

## Complexity

I never knew anybody . . . who found life simple. I think a life or a time looks simple when you leave out the details. **Ursula K. Le Guin**

Abandon the urge to simplify everything, to look for formulas and easy answers, and to begin to think multidimensionally, to glory in the mystery and paradoxes of life, not to be dismayed by the multitude of causes and consequences that are inherent in each experience -- to appreciate the fact that life is complex. **M. Scott Peck**

Life is forever yearning toward greater creativity, complexity, and becoming. There are always new possibilities inviting exploration and proffering hope. The future evokes fresh excitement and the desire to weave new pathways. The future never ends. **Diarmuid O'Murchu**

The power with which we hold our most sacred beliefs and practices is worthy of our reflection and generates within us a necessary compassion. Their complexity and interconnectedness are but a part of what make them precious to us. **Amanda Millay Hughes**

In this time of much change and the compounding of complexity, we need to use capacities that we never knew we had — capacities rarely used or even lost, perhaps, since childhood or the childhood of the race. We might refer to these capacities as evolutionary accelerators. **Jean Houston**

This is the time for every artist in every genre to do what he or she does loudly and consistently. It doesn't matter to me what your position is. You've got to keep asserting the complexity and the originality of life, and the multiplicity of it, and the facets of it. This is about being a complex human being in the world, not about finding a villain. This is no time for anything else than the best that you've got. **Toni Morrison**

Solitude, silence, and prayer are often the best ways to self-knowledge. Not because they offer solutions for the complexity of our lives but because they bring us in touch with our sacred center, where God dwells. **Henri J. M. Nouwen**

There are three principal types of patience or tolerance: acceptance of harm and injuries inflicted by others; voluntarily taking upon oneself the pain, sufferings, and hardships that are involved in the practice; and developing and enhancing one's capacity for patience and tolerance by developing one's appreciation of the nature of reality, such as the complexity of situations. This could also include insight into the ultimate nature of reality, such as emptiness . . .

**The Dalai Lama, Geshe Thupten Jinpa, translator**

It is time to embrace the grandeur, complexity, and paradox that characterize evolution at every stage, a story that continues to unfold under the mysterious wisdom of our cocreative God, whose strategies always have, and always will, outwit our human and religious desire for neat, predictable outcomes. **Diarmuid O'Murchu**

The middle path makes me wary. . . . But in the middle of my life, I am coming to see the middle path as a walk with wisdom where conversations of complexity can be found, that the middle path is the path of movement. . . . In the right and left worlds, the stories are largely set. . . . We become missionaries for a position . . . practitioners of the missionary position. Variety is lost. Diversity is lost. Creativity is lost in our inability to make love with the world. **Terry Tempest Williams**

The person we live with is one of the great unknowns in our life. To see them without preconceptions, in their mysteriousness, is to see them for themselves, rather than as some appendage to our own lives. And that can bring pleasure not only to us but also to them. It is liberating to be seen for who we are, an ungraspable complexity rather than a predictable list of characteristics. Clear seeing like this can even rejuvenate a flagging love.

**Roger Housden**, Seven Sins for a Life Worth Living

Caught up as most of us are in the complexities of daily living, we forget that we are surrounded by the creative power of Love. Every once in a while we need to step aside from the troubles and pleasures of our lives, and take a fresh look, a time to feel, and listen to our Source. **Madeleine L'Engle**

The transcendence which brings a person back to himself . . . means the sublimity of God, the immeasurability of his wisdom and the fathomless complexity of his creative Spirit. The fear of God links reverence before the majesty of the 'ever greater God' with a childlike basic trust in his immeasurable goodness, and curiosity about his creative activity in the history of the cosmos, the history of life, and in personal history. **Jurgen Moltmann**

Arising out of a dead universe, evolving from simplicity toward unimaginable complexity, life does seem to be an immense journey — as Loren Eiseley described it — but one without a human destination. We are not the goal of evolution, nor are we competent guides, despite our tinkering with DNA. If we are voyageurs, then so are the otter and eagles, locusts and spiders, lichens and pines, along with countless species that have gone down into the earth.

**Scott Russell Sanders**, Writing from the Center

Instead of being a machine, nature at large turns out to be more like human nature — unpredictable, sensitive to the surrounding world, influenced by small fluctuations. Accordingly, the appropriate way of approaching nature to learn about her complexity and beauty is not through domination and control, but through respect, cooperation, and dialogue. **Richard Louv**

In the Buddhist scriptures, one speaks of eighty-four thousand kinds of negative emotions. These are not all identified in detail, but this vast figurative number reflects the complexity of the human mind and gives one to understand that methods to transform this mind need to be adapted to the great variety of mental dispositions. **Matthieu Ricard**

When we are thrown into confusion by inner troubles, we have no idea how to soothe them and instinctively turn outward. We spend our lives cobbling together makeshift solutions, trying to imagine the conditions that will make us happy. By force of habit, this way of living becomes the norm and “that’s life!” our motto. And although the search for temporary well-being may occasionally be successful, it is never possible to control the quantity, quality, or duration of exterior circumstances. That holds true for almost every aspect of life: love, family, health, wealth, power, comfort, pleasure.

**Matthieu Ricard**, Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill

We struggle with the complexities and avoid the simplicities. **Norman Vincent Peale**

Everything must be made as simple as possible, but no simpler. Attributed to Albert Einstein, but not documented. Per [quoteinvestigator.com](http://quoteinvestigator.com), believed to be a paraphrase of

It can scarcely be denied that the supreme goal of all theory is to make the irreducible basic elements as simple and as few as possible without having to surrender the adequate representation of a single datum of experience. **Albert Einstein**

For every problem that is muddled by over-complexity, a dozen are muddled by over-simplifying. Unknown, from [quoteinvestigator.com](http://quoteinvestigator.com)

What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention, and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it. **Herbert A. Simon**

By Your Hand

A poem by **Ha’ani Lucia Falo San Nicolas**  
**for Deon**

I peer at the ridges of your palm  
rested along the crevice of mine,  
while tracing your jagged vasculature  
with a delicate press of my finger,

and I explore every uneven wrinkle,  
every pronounced callus, every rounded

mole like it is the hilly, stone-ridden  
backyard of my childhood home in Mongmong.

I know this place. I have been here  
before. I read the swirls inscribed  
into your firm dark skin, sound out

each node and connecting branch,  
sew syllables into words that spell  
out gima': home.

I raise your hand transposed against  
the evening sky, clear of clouds, and I  
can find the constellations within you.

Did you know our forefathers did this at sea—  
placed their arm to the heavens to translate  
the stars? Master navigators of the open ocean,

yet you, my love, are more than a map; I dare  
not fold nor decipher your complexity. You  
are the beloved, longed-for destination at the end

of the journey, the place that our ancestors craved  
return, the reason for the expedition—refuge,  
promise, hope. You are home.

Originally published in Poem-a-Day on May 25, 2022, by the Academy of American Poets

### **For Reflection and Discussion**

A What does complexity mean to you as a spiritual theme?

B Are you surprised that the theme is complexity and not simplicity?

C Pay attention to your own tendencies with respect to over-simplification or over-complication.  
What have you observed?

D How does your experience at All Souls inform your understanding and your experience of  
complexity?

——Mary Beth Hatem, for covenant groups at All Souls, Unitarian