

Barack Obama: Eulogy at the Funeral of Clementa Pinckney, Charleston, June 2015

Following the killing of 9 people at a Bible study group in [Charleston, South Carolina](#) President Barack Obama attended the funeral of the pastor of the church and South Carolina state senator, [the Reverend Clementa C. Pinckney](#).

The video is from [the C-SPAN Youtube channel](#), and the transcript from [the Washington Post](#).

President Barack Obama:

Giving all praise and honor to God.

(APPLAUSE) The Bible calls us to hope, to persevere and have faith in things not seen. They were still living by faith when they died, the scripture tells us.

(APPLAUSE)

They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.

We are here today to remember a man of God who lived by faith, a man who believed in things not seen, a man who believed there were better days ahead off in the distance, a man of service, who persevered knowing full-well he would not receive all those things he was promised, because he believed his efforts would deliver a better life for those who followed, to Jennifer, his beloved wife, Eliana and Malana, his beautiful, wonderful daughters, to the Mother Emanuel family and the people of Charleston, the people of South Carolina.

I cannot claim to have had the good fortune to know Reverend Pinckney well, but I did have the pleasure of knowing him and meeting him here in South Carolina back when we were both a little bit younger...

(LAUGHTER)

... back when I didn't have visible gray hair.

(LAUGHTER)

The first thing I noticed was his graciousness, his smile, his reassuring baritone, his deceptive sense of humor, all qualities that helped him wear so effortlessly a heavy burden of expectation.

Friends of his remarked this week that when Clementa Pinckney entered a room, it was like the future arrived, that even from a young age, folks knew he was special, anointed. He was the progeny of a long line of the faithful, a family of preachers who spread God's words, a family of protesters who so changed to expand voting rights and desegregate the South.

Clem heard their instruction, and he did not forsake their teaching. He was in the pulpit by 13, pastor by 18, public servant by 23. He did not exhibit any of the cockiness of youth nor youth's insecurities. Instead, he set an example worthy of his position, wise beyond his years in his speech, in his conduct, in his love, faith and purity.

As a senator, he represented a sprawling swathe of low country, a place that has long been one of the most neglected in America, a place still racked by poverty and inadequate schools, a place where children can still go hungry and the sick can go without treatment – a place that needed somebody like Clem.

(APPLAUSE) His position in the minority party meant the odds of winning more resources for his constituents were often

long. His calls for greater equity were too-often unheeded. The votes he cast were sometimes lonely.

But he never gave up. He stayed true to his convictions. He would not grow discouraged. After a full day at the Capitol, he'd climb into his car and head to the church to draw sustenance from his family, from his ministry, from the community that loved and needed him. There, he would fortify his faith and imagine what might be.

Reverend Pinckney embodied a politics that was neither mean nor small. He conducted himself quietly and kindly and diligently. He encouraged progress not by pushing his ideas alone but by seeking out your ideas, partnering with you to make things happen. He was full of empathy and fellow feeling, able to walk in somebody else's shoes and see through their eyes.

No wonder one of his Senate colleagues remembered Senator Pinckney as "the most gentle of the 46 of us, the best of the 46 of us."

Clem was often asked why he chose to be a pastor and a public servant. But the person who asked probably didn't know the history of AME Church.

(APPLAUSE)

As our brothers and sisters in the AME Church, we don't make those distinctions. "Our calling," Clem once said, "is not just within the walls of the congregation but the life and community in which our congregation resides."

(APPLAUSE)

He embodied the idea that our Christian faith demands deeds and not just words, that the sweet hour of prayer actually lasts the whole week long, that to put our faith in action is more than just individual salvation, it's about our collective

salvation, that to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and house the homeless is not just a call for isolated charity but the imperative of a just society.

What a good man. Sometimes I think that's the best thing to hope for when you're eulogized, after all the words and recitations and resumes are read, to just say somebody was a good man.

(APPLAUSE)

You don't have to be of high distinction to be a good man.

Preacher by 13, pastor by 18, public servant by 23. What a life Clementa Pinckney lived. What an example he set. What a model for his faith.

And then to lose him at 41, slain in his sanctuary with eight wonderful members of his flock, each at different stages in life but bound together by a common commitment to God – Cynthia Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lance, DePayne Middleton Doctor, Tywanza Sanders, Daniel L. Simmons, Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Myra Thompson.

Good people. Decent people. God-fearing people.

(APPLAUSE)

People so full of life and so full of kindness, people who ran the race, who persevered, people of great faith.

To the families of the fallen, the nation shares in your grief. Our pain cuts that much deeper because it happened in a church.

The church is and always has been the center of African American life...

(APPLAUSE)

... a place to call our own in a too-often hostile world, a

sanctuary from so many hardships.

Over the course of centuries, black churches served as hush harbors, where slaves could worship in safety, praise houses, where their free descendants could gather and shout "Hallelujah..."

