

SOULFUL STORIES, SURPRISING SCIENCE  
AND PRACTICAL WISDOM

—  
JONATHAN FIELDS

# EARLY RAVES

"Amid the pressure of our everyday routines, it's easy to forget what matters most. We yearn for lives with more energy, enthusiasm, and connection—but where to start? The brilliant Jonathan Fields shows us, in this thought-provoking and action-provoking guide. With engaging (and often funny) stories, cutting-edge research, concrete ideas, and examples from Fields's own experience, *How to Live a Good Life* will inspire readers to start living their good lives, today."

—Gretchen Rubin, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Happiness Project* and *Better Than Before*

"Many people over the years have considered the question of how to live a good life, but only one of them is Jonathan Fields: seeker, leader, thinker, mensch. Drawn from Fields's wide-ranging intellectual sources and deeply kind heart, *How to Live a Good Life* is the one book you need to answer the one question that matters."

—Susan Cain, co-founder of Quiet Revolution and *New York Times* best-selling author of *Quiet*

"Want to move from dreaming to doing, then *How to Live a Good Life* is for you. With an irresistible blend of soul, humility, and smarts, Jonathan Fields takes you by the hand and walks you down the path to the life you've longed for but didn't have a clue how to create—one full of meaning, connection, and fun. Don't just read it, live it!"

—Kris Carr, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Crazy Sexy Diet* and *Crazy Sexy Kitchen*

"Jonathan Fields's book takes ideas from psychology, literature, and philosophy (both Western and Eastern) and blends them into a delicious fruit smoothie of wisdom. The book will help those who want to give their life more meaning, value, and deep breaths."

—A. J. Jacobs, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Drop Dead Healthy* and *My Life As an Experiment*

"Jonathan Fields is shining his spotlight on possibility—not lofty dreams, not success strategies, not motivational techniques but POSSIBILITY. Straightforward, dynamic, and written with the vitality he wants readers to discover in themselves, this newest book explains how anyone can live a more energetic, joyful, and passionate life."

—Anna Jedrzewski, *Retailing Insight*

"*How to Live a Good Life* skillfully pairs potentiality with action. Fields's voice is refreshingly down-to-earth, and his enthusiasm is contagious. My 'Good Life' buckets runneth over after reading this book! I've drunk The Good Life Kool-Aid and suspect a lot of others will too!"

—Kristen Noel, Editor-In-Chief, *Best Self*

# How to LIVE a GOOD LIFE

SOULFUL STORIES, SURPRISING SCIENCE,  
AND PRACTICAL WISDOM

JONATHAN FIELDS



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# Introduction

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I'm the son of a hippie-potter mom and a mad-professor dad. I came of age in the '70s and '80s. Growing up, Duran Duran, ripped-jeans, big hair, and Frisbee were my religion. Yes, for those who've glanced at the head shot of me on the inside cover, there was a time I had hair. Same cut as Juan Epstein from *Welcome Back, Kotter*, and it was #GLORIOUS! I just missed the '60s free-love thing, but there was still a lot of love in our house.

Under the surface, though, as I'd come to learn, things weren't as I thought. My parents' marriage was coming apart. Over the years, my mom had become less hippie and my dad more academic. They wanted different things; they'd become different people. My mom had always been fiercely creative, possessed by the urge to make stuff. That's something I inherited from her. Clay was her playground. She'd vanish for days into the basement studio, absorbed in the process of throwing slabs into works of art. As my parents drifted apart, though, life got increasingly complicated. Pulled in many directions, my mom spent less and less time lost in the embrace of her basement pottery studio, largely abandoning the consuming devotion to craft that had been her source of solace, inspiration, identity, salvation, and even income for so many years. In my junior year of high school, my sister split for

college. Shortly afterward, my dad moved out, leaving my mom and me alone together in a big old house.

My folks had kept most of the emotional fallout of their separation from us, at least in the early days. Now, mom and I had to figure out a new dance. She kept up the facade of strength for a while. Then, one day, it all came tumbling down.

I came home to find her sitting on the edge of an old mattress flopped on the floor in the middle of her bedroom—hers alone. Her head lay buried in her knees. Her arms clung to her shins. She was crying. I'd seen her angry plenty of times, especially in the years leading up to the divorce. But I'd never seen her sitting quietly, lights off, weeping.

