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# Understanding Myself

– Daily Thoughts

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*A Zen and Art Book by*

DOUG HOPPE

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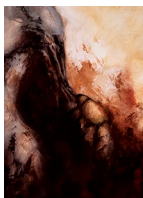
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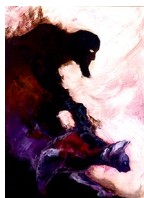
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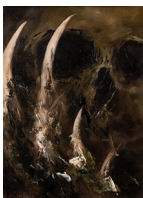
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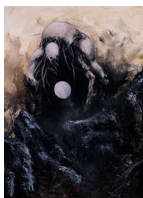
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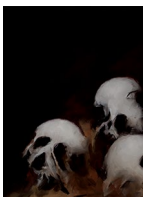
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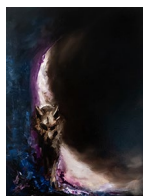
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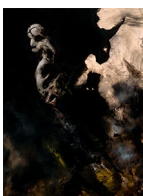
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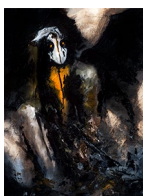
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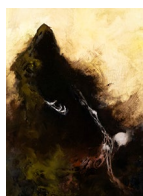
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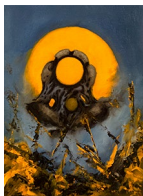
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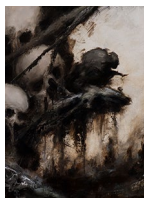
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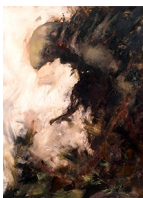
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# Everything doesn't always work out

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The world is not all sunshine and roses. So many books that are supposed to help you understand who you are really only talk about the positive things in your life. Things that you are happy to embrace and make you feel special.

Guess what? You're not special. I'm not special. No one is. Life isn't about having everything you want handed to you on a silver platter. It's messy. It's dark. It's going to hurt sometimes and you're going to want to give up.

You know what? That's okay. It should be dark and scary sometimes. Those are the times we dig deep into our soul and really understand what we want. Sometimes you can't do it alone. We all need help from friends, family, and even strangers. Just remember not to solely depend on that help. You have to do your bit, as well.

Now, just because the world can be dark and messy, that doesn't mean that it's always going to be that way. More often than not, it's just a passing moment. Granted... that moment may feel like it lasts a thousand years, but it'll pass.

So, what can you do about it? You can say "Hey! I've got issues, but so does everybody else! Can I overcome those momentary issues and live the life that I want?" This is the first step to understanding who you really are.

# What is this book?

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Is this a Zen book? A self-help book? Or is it just an art book with a lot of scary pictures in it?

It's all three of them and none of them. Like many things in life, it seems too easy to categorize things into something people understand, but that is too limiting. By categorizing something, we have immediately dismissed other possibilities without even considering their benefits.

So, let's go over each one and let me tell you about how I think about this book.

Is it a Zen book? Well, no. There is nothing in this book that relates to Zen Buddhism. There is no religion or belief attached to the book. However, like Zen sayings, you can meditate over each idea that you read and determine your own feelings about it.

Zen sayings help you understand your life better and follow a path to Enlightenment. The sayings in this book serve the same purpose. They help you better understand who you are and, if you need to change an aspect of your life, you can meditate on the meaning and how it relates to you.

Is it a Self-Help book? Again. Not really. Self-help books always have the premise of giving you ideas on how to overcome some situation. I

know. I've read a lot of them in my time while searching for my own answers to life.

This isn't one of them. This book has no answers unless you bring them yourself. The main issue that I have found with self-help books is that the answer doesn't fit everyone. The answers that they gave me were okay, but nothing ever stuck. They weren't me. They were for someone else.

This book is about giving you ideas about various topics that may affect you. That way you can bring yourself to the saying rather than the saying forcing its ideas onto you.

