

AN UNPLANNED
ENCOUNTER
WITH YOURSELF



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SELECTED PREVIEW

An Unplanned Encounter with Yourself

*A journey inward—through identity, relationships, authenticity,
language, and the choices that quietly shape a life.*

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A Compass, Not a Map

This book almost had a different title: *As Above, So Below*. In Polish, the phrase echoes the words ‘as in heaven, so on earth.’ They appear in the Lord’s Prayer, which in Poland even many atheists know by heart. I worried that the title might make this sound like a religious book before the reader had opened the first page.

But the phrase did not begin with Christianity. Its roots reach back to ancient Hermetic thought and the Emerald Tablet, attributed to the legendary Hermes Trismegistus. And although I chose another title, I never quite left those words behind.

In a way, they hold the entire book within them. As above, so below. What lives inside us finds its reflection in the world we see, the choices we make, and the life we gradually create. Hermetic thinkers saw the human being and the universe as reflections of one another. We are shaped by the world, and at the same time, we take part in shaping it.

Every moment of self-awareness, every choice between reaction and calm, stagnation and movement, quietly changes the direction of our lives. We may not notice it when it happens. Often, we recognize it only much later, when we look back and realize that our path has changed. This is also where responsibility begins: in understanding that what happens within us eventually finds its way into how we live.

For some, this is simply cause and effect. For others, it is evidence of a sacred unity. For me, it is the alchemy of everyday life. When I change, my reality changes with me. When I allow myself to see rather than merely look, to listen rather than simply hear, to feel rather than move through life half-awake, I begin to notice more: the grass beneath my feet, a stranger’s smile, the first light of morning. The world has not necessarily changed. But the way I meet it has.

Let me save you some time: this book will change nothing in your life unless you are open to change. You have probably encountered many of the ideas in these pages before. Perhaps you have read them in other books, heard them in conversations, or recognized them for a moment before returning to your usual

life. If none of them has ever stirred anything in you, this book may be no different. Then again, I like being wrong.

Sometimes understanding arrives without warning. A song we have heard hundreds of times suddenly speaks to us as if we were hearing it for the first time. The words have not changed. We have. Meaning reaches us when we are finally ready to receive it.

This book is for those who are searching for meaning and want to understand themselves more deeply, but do not know where to begin. It is for anyone standing at a crossroads, surrounded by questions and unable to find answers that feel true. As I wrote it, I often thought about the person I had been several years earlier. I wrote for that earlier version of myself, hoping that the book I once needed might now find someone in the same place: alone, uncertain, and divided within.

Most books focus on one part of the inner journey. This one brings several of those parts together. It asks not only why we feel, choose, and repeat the things we do, but also how we can begin to live differently. The stories, research, personal reflections, and exercises in these pages are here to help you make sense of the chaos of thoughts and emotions, and then turn that understanding into action.

Think of this book as a compass rather than a map. It cannot choose your destination or walk the road for you. But perhaps it can help you recognize where you are, understand what brought you here, and decide where to go next. Life has a way of leading us toward places we never intended to visit, yet somehow needed to reach. Somewhere between holding on to control and allowing life to unfold, we encounter ourselves.

As you move through these pages, remember that each of us is at a different point in the journey. We see the world through different lenses, shaped by different histories. Take what resonates with you. Leave what does not. And if the words begin to form sentences you feel you have carried in your heart for years, perhaps they are not telling you something new. Perhaps they are helping you recognize what you already knew. The truth may have been within you all along. Ready? Let's begin.

Who Am I Beyond My Social Roles?

People will do anything, no matter how absurd, to avoid facing their own souls. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.

— Carl Jung

Who are you when no one is watching? When the world falls silent and you are left alone with your breathing and the quiet murmur of your thoughts? Who are you when you stop running from the truest version of yourself? What do you do when life slows down and gives you a moment simply to be with yourself—when there is no one to meet, nowhere to go, and nothing to drown out the silence? What do you feel when difficult memories return or something touches an old wound?

It is not easy to stop running. The moment you pause, you may have to face the truths and feelings you have been hiding from for years: mistakes you made, opportunities you missed, dreams you abandoned. Yet this is where release begins—in the stillness that allows what has been buried to be seen and felt. When you stop rushing forward blindly, you may discover that you were never as lost as you imagined. Somewhere within each of us is a place where light meets shadow and old wounds no longer define us. It is there that you begin to find yourself again—not the person the world sees, but the one who has always been waiting for you to stop.

For centuries, philosophers—and later psychologists—have returned to one of the central questions of human existence: Who am I? Their answers differ because they begin from different ideas about what makes us who we are. I see their reflections as signposts rather than final answers. Each of us must find our own response in what we carry within.

More seriously, I see personality assessments as useful tools for describing—and sometimes discovering—our natural tendencies. They can help us choose a direction for growth, especially when we struggle to recognize our own abilities. But a tool that points toward our strengths should not define who we are or set the limits of what we believe we can become. I enjoyed identifying with my results, particularly when they flattered my ego. The danger begins when we allow a description to become a boundary.