I didn't know what to do. For the moment, I was being called into the role of caregiver. It was my turn to kiss the boo-boo. But, this wound was soul deep. So I did the only thing I knew. I sat next to her and gently wrapped my arm across her back. "What's wrong?" I asked. In a somber silence that seemed to linger interminably, the unease of reversing roles washed through me. I almost hoped she wouldn't answer. Then I wouldn't need to figure out how to respond. My standard fallback to 17-year-old sarcasm wouldn't close this gap.

"I lost it," she whispered. "I went downstairs to the studio today. I sat at the wheel, grabbed some clay, and tried to throw. I kept trying. But I couldn't do it. It's gone." On the surface, the "it" she was talking about was her near-mystical mastery over clay. Just below that, it was the entirety of her being. Her identity as a maker, an artist, a powerful woman, and a creator. Her ability to reconnect with joy, to play, to get lost in a process, to achieve and be recognized, to put money in the bank and food on the table. The "it" that had left her was the very essence of who she believed herself to be. Somehow, at 17, I got that.

I wanted to cry along with her. Instead, I spoke. I'd trained as a gymnast for years, so this metaphor tumbled clumsily out. "You haven't lost it, Mom; you're just rusty. It's like me and gymnastics. You know how I get into great shape for competition during the season, but then during the off-season I kind of fall apart. And when I come back to training camp the week before we start, I'm



pretty terrible. It takes me a few weeks to get everything back. But it always comes back. Once it's in you, it's in you. You've been away from it for a while. You haven't lost anything. You're just rusty. It'll take a little time to get it back, but you will."

As she listened, the crying began to ease. Her breathing relaxed and she looked up. "Yeah," she said, "that makes sense." A spark of hope emerged, along with a gentle smile, and she gave me a hug. Later that evening, I heard the clank of the basement door as she made her way back into the studio.

I've often wondered why this moment has stayed with me. It would be years before I realized what had actually happened. What had been revealed to me. And it would be many more years until I gave myself permission to own the possibility that somewhere within me lay the ember of a rough-edged ability to affect others. Both the desire and the potential to create moments, experiences, and things that might inspire a change in state and belief. To incite possibility.

This potential to make a difference is, truth told, something I still grapple with. Owning it feels a little too trippy for my rational brain and a little too forward facing and arrogant for my more introverted, maker self. When my last book was named the number-one personal development book of the year by 800-CEO-READ, I was publicly grateful, but privately I recoiled at the label and what I believed it implied, both about me and about the work I was doing in the world. I'm not that guy, I offered quietly to friends. I'm about business, entrepreneurship, language, and creativity. Yet everywhere I've turned there have been signs. You are all those, those same friends would reply, but underneath it all, you're about something bigger: creating vehicles and pathways and moments that allow people to embrace their potential. To connect. To reveal. To see and engage with possibility.

I've come to learn that not owning this part of me out of fear of some kind of external judgment or label—well, that causes its own pain. It keeps me from doing what I'm here to do. Having refused the call for so long (I'm slow; what can I say?), I finally realized it was time to step into it.

That gradual awakening has fueled years of seeking and study and fierce engagement with life. It eventually brought me back to my seat not just as a student, but also as a maker, a mentor, a writer, and a teacher. It's the reason this book exists.

## Who Is This Book For?

I wrote this book with one person in mind but soon discovered she was, in fact, the face, the heart, the soul, and the stifled yearning of millions. From the outside looking in, she had so many reasons to be grateful. A confident woman in her middle years, she was building a career, had plenty of friends and shared interests, and put on a great show of health. She knew she was, in so many ways, blessed. But that did little to quell the undercurrent of yearning and her growing sense of stifled potential. Her deeper reality, like that of so many of us, told a different story.

She had given up so much in the name of being an adult and partner; a source of unflagging, always-on strength and wisdom, kindness and understanding, security and surrender. Everything to everyone at all times, except herself.

What had happened to those deep interests and passions, the burning questions, delicious topics, joyful activities, and moments of transcendent awe that had been at the center of her younger life? They had long been relegated to the land of lost socks and someday. Being lit-up ceded the way to being grown-up.

