

“One of the wisest among us has written a stellar book on wisdom.  
What is revealed is astonishing in its depth and relevance.”

—JEAN HOUSTON

THE  
WISDOM  
PRINCIPLES

A HANDBOOK OF  
TIMELESS TRUTHS AND  
TIMELY WISDOM

ERVIN LASZLO

FOREWORD BY DEEPAK CHOPRA

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# FOREWORD

by Deepak Chopra

If you stand back for a moment, you will see that we are living now on a shaky twig branching off from the tree of wisdom. Modern people naturally don't generally see it that way. The word "wisdom" is loosely used without investing it with the importance it deserves. In this regard Ervin Laszlo comes at a pivotal point, rescuing the honor of wisdom by revealing what it actually is.

Wisdom isn't the same as education, learning, expertise, skill, long experience, or any other synonym. The best way to describe it is through direct experience. You touch the core of wisdom when you act on intuition and insight, when you have an "aha" moment, and when you suddenly know, without a doubt, what is true. Imagine that the active mind is like the surface of a river tossed by the wind into waves and eddies. Beneath the surface the currents grow calmer, and at the river's lowest depth, the water is almost still. This is the level where wisdom is encountered.

To put it simply, knowledge is the product of thinking, but wisdom is a state of awareness. The reason we live on a shaky twig today is that the secular world recklessly tossed out wisdom as somehow undesirable. It became superficially identified with tired, old, sententious talkers, self-styled sages expending hot air. (Perhaps it took the decline of sermonizing to clear the way for renewing what wisdom really is.)

There are distilled gems of wisdom in this book, the fruit of the author's decades of reflection, with the underlying purpose of reaching a vision of life. In this vision, wisdom is the best use

of the human mind, and the guidance of wisdom creates the best life anyone could lead. I am writing this foreword during the dire days of the coronavirus pandemic, when two movements have sprung up around the world. One is the movement fueled by fear and panic. The other is fueled by wanting to create a new and better world.

Ervin Laszlo is speaking here and has spoken on behalf of the movement for renewal in all of his books. What sets his vision apart is that it isn't based on issues. Crises face us on all sides, and all have been subjected to the knowledge of experts, vast pressure for change, and the glaring need for such change. Yet so far, all the understanding, outcries, goodwill, and the rightness of a cause have been ineffectual. If we ask ourselves why, the mind answers at the three levels of the river mentioned above.

The restless active mind struggles against obstacles, blames the bad faith of reactionaries, prays for the good to prevail, and forever laments that the problems are too overwhelming to solve. Beneath the surface, the calmer mind sets about with diligence and sobriety to find solutions and act on them. At the very depth of the mind, however, wisdom has a different response. It recognizes that the world is going through an identity crisis. Until we ask "Who am I?" and come up with a better answer, the same old stories will be recycled between victim and oppressor, the forces of light and dark, the lost battle of the powerless against the powerful.

"Who am I?" is the critical wisdom question that determines your state of being. The wisest answer, based on the highest level of your being, is this: "I am a finite field of pure consciousness, unbounded, eternal, blissful, and self-fulfilling." The words that issue from this state of being are not divine, unworldly, impossibly pure, or suitable only for a saint or yogi. Because every mind is fundamentally wise once you reach the right level. Wisdom is a universal condition, and by far the most joyful one to live in.

The fact that we are perched on a shaky twig right now will change when we stop identifying with the restless active mind.

One way to grasp the meaning of this comes from reading this book, because the writing takes you to the level where your own wisdom exists. You are put into contact with yourself. You will experience “Who am I?” differently almost at once.

I am reminded of a lovely anecdote from the life of a modern Indian guru in Mumbai. He led a simple life above a shop, and although he was revered by his devotees, the same devotees felt free to vent their resentments and complaints. One day the guru was entertaining a devotee who became impatient, because their lunch hadn't been brought up yet. “I don't see why you and I are so different,” the devotee grumbled. “We're just two hungry old men sitting above a shop wanting our lunch.”

“Here is the difference,” the guru calmly replied. “You are just a hungry old man waiting for your lunch. Your world is bounded by your moods and whims, your ever-shifting desires and dissatisfactions. Your world is private, and no one else can enter it.