Is it an art book? Yes, and no. Isn't that the answer that most people hate? I hate it as well. Just tell me the answer and let me go on with my day. As with everything else, it's not so clear.

All of the paintings in this book were done by me. They are the visions I see when I'm contemplating a new piece. Each is an individual oil painting that started out as random black and white shapes created on a digital tablet. Like looking at clouds, I see things in the shapes and, fortunately; I can draw (or so I like to think. Other artists may disagree with me).

As I work out the shapes into some image, they tell me the story and the story changes the shapes. It's kind of like shifting sand. Eventually, I get the image that I want to paint and the story/meaning that I want to say. Once I'm done with that, I transfer the drawing to my canvas and use the digital image as a thumbnail.

So, yes... this also could be considered an art book. Like with so many of my products, I want it to be much more than something you pick up, look at the images, and then put it away on a shelf somewhere.

I didn't want to create that type of book.

## How to use this book

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Naturally, you can just use this book as a traditional art book and enjoy the meanings and stories that go with each painting.

Or...

You can use this as daily meditation and thought-provoking exercises that will change how you see the world. Who knows? Maybe the changes in you will radiate outward and the Universe smiles upon you and your newly found wisdom. The Universe decides you are the new Chosen One and will bless you with riches, a large following of people who listen to every word that you say, and all your dreams will come true. You may even reverse time and live your entire life again with your new ideas.

Or maybe not.

Just kidding. Using this book as a meditation book is fairly simple. Just let go. Concentrate on something that is bothering you and try to have

a sense of calmness wash over you. I do this by pushing out everything that is going around me and relaxing. I can feel the calmness surround my body, and then I'm ready. With the situation focused clearly in my mind, I open the book to a particular page.

Remember. The meaning will not tell you how to solve your problem. It will let you know what type of issue you are facing. Once you have decided how to interpret your given situation, you are on your first step to solving it.



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# Understanding Myself

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# Anything

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There are times in our lives we would give anything to achieve a certain goal. We can't see beyond the moment because of our obsession. That desire may be the love of someone not interested in us or forgetting past pains. It may be riches or a coveted job position. It doesn't matter. All that matters is the goal. In that obsession, we forget the ones around us who improved our lives. We forget what we already have to pursue something we may not need.



# Assimilation

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What may be terrifying or harsh at first eventually becomes the norm. Our minds and bodies are extremely good at adapting to harsh situations and dealing with them. For some people, they need a little bit of help to be able to lead a fruitful and happy life with the situation. Others are able to adapt to it easily. In both cases, most people will learn to live with the condition and come to accept it.... Whether or not it is good for them or not.





# Amusement

---

Sometimes you feel that you aren't wanted. You are just some side-show attraction that your friends hang out with because you are not like them. It could be your appearance, intelligence, or just the fact that they need a punching bag around. Someone that they use to make themselves feel better. Those aren't your friends. Friends care about you and try to make your life better at the same time you are making their lives better. Beware of those who just use you.





# Bravery

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A brave person is not someone who recklessly goes out and does dangerous things. The brave person is someone who realizes that, even though they are terrified, they still have to go out and do what needs to be done. They understand the risk and possible pain that is associated with the action. However, they accept the risk to achieve that goal. The really brave person may fail many times but will always get back up and try again.



# Broken

---

All we see is the outer beauty of someone. The way they wear their clothes. The cars they drive and the house they live in. This is not always the truth. There are parts of ourselves that we keep within us. The parts that is embarrassing. Parts that make us feel like we don't fit in and are not like others. Parts that we consider broken. Those are the parts that makes us special. Makes us unique. Would life be better if you embraced those parts?



# Cleansing

---

Purge the destructive forces in your life. Whether they are habits that you have adopted or people who make you constantly feel bad. Throughout your life, it's a constant battle to get rid of that which can harm you and embrace that which is beneficial. The tough part is that you don't always know which is which. Sometimes the harmful forces are wrapped in a beautiful or comfortable shell you don't want to give up. Sometimes it's tough to decide.





