



understanding **GOOD & EVIL**

Finding Meaning
in an Absurd World

by George Lorenzo

Dedicated to believers and non-believers.

Without an afterlife, our Earthly actions and deeds have no ultimate consequences except during our time alive, which, in many cases, is not enough time to fully apply justice.

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Preface

I am *not a theologian. I am a serious, painstakingly accurate researcher, writer, publisher and highly introspective human being. I was raised a Roman Catholic, influenced by nuns and priests who were my early educators. I was a devout altar boy with sincere aspirations to enroll in the seminary until my early high school years, when my beliefs in mostly man-made Catholic dogmas lost their meaning. I eventually became spiritually inclined, a student of all religions, taking what I thought made the most sense from many different faiths and spiritual quests, reading widely.*

This ebook is a synthesis of my research and personal views about the afterlife. While always something of high interest to me, when I turned 60 in 2014, I became more focused on going deeper into this topic, with an emphasis on defining heaven and what is required of us to get into heaven (if, of course you are a believer). It is my sincere hope that readers of this ebook will feel well informed enough to talk about this topic intelligently or to pursue this topic further, or, even better, to make some changes in their lives for the betterment of themselves and others, as the research, introspection and writing of this has done for me.

This ebook takes a close look at heaven (as well as a philosophical view of good and evil), a topic that all of us think about – some much more frequently than others. Through deep research in conjunction with personal beliefs that have developed over decades, I make a serious attempt at describing heaven, and, its opposite, hell.

It's important to explain that this ebook is a deeply thought out and very determined synthesis of many years of readings and personal experiences related to the afterlife that I have culled and put together over several months of pointed introspection, writing, editing and rewriting.

Having said that, I think it is important to establish up front what I have come to believe about the afterlife: First, as a spiritual person and believer in karma and

reincarnation, I do not believe in eternal hell, but I do believe in justice after death. By justice I believe that the effects of the wrongs we committed on earth are imposed upon us either before we die, after we die, in our next reincarnated life, or through a cosmic mix of the here and now and the future. By paying off a karmic debt, we fully experience the wrong and hence learn from it.

Believing in reincarnation and karma has helped me deal with any existential angst that I have struggled with for most of my life. In short, I feel that some retribution or lesson must be imposed for the wrongs humans commit on humans. Or, perhaps retribution comes in the form of shame during our lives, where we fully realize the wrong we committed. Shame is a very difficult result of our actions that can cause extreme depression and turmoil.

Buddhism & Science

The Buddhist concept of reincarnation has mingled with scientific inquiry at several universities and non-profit organizations to take a deeper look into proving and/or disproving its existence. Nobody has come to an absolute conclusion. As one example of this kind of work, researchers from the University of Virginia's Division of Perceptual Studies (DOPS) at the School of Medicine have been studying, since the 1960s, children who claim to remember previous lives. They have accumulated 2,500 cases of children who bring out detailed facts and feelings of dead people who have had no relationship even remotely to these children. One is a young boy in Louisiana who could recall vivid details – too specific to be coincidental – of being a fighter pilot from Pennsylvania during World War II.



Like any purely scientific inquiry, the folks at DOPS have been objectively gathering data and evidence that supports that notion that consciousness does not end with death and that it can be transferred to someone else. [1](#)

In an NPR interview, the current director of the program, Dr. Jim Tucker, said that he believed that consciousness could be a separate entity from physical reality.

Max Planck, who's the father of quantum theory, said that he viewed consciousness as fundamental and that matter was derived from it. So in that case, it would mean that consciousness would not necessarily be dependent on a physical brain in order to survive, and could continue after the physical brain and after the body dies. In these cases, it seems - at least, on the face of it - that a consciousness has then become attached to a new brain and has shown up as past life memories. [2](#)

So, in very basic terms, the message I am supporting is number one, yes, there is an afterlife, and number two, having a free will to do as we please, whenever and wherever we want, has implications that can be tied to karma and reincarnation. Otherwise, in my opinion, the world would be much more chaotic and unpleasant.

My View

I have a personal view of heaven as a place where the essence of our being, which is unique to each and every one of us, creates our own distinctive version of heaven. So, there are countless heavens, and where my soul resides is different from where your soul resides, but we do meet each other's souls and happily coexist with each other's souls in the afterlife because our deep and enduring love for each other demands it.

Our notion of time and space in heaven is not like it is here on Earth. We are made aware of what exists in the universe and we choose whatever time and space our soul might desire to experience at any given

moment. We can also reincarnate based on what level of self-fulfillment our soul desires to reach. Overall, for every soul, the goal is to achieve oneness with the universe and to endlessly create what is good, righteous and beautiful for the betterment of all souls.

I also think of heaven as a place where all the creativity of human effort coalesces into something magnificent beyond anything we could imagine. In the meantime, just thinking about the enormous amount of mankind's creativity and invention throughout time – all the music, art, literature, film, scientific discovery, accomplishment over adversity, etc. – is a good meditation to practice. If you are a believer, it will bring you closer to God. Just keeping your eyes and mind open and practicing meditation on a regular basis is enough to reveal God and the afterlife – that has been my experience.



Another good meditative practice entails making a strong effort toward being more cognizant of all the immense suffering that our fellow human beings must endure on a daily basis. I believe that understanding human suffering is a key ingredient toward becoming a better overall human being, more tolerant and compassionate. Tuning out all the bad stuff and living blind to all that is going on in the world is a selfish and unhealthy way to live.

A Short Story to Get Things Started

I'd like to continue this journey into the realms of heaven and hell with a story from when I was a college student in my mid-twenties, living on my own, healthy and happy. One morning, completely out of nowhere, I felt an enormous pain in my right side and could barely get out from bed. I rolled sideways gently, enough to maneuver my body to reach the phone on my night stand. I groaned in agony and called my neighbor for help.

