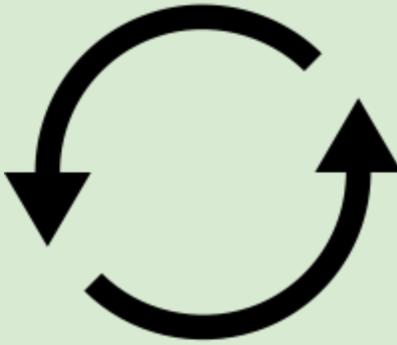


# Awakening and Responsibility, a Short Primer



by Soryu Forall



When I was four years old, I was standing in the kitchen near the wastebasket looking up past the edge of the kitchen counter at my mother while she made dinner. I told her very clearly, “**We must do something right now.**” I was referring to the human destruction of life on earth and the fact that we need to stop it. This moment of clarity as a four year-old became a guiding event in my life.

I think that this sort of experience happens to all of us. All of us have moments of compassion and clarity as children. What is unusual about my life isn't that it happened, the unusual point is that I'm telling that story right now. It's not that that happened, and therefore it changed my life; it's not that I live this life because that happened; it's not that that story is significant because it changed my life. It's that **I made that story significant by telling it, and telling it, and telling it again. By telling it, I made my identity. I made my life.** Why did I tell that story and make this life? There have been about one hundred million ten-second spans in my life; why did I choose that ten-second span to remember and to talk about? This is one of the deepest questions that we can ask of ourselves and of the stories that we tell about ourselves.

The purpose of life is to go beyond our own perspective. If we have a human perspective, if we identify as a human being, then our goal must to be to escape from a human perspective, to escape from being a human being. Therefore, the purpose of life is to die. The purpose of our

identity is to come to the end of that identity. And by coming to the end of that identity, we become more capable of seeing others in their identities. By coming to the end of our story, we become more able to see others' stories clearly. And in doing that, we're able to care for others; and in caring for others, we become even more truly ourselves; we tell a story that we can even more truly believe in. We can have an identity we can be even more proud of. And then we begin that loop again, escaping from our perspective, to care for others even better, and in so doing becoming ourselves more fully.

This loop is the essence of the structure of spirituality. We create positive feedback loops that end themselves; create a positive feedback loop between the way we perceive and the way we behave, so that we perceive certain things and therefore we behave in certain ways, perceive ourselves as being someone who cares for others and therefore we behave in that way and therefore that's what we perceive.

Loops grow exponentially, and exponential growth is a fundamental aspect of growth in nature. Exponential growth is growth creating even more growth. This loop continues as long as resources are available, but **there are limited resources. There are limited resources in the physical world, and there are limited resources in our minds, our subjective experience. Our stories control the resources of our minds, and our minds control the resources of the physical world.** Therefore, we must use the resources of our minds.

The number of times I could be four and say that to my mother is quite limited. But within my mind I can repeat that story dozens, or hundreds, or thousands of times. I can repeat it to other people so that they repeat that story in their own minds, so that they see me as that kind of person. Furthermore, they're given permission to tell a story about themselves as people who also deeply care for life on earth. And then that story, "**I care for life on earth,**" spreads, and because it can spread through minds, it can grow in its power. As this happens, our behavior is changed along with it. Because we share our experiences through story, those experiences become a shared view that we live by, and as we live by it, we change the world. Exponential growth requires resources and more resources; we can collectively allocate subjective resources through

sharing stories. As these mental patterns grow, they change how we live, how we allocate physical resources, and they alter the world that we create.

But in order for it to have great power, it has to be an automatic loop; it has to be a loop that happens in our subconscious, not merely our conscious, minds. Conscious attention is very limited, but when a story is played constantly in our subconscious, in our interpretation of things, it gains enormous power over our lives. When subjective stories are shared so fully that they enter the collective set of assumptions, our behavior changes, and the world changes accordingly.

Even if all of this is clear, we must ask further: Are these stories good stories? Which stories should we be telling? How can we know? To answer this question, we need a place outside of all stories, from which we can look at the stories and find out if they're the right stories. In order to do that, we have to go beyond what we believe and what we prefer. We have to go beyond what we want, what we assume, so that we can see what stories are most true and useful, from a place that's independent of them. We must go beyond opinions and prejudice. The experience of losing opinions and prejudice, shedding assumptions and preferences, is the end of stories. That's the end of identity. The stories are, in one way or another, fabrications, and fabrications contain lies. But that which is completely independent of stories, that which is completely independent of fabrications, is independent of lies. Therefore, it can be trusted.

Every loop ends at some point; every story ends at some point; every positive feedback loop producing exponential growth at some point collapses. **The greatest skill is the construction of stories that loop back on themselves and then end in peace, allowing us to be free even from them.** We in our society believe in certain things very deeply, so deeply that we may not believe they are beliefs. They've completely entered our subconscious set of assumptions. **Capitalism is a paradigm that we believe in and act according to; science is a paradigm that we believe in and act according to. But these are loops, these are stories, shared explanation, popular assumptions; they're constructions, they're fabrications, and they will end. The question is, will they end in suffering or in peace? Will they end with the elimination of life as we know it or will they end with the flourishing of life on earth? A good story ends by freeing us even from itself. A bad story imprisons us so that we will provide it with resources.**

**Writing a story that ends in peace is the greatest skill of a human being. This story is written with two aspects: the Awakening aspect and the Responsibility aspect.**

The Awakening aspect has two sides: on the one side, Love. We embrace others' perspectives. By learning to hold to others' perspectives, we become more capable of letting go of our own perspectives. And by letting go of all perspectives, we become more open to receiving others' perspectives. We come to the point when we enjoy understanding the views of others. We enjoy that. We enjoy seeing things from other people's perspectives so fully that we act accordingly, and those actions care for them. Care is Love.