(APPLAUSE)

... rest stops for the weary along the Underground Railroad, bunkers for the foot soldiers of the civil-rights movement.

They have been and continue to community centers, where we organize for jobs and justice, places of scholarship and network, places where children are loved and fed and kept out of harms way and told that they are beautiful and smart and taught that they matter.

(APPLAUSE)

That's what happens in church. That's what the black church means – our beating heart, the place where our dignity as a people in inviolate.

There's no better example of this tradition than Mother Emanuel, a church...

(APPLAUSE)

... a church built by blacks seeking liberty, burned to the ground because its founders sought to end slavery only to rise up again, a phoenix from these ashes. (APPLAUSE)

When there were laws banning all-black church gatherers, services happened here anyway in defiance of unjust laws. When there was a righteous movement to dismantle Jim Crow, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached from its pulpit, and marches began from its steps.

A sacred place, this church, not just for blacks, not just for

Christians but for every American who cares about the steady expansion...

(APPLAUSE)

... of human rights and human dignity in this country, a foundation stone for liberty and justice for all.

That's what the church meant.

(APPLAUSE)

We do not know whether the killer of Reverend Pinckney and eight others knew all of this history, but he surely sensed the meaning of his violent act. It was an act that drew on a long history of bombs and arson and shots fired at churches, not random but as a means of control, a way to terrorize and oppress...

(APPLAUSE)

... an act that he imagined would incite fear and recrimination, violence and suspicion, an act that he presumed would deepen divisions that trace back to our nation's original sin.

Oh, but God works in mysterious ways.

(APPLAUSE)

God has different ideas.

(APPLAUSE)

He didn't know he was being used by God.

(APPLAUSE)

Blinded by hatred, the alleged killer would not see the grace surrounding Reverend Pinckney and that Bible study group, the light of love that shown as they opened the church doors and invited a stranger to join in their prayer circle.

The alleged killer could have never anticipated the way the families of the fallen would respond when they saw him in court in the midst of unspeakable grief, with words of forgiveness. He couldn't imagine that.

(APPLAUSE)

The alleged killer could not imagine how the city of Charleston under the good and wise leadership of Mayor Riley, how the state of South Carolina, how the United States of America would respond not merely with revulsion at his evil acts, but with (inaudible) generosity. And more importantly, with a thoughtful introspection and self-examination that we so rarely see in public life. Blinded by hatred, he failed to comprehend what Reverend Pinckney so well understood – the power of God's grace.

(APPLAUSE)

This whole week, I've been reflecting on this idea of grace.

(APPLAUSE)

The grace of the families who lost loved ones; the grace that Reverend Pinckney would preach about in his sermons; the grace described in one of my favorite hymnals, the one we all know – Amazing Grace.

(APPLAUSE)

How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

(APPLAUSE)

I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.

(APPLAUSE)

According to the Christian tradition, grace is not earned. Grace is not merited. It's not something we deserve. Rather, grace is the free and benevolent favor of God.

(APPLAUSE)

As manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings. Grace – as a nation out of this terrible tragedy, God has visited grace upon us for he has allowed us to see where we've been blind.

(APPLAUSE)

He's given us the chance where we've been lost to find out best selves. We may not have earned this grace with our rancor and complacency and short-sightedness and fear of each other, but we got it all the same. He gave it to us anyway. He's once more given us grace.

But it is up to us now to make the most of it, to receive it with gratitude and to prove ourselves worthy of this gift.

For too long, we were blind to the pain that the Confederate Flag stirred into many of our citizens.

(APPLAUSE)

It's true a flag did not cause these murders. But as people from all walks of life, Republicans and Democrats, now acknowledge, including Governor Haley, whose recent eloquence on the subject is worthy of praise...

(APPLAUSE)

... as we all have to acknowledge, the flag has always represented more than just ancestral pride.

(APPLAUSE)

For many, black and white, that flag was a reminder of systemic oppression...

(APPLAUSE)

... and racial subjugation.

(APPLAUSE)

We see that now.

Removing the flag from this state's capital would not be an act of political correctness. It would not an insult to the valor of Confederate soldiers. It would simply be acknowledgement that the cause for which they fought, the cause of slavery, was wrong.

(APPLAUSE)

The imposition of Jim Crow after the Civil War, the resistance to civil rights for all people was wrong.

(APPLAUSE)

It would be one step in an honest accounting of America's history, a modest but meaningful balm for so many unhealed wounds.

It would be an expression of the amazing changes that have transformed this state and this country for the better because of the work of so many people of goodwill, people of all races, striving to form a more perfect union.

By taking down that flag, we express adds grace God's grace.

(APPLAUSE)

But I don't think God wants us to stop there.

(APPLAUSE)

For too long, we've been blind to be way past injustices continue to shape the present.

