

What I Have Learned About Life

November 2026

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

When you grow up as a child, at some point you reach the moment when you ask yourself what to do with this life. You ask yourself the central questions of life. I fear that a frightening number of people leave these questions unanswered and remain without orientation all their lives. This text is meant to help the reader find answers to the central questions of life for themselves. The text makes no claim to completeness or correctness. It is merely meant to be a summary written to the best of my knowledge and belief, from a personal point of view.

A small warning right at the start: this text is not meant to be taken lightly. If you don't know it yet, you may well have something to digest. The text is meant to be precise and direct. Enjoy!

This text does not intend to repeat what has already been discussed at length in many other texts. It is merely meant to present one possible way of looking at things, in the hope that this helps the reader along. In what follows, the most important insights are summarized first. After that, it is described how one can arrive at these insights.

The central questions for a human being are:

1. What is life for?
2. What do I do in life?

The answers I have found for myself to these questions are:

1. You have a task to fulfil. Your task is to lead a happy life. Finding out how to do that is part of the task.
2. Do what makes you happy.

This immediately leads to the next question:

How do I find what makes me happy?

Unfortunately, the answer to this question is hard to sum up in one sentence in a way that the sentence actually helps. One possible attempt at such a sentence would be:

Always be aware of your inner centre and live in the now.

Developing as deep an understanding of this statement as possible is what this text is about.

The original version of this text is in German. Versions in other languages that come directly from the author have generally been translated from German with automated assistance and proofread by a native speaker, if someone was available.

CHAPTER 2

It's Won in the Head

When it comes to how they manage to achieve their performances, athletes often say:

It's won in the head.

In my opinion, this statement can be applied to the whole of life. If I want to achieve anything, even if it is only to be happy, then it is a question of what is going on in my head. On this point, what matters is how I know how to take each moment. So it is about how I deal with the now. This immediately leads to the question:

What is the now, and how do I deal with it?

I racked my brains over exactly this point for a long time, and even once I had found my answer, for a long time I was unable to put it into words. I was missing a word that I first had to invent. The word is nowpoint (in German: Jetztpunkt). Later I learned that I was not the first person to come up with this word. The relationship between happiness and the nowpoint can be summed up like this:

The search for happiness is about the handling of the nowpoint.

So that this statement can be understood, I have to explain what the nowpoint is. If you look at a time axis, it usually has exactly one dimension. Time runs in exactly one direction: always forward. If I want to mark "now" on this time axis, I have to think about how to do that. Quite intuitively, I mark now as a point on this time axis. I call this point the nowpoint.

The nowpoint has some special properties. Since time always runs forward, the point is constantly moving along the time axis. I also notice that I have difficulty talking about this point, which we all constantly experience. Because when I say a word, the beginning of the word already lies in the past by the time I have finished saying it. So I can only talk about the nowpoint that we all experience in the form of longer texts, like this one. Since the individual experience of all things takes place in the head of each of us, and since we presumably cannot, as a rule, read minds, the last step, recognizing and handling this nowpoint within oneself, must be taken by each of us independently, without help. It is only possible to offer support with this through a text like this one. The way we deal, consciously or unconsciously, with the nowpoint in our head decides what character we develop and how we deal with our life. Here I would like to cite a quote from an older, very well-known musician in a conversation with a young up-and-coming musician:

Don't do anything you don't want to do. In life, the only things you have to do are die and pay taxes.

I would like to change this quote into:

Don't do anything you don't want to do. In life, the only things you have to do are die and become aware of your nowpoint.

How one becomes aware of one's nowpoint is, in my opinion, for every human being an absolutely decisive factor in how their own life turns out as a whole. It has turned out that this becoming aware is evidently very difficult. And even once you have managed it, you still have to learn to get along well with the nowpoint you have discovered in yourself. As a rule, this is a process that takes years. All I can say is: take heart! The earlier you start, the less pain you will still have to suffer, the better you will cope with the bumps of life, and the greater the happiness you will be given. The path one can take can be summed up in the following points. In the further passages of the text, I would like to explain these points in more detail:

1. Becoming aware of the nowpoint.
2. Learning to protect one's own nowpoint from outside influences, thereby finding inner calm and peace, resisting attempts at manipulation, and defending oneself against attacks of all kinds, which life presumably inevitably brings with it.
3. Learning to experience and handle the nowpoint in everyday life. This learning remains a lifelong process.

