How to Work on Oneself

A Sketch

Jens Oliver Meiert

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This version was published on 2024-11-01

For everyone who believes there's something wrong with them. Nothing is.

Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction

"Just work on yourself
and: every time you work on yourself,
you get calmer,
you hear more,
you sense more,
you are more,
you're more present."
—Ram Dass: *Remember, Be Here Now* (1971)

There are many attributes to being human. Physical and psychical attributes. For example, we have opposable thumbs, and we can reason. If there is an attribute we lack, however, it is perfection. We humans aren't perfect. Perfection seems unattainable and resembles death—not as in death equaling perfection, but as in perfection, ironically, making life not life-worthy.

The point of this little book isn't to be a philosophical treatise about being human, nor is it about perfection. (For a philosophical discourse it is too broad.) It's about learning. It's about working on oneself. It's about growing as a person.

There remains, though, a philosophical touch to this book. It starts with learning, working on ourselves, and growing to be better, which may be closer to what life is about. There are schools of thought that suggest that we're here to learn, that there are many realities, and that this one, our reality, was a "training system." And of course, falling back to religions like Hinduism or Buddhism and their ideas of reincarnation or rebirth, we get the idea that learning is close to what we're here for, too, though with the cycles we may go through, we may have plenty of time to avoid rushing through life's lessons.

In no way, then, does the following intend to be dogmatic. Sooner or later in life we find that things aren't black and white, and that there isn't necessarily right or wrong. What this book shares are ideas—ideas on how we can learn more. Ideas about how we can work on ourselves. Ideas that help us grow. Because no matter whether there is a universal lesson plan for us, most life seems to benefit from such growth.

—Jens Oliver Meiert

Dilemmas

A student of life or philosophy or psychology may pose the question: Aren't we okay as we are? And we ask additional questions when looking at acceptance—universal acceptance in particular. We have to accept ourselves! We're great as we are! We must be okay!

We are okay as we are, but we can always improve.

I myself don't want to try to explain this duality, this tension, but for practical purposes I deem both notions "right" and claim that both are important. We are okay as we are, but we can *also* always improve. I believe we need the former notion to ground ourselves, and the latter to grow.

A lesser dilemma appears to be that inevitably, in our reality system where space and time are core ideas, we're spending time—yet often, we're *wasting* it. That means we can't help using time, but that doesn't mean we're making *good* use of it.

I don't aim to explain and judge, for perhaps we can't use time incorrectly—or may waste time on things we deem useful. But I do believe there are qualitative differences in how we use time and that it behooves us to pay attention to how we use time.

How these two statements relate to this short book is simple: Working on ourselves doesn't mean that we don't accept ourselves. It means that we acknowledge and embrace opportunities to grow, and that working on ourselves makes for beneficial use of time.

Fundamentals

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The 20 Paths

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1. Learn

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2. Read

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3. Listen

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4. Take Notes

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5. Pick Excellent Sources

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6. Pick Unassuming Sources

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7. Be Cautious Around Media

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8. Be Suspicious of Entertainment

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9. Ask Questions

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10. Ask *Yourself* Questions

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11. Brainstorm

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12. Make an Effort

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13. Be Diligent

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14. Develop Routines

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15. Improve Skills

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16. Use Tools

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17. Change the Point of View

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18. Cultivate a Reflex

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19. Focus on the Process

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20. Dial It Up

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Alternatives

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Emergency Exit

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Afterword

When finishing this manuscript I observed many "maybe's", "perhaps's", "eventually's". Was what I wrote so vague and frail? Would it lend itself to anything of value and import? Would it cause confusion rather than clarity?

I'm convinced that when it comes to the underlying idea for this brief book, to explore options to work on ourselves, it meets that expectation. I'm also certain, on the basis of years of academic and unacademic study, that there is no "formula" that would warrant a clear, a proven, a "right" way of learning and working and growing. As such, I believe maybe's and perhaps's and eventually's aren't just normal but necessary.

That there are eventualities because there is no formula is a minor point. The major point is still the idea that while we learn, and perhaps are here to learn, we can do much to learn, then do more to learn, and with that, work more on ourselves, and through that, grow. And so working on ourselves means growing, and our growth not only benefits us—but everyone.

All the best.

PS.
In the weeks between finishing and publishing this manuscript, I've collected more important data relevant to the effectiveness (as well as the boundaries) of the belief work I touched under *Fundamentals*. Similarly, I've noticed how I had personally overshot with some of what I'm presenting in this little book, to an extent that I had turned too "OCD," too focused on problems, too obsessed with learning, which may have impeded instead of boosted my own growth.

As said method to work with our beliefs does, as mentioned, deserve a separate stage, and as eagerness does not invalidate methods, I've decided not to alter the manuscript.

Bibliography

Books that contributed, inspired, or supported points made in this work, for further reading.

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- *Unspun: Finding Facts in a World of Disinformation* by Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (2007)
- *Why Don't We Learn from History* by B.H. Liddell Hart (2012)
- *You Are Good at Things: A Checklist* by Andy Selsberg (2012)

Feedback

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About the Author

Jens Oliver Meiert is a German author, philosopher, adventurer, artist, and developer, sometimes all at once—and sometimes none at all. Jens, who has written seven non-bestselling books about a variety of topics, is currently studying philosophy and economics at the *Universität Hamburg*. He has in the past been a technical lead at companies like Google and GMX, traveled the world (18 countries on 5 continents in 2012, 48 countries on 6 continents from 2013–2015), and tried a number of art-political campaigns (like: *Endless Peace*). Jens loves coffee, men's fashion, and Werder Bremen. Online, he lives at meiert.com. Say hello.

Other titles by Jens Oliver Meiert:

The Problems With All the Good Things (2023)

When good is considered unproblematic, and everything can be shown to be problematic, then—

Available at Amazon, Apple Books, Kobo, Google Play Books, and Leanpub.

199 Love Haiku (2019)

This is not a typical poetry book. It is a selection of short poems that originated in a mistaken and later free interpretation of *haiku*, which then took on a life of its own. It is a selection of 199 short poems about love, romance, joy, drama, despair, and freedom.

Available at Amazon, Apple Books, Kobo, Google Play Books, and Leanpub.

Journey of J. (2015)

Journey of J. is a unique blend of photo journal and introspective diary, an unusual testament to 557 days of travel around the world. In this report, Jens Oliver Meiert shares 1,017 photographic impressions, and juxtaposes 291 personal observations. From simplified to deep, the result is a particular perspective of what happened in the traveler's and adventurer's life and in the 48 countries visited from 2013 to 2015.

Available at Amazon.

100 Things I Learned as an Everyday Adventurer (2013)

This is the book that the most boring person would write when they discovered life's possibilities. Meet Jens, a hectic, neurotic self-proclaimed adventurer, and his very individual account of one hundred different activities he tried over the course of three years (2010–2013). From rafting to security guard certifications to crocheting, everything had a lesson, and these lessons are shared in this book. Look forward to the German answer to Winston Wolfe explaining one way to live life.

Available at Amazon, Apple Books, Kobo, Google Play Books, and Leanpub.

The Web Development Glossary 3K (2023)

What is a BHO? CQRS? An EMD? What is Goanna? Hooking? Sharding? How about dynamic color, the phoenix server pattern, or the rules of ARIA? Covering more than 3,000 terms and concepts, and including explanations from Wikipedia and MDN Web Docs, *The Web Development Glossary 3K* provides an overview of web development unlike any other book or site.

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