

TURNING TOWARD

Suicidal Thoughts



*Facing Life's Biggest Demon,
Standing Your Ground, and Winning*

Jamison Todd Johnson

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BEFORE YOU READ

If you’re thinking about suicide, please reach out right now. You don’t have to be sure. You just have to make contact.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline	Call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org. Free, confidential, 24/7.
Crisis Text Line	Text HOME to 741741.
Veterans / service members	Call 988 then press 1, or text 838255.
En español	Llama o envía un texto al 988 y oprime 2.
The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+ young people)	Call 1-866-488-7386, text START to 678-678, or chat at thetrevorproject.org.
Trans Lifeline	Call 1-877-565-8860.
Outside the U.S.	findahelpline.com (175+ countries) or befrienders.org.
Immediate danger	Call 911 or your local emergency number.

DISCLOSURE · EXPERIENCED · RESEARCHED

This essay is not to be taken lightly. Please read with care.

“Shine the light where the dark exists.”

— from this [essay](#)

*For everyone who stayed one more night.
And for the voices on the other end of the line,
who answer in the dark.*

THE TURNING TOWARD SERIES

Turning Toward Mental Health

Turning Toward Depression

Turning Toward Addiction

Turning Toward Suicidal Thoughts

YOU ARE HERE

Turning Toward Anxiety

Turning Toward ADHD

This piece is an introspective view of my own suicidal thoughts, at one point in my life, and how I backed them down. Then some thoughts on how I later used that experience to back them down every time they resurfaced. It does not list “Observed” near the title, because I am keeping it wrapped solely to my own inner thoughts and my own research, in the hope that someone reading can find a way to back down their own demons. I will not be discussing anything other than the conscious introspection of those moments, because they were vivid, and I will likely never forget them. I will have to live with the fact that I even considered it so deeply, for the rest of my life.

That being said, had I chosen to do things differently, I would not be here pummeling page after page with these thoughts, trying to “urgently” save every person who reads my madness. Delusions of grandeur, I believe is the term. Much like Jung, I was one of the fortunate ones — able to save myself when nothing else could. I know man can only guide man into different ways of understanding their ego.¹ But this is in no way, as I’ve said before, any kind of “clinical methodology.” This is only my story.

My hope — my true and honest-to-God hope — in making all these journals is that I can find a way of explaining things so that any reader can relate, and that maybe something will “click” in their subconscious, and I buy them some more time here on Earth.

Buy. What a silly concept. Writing these journals isn’t robbing me of anything but time — time I would be giving to

the reader. Serendipitous, if you ask me.

Maybe, just maybe, you can back the demons down — with my story, and your doctors, friends, family, and loved ones. Maybe you'll be writing your own testimony, with your own “brush” of any nature, saving lives in your own way.

Out of respect for myself, and for the privacy of my loved ones, I will not be discussing much about the “why” these thoughts occurred. I will only dig into the “why” I'm around today to write about them. To say I haven't had these thoughts in decades would be a lie — but my larger truth is that when I have had them more recently, the demon seems more like a bug I can squish with my heel and keep walking.

The heart of this story revolves around a situation almost twenty years ago. Even writing it today, the scar I caused emotionally has not fully healed. That is my burden to bear — but I no longer fear the reaper. Keep your friends close and your enemies closer, they say. Brushing so close to death can make him feel like a goofy friend who is curiously patient, considering the circumstances, and jokes about your “untimely demise.”

Shine the light where the dark exists: I can take the most painful thoughts and turn them into jokes, and they float away like the wind. This is not an easy accomplishment, I can assure you.

In *Turning Toward the Subconscious*, I spoke of being at the peak of your own existence. I want to correct myself here.

The peak is of experience, not existence. Experience is yours alone. Existence is shared.²

But what of when we fall down that mountain and skin our egos? I should not be so harsh — the ego is necessary to survive, and surviving is the sole, unarguable rule of the game that all life on this planet plays. But what of the pawn — the unarguable victim in the game? The “I” when it becomes so detached from the Self that even the word “hopeless” glimmers, simply by being a word that still contains hope.

I’m going to take this walk with you as slowly and carefully as I can, because some of these words will bring me very literal mental pain as I put them on the page. Remember, as I write, that this is my “Philosophy of Psychology,” and in no way represents the opinion of a licensed professional.

