me several times and it's awesome in the moment. You feel like you are telepathic or something. That's really freaky and cool. But it's not the norm. The norm is: not what I expected.

My life is the same. Sometimes it looks like I'm choosing my decisions, and my decisions are leading my actions and my actions are yielding my results, and I feel awesome and like I've got manifestation powers or something. But that's not the norm. The norm is: I deal with what shows up. In that sense, my life is way more like improvisation theatre.

After all, Shakespeare said:

*“All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts”*

So this begs the question... How do you get good at improv?

Welcome what's here and now and go with it. Let go of the attachment to your idea and what you want to have happened. Don't be 3 steps ahead. Be with the step that's happening now. Choose to go with the flow.

It's fun, exhilarating, surprising, and it requires you to trust what is going on. For that, you need to trust the people around you, trust that they'll support you, and equally be here to support them.

The best part about improvisation? Miles Davis said it best. There are no mistakes.

## Chapter 2

# Stop trying to choose the best

*The alternative to maximizing is to be a satisficer. To satisfice is to settle for something that is good enough and not worry about the possibility that there might be something better.*

**Barry Schwartz**

When I started studying hypnotherapy, I browsed the web to see what kind of trainings existed in London. I compared a few institutes and ultimately went for a small boutique school that taught hypnosis in a therapy context, along with some elements of neuro-linguistic programming, cognitive behavioural therapy and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing.

It wasn't the best school. It wasn't the most prestigious. I wasn't the most well-established. It surely wasn't the most endorsed. In fact, I started with a 3 months foundation course to hypnotherapy before I chose to join the one-year clinician course. We were only 6 people in the class. It was basic, unconventional and fun.

But this choice, which was probably not the "best" option in terms of quality, turned out to be perfect and priceless for me. This particular institute and its teacher taught me a lot on the nature of working with people's minds and emotions, and using hypnosis as well as a range of solution-centered therapeutic approaches. It built my confidence. It gave me a lot of practice hours. More importantly, it helped me retrain into something different than investment banking where I was spending most of my days. And in the end, I learned what any other institute would teach in a one-year clinician course. The path was all that mattered.

Inversely, when I went to business school before that, I had the opportunity to go to HEC, the most prestigious business school in France. I was blessed to be given this chance after 2 years of really intensive studying and taking some high pressure exams. Some of my friends at the time had decided to repeat their second year of study just to get in this particular school. Of course it was highly prestigious and could open a vast number of doors professionally.

But in terms of the content taught, I didn't learn more than any of my friends who ended up in other business schools across France. The knowledge imparted was the same, the subjects were similar, and the teachers were not particularly above average. They were researchers and publishers (that's a big part of what contributes to the school's ranking). Moreover, because I left France right after graduation, I hardly if ever "used" the brand of my business school to my advantage. The investment bank I went to work for in London cared way more about British and American universities than they did about HEC. And more so after I left banking and started working with people in a coaching context. Nobody looked at my education. Nobody really cared. All my clients care about is whether I can help them.

I don't want to seem ungrateful. I loved going to HEC. I'm not saying it didn't add massive value to my life, because it did. I'm also not saying that it will never contribute to some doors opening professionally, or that some clients didn't relate to me because I went there. Of course they did. But had I gone to another business school, other people would have related to me in the same way. Other doors would have opened up.

What I'm trying to do is show a more realistic view that ultimately, obsessively attempting to go for the "best" option is more often than not just a waste of time. It doesn't yield tangibly better results. It just provides certain consequences and outcomes, but these are not necessarily better than other consequences and outcomes that would have been obtained with another option.

Choosing is what has you move forward.

My wife has the tendency of wanting to choose the absolute best place to stay in, the best restaurant to eat in, the best dish to eat, or the best yoga class to attend. I must acknowledge that this leaves her with great taste and an ability to discern quality better than me. And sometimes, we do have some extraordinary experiences.

Simultaneously though, it regularly leads her to be paralysed in action because she "doesn't know" which option is going to be the best - and I help with the last decision. Notwithstanding the time she spends researching the various options... And even with all that care, she sometimes is disappointed because the reality does not match the expectations.

Looking for the "best" option has a big pile of drawbacks attached to it. Be sure to look at that before you choose to operate this way.

I have to laugh. We all have this friend who spends hours online looking for the absolute best deal possible, right. The best flights, the best sofa, the best bedside table lamp, the best aloe vera cream, the best vacuum cleaner, the best self-inflating mat, etc... "Best" often meaning highest quality at a lower price than anywhere else.

And fair enough, they do get some pretty awesome deals sometimes. But at what cost? Spending dozens of waking hours looking for a flight that will be over in less than a day, or purchasing an item which we won't care about in a few years.

In the grand scheme of things, I believe that time is our most valuable commodity. Everything else is secondary.

## Chapter 3

# What if I don't feel committed?

*Failure to commit is the high cost of low living.*

### **Steve Hardison**

It was August 2017, just about a month before my wedding. My wife and I had been engaged for 15 months at that time, and several friends had been asking me about my decision. They seemed fascinated by this act. "*How did you decide to propose? How do you know she is The One?*"

Others, perhaps less subtly, came up with: "*The wedding is coming up soon, man... Do you have any doubts?*"

What I told them then is what I still believe now: "No, I don't have 'doubts'."

The problem with these questions lies not in the different answers they might lead to. The problem lies in where these questions are coming from.

Doubts are rooted in Fear; Commitment is rooted in Choice.

Let me clarify something here. I was not transcended by a shining white light the moment I laid eyes on my future wife - nor was she, believe me! I was simply attracted to her, like I had been to other women many times in my life before, and I went up to talk to her. That's it. The magic is created as we move forward, helping each other grow and adjusting our trajectories as we go. It does not show up at any sudden point in time.

*"How did you decide you wanted to marry her?"*

I don't know exactly when I made the decision, because it kind of just emerged progressively. We were creating such a profound and intimate relationship together. It was pretty natural to start projecting, imagining and hinting at possibilities of committing to being with each other and growing together for the rest of our lives.

*"How did you know She was The One?"*

Well, the truth is I didn't know, and I still don't know. I just decided that she was. I see many people living in the shadow of their fantasies about the mysteries of life and love... Like with

drugs, I have for a long time been chasing love and relationships, looking for the next HIT, excited at the prospect that it will be better next time, and never appreciating what I had, or that what I had might very well be what I was waiting for. This juvenile way of being surely was not going to allow me to create a marriage.

