

**who am I?** a guide for dealing  
with difficult emotions

Feelings aren't bad.

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If you're feeling stuck, go with it. Ask it why. You're probably too focused on one path and, without noticing, you've been walking into a wall for a while. This is human and natural, and totally not your fault. Step away from the wall. Don't try to find your way. You've just gone through a lot of pain and effort and it can seem like it was all a waste. Even years of your life can seem like a waste when you're in this attitude. Sit with the feeling, even just for 60 seconds. It'll be worth it, I promise. Acknowledge all the feelings you're feeling, really try to experience them as they happen, but let go of trying to see the ones that have already passed. In time, the wall will disappear. The room you're in will lighten up. Energy will start passing through you again. Because there are no walls. There is no wasted effort. And there is no maze. It just felt like that for a little while. Give your mind the space and time to relax, by itself, without forcing it, and this all becomes clear.

If you're feeling dissatisfied, look inside. If at this point in your life, you have no limbs, an artificial heart, and a breathing problem, you are still going to be okay. There is magic in facing the moment. You probably feel a little overwhelmed by how bright the future looks and the impossibility of getting there quicker. You probably want to skip over some part of your life. What if I told you it is not the road that makes the journey, but the traveler? It's not exactly true, mind you, but just imagine a hero from one of those books you read asking if they can skip over a quest because it seems so hard. They don't... not because they know they're going to end up having a good time or they're going to meet someone awesome, it's because they're caught in the story. They're being pushed along at a terrifying pace and therefore their life is exciting and full of adventure. Yours can be too, but you have to let go of the idea+feeling that some parts of life aren't as good as other parts.

If you're feelings sad, think of your father and mother as children. Think of Hitler as a child, cooing in his mother's arms. Think of every tyrant of life, every concept like money or democracy or Disney's version of love, being just an infant idea in some random person's mind. Imagine that and you will see clearly that sadness is not sadness, but a resistance to what is. Why can't I get that back? Why can't I have that again? It's because just as everything is born, everything dies. But really, everything just changes. Imagine it like flipping the pages of a book. You want to flip the page to get on with the story, but sometimes you want to go back a few pages or stop reading because it's coming to an end. But do you? Most of the time, you just keep reading anyways, because you want to get to the next chapter and you want to get to the next book. You're afraid the next page isn't going to be as good as the last one but this fear is blocking you from even experiencing it. Let go of the fear, the resistance, and just read. Everything will sort itself out and the story will come to life if you want it to.

If you're feeling self-hate, you don't know who you are. What is there to hate about yourself? You are an energy creature communicating with other energy creatures on a vast planet floating in outer space. You have thoughts sometimes, you have fears sometimes, and you hardly know what either of those things are. If you really look, really see yourself, you'll know that you aren't who you thought you were. You were thinking for a while, maybe a few minutes, maybe a few weeks, maybe your whole life: I like this person, who I am or I don't like this person, who I am. Or maybe: I can work with this, this person who I am. But it turns out you were wrong. Things change, people change, and you change too. You can't control what you like or what you want or how you feel most of the time. You really can't. Admit that and the self-hate disappears. Self-hate arises from thinking that you're something that you aren't, thinking that you should be someone who you're not. It's impossible and even if you could magically transform, you wouldn't really like it, not really. Imagine being able to magically accomplish anything what would it be worth? It's like having so much money you can buy all the books you want, but you don't end up reading any of them, you just end up shopping. Stop shopping and start paying attention to yourself, this feeling being who doesn't want to be feeling how it's feeling right now.

If you're feeling self-anger, you probably fucked up. Just kidding. There's no such thing. Some people will tell you Hitler fucked up and some people will tell you their neighbor cheated on her husband and she really fucked up. Some people will tell you about their cousin who's addicted to heroin and how it's the worst and some people will tell you about how they have depression and it's like a giant mountain that you have to climb every day even before getting out of bed. You know the truth though: this is all there is. There's this vast plain of existence that just exists in people's heads, where there are pockets of good and pockets of evil. And, of course, the people talking are always trying to convince you that you're in a pocket of good and you shouldn't leave and go over there, over that hill, not even with your mind. There are some things you just shouldn't think about. But the nice thing is that this world is not made up of thoughts. And though the clamoring masses are calling for your death, as you stand upon the stage of your execution, their words can (and will if you let them) pass over you like the wind. It is only someone who understands how useless and incompetent and senseless the voices in his or her own head can be who can understand how useless and incompetent and senseless all the voices on earth can be, though they seem to rise against you at the same time. Take every moment graciously and with patience and the road will seem less rocky in a moment. It feels impossible, at first, I know, but life has a way of balancing even on the head of a pin.

