

# Priorities

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What is day-dreaming other than being somewhat of an embarrassment? Tie a string around your finger. That's what some people do in order to remember something.

Can you be aware of what you're thinking at any particular moment? Can you consciously choose the one thing that you most wish to think about, now?

What I'm asking might serve as a way to get 'a foot in the door' – into an area which has been up to now mostly embarrassing. When you tie your shoelaces, then tie them! When eat, eat! You hear what I'm saying? Most of the time you are not conscious of what you're doing – it's just 'happening'.

This is not an easy thing to look at. That is why I suggested that in order to remember you tie a string around your finger – as primitive as that might seem. This could no doubt be expanded into other areas where you could be paying attention. That would take a conscious effort, but you just might get a foot in the door.

'Conscious effort' implies having a choice. We are conscious beings, potentially. Dogs also have consciousness but don't have choice within it. They instinctively bark at strangers, lick the people who feed them, and find a warm corner on a cold night.

You see this child? Such an amazing phenomenon! Well, this cute little bundle of purity is going to be talking before you know it. And people will be left with their mouths hanging open. Anyone who attempts to answer her is going to be shocked when they hear their own words coming out – wondering where the hell they came from. But she'll survive all that, somehow, and grow up to be a 'nice little girl'. She'll also move towards the heat when it's cold. Now she has little choice so let's not get too romantic. You'll forgive me if I don't make her more important than any one of you just because she's a 'little bitty baby'.

In order to learn you have to be a REAL SCIENTIST – and leave your personal ambitions, and guilt, aside. The world as it is today is forcing people to consider ultimate issues, whether they are related to a discipline such as the Work or not. We have been pushed into a corner and everyone will have to do their very best with whatever knowledge they have managed to absorb.

I generally attempt to take advantage of events that are out of the ordinary, trying to catch the energy and use it. For example: the shock of Tzvika's death allowed a deeper look at a whole lot of things, for everyone who knew him.

Today is Tamara's thirtieth birthday! There is really something special in turning thirty. Actually, every tenth year has a certain shock to it. How many ten year periods do we have? Eight? Eight ten year periods can go by real quick. Rather than just saying 'oh my God', and start looking for the wrinkles and gray hairs, that shock should stimulate some deep thinking. Worrying about it would be nothing more than falling for a social red-herring.

Do you know what a 'red-herring' is? That's when a subject is being discussed and someone throws in something that takes the focus away from the real issue. Like this issue of how old you are. No matter how you mess around with the numbers, the fact is that you've only got a few ten year periods. The real question has to be – is it WORTH ANYTHING ?

When people pass thirty they tend to get nostalgic about their youth. In their twenties they could still imagine themselves a bouncing teenager, but in their thirties it's already not so easy to 'bounce'. Then, by the time they reach forty, they can't help but realize that they are closer to fifty than they are to twenty. There is a sense of loss. Before, it appeared that the 'whole world lay ahead' – they might grow to be popular, famous, any number of things.

All that kind of 'thinking' took place in a more or less day-dreaming state. But people 'exist' in their day-dreams. Those thoughts were basically red-herrings. First of all, who was really having such a great time in the past? And, were not all those 'future possibilities' pretty much uneducated speculations?

Is this whole business of life WORTH ANYTHING? Is there anything really essential to be done here?

I get a 'bone in my throat' when I talk like this. Who gets to think clearly, about anything, anymore?

Well, it's Tamara's 30th, and that has a certain weight to it. It's 'heavy' – not in a negative sense, but it is heavy. It's not just because of the birth-date, anymore than the present state of the world is because of September 11. Certain events however can bring to light things that are already known, but only vaguely up to then.

Tamara is in a different space today – her whole world is on the scales, so to speak. There is nothing really new, but a bell as if rang on December 9, 2001. Like in a boxing ring – the bell rings and you 'come out'. Now, will she get into the ring and start shadow-boxing? Boxers sometimes stand in front of a white screen in a dark room with a light at their back – their shadow falling on the screen. Then they start punching away at their shadow. That's called 'shadow-boxing'.

Oh, my God – in a strange way most encounters we have with people are just that. Anything that is not in the category of 'external considering' – is shadow boxing. In Eastern literature this world is often referred to as the 'world of shadows'. All that you generally see and react to in another person is their surface expression. You don't see their 'inner life' or motivations. You are really dealing with your own picture, not their reality. You'd better believe it! Generally you're doing a lot of shadow boxing – dealing with 'shadows' most of the time.

You catch the imagery?

Anat : The imagery, yes.