I would argue that love isn't mysterious at all. I felt great with this woman who would later become my wife; not only that, I felt greatly consistently. I could be more myself with Her than anyone else I had ever met; I loved being around Her. I loved talking with her. What other feedback from life does one need?

*“How do you know your relationship will stay the same?”*

I don't, and I never did. Actually I am fully aware that it will evolve and change, therefore it inevitably won't stay the same. But I see it as my responsibility to create this evolution in a way that fulfills both of us; I don't surrender my agency and power to some unknown external and random source of hope. In Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) you learn about "nominalisations", words that are intangible 'things' that we create as entities, eg. a "relationship". A relationship is not a "thing". You can't put it in a wheelbarrow. It is an unfolding which results from a way of being and doing. Two people are relating to one another, ongoingly. It is up to me to shape that relating on an ongoing basis.

*“Did you ever wonder if you might be attracted to other women in the future?”*

The answer seems obvious to me, but I guess it's worth spelling out so that nobody feels there is something wrong with them. Of course I will be attracted to other women throughout my lifetime. This is biological. It has nothing to do with the decision to marry and commit to love and grow old with one person. You do not eat every time you see tasty food, do you?

*“Did you ever doubt your decision?”*

No, for a very simple reason which also informed my answers to all previous questions...

Because I made a decision to commit. Again, and again, and again...

The problem that most people face is that they believe commitment is a feeling. A friend of mine said this to me the other day: *"Mmmmh, yeah I'm not sure I could do what you are doing, I don't feel committed enough to my girlfriend to marry her."*

Commitment is not a feeling, commitment is a choice. You simply choose. Either you are or you are not. But the irony of it all is that NOT committing will create what you fear, while committing will create what you most desire.



## Chapter 4

# Just for today

*Just for today I will be unafraid. I will enjoy that which is beautiful & will believe that as I give to the world, so the world will give to me.*

### **Alcoholics Anonymous**

When exposed to the idea that we might have to commit to something or someone for the rest of our lives, most of us tend to freak out a little bit, if not doubt our abilities at the very least. Life-long commitments seem like insurmountable requests, especially nowadays. We say we have a fear of commitment. We dread the “commitment trap”. I see that show up often in romantic relationships, but not only. Giving up something in one’s diet, for example alcohol or meat, can be a source of distress for somebody.

*“Are you asking me to commit to the same person for the rest of my life?”*

*“Are you saying I can’t eat any more meat, ever?”*

*“Are you asking me never to drink any sip of alcohol ever again?”*

The most obvious and honest reaction to these questions is: “*I don’t know if I’m capable of doing this...*” Of course you don’t know if you can do this! You have not lived the rest of your life yet, so how would you know?

The idea of a life-long commitment is a tough one to grasp. How can I make a promise that I will have to uphold in 5 years, 20 years, 50 years? It seems a ridiculous and near impossible task, like Sisyphus tirelessly pushing his large rock up on a steep hill. Doomed to fail.

This is why I love the “Just For Today” idea which is used in AA’s 12-step recovery programme.

You don’t have to never drink again. But just for today, can you make that promise to yourself? Can you stay away from alcohol, just for today? Sure, that I can do. It feels manageable. How about tomorrow? Tomorrow we’ll see when we get there. And then, the next day, the same question is asked. Just for today, can you keep that promise? And we go on repeat, one day at a time.

All we did is chunk it down to something that feels realistic and achievable. We're not making grand gestures about infinity and eternity here. We're just taking life one day at a time, and truth be told that's not such a bad idea considering that's how all of us live it.

That's how I - pragmatically - see my commitment to my wife. Whenever someone asks me about my ability to stay committed forever, I admit that I don't know about forever. Of course like any human being I enjoy the idea of it, I enjoy the feeling of saying that I can commit forever because it feels noble and powerful. But if I'm honest, all I can do is take it one day at a time, and every day choose to renew my whole-hearted commitment to her.

Any commitment you make in your life is not forever, simply because it will need to be renewed regularly. And when you feel like wavering or like you're stepping off the path, ask yourself if you would be willing to keep up your commitment "just for today".

One of my clients once started debating this, arguing that this was tricking himself into a fake reward that would never come. He saw this process as a sort of delayed gratification mechanism, which would be deceitful as he would never actually reap the reward the next day because of repeating the idea the next day. In his mind, Just For Today was a trick of the mind, depriving him of something valuable and desirable.

He got it completely upside down.

The reward isn't alcohol, meat, or sleeping with anyone you want. The reward isn't what the commitment casts out of (or into) your life. The reward is the upholding of the commitment itself. The reward is going through the day keeping your word to yourself. The reward is noticing the clarity and purity of your mind when you do so. The reward is simply enjoying your own power to choose.

This is not deprivation. This is liberation.

## Chapter 5

# Know what you're working for

*We either make ourselves miserable, or we make ourselves strong.  
The amount of work is the same.*

**Carlos Cataneda**

A client wanted to take her business to the next level. She was eager, but she couldn't get herself to do the things she said she wanted to do to make important changes happen in her company. Through our conversations it became apparent that she did not know what she was working for.

Simon Sinek's "Start with why" is not just a buzzphrase. Knowing your reasons for doing something or being a certain way is extremely valuable. This knowledge will give you extra power, extra fuel. Simply put, knowing your reasons raises self-awareness which is the source of all creativity, possibility and power.

If I'm angry and resentful, why am I doing that? What is it doing for me? What am I working for?

*Work (/wɜːk/) Noun: activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result.*

What is the purpose or result you are trying to achieve by making yourself indecisive? Regretful? Doubtful? All of these require energy and mental effort. Let's figure out what it is that we are trying to achieve when we behave a certain way.

I realised that when I make myself confused and frustrated by indecision, something which happened regularly over the past few years, I have very good reasons to do that. I'm not talking here about justifications, meaning alleged causes for my dissatisfaction. I'm not looking for the blame: "My wife did such and such, therefore I'm pissed off". I'm looking for the unspoken goal and result that my behaviour is attempting to fulfil. What is the outcome that being frustrated and confused is leading me towards right now?

I'm working for something. I'm trying to get something. What might that be? This can be an illuminating quest.

Last time I looked, I realised I wanted to be right. Being frustrated also allowed me not to take responsibility for my situation. I had a scapegoat, someone or something to blame and that felt good. I also got some attention from people close to me who were supporting me. I could justify different things that I was not doing or not performing in. I got all this from doing the work of making myself frustrated.

The moment I realised this, the moment I became aware of what I was working for, I had a moment of honesty with myself. I had to make a choice here, about who I wanted to be and what quality of life I wanted to experience. Not quality of life as in: having golden shower taps and eating foie gras for breakfast. Quality of life as in: the emotions I feel on a moment by moment basis.