# Compulsion

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You don't want to do it but you can't help yourself. There is something about it that draws you in. You hate yourself every time you take a step towards it. However, the allure is too strong. It makes you happy when you give in and indulge yourself and you beat yourself up when you don't. We all have something we can't let go of. Food. Forbidden Love. Adventure. The hard part is to balance it so that it doesn't become an obsession and take over your life.





# Dangerous

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Keeping yourself locked away is not the answer. You think you are harmful to others and it would be better if you were just left alone. That way you can't hurt anyone and, more importantly, can't be hurt. Meaningful life is about interaction. It's about being hurt and, accidentally, hurting others. True friends and those you love will forgive you. Help is always there when you need it. It's just about having the courage to ask for it.



# Darkness

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You don't like to admit it. You bury it and pretend that it's not there. You're ashamed of it. Everybody has a bit of darkness inside of them. You're human. There are the secret thoughts in the middle of the night that you wish you could act on, but you don't. For most people, the good inside of them holds the darkness at bay. The goodness is an anchor that you can hold on to when you feel yourself slipping into the darkness.



# Decay

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We are not immune to the chaos that surrounds us. In fact, we need it. Every creature on this planet is linked to one another. The decay of the flesh of one creature is the sustenance for another. The important thing to remember is that we are not the same as our bodies. The mind lives eternal in the memories of our friends and families....in our shared history.





# Deception

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Emerging from the shadows, you see shapes that don't feel right. You can't put your finger on it but you felt afraid. Our mind is very good about creating menacing things from something that seems harmless. Part of it is the environment you live in. Part of it is a survival mechanism. Most of it is based on what you've seen in media and what you've been taught. Learning to not let your brain make you afraid is very difficult. However, it can be done.





# Decisions

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He has a choice that he can make.  
He can go forward with his plans  
or go back the way that things  
used to be. He knows what is  
expected of him and he doesn't  
like it. How do you break the cycle  
if you can't see any other way?  
Are the choices that we make our  
own or are they forced on us from  
others? Is it really my decision or  
am I just afraid?



# Desire

---

There will always be things in your life that you'll want but cannot have. The new job. That special person who doesn't know that you exist. That talent that seems to elude you no matter what you do. The importance of that desire controls your life and, in the end, defines how happy you are and what you do with your life. It can make you go farther than you have ever dared... or... it can hold you back so that you never grow.



# Discrimination

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You can feel them staring at you from across the way. Their eyes piercing and cold as they judge you. You know exactly what they are thinking and what they are saying about you. They're commenting about the way you look and the clothes you wear. Even the people who are around you. We create stories in our head that are often not true but are based on our own current thoughts. We project our own insecurities on others and those insecurities end up controlling our own behavior around them.





# Disillusioned

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We're all creatures of habit. We do the same thing day-in and day-out. Years go by but we don't tend to remember them. They all blend together. When it is all said and done, can you look back and say that you were proud of your life? That you lived fully and were proud of your accomplishments? Or will you look back and see that there was nothing to show for it because you because you just went through the motions?



# Distortion

---

We're not very good at seeing our true selves. The picture in our mind is never the same as the way that others perceive us. For many people, how they view themselves is much worse than how others see them. If people were able to view themselves by their actions rather than what they say or their thoughts, they may be able to see their true self.



## Dwelling

---

You're getting older. You can't deny it or fight it. Eventually, you, like everything else, will die. So many people try to fight the inevitable. You can't win. This, however, doesn't mean that your life is meaningless and that you should just fade away. While you have the time available to you, make the most of it. Love people. Live life. Do what brings meaning and joy to you and others. The end doesn't define you. What you do with the time you have... does.





