



Craig Constantine

PRACTICING REFLECTION

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My intention is to show you how to develop the skill of personal, self-reflection. This little book is based upon a series of posts which appeared daily on my blog at the start of 2021. Each of the following pages carries a thought meant to prompt reflection and my ideas about learning to be more reflective. I hope you find this useful, that it brings you some small measure of peace, and leads you towards self-compassion.

Interested? <https://constantine.name/>

DAY 1: WHERE TO BEGIN?

My intention is to show you how to develop the skill of personal, self-reflection. I am excited that you are joining me for a journey of small steps!

It took me many years to develop my personal habit and routines around reflection. On my blog, I've written a lot about the changes I've attempted in my journey of self-improvement, including a post in particular detailing what my morning reflection looks like. However, I'm not going into great detail of my habits and routines.

What are you thinking right now, after reading that paragraph?

(Sit with that question for a bit.)

What do you think about what I wrote?

Are you curious to know my story in more detail?

What do you think about being reflective?

Are you curious to know more about yourself?

Whatever you're thinking, that's perfect.

What you're going to do, is practice being reflective. You've done the easy part: You've decided to practice.

(That's all for today.)

DAY 2: WHY SELF-FOCUS?

In this, our journey of small steps, reflection means self-reflection. That requires self-focus.

When you are self-focused—I'm talking about the small time you're using right now to read this—you are the most important person in the universe.

You focus on you. I focus on me. They focus on themselves. Each of us self-reflects.

We know that other people are not resources for our consumption. It turns out that the best way to change the world... to be happy, to serve others, to be fulfilled... is to work on improving ourselves. Then we can each best do whatever it is we're called to do.

Our experienced universe is not zero-sum. That means that it is possible for me to improve myself without causing other's loss. In fact, my self-improvement improves the world. My relationships with others are a part of myself. Improving myself improves my relationships, which—since those relationships are also part of others—directly improves the people with whom I am interrelated.

DAY 3: HOW TO PRACTICE

For each of these prompts, grant yourself 2 minutes for self-reflection. One-hundred-and-twenty seconds.

Pause life.

Read.

Think.

Resume life.

The prompts will be hit and miss; some will resonate with you and ring your thoughts as a beautiful bell. Some will fall flat leaving you to think I'm daft. Never you mind that.

Pause life.

Read.

Think.

Resume life.

Let's guess that you have 37 seconds remaining of today's 2 minutes. For today's "Think", please count slowly to 37. ...yes, stop reading now, and count to 37.

Resume life.

DAY 4

AM I AN ENERGY-GIVER OR -TAKER? — Strive to lift others up; to leave them feeling better than before the encounter. While being mindful of my own energy level, seek ways to create a zest for life in others.

Remember: 2 minutes. Pause life. Read. Think. Resume life.

DAY 5

BECOME MINDFUL OF ATTACHMENTS THAT LEAD TO CLUTTER AND COMPLEXITY — “For example, if you are attached to sentimental items, you won’t be able to let go of clutter. If you are attached to living a certain way, you will not be able to let go of a lot of stuff. If you are attached to doing a lot of activities and messaging everyone, your life will be complex.” ~ Leo Babauta

Many of the prompts I’m sharing have been chosen from the generous gifts given me by others. When I’m explicitly quoting, they are attributed (as above.)

DAY 6

PERSPECTIVE — “In the meanwhile, while they are robbing and being robbed, while they disrupt each other’s repose and make one another miserable, life remains without profit, without pleasure, without moral improvement. No one keeps death in view, everyone focuses on remote hopes. Some even make posthumous provisions—massive sepulchures, dedications of public buildings, gladiatorial shows, and pretentious obsequies. But the funerals of such people should be conducted by torch and taper light, as though they had in fact died in childhood.” ~ Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life*

2 minutes: Pause life. Read. Think. Resume life.