What we make out of every event that happens is up to us, right? The saying goes: "We don't control what happens to us, but we can control our interpretation of and response to what happens to us." Many people in history articulated this powerful idea, from Epictetus to Shakespeare to Viktor Frankl.

An interpretation that will make you miserable is up to you. Period. If you make yourself miserable, you are getting something from it. Possibly one if not several of the outcomes I shared above that I identified in myself when I go there.

But also, notice that the effort and amount of energy necessary to achieve the result of taking responsibility, being strong, being an inspiration for others, dealing bravely with what is and moving forward with creativity is the same. If you want to work for that, you can. It's available to you. Always.

Being miserable or being strong.

The amount of work is the same.

## Chapter 6

# It doesn't matter what you choose

*We plan, God laughs.*

### **Yiddish proverb**

In the movie *Sliding Doors* with Gwyneth Paltrow, the film splits into two different realities, two different lives for the main character the moment she walks down the stairs to catch the underground. In one life she makes it on the train and all the way back home just in time to see something that will change her life forever. In the other life, something gets in her way and she misses that particular train. She gets home a few minutes later, and she does not see what happened. The film then runs both scenarios in parallel for the rest of it, and you get to see both of these lives. At the end, you're left wondering... which life was actually better?

If happiness is what we want, then it doesn't matter what we choose. No matter what decisions I have made in my life, they were followed by equal moments of happiness and sadness. Give it enough time and I'll go up probably about as much as I go down. I anticipate it will be so until my final day on this planet - let's hope I have got a few more decades to walk about!

Of course it may seem hard to be absolutely certain that it does not matter what we choose. The fact is we only get to live one version, one scenario of our life unfolding, so how can we be absolutely certain about what would have happened or not happened in another? How can we really compare?

The best proxy I can use for that game is looking at the multitude of people I have worked with. Some clients thought if they chose to quit their jobs, their life would work better for them. Some clients had quit their jobs and thought if they had remained in their jobs their life would work better for them. Some had chosen to have children, others didn't choose to have children. Some had chosen not to have children, others didn't choose not to have children. Some had chosen to marry. Others had chosen to remain single. No matter the choice and its alternative, I

have worked with people on both sides of the crossroads and always I have found people who are fully satisfied with their choice, and people who are not. Chances are you know the same phenomenon around you just looking at your family and friends.

The only thing that matters is not about what path you choose. It's about your attitude after you have made the choice to walk on one.

It's about embracing what is - Byron Katie calls it "loving what is" - instead of fantasising about what is not. We all have this power to do one or the other. It's called imagination. In my own life, I know that the times I have chosen to focus on what was not were the times that caused me most dissatisfaction, confusion and uncertainty. Instead, when I look at what's around me and I take the time to appreciate what I have and what I do, I feel grateful and peace sets in.

Perhaps it's ironic that gratitude is a choice in itself. Perhaps even that doesn't matter?

## Chapter 7

# There is no right path

*Every path is the right path. Everything could have been anything else and it would have just as much meaning.*

**Nemo**

*Mr. Nobody*

We humans are such incredible creatures. We have the ability to derive meaning from anything! We are also able to question forever and dive into an abyss of meaninglessness. Therefore no matter the path, it can be meaningful if we choose to see it that way, and meaningless if we don't.

So often I have been trapped in my own head wondering what the right decision might be. There were pros and cons for each. I'm sure it's the same for you when you consider making a difficult decision and you are struggling with the choice. But if I'm honest with myself, more times than I can count I ended up making a decision and it turned out it was the right decision, but I could only know this and feel this afterwards! Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

Why do we struggle? Firstly, we can see pros and cons to both paths, so usually the way ahead is not obvious. Secondly, we are afraid of regret. Thirdly, we are concerned with what people might think. Let's look at these in turn.

Pros and cons to all decisions, that's a given. It will always be this way. The point is to know what set of drawbacks - the cons - you are ready to deal with. Or, as Mark Manson elegantly puts it, "which flavour of shit sandwich do you like"? We are always going to have to deal with a package, so now it's just a matter of looking at what you're ready and willing to handle.

Fear of regret has nothing to do with the decision itself. It has to do with an attitude of regret. In other words, it's not out there, on the path, in the world of circumstances and events. It's all in my head.

The way I see it, I can only feel regret if my mind is stuck in the past while my body is moving with the present. To regret means to look back with distress or sorrowful longing.

If I align my mind with my body and look at where I am now and softly focus on that, then I can't feel regret. It just has no life in the present. I can't even consider the alternative that could have occurred had I made a different choice, because that would require my mind to wander back into the past and fantasy land instead of staying right here with my body, right now.

What people might think, well that's tough luck because I will never ever be able to control any of that. Have you ever made a decision you were super happy with, thinking you were awesome and on top of the world for making that choice, only to have your friend Nancy or your uncle Bob call up and say "what on earth were you thinking?" It's comical when you think of it. Being afraid of the opinion of people who are as clueless in the face of choice and decision-making as we are.

Make a decision, lift your chin up, smile and walk. Try it. It's easier than it seems.



## Chapter 8

# Fruitful indecision

*One who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is intelligent among men.*

### **Bhagavad Gita**

There are some instances in my life where I have been in a place of indecision about something. I think all of us have.

A choice I needed or wanted to make, which I simply could not make up my mind about. Sometimes I've hesitated and been in that space for months. I have had this occur both in romantic relationships and in professional endeavours, but it can really show up anywhere.

It can be painful, not to know what to choose. If I'm really honest, it's one of the things I find most frustrating in my life. I guess that's why I'm writing ideas down about making choices!

So when I've been in that indecisive space, what I have noticed is that there are two ways I can handle it. One is what I'll call "sitting with the discomfort", and the other one is "ruminating". I need to credit my good friend Nic for articulating that distinction for me.

Sitting with the discomfort is about doing two things.

The first one is allowing myself not to decide for now, and choosing a date in the future when I'll book some time with myself and look again at the decision. This helps my mind relax knowing that the choice is going to be looked at again, so it doesn't need to keep bringing it to my attention every hour of the day. If I'm still not clear when the time that I've booked comes, no problem. I just do the same thing again. I put a time in the future, maybe a day, maybe a week, maybe a month from now, when I'll review the situation again.

The great thing about this is that I'm giving my mind relief. All it wants is for this situation to be considered. So if I'm committing to consider it at X time on Y date, then that's all my mind needs to calm down. Every time the thought comes up, I remind myself that it's fine, we'll deal with it at X time on Y date.

