

The background of the cover is a white canvas with several large, expressive brushstrokes. A prominent horizontal stroke in a vibrant blue color spans across the upper third of the page. Below it, there are several grey brushstrokes of varying thickness and direction, some overlapping the blue one. The overall effect is one of fluid, organic movement, consistent with the title 'Let It Flow'.

YACOOB MANJOO

LET IT FLOW

poems and reflections

LET IT FLOW

poems and reflections

By Yacoob Manjoo

This document is provided as a sampler of the full book,
which is available in electronic format. See the final page of this document for
more information.

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Yacoob Manjoo asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

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Preface

From an early age, I loved reading. It was my favourite pastime: the thrill of delving into other worlds...the words on a page coming to life. Naturally, this progressed to an affinity for creative writing. Teachers would compliment my work and encourage me to write outside of school. Though I appreciated those kind words, I didn't see myself pursuing it as a career. I believed that a writer's livelihood depended on inspiration and creativity – gifts which I couldn't take for granted. So, at the age of seven, the threat of writer's block killed what may have become a career in writing.

Creativity, and the love of reading and writing, later withered away, as I grew, and futile adolescent obsessions consumed me. I wrote only when forced – dull and uninspired school assignments.

This trend continued into university, until a personal turning point changed my life forever. It also served as a catalyst for my introspective side to resurface – putting me on a path of self-expression: a state of being where I was free to let loose what I held inside. Encouraged by a writer friend, this creative rebirth spawned poetry. I was amazed at how these expressions needed no thought. They just came to me...they *flowed through me*, onto the page. It was all so easy: the words, the sentence construction, the metaphors and similes... everything...everything was just *there*. My feelings, thoughts, dreams, fears...it all poured out of me, cathartically. I didn't stop to edit. I didn't let my left-brain tendencies stifle the creative process. I just let loose whatever needed to be released.

My words found a public home on the blog I started, and as the writer inside me grew in confidence, I became more willing to share my inner self with others.

The collection before you serves as a creative timeline – bringing together my most significant written expressions from my twenties and thirties. Most have appeared on the blog, although some previously-unpublished works are also included.

The book is divided into three sections:

1. Poetic outpourings on life's journey
2. The quest for love and marriage, and what came after
3. Reflections on life

I hope that you enjoy the contents of this book and take benefit from it.

Thank you for sharing this journey with me.

Yacoob

2019

1. Journeying through Life

Rooftops



I like rooftops because they are freedom.

Every building has one,
and every person knows this –
yet most don't give it a second thought.
They don't know what lies above.

A world of freedom,
an escape from human-kind.
The biggest wide-open space in existence:
unobstructed sky,
endless horizons,
indistinguishable layers
expertly constructed
by the Builder of all things.

I once had a rooftop,
spacious and remote from everything,
a favourite getaway spot;
where the sun would kiss my face,
the breeze would pass my presence,
and all around,
peace prevailed in the quiet, undisturbed air.

Mountains in the distance,
oceans on the sides,
thoughts of what lay beyond
those distant waters.

What far-away lands existed out there:
adventures to live through,
sights to capture for the very first time.

Worlds beyond my own,
experience beyond my expectations.

From my perch,
way up above the bustling population,
I saw beyond:
beyond my own walls,
beyond my inhibitions,
beyond *me*;
All that could be,
if I dared venture out.

I like rooftops,
for they give space to my dreams.

Allow these inner eyes to explore,
And ignite in me the thought
of what could be.

Date written: June 2008

Memories of a Past Life



Warm days
spent playing in the garden.
Oblivious to time,
free of all responsibilities.

Childhood
in its purest form.

It felt like every day was sunny – no matter the season.
The weather always good...
No differentiation
between summer and winter,
and everything in between.

It took a song to teach me
the order of the seasons,
because to me,
those names didn't matter.

What *was* important was when school holidays were coming,
especially December –
the longest annual escape
from the educational imprisonment called “school”.

My very first home:
a small and humble one bedroom flat,
nestled in the rolling hills
that would be the backdrop to my formative years.

Mangos and litchis
(neither of which I ate),
jungle-like back yards,
troublesome monkeys,
not to mention the famous Indian Mynah.