“But my world is unbounded. I see openness and light in all directions. My being is the Being of all living things, of existence itself. All are welcome in my world, and when they enter, they experience the bliss of pure awareness.”

I find it hard not to shed tears reading this story, as I have done dozens of times. Bliss can touch us like heartache, because it must push aside the sorrows created by the ego. But the story is beautiful at the same time. We've all heard it said, “What you don't know can't hurt you,” but in the case of wisdom, the saying should be “What you don't know can change your life.” Wisdom is that precious thing inside us that we don't know until we touch it, and then it changes us completely.

In that spirit, I invite you to read Ervin Laszlo's new book *The Wisdom Principles* in a particular way. Relish the writer's thoughts and words but at the same time be open and willing to meet yourself. Wisdom can inspire you when it belongs to someone else; it can transform you only through direct experience. By opening this Handbook of Timeless Truths and Timely Wisdom, you open the door to your new identity, because across the

threshold there is only the lightness of Being, and infinity in all directions.

# INTRODUCTION

by Neale Donald Walsch

What you are about to experience is a deep look at how we might meet some of the biggest challenges and solve some of the major problems facing humanity today. Because this could have a major impact on your own personal daily experience, not just the world at large, I hope you will jump into this exploration immediately.

You will find more than wisdom here. You will find a way out of the maze, a pathway from the box canyon in which we seem to have marched ourselves.

I wrote in a book that I published several years ago that 98 percent of the world's people are spending 98 percent of their time on things that don't matter. The book you are now reading reminds us in wonderfully direct ways of what *does* matter, and how we can step into the living of that.

Let me put this all into context, if I may. The challenge we are now facing on Earth is that nothing is working. I'm sure you're seeing this. The world's presently-in-place political systems, economic systems, social systems, and even our spiritual systems are failing us right and left. None of them have been successful in producing for the largest number of us the outcomes they were intended to produce. And yet the people in power within those systems continue to seek support for their systems *from* the largest number of us.

We can't continue to offer it. We can't. It is no longer viable for us to support, much less perpetuate, an approach to the creation of our future that we can see is leading us not into the

days of our dreams, but deeper into a collective nightmare from which most of the world doesn't seem to know how to awaken.

I perceive that Ervin Laszlo is a person who does. He's an awakener. A way-shower. A guide. An escort on the journey of life upon which billions have embarked without studying the map.

I believe it is important to listen to thinkers such as this. Not because I think that Ervin Laszlo and others to whom he points may know more than we all do. (They'd be the last ones to suggest that.) But because with the road maps they offer, we can find our way back to our own innermost awareness, our own highest understandings, and our own most expanded level of consciousness. Therein, of course, lies the treasure.

Whether we agree or disagree with all that is said and proposed here, we can know *why* and *how* we agree or disagree—and that, by itself, can be important markers on our own trek through the woods.

Ervin Laszlo inspires us, in the remarkable excursion into clarity that is this book, to see that the opportunity before us to advance in realizing our highest potential as a civilization is now exhilaratingly available and totally within our reach. The assertion here is that this is true during this time of—and actually *because* of—the calamitous events being visited upon us in this epoch of our history.

He begins by reminding us that human beings were in the distant past better prepared in many ways to deal with events such as those today, as they were often more kind, more compassionate, and more united in caring for one another and for their home than much of humanity is today.

He does not present this as an indictment, but as a gentle invitation to daringly and dynamically move forward in creating the way we choose to be, in part by looking back at the way we used to be. He suggests that we knew something *inherently*—something important—that we seem to have forgotten. He then explores, in wonderful depth, exactly what this is.

What we're given in this book, then, is not just a look at the wisdom of our yesterdays, but also at the promise of our

tomorrows.

What we need now are some expansive new ideas, and that's what Ervin Laszlo and his friends Maria Sagi and Kingsley Dennis offer here. "New" not in the sense of never having been heard before, but in the sense of never having been *tried* before. Not on a wholesale, global basis. Not with complete and unwavering, species-wide commitment.

Chief among these not-yet-undertaken approaches is to embrace, conceptually and functionally, the conviction that we are all made of the same stuff. That we are all one, and indeed, that *all* things are one thing, manifesting differently.