If you are feeling anxious about a recurring thought, it's probably because you think this thought belongs to you. It does not. Every time your mind reminds you that you are this anxious thought or that it belongs to you and you need to do something about it right now, immediately, do not thank it, do not acknowledge it, do not feel sorry for it. It is not a person. You owe it nothing. Treat it as you would treat a wave rushing to shore. Every wave is different, is it not? Do you believe that you are different, that you somehow escape the laws of reality? No, this thought is an attempt to make you seem more solid than you are. This thought is like a stinky old blanket that you've held onto your entire life. Let it wash out with the tide and then come back tomorrow to the shore and look out at the ocean. You can hear it more clearly now, see each wave more clearly now.

If you are feeling anxious about a choice, look back at some things you've done recently. Did you draw a picture or hang out with a friend? Were these choices that you decided to decide to make or did they just happen? Did you set about making a plan for deciding what to do? No. Don't get caught up in the narrative, that endless narrative they're weaving, about people who make bold choices and formulate their own plans for world domination and then act on them. It's not real, it's a form of self-comfort, and it never works that way. Let go, just a little, of the control you think you have over this life, your life. This, you, are the whole world. Everything you imagine the world is, is you. Surrender to that, whatever it is, and let the choice make itself, though you hate it at first. You, in struggling to make a choice, are afraid of what you are going to learn beyond the veil of the next instant. It will happen now or in 10 years or on your death-bed, but it will happen. You will realize what life is offering you: a chance to start over again, from scratch, with nothing to prepare you or protect you. Take it, grab hold of it, and force it into your skull because you love it, you really do, you just can't believe how generous life is that it presents these things so often to you. Do not thank it, it doesn't want thanks, it wants to know what it feels like. Show it.

If you are feeling anxious about a friendship, think about a friend you have, a different friend. Have you ever hated them? Have they ever said something that made you snarl? Did they ever post something online that made your eyes roll? If not, if not even once, they are pretending. They are presenting. Let them go, undo their bindings in your mind, so that you can really get to know them. Everyone is a possum, sure, but everyone is a mountain lion too. Don't love the possum so much that the mountain lion feels discarded and worthless. Let them all breathe at once. Do not hold a stick with a carrot unless you want to attract only a certain kind of animal. We are all multitudes. To believe you are a multitude and no one else is, is a sacred lie. The type of lie that nations are built on. Discard it like the rest and let everyone breathe. If you lose a friend, so be it, be a friend to yourself and do not hold on to them too dearly. Unless you want to. But just make the choice. I mean, if there is a moment when you have a choice, a violent choice to make, the best thing you can do is reach out through the void, through all those walls we pretend are there, thick, brick, and high, and touch your friend, hold them tight, and clasp them to your chest. If there are magic potions in this world, this is one, and it will lead to a lifelong friendship.

If you're feeling anxious about a relationship, you are wearing a mask. You can tell me, "No: they are wearing a mask." But the scene has changed and you're not admitting it. They are keeping on the mask to be courteous to you. You may be keeping it on to be courteous to them. Take it off. Not slowly. The scene has changed. Rip it off and move on to the next scene. Embrace it. Love it. Get to know it. If the scene is going to be a betrayal, act through it. If the scene is going to be an exclamatory fight, act through it. Don't lose yourself in the part. Lose yourself in the part. It doesn't matter. Just don't fight the scene. And when it all comes undone, and you're both sitting there, exhausted, totally annihilated by the power and force of life and death and hopes and dreams neither of you knew you had, I guarantee you, you will have a choice. Even if the words "this relationship is over" have been said in a million different ways throughout the scene, you will have one chance, at the end, to say one thing, if you want, to bring it all back again: "But maybe..." And then you'll march, together, hand in hand, into Act II. But fear the consequences or choose not to choose, and you might sit on that stage, with no one watching, for hours afterwards, or days, or years. And no one will come to rescue you. Until you realize, just outside, is the whole world and, after all, it was the world you loved, the same world that's inside your lover, and it wasn't really your lover who you loved after all.