1987 brought huge floods:
the Umgeni River bursting its banks;
many unable to travel due to the chaos.

My second home:
a fortress of sorts.
Massive to me;
Multiple levels which held both adventure and terror:
the prospect of nights alone,
along with the creatures (and imaginary robbers) that may invade my space.

My refuge under the dining room table:
a spot where I'd hide when upset,
feeling injustice at how I'd been treated,
running away from everyone,
to wallow in my pain and soak in my sorrow.

Walking with my aunty and cousin to nursery school,
where the leftovers of a clothing factory
would make up swords and other creative toys.
Little minds on the way to big futures.

One term at an Indian junior school,
where I quickly made friends,
who tied my shoelace when I could not,
accompanied me in the schoolyard –
outsmarting the prefects
who didn't take kindly to our ingenuity,
and unjustly banned our attempted rebellion.

Moving to another school:
a place of privilege,
where I felt out of place,
both in colour and personality.
Embarrassed that I'd be dropped off in a delivery van,
while others came in a Ferrari.

It's not that they were *better* than me,
but more the feeling of being out of place:
barely another of the same pigmentation,
in a time when Apartheid was on its way out.

One friend in seven years.
Deeply embedded in an alien environment,
which I so wish to avoid for my own kids.

Happier times, though,
when surrounded by my own people.
Family and the few friends I had.

Saturday night movies at The Wheel;
Occasional adventures at The Workshop;
Shopping expeditions to The Pavilion;
Delicious chocolate cakes in Overport City;
and the ever-present Musgrave Centre,
which was core to my existence in later years.

Its library was my first port of call for school projects:
research via catalogue cards and paper books,
photocopying endless pages of relevance.

A far cry from the instant access available to today's kids
with the tap of a screen.

One day internationals and test matches at Kingsmead Cricket Stadium.
The excitement of foreign teams returning to our shores
after years of isolation.

Sun, surf, and the big sea;
Capital Radio,
a constant soundtrack to my early years.

The Blue Lagoon;
The city centre;
Wimpy, Jolly Grubber, Talk of the Town,
and other takeaways...
our weekly culinary highlight.

Karate on Saturday mornings:
hard work made bearable
by handball or rounders afterwards.

Terrifying gradings:
gashkus in the presence of Lao Tze Bob,
who was the biggest monster to us all –
though his harsh discipline was not without wisdom.

Sunday morning runs at Greyville Racecourse,
followed by a trip to Game City for eighty cent cooldrinks...
how drastically the price has changed.

Also on Sundays,
squash at the top of the Royal Hotel;
endless hours of tennis at Berea Park;
informal cricket matches there, too,
with all the seriousness of an international fixture.

Backyard soccer and tennis;
sweet treats after hours of exertion.

The beachfront,
with its bumper cars and pools,
rickshaws and rides,
including those red cable cars,
suspended high above the earth,
feeding my fear of heights.

The pier,
stretching out far into the water:
the feeling of standing over the Indian Ocean,
saved only by concrete blocks under your feet.
Holding firm for decades,
yet vulnerable to collapse
in an instant.

My third home:
the place where I still live
when my dream life takes me back to Durban.

Century-old foundations,
sturdy wooden floors,
light fittings that rattled every time a car drove past,
bumping its tunes loud enough to be a public broadcaster.

(Occasionally) taking out the garbage on Sunday nights,
scared of the maggots that had gathered
in those dreadful black bags,
which also held the prospect
of other unpleasant creatures that may have settled inside.

My first colour computer:
hours and hours spent
playing Jonty Rhodes Cricket,
Championship Manager,
and all the other games that so occupied me back then.

The wonders of Internet access at home:
a lengthy extension cord

plugged into a dial-up modem;
that familiar sound every time
I attempted to connect,
hoping there would be an available slot on the exchange.
Then experiencing a world of possibilities online –
some of which were far from wholesome
(though perfectly normal for a teenage boy).

My awesome Lego collection:
a cricket stadium being the crowning achievement of junior construction.

Walls plastered with posters of sports stars.
A CD drawer that filled up quickly,
as my addiction to music flourished
in that very room of mine.