What is fascinating about this idea is that we don't have to agree on what the one thing is. We could call it God. We could call it the Higher Power or life's Organizing Principle. We could call it the Essential Essence, or simply Pure Energy. We could call it the Cosmic Attractor—the universe's intrinsic impulse toward wholeness and oneness. Or call it, simply, Love.

There is an implicit question found in the folds of what is offered in this book. What if we jointly decided—that is, what if humanity *as a family* collectively agreed—that we all really *are* nothing more (and nothing *less*) than an individuation of that One Thing? And what if we could find a way to inspire that idea to be the evolutionary driver of our species?

Do you think it would make any difference in the way we treat one another on our planet today? Do you think it would better equip us, and offer us more effective tools with which to meet the tumultuous events of this moment in our collective lives?

I think I may know one way we could do that. But it would require you to "play." Here's my idea: What if we chose to use *imitation* as a device with which to put into our Cultural Story the idea of our oneness?

You have surely noticed how rapidly a simple figure of speech can find its way into the lexicon of people around the world. Likewise, specific items of clothing, and ways of wearing them, can become de rigueur virtually overnight. (Baseball caps worn sideways is one example that comes to mind. One day no

one would think of doing it, the next day tons of people are doing it.)

Now, suppose the power of imitation was used as a means of elevating humanity above its most self-harming behaviors. (Violence, to pick an obvious one. Ignoring, if not actually working against, the paramount wisdom principles, which are concern with the good of everyone. This list could go on and on.)

What if we decided that, with our own everyday words, with our own everyday decisions, with our own everyday actions, we were going to model oneness? Not just our oneness with other people, but with the planet itself. Do you think that acting in a certain way, speaking in a certain way, *being* in a certain way, would have any effect on others? Do you think this could “catch on”?

It would, if others found it attractive. It would, if others found that it made them feel good when *they* did it.

There’s something fascinating about the opportunity before us. Humanity no longer needs to use the painstakingly time-consuming process of passing desirable adaptations on to others by the generations-long genetic transfer of information. We have stumbled on a way to impact behaviors nearly instantly. The lightning-speed eruption of mass communication in our lifetime has allowed *imitation* to replace *mutation* in the process of *adaptation*.

This simple tool can be curative and transmogrifying, almost magically altering humanity’s least beneficial behaviors. Everything depends on who and what is being imitated.

That’s where you come in. Or *can* come in, if you choose. No one is going to give you this assignment. There will be no “knighting in the field” of those chosen to rescue the damsel in distress that is humanity. We all have to self-elect to do it.

We have to choose ourselves to be among those who commit to moving forward their own individual and personal evolution by embracing and demonstrating behaviors that, through the natural course of events, awaken those whose lives they touch, so as to realize who and what we human beings really are (I am

going to say: “individuations of Divinity”), and how what we are may be made manifest in our earthly existence.

As a rule, people take their cues from those they admire. Most of us begin with our parents, if we are lucky enough to have parents with admirable qualities. It can go from there to older brothers or sisters, other wonderful family or friends, then to sports figures, entertainment celebrities, and right straight up to—or much beyond—the leaders of our country.

And what is being imitated is not just a fashion and a fad, but words that are spoken, ways of being that are demonstrated. So, look around now. Are people in your country being more compassionate and caring, patient and understanding, gentle and tolerant, accepting and forgiving than ever? Are they imitating someone? And who?

And perhaps more urgently, what or who are *we* offering *them* to imitate?

Wouldn't it be a remarkable way to live if the moment you stepped out your front door you were offering others something important to imitate?

Of all the marvelous wisdom principles offered here, the one that entices me the most is that you have a purpose on this planet. And that purpose feels relevant to the question I asked above.

I don't want to give away the punch line of this book, so I won't go any further with that now. My wish for you is that you dive deeply into all the richness that is offered here, and savor Ervin's insight about that as the reward for your explorations.

So, if you have a genuine interest in the purpose of your life, and how to make life better for yourself, your loved ones, and all those whose lives you touch, you have put yourself in the right place with this book at just the right moment.

I am going to suggest you begin by asking the question I have been putting before myself and others for twenty-five years. *Is it possible that there's something we don't fully understand here about God, about life, and about ourselves, the understanding of which would change everything?*

That is the question of the hour. That is the pressing inquiry of our day and age. That is the question explored here, with substantial and not merely simplistic or simply trendy answers offered for you to ponder. A wonderful basis for making fundamental decisions about your life will be found in your reading just ahead.