DAY 7

TEMPERANCE — “Eat not to dullness; Drink not to elevation.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

Perhaps you’ve already begun to look forward to your two minutes of reflection?

DAY 8

BE PROACTIVE — “While the word proactivity is now fairly common in management literature, it is a word you won’t find in most dictionaries. It means more than merely taking initiative. It means that as human beings, we are responsible for our own lives. Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions. We can subordinate feelings to values. We have the initiative and the responsibility to make things happen.” ~ Stephen Covey

2 minutes: Pause life. Read. Think. Resume life.

DAY 9

LOOK INWARD — “Everybody is too busy with their own lives to give a damn about your book, painting, screenplay, etc., especially if you haven’t sold it yet. And the ones that aren’t [too busy], you don’t want in your life anyway.” ~ Jason Korman

Have you considered adding some physical ritual to your reflection? Perhaps taking three deep, slow breaths before the reading, or ... If you decide to try something, don’t go crazy; just something very small and easy. Or not. That’s fine too.

DAY 10

AM I LIKELY TO "ACT" OR "REACT" TO A TASK? — Seek the reason for the task so that it may motivate me to proper action. Otherwise, determine how to eliminate or avoid the task entirely. Do or do not; there is no try.

2 minutes: Pause life. Read. Think. Resume life.

DAY 11

SILENCE — “Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

Everything you do is initiated by triggers. “X” happens to me, so then I do “Y.” Creating a new habit is difficult because we don’t realize we need to attach it to a trigger.

DAY 12

IMPRESSIONS — “But if you have in reality given thought to nothing other than the proper use of impressions, then as soon as you get up in the morning ask yourself, “What do I lack in order to be free from passion? What, to enjoy tranquillity? What am I? Am I a mere worthless body? Am I property? Am I reputation? None of these. What, then? I am a rational creature.” What, then, is required of you? Go over your actions. “Where did I transgress: in relation to peace of mind? What did I do that was unfriendly, or unsociable, or inconsiderate? What have I failed to do that I ought to have done with regard to these matters?” ~ Epictetus, 4.6.34-5

Trigger. New habit.

DAY 13

WHAT AM I DOING WHILE ON “THE BENCH”? — If there is somewhere I want to be, begin walking. Identify something which I can do now, or very soon, which is interesting. Remember that efficacy is active, not passive.

You’re using the arrival of this email as your trigger. Do you recall that I mentioned on day one that I was introducing you to being reflective upon being prompted?

DAY 14

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND — “Each part of your life can be examined in the context of the whole, of what really matters most to you. By keeping that end clearly in mind you can make certain that whatever you do on any particular day does not violate the criteria you have defined as supremely important, and that each day of your life contributes in a meaningful way to the vision you have to your life as a whole.” ~ Stephen Covey

Trigger. New habit.

DAY 15

IMPROVE ONESELF — “So now, are you not willing to help yourself? And how much easier such assistance is! You need not kill, imprison, or assault a man; you need not come into the market-place, you have merely to talk with yourself, the man who will be most readily persuaded, and to whom no one can be more persuassive than yourself. So, in the first place, pass judgement on your actions; but when you have condemned them, do not give up on yourself, nor be like those mean-spirited people who, when they have once given way, abandon themselves entirely, and are, so to speak, swept off by the flood.” ~ Epictetus, 4.9.13-4

Today’s a good day to look closely at the trigger you’re experiencing. There are always ways you can change a trigger. Tinker—if not for real, then at least as a thought experiment—with changing the daily trigger for this journey.

DAY 16

DISTRACTION, BUSYNESS AND CONSTANT SWITCHING ARE MENTAL HABITS — “We don’t need any of these habits, but they build up over the years because they comfort us. We can live more simply by letting go of these mental habits. What would life be like without constant switching, distraction and busyness?” ~ Leo Babauta

Trigger. New habit.

