

YOU ARE PERFECT

One thing you may have noticed so far in your journey through life is that things have a tendency to change. You probably look different now than you did as a young child. You've learned things and been to new and interesting places, and how you feel about yourself has most likely changed—perhaps even in the last five minutes. Some of us get bored easily and thrive on change, while others are quite content with the status quo and become anxious when things change too fast or too much. In either case, we're looking for deep abiding joy and meaning, otherwise change would have no more value than a mirage in the desert. The real question is how can we experience unchanging truth, beauty, and joy in an ever-changing world? To start on this wonderful journey of exploration, we begin by looking into the nature of change and how we typically respond to it.

Each day, the sun boldly appears over the horizon in the morning and sets amiably at dusk. The leaves on trees change colors with the seasons, waves arise and subside in the sea (a phenomenon well known to surfers and sailors), and the weather can go from sunny and fine to scorching hot or cloudy and chilly with thunderstorms. Some changes are fast. The speed of light, for example, can cover seven and a half times the distance around this planet in a mere second. So, when you look at your face in the mirror in the morning, you're pretty much seeing yourself in real time! In comparison, Shinkansen bullet trains in Japan shuffle rows of matcha-latte-drinking businesspeople

through the countryside at the sluggish pace of two hundred miles per hour. Other changes are really slow, such as a drop of liquid tar pitch that takes sixty-nine years to fall. Imagine watching liquid tar pitch drop out of a canister, without Wi-Fi and a smartphone by your side. That's called dedication!

Of course, humans are not to be outdone in the slow department. The T. J. Bivins machine is estimated to make one mechanical rotation in 3.8 billion years. Barring that we get our time-travel act together, I'm sure few of us will be around to verify it!

The response to change varies from person to person and is usually dependent on the kind of change. For example, artists and designers thrive on change when they're developing new projects but might get a bit edgy when they return home to discover that their lover has flown the coop. Bank employees might get frustrated with a barrage of changing compliance regulations but are not averse to coping with their friends' states of inebriation at the pub.

Change lies at the root of our sense of time and space. For example, if your watch hand changes or it starts to get dark outside, you note that time is ticking away. If you can walk for miles without bumping into anything, you call it the great outdoors (or more likely a desert). When you flatten your nose while strolling into an exceptionally clean windowpane, you call it being spatially challenged.

As Einstein well knew, space and time are related. We all experience a scaled-down version of this phenomenon in daily life. For example, when your mind is spaced out, you suddenly wonder where time went, and if you're rushed for time in processing a mound of less-than-exciting paperwork, you feel claustrophobic. Change also underlies cause and effect. If you let toast sit in the oven too long, it quickly becomes charcoal. However, if you're the type who doesn't like to waste food, the charcoal may be eaten to improve your acid indigestion, which then leads to a better sales presentation that develops into an unexpected job promotion—and

perhaps your newfound wealth allows you to afford raising a family. You get the idea.

In short, change is here to stay. In and of itself, change is a harmless phenomenon, unless you notice your body decaying or dying. Then change becomes a matter of some concern. As we humans evolved, we made the brilliant decision to manage change, to make it work in our favor. For example, we try to prolong life and ensure our experiences are as meaningful and pleasurable as possible. To accomplish this feat, we needed some guidelines to compare notes, so we developed measurement and labeling. Thus were born opposing labels, such as up/down, light/dark, good/evil, right/wrong, happy/unhappy, and so forth. We measured these opposites both qualitatively (how we subjectively feel about them) and quantitatively with standard measures such as the yard or meter—and recently through electrical and blood flow patterns in the cells of the brain.

Once we had a language for change, we could start comparing notes. “Who is better or eviler than who?” “Am I happier today than I was yesterday?” “Am I as attractive as he is?” “Is she a competent analyst?” “How’s the weather today?” At this point in our development, greater challenges surfaced. Cast out of the Garden of Eden, so to speak, we began to fear that our changing minds were going to get the better of us. Physical concerns like becoming a lion’s midnight snack were soon replaced by a whole menu of new fearful specters. “Do I fit into society?” “Am I overweight?” “Will I make enough money to survive?” “Do my heels match my dress?” “Will the boss appreciate how hard I work?”