Nobody else saw that she was increasingly uncomfortable in her own skin, but she knew. Standing before her mirror revealed more than clothes could ever hide. It wasn't just about the way she looked; it was about the way she felt. Her health and vitality, her sexual and sensual core, had gone the way of her exercise and former identity. Her friends, numerous as they were, drifted somewhere "out there," wrapped in their own versions of sweet oblivion. Sure, there was the occasional "Let's do lunch" text, but without fail, it would linger unanswered in the digital ether. She had her "people," but having them and being with them were two different things. She was never truly alone but often lonely.

She met each day overwhelmed with a sense of pervasive busyness, and fractured attention. It was as if a swarm of “interested parties” were in control and her job, from the moment she opened her eyes to the moment she lay down to sleep, was not to choose with intention but to mindlessly react to an ever-expanding list of other people’s agendas. Punch lists replaced purpose and possibility. Awakened one morning, she thought, “Welcome to my autopilot life.”

Maybe most upsetting was that pervasive sense of untapped potential, as if the “real” her was screaming to get out, to reclaim that lit-up self she used to be or silently yearned to become. She’d give anything to close the gap between the life she knew she was capable of living and the one that met her every morning. And she was gut-tired of answering “busy” and “fine” and “surviving” whenever someone asked, “How are you?” She was desperate to be in a place where she would look up when asked and, with a radiant smile, reply, “So damn good!”

She had flatlined on nearly every level. It was as if she were living that classic lyric from Pink Floyd: she’d become “comfortably numb.” For years, she didn’t want to own it. Despite her slow descent into what Teddy Roosevelt famously described as “the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat,” there was extraordinary good in her life. She knew this. With so much “real” suffering in the world, she had just written off her state of disillusionment, disconnection, and malaise as a “first-world problem” because it was more about elevation than survival. And who was she to complain? Who was she to want more? Framing it this way not only made her feel greedy for wanting more, but gave her a seemingly rational justification for inaction. But there was something else. If she stood in her deeper truth, if she really owned it, she’d also have to own both her role in arriving at that place and her responsibility to do what was necessary to create a different future. And that terrified her, because she had no idea how to bridge the gap between where she was and where she so desperately wanted to be.

Until she finally hit her breaking point.

I wrote this book for her—but then, I’m guessing if you’ve read this far, there’s a good chance she is you. Even if you’re a guy. Even if you’re just graduating from college. Even if you’re starting over a bit further into life. We’ve all felt what she felt at different moments along the road. We’ve all been in that place of “fine” and “busy,” disconnected from the people, places, and activities that allow us to walk through each day utterly alive. Disconnected from our best selves. We’ve all felt like a piece of us was dying a little bit every day and we just didn’t know how to flip the switch, how to turn our lives back on. And we’ve all spun the conversation in our heads that justified inaction and complacency. The one that kept us cocooned, safe from the unknown, but also estranged from the possible.

Sadly, we are not alone. In a world where awareness and intention long ago lost the battle to mindless surrender, we’re not even the exception. For years, if not decades, we’ve been living with an undiagnosed condition, Reactive Life Syndrome. Living each day not by choice, but by default. Doing what we can simply to keep up and tread water. It’s not about getting ahead, but rather about desperately trying not to fall too far behind. And in the end, it’s a losing proposition. The great news is that it’s not too late. There is an antidote.

If you’re nodding and saying, “That’s me. This is what I need. I am ready,” then this book will serve as your guide. The community you’ll discover around the ideas in the book will help ensure that, maybe for the first time in your life, you’ll move from existing to living, and from knowing what to do to actually doing it.

But then, I’m guessing you’ve heard that line before. And you’re wondering, “Really? How is this going to give me back my life? What makes it so different? And who are *you* to tell *me* what to do?”

With your permission, I’ll start with that last question.

## Who Am I to Write *This Book*, and How Is It Different?

My finger hovered over the send button. “Who am I,” I wondered, “to propose a book entitled *How to Live a Good Life*?” The arrogance! A middle-aged, married dad from the Upper West Side of Manhattan pontificating on the single most vexing question in all of human history. What do I have to say about how to live a good life that hasn’t been said or shared a million times before? Funny enough, a large part of my work is helping people and companies who’ve lost their sense of identity, voice, and meaning answer this very question. *Who am I to have something to say?* As I sat with the question, the words of iconic dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, offered in Agnes de Mille’s biography, *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham*, settled over me:

There is vitality, a life force, energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is nor how valuable nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep yourself open and aware to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open. . . .

