

100 QUICK ESSAYS



From
@TheDevoutHumorist

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For those waking up.

Dear Reader,

What you have here is a collection of random ideas expressed within the 2,200-character limit of Instagram. They're organized in no particular order and by no means need to be read that way. The best approach to reading this book could be flipping to a random page and beginning there, or perhaps perusing the Table of Contents and picking a title that stands out at the time of doing so.

These essays are loosely categorized by subject—such as childhood inspirations, float tank meditations, or societal observations—and even more loosely organized by a timeline from youth to the present, so, if you choose to read them in order, just know that's what you're in for.

These stories were also written as bite-sized reflections, so I believe they're meant to be consumed the same way. What I mean is that this book wasn't designed to be a page-turner, but rather a collection of one-off meditations. It's more like a coffee table book, a bedside read, or—dare I say—for the toilet bowl (if you're into that sort of thing).

Happy pooping,

The Author

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PIN THE TAIL

*Do not mix truth with falsehood or
hide the truth knowingly.
—The Qur'an 2:42*

One of my earliest memories is of lying. (How's that for entering consciousness?) I'm not proud of it, which is probably why it stuck so hard, but I thought cheating was the way to get ahead back then.

To set the scene, my extended family was on vacation—which I deemed a “beach-cation,” due to my youthfully ignorant grasp of words and an acute observation of where this detour from normal life took place.

During rainy days on beach-cation (which I recall feeling were a divine injustice), we'd play indoor games for entertainment. These included your stereotypical board and card games, of course, but sometimes the adults would teach us new games, like Pin The Tail On The Donkey.

This was no ordinary game of Pin The Tail On The Donkey, however; there were stakes. Arcade tokens for the winner, to be exact: entertainment currency for the local coin-operated game center we'd be attending during this annual visit.

Now, I sat back and observed a few foolish-looking cousins bumping into walls after being spun around or wandering into

donkey-less rooms while blind, and I was determined not to be a loser like them. Fortunately, when it came time to blindfold me, my uncle did a poor job with the bandana, and there was a crack at the bottom through which I could kinda, sorta, maybe see.

Without knowing how to make myself look convincingly lucky, I waltzed right up to the poster and pinned the tail where any anatomically correct donkey had one.

“Could you see?” my uncle said.

“No!” I said.

“Tell the truth,” he said.

“I swear!” I said.

And—bless his heart—he pried no further and coughed up the coin.

But I remember holding those tokens in my hand, feeling something I’m not even sure I could have named back then: guilt.

I didn’t earn those coins, not honestly anyway. I lied, and that didn’t feel good, and I never wanted to feel that again.

Consider this my public admission that I, the dishonest donkey-pinner, did wrong. I hope this confession absolves me of my sin and frees me from the guilt I’ve been holding onto all these years.

Sorry, Uncle T!

SHREDDER

*Like the child, innocently making thousands of mistakes,
his father teaches him, and scolds him so many times,
but still, he hugs him close in his embrace.
Please forgive my past actions, God,
and place me on Your path for the future.
—Siri Guru Granth - Ang 624*

When I turned seven, I had some “friends” over for a birthday party. I put “friends” in quotations because one of those backstabbing munchkins smeared the term with their appalling behavior that day.

One of my pals gifted me the most prized Ninja Turtles action figures on the market at the time, revealed for all to see during the post-cake unwrapping ceremony. But it was a short-lived affair between that toy and me because by the time the party was over and all my friends were gone, so too was Shredder—the main villain of the Ninja Turtles franchise. (I see the irony now, with the evil character being stolen. Like does attract like, it seems!)

Which of these two-faced companions felt so impoverished financially and morally that they had the audacity to ruin the celebration of *my* birth?

Was it Todd, you ask? The spoiled only child whose love for toys outweighed his love for his friend? Or Jerry? Putting on a

friendly facade since kindergarten while plotting this day? Or perhaps Mark, the very gifter of the toy himself, who couldn't bear to part with such awesomeness, so he snatched it, fueled by jealous rage.

This early instance of betrayal may seem silly now, but to the seven-year-old boy whose love for toys shaped his faith in humanity, who knows what kind of imprint this had? Did it impart the notion that even your closest friends can't be trusted? Were birthday celebrations entwined with feelings of betrayal? Who knows how deep the Ninja Turtle scandal goes?

Did my "friend" ever learn that that's no way to get ahead in life? Did they walk away carrying the burden of guilt in their pocket along with my new toy?

Or did that same steal-to-get-ahead mentality follow them in the future, manifesting itself in adult ways?

Are they still holding onto Shredder, like a family heirloom—*my* family heirloom—to be passed on to *their* son, along with whatever generational shame plagues such family lines?

Where does it stop? When does the madness end?

Whoever it was, if you fess up now, *maybe* I'll forgive you. But do it before it's too late, before the scorching flames of Hell engulf your toy-stealing soul.

EARLY BETRAYAL

*Whenever you speak, speak justly,
even if a near relative is concerned.
—The Qur'an 6:152*

I went into a recent meditation with the intention of reflecting on why I can be such a cold jerk at times. What emerged from the depths of the oddball memory banks was something I hadn't thought about in years. I was standing on the edge of a boat launch with a cousin of mine, whom I didn't get to see very often. We had just returned from a fishing trip with my dad, and he and I were playing on the shore.

My cousin was older and cooler, someone I looked up to, so I was shocked when I did something apparently foolish, and he immediately told on me. This resulted not only in my father scolding me, but I even got put in timeout when we got home.

Now, from your perspective, looking onto someone else's childhood, I'm sure this seems like no big deal. "So you had to sit in timeout for a few minutes," the critic says. "There are children starving in China!" But looking back through the eyes of a child who had little to no life experience for comparison, what happened here was an early act of betrayal by someone I admired.

To be thrown under the bus like that, and for seemingly no reason at all? Not to mention the fact that you come into *my*

house, get *me* put in timeout, and then spend 1-on-1 time with *my* dad? Well, that didn't sit right with me at all.

You better believe I stewed in that comfy prison chair while building a deep hatred for tattletales. And the smug look on his face while I was sentenced to twenty minutes of incarceration was the most punchable face I've seen to this day. It brewed a resentment in me that I'd apparently held onto for the next two decades.

That is until I finally let it go.

MR. CREEPY

*The Master said,
“The firm, the enduring, the simple, and the modest
are near to virtue.”
—Analects of Confucius - Book 13, Chapter 27*

In elementary school, I had a music teacher named Mr. Creepy, or something like that. I remember thinning wisps of gray, wrinkled skin over a bony frame, and disturbingly yellow fingernails, grown out for the purpose of plucking guitar strings. I didn't have much life experience then, but I knew he was strange from the moment I saw him.

One day, Mr. Creepy brought in an old-school projector, the kind that rattled as it shifted from one slide to the next, and he gave us an unsolicited glimpse into one of his personal endeavors. We put aside aimlessly blowing into our recorders for a day to listen to the story of an adventure he'd been on. I don't recall the specific details of where, when, or why, but he shuffled through slides of a sabbatical that, in retrospect, seemed like a spiritual journey.

In short, he had abandoned all his worldly possessions for thirty days (including his shirt, if my memory serves me) and went off to live in the woods. I mean *really* live in the woods. This guy carved his own canoe out of a tree and paddled up a

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