I managed to get dressed, and my friendly neighbor quickly got me safely to the nearest hospital emergency room for an x-ray and diagnosis by the attending physician.

“You have a large mass on your right lung,” the doctor said in a serious tone. “We don’t know what it is. You need to be admitted.”

“You mean you are putting me in a room?” I asked in disbelief. I had never been hospitalized before.

“Yes, we have to take a closer look to see what that mass really means. It’s about the size of a grapefruit,” he said in a manner that made me believe I was in deep trouble.

In short order I was lying in a hospital bed on a floor of the hospital identified as oncology. In my youthful ignorance I had no idea what it meant to be stationed on that floor.

I saw across the hall an emaciated elderly woman lying in bed, withdrawn, reeking of sadness and death. Despite the enormous pain I was experiencing, I forced myself out of the hospital bed to take an inquisitive stroll down the hallway, glancing into the other rooms. This was a circumstance that I needed to know more about immediately, and the nurses were not giving me enough solid information. Once down the hallway, taking peeks at the other patients, it quickly became evident that to be given a bed on that floor meant that something was seriously wrong with me.

A nurse came along, scolded me and helped me back to my room. When she returned to her other duties, I got out of bed again and opened the medical chart that was in the folder on my room door: The words “CANCER” in all caps hauntingly stared back at me. These were the days when your medical charts were in hard-copy folders and not inside laptop computers on rolling carts that nurses push around today. To say I was taken aback is an obvious understatement.

I went back to my bed. After a few short minutes, I suddenly and surprisingly felt this incredible peace of mind that I had never felt before or since. Moreover, the pain, while still there, subsided considerably. It was as if my conscious was suddenly altered in a way that I can barely explain except to say that I was extraordinari-

ly serene. I thought how strange it was for me to feel so calm under such horrible circumstances. What was going on here? Was there some outside force of Nature intervening on my behalf, letting me know that everything was going to be okay – that it was not yet my time to go? Was I experiencing some outside-myself spiritual compassion?

This was not my only experience with something beyond myself relative to what I would consider a knocking-on-the-door-of-death experience. There were several more uniquely spiritual experiences in which I believe I was perhaps given a glimpse of something other worldly. I will describe all of these experiences in more detail later. All of them were similar in that they were serious encounters with the possibility of dying, but each time I came to realize that my time was not up yet, that there were some things, perhaps, that I was meant to accomplish here first. If I paid close attention, maybe I would discover what they were.

That first experience as a young college student moved me from having a wavering faith in God (where I hoped that God was real) to starting to believe in what Deepak Chopra refers to as having “knowledge” or “no doubt that God is real, and therefore you live as if God is always present.”³ It formed the nature of my true spirituality and increased my inquisitiveness about the afterlife as well as opened up my conscious to living more in the present, being more accepting of death, letting go of certain false aspirations and feeling much happier overall.

Now, let’s take a short journey to get a keener understanding about the afterlife, particularly concerning the notions we have about heaven and hell.

What Do You Believe?

There are certain facets of our lives and the nature of reality that cannot be explained. Questions about life after death cannot be answered definitively. There is basically no undisputable proof that life exists after death. There is, however, evidence of an afterlife. Our consciousness, for example, cannot be explained by science. Heaven, I

think is also like this. It cannot be explained by science, but many of us still have very strong beliefs about its existence, and many of us may have even experienced things throughout our lives (evidence) that make our beliefs grow stronger.

As humans we co-exist with our different concepts and strong beliefs about the afterlife and we hold onto mental images of heaven and/or hell and whatever else our spiritual nature or lack thereof tells us.

If you are a believer in the idea of your soul being transported someplace after death, you also hold beliefs that explain what may be required of you during your time on this planet in order to gain entrance into a heavenly realm or – the opposite – that you must avoid in order to evade the possibility of being thrown into the depths of eternal damnation.

Perhaps you are the kind of person who believes that as long as you live a life in which you do not harm others and live by the tenets of the Golden Rule, your entrance into heaven is guaranteed. I don't think it is unreasonable to feel that way, but I doubt very much that it is true. In my opinion, it takes much more than that to get admitted into heaven after you die.

Another point of view addresses the prospect of every single detail of your life being tabulated by some godly gatekeeper. With my belief in karma and reincarnation, the logic of atonement and justice makes sense to me. Of course, I have no idea whatsoever of how this tabulation may take place, but I do believe it happens

Or, perhaps you sincerely believe that heaven simply does not exist - that it is only a figment of our imaginations. Whatever you may or may not believe, heaven is a fascinating topic of conversation, one that is defined in many different ways.

Common Definitions of Heaven

What is heaven to begin with? Can we define it? The major religions of the world have their unique descriptions of heaven. When compared to each other, you can see vast differences as well as vast commonalities. Different sects within the same religions have varied definitions of and notions

about heaven (and hell), making it difficult to come to a clear and succinct world-recognized, commonly accepted definition of the strong beliefs people have regarding life after life.

Let's start with the three largest religions in the world: Christian, Islam, and Hindu. According to a Pew Research study conducted on 84 percent of the world population of 6.9 billion people in 2010, 32 percent worldwide are Christians, 23 percent are Muslims, and 15 percent are Hindus. The remaining are Buddhists (7 percent), various folk religions such as Native American and Australian Aboriginal (6 percent), a hodge-podge of followers of Baha'i faith, Jainism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Taoism, and others comprise a little less than 1 percent of the world, and Jews comprise 0.2 percent worldwide. In addition, about 16 percent of the total world population do not belong to any religion. ⁴ Many of these unaffiliated souls believe in some kind of God or spirituality and some form of heaven that is perhaps more individualistic in nature as opposed to belonging to other similar mindsets.



