

## Serendipity is king

Apparently the word *serendipity* derives from a tale about these three princes of Serendip, or Sri Lanka, where they were always making discoveries upon accidents—of things that they weren't even in search of. I feel like this is a very, very, **very** important idea to hone in on as a street photographer, the idea of serendipity. For honestly, I can tell you with 100% certainty, as much as I can go out there with the intention of making a photograph of something, it really is the serendipity that feels most rewarding.

For instance, when I go out, I don't have any plans or predestination in mind. When I go for a walk with my camera, I literally just follow the light, and walk towards the river.

### **Just follow the light.**

And so when I follow the light—not with my back to the light, by the way, but with my face directly facing the sunlight, walking towards the sun, whichever direction it is—I feel this sensation of bliss. When the sunlight appears through my eyes, I feel like it charges my soul.

Actually, just yesterday when I was going to throw the trash out of my hallway, my neighbor saw me because my shirt was off and was like, “How did you get so tan?” And I just told him, when I go for my walks and the sun is out, I just walk without my shirt on and read my book by the Riverwalk at Penn's Landing. I also just like to lay out in the hammocks and just bask in the glory of the sun.

He was telling me that maybe he's not supposed to be out in the sun because it's dangerous for people his age? I wonder how true this is. I hear this very often—even from people that are young. There are a lot of young people that still believe that being out in the sun is bad for you?

But anyways, there really is something truly blissful about the sensation of the sunlight kissing your skin. And I think it has to do with the synthesis of the hormones in your cells, and the specific function for a man in the production of

testosterone. I actually think that this might just be like one of the most fastest, easiest, quickest ways to increase your testosterone: just bask in the sun.

And then, so as I'm walking and following the light and the sun, and I feel this overwhelming sensation of bliss, joy, strength, and power, I simply follow that feeling. I follow my bliss, my joy, and wherever that leads me. And then sometimes you'll be surprised at what you find on the other side. It's really not about the outcome or the discovery, but the serendipity of the moment and the joy of stumbling across things.

And so, a lot of the times, walking to Penn's Landing can actually feel like it's out of the way, because it's at the edge and outskirts of the city, and most people won't actually go there to practice street photography because of this. It's very easy to stay in the center of the city, and photograph where you know people will be, where the hotspots are, etc. But it requires a natural gravitational pull, a desire to photograph certain locations, and because I know that the sun will always be there in the morning, I simply gravitate there. And then, simply by following the sun, I genuinely believe that I always find my best photographs. By following the sun, and following that feeling of bliss and joy, and just literally orienting myself with wherever the sun is, serendipity blesses me with new discoveries.

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### **It's not just chaos**

I think if we assume that everything is just random and chaos and there's no order in the world, that anxiety is born. If you think that nothing is in your control, that everything is random and life is just happening to you, then it is inevitable that you will fall into some sort of depression, social anxiety, or some weird mental problem.

However, when you recognize that you are a creator, that the world is happening within you, within your consciousness, and that you are responsible for how you respond to that internal dialogue that you're having with the world, you project whatever you feel about life in front of you. You can genuinely, I believe, put order to the world simply by the way in which you shift your perception of reality.

**You are the creator who can put order to the chaos.**

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### **What is the problem with modernity?**

So I think the number one problem with modernity is the atomization of man. There is no tribe, community, or greater cause to fight for, strive for, etc. There's only: my identity, my money, my property, me me me.

Now, in the past—considering ancient societies like Athens, Rome, Sparta, or even let's just consider Philadelphia during the birth of America—when America was born, the founding fathers and great men like George Washington or Thomas Jefferson were all very young, yet had so much drive to accomplish great things. For instance, I believe Jefferson was in his 20s when he penned the Declaration of Independence. And what is amazing about Jefferson is that he wasn't only a writer or statesman, but he was also a horticulturalist, a philosopher, an astronomer, a musician, and multifaceted—a true renaissance man.

I think in the past, the men actually strived for excellence. Whereas now, the men in society are simply striving to generate money. Instead of creating or renovating or making anything, we just become these cash cows or drones who are just here to make dollars and buy stupid shit.

Like when I walk around the city, I just can't help but imagine what it would be like to live in the times of the birth of America or the times when the streets were filled and bustling with people creating and building things. And now, when you walk around the city, it seems like there's this trend towards just opening up arcades with bars in them?

Like there's this new arcade bar for people to ride around in these race car simulators and drink alcohol? Or the big putt-putt or mini golf with a bar, the bowling alley with a bar, the retro video games with a bar, skee-ball with a bar? Like everything is just little kid games with a bar?

And so we're just like a bunch of big kids—but not in a good way—in a very immature and childish way, just waddling around consuming junk and playing video games.

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### **The antidote to modernity**

So the antidote to the modern world is to just think about the ancient world more.

How would an ancient soldier in Rome be living his everyday life?

Or even more interesting idea: what if you were an ancient slave, a gladiator, forced to compete in the games?

So if you were an ancient gladiator, enslaved to the games, in the Colosseum, and you were forced to fight against lions and tigers, how would you live your life?

You'd probably just be 100% battle-ready, physically, becoming the strongest person that you can possibly be, training your mind, body, and spirit to overcome any difficulty. You would pretty much have zero fear of death, and just live each day under the assumption that it's your last.

Because once those Colosseum doors open and you're thrown into the ring, do you really think you're gonna defeat the lion?

This is a random extreme example that I'm just thinking of right now, but it's a weird metaphor I'm thinking about in terms of just treating each day like your last—or like each day is just a 24-hour lifetime.

If you assume that each day was just a 24-hour lifetime, and that's all you really had, how would you live your life?