(APPLAUSE)

Perhaps we see that now. Perhaps this tragedy causes us to ask some tough questions about how we can permit so many of our

children to languish in poverty...

(APPLAUSE)

... or attend dilapidated schools or grow up without prospects for a job or for a career.

Perhaps it causes us to examine what we're doing to cause some of our children to hate.

(APPLAUSE)

Perhaps it softens hearts towards those lost young men, tens and tens of thousands caught up in the criminal-justice system and lead us to make sure that that system's not infected with bias.

(APPLAUSE)

... that we embrace changes in how we train and equip our police so that the bonds of trust between law enforcement...

(APPLAUSE)

... and the communities they serve make us all safer and more secure.

(APPLAUSE)

Maybe we now realize the way a racial bias can infect us even when we don't realize it so that we're guarding against not just racial slurs but we're also guarding against the subtle impulse to call Johnny back for a job interview but not Jamal...

(APPLAUSE)

... so that we search our hearts when we consider laws to make it harder for some of our fellow citizens to vote...

(APPLAUSE)

... by recognizing our common humanity, by treating every child

as important, regardless of the color of their skin...

(APPLAUSE)

... or the station into which they were born and to do what's necessary to make opportunity real for every American. By doing that, we express God's grace.

(APPLAUSE)

For too long...

(APPLAUSE)

For too long, we've been blind to the unique mayhem that gun violence inflicts upon this nation.

(APPLAUSE)

Sporadically, our eyes are open when eight of our brothers and sisters are cut down in a church basement, 12 in a movie theater, 26 in an elementary school. But I hope we also see the 30 precious lives cut short by gun violence in this country every single day...

(APPLAUSE)

... the countless more whose lives are forever changed, the survivors crippled, the children traumatized and fearful every day as they walk to school, the husband who will never feel his wife's warm touch, the entire communities whose grief overflows every time they have to watch what happened to them happening to some other place.

The vast majority of Americans, the majority of gun owners want to do something about this. We see that now.

(APPLAUSE)

And I'm convinced that by acknowledging the pain and loss of others, even as we respect the traditions, ways of life that

make up this beloved country, by making the moral choice to change, we express God's grace.

(APPLAUSE)

We don't earn grace. We're all sinners. We don't deserve it.

(APPLAUSE)

But God gives it to us anyway.

(APPLAUSE)

And we choose how to receive it. It's our decision how to honor it.

None of us can or should expect a transformation in race relations overnight. Every time something like this happens, somebody says, "We have to have a conversation about race." We talk a lot about race.

(APPLAUSE)

There's no shortcut. We don't need more talk.

(APPLAUSE)

None of us should believe that a handful of gun safety measures will prevent every tragedy.

It will not. People of good will will continue to debate the merits of various policies as our democracy requires – the big, raucous place, America is. And there are good people on both sides of these debates.

Whatever solutions we find will necessarily be incomplete. But it would be a betrayal of everything Reverend Pinckney stood for, I believe, if we allow ourselves to slip into a comfortable silence again.

(APPLAUSE)

Once the eulogies have been delivered, once the TV cameras move on, to go back to business as usual. That's what we so often do to avoid uncomfortable truths about the prejudice that still infects our society.

(APPLAUSE)

To settle for symbolic gestures without following up with the hard work of more lasting change, that's how we lose our way again. It would be a refutation of the forgiveness expressed by those families if we merely slipped into old habits whereby those who disagree with us are not merely wrong, but bad; where we shout instead of listen; where we barricade ourselves behind preconceived notions or well-practiced cynicism.

Reverend Pinckney once said, "Across the south, we have a deep appreciation of history. We haven't always had a deep appreciation of each other's history."

(APPLAUSE)

What is true in the south is true for America. Clem understood that justice grows out of recognition of ourselves in each other; that my liberty depends on you being free, too.

(APPLAUSE)

That – that history can't be a sword to justify injustice or a shield against progress. It must be a manual for how to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, how to break the cycle, a roadway toward a better world. He knew that the path of grace involves an open mind. But more importantly, an open heart.

That's what I felt this week – an open heart. That more than any particular policy or analysis is what's called upon right now, I think. It's what a friend of mine, the writer Marilyn Robinson, calls "that reservoir of goodness beyond and of another kind, that we are able to do each other in the ordinary cause of things."

That reservoir of goodness. If we can find that grace,
anything is possible.

(APPLAUSE)

If we can tap that grace, everything can change. Amazing
grace, amazing grace.

Amazing grace...

(SINGING)

(APPLAUSE)

... how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was
lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now, I see.

(APPLAUSE)

Clementa Pinckney found that grace...

(APPLAUSE)

... Cynthia Hurd found that grace...

(APPLAUSE)

... Susie Jackson found that grace...

(APPLAUSE)

... Ethel Lance found that grace...