The second thing that sitting with the discomfort is about, is remaining open to what the discomfort might bring up for me whilst I sit with the indecision. In other words, what is there

for me to learn here, in this discomfort? What capacity is it forcing me to develop? Who am I getting closer to, perhaps because this person is helping me with my thoughts whilst I'm unclear?

Remaining open to noticing what the discomfort is drawing out of me is powerful and helps me be with it longer. Don't get me wrong: it doesn't make it more comfortable. It just means I'm using this indecision, which for now is dominating my thoughts, as a platform to learn about myself. Everything serves.

On the opposite side of the distinction, there is ruminating. That's just playing ping-pong with your thoughts, and I've done that too, many times. One day I'm more leaning this way and think I'll decide to go right, and then the next day for whatever reason I'm now leaning more towards going left. I'm now more confused than ever. I'm volatile and my thoughts are going left, right, left, right. I have stories that loop round and round in my head and I'm going nowhere. That's ruminating. It is also uncomfortable, but it's not useful.

Indecision will probably never go away. There's always going to be something in life we're not sure about. Something we don't have enough data about, or a situation that is bringing up some fear which does not allow us to make a decision, or 101 other reasons why making a decision is not straightforward.

In this case, notice what you're doing with that indecision. Is it fruitful?

Are you ruminating? If you love chewing on grass, keep doing what you're doing. It seems to work just fine.

If you'd rather try something else, how about sitting with the discomfort?

## Chapter 9

# Time to kill that thing!

*Once I made a decision, I never thought about it again.*

**Michael Jordan**

Draw a line vertical on a piece of paper. Then at some point stop, and draw two lines that are branching off from this initial line. One goes left, the other goes right. That's the most basic representation I can think of to demonstrate the mental process of decision-making. The original crossroads. The eternal dilemma.

Now if you're anything like me, it's not uncommon that you venture off in one direction and kind of, sort of, half-look over your shoulder to what lay back there, on the other path, and wonder "what if...". So let's say you picked the line going to the right, but as you look at the piece of paper, you keep wondering what there might have been in store for you on the left. Did you make the right decision? What if it was better there?

It can be fun to look back at the origin of words. I do it sometimes. The etymology of the word "decide" is instructive. It comes from the latin "de-" which means "off" and "caedere" which means "to cut". So literally, to decide is to cut off. The *-cide* part is what you find in other words like genocide and homicide.

Therefore to decide means, literally, to kill the alternative. Metaphorically speaking... If I look at my piece of paper and I go right, I want to scratch and scuff the line going to the left. I want to erase the alternative from my mind. Then I'm free. Then there is no looking back to what could have been.

There is just me walking on the path, looking and enjoying what's around me in this moment. It's beautiful. It's all I need.

What choice have you made recently that you are not certain about? What's the path you are contemplating instead, the one you could have been on but are not because you decided otherwise? Are you ready and willing to go and *choose that now*, instead of just thinking about it

and letting your life slip away in front of you because you're not present with what is? No? Then erase it from your mind. Stop thinking about it. It's easy. Just stop. When the thought comes, consciously think or do something else. Time to kill that thing.

## Chapter 10

# Make it right

*The struggle ends when the gratitude begins.*

**Neale Donald Walsch**

Isn't it extraordinary to realise that we always have the power to make the right decision, no matter what? Because we do. I can always rationalise and justify my choices in hindsight. After all, isn't this how we do it most of the time?

My brain is a meaning-making machine and my ego wants to be right. Together, these factors mean that I will always have the ability to find justifications and rationalisations to my decisions. When was the last time you did something, and came up with clever reasons for doing it the moment someone challenged your action or decision?

When I chose to leave my job in investment banking, there were many reasons to quit, and at least as many reasons to stay. No one but myself could tell what was better for me. It wasn't a straightforward choice. I wanted to prove myself. I wanted to be successful and make my parents proud. So leaving - although evident due to how miserable and frustrated I was in my job - was a tough decision to make. One I could doubt easily. So I made it right. In the last few years I sometimes have felt like perhaps I could have stayed a little bit more. Saved a little bit more money. Gained a little bit more experience. But what good does dwelling in the past do for me? None. When that happens and these thoughts occur to me, I remember that I have the power to say "this was perfect the way it happened; it was the right time and I'm so glad I had the courage to quit". It was the right decision because I made it right. I use justifications and rationalisations like I've done a million times before. You and I can do so no matter what.

It's an interesting choice of words, "no matter what".

Matter: physical substance in general, as distinct from mind and spirit. In other words, we can understand "matter" as the physical reality which surrounds us at any moment in time. The circumstances you find yourself in, if you like. Therefore whatever the circumstances are, I can

choose my decision and my choice to be right; no, I can *make it right*. No matter what! If I have less money, if I am single, if I get sick, all these are just circumstances. Matter. And I can have whatever I did to get there be right for me. It is my choice.

Sometimes it can feel difficult to do this. Certain choices and their consequences can be hard to deal with. So how can we do this effectively? How can I make it right no matter what? I look for the benefits of a particular decision or choice or occurrence. To myself first, and to the people around me second. I take a notepad and a pen and I write all the benefits that I am blessed to have in the situation I'm in, and all the benefits that come to me because I am not engaged in any other path. Once I have done that, I can replicate the process for everybody else around me.

For example: how does it benefit me that I am no longer in investment banking, that I quit when I did instead of waiting another year or two? I scan all areas of my life, all aspects of time, energy and space, and list the numerous benefits I can see and acknowledge in my life because of that decision. Then I ask myself how does it benefit my wife and our relationship that I am no longer in investment banking? How does it benefit my family? How does it benefit my friends and social circles? How does it benefit the clients that I have engaged with since, in my new profession?

Then all doubt dissipates. This choice is and was right. I make it so.

What is one decision you made in the past that you feel slightly doubtful about? One choice that sometimes you end up questioning and wondering whether you should have done differently? Use the exercise above and *make it right* for you.

Because you can.

## Chapter 11

# No decision is forever

*It matters not how strait the gate, how charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.*

**William Ernest Henley**

I remember attending a wedding once. The people getting married had been together for more than a decade. During that time they separated once. They did so for less than a year. Then they decided they actually wanted to be back together. They did, and years later, they got married.

I'm sure their separation was painful when it happened, and neither of them was particularly relieved or rejoiced by it. But the point is: it wasn't forever.

Now they are married. And who knows what will happen next? We all know people - and some of us are among these people - who have spoken vows of eternity under the stars, and yet a few years later decided to go our separate ways. I'm not saying that they will divorce or choose to separate again. What they do is up to them and I wish them nothing but what fulfils them most. However the possibility of a different path exists, and firmly believing that it does not would be naive at best.

