

# L'Chaim

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What follows from here is my attempt to articulate a visceral, primal and absurd experience of life affirmation, which is intense within my being as I find myself here writing this, with tears in my eyes; through this medium of language, which I continually find to be inadequate as a means of expressing raw feeling and authentic experience. If I were to really express this to you – whoever you are – I would be holding you in an embrace that was full of love for whoever the fuck you are.

*“Let us love life”* Albert Libertad

*“Life can only be beautiful for those who take it upon themselves the desire to live their own lives”* Emile Armand

I titled this piece l'chaim with little concern for how it might be encountered by anyone reading it. Obviously this is not a phrase used by the majority of English speakers regularly. Without much experience of being-with Jewish individuals or having seen the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*; this Hebrew toast, meaning “to-life”, is not one many individuals will have encountered (probably – so says my absurd reasoning). But fuck it, I love the interjection, so that is the title.

What has got me to expressing this feeling of l'chaim, what has left me repeating l'chaim in my mind repeatedly in meditation through the last few nights after post traumatic stress dreams the past few nights, is an experience I found myself thrown into a few days ago. While driving in icy conditions, I suddenly found the car I was driving turning in a way that I had never experienced before. The car was no longer moving under its own machinery, but was under the anarchic power of the ice and motion. Twisting around, spinning towards the hedge on the other side of the road, I found myself in the midst of an involution, where the wildness of the world was destroying any notion of machinery overcoming life's conditions and forces. Then the car hit the hedge and I felt myself being turned over with the metal embodiment of anthropocentrism, mass extinction and the conditions that birthed global warming. Suddenly I was upside down, with the roof crunching underneath me, glass shattering, my head against the roof and my body held safely by the seatbelt. Collapse happened then; civilisation was ruined and I found myself in the wreckage, surrounded by icy roads, wondering if I would be road kill. The fear of death was intense and all manner of scenarios came to my mind, but I managed to reach for my phone

and call for help. While I was on the call, three men had stopped their cars nearby and come to help me. While I was not yet ready to get out of the car, they made a few more calls for me and then assisted in getting me out of the car. Minutes later loved ones of mine were there, then the officials, who dealt with the removal of the car from the road, and I was then taken home. I spent the rest of the day with loved ones taking the most beautiful care of me, with my life, presence, Being being utterly affirmed.

The day after this incident I was in conversation with a woman who is a very healing presence in my life, who shared a feeling of amazement regarding yet more intense experience that I've lived through and that I had come out of it with so little damage – I'd seen the doctor earlier that day who had advised me that the only damage was some whiplash, with no spinal damage and everything else seeming incredibly unharmed, considering how bad it could have been. She asked me how it felt to have survived so much, to yet again be looking at life from the position of "oh shit, I just survived that". My honest response was that I felt – and as I write this feel – pride. The feeling that goes with considering how much I have survived, that life has thrown me, is pride. I described this pride as feeling something akin to a Nietzschean heroic-individualism; like a pagan-hero who overcomes every attempt to kill them that the gods throw their way. To rephrase this slightly, into the realms of absurdist philosophy, treating the absurd as Shestov's dark, unreasonable and irrational god, and living/being-with absurdity to be, as Camus described, metaphysical rebellion/revolt; I feel proud of my rebellion against the god's. Individuals who find Nietzschean and absurdist aesthetics cringey or distasteful might well dislike this description of how I feel, possibly mistaking it for some kind of machoistic or revolutionary-left posturing. Such bad-faith readings are not something I feel inclined to pander to, by watering down what I shared with my friend or how I feel; so I will continue with the conversation. When she asked me about my shock, I shared that I was (and am now too) experiencing my primal animal being screaming out that I am alive – which amidst this industrial mass-extinction death camp I encounter within me as an affirmation of refusal, rebellion.

