



## 'Join Us For A Trip On Theseus's Ship!'

### A Voyage of discovery!

*"Novelty unfolds time, montony collapses time and purpose makes it livable"*

**I'm an avid reader.** I always have been and from an early age I got the power of the written word and its almost magical ability to transport me to other worlds—Get me thinking about stuff in new and different ways—& also help me to better understand the world I live in, day-in, day-out.

### A Question?

This all rather begs the question then, *"What are the books that have helped me make positive changes in my life?"* Of course, that could be a very long list indeed, and might not even be that exciting to read. More akin perhaps, to watching paint dry, n'est pas?

So, I started to think about it from a slightly different angle i.e. *'Given who I am and what I believe, which books have brought me to this point, making the most impact and why?'*

I have written pieces before where I have recommened my top 17–20 Leadership, Management and Business books and you can check out what I had to say back then, way before COVID\_19, [here](#)—However, I have no wish in this piece to retread that ground!

### To Have Any Real Value and Purpose This Needs to be More Personal & Focussed

Change & Identity are for me two *Massive Themes* in all areas of my life, both personal and professional. Change seems to happen rather often and is present as an enduring constant. Indeed, to Live is to Change. *But what impact does that have on Identity?*

The Italian author of *'The Leopard'* (**Book №1**), **Tomasi de Lampedusa** wrote, *"Everything must change in order to remain the same"*—And now after 60 years on planet Earth, I'm still trying to get my head around that—But do you know what, I think Lampedusa was on to something!

We live in a world of impermanence—In a state of constant flux. In constant motion and commotion, that shapes, moulds, defines us.

## Fear of Change

For many though, change in any form represents doubt and uncertainty, so relevant to what so many of us are currently experiencing during the Coronavirus Pandemic—It can even create fear and can we truly be ourselves and understand who we are, if we live in constant fear? If we are forever anxious? If we do not understand that *existence precedes essence*?

And it is not something that we can necessarily control, as chemically *Change* can cause a threat response in our brain that zaps our neural energy, plays havoc with our memory and undermines and thwarts performance.

So, it follows that we are the product—the *sum parts*—of all the change we have endured—But more importantly, how we have endured it and whether it has made us *fragile*, *robust* or *anti-fragile*.

These terms were first used in such a way by **Nassim Nicholas Taleb**, who predicted the 2008 financial crisis in his book, '*The Black Swan*'.

**A fragile person Taleb describes** as someone who feels they have nothing to gain and will go out of their way to avoid any change. A *robust* person on the other hand, is in Taleb's words someone who won't break easily, but will nonetheless be hard to convince that anything will be improved by change.

And then there is the person who is *anti-fragile*. Characteristically they are more than just adaptable, resilient or robust, and they don't just endure change, but rather they go out of their way to seek it out and intuitively will understand how they can benefit from it.

## Book №2

I remember around the age of 8, I was captivated by a **CS Lewis** book, '*The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe*' (**Book №2**).

The magic, myth-making and symbolism—It all came together for me and I was transported in a whole host of new directions.

It was actually the second in a seven book series, with the overarching title, '*The Chronicles of Narnia*'. The series starts with '*The Magician's Nephew*' and ends with '*The Final Battle*'—And as the chronicles play out across time, space and different worlds inhabited by Kings and Queens, dragons and dwarfs and other magical creatures, many of the characters go through tremendous and life-changing story arcs.

I have to say I've re-read all the books as an adult quite a few times since, and they all still resonate, but none more so than, '*The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe*'.

## Book №3

By the age of 11 though I'd moved on to the books of **Ian Fleming**. I had discovered James Bond *and* again captured and transported by what seemed a very sophisticated and adventurous lifestyle.

'*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*' remains my favourite in the series and also my favourite of all the *Bond* movies.

Of course, at 11 I wasn't digging too deep into the underlying misogyny and psychopathy that was implicit in the stories, but these books introduced a young boy to the delights of scrambled eggs with *herbes de provence*, freshly squeezed orange juice, and strong black coffee. As well as a technicolor and exotic world, far removed from the drab monotone of the late 1960's that I was living in.

## Book №4

Another book that featured large in my early life was, in fact, The Bible.

I wasn't particularly religious—but as a chorister, I spent a lot of time in and around church—singing at morning and evensong, weddings and funerals.

By the age of 13 I'd read both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, at least twice—**And what stood out for me were**

**both the Change & Identity memes**— In the sense that whilst the past is fixed, lasting change is possible through belief and faith—And this faith & belief can nourish and renew who you are and how you see yourself.

**Deuteronomy 31:6** calls on us to be strong and courageous. **Ecclesiastes 3:1** tells us there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens. Whilst **Hebrews 6:19** describes hope as an anchor.