(APPLAUSE)

... DePayne Middleton Doctor found that grace...

(APPLAUSE)

... Tywanza Sanders found that grace...

(APPLAUSE)

... Daniel L. Simmons, Sr. found that grace...

(APPLAUSE) ... Sharonda Coleman-Singleton found that grace...

(APPLAUSE)

... Myra Thompson found that grace...

(APPLAUSE)

... through the example of their lives. They've now passed it onto us. May we find ourselves worthy of that precious and extraordinary gift as long as our lives endure.

May grace now lead them home. May God continue to shed His Grace on the United States of America.

Ernest Hemingway: Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, 1954

Ernest [Hemingway](#) (1899 – 1961) was an American author and journalist whose economical style had a strong influence on 20th-century fiction, and who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954.

The transcript can be downloaded from [the Nobel Prize website](#). The video is from [the Misery of Existence channel on Youtube](#).

Ernest Hemingway:

No writer who knows the great writers who did not receive the Prize can accept it other than with humility. There is no need to list these writers. Everyone here may make his own list according to his knowledge and his conscience.

It would be impossible for me to ask the Ambassador of my country to read a speech in which a writer said all of the things which are in his heart. Things may not be immediately discernible in what a man writes, and in this sometimes he is fortunate; but eventually they are quite clear and by these and the degree of alchemy that he possesses he will endure or be forgotten.

Writing, at its best, is a lonely life. Organizations for writers palliate the writer's loneliness but I doubt if they improve his writing. He grows in public stature as he sheds his loneliness and often his work deteriorates. For he does his work alone and if he is a good enough writer he must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day.

For a true writer each book should be a new beginning where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment. He should always try for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed. Then sometimes, with great luck, he will succeed.

How simple the writing of literature would be if it were only necessary to write in another way what has been well written. It is because we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him.

I have spoken too long for a writer. A writer should write what he has to say and not speak it.

Again I thank you

Tim Minchin: Address to University of Western Australia

The British-born Australian comedian, actor and musician [Tim Minchin](#) speaks to graduates after being awarded an honorary doctorate at the University of Western Australia.

The transcript can be downloaded from his website, timminchin.com. The video is [on the University of Western Australia's Youtube channel](#).

Tim Minchin:

In darker days, I did a corporate gig at a conference for this big company who made and sold accounting software. In a bid, I presume, to inspire their salespeople to greater heights, they'd forked out 12 grand for an Inspirational Speaker who was this extreme sports dude who had had a couple of his limbs frozen off when he got stuck on a ledge on some mountain. It was weird. Software salespeople need to hear from someone who has had a long, successful and happy career in software sales, not from an overly-optimistic, ex-mountaineer. Some poor guy who arrived in the morning hoping to learn about better sales technique ended up going home worried about the blood flow to his extremities. It's not inspirational – it's confusing.

And if the mountain was meant to be a symbol of life's challenges, and the loss of limbs a metaphor for sacrifice, the software guy's not going to get it, is he? Cos he didn't do an arts degree, did he? He should have. Arts degrees are awesome. And they help you find meaning where there is none. And let me assure you, there is none. Don't go looking for it. Searching for meaning is like searching for a rhyme scheme in

a cookbook: you won't find it and you'll bugger up your soufflé.

Point being, I'm not an inspirational speaker. I've never lost a limb on a mountainside, metaphorically or otherwise. And I'm certainly not here to give career advice, cos... well I've never really had what most would call a proper job.

However, I have had large groups of people listening to what I say for quite a few years now, and it's given me an inflated sense of self-importance. So I will now – at the ripe old age of 38 – bestow upon you nine life lessons. To echo, of course, the 9 lessons and carols of the traditional Christmas service. Which are also a bit obscure.

You might find some of this stuff inspiring, you will find some of it boring, and you will definitely forget all of it within a week. And be warned, there will be lots of hokey similes, and obscure aphorisms which start well but end up not making sense.

So listen up, or you'll get lost, like a blind man clapping in a pharmacy trying to echo-locate the contact lens fluid.

Here we go:

1. You Don't Have To Have A Dream.

Americans on talent shows always talk about their dreams. Fine, if you have something that you've always dreamed of, like, in your heart, go for it! After all, it's something to do with your time... chasing a dream. And if it's a big enough one, it'll take you most of your life to achieve, so by the time you get to it and are staring into the abyss of the meaninglessness of your achievement, you'll be almost dead so it won't matter.

I never really had one of these big dreams. And so I advocate passionate dedication to the pursuit of short-term goals. Be micro-ambitious. Put your head down and work with pride on

whatever is in front of you... you never know where you might end up. Just be aware that the next worthy pursuit will probably appear in your periphery. Which is why you should be careful of long-term dreams. If you focus too far in front of you, you won't see the shiny thing out the corner of your eye. Right? Good. Advice. Metaphor. Look at me go.