What I'm saying is that no marriage is "forever". No decision is "forever". Nothing is "forever".

"Forever" means "for all future time". Time will continue after we pass. Unless you refer to the experience of time we have as humans, and which ends the moment we die. In that case perhaps there would be a place to consider a decision to be made forever, as in made for the rest of my life and until I die. Is that my "forever"?

I don't know. And even then, do I know what happens after I die? Do I know how I will experience time then? And if we consider the word "all" in the definition: "**all** future time", then surely this does not encompass only my own experience of time, but all experiences of time. Of

other people. Of other beings. Of the planet and the universe as a whole. So forever must extend way beyond my own death. And there, I have no visibility of what will happen.

I know it may seem weird or shocking to consider this. As humans we love grandiose gestures and we are slightly infatuated with immortality so we love to use the word “forever”. As a kid I always wanted to be immortal, it was like the superpower I hoped to have. I loved vampires and elves because they could live forever. It seemed so cool.

“Forever” is the climax of love stories and any heroic journey.

But looking at my own life, if I’m honest with myself, no decision I make is forever. Show me the chains! Where are my shackles keeping me in any situation forever? Where is my cell? Show me the guards! I can’t see them.

I am free. Always free. Life can flow beautifully and I can flow with it, eagerly going with the stream. I can change my mind. I can make a decision today, and a different decision tomorrow. I can even make the opposite decision today as the one I made yesterday.

That’s the beauty of it.



## Chapter 12

# Is the Universe friendly?

*I think the most important question facing humanity is, 'Is the universe a friendly place?' This is the first and most basic question all people must answer for themselves.*

**Albert Einstein**

The other day I was having a conversation with a friend. She's absolutely wonderful. She is one of these people who exist and live in a magical space of enthusiasm and bubbling energy. Speaking to her is always a delight and a reminder of our childlike essence. The power within us to laugh and play, just because it's fun.

I was sharing with her a decision I was unsure about, which was the cause of a lot of inner turmoil and tension for me. It was far from a life or death scenario, but I sure as hell made it to be one in my mind, and it was drilling holes between my temples. I was seeing my life branch off in two possible directions and it was painful because neither felt entirely satisfying, and there was fear and dissatisfaction attached to both. There were also great feats and wonderful possibilities, but at that point I was blocking myself from seeing those properly and appreciating them.

Then after we talked for a while, she asked me this question: "Is the Universe friendly?"

I felt like an opening up in my mind. Obviously, I knew instantly what my answer was because it had been my life experience entirely. But more illuminating was the light shone on the consequences for the decision I had to make. It's funny how you can know something, but not *really* know it, until someone says something or shows you something in a certain way, and then it sinks in.

I always felt like the Universe was a friendly place. I genuinely think I am the luckiest guy I know, and I love being here. Alive. Experiencing the marvels this life has to offer. Doing my best to make the most of it all. So when my friend asked "Is the Universe friendly?" I answered "Yes". Then I realised the implications. What she helped me see was that no matter my decision,

things would turn out great. My life would be awesome and I'd love it and have a good time, because it would inevitably turn out to be the best path.

Think about it this way. Have you ever had a romantic relationship, or a few, that didn't go according to plan? Relationships that ended and hurt you, even if you thought initially that the person might be the partner for you? And has it ever occurred to you that for all of them or at least most of them when you look back now, you think "Thank God this ended!" ?

That's what I mean.

## Chapter 13

# Did the baby say Dada or Data?

*What gets measured gets managed.*

**Peter Drucker**

The other day I was speaking to a business owner and she was unsure about what to do to grow her business. She had multiple options and strategies available to her, and a choice to make as to which one to focus on so as not to spread her resources too thin. We started to talk and I asked her some questions to understand what her considerations were for each alternative.

What we discovered was that she didn't have much data to make her decision. She didn't know exactly where her initial customers came from, how they heard about her and her services, how effective were the flyers she gave away in the streets, nor how powerful her blogs were. She did not follow her website's traffic and did not track her leads, revenue, repeat business or profit margins. And yet she wanted to decide how to market her services and was hesitating between using social media, running free events, creating ads online and offline, joining networking groups, and I can't even remember what else she was on.

I'm not an expert, but having no data to rely on surely isn't going to help to make a decision.

I was terrible at this for years. From the moment I started being self-employed and working with people, just about the one thing I did right was track my revenues and expenses. But I was clueless about all other aspects of my business. I thought to myself: "I don't need all this extra noise, just focus on being competent at what you do and the rest will take care of itself." While there is some validity to that statement and I would stand behind it if I had to, it's also incomplete. More importantly, I never had a major problem with decision-making. But if I had, my problem would not have been with making the decision. It would have been lacking the right information.

Often we are indecisive simply because we don't have enough data - or the relevant data - to make a decent assessment of our choices. What are the things that you need to know that would help you decide? Make a list.

Obviously you can't know things like: "is this going to work?" Or "will this be more successful than that?" If we had access to these answers, nobody would ever suffer from analysis paralysis. But you can - and you must - know your data based on past evidence. Collect it. Understand it. Analyse it. Decisions are much easier then.

What works for me?

What does not work for me?

What do I want to know?

What do I need to know?

What is my budget for this particular aspect of my business?

What was the result from every experiment I made so far?

How did I create those results?

What generated the most leads?

How did I create my first 10 clients?

What do I like to do?

What do I not like to do?

Can I afford some help with this?

What help do I already have?

Who can I ask for guidance?

What are my resources?

What are my needs?

What are the benefits of this?

What are the drawbacks of this?

Where will I contribute the most?

What do I need to learn?

etc.

Dive into these questions like a baby exploring every single square foot of the living room. One square foot at a time, with ravishing focus and curiosity.

Indecision is not the problem. Lack of information is.

## Chapter 14

# I have a dream

*We must be willing to let go of the life we have planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us.*

### **Joseph Campbell**

I never went travelling around the world. Although I distinctly remember making the decision once that I would. It was 5am; I was in an Australian airbnb on the Great Ocean Road. And I decided that I would quit my job in investment banking in the next one or two years, and go travelling to explore the world.

That never happened.

Well, the travelling around the world part didn't.

I did quit the job about 18 months later. But by then I was really in love with a woman who would, later on, become my wife, and I did not want to leave her behind.

You see, right about the time I made this decision to travel around the world, I met someone, and we fell in love.

As time went on and my plan of quitting my job became more and more tangible, she supported me through it and our connection grew stronger and stronger.

