

# The Meaning of Life

By

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Note: This article is based on an actual email conversation. I took the liberty to make additions, and edit other sections in order to make it more readable.

**On Jan 30, 2008 9:07 AM, Jerusalem <Danny> wrote:**

Hi Judy,

We are snowed in today and most of the city is shut down. I won't be going to work today. So, with the spare time, I wrote down the following discussion that I had the other day with Yahav. Since we are both new grandparents, I thought that you might enjoy it.

Danny

As he stared at me while I ate, I understood from the deep frown on his forehead and the serious look in his eyes that at his young age he was already contemplating the deeper meaning of life, trying to figure out why he was here and what life was all about.

As a grandfather must do when talking to his grandson, I knew that I had to make the explanation as simple as possible so that he would be able to comprehend. "Yahav, it's all really quite simple. It's all about clocks. The clock was ticking before you came into this world, and the clock will keep ticking while you are in it. You try to do your best to make the world a better place, get married, have kids, and pass your values on to them so that they can carry on. Then you move on to the next world (olam haba), and the clock keeps ticking after you have left this world." I wasn't sure that he understood as he continued to stare at me, resting in his grandmother's arms. After all, he was only two months old. However, the next time that Yahav came to visit, he was a lot more relaxed, smiling, laughing, and making funny noises. I think that he understood.

**On Jan 30, 2008 7:04 PM, Oregon <Judy> wrote:**

*Danny, that's really a nice article. I see that you have made the transition to grandfather. Isn't it the best? I wonder if Yahav is noticing the snow. I'm envious of your snow. Everyone around*

*us has had some but it just won't stick in our neighborhood. Our dog Riley loves to get out and run around in it. But this year, nothing.*

*Diane's wedding is almost here. It's getting very exciting. Everything is finally coming together. There have been some bumps along the way but nothing much. We will sure miss you and Naomi. It won't be the same without you. But this way we have the summer to look forward to. Do you have any idea what month you'll be coming?*

*I haven't been feeling well lately, but I am starting to feel more human again. I may even get to the grocery store today. Who knows.*

*Enjoy your snow day. Perhaps it will inspire more writings. Or maybe touch your heart in some new and different way. Take good care and give Yahav a kiss for us. And Naomi too. Love Judy*

**On Jan 30, 2008 8:57 PM, Jerusalem <Danny> wrote:**

Hi Judy,

We still feel bad that we won't be able to be at the wedding. Naomi is working 6 days a week now as the teachers have to make up for the two months that they were on strike. She will be working like this until the end of the school year. I just didn't feel too comfortable about traveling alone with my health problems. I've finished a lot of medical exams lately and doctors visits to put everything together to submit for early retirement. I'm sure that it will be a very nice wedding and a lot of fun and special for you guys.

We have reservations to fly into Portland in June, and will be staying for 6 weeks, traveling the length of the West Coast, visiting friends and relatives.

**On Jan 30, 2008 9:10 PM, Oregon <judy> wrote:**

*Hi....it's me again. I think I'm avoiding taking a shower because it seems like such a big effort. Instead I'm thinking about your writing.*

*Time has always seemed like my greatest enemy. It seems the cause of my greatest anxiety. If I can live outside of the constraint of time I feel like I can overcome my shakiness. So I'm interested to hear of your way of looking at time. It seems much more friendly. Tell me more about the Clock and Time.*

**On Jan 30, 2008 9:30 PM, Jerusalem <Danny> wrote:**

Whoa - just got your second email. That's kind of a heavy-duty question.

Having a chronic illness has really changed my way of looking at things. I've had to take things that I was saving to do later in life and do them now, as there might not be a later. I had to ask myself, what is it that I really treasure and really want to do and to start making the changes in my life so that I can do those things most important to me.

So what is it that I really want to do?

The three things that are important to me in order of priority are:

1. Family - I want to spend time with my family. I want to spend more time with my kids, their spouses, my grandchildren and watch and help them develop and attain their aspirations in life. I want to enjoy them and relish in the fact that they represent my future and what I am passing on to the world after I am gone.