Alan : You keep your eye on me – you might get beyond the image.

You, Hagit, are looking well these days. You must be having a very difficult time. It usually works that way. Would you rather have a 'good time' and a false face, or 'difficult time' and a real face? Would you prefer to face the issues of where and who you are now, or do it when you are seventy? You see, I'm really not so shocked with Tamara's thirty years. I'm more interested in where she'll be in her seventies.

We're not cats and dogs. Potentially we're much more than that. And we don't have to live our lives in swirling emotions and inconclusive thoughts. We don't have to, although people pretty generally do. But in the times we are now living, the people who are doing

the 'pretty general' are so obviously in a hopeless state. Their false pride and vanity ain't taking them nowhere. Just a few years ago they might have gotten by with that.

So, what I want to suggest to you lovely people, is that you really come to terms with whatever you've got and what you intend doing with it. Because if you don't – 'it' will do, all by itself. That could only lead to increased confusion.

You've got two main choices. If you have ambition in the world – then go to it! The alternative is work on your 'inner life'. You can work on the WORLD, or you can work IN. They're not totally exclusive. In a way they are like two legs. You use both of them. You are living in those two worlds. But the big issue is – where do you put the emphasis. You must establish what your AIM is – what is it that you want, what do you believe is possible!

That's coffee . . . you can't have coffee, you're too young (Eliya). I knew you when you were an infant 'this big'. Can you look without touching? Can you look without the hands? Eyes! No! Oh, I said 'no' . . . we try to avoid that word around here don't we? Matches, matches. Oh, they're dirty little things, five more licks and you're poisoned. Thank you very much. That's a microphone, that's a lighter. You want to touch everything? (Laugh) No, no, that's the ashtray, same old dirty ashtray, that's out of the question. Take a look at all those nice people.

Is it too much to expect the young women to consider 'why they're alive' and 'what they want to do with their life'? Have they decided that they are here to have a 'good time'?

Think about it! Even if you come to the conclusion that you don't know shit – at least you stop getting so irritated with other people. If you don't know why and what you're doing – no one can get in your way. There's nothing to get in the way of. So at least you become modest. It's your choice.

I've seen you (Hagit) in different situations and know that your mind is subtle enough. When something happens that catches you, like the Tzvika drama, you're active, efficient,

focused and have the measure of things. You were so effective then that a man almost left his wife and two children he was so impressed with you.

People can spend their whole life drifting and still continue to struggle with those that appear to get in their way. How can you not get in the way of something that is drifting? Something that is drifting bumps into everything.

Shall we all sing happy birthday? Tamara might sink right through the floor. It's good exercise. Jesus, how many years have I known her, and she'll dissolve in the face of 'happy birthday'?

§ Happy birthday to you  
Happy birthday to you  
Happy birthday . . . dear Tamara  
Happy birthday to yoooooooo. §

'To 120'!

Wouldn't that be something? You'll probably live to regret that you haven't got money – you won't be able to buy yourself a new liver, a new heart, new lungs. You'll probably live to see the rich living to 120, as miserable as they might be. I don't know – people hide things so well.

We should mark this occasion with something. Something overly dramatic, something visually unusual, to remember this day. What can we do? Is there any paint in this house?

Stephen : I have some in the kitchen.

(Returns with paint)

Alan : Tamara, would you draw my outline on the wall?

Tamara : Take off the hat.

Alan : Take the hat off? No, it's a crown of thorns!

There's my poem, which ends:

' . . . if the mind doesn't struggle  
they think something's wrong  
won't open their hearts  
won't join in a song  
want to keep up  
with the madness they see  
won't step aside  
in the hope to be free  
if their virtue ain't visible  
to you and to me  
they wish they were dead  
oh lord, oh lordy! '

Anat – you wouldn't want to get in the way of an experiment, would you? Could you move aside?

What a nice color – now you can paint in the outline.

You know, most people end off being a semi-acceptable explanation to their parents. That's about the limits of their ambition. Interesting thought, hum? A lifetime of struggle to become a 'semi-acceptable something'. Shocking, huh? Does that penetrate, Hagit?

Have you finished the painting?

Tamara : Yes.

Alan : Let the drips drip – it's 'blue blood'!

You don't know yourself all that well – so how can you expect anybody else to? Who do you want them to take you as? How can they know who they're dealing with when you don't even know, exactly? It's just a fact! Do you know your thoughts, emotions, body, and how they come together in your actions? Do you know who and what you are? Can anyone else be expected to?

If only you were to stop losing so much energy by insisting that others take you this way or that; stop expecting so much from 'them'.