# Emergence

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In the beginning, we are weak. It's natural. However, everybody has an internal strength that can help them achieve their goals and improve their lives. That internal belief can help them get over the hard parts of their life and to continue to move forward. It's tough. It's hard. It's prone to failure. When that person finally and truly believes in themselves, you can easily see the change in them.



# Exile

---

We like to think that we don't need anyone. That we are an island unto ourselves. For most people that is not true. When we are removed from what we know as our life, we feel lost. Our old patterns must be replaced by new ones if we are to survive. The tough part is to determine what we need to survive versus what we need to make a good and enjoyable life for ourselves. There is a major difference between the two.



# Fear

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Fear is a reaction to something that we find unpleasant. Many people define their fears by what others have told them rather than what they experienced. Our natural reaction to fear is to eliminate the cause and to avoid that situation. However, if you think about what the real outcome is, you'll find that, most of the time, what you believe will happen could not possibly happen. How many times have you stopped and let fear make your decisions?







# Fearless

---

Life is about perceptions. We bring our own biases with us when we interact or view things. When we see scary-looking things, we think of all of the evil that they will do. However, if you had experience with something similar and did not find it scary, your perception will be vastly different. Our perceptions help us evaluate things quickly for threats but, if we feel safe, we should go beyond the initial thought, we may find that our perception is wrong.



# Forged

---

We're forged in fire and tempered in love. How we deal with the issues and triumphs in our lives defines the person we are. It may not be the person we want to be. If you want to change, put yourself in situations where you may succeed just as equally fail. Without any failure, you become weak. However, if you fail all of time, you become frustrated. It is a delicate balance that you must walk to truly grow.



# Forgetfulness

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The memory is there. You can feel it. It tickles your brain. You can only feel parts of it and other parts are eluding you. It's like viewing something through a frosty glass window. You have an idea of the feeling and situation, but you can't fully remember it. The more you focus on it, the more the memory changes to what you want it to be. Eventually, it becomes your new reality, and it is hard to get back to the original memory.







# Friendship

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True friendships that don't depend on the past are extremely rare. It may have been years since you've seen them and you both have lived different lives and taken different paths. Sure, you'll catch up and reminisce about the days you spent time together. True friendships go past that, though. They begin the new story as you connect. It will be like you just saw them yesterday and the years apart mean nothing. There is a bond that connects you that time cannot dissolve.



# Healing

---

Over time, you've experienced a broken heart. Hopefully, later on, you've also experienced the healing heart. This is when someone changes the way you feel or you've learned to love yourself. Either way, the pain diminishes. Not gone. Just not as strong as before. This may have been a new love but not necessarily so. When you experience the healing heart, you'll find your body and mind repairs itself so you can become whole again. It's easier to find the joy in life and others.



# Hidden

---

We all have thoughts that control us and define us. Things have happened in the past that were done to us or that we've done to others. Some of it we've regretted. Some we haven't because they truly deserved it. That was the past. Now that we've grown older and, supposedly wiser, would be do the same thing now if those situations happened?







# Hope

---

Sometime, hope is all we have. Things aren't quite going our way and we don't know what to do. We constantly watch for something or someone to help us and save the day. Sometimes, we're lucky and it does come. Sometimes we're not and we have to endure and keep going on. Hope has the great power of strengthening your will and enabling you to survive any hardship. Hope is sometimes all we have.



# Immersed

---

We think that we are the masters of our world and we're not dependent on anything or anyone. In reality, we and the environment are one. What happens to one affects what happens to the other. There is no separation. Who can tell where one begins and the other ends?



# Jealousy

---

Why we covet things is a personal choice. What value we place on other items is totally based on our desires and want. However, what happens when the objection is denied us? We try even harder to obtain that which we cannot have. What happens if we do gain the item? We try even harder to prevent someone from taking it away from us. We go to great lengths to prevent it being taken. How much does this cost us? In time? Money? Relationships?