If you live like this, a deep feeling of happiness and contentment is given to you all by itself. There is a proverb that aptly characterizes this strategy:

Good things come to those who wait.

One should have a little trust in nature here. The three points described above are burdened with many prejudices. Many people naturally want to be good people and, especially in private life, to share everything with their life partner and with friends. It is often regarded as improper and reprehensibly selfish to build, in one's innermost private sphere, a protection around the nowpoint against outside influences. In my opinion, this protection is necessary for the human mind by its very nature. Unconditional openness towards people who are close to you, or who should be close to you, makes you ill and does not really lead to happiness, but leads to spending your life in an illusion and a lie. That does not mean that you cannot talk and argue about everything and share everything with each other. But as long as we cannot read minds, there is unfortunately no way around the fact that, in the last step, everyone has to come to terms with their own nowpoint themselves. One can and should get help with this, for example through this text, but the last step everyone has to take for themselves, entirely alone. This is called existential loneliness. Existential loneliness is inevitably an integral part of the life of every human being.

For me, this is a fundamental truth. In this context in particular, the following applies:

Our universe runs on truth. No one gets around the truth. For anyone who tries to get around the truth, the universe takes care of it. And every bill gets paid.

CHAPTER 3

How Do I Become Aware of My Nowpoint?

This is the most difficult and the decisive point of the whole matter. The following applies here:

If someone claims of themselves that they are aware of their nowpoint, or that they are truly happy, then, as long as we cannot read minds, we will never know whether it is true or not, because this statement can always arise from the fact that the person has not yet understood the matter, or the statement may quite simply be a lie.

...but...

If you are aware of your nowpoint, or are truly happy, you know it for yourself.

This is where the concepts of trust and faith come into play. If I do not know something, and perhaps can never know it, such as the truth of the statement above, I can nevertheless develop trust in it and faith that it is so. That means that, while aware that I cannot know it, I simply assume that it is so. As a rule, it takes quite a long time to develop trust and faith in this sense. Presumably you can never be completely sure that this trust and this faith will not be shaken again after all. You simply must never stop looking after yourself on these points. That is life, it seems.

But now more concretely on how I become aware of my nowpoint. I have had many discussions about this point, in which people tried to capture it in other words. Unfortunately, that is nonsense and does not lead to the goal. If I stop thinking in words and images, which may already be quite difficult if you are not used to it, then the nowpoint lies in what you still perceive of yourself. The nowpoint is where words, images and feelings have their origin. If you relax completely and stop consciously thinking words, images and feelings, then you can discover the nowpoint in what you still perceive of yourself. To discover the nowpoint within yourself, what is needed is what is called self-reflection. This has been taught for thousands of years.

Nowadays it is also fashionably called metacognition. It refers to the ability to think about one's own thoughts. This ability requires some practice if you do not have it yet. To acquire this ability, you should practise and get into the habit of remembering all your own thoughts, at least briefly. Once you have become aware of your nowpoint for a moment, you have already accomplished the most difficult part. If you are not yet familiar with these trains of thought, it is normal to feel overwhelmed at first. In my experience, learning and training these trains of thought usually takes months or years.

The next question immediately arises:

How do I stay aware of my nowpoint?

This is a fairly long process, a phase of learning and practice that you have to go through. In the beginning you often have difficulty, especially in everyday life, becoming aware of this point and staying aware of it. But I have found that you learn it like riding a bike. This passage invites prejudice. One could object now: that's programming and brainwashing. I would like to answer: seen that way, all of life is one single programming and brainwashing. The only question is which programming you choose. Since this text is about how to become happy, it should also describe how that can be achieved. There is of course no law and no obligation here. You are not forced to do it this way. You can also spend your life in any other way you like. Perhaps there are other solutions to the problems addressed in this text. This is one possible variant.

CHAPTER 4

How Do I Protect My Nowpoint from Outside Influences?