Adding value to another’s life is not about being a guru, a sage, or a wizard. It’s not about placing yourself above others, preaching down, or telling anyone to “sit and listen while I save you from the world and yourself.” When I look at the astonishing body of wisdom around the pursuit of a good life, from the Stoics to the Buddha, from faith to science and metaphysics to mythology, it’s clear to me that there is little, if anything, that’s not been studied or said before. There are precious few new ideas. Yet, in the face of this gob-smackingly huge collection of wisdom, much of humanity stumbles along, eternally yearning for a life it knows is possible, but having no idea how to find or create it.

The problem isn't that we don't have the answers. We've had them for thousands of years. It's that the things that work are either engulfed in a vast sea of noise or offered in a way that doesn't land. They're too hard to find and validate, too complicated, too theoretical, too mired in dogma, that war with the reality of our lives.

I'm not here to claim ownership of something profound and new, but rather to help you separate the wheat from the chaff. To identify the big levers, the things that work. And then to share them in a way that preserves their potential but also goes down easy. A way that inspires not just understanding, but action and integration, without the need for blind faith, godlike willpower, or total disruption.

My role has been to live fiercely and study deeply. To walk through each day an eternal student. To wade into Joseph Campbell's disquieting abyss in search of our treasure. Hopefully the way I share my unique understanding and experience will somehow connect with the way you need to hear or see or feel something at this moment. Maybe some small piece will awaken a part of your story in a manner that helps you breathe a little easier, love a little more openly, or live a little more fully. That is my intention in writing this book.

But what about you? All I ask is this: Stay open. Hold on a little less tightly to the safety of a consistent yet failed past and to the perceived sanctity of truths that may or may not have served you and the way you dream of being in the world. As Mark Twain famously offered, "It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so."

## Where Do the Ideas I'm about to Share Come From?

In the next chapter, I'll offer a simple model that you can use to guide nearly every decision in life, something I call the Good Life Buckets. Where does it come from? In part, from decades of study. Some at the feet of extraordinary thinkers and teachers, from Buddhist lamas to education reformers and grounded-theory researchers to neuroscientists. Other learning comes from

thousands of hours and decades of quiet study and contemplation, devouring everything from Thomas Merton to the *Bhagavad Gita* to reams of academic studies and research reports.

Then there's the wisdom that can come only from some 50 years of life. Lessons learned through more than two decades building communities and companies, failing repeatedly and finding the will to step back into the arena until I got it right. Years teaching everything from yoga to entrepreneurship to thousands of students from around the world, speaking on stages large and small, working with everyone from soccer moms to CEOs and movie stars to moguls, leading retreats, writing books, and lecturing at universities. But without question, my deepest, most humbling growth has come from being a dad and a husband, and from my daily practice, one that cultivates a deepening stillness and continues to awaken me to the life-affirming truth of my own impermanence and the urgency that comes from accepting that on a day unknown to me, I and all those I love will be gone. Each of these experiences has shaped what Martha Graham would call my unique expression of life. My quickening. My channel. And they've all found an outlet in the venture that now commands a good part of my vocation, Good Life Project®.

In January 2012, I began to write what had normally been an annual essay that inventoried and reflected on the year behind and set intentions for the year to come. That document rapidly grew into a 34-page Warren Buffet-style annual report that I published and shared on my blog. On the final two pages, entitled "2012 Reimagined," I shared a story, and an invitation:

"What inspires you?"

That's what an audience member asked during my keynote at a conference last summer.

Little did she know, I had something hidden . . . something the audience couldn't see . . . a little piece of paper resting on the monitor next to my notes . . .

It was there to remind me what really mattered. I could crash and burn on stage, but this piece of paper would make it all okay.

It was a heart. Drawn for me by my 10-year old daughter before I left. No matter how my keynote went, she'd still be there to place her hands on my cheeks when I walked in the door and share a few butterfly kisses and a hug that said, "You're everything I need."

