

A Call for Great Souls

Cool breeze, chill down my spine
Morning walk, precariously marching
Along the intersection between order and chaos
Pitch black trail, I thrive in the unknown
I reach the point of no return
Atop the cliff, I yearn for the horizon, an endless expanse
I want to see more
My body, mind, and spirit are eager to explore

Into the Unknown

I remember being a young boy, exploring in the Wissahickon Forest. I would carve my own paths, explore caves, build teepees with sticks, sharpen spears, attempt to hunt deer, climb trees, swing from vines, go fishing, and even build bridges with stones. There is a divine quality to nature that calls me onward. I make sure to spend every morning along the Schuylkill River Trail. While I walk the trail, it reminds me of my childhood in the woods, as I know that this river flows into the forest just five miles upstream, into the unknown.

Me and My Treehouse

Pulling vines, ivy, and dead sticks, looming from a tall tree, I fuel my inner child-like curiosity. Working in Fairmount Park feels like a dream, like I'm a big kid, playing again. I take great pride and joy in my work, especially when I clear land that hasn't been touched since 1998, around the time I was born in 1996. During my breaks, I find myself crossing a stream, a tiny creek, with a few logs used as a makeshift bridge. When I enter the trail, the sun kisses my skin as it peers between the tree canopy. When I arrive at the treehouse that I so graciously found through my inner curiosities and exploring, I read, stretch, and enjoy the great outdoors. I have found my symposium, my location of recluse, where I thrive in solitude.

Why I Thrive in Solitude

I've always been one who could play alone. My imagination as a child was always something that kept me open and comfortable with myself. Whether I was playing outside or even in my own room, organizing warrior figures from Piazza Navona in Rome in intricate battle scenes, creating dialogue and stories for each character.

When you're comfortable in your own skin, and love yourself or know thyself, you feel most comfortable on your own. Actually, I think it's only possible to know yourself truly by stepping aside and spending time by yourself. As a street photographer, I love people, society, and being surrounded by the chaos—the hustle and bustle of a market or street corner. However, after doing this, I'm at a point where I need a break from it all, at least for the first eight hours of my day. I cannot be surrounded by this chaos all day long, and part of me just wants to stand under a tree and listen to the song of the beautiful bird, the humming insects, and the rustling of leaves. There's silence in nature and solitude, where I believe we find a divine connection to something greater that orients me towards a new height.

I Feel Like Diogenes

As I pee under a tree after drinking 2 liters of water, I feel like an ancient cynic, without a care in the world for society's norms. Diogenes of Sinope is quite an interesting character, who lived under a clay pot, as a homeless philosopher. I appreciate the way in which he challenged the society around him at the time—the fancy aristocrats, such as Plato, or even warriors, like Alexander the Great. Legend has it, Diogenes spent time walking through Athens with a lantern lit in midday, saying that he was looking for honest and virtuous men. I relate to his self-sufficiency, as one time he noticed a young boy drinking water with his hands, and decided to get rid of his bowl, and simply use his hands as a cup to drink. After my Peace Corps service in Zambia, Africa, it certainly taught me to be self-sufficient—drawing water from wells, slaughtering animals, preparing them for meals, and even simply eating with my hands, without utensils. To this day, I use a wooden bowl with my meat and just eat it with my hands. If I have ground beef, I use a wooden spoon and just eat it like a bowl of cereal.

The Meat Calm

After I break my fast and eat, I feel so calm and enter a deep sleep. Eating one meal a day is quite interesting, as one time I tried to break the fast a little bit too early, and it did not feel right. The act of adjusting throughout the day seems like a very inefficient way to go about life for me. It becomes so distracting and inhibits my ability to think clearly, or even move throughout the streets. But if I eat towards the end of the day, around six or 6:30 PM, I feel so relaxed, knowing that the day has come to an end, the sun is now setting, and I soon rest my head in bed around 8 PM. There's this feeling you get after eating meat that soothes your soul and calms your body down. I think it only occurs when you feast until satiation after breaking a fast, and just chill at home, knowing that you have no other things to do in the day. The more I eat meat, the more I see it as medicine, not even just as food. Meat means more to me, like it is manna, that nourishes my soul and fortifies the flesh on my body. After all, we are flesh, and through consuming flesh, we fortify the flesh on our bodies.

Masculinity is Hormonal

I think something that we neglect is the difference between male and female, hormonally, at the metabolic level. Men have higher testosterone levels, naturally, and it's something that we should be more mindful of. Truth be told, increased testosterone levels are what make a true man. I believe low testosterone is what causes pettiness, aggression, and lowly behavior from men. I know for a fact that with increased vitality, testosterone, and strength, I feel much more calm, relaxed, and less aggressive. My temperament is very low, with increased testosterone. This means men, in our natural state, are actually quite peaceful, not chaotic or overly emotional. It's very simple to be a man, as all we truly need is an open space, meat, sunlight, and water. These are the ingredients that keep men aligned with their nature.