Once you have got to the point where you can become aware of your nowpoint at any time without difficulty and stay aware of it whenever you want, you may find that you also have difficulty maintaining this state, because you are subject to outside influences. One danger at this stage is that you become particularly open to manipulation, because you clearly feel the nowpoint but are not clear about how its reactions come about. Other people may notice this quickly and then have the opportunity to bring about reactions in a planned way by acting on the nowpoint through what they say and do. As an escalation of this situation, it can then happen that you become aware of the influences and everyone is clear that manipulation is going on, but the manipulations simply continue aggressively anyway, and you have a hard time resisting being the slave of others. This can become very exhausting and unpleasant. You then enter the phase in which you have to learn to set boundaries. Setting these boundaries in turn has to be learned and practised. Ultimately, everyone has, so to speak, a garden fence around their personality, and therefore around the nowpoint too. In everyday life, this fence is readily and often ignored and climbed over. Learning to defend the fence can be difficult. Ideally, you learn it as a child, quite naturally, in dealing with other children. It may well be that, for various reasons that you cannot all influence, you have difficulty defending the fence and never quite manage to learn it without help. You should not be ashamed to seek professional help in such a case. This is far more widespread than one would think possible. I have found that learning this defence is a process that takes years, even if you have recognized the problem quite clearly. Above all, it is also a matter of practice. If you practise it long enough, you get better and better at it. I have also found that nature then begins to help itself, everything in your head comes into balance, and you can rest within yourself better and better. In this way you can stimulate the self-healing powers of your own mind.

In a nutshell, defending the fence is about not accepting and putting up with anything that unsettles you and, as the saying goes, gets to you. By this I mean things that influence the nowpoint from outside against your own will and work against the action of the nowpoint from

within. That is of course sometimes easier said than done, especially when the situations you find yourself in are so tricky that you can hardly avoid these upsetting things. The only way I can think of is to sort out these things consistently, even if it takes a long time and is complicated, and remove them from your own life, or to change your own attitude so that they no longer get to you. Here you will probably find more often that your attitude cannot simply be changed at will, and that only sorting out remains. I do not wish to call for general rebellion with this. If anyone has good, practical ideas on this: let's hear them!

Once you have finally reached the point of being able to defend the nowpoint, the rest of life is about experiencing and enjoying the nowpoint.

CHAPTER 5

Carrying the Nowpoint Outward

"Recognizing the nowpoint" and "defending the nowpoint" are not quite the whole story. You may not want just to sit around passively setting boundaries, but also to shape life actively. Once you have learned to defend the nowpoint, you find that it develops a life of its own. It may be difficult to always interpret which impulses come from the nowpoint. Creativity is called for here. Reduced to simple points, I have come to the following view:

You want to love living beings and be loved by them. You want to love things and activities. You want to build up rather than destroy.

This now sounds very naive and soft-soaped. In this clarity, the statement is sometimes hard to sustain and is the subject of great discussions. After all, it is about leading a happy life. You may gain experience of what makes you happy and what does not. Pursuing the points above probably makes you happy. How these simple points can be put into concrete practice, everyone has to find out for themselves. The nowpoint tells you what to do. In doing so, you may feel resistance and have to learn to find the right measure for overcoming that resistance. When moving the fence around your own nowpoint, you find your limits at the fences of others. Here it is a matter of negotiating, as equals, how the fences are set up. This negotiating probably leads to extensive discussions. Have fun with it! What about games, for example, in which things are destroyed? If something truly vital were destroyed, the fun would certainly be over at once. Since it is only a game, you can also give free rein to your aggression for once, although for many that is a rather dubious pleasure.

CHAPTER 6

Advice Everyone Can Understand

The concept of the nowpoint may be a little demanding for some to understand and put into practice. So here is some simple advice that everyone can understand, which I have derived over time from the explanations above. Some of it has already appeared in the text.

1. Our universe runs on truth. No one gets around the truth. If you try to get around it, the universe takes care of it. Every bill gets paid here.
2. As with all things that revolve around truth, there are many ways to misunderstand the handling of the nowpoint, or not to understand it at all. But once you have understood it, you know it for yourself.
3. The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine.
4. You must never lie to yourself.
5. In life, the only things you have to do are die and become aware of your nowpoint.

6. You live because you have a task to fulfil. Your task is to lead a happy life. Finding out how to do that is part of the task.