I held up the heart in response to the question and said, "This. My daughter," then explained what it was. Standing there, with the piece of paper raised high in the air before 500 people, I nearly burst into tears. So did many in the audience.

That piece of paper with the hastily drawn heart comes with me when I travel. If I'm on stage, it's there with me. But there was more. An invitation bundled with an announcement. Ten ideas, a different approach to building not just a living, but a life. And a new venture, one that would take my (until then) very personal exploration of life well lived and turn it far more public than I'd ever planned.

"What if I shared my quest," I thought. Sitting down with teachers, known and unknown, filming and recording the conversations, then not only learning but offering these people and ideas up to the world. What if I made it my full-time pursuit to find, learn from, and share people with pieces of the puzzle? People like the ephemerally wise and wickedly funny Brené Brown. People like polio survivor and education revolutionary Sir Ken Robinson. People like Shambhala Buddhist lama Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, a fiftysomething Tibetan lama whose name literally translates to "Earth Protector." People like iconic graphic designer Milton Glaser, who, when I sat down with him at the age of 85 remained stunningly prolific, deeply committed, creating, teaching, and playing with his wife of some 60 years. People like acclaimed illustrator Lisa Congdon, who stumbled into art in her thirties and made it her life. Or famed behavioral economist and psychologist Dan Ariely, whose fascination with human nature and subsequent vocation were triggered by a three-year stint as a patient in an Israeli burn ward at the age of 18. What if I could travel the world, visit with these beacons of life-earned wisdom



and light, learn at their feet, integrate what I learned with my own experience of life, my own unique view, voice, and channel, and then share it all with the world?

With that, Good Life Project® was born. And without intention, the very early seeds of this book were planted. Now years into this quest, those seeds of an idea that began as a deep yearning to learn and share have grown into a media and education venture with a global community, an acclaimed web series and podcast with hundreds of thousands of listeners and viewers in more than 150 countries. We've also grown a catalog of courses, gatherings, events, and even an annual celebration, Camp GLP, where "GLeePers" from all over the world converge on a summer camp for three and a half days of pure magic.

Along the way, the incredible access to extraordinary minds and gorgeous souls began to cross-pollinate with my own experiences, and something profound began to emerge, a simple model I began to call the Good Life Buckets™. This easy-to-digest framework offers a way to look at the life you're living, quickly and easily assess what's working and what's not, and instantly know where to focus your energy to make things better; then it tells you what to do. I began to share the Good Life Buckets™ with increasingly large groups and within our courses and gatherings. The response took my breath away.

Mel Charbonneau, a married mother of three young kids and cofounder of the emerging women's movement Fellow Flowers, was one of the first to learn about the buckets. In the middle of one of our intensive seven-month training programs, she shared some great news. She was pregnant with her third child. And, much to my surprise, the Good Life Buckets™ played a major role in both her decision to have another child and how she would completely reconfigure her life to continue to flourish as a mom and an entrepreneur and live a great life. In her words:

Having another child was a big deal. I'm in major start-up mode with my business, giving it a ton of my time, creativity, and energy. And I already have two little girls, ages 7 and 4, who get all my love and attention

when I'm not in biz mode. My husband and I had just figured out our groove with family and business when I realized something big—I really wanted to have another baby. How do you have that conversation?

How do you discuss those big pieces of your life that will have to once again get reacclimated? Enter the buckets. When I returned home from Costa Rica, it was like I had a whole new dialogue to share with my husband, which helped guide our decision and reaffirm what was most important to us. It gave us context for questions and conversation. . . . It actually became really good motivation to pause, prioritize, and let go of a few things. For our marriage, it brought us closer because connection (family relationships) is the MOST important part of our life, and now our goal is to make a contribution and vitality support and nurture that, leaving room for the fun, chaos, and adventures of life.

Charbonneau is just one of so many examples. As more people learned about the Good Life Buckets™, I noticed something wonderful. They began speaking in “the language” of the buckets—“I’m feeling like this one bucket needs filling today”—and using it to guide their decisions, big and small. The outcomes were better than I ever imagined, and with its application in the real world, I’ve been able to refine the model. This book is your window into this seemingly simple yet transformational tool, explaining how you can tap the buckets to guide your decisions and actions in the quest to live a great life.

