

GATE 2-2

DEPARTURE INTO LIFE



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*Some people can feel the rain.
Others just get wet.
-Bob Marley*

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FOREWORD

The most important task in your life is to find out what your most important task in life is.

Wow, that phrase really kicked arse the first time I heard it, a moment that I would never forget. I didn't know at first why these lines moved me so deeply, I had been living the 'normal' lifestyle expected of a professional. Standardized. Yet up until this moment, these thoughts had not invaded my thoughts.

The hidden question in this sentence, however, aroused an unrestrained curiosity. An interest that is very difficult to put into words.

What is the meaning of life? Why are we here and what is all the other bullshit? Where do we go afterwards and how do I become happy in my life? Questions that we probably all ask ourselves at some point in our lives.

The search engines offered unsatisfactory responses, encouraging me to undertake my own research in many countries of the world, taking things into my own hands.

Some people feel that 'something' is not quite right, that there is 'something missing,' but can't really explain what that might be. They attribute the void to circumstances or external influences. Like many others, I also couldn't pinpoint where the problem or emptiness lay.

Making more money, being desirable in the eyes of others and flashing around our various status symbols becomes

obsolete. In those moments of reflection and silence, behind and beyond the constant chattering that question repeats itself, gnawing a hole in your heart and head, demanding an answer.

What is the most important task in your life?

If this rings true with you then come with me on the journey that I took to find the answers.

DEPARTURE

On the way to the airport it started to rain. The kind of rain that splatters the window and looks like it's going to thump you in the guts if you let it. I was sitting in the taxi, thinking about what I was doing here. I didn't know at this point that over the forthcoming days and weeks, I would really be looking at this question, I mean really looking, ripping it apart and wrestling with its bare bones.

The rain continued to pour and the music whirled in the background as I let my mind wander. Over and over again, on repeat, the same question dominated my thoughts, 'Am I making the right decision?'

When I received an email a few weeks earlier, I never thought it would put me on this journey. 'You decide your own luck' was the subject line. Typical spam but for some reason, perhaps force majeure or just out of pure curiosity, I felt compelled to open it. There was one sentence that struck me: "Everything runs on your terms and at your time!"

I didn't give it much thought at first because I was busy focusing on the content of the email but I couldn't help asking myself the question: 'Was I on the wrong track? Was I even searching?'

The more I read the text, the clearer it became to me that I really was looking for something. The professional successes that I had achieved had lost their meaning. Had I always been kidding myself that they held any value? Perhaps I had been pretending to myself all along. Surely

everything in my private life was as it should be but I began to question this also.

I hoped to find answers on this journey. Real answers to the questions that I had.

"We are here."

I was so immersed in my thoughts that I never noticed the taxi driver in the first place. "We're at the airport," he repeated, tapping me on the shoulder. Torn from my thoughts, I replied, *"Thank you"* and paid him.

The raindrops fell on my face and I was glad when I entered the dry entrance hall of the airport. Everyone, young and old, in a hurry, clutching bags, tickets and phones going on their way to destinations across the globe. The stress of some of them was palpable, you could almost taste it.

Purposefully but also mechanically I cleared my way through the usual madness; going through the motions as if on auto-pilot - removing my shoes, emptying my pockets, placing my electronic devices, one, two and three on a tray. A well-rehearsed routine that seemed at odds with the stream of questioning that was going on inside my head, thoughts flying at each other in random patterns.

I eventually found a seat in the departure lounge and looked across to the person next to me, a business woman who was juggling an iPad, phone and a newly poured cup of coffee. She looked harassed and far from relaxed. Here I was at gate 2-2, ready to begin this most important journey of my life, looking at a woman I didn't know but who I could see had reached that same point in life that I had.

As I glanced across to her, I could see that one or the other was going to come off worse. No sooner had the thought crossed my mind then the inevitable happened.

My instincts kicked in and I tried to grab the silicone, sleeve grip of the cup but the gesture of kindness ended up in the coffee seeping into the contents of my bag which now dripped with its aroma. She apologized and used her handkerchief to soak it up as best she could but its stain and smell would be forever etched on my bag, perhaps as a reminder of the start of that journey that had taken me so long to take.

In a low voice that she adopted, in an attempt to disguise her embarrassment, she swore to herself. She began packing away her belongings, the laptop, the phone the iPad and glancing up to me said, "Sorry, it's not my day. I'm Carla."

"I am pleased to meet you but please don't worry, we all have bad days! I am Ben." Her eyes softened and her mouth relaxed as she visibly relaxed into her body. She pulled out a book from her bag and I couldn't help but notice its title, *The most important task in your life is to find out what your most important task is.*

"Great title," I said, looking at Carla, who was pulling up the cream sweater closer to her ears as she tried to find some warmth against the chill of the air conditioning. *"Erm, yes, well thanks. We all need a purposeful meaning in our lives, don't we?"* she said, now snuggling her fingers inside the sleeves of the jumper.

It was as if she had, had a private viewing inside my head because this is exactly the question I had been debating on the way to the airport and which now refused to leave me. I