

## Recapture the Rapture Book Notes

As E. B. White, the author of the children's classic *Charlotte's Web*, once reflected, "I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day."

He's also shaped the cognitive sciences, where the Semmelweis reflex—the idea that we habitually and often violently reject new evidence or new knowledge because it runs so counter to our preexisting articles of faith—has become a standby on the list of common cognitive biases. Our cognitive biases hamper our ability to predict with any degree of certainty what's going to happen next. That's because the Semmelweis reflex kicks us out of accepting what is staring us in the face. We can't wrap our head around it because it runs so counter to everything we hold to be self-evidently true. Someone broke our dashboard. At this point we're flying blind.

The endless upward ascent of bigger cars and bigger houses, of higher education translating into professional opportunity, and of earning more, having more, and doing more than our parents before us and their parents before them—that whole dream, brief though it was, is unraveling right in front of our eyes.

When twenty-six people, who could all comfortably fit on a bus together (not that they'd ever ride one), own as much wealth as the poorer half of the world (nearly four billion people), you know we're in a strange place. That sort of asymmetric resource accumulation has never existed in all of human history, or anywhere in nature, for that matter. And it all accrued during an era where democratic, technocratic, "rising tides lift all boats" trickle-down philosophies were the dominant story. It's not surprising that some of us have lost the plot.

Left to our own devices, we regress under stress. Put simply, tribalism is destiny. Humanism is optional.

Let's take them one at a time. Inspiration serves as an essential counterweight to the crushing "life's a bitch and then you die" monotony of existence.

Healing—the second core nutrient we all require.

Connection—the third essential quality that faith has always conferred upon believers—is connection to community.

To recap: A viable candidate for Meaning 3.0 will need to fulfill the pro-social functions of traditional 1.0 Faith—Inspiration, Healing, and Connection. And, to stand a chance of helping the world, it needs to fulfill the inclusive promise of 2.0 Modernism, and be Open Source, Scalable, and Anti-fragile.

The closer to our primitive survival circuitry we are working, the simpler, more powerful, and more reliable those interventions can be.

Four of the most potent and accessible physical drivers to shape consciousness and culture and help us build Meaning 3.0 are: Respiration—We are hard-coded to ensure our oxygen supply remains constant, so modulating breathing is one of the surest-fire ways to shift physical and psychological states. Embodiment—The core regulators of our parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system play an enormous role in our health, well-being, and stress resilience. They are the metronome of our physiology that sets the rhythm of our lived experiences. Sexuality—If we do not procreate we die. So there are tons of neurochemical drivers baked into our systems to ensure we do. Understanding them allows a powerful reorientation to this central life-giving activity. Substances—Humans, and most other animals, routinely seek to shift states as part of their learning, growing, and mending. Ron Siegel at UCLA has even gone as far as calling the intentional pursuit of intoxication a “fourth drive—a desire to feel different, to achieve a rapid change in one’s state” that is “as much a part of the human condition as sex, hunger, and thirst.”

To those four we can add the most ancient and effective amplifier of experience: Music—From ancient fireside chants to cathedrals to chain gangs to concerts, music has accompanied us on the journey of human civilization. It not only “soothes the savage beast”; it shapes our physiology, sense of connectivity, and capacity for awe.

Respiration, embodiment, sexuality, substances, and music supporting inspiration, healing, and connection.

One study found that “didgeridu sound meditation is as effective as silent meditation for decreasing self-perceived negative arousal, tiredness, and energy and more effective than silent meditation for relaxation and acute stress.”

### The Gospel of Gasp

Whether it comes wrapped in spiritual, martial, or athletic language, breath training boils down to three things: oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon dioxide. Varying the rate, depth, and rhythm of our breaths changes the ratios of the three gases that make up our atmosphere. In turn this affects how our bodies and brains perform and how our hearts and minds feel. That’s pretty much it.