## **Let’s Get Your Good Life Going!**

It’s time to set in motion your personal Good Life Project. To discover a new way to get from where you are now to where you know in your bones you’re capable of being.

Before we dive in, one last thought: This book is your road map. The approach, ideas, and many invitations to act, to play, to

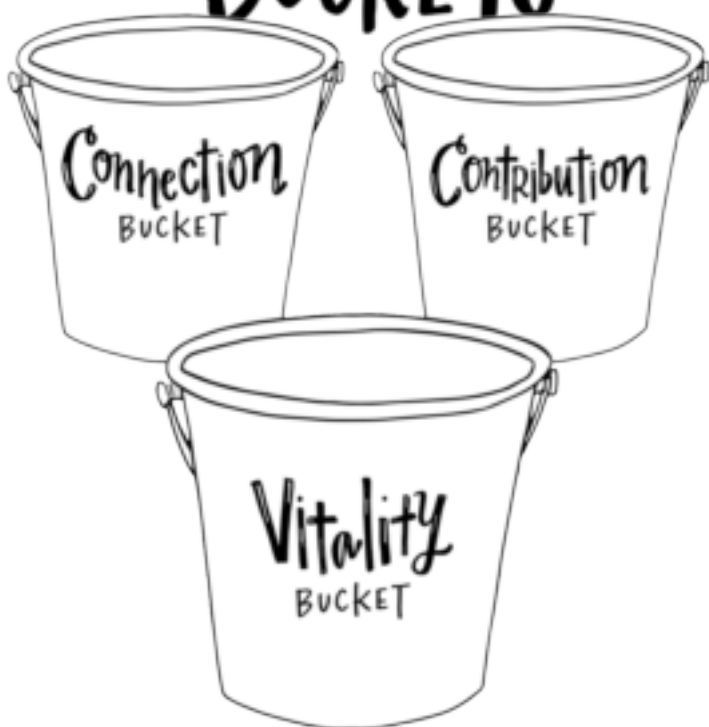
connect, and to embody what you're learning on a daily basis will serve as a hybrid good life manifesto and a practical yet powerful guide. One that allows you to ease into a process of awakening and becoming in a way that feels right to you.

At the same time, the real magic happens when you put down the book and start doing the work. So I've created a set of additional resources not only to ensure you stay supported, feel inspired, and are held while you're "doing" the book, but also to help you carry the learning and doing into the rest of your life.

Throughout the book, you'll see references to a web page called [goodlifeproject.com/bookinsider](http://goodlifeproject.com/bookinsider). Here, I'll share a wide range of free resources, links, downloadable files, worksheets, guided audio, and more, all in one place. You'll also find an invitation to join our beautiful, supportive, and private Good Life Project online community, crafted around an ethos of generosity, compassion, nonjudgment, and elevation. There you'll find a place to share your experiences, ask questions, find accountability partners and support, and more. Oh, and don't be surprised if you also end up making a bunch of friends along the way. Our "GLeePer" family has been known to be a pretty friendly lot!

Onward then—to the buckets we go!

# the Good Life BUCKETS



Think of your life as three buckets.

The first bucket is called Vitality, and it's about the state of your mind and body. The second is Connection; this one is about relationships. The third, Contribution, is about how you contribute to the world.

The fuller your buckets, the better your life. When all simultaneously bubble over, life soars. That's what we're aiming for. But the flip side is also true. If any single bucket runs dry, you feel pain. If two go empty, a world of hurt awaits. If all three bottom out, you don't have a life. Figuratively and, in short order, literally.

There are likely hundreds if not thousands of ways to fill your Good Life Buckets. But, as promised, this simple framework and book are about making your life easier. For all three buckets, we'll keep our focus on a very small number of what I call bucket-filling "big levers." These are the little things that will fill your buckets most powerfully. In the chapters that follow, you'll discover 10 ways to fill each bucket.

Before we get there, let's go a bit deeper into each bucket. Then we'll take a quick snapshot that will tell you how full each of *your* buckets is right now (don't worry, no judgments). After that, you'll learn the three "laws of the buckets." That'll give you everything you need to start your own Good Life Project and dive into the chapters that follow.