Roman Catholic

As a Catholic Christian (about 16 percent of all Christians worldwide), I was raised to believe in heaven, hell and purgatory. None of these were ever described to me in great detail. Heaven was simply a place of beauty where there was no pain or worry. Hell was where you burned for eternity, and purgatory was a nasty punishment stopover where you atoned for any relatively minor sins (like telling white lies or overindulging) you committed over your lifetime and where you were subsequently given a pass into heaven once your atonement was completed. For the most part, the Catholic priests and nuns during the 50s and 60s taught

us about these life-after-death places to instill fear. Be good and do not commit any sins and you will not suffer the consequences of eternal flames.

Islam

Muslims, on the other hand, use fairly descriptive terms about heaven, painting a picture in the Qur'an of a place called "Janna," as well as a good number of other names that essentially mean paradise, that all point to an eternal garden, where, according to the Prophet Muhammad, there exists beautiful sights and sounds that we cannot even fathom as mere mortals. As a male you can expect some hefty blessings in the form of a bevy of beautiful virgins who will cater to your every whim and fancy (by some Muslim accounts but not all). Sensual pleasures are given out freely in Janna. For most Christians, sex is not even mentioned when it comes to paradise. 5



Hindu

Hindus believe in reincarnation, which puts an entirely different slant on the notion of heaven that Christians and Muslims do not consider. Hindus believe in heaven and hell, but your soul will not remain in either for eternity because your soul will be repeatedly reborn as human or animal, depending on the karmic debt you have accumulated over numerous lifetimes. Both heaven and hell consist of a variety of realms that have different traits. In the Hindu heaven you are surrounded by numerous celestial beings and all your desires are fulfilled for a predetermined period of time based on your karma, and then you go back to a seemingly endless rebirthing process until you reach the highest level of soul liberation, called moksha, which is the purest essence of peace, tranquility and self-fulfillment. 6

Buddhists

Buddhists, like Hindus, do not believe in an eternal/permanent heaven or hell. And hence, very much unlike my Catholic upbringing, they do not practice the indoctrination and faulty logic of fear of eternal damnation as a means for us to do good. Additionally, they too believe in karma. So, you are in heaven and/or a kind of hell as long as your accumulated karmic debt is taken care of and then you are reborn. Overall, the goal of the pure Buddhist is to reach Nirvana, which can happen during one of your rebirths on earth if you are a devout Buddhist. The Buddhist's life is a series of births and deaths until you reach what is considered the noblest and happiest path of existence, Nirvana. 7

Judaism

Jews are essentially silent about any kind of afterlife. The Torah does not mention anything about heaven and "there is no definitively Jewish explanation for what happens after we die." Rather than being obsessed with what happens when we die, the Jewish faith focuses more definitively on the here and now. This does not mean that Jews do not believe in the afterlife. Some historically Jewish-based ideas about heaven include "Olam Ha Ha," which means the world to come when the Messiah arrives on Earth to judge all the living and the dead; "Gehenna," a place similar to the Catholic's purgatory, but this one is limited to a period of repent and punishment that lasts 12 months; and "Gan Eden," a paradise for those who lived a righteous life. 8

Jains

I added this relatively remote faith (4.3 million worldwide 9) for personal reasons, primarily because one of my college roommates was an international student from Mumbai, India who happened to be of the Jain faith. He was a very calm, peaceful young man and a diligent student who was constantly studying and doing homework for extra credit. He was a vegetarian who had an amazing arsenal of food spices that he brought with him from home. I never saw him get angry – he exuded a quality of peace that I assume had something to do with his upbringing as a Jain.

In any case, Jains are very similar to Hindus, but there are some significant differences. For example, Jains believe in an eternal heaven, and their view of karma is kind of complicated. "Jainism teaches that there are two different kinds of karma, ghati (destructive) and aghati (non-destructive)," as explained in religionfacts.com. "The former affects the soul and the latter affects the body. Within each category are several kinds of karma, each of which has particular results and a way of being shed. One can only attain liberation when he or she has shed all karma." Jains also believe in hell, which in the Jain faith, as in many other religions, is not a place enflamed with fire but instead is an incredibly cold place comprised of eight levels that get colder as you go downward. [10](#)

Taoists

Taoism (2.7 million worldwide [11](#)) is a Chinese religion with strong influences from Confucianism and Buddhism. Archeological discoveries show that Taoists had no set belief about the afterlife. Early Taoists had utopian beliefs that suggested that it was possible for humans to obtain supernatural powers and live forever. In general, however, Taoists are very much like Buddhists. Overall, Taoists basically do not have a unified view about the afterlife, making it very difficult to identify what kind of views they have for the existence of any kind of heaven or hell. [12](#)

I included Taoism because I felt it was representative of numerous other small religious groups throughout the world that do not have any scriptures or historical literature that clearly delineates what they believe about heaven.

Of course, I have not covered all the religions of the world here, let alone all the numerous sects and varied belief systems. I only meant to provide a relatively brief synthesis of what some of the major religions of the world have to say about heaven. For more on this topic, in general, look through the reference section for links to a good number of websites about all the various religions of the world, all of which are sound and pass my test for valid and authoritative information. Religion gets more than enough play on the Internet, making it

easy to spend day after day reading about moral and ethical world views that really have more similarities than differences, especially when it comes to finding common information about what is considered basic everyday human goodness as opposed to evil.