Leave your doubt at the door. There’s no point investing your thoughts in countering a “theory” I have about myself. Incorrect. This is a theory I have about my ego. My Self is what saved me. Irrelevant — I don’t even know who my readers are, but I love them, and I trust they’ll find their way with or without my help.

Let me open a door in my subconscious that has been closed for almost two decades, and show you exactly how dark the dark can get.

The truth to hold here is in the repetition. I talk about frequency a lot — increasing the things in your life that bring you joy, and decreasing the things that bring you discomfort. This is the final warning to get off this train. After this

paragraph, I'm going to dive into a place I haven't been in a very long time.

The uncomfortable reality is the unavoidable truth that we were born, things got complicated, and then we die. Besides the Self, this is the only thing we all truly have in common. Even the fiber of our DNA is unique to the person — but that would segregate even large groups of people into an infinitely long chain of events. History and culture matter; they shape the ego, and the languages we think in, in different ways.

I've stepped off the elevator too early. All the way. To the bottom.

There was certainly a point in my life where hope was a myth. There was a day — I remember it clearly — when I could not imagine the sun rising anymore. Here is the first thing I learned that night: I slept, and the sun rose. Whether I liked it or not.

Some things are out of our control, and often, even our own thoughts run themselves off the track that joins them to our egos.

I'm going to be completely transparent. I am not a materialistic person, and this story is a large part of why. The night I never thought I'd see the sun again revolved around a day I lost all of my material belongings in one fell swoop, because of a mistake I made. A very large mistake that still haunts me. I didn't hurt anyone physically (I touched on this

in *On Forgiving*), but I caused a mental ripple that still hasn't fully healed.

The reality is that I let recreational drugs put me in a position to be around people with no social boundaries. I'll go over this in more detail when I get to *Turning Toward Addiction*. I set myself up for failure — that's what really happened. And that failure landed in my lap so ferociously, and in so many ways at once, that I not only lost everything I owned in ten seconds, I also ended up incarcerated over the ordeal.

When I say everything, I mean everything. Yearbooks covering my childhood, NES cartridges, signed books I'd kept for years, every CD I had ever owned, every ticket stub, from every concert, every thing that “mattered” to me, or to my “ego” — literally everything a middle-class human being can accumulate from birth to early adulthood.

Gone in the blink of an eye.

Then I was left to suffer in the lonely madness surrounding my mistake. I did everything I could to mend the situation, but the wound still seeps.

Now. That day as it was, and the night that followed. I learned something very valuable that day — something that has carried with me the whole time I've been alive since. The method is simple, but the peculiar way I learned it is still strange to me.

Quick time travel before we begin. Let me tell you about something I learned long before that day: the books I later

had to go back and reread, the ones that weave themselves through everything I write about now. The works of José Silva and Hermann Hesse and Carl Sagan, among others. Kurt Vonnegut, George Orwell, and — wouldn't you know it — Carl Jung. I took them all for granted. I had all the keys for myself. I just didn't know what any of the locks looked like.

I'll do my best to put the feelings and the thoughts into words, so you can see what I mean about that day when it became that night. Sooner or later those thoughts took over my subconscious, drove me like a vehicle, and sent me through the motions that ended in — I knew where. The people who have been there know where. There were no brakes.

Every move I made was part of it. I'd already followed the thought all the way to its end. But on some deeper level, I guess you could say I wanted to stick around and see the outcome. I think this is a turning point for people like me — the realization that choosing that avenue offers no satisfaction upon completion, at the social level.

But other thoughts, emotions, and small occurrences can steer us in a direction that pulls us away. Later in my life, I lost many friends to suicide. I'll never know what their last thought was. But I hope it was a wish that I would choose differently in their wake — that I would learn from what they couldn't.

Somewhere in my "I don't have anything left" conversations with myself, as I walked the detention block, I passed a TV in

the common area. It was playing *Annie* — the little orphan, the red dress, the song about tomorrow. I heard it, registered it, catalogued it, and kept walking. I had bigger fish to fry. Like existing as nothing, and coming back to nothing, because I had nothing.

I'll spare you the details of the madness that followed when I was put in my cell for nightly lockdown. The people who have been there know what they are. That's enough said on the matter. But like I said — the body goes on autopilot. A rhythm sets in, and it almost carries through the motions on its own.