If you are not working to know the 'who and what of yourself' – then what else in god's name are you going to do? Play Russian roulette?

At the end of the road is a very big something:

'TO KNOW THYSELF IS TO KNOW THY LORD'

Oh!

You don't have to start with a superhuman ambition – it's very normal to want to know. Now everyone is rushing around demanding to be appreciated, for what they are. But what they really are is barely visible. Do you want to get back to your basic reality, or do you want to drift on in imagination?

Na'ama, I have a question for you. Respond only if you wish. Is what I'm talking about relevant to your own life? Are you hearing this as an obvious truth? You've been hearing everything I've said, right?

Na'ama : Yes.

Alan : How is it hitting? Where's it hitting?

Na'ama : It's a . . . the truth is obvious . . . but I found myself . . . that I had to open my eyes to it. It was there all the time, but I didn't see it . . . I didn't.

Alan : Not only as a fact, but also relevant to yourself?

Na'ama : Yes.



Alan : First of all, it's a formula for not leaking. That's really the issue – energy! If you are going to observe yourself, study yourself, you need energy! You 'manufacture' energy when you're asleep at night but it mostly gets dissipated in useless things. Expectations from others is a big part of it. If you really see the ridiculousness in that then you at least stop leaking there.

There is a shock when someone doesn't conform to your expectation. But you need not react to it. It can hurt, but you don't have to leak. There you have a 'gift of energy' – that you can use to remember, and observe your functions.

The Work is the 'Way of Understanding'. This house might assist you in that effort. Where you would habitually react or turn your back and move away, here you have the opportunity, and necessity, to face up to all kinds of things.

What is the issue? Knowing who and what 'I am', no? That's a real piece of work and requires conscious effort. It will not happen by itself – experience must be awared consciously!

'BRING CONSCIOUSNESS UP TO THE LEVEL OF INCOMING IMPRESSIONS'

Oh, another hint!

All of this would require intelligent effort. The reason why people are in such misery is so obvious – they don't really know themselves, or anyone else. And nobody is satisfying nobody – nobody thinks they're being treated 'rightly'. Just ask them!

You should eventually establish your 'identity' in the observer – the learner! It's the only real place to 'stand your ground'. In your own modest consciousness.

Maybe the few things that are being talked about here can somehow form part of your thinking when you are thinking for yourself. Check out where the hell you stand, don't play games. We all believe in truth and wouldn't be satisfied with anything less. Just between 'yourself and yourself' – where do you stand?

Erase the word 'Alan' and put in the word 'Work'. That's either something in your self-interest or not. Or is it optional? One could say that about almost anything. Your parents – is there something serious in your relationship to them? Because, if it's serious, then what is the point? The work you do in massage – is it serious or just another thing? 'I want to go to India' – serious or not? You've got to think, evaluate, the seriousness of things, relative to yourSelf! It's more than just a feeling, although feeling is an important aspect. The Work? Serious?

Looking for Tzvika – that wasn't optional. It was so serious it became a single minded activity. So, something that's serious – do it single mindedly. It's good to look at such things, without any pride, or guilt.

At some point in the relationship with my parents (I have to guess how old I was – between thirteen and sixteen), certain words came to me. I don't think I told them directly – I wasn't in the habit of 'opening a mouth' on anybody. But what I thought so clearly was, with them, everything was 'serious' – but nothing was important! It just became clear. That touched me. All those 'concerns' of theirs.

If you haven't got a sense of what is important, how the hell can you be serious about anything? You can be stubborn – but you can't be serious!

Now it's time for 'you dudes' (as Mike Silverman would say) to look at this issue 'square in the eye'. Because until you do, regardless of what you know or don't know, you can't be taken seriously, really.

Is there anything important to you?

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'Important' is like, if you'll excuse the expression, 'evaluation'. What's important should talk to your mind, your heart, and your soul. If you can establish that, then you have a real 'Do'. From there you can sound a 'Re' – make the appropriate effort. Your 'Re', your effort, cannot be more real than your 'Do'.

You follow this, anybody? (Laugh)

This should bring about a tremendous amount of humility. You're still not exactly sure what's important, and that must become clear, for you to progress. And until it is, stop prancing around so proud!

What's that bird with all the fancy feathers?

Stephen : Peacock.

Yes, 'Peacock' – stop 'peacocking-around'!

What would constitute a real scientist? Generally scientists are experimenting with things outside themselves. Real Science would be experimenting on oneself. 'Experimenting' may sound cheap – it's not.