2. Don't Seek Happiness

Happiness is like an orgasm: if you think about it too much, it goes away. Keep busy and aim to make someone else happy, and you might find you get some as a side effect. We didn't evolve to be constantly content. Contented Australopithecus Afarensis got eaten before passing on their genes.

3. Remember, It's All Luck

You are lucky to be here. You were incalculably lucky to be born, and incredibly lucky to be brought up by a nice family that helped you get educated and encouraged you to go to Uni. Or if you were born into a horrible family, that's unlucky and you have my sympathy... but you were still lucky: lucky that you happened to be made of the sort of DNA that made the sort of brain which – when placed in a horrible childhood environment – would make decisions that meant you ended up, eventually, graduating Uni. Well done you, for dragging yourself up by the shoelaces, but you were lucky. You didn't create the bit of you that dragged you up. They're not even your shoelaces.

I suppose I worked hard to achieve whatever dubious achievements I've achieved ... but I didn't make the bit of me that works hard, any more than I made the bit of me that ate too many burgers instead of going to lectures while I was here at UWA.

Understanding that you can't truly take credit for your successes, nor truly blame others for their failures will humble you and make you more compassionate.

Empathy is intuitive, but is also something you can work on,

intellectually.

4. Exercise

I'm sorry, you pasty, pale, smoking philosophy grads, arching your eyebrows into a Cartesian curve as you watch the Human Movement mob winding their way through the miniature traffic cones of their existence: you are wrong and they are right. Well, you're half right – you think, therefore you are... but also: you jog, therefore you sleep well, therefore you're not overwhelmed by existential angst. You can't be Kant, and you don't want to be.

Play a sport, do yoga, pump iron, run... whatever... but take care of your body. You're going to need it. Most of you mob are going to live to nearly a hundred, and even the poorest of you will achieve a level of wealth that most humans throughout history could not have dreamed of. And this long, luxurious life ahead of you is going to make you depressed!

But don't despair! There is an inverse correlation between depression and exercise. Do it. Run, my beautiful intellectuals, run. And don't smoke. Natch.

5. Be Hard On Your Opinions

A famous bon mot asserts that opinions are like arse-holes, in that everyone has one. There is great wisdom in this... but I would add that opinions differ significantly from arse-holes, in that yours should be constantly and thoroughly examined.

We must think critically, and not just about the ideas of others. Be hard on your beliefs. Take them out onto the verandah and beat them with a cricket bat. Be intellectually rigorous. Identify your biases, your prejudices, your privilege.

Most of society's arguments are kept alive by a failure to acknowledge nuance. We tend to generate false dichotomies, then try to argue one point using two entirely different sets of assumptions, like two tennis players trying to win a match

by hitting beautifully executed shots from either end of separate tennis courts.

By the way, while I have science and arts grads in front of me: please don't make the mistake of thinking the arts and sciences are at odds with one another. That is a recent, stupid, and damaging idea. You don't have to be unscientific to make beautiful art, to write beautiful things.

If you need proof: Twain, Adams, Vonnegut, McEwen, Sagan, Shakespeare, Dickens. For a start.

You don't need to be superstitious to be a poet. You don't need to hate GM technology to care about the beauty of the planet. You don't have to claim a soul to promote compassion. Science is not a body of knowledge nor a system of belief; it is just a term which describes humankind's incremental acquisition of understanding through observation. Science is awesome.

The arts and sciences need to work together to improve how knowledge is communicated. The idea that many Australians – including our new PM and my distant cousin Nick – believe that the science of anthropogenic global warming is controversial, is a powerful indicator of the extent of our failure to communicate. The fact that 30% of this room just bristled is further evidence still. The fact that that bristling is more to do with politics than science is even more despairing.

6. Be a teacher.

Please? Please be a teacher. Teachers are the most admirable and important people in the world. You don't have to do it forever, but if you're in doubt about what to do, be an amazing teacher. Just for your twenties. Be a primary school teacher. Especially if you're a bloke – we need male primary school teachers. Even if you're not a Teacher, be a teacher. Share your ideas. Don't take for granted your education. Rejoice in what you learn, and spray it.

7. Define Yourself By What You Love

I've found myself doing this thing a bit recently, where, if someone asks me what sort of music I like, I say well I don't listen to the radio because pop lyrics annoy me. Or if someone asks me what food I like, I say I think truffle oil is overused and slightly obnoxious. And I see it all the time online, people whose idea of being part of a subculture is to hate Coldplay or football or feminists or the Liberal Party. We have tendency to define ourselves in opposition to stuff; as a comedian, I make a living out of it. But try to also express your passion for things you love. Be demonstrative and generous in your praise of those you admire. Send thank-you cards and give standing ovations. Be pro-stuff, not just anti-stuff.