Let's start with your Vitality Bucket.

## Your Vitality Bucket

*"None of the other stuff is going to work if the animal that you live in is just a broke-down mess." — Elizabeth Gilbert*

If you don't have your health, we've all heard, you don't have anything. You can't buy your way out of a tumor. Or depression. Or illness. Or pain. You can't feel alive, happy, and joyful when your body is abandoning you. And you can't drink in all that life

has to offer when your body is limited in its capabilities. Not only that, but a vital body is the vessel for that three-pound bundle of consciousness called your brain, the thing that processes whether you're living a good life or not. The thing that feels and chooses, that controls your organs, systems, and movements. There is a powerful feedback loop between your mind and body.

What exactly is vitality, then? For our purposes, vitality is an optimal state of body and mind. When you think about the state of your body and mindset, you want to feel:

- Energized
- Fit, strong, and flexible enough to participate in life
- As free from pain, disease, and disability as possible
- Aware of and capable of being in the moment
- Optimistic about the future and what it holds
- Peaceful and calm, able to dissipate stress
- Able to bounce back from adversity
- Immersed in a process of growth
- Grateful for what's right in life
- Fueled by a sense of meaning
- Happy

Notice that vitality isn't just about our bodies. It's about our minds. Why is that? Because, in truth, there is no distinction. Your mind and body serve as seamless feedback mechanisms, chemically and electrically. They are so hopelessly intertwined that it's silly to speak of them as separate. The state of your body—its health, strength, disease, ability, or disability—has a profound effect on your mind. If your body is in pain, so is your brain. We get that. Less intuitive, though, is that if your mind is in pain, so is your body. Depression, anxiety, sadness, stress, and heartbreak all create real, measurable physical symptoms in our bodies, ranging from pain to inflammation and disease. By the same token, joy, love, belonging, meaning, peace, and ease create a cascade of

positive effects that we feel equally. When we head into the daily explorations to fill your Vitality Bucket, we'll explore things that elevate both mind and body.

Okay, let's head on over to your Connection Bucket.

## Your Connection Bucket

*"There is nothing I would not do for those who are really my friends. I have no notion of loving people by halves, it is not my nature." — Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey*

Our Connection Bucket is about nourishing relationships. It's about intimate partners, family, close friends, colleagues, coconspirators, and like-minded community. It's about love and lust, passion and compassion, resonance and belonging. It's also about how well we know and relate to ourselves. And for some, it's also about our relationship with the experience of something greater than ourselves, whether we define that as God, source, spirit, consciousness, nature, the divine, field, or anything else.

We are innately social beasts, born to be with others. When we're with the right others, in the right way, magic happens. We come alive and our world, our capacity to flourish and grow and engage with life and joy, expands. When we're with the wrong people, in the wrong way, or isolated from the right people, everything shrinks. Our ability to drink in all life has to offer crumbles. When we're completely alone, isolated from humanity, we first lose our minds, then wither and die. Yes, even the rare professed diehard mega-introverts among us.

In order to fill our Connection Buckets, we need to find and be with "our people." Those we can love and those who'll love us back. Those we can befriend and play and laugh with. Those who will serve as a source of acceptance, allegiance, and belonging. In other words, those who just plain get us.

When we think about the relationships in our lives, we want to feel like:

- We give love and receive love, without condition
- We belong—we're seen, understood, and embraced by friends with shared values, interests, and aspirations (and sometimes culture)
- We are connected to something bigger than ourselves, be it natural or ethereal

How do you cultivate these connections and relationships and the luscious, bucket-filling feelings that ride along with them? You'll discover 10 powerful ways in our Connection Bucket daily explorations.

That brings us to the final bucket.

## Your Contribution Bucket

*"Imagine immensities. Pick yourself up from rejection and plow ahead. Don't compromise. Start now. Start now, every single day." — Debbie Millman*

Your Contribution Bucket is about how you bring your gifts to the world. It's the answer to the poet Mary Oliver's gorgeous question, "Tell, me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

It's about contributing to the world, even if that world is a single person, in a way that is meaningful, in a way that matters and allows you to feel like you matter. It's about that deep knowing that you're doing the thing you're here to do. There's a sense of calling that's pulling you from ahead, rather than pushing you from behind. It's about being lit-up along the way, absorbed in that semi-trance state beyond emotion, where time ceases to exist and you feel like you're channeling pure consciousness. It's about feeling like you're accessing your full potential, your strengths, your gifts, the deepest parts of your humanity, leaving nothing unrealized or untapped. You are fully expressed, seen, and heard.

