

*You will never find the eternal life
That you seek. When the gods created mankind,
They also created death, and they held back
Eternal life for themselves alone.
Humans are born, they live, then they die,
This is the order that the gods have decreed.
But until the end comes, enjoy your life,
Spend it in happiness, not despair.
Savor your food, make each of your days
A delight, bathe and anoint yourself,
Wear bright clothes that are sparkling clean,
Let music and dancing fill your house,
Love the child who holds you by the hand,
And give your wife pleasure in your embrace.
That is the best way for a man to live.*

Are We Really Happy With Who We Are Right Now?

*Well, I'm no writer, but if I were, it seems to me I'd want to poke my head up every once in a while
and take a look around...see what's going on.*

It's life, Jake.

You can miss it if you don't open your eyes.

Both *Siddhartha* and *Gilgamesh* argue for the necessity of joy, of pain, of connection, of experience – and of coming away from it all having learned and adapted to something. Adventure, as the particularly wonderful movie *Up* once remarked, is out there. It seems we should chase it.

Yet the countering desire is not to seek out new life and new civilizations, but to acquire, hold, and enjoy – to find or build the sustainable and secure, then to hold on tight for as long as possible. The adventure is only worth seeking if we seek it together.

I have asked you twice to consider relationships, especially what it costs (and should cost) to maintain them. I do this in order to direct your attention toward one of the questions pulsing at the center of both *Siddhartha* and *Gilgamesh*, not to mention *(500) Days of Summer*, *Hell-Heaven*, and *Out in the Great Alone*: **Is any of this worth it?** (The answer, to varying degrees, is “Yes.”)

I think any pursuit of the meaning-of-life question (which, yes, you must answer – your final project awaits in just a couple short months!) has to start there: What matters?

I gave you a strictly hypothetical version of this bit with the “What would you attempt to do if you knew you would not fail?” Foundation Question. Now I would like to ground it in reality.

Your assignment for this week is two-fold, requiring both action and writing. I give you permission to take some time to do something fun, something unambiguously wonderful, something you love – and to do so on a weekday (for it’s awful to find oneself always waiting until the weekend to start living the life you’d like to lead). If such a quest seems burdensome, or even impossible, consider this your warning sign – or, if you’ve read enough of *Siddhartha* by now, your caged golden bird. We need the good things in life to sustain ourselves; we are not Samanas, nor should we aspire to their ideals.

First, write about what you intend to do before you do it. I want to see the gleeful anticipation. (And yes, you’re allowed to do this even with the lessons you learned from *The Futile Pursuit of Happiness* rattling around in the back of your head.) Tell me why this thing is something you truly love; tell me why you don’t get to do it often, if at all.

Next, go “do the thing.” Gather the people you need if you need other people for your experience. Provided that it’s school-appropriate and safe – no lawsuits should result from this assignment, children of mine – give me a full, immersive telling. Put me there, in your shoes, regardless of whether “the thing” is exciting or mundane. Maybe your “something” involves going to an aquarium and touching a ray, or watching a manatee drift around. Maybe it involves going to a place in the wilderness you loved as a child. Maybe it involves playing catch with your dad for the first time in a long time, or working with wood, or reading a book you’ve been meaning to start for ages. Maybe it involves leaving Arcadia; maybe it involves staying right here. Either way: make me understand the wonder and beauty of this ideal slice of life.

Finally, once it’s done, reflect. And don’t protest that writing about it for a school assignment somehow destroys it! If it’s truly a fulfilling experience, you shouldn’t have any trouble writing about it, nor capturing that feeling and sharing it with a larger audience that’s hungry for such things.

Over the next three days, I’m asking you to look up – just once – and live a small part of your life according to your own wishes and wants.

And once you’re done with that adventure...well, as *Up* once said: go find another one.