Dedicated Gameboy sessions.
Piles and piles
of soccer, cricket, and tennis magazines;
not to mention Disney Adventures.

M-Net movies;
snippets of KTV;
and the endless sitcoms
which were the highlight of a regulated TV schedule.

The first day of High School:
intense social anxiety,
not fitting in at first,
but eventually finding comfort within a group of peers.

Classroom cricket in the Riccitelli Oval:
a highlight of our mornings.
Along with “checking” my friend’s homework
when I hadn’t done my own.

The enduring terrors of P.E. –
swimming remaining my nemesis.

Sports days at the university fields:
sarcastic replies
to spirited chants of support for the athletes.

The horrors
of high school Maths and Science,
balanced with the comfort of History in a small class –
the special ones,
who saw value in the subject,
and gained so much more
than simply learning facts and figures.

1994 elections:
a week off school,
stoked by fears of violence,
in the days when the masses came out
to vote for the very first time.

Doc Martens a must-have;
lollipops in the back of class;
drinking fizzy drinks
through holes poked in the can;
a tuckshop I never quite made use of;
and the vending machine that stared at me daily,
as I waited to be fetched after school.

Crocodile clips and hydrochloric acid,
the wonders of phosphorus out of a jar;
circuit boards and Bunsen Burners –
the fun side of Science.

Drama lessons
at the neighbouring convent school up the hill.

Berg winds and scorching Durban heat.
A peaceful view of the ocean
from my Standard Six classroom window:
especially serene on a Friday afternoon,

when we would be released
after a week of confinement.

Tennis after school,
along with cricket practice,
and the occasional match –
though I was never considered good enough for the more important teams.

Putting my hand through an old window,
being calmed with sugar water
(which I didn't need).

The headmaster rushing me off to hospital.
The most painful medical experience ever:
injections and stitches
in the very centre of a fresh wound.

The attempted hijacking after school one day:
a near death experience
which transformed my father's life,
yet had little effect on mine.
Trauma counselling held no value to me,
for it was only the first night,
and first few days,
that fear lingered over me.

The court appearance later that year:
having to face the suspect in person,
unable to testify in camera because the facilities were unavailable.

Our Matric jerseys,
together with the traditional war cry in the middle of the Quad:
reminding the school of who we were.
I never participated much... public displays of status holding no value for me.

Free periods in the library,
spent reading nonsense on the Internet.

Studying for,
then writing,

Matric finals,
at a nearby hall.
My wobbly desk secured by folded paper under one of the legs.

My final exam,
coming the day before my eighteenth birthday.
But a death in the family that very same day:
the demise of my school career,
coinciding with the earthly demise of an uncle who had taught me much,
though I never really valued him while he was with us.

Ramadaan through that summer;
anxiety about exam results,
then finally getting the news that January morning:
doing better than I'd expected,
and choosing to leave the comforts of home,
and make the move to Cape Town.