# Judgement

---

We all fear what seems scary to us. We make up stories in our heads to justify our decisions. We look at people who are different and project our own thoughts on them. Most of the time, we're wrong. We've judged them for their looks and categorize them without really understanding them or the lives that they have lived. Most people are really alike. We just don't give them the benefit of the doubt.



# Knowledge

---

We feel pretty special when we know secrets that others don't. It makes us feel important. Doesn't matter what the secret is, it elevates us above everybody else. Some people are willing to share the secret with everybody else. The feeling of satisfaction outweighs the feeling of being more knowledgeable than others. Imagine what could be done if more ideas were shared rather than hoarded.



# Loneliness

---

For many of us, we want a place that we can call home. This is a safe place where many of our loved ones and friends live. It's where we can be comfortable being ourselves and not having to be something we're not. Traveling to find that place is not just a matter of a physically relocating ourselves. It's a matter of knowing where we belong and who we are. Until we truly understand that, we'll always be traveling to find that place we can call home.





# Magic

---

Look around you. You can feel it. Not the fantastic electronic devices people have. The people themselves. The way that many people help one another even though there is nothing in it for them. Sure, there are bad people in the world. There are also a lot of good people. They bring with them a power that changes others. They care about people, not because of their wealth or status, but because someone is in need. They don't just do it once in a grand gesture. They do it every day with small loving gestures. It defines who they are.



# Memories

---

Time moves on whether we want it to or not. Buildings are created and, through decay or destruction, fall into ruin. People are born, live their life, and then pass on. There are many things that we don't want to forget. So, we try to preserve them or create small and large monuments to remind us. It is only a temporary solution. It is there for us to remember and, hopefully, pass on that memory to others. After a while, though, that memory will also fade. Time moves on whether we want it to or not.





# Nature

---

Nature can be cruel and harsh. At its root, nature is about survival and taking care of family. Sometimes you need to be fierce and dangerous. Sometimes you need to be caring and understanding. Being too fierce or too caring can lead to problems. Those who are too fierce may lead a lonely life. Those who are too caring are often taken advantage of. It's a balance that is hard to strike but it must be done for your overall well-being.



# Negativity

---

We're always taught to see a situation a certain way. A wizard summons creatures that are forced to do his bidding. The creatures hate it and want to return home. What if the creatures treated the summoning as a one-way free ticket for adventure and are happy to come and help? Some people will always see all situations in a negative light. Some people always see situations in a positive light. Which one are you?



# Nightmares

---

For many of us, our dreams are reminders of our deeper desires. They present pieces of our lives that we wish were different. They are fractions of the life that we wish to have. For some, though, that fraction is easily distorted and we're terrified of what we see. What is currently happening in your life affects those desires. Like everything else, what you do or don't do with that information can help guide your life.





# Overwhelmed

---

You wonder where it went wrong. What did you do? What could you have done differently? Sure. It could have been your fault. However, it could also be someone else's fault. In the end, it doesn't matter what happened. All that matters is you gather up your courage and deal with the situation. Ignoring it will only keep you stuck and the feeling will last forever. Seeking help is not a bad thing. You'll be surprised how much your friends or family really wants to help you.



# Partnership

---

There are people who think that pets are just animals. Then there are those who think that they are family. For those who understand that pets are family, they understand that it's a mutual relationship. The pet provides companionship, love, comfort, and protection. In turn, you provide the exact same thing to your pet. Like a spouse or a loved one, the relationship is just as important as it is between humans.







# Peace

---

We're tired. We just want it to end. We want life to be simple. We just want to go home and relax. Go home and not worry about anything. Relish in the embrace of our loved ones and know that they love us for who we are and not all the things we've done. At the end of our lives, could this happen? Could we just leave our troubles behind and relax? Not worry about anything?