The other aspect of Awakening is Wisdom, and Wisdom is the experience of holding to no perspective whatsoever. Nothing is perceived, and nothing is achieved. There's nothing accumulated, everything is gone. But this isn't what we imagine nothing to be. Anything we imagine it to be is something imagined, something we have fabricated. That's not insight. Insight is vibrant, and clear, and shining, and brilliant. Through experiencing Wisdom, Love arises naturally.

The Responsibility aspect has two sides: on the one side, Love. On the other, Power. Power means that we clarify our own perspective so that others will follow it. We hold to our own perspective. We compel others to see according to our perspectives, so fully that they do what I want them to do. This is Power. Power is the ability to get people to do what we want them to do. This isn't good or bad in itself. Power on its own, unconnected to Love, is simply selfishness. Power based on Love is of the greatest service. To link Love and Power together, the ability to hold to other people's perspectives, and the ability to hold to my own perspective: this is what we call Responsibility.

We link Responsibility to Awakening, so that we have a stable place, a clear place, from which to know. Ourselves, me, this person, this identity, this is a story. To commit that story to the highest good, to commit ourselves to fulfilling our purpose, to tell the story that is our truest life, that is realizing our vow. Our vow is our most authentic and kind life. And we must realize this before we die. We must realize the purpose of our lives before we die. We must put that at first priority, and be willing to lose everything for the sake of our vow. To realize it, we see from our

own perspective and from others' perspectives equally. Our purpose in life isn't just what we want to do; our purpose in life isn't just what others want us to do. Our purpose in life is the place where what we want and what others want meet, where there's no conflict between inside and outside. To live from that place is the threshold to fulfilling our vow. But even this isn't sufficient: to live our vow we also must gather the skills needed to achieve it.

Our vow is our life, but the loss of our life is how we find it. **We tell our story; that's our life; we lose our story; that's our death.** This death is safety, it's peace, it's joy. And it enables our vow. **As long as we are wrapped up in stories, in fictions, we'll protect those stories and fictions; but when we've let go of everything, when we've lost everything, there will be nothing left to protect, nothing that could push away from achieving our vow, there will be nothing that can compel us to ignore what we know is right. In order to experience each of these components, we require discipline. We use our conscious attention in order to cultivate a path called "Mindfulness."**

We all know how limited our resources are in terms of willpower. Therefore, we make use of the most foundational tool in the practical methods of going beyond ourselves and achieving our vow. That basic tool is community. We connect with a community, caring for others and allowing others to care for us. Sometimes caring for us means making us comfortable, giving us certain opportunities; but sometimes it means something deeper. This deeper kind of caring is also needed for us to fulfill our potential. This means that others see us, are inspired by us, and see in us what we can achieve; they then expect us to do it, and don't give us the opportunity to make excuses for why we can't. They ask us to go through and beyond discomfort to a place we cannot currently believe in. We can go beyond ourselves, we can go beyond our limitations, because there are others who are supporting us, even if that support is uncomfortable. And when it is both comfortable and uncomfortable, we have a relationship that we can truly depend on.

We have both sides: the comfortable side, when we become more and more intimate with others, and the uncomfortable side, when we use that intimacy to go beyond ourselves. To truly go beyond ourselves is to die. We fulfill our potential so that we die. And for others to support us in doing that is the greatest love. We often think that love means that people support us, but we

know that ultimately, we need to go beyond this. **There's a kind of love that asks us to go beyond our own identity, beyond what we want, beyond what we think is true.** If we can go beyond it, it's not me. If we can go beyond it, we won't be attached to it. If we can go beyond it, it's not ultimately true.

As we move through this path, we may experience challenges, and we may experience suffering. But that suffering, if we experience it skillfully, is what enables us to do what must be done. It's what enables us to achieve our vow. When we experience suffering for ourselves, we know "I can't wait until later to resolve this." **It doesn't make sense to think "I'll deal with this tomorrow." We know this has to be dealt with right now. We have a sense of urgency, and that urgency is what allows us to fulfill our vow.**

The more deeply we experience a sense of unavoidable suffering, suffering that we want to avoid but can't, the more deeply we are able to connect with others when they do. Further, the more deeply we experience that, the more deeply we can transcend it. It doesn't work if we aim for suffering, but when we receive it, we accept it, we learn from it, and **we know that this vow must be achieved right now.**

**We must do something right now.**



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## Glossary

**Awakening** is going beyond our own perspective, identity, and story, so that we can attain the wisdom of having no perspective at all. This can be accomplished with the help of mindfulness.

**Love** is being aware of and acting on others' perspectives.

**Mindfulness** is the practice of embodying wisdom, love, and power through meditation.

**Power** is compelling others to see from your perspective, so that they do what you want them to do.

**Responsibility** is the union of love and power through the act of service. With power, we hold to and use our own perspective; with love, we see others' perspectives.

**Stories** are fictions which we live by. Stories are often but not always shared with others. They are the lenses through which we perceive the world and thus they determine our actions.

A **vow** is our deepest commitment to be of service to all living beings and the world, to excel in a way that helps all living beings, or, more playfully, to "dance the dance that only we can dance." When we live our vow, we are acting from a place where do both we want to do and what the world needs us to do. In this space, there is no conflict between our personal motivation and the world's well-being. This is our most authentic, kind, and true life.

**Wisdom** is holding to no perspective at all.