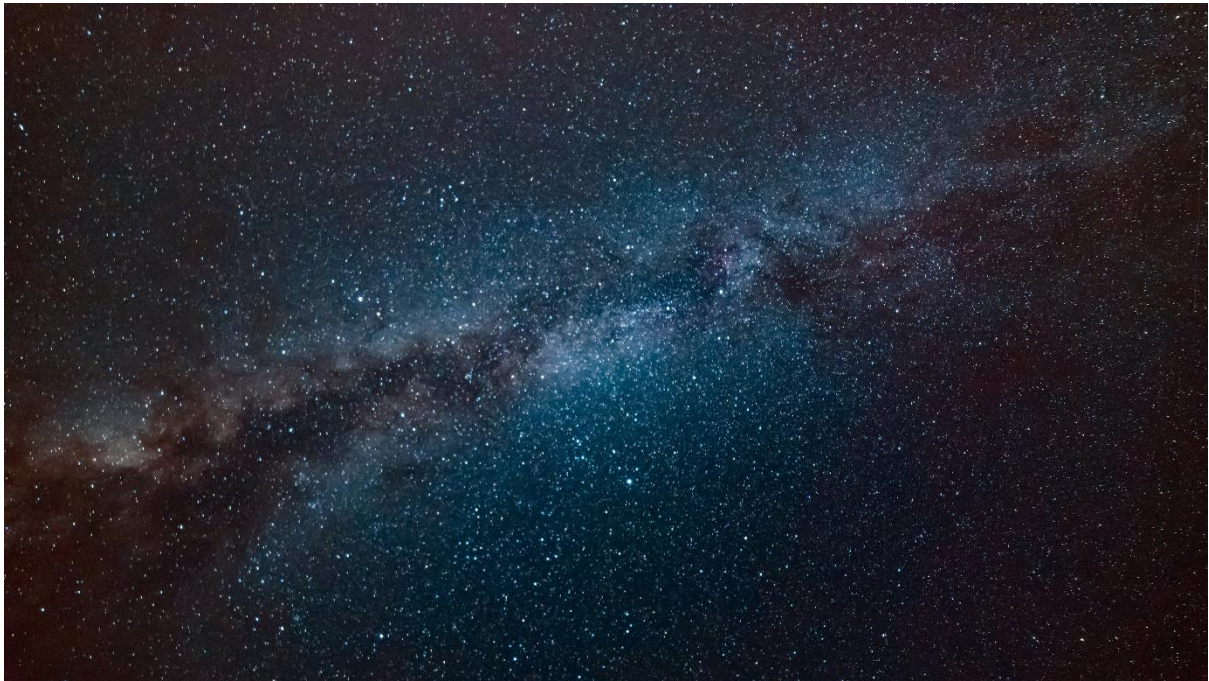
Learning to cook over those last few weeks,
before embarking on what would effectively become a one-way journey.

For I never returned to my home city as a resident...
but always as a visitor.

And though those visits are now few and far between,
my memories and sentimental love have not faded.
For in this heart and mind of mine,
Durban will always remain
Home.

Date written: November 2016

Thoughts at 37,000 Feet



Starry, starry night,
hanging majestically over the Earth.
Adorning our night sky
with beautiful, radiant light.
Beacons of serendipity,
within the dark canvas
that stretches over this Sahara Desert.

I observe this from within the man-made metal bird.
A wonder – in itself:
how something so heavy,
so filled with people, luggage...*things*,
glides through this thin, cold air,
In the early hours of another day.

Inside,
the people slumber:
wrapped in their blankets,
souls no longer with us –
having departed

for the unknown destinations
our inner beings visit each night.

Oblivious to the wonder
of the night sky
just outside this temporary dwelling we share.

Some have put themselves to sleep watching movies,
others are drowning their consciousness in music,
while the wise among us read a book to pass the time.

Or perhaps,
the few,
have spent part of this night
in remembrance of their Creator.
In prayer,
and reciting of His book –
a time undisturbed,
where we're confined to this space,
without the distraction of the outside world –
though the spectre of entertainment
remains with us –
always available
to divert our attention
from that which benefits our souls, hearts, and minds.

As we fly over scattered civilisations,
illuminated with their orange lights,
I marvel at the vastness of our planet:
so many different cultures, languages, and people,
each living through its own set of joys and pains,
independent –
yet sometimes meeting each other;
living separate – yet connected – lives;
for we're all one:
one species,
on one Earth,

under one sky,
under the loving gaze of One Creator.

And One Day,
we'll all be together:
gathered in one place,
for a day with one purpose.

And on that Day,
I wonder
if I'll remember this moment,
these thoughts,
and these companions...

all pieces
of a short episode,
lived and observed
at 37,000 feet.

Date written: December 2018

2. The Quest...and what came after

Reliance

(For the single people out there)

They tell you to be patient.
They say your time will come:
what is meant to be will be.

And all that lies between now and then
is a trial of faith,
a lesson in patience,
a revelation of your ultimate reliance on the One.

You seek that which, you feel, will complete your heart;
complement your mind;
bring lasting comfort to your soul.

You wish for the bond of love and tranquillity,
placed between your hearts.
You yearn for the one who will be a garment to you,
and you fulfilling the same blessed purpose for them.