DAY 17

ORDER — “Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

One day, these triggers from me will end. To what trigger under your control could you attach this nascent habit of self-reflection?

DAY 18

NOTICE THE SPACE — “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” ~ Viktor Frankl

Reflection is about self-focus. Each day you’re practicing holding up a mirror. Specifically, you’re observing your thoughts, in response to a prompt.

DAY 19

WHAT CAN I DO TO BE SO GOOD THEY CAN'T IGNORE ME? — Continuous improvement? A “big swing?” A simple but insightful solution? The path to “the best” is not obvious and likely does not pass directly through the most-obvious next thing.

It's not necessary to move beyond simply observing our thoughts. Simply practicing *observing* your thoughts will make you more aware of your thoughts.

DAY 20

PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST — “The degree to which we have developed our independent will in our everyday lives is measured by our personal integrity. Integrity is, fundamentally, the value we place on ourselves. It’s our ability to take and keep commitments to ourselves, to “walk our talk.” It’s honor with self, a fundamental part of the Character Ethic, the essence of proactive growth.” ~ Stephen Covey

Our practice of reflection is an explicitly inward-facing activity. We’re repeatedly, intentionally being aware.

DAY 21

CHOICE — “For there are two rules we should always have at hand: That nothing is good or evil, but choice; and, that we are not to lead events, but to follow them. “My brother ought not to have treated me so.” Very true, but it is for him to see to that. However he treats me, I am to act rightly with regard to him. For this is my concern, the other is somebody else’s; this no one can hinder, the other is open to hindrance.” ~ Epictetus, 3.10.18-9

Reflection. Inward-facing. Intentional awareness of our own thoughts.

DAY 22

AM I AUTHENTIC OR OBSEQUIOUS? — Discerning the difference between obsequiousness and politeness can be difficult, but courtesy should be rooted in benevolence. Politeness should be the expression of a benevolent regard for the feelings of others; it's a poor virtue if it's motivated only by a fear of offending good taste. In its highest form Politeness approaches love.

A good mirror shows an accurate image. A fun-house mirror shows a distorted image. How is your reflection on your own thoughts?

DAY 23

SINGLE-TASK BY PUTTING LIFE IN FULL-SCREEN MODE — “Imagine that everything you do — a work task, answering an email or message, washing a dish, reading an article — goes into full-screen mode, so that you don’t do or look at anything else. You just inhabit that task fully, and are fully present as you do it. What would your life be like? In my experience, it’s much less stressful when you work and live this way. Things get your full attention, and you do them much better. And you can even savor them.” ~ Leo Babauta

Having now spent at least 46 minutes in self-reflection and practicing awareness of your own thoughts— ...any change in daily lived life? ...any change in your relationships? No right answers, simply awareness.

DAY 24

TAKE ACTION — “Action’s ecstasy is instantaneous and compounding: Even if for the millionth time, it works its magic. Its trigger is sure: All you do is peel your ass off the bottom of whatever hole you are in, and climb!”
~ Bryan Ward

Are you surprised by your thoughts’, and your mind’s, complexity?
Are you amazed? Are you empowered?

DAY 25

RESOLUTION — “Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

We’ve been developing our awareness via self-reflection. What happens if we turn our awareness outward?

DAY 26

THINK WIN/WIN — “Most people tend to think in terms of dichotomies: strong or weak, hardball or softball, win or lose. But that kind of thinking is fundamentally flawed. It’s based on power and position rather than on principle. Win/Win is based on the paradigm that there is plenty for everybody, that one person’s success is not achieved at the expense or exclusion of the success of others.” ~ Stephen Covey

Were there any moments yesterday when you suddenly—it can be quite jarring the first few times—became aware that you were *aware* of your own thoughts?