Real Science is the science of Self Knowledge. You have precious little of that, though considerably more than the average person – enough to allow a conversation like this to be something that you can follow from your own experience.

What has been pointed out? Two things, it seems to me. One is, that you don't have a firm sense of something being really important. Maybe at certain moments you do. That's worth checking. The other thing is, that you don't know just who and what you really are!

Oh, ho! Not knowing what is important is a bit insulting to your intelligence. But not knowing 'who and what you are' – that wipes out your very existential sense of yourself. You just got erased from the 'world of shadows'.

Now, can you relax in that? Can you relax in the 'not knowing' for two seconds – be modest enough, honest enough?

That's the road back to 'be ye as little children'. Little children are admitting 'I don't know' all the time. Where are your shoes? 'I don't know!' Where's your father? 'I don't know!' They have no problem with the truth.

What do you know for sure?

'I don't know nothing . . . but god forbid . . . I would never admit . . . to that!

You see the kind of mechanical tricks the mind plays on itself in its dreamy state? All those contradictions. A person knows that they don't know, and two seconds later they're arguing some point, huh?

The Work talks about a person reaching the place of ORGANIC SHAME.

Why don't we find out what is important, and go to it? Do you think for instance, that if there was something really important – it would be a different thing for you, than for me?

That's like a Zen Koan – worth pondering!

This could be a night to remember. It would be a shame if one night after another night after another night were all lost – just water under the bridge.

I would like. 'I would like?' I haven't said that in a long time. I would like, never-theless, that each of you write down what I have here on this card, and keep it for yourself. And for the next week, I would like you to think about it. How was it put?

'If something was really important – do you think it would be a different thing for you, than for me?'

If you would do that, we could come together next week and make that the focus. I want to know where I stand. Don't you want that for yourself as well?

(I want to know where I stand . . . relative to what I think is important . . . as close as I can get . . . because if I can't do that . . . I really can't take myself seriously. I want to get closer to that! Fuck the problems . . . maybe all my problems are due to the fact that I didn't know what's really important to me . . . and if I don't know . . . then everything I bump into in the world has little relevance!)

You might find out that all your problems were, in fact, because you weren't doing shit with the energy that you have – because you were not clear about what was important to you. You were drifting. All your problems were because you were drifting!

A human being can actually ask such questions. Even if your answer is 'I don't know' – you've already got a certain kind of stability in that place. It's called humility! Stability in humility.

HUMILITY CANNOT BE ASSUMED -  
IT CAN ONLY RESULT FROM SEEING THE TRUTH!

'If something was really important – do you think it would be a different thing for you, than for me?'

If you were in a monastery or ashram in India, they wouldn't be ashamed to call that the meditation exercise for the week. A 'meditation'! We don't use that word around here so much. We got a little more precise – Pondering – 'thinking and feeling about something at the same time.' But, alright, for now, a subject for meditation. The word 'meditation' kind of vibrates nicely in the chest but it tends to neglect the mental aspect.

Pondering, as defined, is a very powerful tool. It seems to me quite amazing that a person could hear such a notion, and ever forget it. The word 'pondering' – bringing two obvious things together – feeling and thinking. That doesn't shock a person's soul?

We thought of calling this tape 'Tamara's shloshim'. She's going to remember this day if it's the last thing in this world I do. (laugh)

Gurdjieff said: 'People generally take everything upside down, inside out.'

Just look at the issue of death. Death is when we leave this world and return to the spirit realm. Birth into the body was 'death' out of the spirit realm.

There is something essential to do in this life. It amounts to a preparation for continued existence, in the purity of the spirit realm, that follows the death of the body. That event

is best served with the death of all falseness, while still in this world.

'WORKING FOR LIFE AND WORKING FOR DEATH  
ARE THE SAME THING.'

Get behind all the bullshit, the pretense, the vanity, the 'insult'! Don't worry about the fears when they arise. Just pay attention to your priorities!

That's maybe the simplest statement made so far. It takes away any kind of 'heaviness' – because it's your priorities.

Maybe this tape should be labeled PRIORITIES. Do you think Tamara is likely to forget her 30th birthday? How will I decide what to call this? Is it important?

A good mantra:

important important important important

important important important important

important important important important

That should empty the mind of all its bullshit . . . . . just empty. It could also bring up something close to REMORSE OF CONSCIENCE – a most definite stage to go through.

Who is ready to live in the truth and stop prancing around like imitation peacocks?

I confess my pleasure at being here with all of you. Why? Because I feel something is deepening, there's more presence. Things that have value – are valued!