When we use “that’s just who I am” to avoid responsibility for behavior that harms us or other people, we lose the chance to understand ourselves more deeply. Maturity begins with recognizing our own destructive patterns and accepting that sometimes the problem lies in what we do. Deep self-awareness, together with a genuine willingness to change, allows us to move closer to the person we want to become.

It takes attention and honesty to accept that who we are is not only the result of inborn tendencies or the conditions in which we grew up. It is also shaped by whom we choose to become, day after day. Often this realization follows a turning point—an experience that leaves us with little choice but to look more closely at ourselves.

Five People

If you want to fly with the eagles, don't paddle around with the ducks.

—T. Harv Eker

If you surround yourself with five confident people, you will become the sixth.

If you surround yourself with five intelligent people, you will become the sixth.

If you surround yourself with five millionaires, you will become the sixth.

If you surround yourself with five idiots, you will become the sixth.

It is said that we are the average of the five people we spend the most time with. As a social species, we are evolutionarily programmed to adapt to the group. We grow and develop through mechanisms of imitation. We take on other people's behaviors, but also their opinions, priorities, and beliefs. This chameleon effect was described by Chartrand and Bargh, who clearly demonstrated that we unconsciously adjust to and adopt the behavior of the people around us. We normalize habits that conflict with our inner moral compass. If most of your friends go out drinking heavily every weekend, sooner or later you will begin to rationalize it.

Nicholas Christakis of Harvard University and James Fowler of the University of California, San Diego, analyzed data tracking the habits of twelve thousand people over thirty-two years. Their conclusions were clear: obesity, smoking, and even feelings of happiness spread through social networks. If your friend gains weight, the likelihood that you will also gain weight increases by 57 percent. The researchers explain this through our natural tendency to adapt to our surroundings. Still not convinced? Try not to yawn when someone beside you yawns.

Our surroundings can either drain our energy or recharge us. Some people will say that there is no point in trying because it will not work anyway,

regardless of the circumstances. After listening for long enough to all the reasons why something is not worth doing, I assume anyone's enthusiasm would begin to fade. There are people you cannot change, and arguing with them is like fighting windmills. I once told an acquaintance that he should try being happy. He replied that he did not want to be disappointed. That sentence ended the entire discussion. So if there is no one in your circle who inspires you, you are not living among friends—you are living in a cage. Choose your friends wisely, and your enemies even more wisely. The people around you not only influence your thoughts and behavior, but also define the range of what feels possible. As Mike Tyson once said, 'Not everyone you fight is your enemy, and not everyone who helps you is your friend.'

Do not let other people's constant complaining distract you. Stay focused on your own path. If your friends have no aspirations, it will be difficult for you to believe that you can climb all the way to the top. According to a popular motivational claim, 95 percent of our professional results depend on the people we speak with regularly. If you earn seven thousand a month and your closest friends earn twelve thousand, there is a good chance that your income will rise too. Why? Because you unconsciously adopt their ambitions, strategies, approach to life, and attitude toward challenges. Some people can breathe new life into us. They can rekindle a fire that was beginning to fade. Some people see more in us than we can see in ourselves. Sometimes someone's presence alone makes us want to try again. These are the people you should look for. Find someone who will be your cheerleader. Surround yourself with people who are hungry for the world, positive, and open to new experiences. You will not only learn from them; you will also want to keep up with them—even if, at first, you came only to sit nearby.

Authenticity: The Key to Freedom

We waste so much energy trying to hide who we truly are, while beneath every pose lies a longing to be loved, beneath every anger a wound asking to be healed, and beneath every sadness the fear that we will run out of time.

Whenever we hesitate to be direct, we unconsciously add another layer of protection that separates us from truly experiencing the world. Often, that thin layer can become the beginning of loneliness, and if we never remove it, it takes away our chance for joy.

It is like wearing gloves every time we touch something. With time, we forget that we put them on ourselves and begin complaining that nothing feels entirely real.

Our daily challenge is not to prepare ourselves to face the world, but to take off the gloves—so that the doorknob feels cold, the car handle damp, and a goodbye kiss like the touch of another living being: soft and singular.

Each of us comes into this world to meet our own soul. The question is: will we show up for that meeting?

As I mentioned earlier, living in alignment with yourself creates the highest vibration—four thousand times stronger than love. But what does it mean to be authentic? Authenticity is not a noisy declaration, but a quiet ‘yes’ whispered to yourself each day. It is a state in which your actions and choices align with a deep sense of your own identity. It is not only honesty with others, but above all loyalty to yourself in the face of outside pressure. It means living in harmony with yourself and your beliefs, so that what you do and say is consistent with the values you hold. You stop pretending—to others and to yourself. You do not disguise your true feelings or convictions, and you are not afraid to express them openly.

