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Exhortations By Tom Block

Art by Tom Block

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An excerpt From Letters to an Imaginary Friend

Anyone who knows you well will know you as a hypocrite.

Do the best you can, then do better. Much better. Even then, it will only be a shadow of what you might have done, if you had really tried your best.

Just because you can forget, doesn't mean that the universe will.

So then: why? Why do it? Why bother? You should be able to answer these questions for every single action. Can you?

To see things as they are. To just keep looking, looking, looking.

The Hippocratic Oath toward life. It's a start, at least – and as difficult as being truthful. But still: it's just a start.

“Why?” Just that: “why?” Isn't the ability to ask that question in such a way that the honest “I don't know” is the obvious reply? Isn't that enough out of life? Why ask for more?

Sometimes you can't control yourself – your negative reactions or even physical actions. Fair enough: you just can't control yourself. So avoid the impetus. Remove yourself. Don't send the email. Don't flash out on Twitter. Don't step into someone's face.

Sometimes removing yourself is the best thing – when you know you aren't up to the challenge.

Hypocrisy: the minute you open your mouth, you're already deep in it. Keep your mouth shut!

If "God" and "truth" are the same thing, then how to get at one to find the other? Patience, silence, correct action, honesty (with oneself).

David says that we should concentrate on the good – after all, it's just as real as all the other stuff. But then what are we to do? Pat ourselves on the back for a job well done? Better to concentrate on injustice, mean spirited-ness, hatred and ignorance (a world built out of lies). Maybe this, at least, can help spur us on to do better. Or is there some midpoint between concentrating on good or injustice which describes a better course of action?

The idea of being "conscious" – that's a laugh! Conscious of what? And "rational," also?! As if.

Everything we can see or feel or imagine: flux. What lies behind it all? Stasis. Not to yearn toward that or try to influence it – just to know it's there.

The anxiety in you: it isn't yours. It's the universe's. Let it flow through you and return to its rightful place. Feel it – I'm not saying it isn't real. Just be aware of its provenance and its destination.

It's not desire (the problem) – desire in itself is not a bad thing. "Desire" is the fuel that keeps the universe existent. The desire to "be." Our desire is simply an echo of the universal will. It is where we point our desire that matters.

Read things; do things that will make you a better person. But for God's sakes – also enjoy yourself! You were given these senses for a reason.

Discover what "faith" means for you. And then live it.

Try to be kind. Just that: try. It's not as easy as it sounds – behind the wheel of a car, in a grocery checkout line, when passing a homeless person. To be kind: day-after-day, moment-after-moment.

Does this mark me as a rogue: that my favorite house of worship is a bar? And why do I feel this way? Because people in a bar will tell you exactly why they are there – and actually mean it! No hypocrisy.

You're no better than anyone else. Know this with certainty.

Avoid situations which will bring out the worst in you, and gravitate to ones which will bring out your best. It's that simple.

One can never lie if they keep their mouth shut. So how can I justify writing this?

Don't ever let fear make a decision for you.

It's not what's "proper." After all, as Socrates noted, popular beliefs are like monsters under the bed: only useful to frighten children with. What's important is what's proper for you.

"It's better to do and regret, than not do and regret" (Boccaccio). Right? But where does that leave you when you enter the World of Truth?

The moment: can you stop there, just there, and enjoy it? Or at least appreciate it – something come once and never to be seen again . . .

The agitation that you feel. Know that it isn't yours – you are just an organ, something else's knee throbbing or their heart diseased.

To be an alien in your own land. Right? Why would you want to be a native and comfortable in a place ruled by "tradition," popular beliefs, polling information and the "well-bred."

Why wait? Why not start today – now – this very moment.

Don't believe the wise man. He knows no more than you do, in your heart. In fact, don't believe anyone. All the answers you need, you already have. Just buried beneath the offal that society has shoveled onto you your whole life, in the guise of "education," "the news," "reality."