DAY 27

CONCENTRATION — “It takes but a little to destroy and overturn everything, just a slight deviation from reason. To overturn his ship, a helmsman does not need the same proficiency as he does to keep it safe, but, if he turns it a little too far into the wind, he is lost: and even if he does not do so deliberately, but simply loses his concentration for a moment, he is lost. Such is the case here too. If you nod off for just a moment, all that you have acquired up till then is gone.” ~ Epictetus, 4.3.4-6

You are using a trigger to practice reflection. Is there anything in your day that resembles the reflection trigger? Opportunities where you could reflect spontaneously?

DAY 28

HOW DO I TREAT SOMEONE I DON'T KNOW? — Your character shows in how you treat those who can do nothing for you.

We're about halfway. Poke your head out of your private journey of practicing reflection and quietly take some guesses about how reflective are the people around you. No judging; recall day one's message about self-improvement NOT being zero-sum.

DAY 29

FRUGALITY — “Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

If you encountered even one moment yesterday where you realized someone else could be more reflective: Visualize that moment you experienced... and imagine slowly raising a hand mirror into that perspective—so you see your own reflection appear on top of that person.

DAY 30

NOPE —

I will not be lazy.

I will not accept what I have now if I know I can do better.

I will not sleep until I finish.

I will not leave until I am done.

I will not tremble in front of new challenges.

I will not stop until I stop breathing.

I will be whatever I want to be

even if it takes sacrifice

even if I have little to give

even if it takes time

even if I have no time at all.

I will succeed.

~ (unknown)

Are there moments in your day when you realize you are aware that you are observing something outside yourself? If so— If you are aware you are observing, can you use that as a trigger to look inward and reflect on your own thinking?

DAY 31

SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD — “You’ve spent years learning how to read and write, years learning how to speak. But what about listening? What training or education have you had that enables you to listen so that you really, deeply understand another human being from that individual’s own frame of reference?” ~ Stephen Covey

Awareness of our inward experience, and our outward experience, is the same. It’s the same awareness. These past few days, we’ve taken our awareness on a brief field trip outside ourselves. For the rest of our little journey here, we’ll remain looking inward.

DAY 32

REATE SPACE BETWEEN THINGS — “Add padding to everything. Do half of what you imagine you can do. What would it be like if we did less? What would it be like if we padded how long things took, so that we have the space to actually do them well, with full attention? What would it be like if we took a few minutes’ pause between tasks, to savor the accomplishment of the last task, to savor the space between things, to savor being alive?” ~ Leo Babauta

How good is your memory? What’s the first food you had after waking eleven days ago? Perhaps, your memory isn’t *that* good. How about something you are currently interested in: 11 days ago, did you have any insights from your morning reflection?

DAY 33

OUTSIDE OUR CONTROL — “If you should ever turn your will to things outside your control in order to impress someone, be sure that you have wrecked your whole purpose in life. Be content, then, to be a philosopher in all that you do, and if you wish also to be seen as one, show yourself first that you are and you will succeed.” ~ Epictetus

Everything about this journey is, of course, optional. But I want you to find paper and pencil/pen. Don't over-think that, and don't try to use something digital. Grab any paper and any pen, and have them handy for tomorrow's reflection.

DAY 34

INDUSTRY — “Lose no time; be always employ’d in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

Remember that paper? Write the first thought that comes to mind, when I say, write the first thought that comes to mind. You’re done.

DAY 35

SYNERGIZE — “What is synergy? Simply defined, it means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It means that the relationship which the parts have to each other is a part in and of itself. It is not only a part, but the most catalytic, the most empowering, the most unifying, and the most exciting part.” ~ Stephen Covey

Today, write the first and second thought. It really, truly, does not matter what the thoughts are. Please try writing them down. Put the paper away until tomorrow.

DAY 36

MUCH ABIDES —

Tho' much is taken, much abides; And tho'
we are not now that strength which in old days
moved Earth and Heaven, that which we are, we are;
one equal temper of heroic hearts,
made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.
~ Alfred Lord Tennyson

I'm not even asking that look back at what you've written. Simply write a couple thoughts, (or more than a couple, if you wish.)

