

Here are four of Tom Asacker's recent articles.

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Drip, drip, drip. 11.11.24

“Stagnation is the slow death of the soul. We must be willing to flow, like water, or risk becoming like the unyielding stone.” ~ bell hooks

As I scrolled through my social media feed, a widely shared meme caught my attention: “You throw a bucket of water on a rock and it doesn’t do anything. You let a drop of water fall onto a rock every day and it creates a hole.” The message was clear: consistency trumps intensity. But as I pondered this timeless wisdom, a profound realization emerged: the subtle way in which the relentless drip of inauthentic living can create a hole in our soul and erode our very being.

Just as a rock is gradually worn down by the persistent fall of water droplets, our spirit can be similarly eroded by the constant drip of compromises, doubts, and fears. It’s not the sudden, dramatic life events that cause the most damage, but the steady accumulation of small, seemingly insignificant concessions. The gradual acceptance of a life that doesn’t truly resonate with us, the slow surrender to societal expectations, and the imperceptible drift from our inner truth can have a profound impact.

This steady erosion of our essence, this relentless drip of inner dissatisfaction, can lull us into a state of passive acceptance, trapping us in a rigid pattern of behavior that no longer aligns with our deepest values and aspirations. The irregular cadence of these drops, the unsettling impact of each cold impact, creates unease as we futilely try to anticipate the next disruption to our sense of self. This constant, low-level stress takes a toll, diminishing our vitality, weakening our immune system, and accelerating aging.

This relentless drip of inauthenticity is a pervasive problem in our modern society. We are constantly bombarded with messages

that encourage us to conform, to fit in, and to subdue our unique nature. We are told to strive for success, wealth, and status, even if it means sacrificing our inner integrity. As a result, many of us live lives that are far removed from our true selves.

While some are awakened by life’s sudden “bucket of water” moments, there’s a steadier, more enduring path to awakening. By cultivating self-awareness, and acknowledging these daily compromises and the toll they take on our mental and physical health, we can break free from the cycle of passive acceptance and embrace a life of authenticity and purpose.¹

In this space, life itself becomes the reward, a flowing river of moments brought alive by the current of authenticity. It’s about aligning our natural flow of energy with our deepest sensations and intuitions. The resistance to this natural impulse is what slowly erodes our sense of self and our connection to the essential nature within us.

We are not passive stones, destined to be carved by the relentless drip of conformity, but rather rivers seeking our true course. When we awaken to the subtle erosion of our spirit, we discover that authentic living isn’t about resisting the flow—it’s about allowing our natural energy to find its own way. By embracing our fluid nature and the wisdom to trust our deepest currents, we don’t just free ourselves from the grinding monotony of inauthentic existence. We become like the mountain streams that, in finding their natural path, create valleys where others may follow, transforming the very landscape of what’s possible in a life fully lived.

Don't Summon the Shadow 11.14.24

"Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings - always darker, emptier and simpler."

~ Friedrich Nietzsche

Nietzsche's observation captures a fundamental truth about human consciousness: our cognitive processes often distort our raw, bodily sensations. But beyond mere distortion, this relationship reveals a deeper psychological pattern—our relentless drive to explain and rationalize our feelings, even when no explanation is necessary or even possible.

This is a challenging yet compelling concept, which is explored in my new book, "[Unwinding Want](#)." The central idea is that people actively *want* to think the thoughts they think. They have a deep-seated desire to summon the shadow and solidify amorphous feelings into coherent narratives. This drive stems from the need to understand, predict, and control life, including their own inner sensations.

Consider waking up in an unexplainably good or bad mood. Our minds immediately search for reasons, drawing comparisons to the past. However, the line between finding and inventing these causes becomes remarkably thin, revealing how eagerly we construct explanations *and* emotions for even the most fleeting feelings. Memory plays a paradoxical role in this process. At its most useful, it helps us recognize patterns and adjust when something isn't working. An organism without memory cannot connect moments of discomfort to realize "This pattern keeps repeating." Yet memory can also lead us to believe that events that happen together are always connected, even when they aren't.

This cognitive distortion is evident in interpersonal interactions. Bodily distress, such as a tight chest or knotted stomach, is often reduced to a simple narrative of threat or rejection. A colleague's critical feedback can trigger discomfort, leading us to manifest anger and dismiss their opinion. A friend's success can make us feel inadequate, prompting us to judge their methods or minimize their achievement.

The truth is that our feelings arise from a complex interplay of physiological forces,

impulses, and conditioned drives, hidden beneath the surface of conscious awareness. This hidden reality, however, is unsettling, so we cling to the first explanation that soothes our discomfort, not because it's necessarily true, but because it relieves our anxiety about the unknown.

Furthermore, we each develop a dominant interpretive lens that grows more rigid with time. Someone raised in poverty may impulsively attribute anxiety to financial worries, the religious to moral failings, and the romantic to relationship shortcomings. These mental grooves become so familiar that our thoughts and emotions follow them, shutting out other possibilities, such as poor sleep quality, the aftereffects of alcohol consumption, or prolonged social isolation.

Distinguishing between primary bodily feelings and secondary interpretations is crucial. The tightness in your chest is real; the scenarios your mind spins are the shadows. When worry appears, the mind races to assign meaning. Hours can be spent searching for problems and solutions, spiraling deeper into distress—all because we confused a temporary feeling with objective reality.

Instead of letting thoughts darken and distort, stay with the raw physical sensation. When we allow emotions to process naturally, without the mind's frantic search for explanations, they often release on their own. Only then can we see if there's something that truly needs attention. No truth can be found while we're lost in the shadows of our interpretations.