Common Definitions of Hell

Regarding descriptions of hell, it is typically located downward, beneath the ground, and can be either terribly hot or terribly cold, depending on the religion. In Christianity it is described as both a fiery pit as well as an abyss. For some very interesting Christian-oriented depictions of hell, see Dante's *Inferno*, a very creative and detailed 14th century poem with nine "circles of hell" and numerous characters. However, Dante's *Inferno*'s is literary, not theological. But "it does reflect a deep yearning to understand the mysteries of life and death and, as such, has generated tremendous interest over the centuries, remaining extremely popular even today." [13](#)

As noted in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, in an article about Christian views of heaven and hell, "some humans will never be reconciled to God and will therefore remain separated from Him forever," meaning "everlasting torment." According to one of the earliest theologians St. Augustine, hell is "a condition in which self-loathing, hatred of others, hopelessness, and infinite despair consumes the soul like a metaphorical fire." So, perhaps the flames we hear so much about are not to be taken literally. [14](#)

Some Hindus see hell as a metaphor for a conscience state, as well, but it's not forever. In many Hindu descriptions related to the afterlife there is a deity called "Chitragupta" who keeps records of all your earthly deeds and then assigns your karmic punishment accordingly until you are reborn again. Chitragupta's boss is Yama, the god of death, who provides access to everything that has ever happened throughout time in what's known as the Akashic records. Yama reviews Chitragupta's record-keeping on each person and ultimately decides the details of that person's next life. [15](#)

Muslims see hell in similar terms as Christians, as an eternal arrangement. According to Christine Huda

Dodge, an Islam expert and author of *The Everything Understanding Islam Book*, the Quran has many different, and all horrible, descriptions of hell, called Jahan-nam. She points to the following, among others: “Those who reject Faith, and die rejecting, on them is Allah’s curse, and the curse of angels, and of all mankind. They will abide therein: Their penalty will not be lightened, nor will they receive respite (2:161-162). They are whom Allah hath cursed: And those whom Allah Hath cursed, thou wilt find, have no one to help (4:52).” 16

Heaven’s Admission Requirements

So, regardless of how heaven and hell are defined by individuals and groups, the really important thing is to understand what’s required of us here on earth to gain admission into heaven. Through serious introspection concerning what we have and have not done over the span of our lives, can we pre-determine whether or not we are eligible for acceptance? Can heaven be similar to an elite institution, for instance, with stringent requirements for becoming a member? From a purely logical perspective, I believe that of course the entrance requirements must be rigid.

When discussing one’s possible entrance into hell or heaven, Catholics often talk about original sin (we are supposedly born with it and will be sent to purgatory unless we have been baptized), along with tabulating the possibility of us bearing



any mortal and venial sins. Although I was taught to believe this as a young man, as I grew older and smarter, original sin and major and minor sins lost meaning. For example, I was taught to believe that not going to church on Sunday was a mortal sin - that if I died on a Monday without going to church the day before could

very likely result in being sent to purgatory or even quite possibly hell for eternity. Well, give me a break, please. Is that in the least bit a justifiable punishment? These are the kinds of teachings that led me astray from Catholicism.

Another aspect of Catholicism that has caused me to question its viability and authority concerns the practice of going to confession, which was drilled into us at the Catholic elementary school I attended. Why must I reveal highly personal facts about my life to a person in a dark confessional who gives me a rosary to say for penance in order for everything to be okay again – so that I have some kind of protective insurance regarding the prospect of being eternally damned to some fiery pit?

I remember making up sins when I went to confession, simply because I did not feel guilty about anything, except, ironically, not having the presence of mind to tell the priest any sins I supposedly committed. I simply did not feel that I did anything wrong. Yes, the nuns and priests laid guilt trips and extreme feelings of fear on our young minds that were so incredibly confusing and scary.

Christians – and I mean not only Catholics - do, of course, practice forgiveness, meaning that proper atonement and forgiving of any harm done to you will increase your prospects for acceptance into heaven. The strong Christian practice of forgiveness is, of course, a pillar of all that is truly good and right, but the Christian belief in eternal damnation does not sit right with me.

Hindus, on the other hand, have no such thing as mortal sin, and no belief in the devil or Satan nor eternal damnation. Hindus explain that when we do not think, speak and act virtuously, we create negative karmas and bring suffering upon ourselves and others. We suffer when we act instinctively and intellectually without super conscious guidance. . . God is perfect goodness, love and truth. He is not wrathful or vengeful. He does not condemn or punish wrongdoers. Jealousy, vengefulness and vanity are qualities of man’s instinctive nature, not of God. 17

Buddhism is very similar in this regard. Buddhists equate sin with stupidity that requires instruction and compassion. While this sounds a bit wishy-washy, it is

not, as many believe, an admonition for no justice. “The suffering inflicted by punishment should have a higher purpose,” writes the Dalai Lama, “namely to discourage the wrongdoer from repeating the offense and to deter others from committing similar acts. Punishment is, therefore, not about retribution but about deterrence.” He goes on to say that “revenge has no place in the exercise of justice. The very idea is outdated. For while revenge weakens society, forgiveness gives it strength.”

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Now that I have briefly explored what the various religions have to say about heaven and hell and how you can perhaps determine if any of these might fit within your personal belief systems, it’s time to get more specific about heaven’s admission requirements as they relate to modern times as opposed to historic contexts that no longer apply today.

Getting Into Heaven Circa 21st Century

What valid admission requirements can we establish relative to how to conduct ourselves in specific and fairly commonplace situations in modern society? What historical religious traditions concerned with putting oneself on a path toward eternal bliss should we faithfully honor without question today?

There are many historical religious decrees that no longer apply today, such as a good number of the 613 Jewish Commandments (the 613 have a number of tenets that reek of homophobia, for example) along with certain Judeo-Christian rulings, such as not being allowed to work on the Sabbath, or Roman Catholics not being able to use contraception. (I am a believer, however, in right to life. In other words, I think abortion is a terribly wrong except in cases of incest, rape or danger to a mother’s life. There are more than enough people on the planet who will take on parenting responsibilities of another’s unwanted newborn.)

