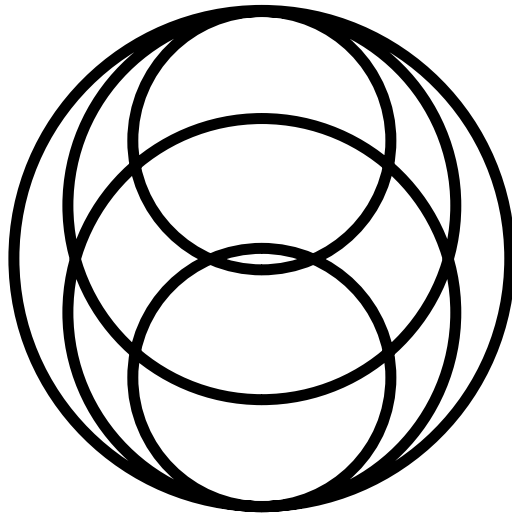


ELS VAN STEIJN

THE FOUNTAIN MAKE WISE CHOICES



EXPAND YOUR SYSTEMIC CONSCIOUSNESS
AND LIVE YOUR LIFE WELL

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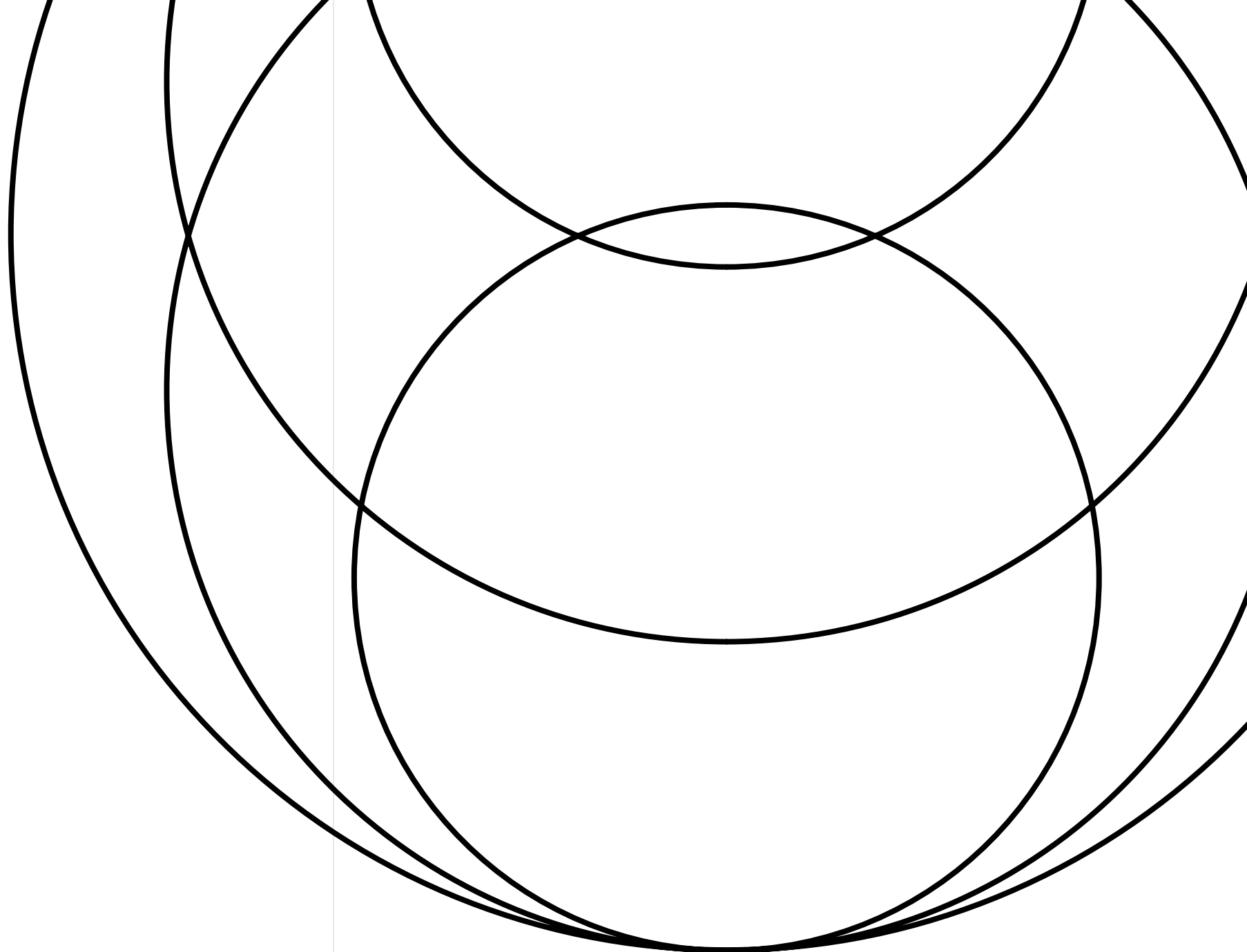
For all the palpable and all the imperceptible forces around us
that carry us, guide us, and enliven us.