You dream of a future –
a life no longer alone.
A companion to share with you all the ecstasy and agony you will face
within life's journey.
Someone who will walk with you,
side by side,
hand in hand,
down the beautiful path that leads back the One to Whom we belong,
the One to Whom is our return.

And though you will face that Day alone,
your bond – and all its manifestations – gives you hope that,
together, you were each other's helping hand.

You encouraged what was good,
and fought what was evil.

You had a common goal – a beautiful goal;
and the support of each other was your safety net:
 you had a home in their arms,
 and when they held you,
 nothing could harm you.

For you were right where you were destined to be,
wrapped in the love of the one who you held so dear,
and the two of you,
wrapped in the Love of the One Who brought your souls into existence,
then shaped you over time –
through pain and joy,
preparing you for the pure, everlasting union that was always in existence –
though you did not know it
until it came to your senses:
 manifested itself in front of your eyes.

He alone, you worshipped;
He alone, you asked for help.

And though, at times, you grew frustrated,
wondering when the help would come;
when it would be your turn –
in truth, His Help was always there.

It was just for you to accept –
with your heart and your mind,
beyond the superficial rhetoric –
that everything has its appointed time.

So on that Day,
as you stand before Him,
you do so in the knowledge that your lives –
your souls –
though beginning separated,
were brought together at the appointed time.

And all that came before was not a waste.
On the contrary, it was a treasure chest:
a collection of thoughts, feelings, experiences;
all part of your preparation.

Yet you did not see it that way,
in your haste to attain that which you so cherished.

But the past has passed, and all is put into perspective now.

And though we cannot conceive what awaits us in the Hereafter
– for Paradise begins where the imagination ends –
we know who we wish to share it with.

So, look past the immediacy of these moments without them;
and remember what awaits you in your future.

Take lessons from the past.
Be thankful for the present.
Be hopeful for the future.

Seek help in patience and prayer;
ask of Him Who is of infinite bounty.

Tell Him all that you fear,
all that you dream of,
all that you want;

Open up to Him and pour out every ounce of the hurt you feel.
Let it all go.

For when you have done so...when your troubles have been released,
you will be brought back to the truth and comfort
of your ultimate reliance on the One:
your Eternal Companion; closer than you can imagine.

Keep the faith, always.

Date written: April 2007

Ponderances of an Expectant Father

You never really know the reality of a situation until you go through it yourself. You can do your research, and hear from others about their experiences and what to expect. But you never really *feel* it. You won't really know it until you live it yourself.

I remember, a few years ago, a discussion with some fellow bloggers. We were all single, and discussing marriage. Each of us had our ideas, our dreams and ideals, as well as our warnings – lessons we learnt from others who had been down that road and faced problems. We had aspirations for the lives we wanted to live when we finally stepped into that (hopefully) eternal union with another.

But we knew that until we actually got to that stage in life, we were just hypothesising.

I'm now almost a year and a half into marriage, and those days are a distant memory. I barely remember what those years *felt* like – let alone the intensity of those feelings.

And today, as I stand so comfortably established in this now not-so-new life, the coming months bring with them the promise of a further step forward, God-willing. After being so settled for what felt like a long time, the natural progression from one state of life to another continues: from singledom to marriage, and now onto parenthood.

From what I gather, the next step is all about **sacrifice**. Because, with this new arrival, my life will no longer be my own. I think of the vast demands involved in being a parent. I think of what a parent is: what they give to their children; what they give *up* for their children; what they do for their children; the natural instinct they have to do anything to make their children happy.

And I wonder – selfish as I may be – whether that's something that will come naturally to me. Will I just automatically become selfless? Or will it take years to learn? Will I ever be as giving, loving, or amazing as my own parents were (and still are) with me?

I guess it's only a matter of time until I find out. (Roughly four months, at this stage.)

And while the world seems to be in ever-increasing turmoil nowadays – with the financial crisis, environmental problems, and occasional social anarchy (the levels of crime in this country) – I wonder whether being a parent in these times will be more difficult than it was in the past.

I recall a statement by the great Islamic personality Ali: “Do not raise your children the way your parents raised you. They were born for a different time.”

Witnessing the progressive deterioration of our world, it's easy to see how relevant that advice is. But I wonder whether we – the parents-to-be – are even capable of *matching* the upbringing we had.