The following is the culmination of research and personal experiences that have led me to come up with a list of heaven’s admission requirements. This is my practical guide to getting into heaven, circa early 21st

Century. Most are fairly obvious, and all of them are good to read just to be reminded, I think, that we can fall into comfort zones without thinking about what is really important to us as fellow human beings.

Eight Major Principles:

Forget Money

Number one, I believe it would be wise to be careful about over-emphasizing the value of the dollar and materialism and guard yourself from being tempted to over consume in a society that promotes these kinds



of unhealthy behaviors. Moreover, the wealth inequality worldwide is a serious violation of human justice. There’s enough money around to eliminate everyone’s financial stress, and those who are at the top need to be responsible for helping to pull the poor up. But when you have a Congress in which more than 50 percent of the members are millionaires, and most of these people only care about getting re-elected and pandering to their campaign sponsors and special interest groups, it becomes easy to see why the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

I have to suppress my urge to pontificate here about the plutocracy, my views about social democracy and our tendency to be selfishly amoral. I will save that for another more appropriate ebook, namely “Fail, Settle or Excel,” slated for publication in summer 2015.

There are numerous examples of goodness over money. The first that come to my mind, growing up Catholic, are the lives of Jesus Christ and St. Francis of Assisi. An interesting account of Christ’s life, relative, in part, to this topic in particular, is detailed in *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*. Author Reza Aslan explained how during the time of Christ there

was “a new crop of profiteers, bandits, and messiahs (who) began traipsing through the Holy Land, preaching liberation from Rome and promising the coming of the Kingdom of God.” These preachers, he writes, all collected money from their followers, who were vulnerable due to the horrible oppression they were experiencing under Roman rule. Jesus, was different. He was a peasant who preached and performed miracles for free. His authenticity as a man who truly cared for and helped others without compensation brought scores of people to the shores of Galilee to hear his message.

The twelve apostles were simple fisherman, not wealthy bureaucrats. Aslan notes that Christ professed how “God’s reign required not just an internal transformation toward justice and righteousness, but a complete reversal of the present political, religious, and economic system (of that time under Roman rule) ‘Blessed are the poor, for the kingdom of God is yours,’” Christ said. [19](#) I think it is good to ask ourselves how this line of thinking can be applied to modern times.

St. Francis, considered one of the greatest saints of all time, is another good case in point. When he was 24, Francis gave away all of his worldly possessions along with a large inheritance he was entitled to as the son of a very wealthy cloth merchant, Pietro. Francis devoted the rest of his life “as a pauper to relieving the misery all around him.” He believed that possessions divided people both socially and psychologically and he honored that belief through the founding of the Franciscan order. The Franciscans were taught that not parting with one’s possessions and passing them to the poor “was tantamount to stealing from him or her.” Essentially, anyone who joined the Franciscan order had to take an absolute vow of poverty and use one’s time entirely toward helping those who were the least fortunate and in the most need of help, which leads me to the next major principle. [20](#)

Help the Unfortunate

Provide assistance to people who are facing difficulties, to those who are basically victims of circumstance through no fault of their own. In short, be compassionate toward everyone. Always be at the ready to help

your fellow man/woman. Hindus profess that we all have duties to help others, such as providing shelter to the homeless, nurturing children, ensuring everyone’s safety – these are all considered spiritual duties. Hindu scripture said that prior to eating, the head of household must step outside and ask “is anyone hungry? Please come to take your meal.” [21](#)

Protect the Earth

The third admission requirement is you must love and protect the earth and all of its creatures – honor environmentalism. The relationship between religion and nature has roots in Native American culture going back tens of thousands of years. The sacredness and spirituality of nature so ingrained in the Native American, our country’s first

honorable inhabitants, has unfortunately been trampled upon and destroyed since the days of early explorers in the 15th century. Where



have we gone wrong today with big business and money driving decisions that affect our planet’s overall health? I think it would be wise to pay close attention to the green movement. Thankfully, young Millennials seem to have a very keen sense for protecting the environment, and we can only hope that their work and dedication with environmentalism will make a difference for our children’s future. Stay close to the earth and always protect it to your best ability.

Promote Peace

The fourth admission requirement is you must promote and sustain peace and forgiveness. Nonviolence and pacifism are the hallmark teachings of the late Mahatma Gandhi, who was tragically assassinated, as was

Martin Luther King, another great man of peace and nonviolence. It is our duty as human beings to promote peace, to practice nonviolence and tolerance. It is no surprise that every major religion promotes the idea of turning the other cheek, yet violence still reigns in the form of terrorist acts on innocent people. Think peace in your daily meditations. Be cognizant of the pain throughout the world that people must endure because of the evils being imposed upon them by human beings who have lost touch and have become sickened by revenge and hate and intolerance.

Pay Your Employees a Livable Wage

Greed is evil and it manifests and spreads widely through businesses that do not pay their employees a livable wage, especially in the fast-food and convenience store industries where stockholders and franchise owners keep much more money than anyone could possibly need, instead of, at the very least, boosting the wages they pay to the people who make their money-making operations sustainable. This is one of the most damaging, unhealthy aspects of American capitalism. The untold suffering that human beings must endure, by being forced to work at minimum-wage jobs that will not even cover the cost of putting a roof over their heads, is shameful. It is ruining America. The inability for hard-working citizens to support themselves and their families is an unconscionable act by the wealthy who have the means to help the poor but instead make their lives miserable. These employers are accumulating some serious karmic debt.