To fill our Contribution Buckets, we need to cultivate these feelings. How? As with our Vitality and Connection Buckets, the



universe of possible contributors is large. We'll focus on 10 big filling levers for our Contribution Buckets in the daily explorations that follow.

That brings us to the Three Laws of the Buckets.

## The Three Laws of the Buckets

### **Bucket Law #1: The buckets leak.**

In the early days, our buckets are new and shiny. No dents or cracks, no rust or tarnish. But over time they get a bit dinged, the paint wears thin, and the seams that held together so tightly begin to separate just a bit. Then they begin to leak. Not a ton, but enough so that we can't just fill them once and know they'll stay topped off for life. Left alone, our buckets eventually run dry. And so does life. Our job, then, is to keep circling around, filling them as needed, and never ignoring any one long enough for it to run dry.

### **Bucket Law #2: Your emptiest bucket will drag the others down with it.**

Intuitively, we know this. Let our Vitality Buckets run dry and it'll be impossible to contribute anywhere near the level of our true potential or sustain relationships in a way that fills our Connection Buckets effectively. Let our Connection Buckets run dry and it becomes brutally hard to muster the energy needed to do the things that fill our Vitality and Contribution Buckets. Let our Contribution Buckets run dry, spending all our energies on things that devour our time but empty our souls, and we'll have trouble finding the reserves needed to cultivate rewarding relationships and a vital mind and body. All the buckets are connected. We cannot fill any one to its full capacity unless the others fill along with it. Put another way, we can abandon one in the name of filling the others for only so long, before we need to circle back and do all our buckets right.

**Bucket Law #3: The buckets never lie.**

We often bring a certain amount of well-intended delusion to the assessment of how full or empty our buckets are. We like to think they're fuller and easier to fill than they are. Think what you want, but the buckets don't lie. If you let one run dry, all the delusion and excuse in the world won't help. Empty is empty. You can't think it full. Be optimistic about the future but honest about the present.

Now we have a new tool to guide our decisions and actions. And we've learned a simple set of rules to help get us on our way. It's great new information. But, as author and visionary thinker Derek Sivers offers, "If information was the answer, then we'd all be billionaires with perfect abs." Knowledge is meaningless without action. It's time to move from knowing to doing, to start filling our Good Life Buckets!

# A PERSONAL NOTE FROM JONATHAN

Hey there (yup, you!),

First, thank you. No, really. Thank you. For reading this chapter. But also just for being so awesome (trust me, you are. I know . . . I've been watching! lol).

We need more of you in the world. People who are willing to step out of the "gray twilight," shake off the suffocating weight of "Reactive Life Syndrome," and step into a deeply connected, profoundly meaningful, and vital life.

And here's the thing. I could really use your help.

I'm growing a movement of lit-up humans. And this book, well, it's the kindling that lights the fire. The more it spreads, the more people we inspire, the bigger our family becomes, the better our lives get, starting with yours.

So, this is really hard to do . . .

I'm still pretty uncomfortable with the whole vulnerability thing. But here goes.

Would you help me grow this movement? Yes?! Oh, that's so fantastic!

Here's the deal.

The book is now available for pre-order. The more books in people's hands, hearts, and lives, the higher and faster we all rise. Starting with, wait for it . . . YOU!

I'd so appreciate if you'd pre-order a copy for yourself. Even better, grab two more copies for friends, so you can "do" the book together. And in case changing your life and your friends' lives and being part of a global good life movement isn't enough, I've created a few super-cool "pre-order bonus bundles" for you, too.

**Check out the pre-order bonus bundles at: [GoodLifeProject.com/book](http://GoodLifeProject.com/book)**

Let's do this. No more autopilot life. No more being asleep at the wheel. It's time for us all to rise together. To step back into our good lives and bring those we care about along with us!

With a whole lotta love & gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'J' and a cursive 'N'.