Sure, we have ideas about how we want our raise our kids. But, just like the pre-marriage discussions I had years ago, we're only hypothesising. We don't know what it'll be like. We *can't* know...until it happens.

All we can do is try to prepare, and try to make sure our foundations are strong so that, God-willing, we can face whatever comes our way and be successful.

And, no matter what situation you're faced with, the best foundation is faith. Faith, accompanied by patience.

The ride hasn't yet started, and it doesn't feel real to me yet. But once it does begin, I hope we'll be well strapped in and ready to endure the ups and downs, and enjoy the adventures to come.

Date written: March 2009

She Flaps

She flaps
her chubby little arms in excitement,
like she wants to take off –
my little birdie,
trapped inside a human body.

She slaps
arms, knees, skin –
whatever takes her fancy,
and she's thrilled about it;
the kind of raw excitement a grown-up will probably never know again.

She babbles
incoherent sounds and noises –
the makings of words,
the beginning of her next form of communication.

She screams
loud enough for the neighbours to hear;
straining her lungs to give it all she's got –
like a little lioness,
discovering the depth of her roar.

She wants to eat
everything we eat,
giving us that look of expectation every time we have a meal in front of her;
as if she's part of the event,
waiting for her portion –
even if she's just had her own food minutes ago.

She whines
when she wants attention,
as if being left alone for five seconds means we've abandoned her;
and she won't stand for it,
not even for a minute.

She hides
under the sheet,
innocently believing I don't know where she is –
and when I find her,
she explodes with joy,
amused that I play along
in her little game of peek-a-boo.

She giggles
in the cutest way I've ever heard –
laughing hysterically when she's in her hyper-energetic stage of the day;
when any silly noise or tickle
will set her off.

She vomits
at pretty much any time of day –
remnants of the reflux that so plagued her
in her days of infancy;
but nowadays,
it doesn't smell quite so harmless.

She smiles at me
when I come home,
and she gets to play with someone else;
giving me a brief moment of feeling so loved by this innocent being,
even though it quickly disappears as we settle down to playtime.

She fights
to keep awake,
as if something is not perfect,
and she won't drift off until we fix it –
yet not long after,
she melts away
into that precious, peaceful slumber
which gives her – and us – rest after the long day of activity.

She's ours
to love and cherish,
care for and guide through these childhood years –
a responsibility so great and tiring,
yet replete with moment after moment
of joy, happiness, and tremendous blessings.

She's my baby,
and she's the most beautiful gift I've ever received.

Date written: March 2010

Summer Daze



The last day of the year,
in the heart of a South African summer.
I'm at work now, but this time of year brings back fleeting memories
of childhood summers gone by:

Hours and hours in the back yard playing soccer and cricket.
Still more hours on the tennis courts,
pushing ourselves to the limits in best-of-5-set matches –
with the end reward being an ice-cold drink,
plus chocolate cake to accompany it.

Sunny Durban days are the enduring memory of my past life.
Those school holidays where responsibilities were non-existent,
and pleasures were all we lived for:
Movies, video games, staying up late.
Not a care in the world,
until the looming dread of the new school year crept back into our thoughts.

Stationery and uniforms;
haircuts and shining those shoes for the first day back...

Oh, the horrors of educational imprisonment:
early morning rising to get to school on time,
assemblies and new timetables,
finding out whose class we'd be in –
wishing to be with our friends,
who shared the struggle with us –
making the torturous daylight hours more bearable.

Science lessons and Maths tests
(the latter of which still haunts my dreams),
academic pressures and extra-curricular bothers...

School was never a 'home away from home' for me,
yet those years –
while stifling my freedom within the system –
gave rise to the foundations of adult life,
and provided the best memories.

And now,
as my own child approaches her first year of 'back to school',
I feel the dread for her.
I know the anxiety she'll face over the years.
Yet somehow, some way,
I'll need to put a bright face on it all,
so that she can be more positive than I,
and enjoy her coming occupation in ways I never did.

For just as she'll face the seemingly never-ending grind of school life –
year after year –
so too will these years be the platform for her future,
and her treasure chest of precious childhood memories.