What initially drew me to individualist philosophy and praxis, and what keeps me aesthetically attracted to individualism, is the life affirmation I found in the thought of individualists like Nietzsche, Armand, Thoreau and Libertad; which is one of the overarching themes of my writings throughout my works – the affirmation of life and care towards living beings is also what I have continually found attractive, beautiful and desirable about environmentalist philosophy and praxis. I have been thinking about attraction, following the collapse of the car and while constructing absurd narratives in my mind as to why I have experienced so many intense and dangerous situations – enjoying the dramatic poetry in my mind of wondering why the gods have directed their unreasonable anger towards me. My meditations/thoughts on attraction have been focused on elephants drawing insects and birds to their bodies through attraction, blackholes attracting solar systems into their dark depths and Oscar Wilde's poetry drawing so many individuals to him. What I notice about elephants, blackholes and Wilde is how powerful I encounter them as being and how attractive I find this power – which is not authority-over, dominance or oppression, in the ways that the term power is often thought of being. Again at the risk of being read in bad faith; I find myself to be a powerful individual and (through absurd reasoning) wonder if this power has gravitationally rendered me attractive to the intense situations that I am playfully/poetically describing as the-gods-fury. This car crash, which really could have been the end of my life, is just the most recent event within a life that I have lived, dominated by an unreasonable amount of bizarrely intense experiences, many of which could well have broken me

as an individual or could have been my ending. Given the unreasonableness of these experiences, I quite like playfully and poetically embracing the absurd reasoning of all of this being because my individual power attracts the gods unreasonable fury and am happy to enjoy the feeling of heroic-rebellion I feel with this.

At this point of writing this piece, I notice that I feel, alongside deep tiredness, back and neck ache, and a mild headache, quite happy and glad to be affirming the experience that inspired this writing. I listen to my breathing and enjoy the sound intensely. In his book on eco-phenomenology *Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram describes an aspect of Jewish mysticism, which is arguably animist (though I'd prefer to describe as hylozoic-physicalist), where YHWH is the sound of breath. When practicing breathing meditations, I often find myself noticing my breath sounding like YHWH and enjoy how this lens brings a pagan-aesthetic quality to my experience of the world in these moments. Last night, after waking in sweat after a particularly stressful dream, I found myself noticing my breath making this sound, with the interjection *l'chaim* going through my mind, like a mantra. The world today has felt more aesthetically-pagan, with each breath feeling like a gift from a kind god I meet in the air that fills so much of the space surrounding me, affirming my life; with an awareness of crueler and more vicious gods who would seek my end. My agnosticism inclines me towards enjoying this pagan-imagery, with a feeling of uncertainty and doubt – but I breathe still and enjoy saying *l'chaim* as if it were a magical invocation.

My chest is now full of emotive feeling and shoulders feel sore, as I write this. In my visual memory I can see the car twisting towards the hedge and remember the feeling of uncertainty that I was experiencing and the lack of knowledge as to whether or not I would live through the event. As I remember this, I feel a deep sense of affirmation of ontological anarchy and wildness. There was no control, no authority, nothing dictating what happened. I was not in control of the car. The car was not controlling what happened. The anarchic wildness of the ice had thrown any concept of anything other than anarchy into the void, whilst throwing the car onto its roof. It was a brutally real experience of the power of anarchy – a harsher involution than I would usually desire, with my being thrust into the inhuman being nearly my ending. Minutes after this moment, when sat in the car of one of my loved ones, who had come to help me, I saw a robin land on the fence in front of me. For only a minute or two, I was able to be-with this wild individual, who had arrived out of nowhere that I could know and enjoy meeting them. While the car collapsing into the unhuman had been aesthetically terrifying, the collapse into the unhuman that the arrival of this robin was to me was just beautiful and welcome. The world was out of control and wildness was being with me in a gentle and beautiful way. *L'chaim* is all I feel to say on this experience.

Thinking about this being thrown into my awareness of anarchy, I am reminded of Stirner's words that "freedom is no fairy gift" and find myself brought into having to consider my responsibility as my freedom-to-respond-as-I-am-able. My freedom, as my ability to respond, is different to that of the robin who was with me the other morning. My freedom is different to that of an elephant. My freedom is different to that of Oscar Wilde. Following from the beautiful paradox of monism=pluralism, I find myself seeing freedom/anarchy as unendingly different freedoms and anarchies, with an awareness that I continue needing to navigate this terrain, which Moore called bewilderment, finding my freedom/anarchy as my ability to respond to the world as I encounter it. Again, I feel to say *l'chaim*.

I say *l'chaim* with absurd passion, with no reason greater than the egoism of my will-to-life.

To-life!  
L'Chaim!

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