Simultaneously, the idea of travelling the world on my own became less and less appealing, because I knew what I would be leaving behind me. At the same time, I did want this trip to be more of a solitary self-discovery rather than the two of us. Mmmh... Dilemma...

After many considerations, I chose not to go. I quit my job.

9 months later we got engaged.

And the rest is history.

I still want to travel the world someday, but I made a choice about what mattered most to me. And I took responsibility for what I would not have.

The cultural exploration.

The backpacking.

The wild adventures.

I think about it sometimes, as I do with other things I never got to do. I call these “unanswered dreams”. Dreams that called for me and which I chose not to answer.

We can’t answer every call that life throws in our direction.

The good thing is that there will always be new ones coming our way, so that’s exciting.

But my unanswered dreams are dreams I have that I can look at with mature affection.

Instead of beating myself up or dwelling in my own self-pity and misery for things that did not occur or I didn’t do, I contemplate what could have been with a smile, very aware of the blessings that came with the decision *not* to go down that road.

My unanswered dreams are precious to me. I treat them like my wife treats our house plants. With a funny and endearing sort of parental affection.

Someone once shared with me that they imagine their life like a ship cruising on the ocean, with their own “unanswered dreams” cruising along in a phantom ship a little bit behind, following them.

Never too far away.

Being pulled along.

Close to their heart.

Possibly even accessible some day, as life sometimes brings these unexpected twists to our existence.

I let go of one dream for another. And I am grateful every day that I did.

There is so much beauty in my life.

And my unanswered dreams are beautiful too.

Chapter 15

## How to master choice?

*When given a choice, take both.*

**Peter Diamadis**

Nuff said.

## Chapter 16

# What can I get from this?

*Life is not happening to you. Life is happening for you.*

**Anthony Robbins**

In every situation, I have a choice. I can try to get through it. Or I can look at what I can get from it.

Getting through something disempowers me. It's like I'm putting some moments between brackets saying: "this does not really count as my life, I'm just trying to get through it so that I can open my eyes again on the other side, and resume what should have been my life all along". This attitude has me clenching my teeth and labouring through what is occurring. Paradoxically, this has me focus on the pain. Nothing else exists.

"We just need to get through this." To go where? What's on the other side? When we say this, let's realise that we're not actually helping ourselves. Sometimes people say this to give themselves strength in order to "survive" (emotionally at least) a very painful situation. But do they feel better once they've "gotten through" something? They might be less in pain because time has passed. That's all. They haven't learned anything. They haven't acknowledged any of the blessings that came along. They are simply bitter, or at best resigned.

One thing I found gives me more strength is to ask myself what I can get from this situation. It's so much more powerful. It may feel a little bit weird at first because we have some unspoken social agenda to behave as victims and pity each other, but really this question is about learning and moving forward. Another beautiful thing this question creates is the full integration of the experience into my life and narrative, instead of shutting it out as something that should go between brackets.

"This is so painful... What can I get from this?" empowers me.

This provides me with a focus on the learning, the blessings, the consequences that are beneficial to me. Even if these consequences are a reaction caused by emotional pain, are they any less valid? If I'm getting closer to my partner as a result of a disease that hit me, then this is



something I'm getting from the pain and I want to notice it. If I learn about something, raise my awareness about something, or develop an understanding of something, I want to acknowledge it.

I've also often seen people (and I've been there myself a lot) "get through" something and then later on realise what they "got from" it. It's not an uncommon pattern to toughen up in the moment and later on when the pain subsides identify some lessons and blessings.

What I'm wondering about is: what if we could do the latter part earlier on? What if we chose not to go for the attention-seeking, self-pitying attitude and just focused on what we could get from an undesirable situation?

Chances are it's not in our control anyway. So why not focus on what's to be gained from it, instead of blaming ourselves or the universe for what happened?

I'm not saying it's going to be easy, but in my book it surely looks much more appealing.

## Chapter 17

# Choose your pain

*Everything involves sacrifice. Everything includes some sort of cost. Nothing is pleasurable or uplifting all of the time. So, the question becomes: what struggle or sacrifice are you willing to tolerate?*

**Mark Manson**

When we make a decision, it is evident that we are looking to choose what will cause us the greatest benefits.

When I do it fully, I tend to assess both the benefits that I will get right now, in the short term, as well as the benefits I will reap in the long term, and I try to maximise the combination of both.

I may also pay attention to the consequences of my decision on other people and the benefits that my choice will cause to those around me. This still constitutes a benefit for myself: either I am concerned by other people's opinions about me and I want to maintain my reputation or human connections, or I really care about them and I want to feel good about my impact on them. Either way, it is still about me.

I might finally consider the consequences of my decision on the wider community (animals, the natural world, the planet), in reference to a moral ideal I subscribe to or a deep value I have. This is in relation to my moral ideals and therefore my self-concept (the view I have of myself). In other words, even if the object of my observation is the world around me, it is still about me.

So no matter where I look, it seems like I am looking to maximise the benefits to me when I make a decision. Why is it so difficult, then?

It is hard to choose because we know deep down that every decision has unintended (let's call them negative) consequences. Otherwise it would be easy to choose. The first of these negative consequences is that choosing one thing inevitably removes the possibility of choosing anything else in this moment. The choice itself collapses reality into one single space-time manifestation. Where before there was infinite possibility, there is now actuality and we have to

live with the absence of any other possibility. That's the first immediate drawback of any decision. Beyond that, each choice will create ripple effects and bring with it as many drawbacks as there are benefits.

This I found to be true for every decision I have made in my life.

This you must keep in mind when you list out pros and cons. Writing that list is not about coming to a sudden realisation. It's not even about making a rational decision once you are aware of the full extent of the choice. It is really about seeing what drawbacks you are about to deal with if you choose this path.

This list will always be balanced. The more you look, the more you will see that both columns will be proportional to each other. If you find a large number of benefits to a decision, be sure that these will come along with a large set of drawbacks. If you find only a few benefits, there will be only a few drawbacks. It's always proportional.

Every choice causes its own baggage of undesirable consequences. Each decision has its own cost attached to it, like a shadow following it around everywhere.

Don't fool yourself by believing that you can make one without the other coming along for the ride.

The question becomes: what drawbacks are you ready to handle? What pain, problems, or difficulties are you willing to take on? What are you willing to suffer (bear in mind, suffering is optional, but that's another conversation)?

Rather than choosing based on the benefits, we might want to consider choosing the drawbacks we're ready to take in our backpack and carry around with us.