Always Speak the Truth

Stop for a moment and ask yourself how many times you do not speak the absolute truth in all matters. It's so easy to stretch the truth, as they say, or tell lies that avoid facing reality. We are all guilty of doing this throughout our lives at one time or another – or perhaps multiple times. If you pay very close attention to the human interactions you have, you will start seeing how frequently you may be lying just to avoid conflict. I've gotten in more trouble telling the truth than lying. But – and this is a big but – I always felt that being com-

pletely and utterly truthful is innately the appropriate path to take and have always felt a sense of calm and inner acceptance when practicing this simple principle.

Protect, Support and Honor Your Family

Stick-to-itiveness and patience will always pay off in good health over the long run for husbands, wives, sons, daughters, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. Infidelity, which is often due to our over-indulgence in sex and ego, has rendered so much destruction on families and relationships. Sibling rivalry, deep differences of opinions, pride, jealousy and financial matters often tear families apart.



With family, oftentimes things are better left unsaid, and oftentimes no matter what you may say, things will not get better. Always be ready to forgive; always be ready to help out. Swallow your pride. Try to practice unconditional love. If none of these work, simply step away and live your life. Sometimes, especially when it comes to family, you might have to let things go and avoid confrontation simply to keep the peace.

Be Grateful and Not Petty

If you are ever feeling down about yourself, crying “woe is me” for whatever may be ailing you at any given time, I suggest you read one of my favorite articles of all time, *Lucky Jim*, by Elizabeth Gilbert, author of the popular *Eat, Pray, Love*. It may be difficult to get online. Last time I looked you could purchase it from Docstoc for \$3 at <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/91193033/Lucky-Jim--Elizabeth-Gilbert>. The story is about Jim Maclaren, who suffered two horrible accidents as a young man by the time he was 30 years old, one in which he lost a leg and another in which he became a quadriplegic who endured an enormous amount of continuous, daily pain

and agony just to stay alive. The amount of challenges and pain and suffering this man had to face, including drug and alcohol abuse, would have killed most people. Jim, however, came to the conclusion that he was actually lucky because these experiences ultimately gave him “an opportunity to see my true self beyond all the noise.” He was no longer trapped in his ego. He discovered who he truly was, and he became closer to God in the process. Reading about Jim’s life will make you realize how petty our daily complaints are and how we can focus on what’s more important in our lives, namely getting closer to knowing our true selves. ²² Jim passed away at the age of 47 in 2010 after inspiring people all over the world with his story of overcoming truly horrible hardship. ²³

I also recommend reading *Losing Our Way: An Intimate Portrait of a Troubled America*, by Bob Herbert, a former New York Times columnist whose heart-wrenching stories about human beings forced to deal with the horrible and debilitating consequences of war, poverty, and our nation’s poor and failing infrastructure will make your problems seem insignificant in comparison. His extraordinarily well-written and descriptive story about Afghanistan war veteran Dan Berschinski, an affable young man who at the age of 24 lost both legs in combat and has endured numerous surgeries and massive amounts of pain and suffering, brought tears to my eye. Based on interviews, Herbert explains how Berschinski now has a “sense of purpose,” and that he knows that he will have “a productive, awesome life, no matter what.” ²⁴

Additional 21st Century Commandments (in no particular order):

- Do not post disparaging comments about people on social media websites.
- Do not talk loudly about your personal issues in a public place.
- Do not download digital property illegally.
- Do not publish false claims online, especially claims about false psychic abilities that prey on vulnerable people who are grieving.
- Do not claim to be some kind of Internet guru or multi-level marketing executive who reveals how you can absolutely, positively make a million dollars if you follow their strategy and purchase their materials.
- If you’re pushing/selling self-help information, be sure to qualify your words as opinions.
- On your website always identify who you are, where your business is located and how to contact you.
- Do not participate in telemarketing scams; do not become a telemarketer who calls on people without their permission.
- Do not participate in hunting expeditions for the sake of sport.
- Avoid pornography.
- Do not speak on your cell phone loudly in public places.
- Do not attempt to jump ahead in long lines.
- Do not use your cell phone while driving.
- Do not drive recklessly; always obey traffic laws.
- Do not bully others lest you would like to be bullied in return.
- Avoid racism (all humans are equal).
- Avoid gender and sex-orientation inequality (all humans are equal).
- Do not gossip.
- Do not abuse drugs and alcohol.
- Do not falsify your online dating profile.
- Always keep your sidewalk shoveled in the winter.
- Always strive to become a better person.
- Do not under any circumstances give sullen-faced

fast-food and convenience-store cashiers a difficult time.

- Never wear sweatpants to church or any social gathering for that matter.
- Always turn your cell phone off at funerals, concerts and speaking engagements.
- Never bring a tuna salad sandwich on an airplane.
- Remove your crying baby from any public place, especially restaurants and church.
- Never talk about religion or politics unless asked to
- Never put on a false smile.
- Always honor a law enforcement officer's request, even if it sounds unreasonable for the safety of you and others.
- Be very careful about over liking firearms.
- Always try your best to put in an honest day's work.

Beyond the Superficial

Up to this point I have shared a good number of examples, some superficial, of how, in my opinion, we can live our lives in a more meaningful way that will ensure a good place for us in heaven. Deep down inside, however, I truly believe that the largest population of heaven is comprised of people who have dedicated themselves to performing good deeds for the unfortunate people on our planet, the Mother Teresa's of the world who have helped the hungry, poor, the homeless, and those who are unjustly repressed by the powerful. For an excellent point view of what these kind of unselfish, awe-inspiring people are all about, see a Ted talk titled "Inspiring a Life of Immersion," given by Jacqueline Novogratz, founder of Acumen, a non-profit organization that helps the poor globally. [25](#)

Novogratz talks eloquently about people she knows

who have devoted themselves to their innermost connection to all living things. Although she does not speak about life after death, she tells stories about some of the people she knows who have devoted their lives to helping those in need without regard for money or security, acknowledging and honoring their bravery and overall goodness – the kind of human beings who, in my estimation, have earned free admission into heaven. She also talks about how others can fall into the trappings of power and look at their fellow humans as lesser beings and hence participate in terrible genocidal calamities of horrific proportions – the kind of human beings who have earned free admission into some kind of hell.