That conviction catalyzed his work as arguably America’s greatest philosophical mind. James’s forays into nitrous spawned two of his key contributions to academia: the first that direct experience is more valuable than religious doctrine or dogma and the second that there is no singular and absolute truth—only a multitude of perspectives.

Regardless of what method we use to get there—ketamine, meditation, brain stimulation, or nitrous oxide—once we find ourselves in a waking delta-wave EEG state, the results are often profound. Delta waves, it’s becoming clear, can mend our brains, spark our minds, and soothe our souls.

Nitrous oxide knocks out conscious processing, accelerates pattern recognition, and boosts the signal of how fast we can think, dramatically. And it does it for anyone with enough wherewithal to retain what they learn.

The Breath of Life So what would it look like to combine all of the respiratory practices we've just explored into one, integrated Vital Respiration Protocol? Warm up with box breathing to increase our CO<sub>2</sub> tolerances and diaphragmatic control. Master the free diver's vagal breathing to lower our heart rates (you can even throw an ice mask on your face if you want to induce the mammalian dive reflex). Blow off excess CO<sub>2</sub> with Grof's holotropic hyperventilating, supersaturate our red blood cells by pre-breathing pure oxygen, and then practice gas-assisted static apnea with a 70/30 nitrous oxide/oxygen blend, or a 30/70 carbon dioxide/oxygen blend.

While the Israelis pioneered the research into the protective and healing role of cannabinoids in brain injury and physical trauma, the Cornell team found that benefits extend to psychological trauma as well. "The results were clear . . . humans with the cannabinoid mutation showed enhanced fear extinction—that is, they learned more efficiently how to be unafraid" [emphasis added].

The movement spread—racking up over a hundred thousand registered members on the forum. And while Takashima's original clientele were older men suffering from enlarged prostates, the Aneros forum now comprises men of all ages. To date, it has sold over 1.5 million units. What began as medical relief for an embarrassing condition became an accidental movement for men to reclaim their sensitivity and embodiment.

The human experience, despite all of its abstraction, complexity, and self-consciousness, is, at a biological level, unnervingly basic. And how that ancient linear circuitry works provides real insight into how we feel and heal.

From our brain stem down to our root, we are wired for wholeness and even transcendence.

It's not that our animal selves lie in contradiction to our angel selves. Our animal selves are literally our stairway to heaven.

"The White Man goes into his church house and talks about Jesus," Parker explained, "but the Indian goes into his tipi and talks to Jesus."

But there are experiences that deliver direct connection to the sublime and obliterate both self and doubt. We just need to expand our search parameters. That's where sacraments like the Native American Church's come in. "Every culture has found such chemical means of transcendence, and at some point the use of such intoxicants becomes institutionalized at a magical or sacramental level," NYU neuroscientist Oliver Sacks says. "The sacramental use of psychoactive plant substances has a long history and continues to the present day in various shamanic and religious rites around the world . . . some people can reach transcendent states through meditation or similar trance-inducing techniques, or through prayer and spiritual

exercises. But drugs offer a shortcut; they promise transcendence on demand. These shortcuts are possible because certain chemicals can directly stimulate many complex brain functions.” That neurological stimulation, that “transcendence on demand” kicks down the walls of third-person speculation and gets us into second- and first-person communion.

Superegos It’s the Pareto principle gone wrong. If the first 20 percent of my experience of cathartic healing delivers 80 percent of the whizbang insights and breakthroughs, I am going to rationally conclude, “Holy shit! This is the most game-changing thing ever. I need to clear the decks and dedicate my life to this transformative practice—at this rate, I’ll be enlightened in no time!” Except that’s rarely how it goes. Pareto twists on us, and we’re now facing the disappointing reality that the remaining 80 percent of our time, money, and effort will be dedicated to gleaning only 20 percent more growth and integration. And that can take a lot of frustrated searching to figure out. The principle applies to ecstatic techniques of any stripe—psychedelics, group work, breath work, body work, tantra, music: succumb to the irrational exuberance of your initial hits of healing, and you can lose yourself. We can become addicted to the states without ever raising our stage.