“This is really it.”

“But even nothing is something. The absence of matter is still... something.”

There isn't a color that describes that place. But it's dark. Not dark the color. Dark the emotion. I had no one left to talk to except myself. I didn't even believe God would answer me at that point.

Little did I know, “My” and “Self” were living in two entirely different places during those motions — and the Creator was very present in the room, though I couldn't feel it. Or maybe a guardian angel. I'll never know.

My thoughts answered themselves. I asked, back and forth, whether this was the right decision. Keep the angel-and-devil-on-the-shoulder image in mind as you read.

“Is this the right decision?”

(Almost jokingly.) No.

“But—”

(Still laughing — it was almost maddening how funny it seemed to this half of my brain.) “Did I stutter? I said no. It’s not the right decision.”

(Then a clear separation of my ego and my Self. This next voice spoke to me, from me.) “But who am I to tell you what to do — you ‘know it all.’ Life’s a simulation; you figured that out on your own. Pull the plug if you want to. I only said it was a stupid f***ing idea. And you’re one of the smartest people you know — so what are you going to prove to anyone by doing it? That you’re a drug addict who died in a jail cell? Silly. Go ahead. Free will is part of the simulation. You said so yourself.”

I remember those thoughts. Clear as day. In my voice, but somehow directed at me. Word for word. Seared in forever. And that was the last time I ever talked to myself like that again.

Strange to think about — how many ways that last sentence applies.

Then the other half of my brain “left the room” and rejoined the one where *Annie* was still playing. Except this was hours after the movie had ended. I realized the singing was coming from me. Humming at first — then a full internal orchestra of that one hopeful promise the whole musical is built on. That the sun keeps its appointment. That it comes up tomorrow whether you’re ready or not.

I need this on the record: I'm a terrible singer. So bad that someone in the next cell told me — more words I won't forget — "Shut the f*** up! If you're not going to stop, at least practice and get better so we can enjoy it!" I laughed a good laugh. They had me there. I laughed so hard I fell asleep singing badly.

Today I can fairly assume the *Annie* on that TV was a synchronicity. I don't know who put it on, or why. In a room that wanted *Breaking Bad* or "something with boobs," I could not tell you why it was there — but people were into it. I'd rather not think about it too hard.

You'll never guess what happened next. The sun came out the next day.

I woke up clutching a copy of *Contact*, by Carl Sagan. On my right was the other book I'd checked out from the library: *The Princess Bride*. To this day, two of my favorite books — and films — and I'll die on that hill. I skipped breakfast and started reading.

I got to the part where Ellie — the scientist who has spent the whole book chasing a signal across the stars — is finally carried to the far side of the universe, and the intelligence waiting for her chooses to wear her dead father's face. It speaks to her in his voice.³

I got chills.

I don't know what happened to the person in the next cell who didn't like my singing. As a matter of fact, I can't even remember a person being in that cell. I'm not entirely sure.

Sometimes we don't know why we do what we do, or why we see things the way we see them. But I can attest to the clinical effectiveness of that experience on me — and that's a truth.

So what did I do from there? I lived. I chose life over death. Today I have a clearer picture of why; back then I didn't understand half of what I do now. But I chose life, and that was what mattered most that day — and every day since. (A few years later, once I'd accumulated a few new “things,” I lost them all again — and I was able to laugh it off, because I still had a duffel bag full of clothes, essentials, cigarettes, and cash. I was good.)

I didn't eat lunch either, or dinner. I read those two books cover to cover, and pressed every word into the subconscious of my new soul. To this day I'll tell you it's why I believe Science and Theology are just two different ways of explaining the same thing.

You can take out your ruler, and you can take out your scripture, and you know what? You can measure the pages and argue about it all day long. Understanding that we were designed — created, modeled in “His perfect image” — even if only a small part of you won't deny it might be real, it's already working its magic.

It did for me. Like I said, a lot of this arrived as synchronicity, and the synchronicities got more obvious as

time went on. So much of what people create is created to make life more bearable — so they tell the hero-story of life and death in as many appealing ways as they can. It's the same kind of creation.⁴

For me, that was all I needed. Everything made sense. It's all “created” the same way — even scriptures. That's an odd way to say it, but you have to understand: I've always been good at symbology, and sooner or later you arrive at the question — who actually made these symbols? They explain life. Hence my equation about life — which never would have been written had I chosen to end mine so long ago. Coincidence? Or fate?