DAY 37

IS THERE AN ELEMENT OF STRUGGLE IN MY HISTORY?

— This reminds me to be kind for everyone I meet is working through their own struggle. Through the experience of my own struggle I can better understand and empathize with others on similar journeys.

Furthermore, being reminded of my past struggles suggests perspective on my day-to-day general lack of struggle.

And write *several* thoughts down today...

DAY 38

MY OATH — Today is the first day of the rest of my life. I shall make no excuses and hold no grudges. I care not where I came from, only where I am going. I don't compare myself to others, only to myself from yesterday. I shall not brag about successes nor complain about my struggles, but share my experiences and help my fellows. I know I impact those around me with my actions, and so I must move forward, every day. I acknowledge fear, doubt, and despair, but I do not let them defeat me.

Now look back through your week of notes. Maybe write a few notes about your observations of your notes? Maybe, you want to look more into journaling? (Today is the last time I'll mention journaling in our journey, but I highly recommend continuing.)

DAY 39

HONESTY — “I am unafraid as I prepare myself for that day when the artifices and disguises will be stripped away and I shall make judgement of myself. Is it just brave talk, or do I mean what I say? Were they for real, those defiant words I spoke against fortune, or were they just theatre—just acting a part?” ~ Seneca

You’ve put a lot of effort so far into practicing reflection. It’s important that we don’t lose the trees for the forest. The focus of daily reflection is the *tree*; the forest will take care of itself.

DAY 40

SINCERITY — “Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

One can bring self-judgement into reflection practice, but it is not necessary. Simply practicing being aware will pay dividends. I’m recommending you do the reflection without the judgement.

DAY 41

SHARPEN THE SAW — “It’s preserving and enhancing the greatest asset you have—you. It’s renewing the four dimensions of your nature: physical, spiritual, mental, and social/emotional. ... “Sharpen the saw” means expressing all four motivations. It means exercising all four dimensions of our nature, regularly and consistently in wise and balanced ways.” ~ Stephen Covey

A human being. Not a human doing.

DAY 42

SELF-COMPASSION — Beware the stern, vociferous, insistent, internal critic. In my head, it sounds like me, but it is not me. If I said to another, even a fraction of the things I say incessantly to myself, I would be arrested, or more likely, assaulted.

My martial arts teacher, Sensei Wirth, turned the phrase: No this. No that. No delay.

DAY 43

WHAT HAVE I BEEN READING? — I've performed this experiment countless times. Read little: nothing happens. Read more: ideas, new connections, inspiration, questions, motivation, short-cuts, wonder.

Many arts teach the lesson of simply being. Zen, for example provides koans: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

DAY 44

JUSTICE — “Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

Different styles of Yoga teach variously about sound, light, and breathing.

DAY 45

BEFITTING A HUMAN BEING — “What would you wish to be doing, then, when death finds you? For my part, I would wish it to be something that befits a human being, some beneficent, public-spirited, noble action. But if I cannot be found doing such great things as these I should like at least to be doing that which cannot be impeded and is given me to do, namely, correcting myself, improving the faculty that deals with impressions, toiling to achieve tranquillity, and rendering to the several relationships of life their due; and, if I am so fortunate, advancing to the third area of study, that which deals with the attainment of secure judgements.” ~ Epictetus, 4.10.12-3

The sublime experiences of life can be found anywhere. I’m hoping you find it within this small space you’ve created for reflection.

DAY 46

FIND JOY IN A FEW SIMPLE THINGS — “For me, those include writing, reading/learning, walking and doing other active things, eating simple food, meditating, spending quality time with people I care about. Most of that doesn’t cost anything or require any possessions. To the extent that I remember the simple things I love doing, my life suddenly becomes simpler.” ~ Leo Babauta

My intention for this series is to bootstrap your practice of reflection. For me to have succeeded, you must end up being self-sustaining in your practice.