2. My clocks - It is important to me that I finish building a grandfather clock for each one of the kids. This may seem kind of silly. But for me, the clock is my family heirloom to them, and hopefully the clocks will remain in the family for generations. Every time the damn thing chimes, they will think of me, hopefully with fond memories.

3. Tai Chi - I really want to help other people in a similar situation such as mine. I seem to have found a niche where there are not many people with a sufficiently high enough level of tai chi experience that also have Parkinson's. This allows me to relate intimately with other Parkinson's people because we have the same symptoms and are struggling with the same issues. I really believe that I have something positive to contribute in this area, and it is very rewarding for me to be helping others. It is also a tremendously creative experience.

Everything else is secondary. I would like to do some more traveling, but if it doesn't happen, it's not a big deal. There really ain't a whole lot more that I want out of life. Most of what I set out to accomplish, I've been privileged to have done. Every day must be lived to it's absolute fullest. We don't know when the last day will be.

Even though I like my work, with my deteriorating health it is becoming much more difficult to get through the work day. If I can get early pension, it would give me more time to do the things mentioned above.

The clock represents exactly what I said to Yahav. Our time here in this world is temporary. We do our best to make the world a better place. Then we move on to another world that I know very little about. I only hope that they do tai chi in that world too (ha ha). Time goes on and we move on too.

I hope that this helps you out a bit. I used to be afraid of dying, but not anymore. I've come to terms with the transient nature of our lives here.

**On Jan 30, 2008 10:53 PM, Oregon <judy> wrote:**

*Hi Danny....this is fun. I'm pretty lonely and bored having been stuck at home for days on end. Please don't feel bad about missing the wedding. You had a couple of weddings and we missed out on being there. It's just life happening. If only we all had clones!*

*Thank you for sharing yourself so generously. I want to say that it's really a gift to have so much clarity about who you are and what you want. But I know it wasn't given as a gift. You did what was necessary to carve that out for yourself. It is very reassuring to see what you have created. To surrender completely to the transitory nature of life is required and I see that you have clearly done that. I think I'm still bargaining. I'm not afraid of my own death and accept that reality. But I'm terrified of other people dying. So death is still a really huge concept for me. The support group that I am in is helping me to claim my gifts and get to the point of sharing them with others but I'm moving really slowly this time so I don't burn out and end up sick. My body is quite quirky and unpredictable. Some days it's off to the gym and pumping iron then off on a brisk walk. Other days, quite out of the blue, I'm flat on my back in bed. Try as I may I can't get into a routine. So I have given myself permission lately to not live today to the fullest or be the best I can be at all times. I don't know if this is some lame cop out, or giving up, or simply coming to terms with the limitations of this particular body. I know you must have gone through this process and have come to some place of balance. I'd appreciate any advice you have in how you got there. It is very humbling and takes such faith and courage. I get so weary of pulling myself up again and starting over. Hope I haven't rambled on too long. Thanks for connecting. Love Judy*

**On Jan 31, 2008 12:11 AM, Jerusalem <Danny> wrote:**

Hi Judy,

I think that most of my "clarity" as you call it I have obtained through my practice of Tai Chi. When I do Tai Chi, I connect to my inner self and have learned to focus in on my heart's desire. Tai Chi allows me to become acutely aware of my strengths, my limitations, and gives some direction in how to develop these strengths and to minimize or live with my limitations.

I've had to learn to acknowledge my own physical limitations and live comfortably with them. I've learned to ask for help when I need to and just kind of let it all hang out and be open about it. With my tai chi group for Parkinson's people that I teach, I tell them that I have limitations too, and if my arm starts trembling while I'm showing them a new movement I just go with it. What the hell, in that group everyone is shaking.

My tai chi group is more than just physical exercise. I'm trying to fashion it into sort of a mini support group as well. We have a green tea break where we can share about our symptoms and

problems as well as talk about tai chi and it's relevance for dealing with them. I am not only stressing the exercise benefits of tai chi, but also the connection between the body and mind (soul) and how tai chi changes our inner selves as well. I also emphasize meditative aspects (we do meditation at every meeting), where we clear our minds and listen to our bodies and inner selves and what they are telling us. Tai chi not only emphasizes becoming acquainted with our own selves, but we also do exercises with partners to sensitize ourselves to others both physical and mental. This is all very experimental on my part, but the response is tremendous and I am always hearing through second-hand parties how much the participants seem to be getting from the group.

