

FIVE BIG IDEAS

**THAT ALL THE WORLD'S MAJOR SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS
- AND ATHEISM...AND AGNOSTICISM...PRETTY MUCH AGREE ON**

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**5 Big Ideas
That All the World's Major
Spiritual Traditions
...and Atheism
...and Agnosticism
...Pretty Much Agree On**

Imagine this:

A beautiful, crisp morning. A quiet, comfortable room. Excitement in the air.

Several trusted, official, authorized, revered, *super-famous* representatives from the world's major spiritual traditions – and atheism – and agnosticism – sit down together for bear claws and coffee.

(It's a thought experiment. Just go with us on this, at least for a few minutes.)

The whole event takes place like a group of conspirators secretly hatching a plot. But the “plot” is revealed to be...well, figuring things out.

And by “things,” we mean, well...“life.”

A respectful, lively, heartfelt, dignified but passionate conversation ensues. Fruitful dialogue. An effort to dig into real stuff, dog down to the heart of the matter, speak one's heart and listen to others'; speak and listen some more.

And keep going until they make significant progress.

Yes, they'd differ on lot.

And they'd probably agree on easy stuff. (Like babies are cute, for example. And puppies.)

But what about Big Ideas?

The nature of the universe and our place in it. The nature of this situation called “life” we're in. What we should do with our lives, and why we should do it, and what it all means. And what the heck is really going on here.

Big Ideas.

Are there any they would *agree* on?

We think so. We there would be (at least) five of them.

Here they are.

1. We don't know crap.
2. Life is hard.
3. We should try to wise up.
4. We should love each other.
5. We should know ourselves.

Why do we claim this?

Below is our “evidence.”

(Quick note: of course, this little project could drown in qualifiers.

Yes, this requires generalizing a bit. (OK, a little more than a “bit.”) It requires painting with a pretty broad brush. It requires looking at the Big Picture and not getting hung up on details. There may be a few arguable exceptions. Of course, there really is no official, authorized, universally-agreed-upon representative of, say, atheism and agnosticism, for example. And of course, there is always plenty of ground for further discussion. We hope so.

That said, enjoy.)

1. We don't know crap. *

Judeo-Christianity teaches that man is in a state of "fall." Islam describes it as a "rebellion." Hinduism starts from the perspective of illusion, while Buddhism speaks of the same thing in terms of "avidya" or ignorance. Taoism regards the rupture between humankind and its primordial nature in terms of a disequilibrium that was lost. Agnosticism has "not knowing" baked into the pudding. And atheism often looks to science "as a Candle in the Dark" (ala Carl Sagan) which presumes, well, darkness.

"We live in a bewildering world."

- Stephen Hawking (Atheism)

"The wise man is one who knows what he does not know."

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 20 (Taoism)

"This whole world the illusion-maker (*mavin*) projects out of this (Brahma).

And in it by illusion (*maya*) the other (the individual soul) is confined.

Now, one should know that nature (*prakriti*) is illusion (*maya*)..."

- Svetasvatara Upanishad, IV. 9, 10 (Hinduism)

"Abiding in the midst of ignorance, but thinking themselves wise and learned, fools aimlessly go hither and thither, like blind led by the blind. Wandering in the paths of unwisdom, 'We have attained the end of life' think the foolish."

- Mundaka Upanishad, Part I, Chapter I

"If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know."

- I. Corinthians, VIII. 2 (Christianity)

"They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart."

- Ephesians 4:18

"Now when hurt toucheth a man he crieth unto Us, and afterward when We have granted him a boon from Us, he saith: Only by force of knowledge I obtained it. Nay, but it is a test. But most of them know not."

- Qur'an, XXXIX. 49 (Islam)

"You must know enough to know that you do not know."



- Ali Hujwiri, Persian Sufi, 11th century (Islam)

“And the eyes of them both were opened... and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.” (Judaism)

- Genesis Chapter 3, Verses 7-8

“Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.”

– Genesis Chapter 3, Verse 23

“The further one goes, the less one knows.”