School doesn't last forever,
nor does childhood.
But while we're young,
we live through both –
a microcosm of life,
perhaps,
good and bad – all mixed together.

So, my child,
appreciate both sides,
take it all in,
and then move on to the adulthood that awaits
beyond these endless summers of youth.

Date written: December 2013

3. Reflections

Halfway to Seventy



Today is my birthday. I'm now thirty-five.

It's a big number, but it's inconsequential to me at this time.

In my early years, because of my physical aversion to fruit and vegetables, I believed I'd be dead by 21. That thought was probably planted in my head by people who believed they could scare me into eating fruits: if I didn't have any, the lack of vitamins and nutrients would cause a rapid decline in my future. But I didn't care. Death was not a worry back then. And 21 seemed far, far away.

And now I sit here, bang in the middle of my 30s – five years after a critical formational period (my 20s), and five years before that magical age of maturity (40). And I don't feel young, nor do I feel old. Truth be told, age really hasn't made much difference to me for quite a while.

Psychologically, at least.

Physically, I've seen the results of a slowing metabolism – with little will to reverse or even fight the outward consequences.

In terms of maturity, I've felt incremental gains over the last few years. Wisdom has, I hope, come in bits and pieces, and I'm no longer as selfish, judgemental, and narrow-minded as I once was. But there are still plenty of character flaws, and much work to still be done: constant refinements to a self that will never be perfect. I have to strive to improve all the time.

As for where I am in life, I've never been one to set time-related targets...or indeed, targets at all. Call me unambitious, fearful of the future, or just plain lazy – but I don't do benchmarks. I don't do 5 or 10-year plans. And maybe that's why I haven't really achieved much...in the worldly sense.

I sometimes come across the online profiles of people I went to school with. Guys that have risen to the top of their fields: executives, managers, and other prominent positions. They're climbing that corporate ladder and finding success. Back in junior school, I was academically superior to most of them. But that counts for nothing, because ambition, opportunity, and – most of all – hard work, leads people to accomplishment. And good for them.

But I've never had career ambitions. I've never been motivated by wealth or material success, because – thank God – I come from a financially stable background, where poverty was never a threat (for most of my life, at least). On the other side, though, I've never been motivated by wanting to change the world, or be some other kind of large-scale transformative force. I've always been pretty self-focussed, though that has changed tremendously over the last decade: marriage, and then children, have largely moved me from my natural tendency to think of myself first.

Do I feel like a failure? Mediocre? Average?

If I dwell on things, perhaps. But my wife shared some encouraging insights with me a few weeks back, as we talked about where we are in life, and where we've come from. And I realised that I should never compare myself to others, because we all have different paths. Some have excelled in the worldly sense, while others have done so spiritually. The rare few seem to have hit the jackpot by finding great balance between *both sides*.

But looks can be deceiving. They've all had their own struggles. And they *still* have struggles. Nobody looking from the outside knows the challenges they battle with every single day. We only see the outward appearance of success and contentment. But in their hearts, and in their minds, each of them – and every human being – faces raging internal battles.

In the end, the only measure of success is where you stand in the eyes of your Lord. A measure which none of us can gauge, because it's an attribute unseen to our earthly eyes.

I also need to step back and look at the bigger picture: how I see myself now, how I feel, and what I think I have and haven't achieved. All of that is not isolated and confined to this moment in time. Ten years from now, where will I be? These little challenges now – will they contribute towards positive character development, and lessons learned? Or will they be marks of failing and regret? Both of which would still be positive, because mistakes and hard times teach us more than 'success' and good times.

It reminds me of a saying of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

“Amazing is the affair of the believer. Verily, all of his affairs are good, and this is for no one except the believer. If something of good/happiness befalls him, he is grateful, and that is good for him. If something of harm befalls him, he is patient, and that is good for him.”

Maybe I'm coming across as melancholy and disappointed at my station in life. But that's not at all the case. I guess I just express myself in more negative terms as opposed to positives, because I'm not a naturally-optimistic person.

But in all honesty, aside from the irritations of life, and the challenges I'm not fighting hard enough, I really feel quite content with where I am.