# Perception

---

At the end of town lives an old wizard. Everybody avoids him and spreads vicious rumors about him. How he scavenges the dead to build his home. How he tortures children and engages in unspeakable experiments. The problem is... no-one has even seen him or talked to him. The stories sprung up since they didn't know anything about him. In the absence of information, most people will always think the worst about something or someone



## Perspective

---

Walking along the beach one day, I see that Death has killed a fish. That's horrible, I thought! Why did the fish deserve that fate? All of a sudden, dozens of little crabs came out and started feeding on the fish. Death points to it and says "They have food for their families. What you may see as horrible, others are grateful that it happened. It's a matter of perspective."





# Petition

---

What would you do to obtain something that you truly desire? In the moment of heat, you would do anything. It doesn't matter what it is or what you want done, all that you can think about is obtaining that goal or person. However, if you sit back and wait out that moment, a time of clarity will come to you. This is the time that you need to evaluate to determine if what you want is really worth what you give up. Sometimes, it really is too late..... sometimes, not.



# Power

---

He was a king who did whatever he wanted... as kings are wont to do. One day, Death came for him and said it was time to go. "No.... I'm a king. I don't think so." Death quietly looked at him and said, "You don't understand... I'm Death. No man may escape my embrace." As the light left the King, he realized that, no matter how powerful he thought he was, there is always something more powerful.







# Pride

---

He has a job to do. Collect and clean up the dead. Most people shun him because, as they say, anyone who would work such a low-level disgusting job must be of low-status. Nothing that should be associated with. He doesn't see it that way. He's good at his job and he takes pride in it. Anything worth doing is worth doing well. What's most important is what you think of yourself. Not what others think of you.



# Racing

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We're so busy rushing around trying to do everything. Between the job, the family, household chores, making time for friends, etc, we find that there is little or no time left over for ourselves. Why are we rushing around so much? One day, we'll look back and realize that we don't remember much of what happened. Can you honestly say that you've enjoyed your life?



# Rebirth

---

Life and Death are intertwined. You can't have one without the other. The end of one thing becomes the beginning of another. When someone passes away, it's always good to look at their life and see how much of it reminds you of your own life. Are you making the same mistakes the other person did? Did they do things you wished you had done? Their Death could be the beginning of living your Life.





# Reflection

---

We are the world around us. We are the product of what was done to us. We are the product of what we have done to it. The world is a dangerous place and it will swallow the weak. By focusing on our strengths, we can keep it at bay and live the life we want. In order to do that, we must allow it to affect us but, more importantly, we need to just take what we need and return the rest. If possible, the part that we return would help someone else.



# Religion

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We all have our own beliefs. Some are not appreciated by others. Some are ridiculed and called heresy. All religions are based on faith and the belief of something that we cannot see or measure. Something more powerful than ourselves. Something that can aid us when we are downtrodden or hurting. Something tangible, according to us, that we can hold onto when times get tough. Our beliefs are important to us. They guide our lives and our actions. What makes one belief more important than another?







# Resolution

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We want the magic bullet. We want the item that will solve all of our problems. We want the powerful weapon so that we can rescue that special person and live the rest of our days in paradise. It doesn't exist. There are no magic pills to solve all our problems. We have only ourselves to rely on. Our skills and abilities. Our friendships and the way that we live our lives. No matter how we solve our problems, there will always be more issues to confront us.



# Sadness

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When we are feeling down ourselves, we all have a place that we go to. Some place where we feel comfortable and safe. From our point of view, it's comforting and known. We can control what happens in here. Something that we can't do in other places. For others, it may be foreboding. They will judge it based on their perceptions and, most time, not understand our safe place.



# Shadows

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There are two people (or more) in every one of us. There is the one we show to the world and the one that is hidden. Part of our core. That shadow side is good or bad and it's up to us to determine how much we let it affect the side that we show the world.





# Singularity

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We all start from the same place and we end up at the same place. It's not where you begin or end, it's what you do with your life that is important. Money, stature, and the number of friends don't matter. Possessions don't matter. All that matters is that you live the life that you want and not what others tell you is a good life. It's up to you to determine what brings meaning to the time that you have.