8. Respect People With Less Power Than You.

I have, in the past, made important decisions about people I work with – agents and producers – based largely on how they treat wait staff in restaurants. I don't care if you're the most powerful cat in the room, I will judge you on how you treat the least powerful. So there.

9. Don't Rush.

You don't need to already know what you're going to do with the rest of your life. I'm not saying sit around smoking cones all day, but also, don't panic. Most people I know who were sure of their career path at 20 are having midlife crises now.

I said at the beginning of this ramble that life is meaningless. It was not a flippant assertion. I think it's absurd: the idea of seeking meaning in the set of circumstances that happens to exist after 13.8 billion years worth of unguided events. Leave it to humans to think the universe has a purpose for them. However, I am no nihilist. I am not even a cynic. I am, actually, rather romantic. And here's my idea of romance:

You will soon be dead. Life will sometimes seem long and tough

and, god, it's tiring. And you will sometimes be happy and sometimes sad. And then you'll be old. And then you'll be dead.

There is only one sensible thing to do with this empty existence, and that is: fill it. Not fillet. Fill. It.

And in my opinion (until I change it), life is best filled by learning as much as you can about as much as you can, taking pride in whatever you're doing, having compassion, sharing ideas, running(!), being enthusiastic. And then there's love, and travel, and wine, and sex, and art, and kids, and giving, and mountain climbing ... but you know all that stuff already.

It's an incredibly exciting thing, this one, meaningless life of yours. Good luck.

Thank you for indulging me.

Aung San Suu Kyi: Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, June 2012

On 20th June 2012, [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), Chairman of the Burmese National League for Democracy and member of the Burmese parliament, finally gave this acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize her husband and sons had accepted on her behalf 21 years earlier in 1991, when she was under house arrest.

The transcript is from the [AsiaSentinel.com website](#). The video can be seen on the [Nobel Prize](#) website.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Distinguished members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Dear Friends,

Long years ago, sometimes it seems many lives ago, I was at Oxford listening to the radio program Desert Island Discs with my young son Alexander. It was a well-known program (for all I know it still continues) on which famous people from all walks of life were invited to talk about the eight discs, the one book beside the bible and the complete works of Shakespeare, and the one luxury item they would wish to have with them were they to be marooned on a desert island.

At the end of the program, which we had both enjoyed, Alexander asked me if I thought I might ever be invited to speak on Desert Island Discs. "Why not?" I responded lightly. Since he knew that in general only celebrities took part in the program he proceeded to ask, with genuine interest, for what reason I thought I might be invited. I considered this for a moment and then answered: "Perhaps because I'd have won the Nobel Prize for literature," and we both laughed. The prospect seemed pleasant but hardly probable.

(I cannot now remember why I gave that answer, perhaps because I had recently read a book by a Nobel Laureate or perhaps because the Desert Island celebrity of that day had been a famous writer.)

In 1989, when my late husband Michael Aris came to see me during my first term of house arrest, he told me that a friend, John Finnis, had nominated me for the Nobel Peace Prize. This time also I laughed. For an instant Michael looked amazed, then he realized why I was amused. The Nobel Peace Prize? A pleasant prospect, but quite improbable! So how did I feel when I was actually awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace? The question has been put to me many times and this is surely the most appropriate occasion on which to examine what the Nobel Prize means to me and what peace means to me.

As I have said repeatedly in many an interview, I heard the news that I had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on the radio one evening. It did not altogether come as a surprise because I had been mentioned as one of the frontrunners for the prize in a number of broadcasts during the previous week. While drafting this lecture, I have tried very hard to remember what my immediate reaction to the announcement of the award had been. I think, I can no longer be sure, it was something like: "Oh, so they've decided to give it to me." It did not seem quite real because in a sense I did not feel myself to be quite real at that time.

Often during my days of house arrest it felt as though I were no longer a part of the real world. There was the house which was my world, there was the world of others who also were not free but who were together in prison as a community, and there was the world of the free; each was a different planet pursuing its own separate course in an indifferent universe. What the Nobel Peace Prize did was to draw me once again into the world of other human beings outside the isolated area in which I lived, to restore a sense of reality to me. This did not happen instantly, of course, but as the days and months went by and news of reactions to the award came over the airwaves, I began to understand the significance of the Nobel Prize. It had made me real once again; it had drawn me back into the wider human community. And what was more important, the Nobel Prize had drawn the attention of the world to the struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma. We were not going to be forgotten.

To be forgotten. The French say that to part is to die a little. To be forgotten too is to die a little. It is to lose some of the links that anchor us to the rest of humanity. When I met Burmese migrant workers and refugees during my recent visit to Thailand, many cried out: "Don't forget us!" They meant: "don't forget our plight, don't forget to do what you can to help us, don't forget we also belong to your world."

