

The Untethered Soul Summary

By Michael A. Singer

What's holding you back from reaching your full potential, fulfilling goals and ambitions, changing your circumstances, or realizing your dreams? You may think it's external forces, but more often than not, it's the nagging voice in your head, filling you with self-doubt and negativity.

The Untethered Soul by bestselling author and meditation guru, Michael A. Singer, invites us to hold a mirror up to ourselves, and reflect not on the outward, but on the internal workings of our minds. The *New York Times* bestseller provides deeply philosophical theories on life, the self, and our minds.

We may find ourselves muttering about how we fail to understand specific individuals, when they do things that disappoint or hurt us. Singer explains that the root of most of our stress, pain, anxiety, and inner turmoil, is actually because we fail to understand ourselves properly. Humans are attached to the ego and the mind, and in order to be free of all the emotional baggage we carry around, we need to analyze ourselves from the inside out. This self-awareness will allow us the freedom to release ourselves from the burden of negativity, and help us to deal with pain and suffering in a more pragmatic and nuanced way.

This summary will guide us briefly down the path of self-awareness and spiritual awakening, and provide us with tools to embrace positivity and acceptance. Singer explains why we gravitate towards the worst-case scenario, why we work ourselves up and spiral into self-doubt, and why we believe that we're doomed to fail before we even start. Singer teaches us to be critical of negativity and toxic feelings, and he trains us

to rethink how we deal with our thoughts and doubts. Furthermore, by showing us what we can control, *The Untethered Soul* offers us numerous tools to embrace positivity, and to untether from the aspects of ourselves so that we can reach our full potential.

Facing the Existential Crisis

You've probably asked yourself the question, 'Who am I?'

Many of us may find ourselves asking this question at various junctures of our lives. However, have you ever deeply interrogated who you actually are?

When you go to a party and meet someone for the first time, how do you introduce yourself? You may say something like, 'Hi, I'm Nancy, and I work in sales.' But is this really who you are?

If we break ourselves down into a name and occupation, this isn't getting to grips with our sense of self. William Shakespeare famously said, 'What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.' Our names do not define us; although they may be important and significant to us, they have no bearing on our sense of self.

If we take the relational approach, we often believe that we exist in relation to other people and the objects around us. But, if we take those things away, we're still here, we're just alone, and perhaps a bit bored and lonely. This is known as the subject-object relationship. Although we experience feelings and emotions towards the people or material objects we're surrounded by, we still remain separate from them.

So maybe our sense of self is determined by our thoughts? We all know Descartes's iconic mantra, 'Cogito, ergo sum,' or 'I think, therefore I am.' However, Singer argues that our selves are not our thoughts either. Again, if we look at the subject-object relationship, we can see why this is. Our thoughts are like our emotions; they're separate from us. To illustrate this, think about when your thoughts are the most acute. It's likely that you're most aware of your thoughts when you're bored or alone. When we're busy or surrounded by distractions, we often don't have time for our thoughts. Hence, we are not our thoughts.

If we're not the identity we give ourselves, the people and objects we're surrounded by, our emotions, or our thoughts, then what or who exactly are we? We've discovered that we're not our personal selves, which are very much defined by how we create our identities, and our self-perception. Singer argues that we are our awareness. Once we rid ourselves of identity factors and internal factors, what we're left with is awareness. We have an awareness that we exist.

Hello, Is It Me You're Looking For?

Close your eyes and say 'Hello.'

What's going on in your head as you say that? Maybe your inner voice responded with a 'hello,' maybe other thoughts were rattling around about your sanity, or perhaps you just noticed a whole lot of internal chatter. In any event, our minds are never silent when we closely scrutinize them.

Our inner voice, or voices, is like having a roommate. And with all roommates, it's a good idea to have a set of rules. While our inner voice is

the one we turn to the most, when we're faced with decisions, anxieties, problems, etc., it's not always a source of comfort. On the contrary, our inner voice often prevents us from living in the moment, and enjoying the fullness of life. Our inner voice is often a distracting influence that leaps into action when we're trying to live our lives and find peace. It nags us about not forgetting things, things we need to remember, whether we've left the iron on, 'is there milk at home?' If we remembered to lock the door, and 'don't forget it's your mother's birthday next week.'

Our inner voice encompasses all of those things that preoccupy us and prevent us from experiencing what's happening around us. The most annoying thing about our inner voice is that all too often, the mind worries about things that don't actually come to pass. We experience all of this worry and anxiety over stuff that doesn't materialize, or is merely incidental.