Clinical psychologist Jordan B. Peterson couldn't say it better: "Pick your damn sacrifice. You don't get to not make one."

## Chapter 18

# Give me some rules!

*Too many options will make a tyrant of all of us.*

**Matthew McConaughey**

I had a client once who could live anywhere in the world.

He wanted to find a place to call home, and all he had to do was choose. He had already travelled extensively, and had the means and the freedom to pick any place of his liking.

His problem? He had no rules. He had no constraints whatsoever. He was as free as a bird. Therefore, the choice was overwhelming him. Too many options with no way of narrowing them down. No way for him to be creative with his plan.

In his talk ‘The Paradox of Choice’, Barry Schwartz tells the story of the 175 salad dressings available at his supermarket. Not 3, not 10... but 175! How the heck do you pick one?

I, for one, know that I would need some rules. Some kind of criteria that restrains my selection. Some arbitrary factors that would remove a good chunk of the possibilities for me before I even have to engage my brain power.

Rules are what will unleash my creativity. Rules are what will give me the freedom to choose.

If I engage my brain power and rational thinking from the start, contemplating 175 salad dressings with no rules whatsoever on how to approach the situation, it takes me about 10 seconds to get overwhelmed.

My coach used to say: “Structure creates freedom”. I had to learn over and over again the lesson that rules and guidelines, even when they are arbitrary, subjective and made up, grant me the freedom I craved.

On the contrary, keeping all my options open would have me trapped, confined in my analysis paralysis, unable to choose in the face of too many possibilities. Unable to resign myself to collapse all of those possibilities into one single reality in the act of choosing.

Some time ago I participated in a workshop with about 12 other people. Our instructor was an extraordinary woman who was teaching us how to reconnect with our capacity to move in a natural environment. We were barefoot on the grass and explored how to move in ways our ancestors or children moved: rolling and climbing and running and twisting and turning... It was a lot of fun.

One of the games was the following: everyone remained immobile, frozen in a different position fairly close to one another, and one participant had to go from one side of the group to the other, going over or under other people. The only rule? This participant had to have one of his hands in contact with the floor at all times...

Try to picture it. People standing, bending, crouching, on all fours or lying down. And one person weaving his or her way through that jungle of body parts always keeping a hand in contact with the floor.

You've got to get creative. That's the only option. You start to move your body in ways you've never done before. You play with the edges and discover new ways that are fun and free.

Before she gave us that rule, the participant could just walk straight through the group. Bending over a little bit here or there. It was boring. There was no creativity. Habit took over and did the work.

Just like it would if you faced 175 different salad dressings. You'd go for the one you always have, because then you don't have to think. Thinking would only overwhelm you.

Unless you had a rule. Something to constrain your choices. That's what I learned that day.

Rules don't restrain creativity. They enhance it.

## Chapter 19

# The FOMO train

*I was about to take over the world, but then I saw something shiny.*

### **Anonymous**

I don't even know where to start on this one. To me the ridiculousness of this concept comes across in how stupid I feel when I try to say it out loud. "Fow-mow"...

I imagine this to be the sound a cow would make as it watches a train pass and it tries to mumble what this moving thing is in cow-language whilst chewing on its grass meal.

What is fomo? You probably know. If not, here's what the acronym stands for: Fear Of Missing Out.

FOMO is what your friends tell you they are suffering from when they attempt to justify decisions they made which they are not owning or satisfied with.

Perhaps you also have invoked this highly dangerous medical condition to explain the conundrum you faced one evening as you were trying to decide whether to go to your friend's birthday party or to your cousin's leaving drinks. (I had to look up the definition of the word conundrum: *a confusing and difficult problem or question*. I put it there because it sounded good).

Let's look at what FOMO is. When I fear missing out on something, what I'm pretty much doing is projecting a scenario in which a set of events will occur and if I am not present, I will be either excluded, embarrassed or regretful. If I am present, on the contrary, I will belong, I will be aware of the set of events, and as such I won't be embarrassed or regretful. This is a simplified explanation and might not be exhaustive to all cases of FOMO, but the essence of the condition is the same. I don't want to be excluded or not be aware of what happened. It usually involves social situations and therefore feelings of acceptance and inclusion in a group.

So right now, you're missing out. You definitely are. No matter where you are, or who you are with. If you're reading this, you're missing out on something, going on somewhere, that some people you know are up to.

At the same time, by doing what you are doing, you are included in the group of people who have read these ideas, and who work on themselves and strive to improve their decision-making and want to learn how to prosper and move forward in their life with greater serenity and assurance.

That's the story of our life. Every single moment we are missing out on things, and missing all sorts of trains that we could catch and ride on.

We have only one reality, the one we're living in moment by moment, at the expense of the infinite number of possibilities that exist on the level of potential only, and never materialise.

And yet how do you feel? I feel fine just now, writing this and knowing that I'm missing out on so much out there. I will still fall asleep tonight.

Every moment is like that.

Do you feel excluded from anything right now? Do you think you'll be made to feel embarrassed when you learn later on what was going on while you were reading this? Will you be regretful that you chose to read this instead of doing something else?

If you do, you don't have a FOMO problem. You have an attitude problem. That attitude problem is called "regret" and it has to do with looking back on past circumstances which you cannot change, instead of being grateful for the past, being present with what is now, and looking to create an inspiring future to live into.

FOMO is the excuse I use to avoid commitments and responsibility.

It's a strategy I have which allows me not to face the possibility of choosing something that maybe wasn't the best choice in hindsight.

It's a cop-out mechanism: I get to not take responsibility for my choices and not have to deal with the consequences (ALL the consequences).

Another benefit that I get is attention and pity: people fly to my rescue when I have FOMO because poor little me, it's not my fault, I am torn between X and Y...

Someone would serve me well if they came to me and said: "Stop lying to yourself. If you want to go, then say so and go! You are a free man, are you not? What's all this nonsense about? Pick the option which is most attractive to you and deal with the consequences. You can't be in two places at once, so stop being a baby about it, pick the one that you like most and BE there. And if you like them both equally, toss a coin!"

Our problem arises when we consider many options and for every one of them, go: "ooh, what's exciting in this scenario? And what's exciting in that scenario? Aaaarrghh I just want both SO MUCH!"

We create knots and knots of complicated thinking, most of it being filled with distractions and desires that are not really our own. We humans get easily distracted by shiny things and forget what truly matters to us.

That's one thing that cows got right.

They don't care much about the shiny train.

They just eat grass.