Most of these fears fall into two categories: loss/gain and praise/blame. The majority of us would probably choose praise/gain over loss/blame (unless there is something to gain in choosing otherwise). Along with these fears come their brothers and sisters: anger, jealousy, greed, lust, pride, and delusion. The entire family of fears thrives on the notions of separation, limitation, and doership. These manifest, respectively, in thoughts such as *I differ from other people and things*,

I'm incomplete, and the results of my actions are mine alone. With these insatiable predators chomping at the bit and agitating the mind, the bar for our expectations of what makes us happy rises, while our sense of self-worth plummets. It's hard to feel good about ourselves when we're needy. Suffering runs rampant in our lives because the ego, our limited sense of self, has parked its bum firmly in the driver's seat, and it doesn't like backseat drivers very much.

Is all this the fault of change? Not in the least. The root cause of suffering is ignorance stemming from the body-bound mind's sense of limitation, separation, and doership. But you might say, "We are different! We look different, think differently, and act differently. How can something so obvious be ignorance?"

If you reflect on your understanding more deeply, what do you really know? Is there anything real outside of what the mind and five senses tell you? If you have trouble imagining this, just think what it's like to be in a coma; not much happening there. Is change even real when the senses are offline?

Many humans intuitively recognize the limits of their knowledge yet respond to the unknown by leaning on the side of arrogance. We've all experienced know-it-alls; though if the person carries a bonified title, it can be harder to spot. Some of us assume we know more about this universe than other species do. Is that true? In terms of the five senses, an eagle can spot a mouse moving through grass about two miles away. I can't read the text on my computer without glasses. A bat can hear fifteen times better than we can. With today's noise pollution levels, that may not be such a great thing. The silvertip grizzly bear can smell food eighteen miles away. Of course, we can imagine the smell of French fries cooking a thousand miles away while surfing "The 10 Best French Fries" on the Internet. A bear probably can't do that. We have about 10,000 taste buds, while the catfish has a whopping 175,000, which simply means catfish appreciate food better than we do. A seal's whiskers can feel the presence of fish about two hundred yards away. If you're not a Reiki

master or adept in distance healing, you probably need to lay some skin on to feel things.

In terms of intelligence, we appear to be at the top of the food chain, but that is a matter of opinion. Some pretty altruistic animals are high on the social/emotional intelligence charts. YouTube abounds with videos of one species helping another. There are even scenes of predators and prey joyfully playing together. On one hand, we seem to have more savvy than a snail crossing a busy highway. Yet from the snail's perspective, it must feel it has its act together; otherwise, why cross the road in the first place? Are we any different in terms of risk management? Do we see clearly what's on the highway of our lives? Sooner or later, we cross the highway during traffic hour, or it crosses us.

Often, we calculate the odds when making key decisions and then go with our gut. That doesn't always work out, especially if our gut decisions are needy and lack clarity. Somewhere in this universe, there are bound to be intelligent life forms that would wonder about some of our "intelligent" behavior. Yet the pride-filled mind likes to collect accolades as we pass judgment on "lesser" species. Sometimes, the lesser species are our neighbors! At the root of species arrogance is fear. Fear also lies at the root of intellectual arrogance—fear that we might have it all wrong. What lies behind all this? Change and the uncertainty it brings somehow make us feel imperfect. The feeling of being incomplete both gnaws at us and creates immeasurable suffering. The concept of imperfection seems, if nothing else, to be somewhat imperfect.

Immediately, a question arises, "If the root cause of our notion of imperfection is ignorance, then isn't that something that needs to change?" The answer to this question is both yes and no: yes in the sense that some special insight is required, and no in the sense that you have already attained the goal of self-realization without lifting a finger. The process leading to insight involves exploration into and discovery of what you, at some level, already know about yourself but perhaps were unsure of. Awakening to your own perfection will