If you're feeling anxious about a career path, take a second to let the blood bleed out. You've done a lot of thinking about this, but no real good thinking about it, you've just glanced at it in moments of panic. I don't want to end up the destitute creative! I don't want to end up the bum on the street! I don't want to end up the malicious executive with power issues! Calm yourself. Careers are part of life, not the other way around. If you want to be here, living, alive, do what makes you feel alive. I guarantee it, though you are working in a prison camp, a prisoner in a foreign country, you can find enjoyment in a part of it. But, of course, this is not the goal. This is not the goal of life: enjoyment for you, for an ego. No. The goal of life is not the best career path for you. The goal of life is not that you feel secure. The goal of life is not that you make enough money or have enough cars or contribute the most to society. The goal of life, as far as I'm concerned, is either non-existent or a complete mystery. If you can give into this, completely, maybe one day you will wake up with a glimpse of its real purpose and meaning, but until that day do not trust even one person who tells you they found it, especially if their job is literally going around telling other people they found it. This is the stupidest job ever, the most self-reflexively bad job. So, anyways, do what you want, seriously, even if it's quitting all the projects/jobs you have right now. If that's what you want to do — ask yourself right now, completely seriously — and promise yourself to have your back no matter what the answer is. Say it: "Really, I will support your walk around the world or your mission to travel into outer space. Or a year smoking pot in a flat in London. Whatever, really." No adventure or social mission required. They, the people who own corporations or let their corporations own part of them, the people who have bought into the system, will do anything to not see your flame for them burn out completely. They will entice you with... whatever. Though it comes to hate for yourself from yourself or from those closest to you, don't give in, don't believe one word they say about it. They will have you convinced you must be Atlas himself if they are able, they really will. When

all along you are only a small thing, who likes simple things, even if those things don't make much sense at the time.

If you're feeling anxious about your identity, try looking in the mirror. Ask yourself: is that me? Just like that doesn't really seem like the true you, all your self-reflective thoughts won't either. It's a puzzle, really. In order to live, for real, you need to let life know you better than you know yourself. It's just a fact of existence. Try to control other people, and you will be controlled. Try to control yourself and you will be confused. Why aren't these buttons doing anything! Dammit! I thought I ran this place! Argh! You don't. You never will. Never, ever. Ever. Those who you think hate you, love you secretly. Those who you hate, you would slip under the covers with. If you hate yourself, you are lonely. If you hate other people, you are lonely. Spend 2 minutes talking to someone else — even cut the conversation short — and you will fall in love with life again. It can even be a conversation with yourself. It can even just be meditating. Identity is a mirage inside a mirage. Identity is the pursuit of people who have lost their way so many times they want a final solution, someone, something, to look out for or to look out for them. Surrender at the deepest level, surrender control, surrender all your ideals and even your beliefs, and you will see, quite clearly: you are no one and you love it. Also, remember the bird, the bird who has food enough to eat and a place to sleep no matter what. Life will get by with or without your self-reflective worries. Worry about food or shelter, sure, but whether this or that person hates you — wait a minute with the feeling, and watch it slip through your fingers.

If you are feeling attacked, you are not paying attention. You have come to understand yourself as something powerful or good. You have started to see yourself as something worth defending. You are not and never will be something worth defending, because you are always wrapped neatly in the arms of everything. If you are feeling attacked, you are misinterpreting. Even if someone cuts you with a knife, do you think they are meaning to cut you? Most of the time, violence, in whatever form it takes, is a type of blindness. You can hold it against the blind person or you can wait for them to stop being frustrated and sad and lead them back to somewhere safe. Realize: you are not the ultimate determiner of people's behavior. People do not do things only because of you, even when they say it's your fault. There are monsters and demons and illnesses in this world and it is not your job to cure them, though if you are patient and kind, you may come to understand them, be able to talk to them, and set them free. For all they are are buckets of tangled energy that doesn't understand itself. Let it go. Let it figure itself out and it will be grateful you spared its life, though you will know it not.

If you're feeling nervous about the future, turn around. You are facing the wrong direction. You are looking out beyond the hills, but home needs some attention. Once you have taken care of what is bugging you at home, you will not be nervous to venture into the hills. Sometimes all it takes is a word or whisper to yourself and everything will settle into its right place. As long as you are at home in yourself, the world is exciting. But, even a slight imbalance in your body, can turn the world into a nightmare, though it knows it not, cares not, sees not, and seems only to push the fear and anger deeper. Look towards yourself and your own place in this mess and be with it, though it feels like a cage made of poison spikes — and soon enough you will be eating poison as if it's delicious and using the spikes as writing utensils or skis or some such thing. A cage is only a cage if you make it so. And the future is only scary if you've lost track of who you are. The future, though it bear down on you and crush you, is not for you to fear. Life's needs must take care of themselves sometimes, and, if they don't, much more than you will perish in the storm and be glad for the exchange.