Novogratz spends a great deal of her time traveling around the world. She says people are saying "the time for change is now" and they want to get more involved; they want to bring greater purpose and meaning in their lives. However, fear and risk-aversion often prevents these people from taking the next step. "Your job is not to be perfect," she says. "Your job is only to be human. And noting important happens in life without cost." And the real question, she adds is "what is the cost of not daring? What is the cost of not trying?"

It is the people who dare and try, I think, to devote much of their time and energies toward helping others; those are the souls who wind up in heaven before any other souls.

Notions of Good and Evil

There are many models of goodness to emulate in Christianity, starting with Jesus Christ and St. Francis of Assisi, as I alluded to earlier. In Buddhism it can be the simple notion of selflessness that is so strongly evident in that faith, whereby the human spirit puts the well-being of others ahead of any self-interest. For Hindus consistently purifying your thoughts and deeds by going through cycles of birth and death that we learn from over time immeasurable happens to each of us until we merge with God or the good of the universe.

Evil, on the other hand, is difficult to resolve in our minds. A human being who harms others commits the gravest of all sins. It's easy



to see the inherent evil in this and how unjust it would be for such a soul to be granted entrance into heaven.

Why does God allow evil to exist? we ask. Having a free will explains it fairly easily (we choose to be evil), but when horrible things happen for no reason other than fate (natural disasters, plane crashes, the death of innocents), we become angry because we believe that God should have intervened. One book that I strongly recommend that everyone read on this topic is *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, written by Harold S. Kushner and read by millions of people. Kushner is a very smart rabbi who tackled this topic very effectively. Here's a synopsis of some of his views:

"Murder and the robbery are not the will of God but represent that aspect of reality which stands independent of His will and which angers and saddens God just as it angers and saddens us.

"God does not reach down to interrupt the laws of nature to protect the righteous from harm.

"God stands for justice, for fairness, for compassion. For me, the earthquake is not an act of God. The act of God is the courage of people to rebuild their lives after the earthquake, to help them in whatever way they can." 26

Another great book that should be required reading for every human being - one that has helped me with existential questions - is Victor Frankel's *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankel managed to survive one of the most horrific evils of all time as a prisoner in Nazi concentration and extermination camps during World War II (incidentally Kushner wrote one the forewords for this book). One short sentence in this book kind of says it all

when Frankl quotes Nietzsche: "That which does not kill me, makes me stronger." He repeatedly emphasizes the concept of self-transcendence. "If there is a meaning in life at all, there must be a meaning in suffering," Frankl wrote. "Suffering is an eradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete." 27

My opinion about why evil things happens outside of man's free will, based in large part from reading the aforementioned and many other philosophers on this topic, boils down to one fairly basic theory: God is not omnipotent. He cannot control natural disasters or fateful things that happen purely because of a series of random events. That is the simple nature of everything. However, when horrible things happen to us, God is there to help, and in the afterlife all injustice is somehow rectified.

Knocking on Death's Door

Okay, so what happened to me during that scary hospitalization experience? The medical professionals performed a bunch of biopsies and other tests that were very painful, and then I had to wait in the room over the weekend for the results. For two days I lied there, feeling very calm and accepting of the possibility of dying.

A priest came in to talk to me, which actually disrupted my serenity. He asked me if there was anything I would like to discuss with him, perhaps any desire to confess any sins, I guess. I told him that I was doing fine, thank you.

The bottom line was that for a guy on an oncology floor with Cancer written on his chart, I was not in the least bit freaking out. I think my serenity came from an inner and strong feeling that told me quite convincingly that even if I did leave the planet, I was still going to be around in some shape or form in some other realm because I was living right at the time not committing any grievous deeds or harming anyone. I had no guilt in my heart.

That Monday morning as I stood looking out the hospital window, a doctor came into my room, raised his

hand above my head and said “you’re cured.” Wow! It was like some kind of weird evangelical healing of the hands. I actually buckled to my knees and said “thank you.”

Turns out I was diagnosed with some difficult-to-pronounce and remember lung and/or bone disorder that called for radiation treatments for several weeks after being released. Doctors refer to these kind of things as “zabras,” where you here the galloping of hoofs only to find zebras instead of horses. The pain left me soon enough and I was back to being a normal college student again.

This was the first close-to-dying experience that I had. Since then I have had several more – each unique. Another happened when my lung collapsed after dealing with a bout of walking pneumonia. I was once again put into a hospital room, but this time there was no feeling of peace or calm. Quite the contrary, I was miserable in extraordinary pain with tubes placed into my side to remove the excess fluids that clogged my middle lobe (ultimately removed) and on a morphine pump for pain. I went into an ugly stupor and felt this horrible black darkness of falling into an abyss of nothingness whenever I fell asleep. I kept thinking this abyss was a glimpse of hell and battled mightily to stay alive, afraid of what seemed to await me if I had passed on.