I started reading about Sparta by Plutarch. There was an interesting quote about the women from Sparta and the way they interacted with their children, who were raised to be warriors. The Spartan women had much more freedom and independence than other women in ancient Greece, in places such as Athens. The women received physical training and education, married and had children, were

outspoken in public affairs, were in charge of estates, and had a very interesting relationship with their sons, that I find to be extremely empowering. Before the boys would go to battle, their mother would tell them,

“Come back with your shield, or on it.”

This phrase highlights the stoic attitude of the women and their relationship with their sons, making them true men, who will either die in war or come back victorious. The more I read about Sparta, the more I appreciate the dynamic between the men and women. There’s another famous quote that I found in the book:

“You Laconian women are the only ones who can rule men,” she replied: “That is because we are the only ones who give birth to men.”

In modernity, we must get over these notions of “toxic masculinity” and embrace our true essence as men moving forward. If we were the ancient Spartan warriors, how would we conduct our everyday life? Perhaps this is the path to becoming a true man, and similarly for women.

Treat Your Neighbor Like Thyself

One of the wisest teachings from our best friend Jesus is to treat your neighbor like yourself. Simple, moral teachings or virtues like this one have the potential to change the world. However, this teaching reminds me that you must change yourself before changing the world.

“Change yourself, change the world.”

During my time in Jericho, you hear the sounds, the beautiful song, from the speaker of the mosque every morning at dawn. When you look out the window, people gather in droves, walking slowly towards this beautiful temple to pray. The village comes together, submitting to God, following the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. This is very similar to the village in Zambia. Every Saturday, men, women, and children gather at the center of the church, reminding themselves of the story of Jesus and the teachings that he gave throughout his life.

I believe that when you follow the teachings from the past, whether ancient philosophers, prophets like Moses, Muhammad, Jesus, or even Buddha, there is truth within their words. If the Bible, the Quran, or any ancient text for that matter has stood the test of time, there is bound to be some wisdom or knowledge and truth within these texts. It would be foolish not to recognize the power within these words, and dismiss them in this modern world.

When everybody in a village comes together, following the teachings of their church, striving to become something greater than themselves, they create a harmonious community and treat their neighbors with the utmost respect. I'll never forget when I came out of a mosque and was immediately invited into the home of the Jalin family. They noticed my curiosity and offered me tea, coffee, and lunch. The respect that the brothers show for each other, through hugs and kisses on the cheek, and the sharing of a meal upon one plate, reminds me of why religion is so important in forming community and family throughout the world.

Why Religion is Important

When you strive to become the greatest version of yourself, how will you treat your neighbor?

Those that strive for greatness will treat their neighbors with greatness and respect. This mutual respect is only present when everyone follows the tradition. I think that this is generally lacking within modernity, as we now live in a man versus man world. Everyone strives to get their own without paying attention to their neighbors or their brothers and sisters. Everybody fends for themselves now, just trying to get by in the pursuit of money, power, or material success. However, the things that we strive for in modern cities are quite meaningless at the end of the day. What matters most is family, community, and other simple things that we take for granted, like our health. You could have all the money in the world, but with poor health and no family, was it all really worth it?

Health is Wealth

Let's say you have a Lamborghini, but you're extremely unhealthy and can hardly walk on your two feet. You've eaten at all the best restaurants in the world, but now you sit alone in a ridiculous vehicle, like a big baby in a stroller. To me, this would be the ultimate tragedy, and I believe it is also the reality in which many live their lives. We sacrifice our health for material wealth. Think of the way we live in office buildings, sitting down, operating computers, going against our natural biological design of standing and moving. I believe this will lead to the decline of our health, as we are not meant to live inside a cage like a zoo animal, in an enclosed system, under fluorescent lights and air conditioning. These closed, bureaucratic systems have replaced God in our lives, and may be the ultimate tragedy of modern life. Ultimately, none of the money in the world can replace the health in your legs, the ability to move, and simply walk. We take this very simple thing for granted—our health, our ability to stand upright, to have the sun kiss our skin, to have clean water running from a tap, or grass-fed beef in our fridge. If you have good health and are full of vitality, consider yourself the wealthiest person in the entire world. We take so much for granted, but I take health as the number one sign of wealth.

The Real Currency is Time

The things that you do throughout the day, or pay your attention toward, how you **spend your time**, is the true currency in this modern world. Just think of the phrases we use:

"Spending time."

Or even this:

"Paying attention."

There's no coincidence that we use the terms *spending time* and *paying attention* in relation to these actions. Time is money. Spending time doing something you hate to buy things that you don't need is not **WORTH** it.

Forever a Student

The optimal way to live life is that of a child, where a child has a blank slate, always open and eager to learn. I believe this is the path to greatness in life, the path of fortifying a great soul. For we should not become hardened by our past beliefs, any dogma or traditions, or even convictions that we may have once had. I want to forever be learning and growing, as evolution is the goal. The path of a student is to forever change my mind, and always have zero preconceived notions of what I will find. To be a great soul is to recognize our flaws, to know that we are wise because we know nothing.