7. Indian proverb: When children are small, give them strong roots. When children are grown, give them wings.

8. In life, very often it is only about throwing each other off balance. You must never let yourself be thrown off balance, but must rest relaxed within yourself throughout your life. This is of central importance for life. You must never want to force anything at any price. That breaks you. You must take life as it comes and make your contribution to shaping life. You will meet people who will deliberately try to throw you off balance. You must not let them do that to you. Despite all efforts, despite all training, there will be moments in your life when you have been thrown off balance. When you become aware of this, you must immediately try to become calm again. This is very important! This is absolutely decisive! Becoming calm cannot be forced or pulled out of a hat in five minutes. It has to be practised. It is about handling the present moment, the now. You have people around you who support you. But the last step, coming to terms with your thoughts, you must take yourself, entirely alone, without help. In this last step, every human being is entirely alone, all their life. This is called existential loneliness. To become calm, you can influence your own feelings to a certain extent; not at will, and you cannot force anything, but you can influence them to a limited degree. You have to perform a kind of walking on eggshells with them. You have to accept and let in the fact that you have been thrown off balance, because you cannot push it away. You have to wish to become calm and concentrate on it, without wanting to force it. If you maintain this tension long enough, you will gradually become calmer all by yourself. Unfortunately, I do not know how to describe this more precisely either. You have to practise it and find your own way in doing so...

9. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not get worked up, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not seek its own advantage, it is not easily angered. It does not delight in injustice but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. (based on the Bible, First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13; slightly revised; a comparison with the version in the Bible, and conclusions drawn from it, would not do the matter justice; this picture of love is slightly different from the picture in the Bible; in my experience, the picture presented here does better justice to life; the revisions are not meant as an invitation to do anything improper or to bear grudges; in my opinion, love should not be squeezed into too tight a corset but should have room to breathe, because it helps no one if you wear yourself out for the sake of love or put love on so high a pedestal that no one can reach it anymore.)

10. To love also means to let go of what you love when the time has come.

CHAPTER 7

Common Mistakes

In this chapter I collect examples of how, according to my insights, nowpoints are handled wrongly. The examples are simplified where necessary to make the core message as recognizable as possible. In everyday life, the examples occur in many variations and degrees.

1. Deliberate lying is used to gain advantages in life systematically. Result: It becomes impossible to be happy, which is then often simply compensated for by a further lie: you simply decide that you are happy.

2. You justify some behaviour by saying that everyone else does it too. Result: It becomes impossible to be happy, because you are constantly trying to meet requirements from outside. (This is not to say that it is automatically better always to do something different. You must in

each case be able to justify it honestly to yourself.)

3. My child should be able to hold their own in life. So I have to make them tough and get them used to hardness from the start. Result: The child is so worn down as a person that they are overwhelmed by it and unable to lead a happy, self-determined life.

4. The parents actively interfere in their children's love relationships because, in their opinion, for all sorts of reasons other things are more important. Result: The children are mentally no longer able to build a love relationship and remain without a partner all their lives.

5. Parents systematically cross the boundary fence around their children's nowpoint as a method of upbringing. Result: The children do not learn to defend the boundary fence and therefore have no chance of living a happy life, because they constantly suffer from the people around them.

CHAPTER 8

The Nowpoint and Politics

This chapter and all following chapters are not important for the basic understanding of this text and can be skipped without significant loss.

For me, politics is always also about the search for and the handling of the truth. That is not easy for anyone. Bismarck said:

Politics is nothing other than the study of hidden snags.

Helmut Schmidt said:

Anyone who has visions should go and see a doctor.

My answer to that is: you gave up too quickly. Visions are what drive us forward. Visions keep us alive and give us a goal. Everything I write here about the nowpoint is, in this sense, also politics. My vision is that one day all people, as they grow up, will learn to consciously perceive their nowpoint and to shape their life with it.

CHAPTER 9

The Nowpoint and Religion

I ask forgiveness if this chapter seems presumptuous in any way. This is not intended. I understand it this way: religion is about coming to terms with life as a whole. I have recognized for myself that God really exists, even if one is constantly tempted to form an idea of him and has difficulty with that. God also exists for those who do not believe in him. Everyone has the opportunity to recognize God at any time. If you want a definition of what God is, my answer would be: God is the line you get when you string together all the points that were or will be nowpoints. What is meant here are the nowpoints of EVERYTHING (everything, everything, everything, not just this universe....).

It follows immediately: every human being is a part of God and can help shape which path God takes. This is how one can understand how the title Son of God for Jesus came about. We are all children of God.