Most religious traditions are inherently conservative. At some point in a distant past, a founder, and possibly an elect group of initiates, had access to revelation. After that, the veil closed, history turned, a priest class grew, and the rest of us had to settle for hand-me-downs and Just So stories.

Sure, there are third-person efforts to talk about the Divine, to add commentary like the Hebrew midrash, or the Church writings of Augustine. But direct second- or first-person I-Thou or I-I encounters with the Numinous? Generally frowned upon, or outright persecuted as heresy. Illumined certainty and orthodox authority have often been at odds. Few powerful priests have been willing to get upstaged by hair-on-fire mystics.

In other words, we need to create a list of widely available “essential substances” that grant inspiration, healing, and connection. Experiences that deliver us to the Sublime with little more than a driver’s license or a doctor’s note. Church, then, could become something else altogether. Self-organized synchronized consumption of prescription pharmaceuticals in a revelatory, celebratory environment. B.Y.O.E. Bring Your Own Entheogens. Brought to you by your local Groove and Reconciliation Committee.

All of the neurochemical priming that makes babies inevitable—our animal nature—can also give us access to higher states of awareness—our angel nature. That is the terrain that tantra in the East and sex magick in the West have always explored—the notion that peak states don’t need to be focused on transcending the body through denial and asceticism. In fact, the path to transcendence can begin in the most immanent place of all—our bodies.

Within an hour of onset of MDMA, serotonin levels rise considerably, boosting mood and heightening perception. Oxytocin follows, reducing fear and stress and increasing trust and connectivity. Therapists suggest that the calming effect of these neurochemicals allows them to

bond with patients and encourage them to revisit and rewrite traumatic memories from a more resilient state.

The study of women's orgasm looked to see if fifteen minutes of manual clitoral stimulation could deliver a similar boost in mood, shifts in time perception, ineffability, and sacredness as the psilocybin studies. They took eight hundred participants of varying ages, ethnicities, and gender conducting the fifteen-minute practice, and surveyed them afterward with the MEQ30. The study revealed three interesting results: First, "These findings suggest that [clitoral stimulation] can trigger a substantial mystical experience, comparable in strength to a moderate dose of psilocybin," the researchers wrote in their findings. Second, "The proportion of participants who reported a complete mystical experience was slightly higher than that found by the maximum dose of psilocybin administered in Griffiths and colleagues' 2011 study (62 percent vs. 56 percent)." And third, "While both partners reported moderate to strong mystical experiences, women reported a stronger response than men."

This has meaningful implications for the rest of us. Mystical states, arguably one of the essential yearnings of humans throughout history, and now proven to have a strong correlation with well-being, healing, and existential equanimity, are attainable through one of the most accessible, inexpensive, low-tech methodologies available. No tracking the deserts of Sonora to find a toad to lick, no traipsing through the Himalayas looking for a sadhu to follow, just the simple act that brought us all here in the first place. Practiced purposefully, with an intent not to procreate but to integrate.

I am not so violently bent upon my own opinion as to reject any offer, proposed by wise men, which shall be found equally innocent, cheap, easy, and effectual. —Jonathan Swift, A Modest Proposal

The Sexual Yoga of Becoming: An Experiment While specific details vary tremendously, based on which levers you choose to throw and which tools you're comfortable deploying, the recipe for a Sexual Yoga of Becoming practice boils down to this: Supersaturate your body and brain with endorphins, dopamine, nitric oxide, oxytocin, and serotonin. Optimize your endocannabinoid system and boost vagal nerve tone. Entrain your brain out of beta-wave executive functioning and into alpha and theta activity, with intentional spikes into gamma or deep dives into delta waves. Reset your brain stem with cranial-nerve stimulation and/or selective exposure to molecules like nitrous oxide or ketamine. Pulse energy, in the form of direct or alternating current, magnetism, light, sound waves, pain, or orgasm through your nervous system. Engage and align spine, pelvis, limbs, and soft tissues for a full range of motion and proprioceptive integration and embodiment. Breathe in deliberate patterns to upregulate or downregulate your nervous system by altering the ratios of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and nitrogen. Play powerful music that syncopates and discombobulates your conscious thinking, and ideally inspires with lyrics that can serve as poetry/living scripture. Take that ride. Don't flinch (or give in to astonishment). Remember what you forgot. Come home. Do your homework. This set of basic protocols isn't set in stone. It doesn't come with taboos,