Another experience that required three-days in a hospital befell me recently totally out of the blue. This time I received an existential, totally random message in the form of an extraordinarily painful attack on my stomach that made me realize that no matter what you do with your life, something horrible can happen at any given moment for no good reason. I was on a very strong health regimen for more than a year, consistently exercising and eating a healthy diet, feeling better than I had felt in years and with all good numbers for my diabetes, cholesterol and blood pressure. Then suddenly without any forewarning a vicious bolt of nausea and pain attacked me while I was standing in my kitchen. In minutes I was vomiting uncontrollably for a period of about eight hours. It was one of the most frightening feelings I had ever experienced and it put me into a horrific hospital situation unlike others I had handled in

the past. This time my mental state was quite different from the other two I just described. Instead of serenity or a feeling of falling into a dark abyss, every time I closed my eyes I received a bunch of ridiculous and senseless mental images that are difficult to describe except to say that they were absurd pictures of creatures and people that my mind somehow created instantaneously. What was this? I have no idea. My best guess is that somehow this nausea was also having a strange effect on my brain. I did pull out of it and to this day no doctor has been able to explain why this happened – not even a best guess.

In addition to these three experiences, I have experienced several serendipitous events that have a certain divine intervention quality to them. I think most of us have these kinds of experiences, perhaps more frequently than we realize. Some are more pronounced than others, such as the evening when I was peacefully driving alone on a dark road on the Big Island of Hawaii where I lived for two and a half years in the late 1970s. My windows were open; it was a beautiful Hawaiian night; I was enjoying the ride, feeling at ease when suddenly out of nowhere I felt this foreboding sense that something bad was about to happen. The feeling was very strong and I tensed up and tightened my grip on the steering wheel. Sure enough, in an instant, a car coming in the opposite direction swerved into my lane and was heading straight for me. I was totally ready and managed to avoid what would have been a horrible head-on collision. As I looked in my rear-view mirror, the driver of the other car caught himself and skidded back into the appropriate lane as if nothing had happened. Either he was drunk or had dosed off. We both went our separate ways without incident.

I moved from Hawaii to Phoenix, Arizona, where another unexplainable stroke of luck strengthened my feeling that my time was certainly not up. I was sitting in the back seat of a two-door compact car with three others, two in the front and one next to me in the back. We were cruising along in the outer left lane of a six-lane highway (three each way) on a Friday night, on our way to some restaurant or bar. A concrete divider separated us from the cars going in the opposite direction. A drunken driver on the other side hit the wall

causing a chunk of concrete to land directly in front of us. It happened so quickly and without warning that hitting it was unavoidable. We were suddenly upside down sliding down the highway. It was like a slow-motion movie. When we came to a halt, I saw an opening by my window and tried to crawl out only to find flames dangerously close, I crawled back in to the other side of the back seat. My friend had already escaped as well as the driver and front passenger. I was the only one left in the car. The front passenger grabbed my arm and pulled me out. It was a tight squeeze and, for a moment, I thought I would not get out. But then suddenly after scraping my entire back against metal, I was up on my feet, hugging my fellow passengers, looking at a completely totaled car that was pretty much flattened. We were told later by the highway patrol who removed the vehicle that they had never seen a car so completely destroyed that had four surviving passengers. We were all relatively unhurt with only minor scrapes and bruises. It was an obvious miracle. I remember saying “Mom” as we were sliding down the highway upside down. That word just blurted out of me. For a long time after that any time I saw a piece of paper on the highway, any object at all, I flinched.

Unlike many of the popular and compelling books on the afterlife showing how clinically dead people were transported through a tunnel to a beautiful white light and a glimpse of loved ones who have passed before them – my near-death experiences showed none of that to me.

“The truth is that, whatever happens after death, it is possible to justify a life of spiritual practice and self-transcendence without pretending to know things we do not know,” writes an atheist author that I enjoy reading, Sam Harris. 28 I tend to practice this,



but unlike Harris, I do accept that there is a God and an afterlife. I am a believer.

Another author I have enjoyed and believe in his credibility is Dinesh D’Souza, a scholar who, like Chopra, takes great pains and pride in publically debating some of the most reputable and intelligent atheists in the world, such as Richard Dawkins, the late Christopher Hitchens and the aforementioned Harris. D’Souza, as does Chopra and most other believers in an intelligent universe, explains that “consciousness lies beyond all scientific laws and explanations . . . and that two features of the mind—specifically consciousness and free will—define the human soul. These features seem to operate outside the laws of nature and therefore are not subject to the laws governing the mortality of the body. The body dies, but the soul lives on.”

He goes on to say that “the absence of evidence may indicate only that we haven’t figured out how to locate what we are looking for. ‘Not found’ is not the same thing as ‘found not to exist.’” 29

If you have the time, take a look and listen to a YouTube video called The God Debate where D’Souza goes back and forth with Christopher Hitchens (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9V85OykSDT8>), or the Dangerous Ideas debate where Chopra goes head to head with Richard Dawkins (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4c_CrQzUGw). If you stay focused (it’s difficult because of the highly complex views they present), the content of these two debates alone will really get you thinking about two vastly different world views about the afterlife presented by some very intelligent human beings. Listen intently with an open mind on both sides and make your own decision.

Where is Heaven Located?

Which leads me to the following conclusion about the location of heaven and hell:

My educated guess concludes that heaven is located in a place scientists have identified as “The Great Attractor,” which sits inside what’s referred to by astronomers

as “Laniakea,” which is Hawaiian for “immeasurable heaven.” Laniakea is the entire universe comprised of more than 8,000 galaxies that are housed inside “superclusters,” with ours, The Milky Way, being located within one of the furthest supercluster outskirts (go figure). Between all these superclusters are a bunch of dark voids, which I can only assume must be the location of numerous hells. All of these galaxies are being gravitationally pulled toward The Great Attractor, which I will assume is the center of heaven. 30

NASA published a neat picture of Laniakea at <http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap140910.html>.

See you there in the future . . .

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