CHAPTER 10

Intelligence

There is the question of what makes up intelligence in everyday life. In my experience, there is on the one hand sheer processing speed, sensitivity and memory, which appear to be largely inherited but can also partly be learned. For a computer, one would speak here of clock frequency and storage space. These qualities alone, however, are not sufficient. Outstanding intellectual achievements at work and in other areas of life also require a suitable personality structure. For a computer, one would speak here of a good program. A decisive factor in being successful with this in dealing with other people is the appropriate social competence. Processing speed, sensitivity, memory and a suitable personality structure are useless in dealing with other people if you are overwhelmed by dealing with people. Therefore, the suitable basic abilities and the suitable personality structure also include the appropriate social competence, without which the other abilities cannot come into full bloom.

CHAPTER 11

Love Relationships

For recognizing one's own nowpoint, gender is irrelevant. Both men and women can do this equally. For a happy love relationship, there are a few simple rules:

1. If both are aware of their own nowpoint, this is very helpful.
2. You must always be able to discuss everything with each other without restriction and without verbal violence (not always everything immediately; it is sensible not to let stress arise in the process)
3. You should always be open and honest with each other and have no secrets from each other. You should never lie to or deceive each other. (that does not mean that you must constantly spill everything immediately; here, too, it is sensible not to let stress arise)

CHAPTER 12

Children

The minimum age at which one can be confronted with this text and be able to understand it varies from individual to individual. A good guideline is the age of 14.

CHAPTER 13

Comments After Decades of Living in Awareness of the Nowpoint

Living in awareness of the nowpoint, also often called the inner centre, is a lifelong process. For me it is pure joy to shape my life always in awareness of the inner centre. It is a wonderful basis for every kind of interpersonal relationship. It gives you happiness, strength and security.

CHAPTER 14

The Nowpoint and Death

At the latest when you have grown older and some people who were close to you and whom you knew closely all your life have died, you start to think about your own mortality. For everyone who reads these lines, this life will come to an end at some point. You may ask yourself: what will it be like? No one knows, but I have arrived at the following idea: what we experience as I, everything we perceive, for example colours and sounds, but also intelligence and consciousness, is purely abstract. These are abstract emergent properties of our brain. That

means that what I perceive as my I can be regarded as a component of a hierarchically superordinate abstract construct - without any magic - to understand it better, you can simply imagine it as an idea that does not exist physically. Every I is, in this sense, a component of this construct. The I of a newborn human being is also abstract again and a component of this construct. The fascinating thing about it is that on the one hand it is and remains abstract, yet in our life we perceive it as really existing. So when I die, my I no longer has a physical representation in the form of my brain, but it nevertheless remains forever a component of the abstract construct mentioned, just like the I of every new human being. Seen this way, my I will live on in new human beings. So when I die, I can take absolutely nothing with me into this abstract construct, but I will live on through every newborn human being, through some more, through some less. So my goal in this life must be to make life good for all human beings born in the future. When I die, my existence continues immediately and seamlessly through the human beings born from then on, through some more and through some less. How will I experience death? No one knows. But I have the firm hope that after my death, in the next life, I will regain consciousness as a baby without memory in the womb of my next mother, and a new life will lie ahead of me.

CHAPTER 15

Where You Find the Nowpoint in Everyday Life

For a better understanding of this text, here are two examples of where you find the handling of the nowpoint described in this text in everyday life, though it may sometimes be hard to recognize:

The Force in the Star Wars films is nothing other than an extrapolation of the nowpoint, made independently for the cinema. So you could call the people who are aware of their nowpoint and have learned to handle it consciously Jedi Knights.

The nowpoint is an independently made rediscovery of Indian philosophy more than 2000 years old, which is formulated in the Vedanta scriptures and from which, among other things, today's yoga was developed. In the present text, this philosophy is reproduced exactly, but in modern, concise wording. In the Vedanta scriptures, the nowpoint is described as the inner centre, and so is the path to self-reflection, nowadays called metacognition.

CHAPTER 16

Epilogue

Start of work on this text: 1987

Date of the first version of this text: May 2003

as long as I live, the next version of this text is already in progress (readers are encouraged to look for newer versions from the author)

it matters to me that this text is copied, passed on and translated into other languages; my request: if you have read this far, keep the text in a safe place and pass on copies, that is important; I think humanity would be better off if every human being knew this text

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my name is Holger Burbach; you can find me under my name on the internet if need be (to avoid confusion: I was born in Lüdenscheid / Germany / Earth / Solar System / Milky Way / Laniakea);

please communicate with me only in German or English; French or Spanish only in exceptional cases