



What if there is no destination? aka: Are we there yet?

We're often told that life is a journey. The renowned British philosopher Alan Wilson Watts had a different point of view. He described the traditional western educational system as setting up this analogy from our earliest years. We go to kindergarten so that we can finish kindergarten and move on to primary school. We attend each year of primary school so that we can complete that year and move on to the next year - there are now 'graduation' ceremonies for completing every level. We complete primary school so that we can start secondary school. We complete secondary school so that we can start university.

In every case, the point of doing the activity is to finish it and move on to the next one. So we're always striving to finish something and start the next thing. But what about once we've finished university and started working? Then the point of the role we're doing is to finish it and get a promotion to a more senior role.

And all this activity is designed to make us 'successful'. But it has at its core a flawed assumption. That at some point we'll arrive at a destination. This begs the classic question: are we there yet? How would we know? What does 'there' look like? What will we have earned with all this striving? The chance to do less and be more? The chance to connect more deeply with the people we love?

But what if we're thinking about this the wrong way?

Watts preferred to think about life as a dance. He asked a wonderful question: When you're dancing with someone, is your goal to get to the end of the dance? Is your goal to get to the corner of the dance floor? No - it's just to enjoy the dance.

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You might have heard the story of the fisherman who noticed a man watching him haul in his catch. The man asked the fisherman how many fish he had caught that morning. Three large tuna, he answered. What will you do now?, the man asked. I'll take two fish to the market to sell them, one fish home to my family, have lunch with my wife, play with my children in the afternoon and enjoy a mug of ale while watching the sunset.

I can help you, the man said. I have an MBA and I know that you could use your afternoons to catch more fish, sell more of them and eventually build up a large fishing business. You can franchise your business and then sell it for millions of dollars. Millions of dollars?, the fisherman asked. How long will it take? About 15 years, the man answered. And what will I be able to do after that? Well, the man said, then you can go fishing in the morning, have lunch with your wife, play with your children in the afternoon and enjoy a mug of ale while watching the sunset.

Watts would applaud the fisherman for enjoying the dance of life.

I love that story, but I also know it's not quite right. The idea of simplifying my life down to only three metaphorical fish a day is very appealing, but what if there's a storm? What if my net breaks? What if the fish disappear? It's just not that simple.

But the MBA answer doesn't feel right either. Working for the sake of working, so I can buy things I don't have time to enjoy. Swapping time for money and status and not spending enough time building meaningful connections with the people I love. That's not success, that only looks like success on social media.

So the challenge, as is often the case, is to combine these two points of view. There is no 'or' here, there's an 'and'.

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Life is a journey, but it's not just a journey. Life is also a dance, but it's not just a dance.

If life is only the progress of a journey, it will become an endless series of artificial, status-seeking 'milestones' that don't mean anything real. A classic road to burn-out.

If life is only the joy of a dance, you might enjoy it while times are good, but you'll have no reserves for when times are bad. Think aimless pleasure-seeking punctuated by crisis after crisis.

A blend of joyfulness and progress is the ideal to strive for - not the social media version of that ideal, the actual version.

If you're on the journey path to burn-out, like I was, I urge you to try and bring some more joy into your life before you let too much more time pass. This is not a dress rehearsal. This day, the one you're reading this on, will be over in a few hours and will never come again. Steve Jobs was fond of saying: "I have never yet found a way to change the past."

There is no destination. You'll never arrive. Enjoy the dance as well as the journey. Start now.



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