Not pointless. Not that. Insignificant, perhaps. But also absolutely necessary. Every second, every feeling, every action. Unique. Without the individual drops of water, there would be no ocean. Without each grain of sand, no beach. The snowflakes taken altogether climb to unimaginable heights.

The most absurd thing a person can say: "I don't believe in God." Turn away. Don't engage. And think to yourself: "But you're lucky that God believes in you." Though of course, even that is absurd – so just return the subject to solid ground: politics.

Salvation? Redemption? Forget all of that – look forward, and just do the right thing from here on out.

The secret? To never expect anything in return. OK – not the secret, but a secret, certainly.

It's never arrogant to be right. It is arrogant to be wrong and think that you are right.

And risk? Of course – risk everything. It is called living.

To find it within. “Within” is the only thing that truly exists, after all. And to remember that “within” and “above” are synonymous.

Everyone – absolutely everyone who knows anything about anything – says that acceptance is the way. So why not just accept?

To move beyond the hope of reward. And from there, to where the action is the reward.

Don't free yourself from anything. Don't renounce; don't turn away. Take what you learn and apply it more forcefully to everything you do. We need you here with us! And the better you are (healed), the better we will become.

Take everything in. But take everything in with a grain of salt.

Take that sack of barley to the top of the mountain. Take a pen and draw through the day until dusk turns to blackness. Walk. And walk some more. Spend time turning things off. Look and keep looking. Find a silent place. Can you? Walk and walk some more. Maybe in a circle – or maybe not.

You try to be honest and try to be honest and try to be honest. But how can you be who you want to be, if you're honest all the time?

To travel from moment to moment with an ever-present awareness of Karma, of cause and effect, of interrelatedness. And then the moments which are unavoidable – in situations which are unpleasant or grating. How to handle those? With that awareness?

You keep getting caught up on this idea of goodness (a sweater snagged on a bramble). “This is good” or “that is good.” In a universe that is exactly apportioned between “matter” and “anti-matter,” who are we to even worry about such things? As Rumi noted: there is nothing in the world that is good for one person which isn't bad for someone else. Conservation of energy. Zero sum game. Infinity.

You know the answer – you know it! What you lack is the faith that you know it. The faith that every moment you know it.

If every single moment has something to teach you? Shhhh . . . listen. Learn.

It doesn't make sense. None of it makes sense. Even the deepest truths espoused by the most profound wisdom thinkers of all eras: they don't make sense. So what is to be done?

Why is the premise that "compassion" and "love" are the basis of creation? The ultimate reason? What about the more obvious "desperation?" Anxiety? The unending violence of the universe? Not "good."

(Fear – that's why.)

Only you know what's right for you. Only you. So listen, trust and do it.

You are the passenger, yes. Of course. You are also the driver.

It's simple. Far more so than Tai Chi or catechisms or symbol-filled books or the knitted brow of the wise. And not only is it simple – it's all around you! Open your eyes.

Don't worry about what the payback is. Just do the right thing. And when you do the wrong thing (again), think about why you did the wrong thing. And pay attention this time, for God's sakes!

Spend more time alone. That way, you can't offend anyone.

Tom Block is an author, playwright, 20-year visual artist and producer of the International Human Rights Art Festival. His first book, Shalom/Salaam: A Story of a Mystical Fraternity, which traces the influence of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) on the direction of Jewish spirituality over the course of 1000 years, was published in Fall 2010 in the United States (Fons Vitae, Louisville, KY) and Turkey (Bilim Artı Gönül Yayıncılık Ltd. Şti., Istanbul, Turkey). His other books include A Fatal Addiction: War in the Name of God (2012 by Algora Publisher, NY); Machiavelli in America (2014 by Algora Publisher, NY); Prophetic Activist Art: Handbook for a Spiritual Revolution (2014 by Centre for Human Ecology, Glasgow, Scotland) and his first novel, The Fool Returns (2014 by Anaphora Literary Press, Atlanta, GA). Home Page: Tom Block, Author and Artist | tomblock.com
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