When the Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize to me they were recognizing that the oppressed and the isolated in Burma were also a part of the world, they were recognizing the oneness of humanity. So for me receiving the Nobel Peace Prize means personally extending my concerns for democracy and human rights beyond national borders. The Nobel Peace Prize opened up a door in my heart.

The Burmese concept of peace can be explained as the happiness arising from the cessation of factors that militate against the harmonious and the wholesome. The word *nyein-chan* translates literally as the beneficial coolness that comes when a fire is extinguished. Fires of suffering and strife are raging around the world. In my own country, hostilities have not ceased in the far north; to the west, communal violence resulting in arson and murder were taking place just several days before I started out on the journey that has brought me here today. News of atrocities in other reaches of the earth abound. Reports of hunger, disease, displacement, joblessness, poverty, injustice, discrimination, prejudice, bigotry; these are our daily fare. Everywhere there are negative forces eating away at the foundations of peace. Everywhere can be found thoughtless dissipation of material and human resources that are necessary for the conservation of harmony and happiness in our world.

The First World War represented a terrifying waste of youth and potential, a cruel squandering of the positive forces of our planet. The poetry of that era has a special significance for me because I first read it at a time when I was the same age as many of those young men who had to face the prospect of withering before they had barely blossomed. A young American fighting with the French Foreign Legion wrote before he was killed in action in 1916 that he would meet his death: "at some disputed barricade;" "on some scarred slope of battered hill;" "at midnight in some flaming town." Youth and love and life perishing forever in senseless attempts to capture

nameless, unremembered places. And for what? Nearly a century on, we have yet to find a satisfactory answer.

Are we not still guilty, if to a less violent degree, of recklessness, of improvidence with regard to our future and our humanity? War is not the only arena where peace is done to death. Wherever suffering is ignored, there will be the seeds of conflict, for suffering degrades and embitters and enrages.

A positive aspect of living in isolation was that I had ample time in which to ruminate over the meaning of words and precepts that I had known and accepted all my life. As a Buddhist, I had heard about dukha, generally translated as suffering, since I was a small child. Almost on a daily basis elderly, and sometimes not so elderly, people around me would murmur "dukha, dukha" when they suffered from aches and pains or when they met with some small, annoying mishaps. However, it was only during my years of house arrest that I got around to investigating the nature of the six great dukha. These are: to be conceived, to age, to sicken, to die, to be parted from those one loves, to be forced to live in propinquity with those one does not love. I examined each of the six great sufferings, not in a religious context but in the context of our ordinary, everyday lives. If suffering were an unavoidable part of our existence, we should try to alleviate it as far as possible in practical, earthly ways. I mulled over the effectiveness of ante- and post-natal programs and mother and childcare; of adequate facilities for the aging population; of comprehensive health services; of compassionate nursing and hospices. I was particularly intrigued by the last two kinds of suffering: to be parted from those one loves and to be forced to live in propinquity with those one does not love. What experiences might our Lord Buddha have undergone in his own life that he had included these two states among the great sufferings? I thought of prisoners and refugees, of migrant workers and victims of human trafficking, of that great mass of the uprooted of the earth who have been torn away from

their homes, parted from families and friends, forced to live out their lives among strangers who are not always welcoming.

We are fortunate to be living in an age when social welfare and humanitarian assistance are recognized not only as desirable but necessary. I am fortunate to be living in an age when the fate of prisoners of conscience anywhere has become the concern of peoples everywhere, an age when democracy and human rights are widely, even if not universally, accepted as the birthright of all. How often during my years under house arrest have I drawn strength from my favorite passages in the [preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#):

..... disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspirations of the common people,

..... it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law . . .

If I am asked why I am fighting for human rights in Burma the above passages will provide the answer. If I am asked why I am fighting for democracy in Burma, it is because I believe that democratic institutions and practices are necessary for the guarantee of human rights.

Over the past year there have been signs that the endeavors of those who believe in democracy and human rights are beginning to bear fruit in Burma. There have been changes in a positive direction; steps towards democratization have been taken. If I advocate cautious optimism it is not because I do not have faith in the future but because I do not want to encourage blind faith. Without faith in the future, without the

conviction that democratic values and fundamental human rights are not only necessary but possible for our society, our movement could not have been sustained throughout the destroying years. Some of our warriors fell at their post, some deserted us, but a dedicated core remained strong and committed. At times when I think of the years that have passed, I am amazed that so many remained staunch under the most trying circumstances. Their faith in our cause is not blind; it is based on a clear-eyed assessment of their own powers of endurance and a profound respect for the aspirations of our people.