The lesson is that not only do we need to learn to control our thoughts, but we also need to be critical of what's going on inside our heads, and rationalize a lot more. Singer explains that 'There is nothing more important to true growth, than realizing that you are not the voice of the mind - you are the one who hears it.' Once we accept this, we'll be more aware that we're merely the bystander to the voice in our head, which will help us to examine it a lot more objectively.

Control, Alter, Delete

Energy is the force that flows through us. This may sound like something from *Star Wars*, but it's also one of this book's central tenets. Without energy, it's difficult for us to live up to our potential, so we must get rid of anything that's causing us to be distracted or encumbered. When we experience negative thoughts, we're less likely to spring into action and

be productive. In Chinese culture, the energy that runs through us is called chi. Our chi can become unbalanced when we have negative thoughts and emotions. Singer explains that we can't control the outside world, but we can control our inner world, and mastering this will allow us to experience greater energy and enlightenment.

The metaphor of a thorn is used to illustrate how we deal with our negative emotions. If you have a thorn in your finger, you can deal with it in one of two ways. Either you can bite the bullet and remove the thorn, or you can ignore it. If you choose option one, removing the thorn will cause you pain for a while, but eventually it'll heal. In all likelihood, the pain might not even be as bad as you first expected. The second option is to ignore the thorn. Should you choose to ignore it, you'll carry the pain around with you, and it'll probably get a lot worse as time passes. You may even have to configure your life around the thorn, and it'll prevent you from doing many things that you enjoy.

In much the same way, when faced with hardship, we have two options. Either we remove the thing that's causing us pain, or reconfigure our lives around the pain. The suggestion is that dealing with pain and suffering is like removing a bandaid. If we choose to live with the bandaid, we sap ourselves of energy, because negativity and toxicity affect our sense of clarity and drive. Furthermore, recognizing and having a rapid response to our emotions, will help us to deal with them quickly. Most of us tend to block out negative thoughts and feelings, but suppressing them will only lead to further hardship.

Exercising Control

There are a few ways that we can exercise more control. We've looked at dealing with our emotions as they arise, but we should also evaluate our

expectations. Expectations have a significant impact on how we experience the world. There are so many things outside our control, and we need to realize that as much as our minds want to control these things, it's impossible.

Practice dealing with your expectations and emotions by starting small and then working your way up. For example, being late, getting stuck in traffic, or handling bureaucracy, are all annoyances we're bound to face. We can allow these things to make us spiral into anger and frustration, or we can look inward and deal with them differently. Experiencing these daily annoyances more pragmatically, will help us train ourselves to deal with more traumatic and challenging situations more easily. All of us are bound to encounter significant events that will cause extreme emotional upheaval. Recognizing that trauma and turmoil are certainties, means that we'll be better equipped to handle them. Once you know you can deal with these things, you can start to enjoy life without worrying about how and when things don't meet your expectations.

Death Is the Greatest Teacher

Death is one of the certainties we have in life, and yet it's something we're so often uncertain of. We fear it, we brush it aside, and we seldom talk about it.

We have a bizarre relationship with death, because as much as we might know that each day is a step closer to it, we ignore it. We claim to acknowledge that it's inevitable, but most of us shy away from dealing with it. We're in constant denial, and a lot of this is because we fear death. Singer argues that this is where we're going wrong. We shouldn't fear death; we should grow from it.

Death is something we can learn from. Accepting the idea and inevitability of death provides us with a daily incentive to live life to the fullest, and to be mindful as often as possible. Life is fleeting, and as soon as we acknowledge this, it'll allow us to act and live in the present. If we account for death, we can't make excuses for things we haven't done, and we can no longer live with regrets.

Death is known as the great equalizer because when we die, we go alone. We rid ourselves of all possessions. Being mindful of this makes us realize what's actually important. The message is that by accepting death, and learning from it, we'll be able to evaluate what we value in terms of decisions, time, and relationships.

In Conclusion

We're often told to let go of our fears because they hold us back. The thing with fear is that it's self-made, and the sooner we realize this, the sooner we'll be able to rid ourselves of unnecessary worries and anxieties. *The Untethered Soul* teaches us to become cognizant of which fears are necessary, and which are just a product of our inner voice running amok.

We obviously can't rid our lives of fear, it's often necessary as a survival

mechanism, but we need to listen to it a lot more. This is what enlightenment is all about. It's about listening to what's going on in our minds so that we can rid ourselves of negative clutter, and lead a more positive and meaningful life.

Furthermore, this book teaches us not to define ourselves by our thoughts and emotions. We are not jealousy, or anger, or anxiety. We are our awareness. Once we're self-aware, we will open ourselves up to so many more possibilities and experiences.

Imagine how much space there would be for new and exciting things, if we were to rid our minds of all the internal clutter that occupies it unnecessarily?