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 47

“I have the mind of a fool, understanding nothing.”

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching Chapter 20

“The fool who knows his folly

Becomes wise by that fact.

But the fool who thinks he’s wise –

He’s called ‘a fool’ indeed!”

- The Dhammapada (Buddhism)

“Monks, ignorance is the leader in the attainment of unskillful qualities...”

- Buddha, Avijja Sutta

“Real knowledge is to know the extent of one’s ignorance.”

- Confucius

“The more unintelligent a man is, the less mysterious existence seems to him.”

- Arthur Schopenhauer

“Something pretty mysterious had to give rise to the origin of the universe.”

- Richard Dawkins

“One can’t predict the weather more than a few days in advance.”
- Stephen Hawking

“The universe is governed by science. But science tells us that we can’t solve the equations, directly in the abstract.”
- Stephen Hawking

“It’s a difficult business, finding out what’s true about the world, the universe.”
- Richard Dawkins

2. Life is hard.

“The human condition” can be pretty rough. Does anyone even try to disagree with this? Maybe four groups: the naïve or inexperienced, folks who are in denial and don’t want to talk about it (“buzzkill, bro!”), certain neo-Vedanta types or mystics who don’t communicate very well, and folks who are selling something.

“Life is suffering.”

- The First Noble Truth of Buddhism

“Man that is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.”

- Job 14. 1

“The life of man upon earth is a warfare.”

- Job, VIII. 1

“All is vanity.”

- Ecclesiastes

“Unto the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children...And unto Adam he said...cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life...In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

- Genesis 3, 16-19

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.”

- Matthew, 10:34

“Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin...”

- Romans 5:14

“A man who would enter Paradise must go through fire and water...”

- Augustine

“A man is a living sacrifice.”
- Chandogya Upanishad 3.16

“The great Way is easy,
yet people prefer the side paths.”
- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

“Recall that your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am placing a representative (a temporary god) on Earth.’ They said, ‘Will You place therein one who will spread evil therein and shed blood, while we sing Your praises, glorify You, and uphold Your absolute authority?’ He said, ‘I know what you do not know.’”
- Koran, 2:30

“He who is attached to things will suffer much.”
- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 44

“In harmony with the Tao,
the sky is clear and spacious,
the earth is solid and full,
all creatures flourish together,
content with the way they are,
endlessly repeating themselves,
endlessly renewed.

When man interferes with the Tao
the sky becomes filthy,
the earth becomes depleted,
the equilibrium crumbles,
creatures become extinct.”
- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 39

“The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation. During the minute that it takes me to compose this sentence, thousands of animals are being eaten alive, many others are running for their lives, whimpering with fear, others are slowly being devoured from within by rasping parasites, thousands of all kinds are dying of starvation, thirst, and disease. It must be so.”
- Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*

3. We should try to wise up

The key word here is "should." Just because we "should" doesn't mean we actually do.

"My goal is simple. It is a complete understanding of the universe, why it is as it is and why it exists at all... I want to know why the universe exists, why there is something greater than nothing."

- Stephen Hawking

"Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known."

- Carl Sagan

"For wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her."

- Proverbs 8:11-12

"...fools despise wisdom and instruction..."

- Proverbs 1:7

"Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding."

- Proverbs 3:13

"The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, though it cost all you have, get understanding."

- Proverbs 4:7

"seek, and ye shall find..."

- Matthew 7:7

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

- James 1:5

"Prove all things."

- 1 Thessalonians 5:21

“Be ye therefore perfect...”

- Matthew 5:48

(Note: presumably, being “perfect” would include being “wise.”)

“Who hear advice and follow the best thereof. Such are those whom Allah guideth, and such are men of understanding.”

- Qur’an, XXXIX. 17. 18 book page 170

“My Lord! Enrich me with knowledge...”

- Quran, 20:114

“And whoso brings the truth and believes therein such are the dutiful.”

- Quran, 39:33

“He who goes out in search of knowledge is in God's path till he returns.”

- Hadith (Tirmidhi) (Islam)

“Knowing that you do not know is the best.