DAY 47

MODERATION — “Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

The skeleton of this journey is the 57 prompts which appear at the top of each of these posts. I wasn't born with those. What will be your prompt, or prompts?

DAY 48

FAULT — “So is it possible to be altogether faultless? No, that is impractical; but it is possible to strive continuously not to commit faults. For we shall have cause to be satisfied if, by never relaxing our attention, we shall escape at least a few faults. But as it is, when you say, “I will begin to pay attention tomorrow,” you should know that what you are really saying is this: “I will be shameless, inopportune, abject today; it will be in the power of others to cause me distress; I will get angry, I will be envious today.” See how many evils you are permitting yourself. But if it is well for you to pay attention tomorrow, how much better would it be today? If it is to your advantage tomorrow, it is much more so today, so that you may be able to do the same again tomorrow, and not put it off once more, to the day after tomorrow.” ~ Epictetus, 4.12.19-21

How are you going to continue to trigger yourself to do your morning reflection?

DAY 49

WOULD I WANT TO GO ON A LONG CAR RIDE WITH ME? — Long car rides are a quintessential American experience. Along with the good however, comes the opportunity for bad. With others present the confined space, lack of privacy, and monotony of rolling vistas create a microcosm of life on a tiny stage. How I share that stage with the others in the car, and what specifically I do while on that stage tells all.

I like to read, and daily-study/daily-devotional books is an entire Genre. But there are also web sites, software, flip cards, ... what calls to you?

DAY 50

GET CLEAR ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT, AND SAY NO TO MORE THINGS — “We are rarely very clear on what we want. What if we became crystal clear on what we wanted in life? If we knew what we wanted to create, how we wanted to live ... we could say yes to these things, and no to everything else. Saying no to more things would simplify our lives.” ~ Leo Babauta

The best choice for medium and method—for prompts, for journaling, for reflection—is whatever reliably triggers you to reflect. Make it yours; change it whenever you wish.

DAY 51

CLEANLINESS — “Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

Do you recall the beginning of this journey? While I created the prompts and the system which you are now enjoying, how will you continue it yourself?

DAY 52

AM I SELF-AWARE? — The first step in my journey was realizing I was unhappy. This realization — detecting it, understanding it, believing it, surrendering to it, and finally owning it — was the first piece of bedrock on which I started building.

It's time for the student to become the teacher. What prompts and triggers are you going to create for yourself as you go through your life being your own teacher?

DAY 53

TRANQUILLITY — “Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

We're in our final week together. The first week was about creating space. 2 minutes: Pause life. Read. Think. Resume life.

DAY 54

PRACTICE DOING NOTHING, EXQUISITELY — “No need to plan, no need to read, no need to watch something, no need to do a chore or eat while you do nothing. You will start to notice your brain’s habit of wanting to get something done. This exposes our mental habits, which is a good thing. Keep doing nothing. Sit for awhile, resisting the urge to do something. After some practice, you can get good at doing nothing, and this leads to the mental habit of contentment and gratitude.” ~ Leo Babauta

Our second week was focused on creating a new habit. Do you have your new habit attached to a trigger?

DAY 55

CHASTITY — “Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another’s peace or reputation.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

Week three was about the practice itself of reflection; becoming aware explicitly that we are— well, practicing being aware.

DAY 56

WHAT IS MY TALK-TO-LISTEN RATIO? — It's better to listen to understand, rather than to, (for example,) listen to refute. Silence is fine provided one's own thoughts are pleasant company. When speaking, think first about why you are about to say whatever it is you're about to say.

Awareness occupied our practice during our fourth week. Inward. Outward. Simply being aware is awesome.

DAY 57

WE CREATE OUR OWN STRUGGLES — “All the stress, all the frustrations and disappointments, all the busyness and rushing ... we create these with attachments in our heads. By letting go, we can relax and live more simply.” ~ Leo Babauta

In week five we tried the tiniest taste of capturing our thoughts. Reflection is a power tool for self-improvement. Journaling—and there are many kinds—is another.