superstitions, and prohibitions. It's the predictable assemblage of a lot of well-established neurophysiology. It amounts to experiential, experimental revelation.

Under the right conditions, Hedonic Engineering can outperform many more intensive or expensive interventions—including talk therapy and clinical psychedelic therapy. That in itself is a meaningful finding, and hopefully one that can help larger numbers of people mend trauma, reclaim purpose, and connect to those closest to them. More research needs to be done, but there is now at least a rubric to help focus and coordinate those efforts.

In her recent book, *How Emotions Are Made*, Lisa Feldman Barrett, a professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, gives us a clue to what might be happening in these situations. Beneath the surface of our emotions, Barrett argues, we have a second layer, known as interoception. It's literally what we sense in our guts. Rather than having dozens of different emotions, at the interoceptive level things are simple. There are two core axes our experience maps to: positive to negative and active to passive. All of our interoception ends up in one of four boxes. You can feel actively positive—like joy and excitement. You can feel actively negative—like anger or flight. You can feel passively positive—like calm or contentment. And you can feel passively negative—like melancholy or depression. On top of these visceral states, we assign words and thoughts, plots and characters, conjuring more elaborate explanations of what's going on for us and who's to praise or blame for the way we feel. But at our root level, it's always one of those four states.

The tools that we have considered—respiration, embodiment, sexuality, music, and substances—intentionally used, just help us do the human thing a little better. They give us more reliable and effective access to ecstasis, catharsis, and *communitas*. That said, leaving everyone to their own devices, with no instruction manual,

So that's it—the Ethical Culture Tool Kit for creating coherent communities. Metaphysics, Ethics, Sacraments, Scriptures, and Deities. “We are as gods,” Stewart Brand wrote on the first page of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, “and might as well get good at it.”

### The Ten Commandments Suggestions

Do the Obvious. There are entire industries devoted to personal growth, biohacking, and self-help. Most of them distract from the broader human project. Rather than getting overwhelmed by all of the options for optimization, just Do the Obvious: Sleep deeply; move frequently; eat real food; get outside; bathe often, play music, breathe deeply, grieve fully, make love; give thanks. You can put all that extra time and money left over toward living a vitalized and engaged life.

Don't Do Stupid Shit.

Let the Mystery Stay the Mystery. The more you plumb the depths of the *Mysto*, the more you realize that it isn't something to be mastered or mapped.

80/20 Awoken to Broken.

F\*ck Your Journey.

Then I read Princeton professor Elaine Pagels's National Book Award-winning title *The Gnostic Gospels*.

Because what Pagels showed was that there really wasn't a singular and definitive historical Jesus. Our understandings of him and what he represented were irreducibly mediated through human interest and historical context.

The idea that a flesh-and-blood mortal could feel a burning truth inside them, and seek to share it with the world, despite the betrayal and ridicule of those they were trying to help, while having to face personal doubt, despair, and uncertainty alone? That sounded more like the human experience we all have to live through than any of the more transcendent tales I'd found elsewhere.

Connecting ecstatic redemption to cathartic suffering appears to be an essential part of cultural immune systems everywhere—a map to find our way home.

As we hurtle toward the final reckoning of the Omega Point, Teilhard envisioned exactly how it would all go down—a race of three intersecting curves: the viability of the planet, those drawn to inclusion, and those dedicated to separation.