Not knowing that you do not know is an illness.

Thinking that one knows when one does not know is sickness.

Only when one becomes sick of this sickness can one be free from sickness.

The sage is never sick: because he is sick of this sickness, therefore he is not sick.”

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 71

“Abandon wisdom, discard knowledge, and people will benefit a hundredfold.”

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching Chapter 19

(Note: although he seems to be speaking against “wisdom,” we’d say he’s not advising that we should “become stupid” any more than “become as little children” literally means we should figure out some way to age backwards. It’s deeper than that, and not literal. We’d say it’s more about moving beyond mundane wisdom, abandoning what is conventionally thought of as book-smarts or ordinary piety. Either way, he’s still giving advice on a wiser course to follow (see below) than another presumably less-wise course. Meaning, the act of giving advice would undercut a literal goal of becoming stupid. All to say...Lao loves the paradox.)

“That so few understand me is why I am treasured.”

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching Chapter 70

“My words are very easy to know, and easy to practice.
Yet all men in the world do not know them, nor do they practice them.”
- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, LXX book p297

“A full investigation into Truth will extinguish your desires at once, and the extinction of desires
will restore your mind to rest.”
- Yoga Vasishtha

“One must strive to get rid of Maya (illusion).”
- Swami Sivananda

“Those who would, may reach the utmost height – but they must be eager to learn.”
- The Buddha

“You know that you know nothing. Find out that knowledge. That is liberation (Mukti).”
- Sri Ramana Maharshi

“Remind yourself that all men assert that wisdom is the greatest good, but that there are few who
strenuously endeavor to obtain this greatest good.”
- Pythagoras

“Wisdom inspireth life into her children, and protecteth them that seek after her, and will go
before them in the way of justice...She will bring upon him fear and dread and trial: and she will
scourge him with the affliction of her discipline, till she try him by her laws, and trust his soul.
Then she will strengthen him. And make a straight way to him. And give him joy.
And will disclose her secrets to him. And will heap upon him treasures of knowledge and
understanding of justice.”
- Ecclesiasticus, Ch IV, v12

“The important thing is not to stop questioning.”
- Albert Einstein

“Never lose a holy curiosity.”
- Albert Einstein

4. We should love each other

“...let us love one another...”

- 1 John 4:7

“...thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself...”

- Leviticus 19:18

“...treat others as you treat yourself.”

- Mahābhārata Shānti-Parva 167:9 (Hinduism)

“However innumerable beings are, I vow to save them.”

- One of the four vows of the Bodhisattva (Buddhism)

“Simplicity, patience, compassion.

These three are your greatest treasures.

Simple in actions and thoughts, you return to the source of being.

Patient with both friends and enemies,

You accord with the way things are.

Compassionate toward yourself,

You reconcile all beings in the world.”

— Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 46

“Just as a mother would protect her only child

At the risk of her own life,

Even so let him cultivate a boundless heart

Toward all beings.

Let his thoughts of boundless love

Pervade the whole world,

Above, below, and across without any obstruction,

Without any hatred, without any enmity.”

- From the Metta Sutta, from the Pali Canon (Buddhism)

“In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.”

- The opening chapters of the Koran

“By one of His signs He created you from dust; you became men and multiplied throughout the earth. By another sign He gave you wives from among yourselves, that you might live in joy with them, and planted love [mawadda] and kindness in your hearts. Surely there are signs for thinking men.”

- Koran 30:21

“Those who embody nobility to act for the sake of the world seem to be able to draw the world to them, while those who embody love to act for the sake of the world seem to be worthy of the trust of the world.”

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 13

“Whatever is hateful unto thee, do it not unto thy fellow. This is the whole Law. The rest is commentary.”

- Hillel the Elder (c. 110BCE - 10 CE)

“That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation.”

- Talmud, Shabbat 31a

“Now this is the command: Do to the doer to make him do.”

- Ancient Egypt, c. 2040 - c. 1650 BC)

“Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.”

- Confucius, China, c. 500 BC

“Above all, maintain constant love for one another...”