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1. INTRODUCTION

**“I RESPECT YOU,
AND I RESPECT YOUR FATE.
I RESPECT MYSELF,
AND I RESPECT MY FATE”**

1.1 THE ART OF LIVING

“The prayer that was answered”

I asked for strength and was given difficulties
to make me strong.
I asked for wisdom and was given problems to solve.
I asked for prosperity and was given brawn and
brains to work.
I asked for courage and was given dangers to overcome.
I asked for patience and was given situations
where I was forced to wait.
I asked for love and was given troubled people to help.
I asked for favors and was given opportunities.
I received nothing I wanted. I received everything I needed.

Source/author unknown, possibly from Sufi literature

This piece fascinates me to this day. It kindles in me a zest for life and energy, and yet it confuses and frustrates me at the same time. On the one hand, it makes me feel like I’ve got a grip on my life, and on the other, I actually experience what a lack of influence I have on things. While that feels contradictory, these two contrasts seem to be able to coexist. Meanwhile, I realize that we live in a world of dualities. Think of the dualities of day–night, strong–vulnerable, guilty–innocent, prosperity–adversity, or war–peace. Everything has its other side, just like the two sides of a coin. You don’t know exactly where one side ends and the other begins and vice versa. Thus, problems and solutions are jointly answers to your issues in life. They may even be victories. My “victories” have shaped me, and through them, I have grown as a person.

The younger me was focused on being in control and had all the characteristics of a “wandering head.” I mainly dealt with things through reason and logic. I barely listened to the signals coming from my body, my gut, or even more intangible things such as invisible laws. I was highly goal-oriented. I showed discipline, behaved like an adult, and kept focused, which helped me accomplish a great deal.

Always being goal-oriented has its advantages and disadvantages. It’s helpful to learn how to achieve goals, certainly in the first few decades of your life. Having a degree on the wall helps you participate more easily in society. Knowing how to stay healthy—both physically and mentally—and arrange your affairs are skills that ensure a pleasant quality of life in the now and the future. These also help build self-confidence. The downside of being constantly focused on goals is that it’s energy-consuming. Not getting distracted and staying on track devour your energy, and you also run the risk of developing tunnel vision. You no longer see what’s happening and what else is available to you outside the cocoon of achieving your goal.

Nowadays, I work more with goal *directions* rather than specific goals. I drift along with the flow of my life and, as a result, am open to my surroundings and see opportunities and options that I wouldn’t notice if I were too focused. When I think something is worth going for, I spring into action to achieve the goal. Then I’m very focused and know my priorities. After that, I let go again. After effort comes the other side of the coin—relaxation—where being tired from “doing the right things” is, in essence, not a bad thing, because it gives you a sense of fulfillment. And then I allow myself to be surprised yet again by the many beautiful things that are out there and what life has in store for me.