Solomon Asch’s 1951 experiment showed that about 75 percent of participants conformed to the group’s incorrect opinion at least once. Today, social media strengthens this mechanism: a 2022 University of Michigan study suggests that 60 percent of young adults modify their online behavior to gain approval. Each of us can probably think of someone whose values we do not

particularly share, yet whose consistency over the years earns our respect. Perhaps this is because being yourself requires courage in a world that constantly tells us we are not enough and endlessly compares us with others. It takes courage to step out of the gray mass and expose yourself to other people's judgment and comments. Authenticity is not a personality trait or a skill reserved for a chosen few. It is a choice—a choice you make every day. A choice about who you want to be, followed by the decision to keep moving in that direction.

Anyone who passes through the fire of self-knowledge may emerge more whole. We meet ourselves not to become flawless, but to become more real. In the rush of ordinary days, all of us sometimes forget our worth. We see ourselves as a collection of failures, stumbles, and careless judgments, while other people notice what remains invisible to us: the spark in our eyes, the way we smile, warmth, humor, or the atmosphere we create. They may feel our energy even when we think our fire is going out. Someone may wish they could love, dream, or delight in life as freely as you do. You may have been an anchor for someone passing through a storm you never even saw. There are strangers whose day you quietly improved with a kind gesture or a sentence. You may not understand how much light you bring. Sometimes you see dusk in yourself while others are watching your dawn. Never forget that your presence can matter.

The Power of Words: How Do They Shape Our Reality?

Words matter enormously in shaping not only our goals, but also our thoughts. Through language, we give form to thought and expression, shaping our patterns of thinking.

I understand the opening of the New Testament to mean that our words act as levers: they name our thoughts, define our goals, and create reality. The way we arrange and verbalize our thoughts has a direct effect on what materializes.

The words we use do more than describe our experience. They also shape the way we interpret it. Saying ‘I have to go to the gym’ makes the activity sound like a burden imposed on us. Saying ‘I choose to go to the gym’ reminds us that the decision is ours. The situation may remain exactly the same, but the language we use can change our relationship with it—from obligation to agency.

‘I am angry that...,’ ‘I am weak at...,’ ‘I am tired...’—phrases we use often in everyday life—cause the brain to encode these statements as traits and conditions, while the body begins to respond accordingly. Neuroscientists describe this as a feedback loop in which words activate neural networks associated with a particular quality and strengthen the way it appears. That is why it is better to say ‘I feel tired’ rather than ‘I am tired,’ emphasizing the temporary nature of the state. Spanish has two forms of the verb ‘to be.’ Both can be used with the same adjectives, but one describes lasting states and stable characteristics, while the other signals that a condition is temporary.

How Does the Language of a Society Shape Thought and Ambition?

Language is not merely a tool of communication. It is also a system for encoding values and expressing a worldview. I speak several languages, and while learning them, I noticed that I assign a different weight to certain words depending on which language I use. This means that the structure of a language influences the way its speakers think.

The brain does not fully distinguish imagination from reality. When we repeat a thought many times, neurons create new connections and reinforce particular patterns. This is how affirmations, which have recently become so popular, are meant to work: positive statements are repeated systematically in order to reprogram subconscious beliefs. The main principles are precision and emotional involvement. It is worth remembering that affirmations must be an authentic expression of your values, not a collection of empty phrases.

Language is a kind of matrix that shapes our neurochemistry. Every ‘I can’t do it’ adds another brick to a wall of limitation. Every ‘I’ll try’ builds a bridge toward new possibilities. In Polish, for example, money is *zarabiane*—earned through work—which tells the brain that obtaining it requires labor. In English, we make money: money is made, a phrase with a different implication, suggesting decisive action rather than arduous work. There is no time to waste. In Spanish, the expression is *ganar dinero*. The verb *ganar* also means to win or gain: something is here today and may be gone tomorrow. If you know Spaniards, you may have noticed that their attitude toward money often reflects this. They do not become too attached to it, and flaunting wealth tends to be frowned upon.

Economist Keith Chen explored whether the way languages speak about the future might be connected to the way people prepare for it. He observed that speakers of languages in which the future is expressed less distinctly from the present tended to save more, make more future-oriented financial decisions, and take better care of their health. This does not mean that language alone determines our behavior. It may, however, subtly influence how close—or how distant—the future feels to us. When tomorrow feels connected to today, taking care of it may come more naturally.

I have offered these examples not only to show how important this subject is, but also to encourage you to examine some of the phrases you use every day. Perhaps you rely on sentences that unconsciously limit you by imposing negative associations. Question familiar linguistic clichés and rephrase the expressions you use, replacing them with ones that serve you better. Choose words that build rather than destroy. And learn foreign languages—each new language is a new system of thought.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

What if meeting yourself changed the way you meet life?

*The complete English-language edition explores self-awareness,
relationships, authenticity, courage, habits, choice, and the life we
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