Buried deep in the esoteric traditions is a little-known interpretation of that intersecting crossroads. It's held by Rosicrucians (literally, those of "the Rosy Cross"), Gnostics, and even other Abrahamic religions like Islam that hold the "cruci-fiction" not as a literal description of a death sentence but as an allegory for the excruciating act of becoming an Omegan.

It's only when we die to our stories, our hopes, our fears, our pleasure, our pain, that we can glimpse what lies beyond all of them. Over the course of our lives, we catalog our stories, rehash our grievances, nurse our wounds, and justify our separation. But that's just pride talking. Not the obvious posturing of "too cool for school" pride—but another more insidious sort. The pride of our suffering, our uniquely and Especially Important Difference. "Proud people," Emily Brontë observed, "breed sad sorrows for themselves." We've spent so long meticulously collecting the stories of our grief, and using them as a shield against showing up fully, that when it comes time to toss them on the fire, we often hesitate.

Rather than doubling down again and again trying to explain the Sublime from here, why not give everyone a ticket to ride? Let them go and see for themselves? It's an experimental and experiential approach—essential if we're trying to create an open-source methodology that works for different people around the world. If we're sincere about trying to architect a flexible and inclusive replacement for doctrinal religion, this reversal is a key step. Rather than telling

people what to believe, based on a distant and non-repeatable founder's revelation, we can share the methods that prompt belief. And let everyone make up their own minds and hearts. That's what the Alchemist Cookbook can offer—a chance to turn thousands of years of religiosity on its head and replace it with self-authenticating techniques of ecstasy.

In our survey of the Big Five techniques—respiration, embodiment, sexuality, substances, and music—there's a deceptively simple recipe that comes up time and again. Maximize endocannabinoids, endorphins, dopamine, nitric oxide, oxytocin, and serotonin. Increase vagal nerve tone and heart rate variability. Shift your brain into baseline alpha and theta activity, with dips into gamma or delta waves. Trigger a global reset of your brain stem with compounds such as nitrous oxide or ketamine or cranial-nerve stimulation (all these correlate with delta wave EEG induction). Load your nervous system with pulses of energy in the form of electrical current, magnetism, light, sound waves, pain, or orgasm. Align your spine, and engage your pelvis, limbs, and fascia for flexible movement and integration. Alter the ratios of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and nitrogen in your bloodstream through deliberate organic or gas-assisted breathwork. Play high-fidelity polyrhythmic music that entrains you out of your default mode network and serves as a carrier wave of your subjective experience. Experience anamnesis—remember what it is that you forgot. Stay awake. Build stuff. Help out.

It offers a global systemic reboot of our nervous system, and with it, our psychology and notion of ourselves. And while death/rebirth rituals are as old as humanity, from the shamanic initiations of indigenous peoples to the Eleusinian Mysteries of ancient Greece, up until now they've been largely metaphysical and metaphorical. Thanks to advances in neuroscience and psychology, we have a much deeper understanding of how to prompt an experience that has been shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding. What used to be metaphysical or metaphorical is now simply physiological.

That changes everything. If we hope to democratize Nirvana, we can't rely on hand-me-down descriptions; we have to be able to go and see for ourselves. Reading inspirational quotes or gazing longingly at images from the Hubble telescope isn't going to cut it. We need the launch codes for actual liftoff.

Crucially, that experience of gnostic death/rebirth initiation is content neutral. What you glimpse or understand in that rarefied state is yours and yours alone. The psychological narrative that you choose to run could be agnostic as you mull the infinite wonders of consciousness. It could be theistic, as you commune with the gods and angels of your pantheon. It could be aesthetic as you marvel at the fractal symmetries of your mind's eye. There's room for all of it on Team Omega. Believe what you want to believe. Just never lose the Faith. (And don't die wondering.)



That's why we need to raise the level of our training. And the only training that's up to the occasion is death practice. If we don't practice transcending our survival programming, at the crux, we'll flinch. Almost every time. The storied exceptions only prove the rule.