## Chapter 20

# I know who I am not, and I see that it is good

*Results! Why, man, I have gotten a lot of results! I know several thousand things that won't work.*

**Thomas Edison**

When I first learnt about hypnosis and NLP and coaching, I was taught to put the emphasis on the affirmative version of a goal. If I said I did not want to feel stressed anymore, I was asked to rephrase this into a sentence that specified what I did want.

The brain can't process negatives, they said. The example involved was always the same: if I say to you "don't think about a pink elephant", what are you thinking about?

The fact that most of us will reply "a pink elephant" is taken as evidence that negatives are overlooked by our brain and as such we should stick to affirmation when we make sentences with the words 'want' or 'be'.

What we do want instead of what we don't want.

Who we are instead of who we are not.

And that is, of course, a useful thing to know.

However when discussing with clients matters of the heart like what career they would love to go into, or what type of relationship they want to create, although it is clear that at some point crafting an affirmative desire or goal will be useful if not essential, there is also tremendous value in identifying what you don't want.

One day I was sitting down with a client who was looking to change jobs. She liked an option she was contemplating, and then said to me: "But what if I try this out and I realise I don't want to do this? What if actually this is not me? Then I will have wasted my time."

She would see this as failure. Failure in her own eyes and failure in the eyes of the people around her.

She could not get herself to see that figuring out what she didn't want was actually a useful thing to do.



I like to imagine that it is as useful as figuring out what I do want.

Think about it: when we do want something and we get it, it's great! But then we learn to set boundaries.

Imagine you're in a job you love: fantastic!

But then you must learn to set boundaries on requests made on you because even though you love the job, there are other things you love too and they compete for your time and attention; or there are certain things about the job you don't like as much and would rather not do; so you inevitably go through a process of learning what you don't want.

Same with a lover or romantic partner. If you find someone you love, that's great. But if you stay with them for long enough, you'll start to know what you like less, or don't like at all, and you'll have to communicate that to create harmony and appreciation in the couple.

So it seems to me like in the end, we have to identify both anyway: what we want, and what we don't want. Over time, both are equally useful in helping us be fulfilled.

In other words, I believe defining who you are not is an essential part of figuring out who you are. It's not a different thing, it's part of the same thing.

The process of elimination is a powerful one. When we look at multiple options, we don't have to get overwhelmed about which one we want to choose.

We can decrease our options first by looking at those we don't want.

What are those that are not us?

What are the paths, the choices, the decisions that would undermine who we are?

We may not know exactly who we are, but if we slow down enough, we can get a sense of what choice would compromise our soul.

And even if we're not capable of doing that, we can go and try things out! I wrote an article once called "Imagination + Action = Clarity". The point was that thinking alone is not enough to create the clarity we crave about what career to choose, where to live, or whether or not to start a relationship with someone.

We need to act so we get feedback from our emotions and from life. Only that will bring us the full clarity we seek.

And if, in the process of acting and getting feedback, we happen to figure out what's not right, what doesn't suit us and what is not fulfilling, then that's very useful to know indeed.

Just like Edison, we identify ways that won't work. We find out who we are not.

And that is good.

## Chapter 21

# The surest path to enlightenment

*The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.*

**Francis Scott Fitzgerald**

I still remember when one of my first teachers, a hypnotist and mentalist called James Tripp, shared a sentence from the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: “The surest path to enlightenment lies in the ability to hold simultaneously in consciousness two contradictory ideas long enough for a higher order to emerge.”

Whether he was quoting the Sutras or paraphrasing them, the idea made a deep impression on me. Ever since, I have been fascinated by all situations that present a binary outcome.

Our Western, cartesian way of thinking is powerful in many ways. It brought us so much and gave us access to so many inventions and innovations.

It’s also limited.

It’s amazing how often the Western “either / or” can be turned into the Eastern “both / and” without any loss of value.

Next time you are confronted with two binary outcomes and the idea that you have to choose one of them, try replacing the words “either / or” by “both / and” and see how that feels.

Either I have to commit to my partner and give up on some of my freedom, or I can keep my freedom but I may lose my partner.

Has this thought, or a variation of it, ever occurred to you?

I know it has for me.

My way out?

The third way.

How could I both commit to my partner AND keep my freedom?

That’s a much more empowering question.

Another person who inspired me a lot - as well as millions of others - is Tony Robbins, and this is what I learned from him.

If you've got only one option available, you don't have a choice. This is pretty obvious.

But if you've got two options available, you still don't have a choice. You have a dilemma, and it usually sucks.

You really have a choice when you can identify at least 3 options. THAT is choice. That's true power.

The third choice will not necessarily always be the answer, but anything less than a third way is likely to be sub-optimal.

So turn your contradictions into paradoxes - which only look like contradictions, but are not actually contradictory.

Let go of your dilemma and look for at least a third option.

Turn your Either / Or's into Both / And's.

And watch the higher order emerge.

## Epilogue

### The Pennant Valley

*“Come to the edge”, he said. “We can’t, we are afraid”, they responded.*

*“Come to the edge”, he said. They said “We can’t, we will fall.”*

*“Come to the edge!” They came. He pushed them. And they flew.*

#### **Guillaume Apollinaire**

We were on a mountain top together, breathing in the fresh and pure breeze.

We had just completed an adventure, a deep journey within ourselves. We had fasted for more than 3 days, slept outdoors under tarps, alone with nature. We had explored sacred ceremonial rituals, expressed our unique voice and discovered the power of our breaths in ways we had never imagined before.

She looked far into the distance, soaking in the gorgeous Welsh valley, acknowledging the trees and the river and the hills and all the magnificent beauty of life.

She saw a road, slightly upward sloping, on the side of a hill ahead of us. A car was driving on it; travellers living their life, heading one way which we will never know. The road disappeared behind the natural edge of the hill.

The man-made structure flashed a sharp and straight contrast with the beautiful curves of nature surrounding it.

Behind that hill, further in the distance and slightly to the left, was another hill, with another road, upward sloping at a different angle to the first one. Travellers heading another way, a different direction, living other lives which we will never know.

Two separate paths.

Two different worlds.

And then it hit us.

The realisation was as bright as day.

The two roads were in fact one road.

The same road.

Their individuality and separateness only appeared to us because of an optical illusion. It only looked like two separate paths because of our own limitation to grasp the full extent of the world before us.

That's all that we could see from where we were standing, on our mountain top.

Two separate roads.

Two separate paths.

Two separate journeys.

Two separate lives.

But in reality, it was the same road, the same path, the same journey, the same life, twisting and turning and rolling through the world, with its ups and downs and unexpected turns.

The first direction led to and merged into the second.

There wasn't any choice to make.

Left or right didn't matter.

All that mattered was to stay on the path.