In fear, or with courage?

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## **Daniel and the Lions' Den**

I remember when I was a little kid, learning about the story of Daniel and the lions' den in Catholic school. Daniel was very devout to praying to God during his time in Babylon. However, the king banned this and made it so that it was only legal to pray to the king, not to God.

Despite this, Daniel stayed faithful and was punished and thrown into the lions' den. Because of his faith, God closed the mouth of the lions, and Daniel was safe.

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## **The Matrix**

Or think of *The Matrix* movie. Remember when Morpheus told Neo to bend the spoon, and he was really confused about it? But then when he realized that all of reality is literally just a simulation in his brain, that he can manipulate whatever's in front of him—and then move the spoon?

Or when he controlled the speed of his environment, dodging the bullets that were shot at him?

Basically, with faith—with just having this undeniable faith in God—anything is possible.

Because when you have no fear of death itself, you are finally free.

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## **Paradise as a metaphor**

As a philosophical thought, it's actually kind of an idea to consider that there is no afterlife. The reason why is because when you assume that there is no afterlife—even under the assumption that you have no fear of death—it really does set things

into perspective. You start to affirm the life that you live on the earth more.

I can't help but think of Saint Jerome in the painting by Caravaggio, where he is hunched over, writing, in a dark space, decrepit in his room, with his weak and feeble body—a beautiful painting—as he's writing next to that skull.

It's a reminder of our inevitable fate—our death.

However, perhaps, instead of yearning for the afterlife and denying our life here on this earth, we can affirm our life here on this material plane, through physical excellence, through life affirmation.

And so if you consider paradise as a metaphor, as a very simple thought: *the kingdom is within you*.

That's why Jesus said the kingdom is in your heart. It's because the way in which you feel and perceive the world around you shapes either paradise or hell within your mind.

When you wake up in the morning full of vitality, just eager to get out and move your body and go out and see the sunrise, you are in paradise.

If you wake up in the morning dreading the sound of your alarm clock, forcing yourself to get out of bed, brush your teeth, go to the office because you feel like you "have to"—well then you're in your own hell.

Hell is basically just a metaphor for a lack of vitality, and that lack of vitality makes you succumb to slavery.

You become a slave to the world, rather than a creator in the world. A slave to the world simply does things because they think they *have to*. A creator in the world only does things because they *want to*.

And so if we assume that there is no afterlife, how will you live your everyday life right here, right now?

If we were in paradise right now, and this truly was heaven on earth, why not just bring it down from the heavens to this horizontal plane right now?

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## Life is a video game

The best game mode in *Call of Duty* was always **Search and Destroy**. Why? Because in Search and Destroy, you only have one life. If you die, you can't respawn right away.

Or maybe you're an old-school gamer, and you remember *Counter-Strike*—this game was always the best, because you have basically one shot, one kill to the head with the AK-47, and you can't respawn—you're dead, you're out. You have to either diffuse the bomb, plant the bomb, win the round, or lose the round.

If you were playing life in **ultra hard-core mode**—one life, one kill, no respawns—how would you live your life?

This is interesting because, actually now that I think about it, if people live under the assumption that there are no respawns, that all is chaos, with zero faith in God or in an afterlife—maybe this is actually a really, really bad thing?

Maybe with this assumption, we will inevitably just be playing skee-ball and drinking beers all day? Or just seek to destroy and embrace hedonism and nihilism.

However, if we assume that we are the creators—kind of like we're playing *Minecraft* in **Creative Mode**, where you're basically in God mode, can never die, and can fly and do whatever you want—you can drop unlimited blocks and create a perfect paradise...

In Creative Mode, you're not bound by fear of death, but empowered by the freedom to build, to design, to imagine something greater.

In Creative Mode, you're not fighting to survive—you're **creating a world worth living in**.

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## Let's build a kingdom

So what if the goal and the meaning of life is actually to just **bring the kingdom down here on earth?**

But the kingdom is internal, and it requires you to go on your little hero's journey, like you're Link from *The Legend of Zelda*. You have the **Triforce of Courage**, you go and defeat Ganondorf and get that force of **Power**, and now there's only that one missing piece...

The last piece is always hidden in the kingdom, in the castle, where the princess Zelda is. Once you get the princess, and the **Triforce of Wisdom**, you have the complete trifecta—**Courage, Power, and Wisdom**.

But without wisdom, the courage and power mean nothing.

So perhaps, if you look at this metaphorically, and life really is this video game, and you're basically just Link—starting from square one with your little dagger sword—going on the adventure...

Let's realize the importance of that one missing piece of the Triforce as **wisdom**.

But it's also really important to recognize that maybe one will never possess wisdom if they do not first possess courage or power.

Because without courage, you're never gonna defeat the beast.

Just think of **David and Goliath**, and him armoring himself with the courage of God, to defeat Goliath with a slingshot. And then, with his courage and power in hand, David went and became king, and brought a kingdom down to earth.

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## Your heart is a kingdom

So let us assume that the **kingdom is your heart**.

I actually just read one of the mystics, **St. Teresa of Ávila**, which I very much enjoyed—*The Interior Castle*. She described seven layers of your heart as these different mansions, and the innermost mansion is a **divine union with God**.

Maybe it's time to go get your gear. Go slay the beasts. And build the kingdom.

But in order to build the kingdom, you gotta crack through the walls, to the center—to wisdom.

You can't beat the game with just courage and power. Those two traits mean nothing without wisdom.

Then you become the true player in the game, like Neo in *The Matrix*, or the ultimate God Mode creator in *Minecraft*—

And become the **King of the Kingdom**.