I am grateful to Ervin Laszlo for offering the gift of his remarkable thinking on the whole subject of our earthly existence and what it means—and what it *can* mean for all of us.

*The Wisdom Principles* is a treasure. I am glad you have found your way to it.

Good work. You did not come here by accident. You followed an impulse.

Good work.

# THE CATALOGUE OF WISDOM PRINCIPLES

## PRINCIPLES OF TIMELESS TRUTH: A GUIDE TO WISE THINKING

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From? Why Are We Here?  
The Miracle of “Every-Thing”  
The Miracle of Coherence  
How Coherence Could Emerge in the World  
The Evolution of Life and the Evolution of the Universe  
The Spiritual is Not Necessarily Fantasy: It Could Be Real  
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## PRINCIPLES OF TIMELY WISDOM: A GUIDE TO GOOD LIVING

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## PART I

# PRINCIPLES OF TIMELESS TRUTH: A GUIDE TO WISE THINKING

*There are principles of wise thinking: principles that are of timeless truth. They have been known to countless generations of sages and philosophers and spiritual people. They pose and suggest answers to the biggest questions of life. Their relevance to our own life has never been as great as it is today, when we face the challenge of finding our way beyond the crisis of the old world, toward a new world where we can all live and thrive.*

## **THE BIGGEST OF THE BIG QUESTIONS: WHERE DID WE COME FROM? WHY ARE WE HERE?**

These are perhaps the biggest of the big questions thinking people have ever asked about themselves and the world around them. Today we can offer a better, more reliable answer to them than we could before.

### **WHERE DID WE COME FROM?**

When it comes to inquiring into our deepest origins, evolutionary science joins mystical intuition to give the same basic answer. We were not created as we are now: we have evolved into it. But the concept of where we had evolved from is different in science and in mysticism. It is different in explication and formulation, though not in meaning.

According to quantum cosmology, we have evolved from the primordial “ground state” of the universe. In quantum cosmology, this state is best seen as a sea of coherent vibration. The manifest universe is the ensemble of the vibrations that emerged in this sea. The emergent vibrations “excited” the quantum sea: they brought it into what physicists describe as the excited state. The excited state is the basis for all possible vibrations in the quantum sea. These are given in potential; and in the excited state some of the vibrations become actualized. The clusters of vibrations that constitute the observable universe are vibrations in the excited state of the quantum sea: they are the manifest state of the universe.

This abstract physics-assessment of the origins of “things” in the universe has been intuitively anticipated in the wisdom traditions. The creation stories of the world’s spiritual systems

speak of a primordial domain out of which the manifest had emerged. In some Eastern metaphysics, this domain is a cosmic egg, whereas in the Old Testament it is a dark and formless sea—a void. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth; and the earth was without form, and void; and darkness [was] upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” (Genesis 1:1–2) From this spaceless and timeless void God created light, the firmament, day and night, and all the things that have come to exist the universe.

This account of our cosmic origins is also given in Taoist cosmology. There it is said that all things originate in the Tao, and all things return to the Tao. The Tao is both the source and destination of all things. It is not observable, and not even nameable. It can be defined only negatively, by what it is not. As the literature of Tao emphasizes, Tao cannot be seen by our eyes. Tao cannot be heard by our ears. Tao cannot be touched by our hands.

The recognition of a primordial ground occurs and recurs also in the history of philosophy. Plato called the ground the sphere of Forms and Ideas, and identified it as the seat of the Soul. The Hellenic philosophers gave it various names: Pythagoras called it “Kosmos,” and Plotinus “The One.” In our time, quantum physicist David Bohm identified it as the “implicate” (enfolded) order, the seat and origin of the manifest world: the “explicate” (unfolded) order. We live in the explicate order, but this order, and all things in it, is shaped and molded—as Bohm would say, “in-formed”—by the implicate order.

The implicate order is the long-intuited and now rediscovered deep dimension of the world. We, as all things in the manifest “explicate” order, originate as in-formed clusters of coherent vibration in the excited state of the quantum sea that manifests as the universe.