By living each day to the fullest, I didn't mean going out and pumping iron and feeling really healthy. There are many days when it is hard for me to function. I have learned to just accept it for what it is and concentrate on living it to the fullest within the parameters of that particular day. Living it to the fullest may just mean enjoying a cup of tea, watching television, planning my next tai chi class, or planning my next clock project. I don't have to feel 100% to do these things and I'm recognizing my frailty at the same time, nurturing myself back to health.

This is kind of deep stuff to think about. Writing about it to you has helped me conceptualize some of my thoughts a bit better. Don't think that I have it figured out. I'm working on myself just as you are working on yourself. What's important is the process, more than the final outcome. I've been taking a very Zen approach to life lately, not really pushing in any particular direction, but just letting the doors open and then walking through. It's been a very fun and calming experience.

It's after midnight here, so I'm going to bed. According to the weather report, looks like I'll be off of work tomorrow too. Thanks for listening to me drag on.

Danny

**On Jan 31, 2008 7:11 PM, Oregon <judy> wrote:**

*Danny,*

*Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts and feelings about your own life and process. It is a great help and relief to learn of how you make sense of the challenges that have occurred in your life. It always shocks me when I realize how easy it is to forget my own knowing. How easy it is to get sucked into my story of blah blah blah. How when I am in the midst of sickness, to think I've lost it all. Thanks for speaking to that place in me that gets so small and scared. Thank you for reminding me that it's okay to show up as me on any given day. I don't have to do anything special. But I am required to be present with myself and at the very least not lie to myself. I feel crappy and I have for a week now and I'm scared that I'll feel crappy for the wedding and I'll let Diane down and then I'll be depressed and on and on and on. So there you have it. Now I can let go of that. Whew!*

*I love what you're doing with your tai chi class. So simple and yet only you are doing it in just that way. I wish I was there and could share in the green tea break.*

*Did you get another snow day today? Is it unusual to have so much snow?*

*Thanks again, Danny for being willing to share so much with me. It is a rare gift.*

*Love Judy*

**On Jan 31, 2008 8:04 PM, Jerusalem <Danny> wrote:**

Hi Judy,

Yes, I also had today off. It is unusual indeed that we get snow two days in a row. It will mostly be melted by tomorrow though.

With both of our kids weddings, I also wasn't sure how well I would feel and how I would hold up to the many people, friends, tension, and pressure. I just decided to go and take it easy and enjoy myself. And, I did. I thoroughly enjoyed myself at each wedding. Just be yourself and take joy in the event as it unfolds.

Thank you for your compliments. I've had to work through a lot, and there are still many more things to work out. But you know, I am not unique. Many of the Parkinson's people that I know are going through the same thing, and there is a lot to be learned from them. They are my true teachers and heroes. Just ordinary people dealing with extremely tough challenges and managing to be an inspiration to others in the process.

There is so much more to share and I look forward to being with you guys this summer.

Danny

**On Jan 31, 2008 9:12 PM, Oregon <judy> wrote:**

*Hi Danny,*

*It's been so nice having this exchange with you. It's finally snowing here but not sticking. Guess it is better that it doesn't stick since Lucy and I have a shopping trip planned this afternoon. We have to get Lucy outfitted for the wedding. She never wears dresses and is quite the tomboy so not sure how this will come together.*

*I'm doing my best to remember that I can be myself no matter what is happening. There is such an old and deep pattern of believing that I'm not good enough so I must do better, so it's a real challenge. And not a new one at that. But maybe at a deeper level I am finding more acceptance of myself and my circumstance. That seems to be a lifelong task for everyone I know so why should I be any different. I am affirming right now in this moment that I am stopping all the "efforting" to be perfect.*

*Love Judy*

*My special thanks to Judy Loney, my sister-in-law, for her warm compliments and her gentle prodding questions enabling me to connect to myself and also to connect to her, drawing out of me some of my inner most thoughts. DL*