## Soulful

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There is a simplistic beauty that exists within someone by just looking in their eyes. Peering into the eyes of another gives a good indication of what they are thinking or feeling. Many times, that look can enhance the beauty of someone even if they are not traditionally beautiful. By the same token, cold and emotionless eyes can detract from someone and make them uglier than they really are. Don't just look at their physical beauty. See what their eyes are telling you.







# Spirituality

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We all have our beliefs that support us when times are tough. Whether it is the belief in a God (or many gods), Nature, or some Ethereal Concept, the belief is our anchor that helps us overcome situations. As time goes by and things are going well in our lives, that belief falls by the wayside. This belief is not a benefactor that gives us all of our desires and is easily dismissed when not needed. It's a reflection of who we are.



# Tenacity

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The darkness surrounds you and you feel lost. All you see is decay and death. Even the air feels dirty. Life is attacking you and you don't know what you do. You just want to give up. Think of the multitudes of small flowers (or weeds) that grow everywhere they shouldn't. These plants found a way to grow and become strong in the harshest areas. They learned to grow around the obstacles and became stronger as they overcame one. Be like the plant.



# Trapped

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Ever felt so locked in that you couldn't move? You're in a situation that you can't get out and will always be there? Things seem like they will last forever. Nothing lasts forever. Two things may happen: You may resign yourself to the situation and try to make the best of it or you may try to change the situation. One leads to some potential near-term pain but in the long run, may lead to a better life. The other leads to a sameness that will destroy you over time.





# Troubled

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Others see you as a strong and confident woman. You have that great job, great love of your life and the world seems to be at your beck and call. Everybody seems to listen to you and admire you. Inside, though, are you really as strong as they think you are? We all have doubts... whether or not we deserve the accolades. The doubt never appears when we are busy... only when we stop and the quiet surrounds us. It's okay to doubt yourself. Just don't let it control your life.



# Trust

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Trust. Such a small word for an important part of our life. We trust that the ones we love will protect us, make us feel wanted, and won't hurt us. We trust our friends will bring joy to our lives and make it more interesting. We trust we will be safe in the communities we live in. Trust. When trust is broken, we see those who broke it in a different light. It's hard to regain trust because you will always be wondering if it'll happen again. It can be regained, but it takes work on both parties... not just the one hurt.







# Value

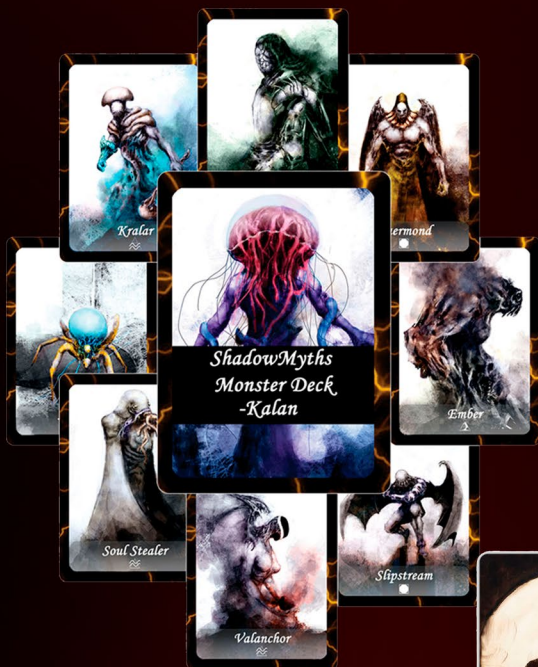
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Value is arbitrary. What is important to someone may be useless to someone else. This doesn't have to be physical items expensive like iPads or cars or houses. It could be intangibles like a smile, small talk, or a kind word. Saying something like "I like the way your hair looks today" could go a long way. Maybe they're having a bad day. That simple phrase may just turn around their day. Never dismiss the power of a smile or a kind word to someone.

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