This understanding invites a different approach: less mental searching, more direct sensing. When caught in cycles of overthinking, remember that the path forward lies not in analysis and rumination, but in acknowledging the shadowy nature of our interpretations and our compulsive need to explain them away. Only then can we step away from these distortions into a more relaxed and joyful relationship with life.

Release your angel. 11.18.24

“I saw the angel in the marble, and carved until I set him free.” ~ Michelangelo

Many have stood before Michelangelo’s masterpieces, marveling at how he transformed unyielding stone into figures that seem to breathe. But these words of his reveal something far beyond the art of sculpture—they speak to a truth about human nature that often goes unnoticed.

Most of us are walking around as hardened forms—a dense accumulation of everything we’ve been told about who we are, what we’re capable of, and what we should be and do. It’s the heavy weight of expectations, social conditioning, and fear that has crystallized in our minds, running like a hypnotic background program in our daily lives.

And here’s the thing: This weight isn’t just metaphorical. It’s what makes life itself feel so damn heavy—like you’re constantly swimming upstream against the current of your own thoughts. It’s what pulls you down, keeps you earthbound, makes each step feel like a drag on your spirit.

From the moment we could understand language, the world began its work—layering us with beliefs and expectations like wet cement, gradually hardening over our pure potential. Parents, teachers, and society at large, often acting out of their own fears and limitations, impose their beliefs upon us. Layer by layer, this protective layer set around us, encasing the angel within.

When Michelangelo created his masterpiece, David—that towering 17-foot testament to human potential—he didn’t start with a pristine block of marble. He chose a block that another sculptor

had abandoned as flawed, one that had been sitting in the cathedral workshop for nearly forty years. Where others saw damaged goods, Michelangelo saw possibility. He saw the angel waiting to be freed.

And this is where his wisdom becomes personally relevant to each of us. That constant chatter in your mind? Those persistent doubts and fears? They’re not the angel. They’re the stone. That voice telling you what you can’t do, shouldn’t try, or will never be? That’s not wisdom—that’s the weight of accumulated thoughts and beliefs that don’t serve your true nature and which need to be chipped away.

The process isn’t about adding something to yourself—another self-help strategy, another life hack, another aspirational identity to grab onto. Those are the very weights turning people’s faces to stone and spirits to dust. Instead, it’s about the art of reduction: carefully removing what isn’t fundamentally you. Each thoughtful subtraction reveals more of your true nature, until what remains is not what you should be, but what you uniquely are.

The world didn’t ask Michelangelo’s David what it wanted to become. The sculpture was always there, waiting to be revealed. So what if you became your own Michelangelo? What if you looked at all the beliefs built up in your memory and asked, “Is this really me? Is this really what I want? Or is this just more unwanted stone to be carved away?”

The angel is in there. It always has been. Your job isn’t to create it—your job is to set it free.

“People often act mechanically, driven by their unconscious programming—the habitual thoughts ingrained in their psyches—rather than their innate wisdom. Like machine-enabled AI, people are trained by society and programmed to pursue various goals—wealth, status, fame, relationships, power, possessions—which are promised to provide security and satisfaction when they never do. They only provide more dissatisfaction, alienation from ourselves, frustration, lack of care and devaluing our values to pursue the false god of ‘stuff’.”

- Tom Asacker

Consciousness, AI and You 10.24.24

“Be in the world, but not of it.” ~ Unknown

Being “in” the world means engaging fully with life—experiencing its joys and sorrows, learning from its wealth of experiences, and absorbing knowledge from various sources, including other people and even AI-generated insights. Not being “of” the world involves maintaining a level of detachment from external prescriptions for how you should live. This includes societal norms, others’ expectations, and, most crucially, the echo of this internalized programming—revealed as the incessant directives of your thinking mind.

True fulfillment comes from turning inward and using your natural intelligence to move you passionately through the world. This involves deep self-reflection, examining your thoughts, feelings, and wants. It means being spontaneous and continuously learning and evolving based on your experiences and new information. Trusting your intuition becomes crucial, as does looking beyond existing data or conventional wisdom. The key lies in taking actions that resonate with your core values, while remaining fully present, free from the distractions of future anxieties or past regrets.

Living your best life is not about finding a perfect formula or following a predetermined path. There isn’t one. It’s a dance of discovery that requires you to be present in the world while maintaining your unique perspective. Your consciousness, unlike an AI’s training data, is not limited to recorded information. It’s shaped by your lived experiences, your felt sense of being, and even connected to a broader universal consciousness in ways we don’t yet fully understand.

Remember, neither an AI with all the world’s knowledge nor another person with their limited perspective can choreograph your life for you. By all means, seek knowledge, ask for advice, and learn from others—but always filter these inputs through your own consciousness, values, and intuition. In doing so, you’ll be truly “in” the world, engaging with it fully, while not being “of” it—maintaining your individuality and creating your own unique interpretation in life’s intricate dance. This balance allows you to leverage the wealth of information and technology available in our modern world, while still living an authentic, conscious life guided by your inner wisdom.

More quotes from Tom:

Mentors are all around us! Some offer advice that we would do well to follow. Some offer advice that help us clarify our values when we decide to not follow it.

To guide our life well, we need to allow ourselves to act in accordance with our inner essence. We must allow ourselves to feel our emotions and adjust / fix their meaning in a way that gives us the space to grow! We must discern and prioritize personal values in a way that resonates with our preferences and deepest desires, while adapting in real time to a changing environment.

Consciousness, the awareness of our thoughts, feelings, and surroundings, is a defining characteristic of human cognition. It’s the subjective experience of being—a phenomenon that has long puzzled philosophers and scientists. This inner awareness allows us to reflect, create, and respond to our environment based on our unique psyches and values.