DAY 58

HUMILITY — Imitate Socrates.

Simply being is easy to understand but difficult to embody. In week six I tried to point at the moon, while hoping my pointing finger didn't draw your attention instead.

DAY 59

FESTINA LENTE — Make haste, slowly. Or, unrestrained moderation. — “The worker must be stronger than his project; loads larger than the bearer must necessarily crush him. Certain careers, moreover, are not so demanding in themselves as they are prolific in begetting a mass of other activities. Enterprises which give rise to new and multifarious activities should be avoided; you must not commit yourself to a task from which there is no free egress. Put your hand to one you can finish or at least hope to finish; leave alone those that expand as you work at them and do not stop where you intended they should.” ~ Seneca, On Tranquility

Last week we began looking beyond this small, introductory journey and talking about ways you could continue on your own.

DAY 60

LOOK BACK — Look back at some of the things you've accomplished or experienced and think... — "Well if that isn't nice, I don't know what is." ~ Kurt Vonnegut — "One never notices what has been done; One can only see what remains to be done." ~ Marie Curie

One day, tomorrow in fact, there won't be any more of these prompts. But having read this far, I hope you'll believe me when I say: You'll like tomorrow's thoughts too.

OUR JOURNEY OF SMALL STEPS

"Meditation is intermittent fasting for the mind. Too much sugar leads to a heavy body, and too many distractions lead to a heavy mind. Time spent undistracted and alone, in self-examination, journaling, meditation, resolves the unresolved and takes us from mentally fat to fit."

~ Naval Ravikant

Today's message is not really a prompt like the previous 60. Alas, we've reached the terminus of our journey of small steps practicing reflection.

Thank you for being awesome!

I created this series by taking my personal collection of self-reflection prompts and forming them into these blog posts. Next, I wrote the three getting-started posts to ease you into the daily routine. Finally, I came up with a theme for each of the 8 weeks and wrote short additions that appeared below the main sequence of prompts. These additions carry the through-line of teaching self-reflection. (...or at least, I hope they did.)

Here are all the additional parts in one place:

CREATING SPACE

Remember: 2 minutes. Pause life. Read. Think. Resume life.

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HABIT

Everything you do is initiated by triggers. "X" happens to me, so then I do "Y." Creating a new habit is difficult because we don't realize we need to attach it to a trigger.

Trigger. New habit.

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REFLECTION

Reflection is about self-focus. Each day you're practicing holding up a mirror. Specifically, you're observing your thoughts, in response to a prompt.

It's not necessary to move beyond simply observing our thoughts. Simply practicing *observing* your thoughts will make you more aware of your thoughts.

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Reflection. Inward-facing. Intentional awareness of our own thoughts.

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Are you surprised by your thoughts', and your mind's, complexity? Are you amazed? Are you empowered?

AWARENESS

We've been developing our awareness via self-reflection. What happens if we turn our awareness outward?

Were there any moments yesterday when you suddenly—it can be quite jarring the first few times—became aware that you were *aware* of your own thoughts?

You are using a trigger to practice reflection. Is there anything in your day that resembles the reflection trigger? Opportunities where you could reflect spontaneously?

We're about halfway. Poke your head out of your private journey of practicing reflection and quietly take some guesses about how reflective are the people around you. No judging; recall day one's message about self-improvement not being zero-sum.

If you encountered even one moment yesterday where you realized someone else could be more reflective: Visualize that moment you experienced... and imagine slowly raising a hand mirror into that perspective—so

you see your own reflection appear on top of that person.

Are there moments in your day when you realize you are aware that you are observing something outside yourself? If so— If you are aware you are observing, can you use that as a trigger to look inward and reflect on your own thinking?