The success of my first book, *The Fountain, find your place*, has enabled me to encounter people I wouldn’t have otherwise met. Every day I hear from people who range in age from adolescence to the last stage of their lives who write that the book has touched them in some way and caused something in their lives to turn around for the better. How grateful I feel for this. My mother, who passed away from a brain tumor in 2007, instilled the concept of gratitude in me back then. She knew she had only a few months to live and refused to be treated. She had been a doctor in her professional life, and she realized that it would not have added much to her life to undergo treatment. She said yes to what was there. With that surrender and dignity, she went into the final months of her life without complaint and was able to fully receive all the love that was there for her. She said, “As long as I’m still making plans, I’ll be fine.” As a result, we visited many beautiful places in the Netherlands in the early phases of the illness. At a certain point, my mother asked me to prepare questions that everyone around the dinner table would then answer. One evening we were sharing our answers to the question, “What are you proud of?” My mother said that the word pride was not something she much identified with, but that the word gratitude was. She was grateful she’d grown up with parents who supported her and were able to help her become a doctor despite being a woman, which ran counter to the zeitgeist of those times. Grateful that her family came out of the war in relatively good shape despite the risks of taking people into hiding. Grateful for the fun she had with her sisters and friends, and so on. It all showed that my mother had self-respect and, at the same time, could not be caught out with an ego that was too big or too small. Her answer puzzled me at the time because I wanted to be proud of myself and secretly hoped that other people

**YOU BELONG TO
THE WORLD NO
MATTER WHAT
BECAUSE YOU
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HENCE GIVEN A
PLACE ON THIS
EARTH.**

would see that I was valuable. I didn't realize then that as a human being, you *have* an ego rather than *are* your ego. In the latter case, you self-identify with your ego. The ego lives by the desire, if not the demand: I want to be important and matter. I want people to see me, take me into account, and love me, preferably because I'm special. I want to belong and have something to offer; these give life meaning and a reason to get up every day. The ego is part of being human. The question is only whether we, with all our ego desires, are still in touch with who we essentially are and what asks to be given shape by us.

Who or what are you when you no longer have an ego? What do you then base your self-confidence and individuality on? What makes you unique? For me, the art of living is about finding a sufficient and strictly personal answer to these questions. Philosopher and writer Simone de Beauvoir describes the art of living as follows: "Finding the guts to break with the ideal and learning to listen to your own truth. Clinging to ideals is just "lifestyle," and this causes you to stay on the surface of life and everything that makes you unique to remain hidden. If I don't dare to show how much love and creativity resides deep inside me, if I don't dare to fail, if I can't be vulnerable, how can I ever reach the peak of my ability?" How brave. Such a stance requires courage, consciousness, and also an ego. And there's nothing wrong with having an ego. On the contrary: you need an ego and an identity to carve out a place for yourself in society.

You belong

You belong to the world no matter what because you were born and hence given a place on this earth. You are here, so you are allowed to be here. I used to think that I had to

earn my place and doubted that I was allowed to be here. I thought I had to validate my right to exist over and over again by always giving to and pleasing others. That turned out to be utterly exhausting. In essence, I was preoccupied with myself and less so with others, although it didn't look that way from the outside. At that time, I was less in touch with my authenticity, my real motives, and my values in life. I also tended to try to outdo others. My ego kept getting in my way until the following finally dawned on me: "Try to become better than yourself." Nowadays, that is what I aspire to.

Nowadays, I stand firmly in my own unique place in "the fountain." Since that became the case, I've been fundamentally convinced that I am good enough. My first book, *The Fountain, find your place*, explains what your rightful place is and how you can catch the invisible flow of the fountain, allowing yourself to live your life well. I summarize for you the basic concepts of that book in the next chapter. In a nutshell, it comes down to the fact that you are 50% your biological father and 50% your biological mother. If you don't accept this "package deal" (all the beautiful and not-so-beautiful things and everything you long for and will never receive), you will not be in your place in the fountain and will never be satisfied with yourself. No matter how much success you have, what affirmations you utter, or how much external validation you get, you will feel empty, unfulfilled, and dissatisfied with yourself deep within. That acceptance affects both the development of your ego and the extent to which you need it.

I now know that, as human beings, we are much more connected to our family system and other systems than we can ever imagine and that invisible laws influence our