That said, I hope that the coming years will bring an accelerated pace of development and goodness, because by the time I hit 40 – if I make it that far – I hope I'll be contributing much more to the world, and doing a lot better in all the areas I aspire to improve in.

Date written: November 2015

Try



When I was very young, I was always afraid of the water. At the beach, I'd cling to my father – fearing the waves would wash me away into the endless ocean, never to be found again...even though we'd only stand in shallow waters.

Then came school, where swimming was a regular activity for our PE class. I'd be terrified – always getting special concession to hold the side of the pool, using that wall as my crutch to go a little at a time...never confident I could make it by myself. The safety net was always nearby.

School galas were a time of special terror for me. Everyone had to swim in at least one race, but I got so anxious that I'd often get physically sick near gala time – so I didn't participate.

But still, my mother persevered – wanting me to learn to swim. I went for private lessons, being bribed with sweet treats. Family friends had pools, and I'd spend time in the water there.

But even through all this, I'd still doubt my ability to tread water. I would imagine myself stranded at sea – either as a result of a plane crash over water, or falling off a boat...with no one and nothing to help. My only means of survival would be the lifeline of treading water. And I knew I wouldn't make it. I wasn't strong enough.

But I was still required – by school, and my mother – to keep trying. To keep going for lessons. To keep partaking in our weekly PE lessons in the school pool – even if I was always the one with the ‘disability’.

A moment is all it takes

And then, one afternoon at a family friend’s house, I was alone in the pool: attempting to swim up and down the width of the shallow end – using the wall as security, of course.

All of a sudden, it clicked. Something just clicked.

I could do it. I could swim. Without holding the wall.

I was amazed. Giddy with excitement.

I ran to tell my mother – beaming with pride. At that point, it was one of the greatest moments of my life: suddenly being able to swim, after a lifetime (albeit a short lifetime) of struggling with lack of ability and zero confidence.

And I didn’t know how it happened. How did I just ‘get it’, all of a sudden? And, why then?

Life lesson

Only now do I realise the truth: we have no ability to do *anything* at all. It is the Almighty that gives us ability – within limits – but we perceive it as our own actions. For example, our own inherent ability to do something even as simple as walking or talking. Yet how many people – with disabilities – cannot do even those ‘simple’ things?

Allah is *Al-Fattah* – the Opener. When He wants to open the doors to something, He does – effortlessly for Him, though it may seem impossible for us.

But Allah also has a sunnah – a tried and tested practical set of rules for this physical world:

“And that there is not for man except that [good] for which he strives.”
(Quran 53:39)

All those years, through all those moments of frustration and sadness...tears of inability and lack of confidence – He put forces in my life to keep me trying. To keep me persevering. And though I had absolutely no expectation of ever being able to swim – to succeed in this aquatic endeavour which was unnatural for my land-loving legs – He kept me trying.

And then, in an instant, He opened that door – that ability.

It was no miracle. No accident. No freak of nature.

It was all part of His plan. Evidence – to my young self – that when you keep trying, eventually you are bound to succeed.

What are *your* challenges?

It's weird that I only realised all of this now...some 30-odd years later. I never really looked for the lessons behind it before, but that lesson suddenly became clear at this advanced stage in life.

Why now?

I don't know. But the Almighty applies wisdom in teaching us, so there is a reason why this epiphany hit me now.

Maybe I'll need to apply it in something else I'm struggling with. Or maybe it'll be a critical life lesson to pass onto my kids for some of *their* challenges.

Or maybe it was just intended for me to share with others: for some (not so) random reader on the other side of the world to come across, realise it applies to one of his/her seemingly-insurmountable obstacles, and take encouragement to keep on keeping on.

Nothing in this world happens by accident. There's no such thing as a random event. Everything has a purpose – a set time, place, and context.

So, whatever you're facing, never give up, and never lose hope.

Keep on trying. You never know when that door will open for you.

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This document is provided as a sampler of the full book – which contains 36 poems and 16 reflections. The printed version is planned for 2020, while the e-book is available immediately from the following locations:

- [Amazon Kindle](#)
- [Google Play Books](#)
 - [Apple Books](#)
- [Barnes & Noble](#) (Nook)
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