Awareness of our inward experience, and our outward experience, is the same. It's the same awareness. These past few days, we've taken our awareness on a brief field trip outside ourselves. For the rest of our little journey here, we'll remain looking inward.

JOURNALING

How good is your memory? What's the first food you had after waking eleven days ago? Perhaps, your memory isn't *that* good. How about something you are currently interested in: 11 days ago, did you have any insights from your morning reflection?

Everything about this journey is, of course, optional. But I want you to find paper and pencil/pen. Don't over-think that, and don't try to use something digital. Grab any paper and any pen, and have them handy for tomorrow's reflection.

Remember that paper? Write the first thought that comes to mind, when I say, write the first thought that comes to mind. You're done.

Today, write the first and second thought. It really, truly, does not matter what the thoughts are. Please try writing them down. Put the paper away until tomorrow.

I'm not even asking that look back at what you've written. Simply write a couple thoughts, (or more than a couple, if you wish.)

And write *several* thoughts down today...

Now look back through your week of notes. Maybe write a few notes about your observations of your notes? Maybe, you want to look more into journaling? (Today is the last time I'll mention journaling in our journey, but I highly recommend continuing.)

SIMPLY BEING

You've put a lot of effort so far into practicing reflection. It's important that we don't lose the trees for the forest. The focus of daily reflection is the *tree*; the forest will take care of itself.

One can bring self-judgement into reflection practice, but it is not necessary. Simply practicing being aware will pay dividends. I'm recommending you do the reflection without the judgement.

A human being. Not a human doing.

My martial arts teacher, Sensei Wirth, turned the phrase: No this. No that. No delay.

Many arts teach the lesson of simply being. Zen, for example provide koans: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

Different styles of Yoga teach variously about sound, light, and breathing.

The sublime experiences of life can be found anywhere. I'm hoping you find it within this small space you've created for reflection.

MAKE IT YOURS

My intention for this series is to bootstrap your practice of reflection. For me to have succeeded, you must end up being self-sustaining in your practice.

The skeleton of this journey is the 57 prompts which appear at the top of each of these posts. I wasn't born with those. What will be your prompt, or prompts?

How are you going to continue to trigger yourself to do your morning reflection?

I like to read, and daily-study/daily-devotional books is an entire Genre. But there are also web sites, software, flip cards, ... what calls to you?

The best choice for medium and method—for prompts, for journaling, for reflection—is whatever reliably triggers you to reflect. Make it yours; change it whenever you wish.

Do you recall the beginning of this journey? While I created the prompts and the system which you are now enjoying, how will you continue it yourself?

It's time for the student to become the teacher. What prompts and triggers are you going to create for yourself as you go through your life being your own teacher?

RECAP

We're in our final week together. The first week was about creating space. 2 minutes: Pause life. Read. Think. Resume life.

Our second week was focused on creating a new habit. Do you have your new habit attached to a trigger?

Week three was about the practice itself of reflection; becoming aware explicitly that we are— well, practicing being aware.

Awareness occupied our practice during our fourth week. Inward. Outward. Simply being aware is awesome.

In week five we tried the tiniest taste of capturing our thoughts. Reflection is a power tool for self-improvement. Journaling—and there are many kinds—is another.

Simply being is easy to understand but difficult to embody. In week six I tried to point at the moon, while

hoping my pointing finger didn't draw your attention instead.

Last week we began looking beyond this small, introductory journey and talking about ways you could continue on your own.

DIGESTIF

When will the rhetorical questions end?

6

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My vision is a world where everyone can flourish. My mission is creating better conversations to spread understanding and compassion.



Great conversation requires great listening from everyone involved. But if we don't actively practice, listening will become a lost art. The key to its preservation lies in cultivating our natural, genuine curiosity. That curiosity will lead to understanding, and then to compassion. I hope you'll join me through my projects, or by taking initiative in your own life, online or off.

To learn more, please visit <https://constantine.name/>