This is the answer of cutting-edge cosmology to the query regarding our origins. In the perspective of spirituality, we come from the nothingness that is also a fullness that preceded and still underlies the manifest universe. This nothingness is the “void” of the Bible, the “Tao” of Eastern mysticism, the “quantum

vacuum” of mainstream physics, and the “implicate order” of quantum physics.

The above answers have a major feature in common: they speak of progressive “creation,” or self-evolution, from common origins. The evolution of the world is not a mechanical, preprogrammed sequence of events, but a creative process inspired and in-formed by a fundamental spark: the seed of life, of mind, and of the order of nature. These seeds are potentials, and they were present already at the beginning and became actualized—and continue to be actualized—over the course of time.

The beginning of this process of creative evolution is traced by most cosmologists to the cosmic singularity popularly known as the big bang. This event took place an estimated 13.8 billion years ago. It injected staggering energies into the preceding ground state of the universe, “excited” it, and gave rise to the formative processes that created quarks and quanta, atoms and crystals, molecules, stars, stellar systems and galaxies, and living organisms and ecologies of such organisms on Earth—and conceivably on millions of other planets orbiting energy-radiating active stars in this galaxy and in countless others.

## **WHY ARE WE HERE?**

I am alive, I live day after day. Until one day I live no more. Why did I live—why do I live now? Is there a meaning or reason for my life—for life altogether?

Of course, it may be that there is no need to spend time on the question of the meaning of life, since the answer is simple and straightforward. There is no higher or deeper meaning: the meaning of life is just to be alive. That would accord with what we surmise about the experience of other living things around us. When spring comes, grass grows and birds sing and they don’t worry about deeper meaning. They don’t ask why they are alive. Perhaps they are alive just to live. Life itself is a great miracle and being alive could be an end in itself. My best friend, Nikki,

greet me in the morning, we look each other in the eye, and we go for a walk. He is happy. He doesn't ask what his life means. Perhaps he would if he could, and he would say: to live and to be happy. But in his present condition as a dog, he cannot ask.

But you and I, who have been born as humans, we can ask. Is there a deeper meaning for our being alive, and if there is, what is that meaning? I cannot with good conscience disregard and dismiss this question. It may be that it is by more than by a lucky fluke that I have been born somebody who can ask this question. Perhaps the capacity for asking it is the answer. Could it be that I have been born a human being so I could ask what it means to live?

On a purely pragmatic level, asking about the meaning of life is an exercise in sophistry. It doesn't contribute to my physical existence on the planet. To stay alive as a biological being I don't need to contemplate sophisticated questions posed by an evolved consciousness. But I have such a consciousness, and I also have the capacity to use it. Is this just a fortunate (or perhaps not so fortunate?) consequence of my being at a relatively advanced stage of evolution? Pragmatic thinkers often say that consciousness is an accidental by-product of the workings of the brain as it seeks to ensure the organism's survival and reproduction. Could they be right—could my evolved consciousness be a mere side effect of my biological existence?

Here we come to the end of the wisdom offered by the physical and biological sciences. If my consciousness is something more, or at any rate something other, than a side effect of the workings of my brain, that something is no longer a physical and biological phenomenon. Consciousness beyond the level where it serves the functions of survival and reproduction must be more than the by-product of a survival-and-reproduction-serving brain. If there is such a "something more" it would not be produced by my brain, and would not be limited to my brain. It would be something that my brain receives and processes, and perhaps transmits. But not something that it *creates*.

In contemplating this possibility, we pass from the physical-biological concept of wisdom to the level of a higher wisdom. The

wisdom we can derive from a consciousness that is a side effect of survival-and-reproduction-oriented cerebral functioning is strictly pragmatic: How do I ensure that I have enough to eat, have a place where I can rest, and find a mate with whom I can reproduce? Important, even essential as these queries may be, my brain-created consciousness cannot produce anything beyond them; the rest, in its perspective, is but imagination and sophistry.

There may be a higher wisdom in the world. And that wisdom derives from a consciousness that exists beyond the brain—one that my brain can capture and process, and ultimately transmit. This is the wisdom offered by the great religions and spiritual systems of the world, and it is supported by the new paradigm emerging at the cutting edge of the contemporary sciences.

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