- 1 Peter 4:8

“Let us try to teach generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish.”

- Richard Dawkins

“Love for your brother what you love for yourself,”

- the Sunnah, the collections of words and deeds by the Prophet of Islam

“Love is a better teacher than duty.”

- Albert Einstein

“For small creatures such as we the vastness is bearable only through love.”
- Carl Sagan

5. We should try to know ourselves

“Know Thyself.”

- Plato/Socrates, The Oracle of Delphi, Heraclitus, Thales, etc

“...man must find his own Soul.”

- Chandogya Upanishad 8.7

“Whosoever knows himself knows his Lord.”

- Hadith of Rasul (SAW) (Islam)

“Realize thy Simple Self,
Embrace thy Original Nature.”

- Tao Te Ching, XIX

“It would be easier to roll up the entire sky into a small cloth than it would be to obtain true happiness without knowing the self.”

- Shvetashvatara Upanishad

“The kingdom of heaven is within you.”

- Luke 17:21

“Let me know myself, Lord, and I shall know you”

- St Augustine

“When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty.”

- Jesus, The Gospel of Thomas

(Note: this isn't official canon. But still – we've heard worse.)

“If you want to know me,
Look inside your heart.”

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

“He who has conquered himself by the Self, he is the friend of himself; but he whose self is unconquered, his self acts as his own enemy like an external foe.”

- Bhagavad Gita, VI. 6

“Valor is the conquest of one’s own self.”

- Srimad Bhagavatam, XI, xii

“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.”

- Proverbs XVI.32

“There is no greater victory in the life of a human being than victory over the mind....the true soldier is he who fights not the external but the internal foes.”

- Swami Ramdas

“How do I know this is true?
by looking inside myself.”

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

“Knowledge studies others,
Wisdom is self-known.”

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

“He who conquers others is strong;
He who conquers himself is might.”

- Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, XXXIII

“Fools of poor understanding have themselves for their greatest enemies”

- Dhammapada, v.66

“When a man rightly sees his soul,
He sees no death, no sickness or distress.
When a man rightly sees,
He sees all, he wins all, completely.”

- Chāndogya Upanishad, 7.26.2

“...either thou killest iniquity or art killed by iniquity. But do not seek to kill iniquity as if it were something outside thyself. Look to thyself, mark what fighteth with thee in thee, and take heed lest thy iniquity, thine enemy, defeat thee...”

- St. Augustine

“Sit down before fact like a little child, and be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abyss Nature leads or you shall learn nothing.”

- Thomas Henry Huxley

“It is difficult to find happiness within oneself, but it is impossible to find it anywhere else.”

- Arthur Schopenhauer

“There’s no way to remove the observer – us – from our perceptions of the world.”

- Stephen Hawking

“We are the local embodiment of a Cosmos grown to self-awareness. We have begun to contemplate our origins: starstuff pondering the stars; organized assemblages of ten billion billion atoms considering the evolution of atoms; tracing the long journey by which, here at least, consciousness arose. Our loyalties are to the species and the planet. We speak for Earth. Our obligation to survive is owed not just to ourselves but also to that Cosmos, ancient and vast, from which we spring.”

- Carl Sagan

“We have to find our own purposes in life, which are not derived directly from our scientific history.”

- Richard Dawkins

“A human being is part of the whole, called by us “universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one true religion. Not to nourish it but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind.”

- Albert Einstein

THE END

(or is it...?)

(No, it isn't.)

End Credits Sequence

We don't see this as an "ending." We see it more as a beginning.

After all, the above poses several challenges to us: we should wise up, love each other, know ourselves.

But...how?

That, dear reader, is what we, your loveable Agents at LiveReal.com, are working on, day and night.

(Mainly nights.)

So if you're interested in taking up the challenge...join in! Wising up, loving, and knowing ourselves is much more fun, effective, and interesting when it's done with other good, like-minded folks.

So join the adventure! Stop on by sometime, & let's figure this out! :)

All the best & warm regards,

The LiveReal Agents
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