*Both are true.*⁵

It's all relative — to each person, and to what they choose to learn. Two people can stand in the same room and live in entirely different worlds; Einstein showed that even time bends to the frame you measure it from.⁶ In my own equation for a life, that difference sits in a single term — the phase, the small angle of Intent each person turns at. Every “I” carries its own.

But turn the lens the other way — down past the frame that each “I” looks through — and you reach something we share.

The “I” that wanted to end it — that was only the ego. The small, frightened thing at the center of my waking mind. It was never the whole of me. Jung knew that. The ego is one lit

point; the psyche behind it runs far past what that point can see.⁷

Beneath the “I” — older, and wider — was the Self. And here is the part I’d had backwards the whole time.

The Self is not walled up inside one skull.

Jung spent his life on this: that the deepest floor of us is not private. It is common ground. Shared. The same dark water under every separate “I.”⁸ That is what I meant when I said existence is shared.

Which means.

Whatever a person makes down at that shared floor can surface in someone else. Not “bring them to God,” or anything like that. The design is complicated. Nobody understands it quite the way the next person does. Every “I” builds its own world —

but they all stand on the same floor.

So imagine if something I make reaches across it. Imagine if our decisions helped people, instead of harming them.

I can do that instead. I don’t even have to harm myself.

The beauty of the “design,” in mathematical terms, is lost on most people walking this earth. The beauty itself is what matters. Imagine the impact you could have if you chose life — and moved other people to do the same. Imagine if you made a whole thing out of it.

See what I mean? I think a person can condition their brain to link whatever ways they have of explaining their own existence to the act of beautifying it. In theory. Can you imagine if, someday, this became clinical fact?

Choose life. I'm begging you.

Call someone who will listen. Buy yourself time in that moment — and you might be buying yourself an entire lifetime of memories, and the kind of immortality that comes from the Traces you leave, not the exit you take.

In theory.



From J

NOTES & SOURCES

- 1 Jung came through his own confrontation with the unconscious (roughly 1913–1917) largely by his own inner labor, later recorded in *The Red Book (Liber Novus)*. He held throughout his work that an analyst can guide but cannot individuate another person: the meeting with one's own depths is finally one's own to make. See C. G. Jung, *The Practice of Psychotherapy*, Collected Works, vol. 16.
- 2 The claim that existence — as distinct from private experience — is shared echoes Jung's collective unconscious: a deep, common layer of the psyche beneath the personal. See C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Collected Works, vol. 9, part 1.
- 3 In Carl Sagan's novel *Contact* (1985), the traveler Eleanor "Ellie" Arroway is carried across the galaxy, where the intelligence that greets her takes the form and voice of her deceased father.
- 4 The recurrence of a single life-and-death "hero-story" across myths and scriptures is Joseph Campbell's monomyth. See *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), itself deeply indebted to Jung's theory of archetypes.
- 5 "Both are true" holds a causal and an acausal reading side by side: on one hand a chain of dependent probabilities (in the spirit of A. A. Markov's chains, where each state follows from the last); on the other, Jung's *synchronicity*, the meaningful coincidence that carries no causal thread. See Jung, "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle," Collected Works, vol. 8.
- 6 Einstein's special relativity (1905) makes simultaneity relative: two observers in different frames need not agree on when — or whether — two events coincide. The author's functional for a life, $L(t)$, carries this per-person difference in a phase term, the angle of Intent unique to each "I."
- 7 Jung treats the ego as the center of the field of consciousness — real, necessary, but a small and limited standpoint within a far larger psyche. See *Psychological Types*, Collected Works, vol. 6, and *Aion*, Collected Works, vol. 9, part 2.
- 8 The Self, for Jung, is not confined to the individual: its deepest ground opens onto the collective unconscious shared across persons. See again *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Collected Works, vol. 9, part 1.

Legible Traces

Turning Toward Suicidal Thoughts is part of *Turning Toward —*, a philosophy-of-psychology series by Jamison Todd Johnson, companion to the *On —ing* essays. The series is philosophical and testimonial, not clinical. If you are struggling, the resources at the front of this piece are real, free, and answered by people. Published open-access under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). Legible Traces · legibletraces.com. DOI: [on file].