All relevant to developing one's emotional intelligence and resilience, in order to better deal with change and better understand who we are!

Amongst all the beggery and beggery though, a particular series of related parables really caught my imagination, concerning patching old garments with new cloth and putting new wine into old wineskins—**Matthew 9:16–17/Luke 5:36–39/& Corinthians 5:17** et al.

These simple stories provide a very clear message about how we should approach, understand and come to terms with change, as well as finding an acceptance of how change may impact on our identity and how we live with that.

For example—'*No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one, otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old: And no one puts new wine into old wineskins, or else the new wines will ferment and burst the wineskins and be ruined, and the wineskins will be ruined too*'

You need to approach change with fresh eyes, new perspectives, a willingness to adapt and be prepared to think and do differently, rather than try and force the new into the old. Whilst you also need to practice kind compassion in all that you do, both to yourself and to others. Mirroring '[The Principle of Charity](#)' which has its roots in philosophical, rather than theological discourse.

This for me is the essence of *Being* and fundamental to the *human condition*.

## Book №5

I then discovered **Marcus Aurelius** who I've already written about for [Thrive Global](#) in a piece entitled, '[Marcus Aurelius and the Art of Well Being & Well Doing](#)'.

Adopted by a future Roman Emperor **Antonius Pius** and then succeeding him and taking on the laurel leaf crown when he died, Marcus Aurelius was well into his early 50's before he started to commit his observations and thoughts to paper.

### But what thoughts and what observations!

His writings and the sayings which make up much of his '*Meditations*' have informed and influenced me in so many ways over the years and none more so than this aphorism, "*Ambition means tying your well-being to what other people say or do. Self-indulgence means tying it to the things that happen to you. Sanity means tying it to your own actions*" ('*Meditations*', pg 92).

## Which Brings Us to My 6th and Final Book

**Plutarch's 'Lives, Complete & Unabridged' (Pub. by Random House, 1st November 1975).**

And why? Well, so much to choose from, but for me it's because of Plutarch's recounting of, '*The Ship of Theseus*', or *Theseus's Paradox* as it's also known.

But first let's provide a little of the back-story.

**Theseus** was the son of Aegeus, king of Athens and **Aethra** (daughter of Poseidon, no less).

He was a proper Greek hero, who amongst many other heroic acts, slayed the Minotaur in the Labyrinth, using a ball of string and, of course, his sword.

So, to return to '*The Ship of Theseus*'—Plutarch simply asks: "*If the ship on which Theseus sailed has been so heavily repaired and nearly every plank and part replaced, is it still the same ship? And, if not, at what point did it stop being the same ship?*"

As I said near the top of this piece, I believe that to live is to change and we can only hope as part of our *Identity of Self*, that we

have the awareness to understand, appreciate and accept this—We are continually creating, recreating and co-creating ourselves, through our actions—Always with the potential to be in constant motion and commotion

In his play, *'As You Like It'*, **William Shakespeare** has the character Jacques deliver a monologue on the *'7 Ages of Man'*—But there are also the *'7 layers of Identity'*, or the *'Genes of the Soul'*, as the award-winning Lebanese-born French author **Amin Maalouf**, puts it.

**We are not, nor ever where, 'concrete selves'**

And as the Harvard psychologist, **Daniel Gilbert** says, *"Human beings are works in progress that mistakenly think they're finished"*. So how can I be defined, or labelled, if I am always a work in progress?

I suppose the big question that I've really been seeking to answer through all my reading over the years, is simply this **'Which Me is Me?'**

Is it the person I am today? Or the person I was 5, 10, 20 or even 40 years ago?



What makes me and my childhood self the *'same person'*, despite a lifetime of enduring change?

It's a big big question, but the written word & the world of stories, has taken me on a vast journey and a true voyage of discovery—And it still goes on.

So, I intend to keep reading, even as I continue to change.

**And I wish for you to be at peace with yourself, accept who you are and to continue to read too!**

*This piece is dedicated to the actor Roger Moore, former James Bond & The Saint to boot, who died on the 23rd May 2017.*



**Paul Mudd is the author** of *'Uncovering Mindfulness: In Search Of A Life More Meaningful'* available on Amazon and [www.bookboon.com](http://www.bookboon.com); the *'Coffee & A Cup of Mindfulness'* and the *'Mindful Hacks For Mindful Living & Mindful Working'* series. He is also a Contributing Author to The Huffington Post and a Contributing Writer to Thrive Global. Through [The Mudd Partnership](#) he works with business leaders, organisations and individuals in support of change, leadership excellence, business growth, organisational and individual wellbeing and well doing, and introducing Mindfulness. He can be contacted at [\[email protected\]](#) and you can follow the continuing journey uncovering Mindfulness on Twitter [@TheMindfulBook](#) and at [@Paul\\_Mudd](#)

