

of life. The more we can come to trust—not “the world” but *our dance with the world*—the more we can flow with the inevitable losses and disappointments that come while nourishing the constructive connections that are equally plentiful. This is not a naïve belief that the world is good but an empowered belief that we can aim for our highest vision and successfully navigate the territory we will have to cross.

On our journey, we are not left to our own devices. The central premise of this book is that being in flow leads to a greater chance of experiencing meaningful coincidences. These coincidences lead us further on the path of flow. From this view, the best way to remain safe is to learn to get *into* flow and dance with life. Positive results are not guaranteed. Bad things happen to good people every day, and nobody escapes mortality. Should we even want to? In the meantime, by living in flow we will live a more vibrant version of ourselves, transcending the need to control life and opening up to its bounty and the beauty of our own soul.

## The Cosmos Is Responsive

What is the meaning of life? Do our actions have a purpose? Is the universe friendly?

Finding answers to these questions that work for everyone is probably impossible. I can't even be sure my own answers to these questions stay the same from day to day! I don't believe there is just one truth to be found. As a white person, as a male, as an American, as a Californian, I can only comprehend a certain slice of experiences with which I am familiar. My sense of what is meaningful or what constitutes a purposeful life probably varies from your sense of those things quite a bit, as do my tastes in clothes or music.

As a physicist, though, I am trained to look for patterns and for commonalities between things that seem completely distinct. While I can't say what is meaningful for others, I am curious to understand what makes something meaningful to anyone. Whether you are black, brown, white, indigenous, immigrant, female, male, younger, older, LGBTQ, cisgendered, Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern, or any other distinction that makes you unique, something drives you to make meaning of the events in your life.

Some of us are confident that the meaning we make is all inside our heads. Others are sure that meaning and guidance come from a deity. Many Western scientists conclude that the universe has no inherent purpose other than the gradual unfolding of events according to physical and statistical laws. The ancient yogic traditions—which should also be considered sciences, because they follow a rigorous process of repeatable experimentation on the inner states of human beings—see purpose all around us in the unfolding of karma.

I believe the third question above provides insight into the other two. Is the universe a friendly place? Amazingly, I believe this is a question that physics can tackle. The theory I will present, based on some well-established science as well as some new science and some speculative ideas, states that the universe is neither friendly, hostile, nor indifferent to us. Rather, it is *responsive*. We live in a cosmos that responds to our actions by bringing us more of the same. To oversimplify for a moment, if we act friendly to the world, we find that circumstances emerge that reinforce our belief that the world is friendly. Similarly, if we act hostile to the world, we find our perspective justified because events arise that confirm our preconceived notions. When we align with circumstances, circumstances align with us. We can call this flow.

### Are You a Dodge Mechanic?

“My young daughter and I were crossing the desert in an old Dodge Explorer. We arrived at a campground at night, and when we arose in the morning, the campground was mostly empty. Then we found our van was making strange noises and wouldn't start. What were we going to do? As we deliberated, a disheveled man climbed out of the creek bed nearby and said, ‘I could hear you're having trouble. I'm a Dodge mechanic; can I help?’ He worked for a few minutes, patched the problem, and gave us instructions to take to the next service station for a permanent fix. Thank goodness just the right person was there when we needed him.” (Story contributed by Anne Cummings Jacopetti)

However, it is not as simple as it initially sounds. The proposed process of meaningful history selection indicates that life will be punctuated by meaningful events. Even if we approach people with kindness, not every person we talk to will be kind in response. This is evident within the first five minutes of my day when I gently wake my eight-year-old daughter. I have a fifty-fifty chance of being snapped at, no matter how kind I am! Rather, life is a stream of events *accented* by useful growth opportunities. These growth opportunities pop up throughout our days, and it is these “singular events” that I am trying to understand in my research.

Singular events are like forks in the road. They are points at which our choice of action makes a significant difference in the course of future events. If we envision all possible outcomes existing on a tree of forked branches, singular events are the forking points where one major path diverges from another.

My view is that we can find the essence of any spiritual teaching through the simple practice of responding to the experiences of life and seeing how life responds to us. Our job is to see what meaningful lesson each experience provides. The most important question to me is this: How does the cosmos respond to what I choose to do? If we understand how the responsiveness of the cosmos works, then we can develop a more compelling relationship to meaning-making and purposefulness in our lives. Such a relationship will allow us to align ourselves more effectively within our personal relationships, our professional relationships, and our political relationships. In this way we can *live in flow*.

If the universe is indeed responsive to our actions, then we are the source of the meaning in our lives. Experiences outside serve as a mirror for experiences inside, and every event can be a meaningful opportunity for learning about ourselves.

I used to see this as a nice philosophy, but as a physicist I undertook a quest to understand how it can be true. The way I see it, every action is meaningful with respect to something, because every action leads to some outcomes and not to others. Doing the dishes and folding the laundry are meaningful with respect to making my home a comfortable place, because these activities logically lead toward futures in which my home is a place I'd be proud to have my parents visit, and they simultaneously lead away from futures where I am frustrated by tripping over my piles of dirty clothes. But these activities don't influence whether I get new clients, so they are not meaningful with respect to my professional goals.

In contrast, time spent on professional activities creates a clear difference between futures where my profession thrives and those in which it languishes, but it doesn't differentiate futures in which my house is in good repair from those in which it is derelict. Whether I get a promotion or not, that bedroom door

latch still doesn't close properly. Every action is meaningful, but I must look carefully inside myself to know which specific meaning my actions exhibit and whether it is the meaning I intend to act upon.

Seeing action in this light, might there be some alignment between intentional prayer, karma, and the responsive cosmos? Through our actions we choose where to invest our effort, and through the proposed process of meaningful history selection we are more likely to experience situations that reflect those choices. It is *I* who bring meaning into the world by tapping into the deep reservoir of divine urges and translating my inner experiences to life in the world.

Rather than wondering what the meaning of my whole life is, I can wonder how to bring more meaning to everything I do. My current view of the meaning of life is to live purposefully. What a challenge this is! Living purposefully can happen anytime and anywhere because the responsive cosmos reinforces whatever choices I make. So in order to understand the meaning of life (in the working definition I provide here), I think we need to understand what it means to live purposefully.

## Acting with a Sense of Purpose

Are you motivated to be purposeful in your life? If you are, you are not alone. There is a growing cultural alignment between who we are at home and who we are at work. Kathy Caprino, a business coach for professional women, surveyed her online community<sup>14</sup> and found that the top qualities these women aspire to are as much personal as they are professional. Caprino's respondents said their top ten values were happiness, money, freedom, inner peace, joy, balance, fulfillment, confidence, stability, and passion. These are not the values we would typically expect people to have