It is because of recent changes in my country that I am with you today; and these changes have come about because of you and other lovers of freedom and justice who contributed towards a global awareness of our situation. Before continuing to speak of my country, may I speak out for our prisoners of conscience. There still remain such prisoners in Burma. It is to be feared that because the best known detainees have been released, the remainder, the unknown ones, will be forgotten. I am standing here because I was once a prisoner of conscience. As you look at me and listen to me, please remember the often repeated truth that one prisoner of conscience is one too many. Those who have not yet been freed, those who have not yet been given access to the benefits of justice in my country number much more than one. Please remember them and do whatever is possible to effect their earliest, unconditional release.

Burma is a country of many ethnic nationalities and faith in its future can be founded only on a true spirit of union. Since we achieved independence in 1948, there never has been a time when we could claim the whole country was at peace. We have not been able to develop the trust and understanding necessary to remove causes of conflict. Hopes were raised by ceasefires that were maintained from the early 1990s until 2010 when these broke down over the course of a few months.

One unconsidered move can be enough to remove long-standing ceasefires. In recent months, negotiations between the government and ethnic nationality forces have been making progress. We hope that ceasefire agreements will lead to political settlements founded on the aspirations of the peoples, and the spirit of union.

My party, the National League for Democracy, and I stand ready and willing to play any role in the process of national reconciliation. The reform measures that were put into motion by President U Thein Sein's government can be sustained only with the intelligent cooperation of all internal forces: the military, our ethnic nationalities, political parties, the media, civil society organizations, the business community and, most important of all, the general public. We can say that reform is effective only if the lives of the people are improved and in this regard, the international community has a vital role to play. Development and humanitarian aid, bilateral agreements and investments should be coordinated and calibrated to ensure that these will promote social, political and economic growth that is balanced and sustainable. The potential of our country is enormous. This should be nurtured and developed to create not just a more prosperous but also a more harmonious, democratic society where our people can live in peace, security and freedom.

The peace of our world is indivisible. As long as negative forces are getting the better of positive forces anywhere, we are all at risk. It may be questioned whether all negative forces could ever be removed. The simple answer is: "No!" It is in human nature to contain both the positive and the negative. However, it is also within human capability to work to reinforce the positive and to minimize or neutralize the negative. Absolute peace in our world is an unattainable goal. But it is one towards which we must continue to journey, our eyes fixed on it as a traveller in a desert fixes his eyes on the one guiding star that will lead him to salvation. Even if

we do not achieve perfect peace on earth, because perfect peace is not of this earth, common endeavours to gain peace will unite individuals and nations in trust and friendship and help to make our human community safer and kinder.

I used the word 'kinder' after careful deliberation; I might say the careful deliberation of many years. Of the sweets of adversity, and let me say that these are not numerous, I have found the sweetest, the most precious of all, is the lesson I learnt on the value of kindness. Every kindness I received, small or big, convinced me that there could never be enough of it in our world. To be kind is to respond with sensitivity and human warmth to the hopes and needs of others. Even the briefest touch of kindness can lighten a heavy heart. Kindness can change the lives of people. Norway has shown exemplary kindness in providing a home for the displaced of the earth, offering sanctuary to those who have been cut loose from the moorings of security and freedom in their native lands.

There are refugees in all parts of the world. When I was at the Maela refugee camp in Thailand recently, I met dedicated people who were striving daily to make the lives of the inmates as free from hardship as possible. They spoke of their concern over 'donor fatigue,' which could also translate as 'compassion fatigue.' 'Donor fatigue' expresses itself precisely in the reduction of funding. 'Compassion fatigue' expresses itself less obviously in the reduction of concern. One is the consequence of the other. Can we afford to indulge in compassion fatigue? Is the cost of meeting the needs of refugees greater than the cost that would be consequent on turning an indifferent, if not a blind, eye on their suffering? I appeal to donors the world over to fulfill the needs of these people who are in search, often it must seem to them a vain search, of refuge.

At Maela, I had valuable discussions with Thai officials responsible for the administration of Tak province where this and several other camps are situated. They acquainted me with

some of the more serious problems related to refugee camps: violation of forestry laws, illegal drug use, home brewed spirits, the problems of controlling malaria, tuberculosis, dengue fever and cholera. The concerns of the administration are as legitimate as the concerns of the refugees. Host countries also deserve consideration and practical help in coping with the difficulties related to their responsibilities.

Ultimately our aim should be to create a world free from the displaced, the homeless and the hopeless, a world of which each and every corner is a true sanctuary where the inhabitants will have the freedom and the capacity to live in peace. Every thought, every word, and every action that adds to the positive and the wholesome is a contribution to peace. Each and every one of us is capable of making such a contribution. Let us join hands to try to create a peaceful world where we can sleep in security and wake in happiness.

The Nobel Committee concluded its statement of 14 October 1991 with the words: "In awarding the Nobel Peace Prize ... to Aung San Suu Kyi, the Norwegian Nobel Committee wishes to honour this woman for her unflagging efforts and to show its support for the many people throughout the world who are striving to attain democracy, human rights and ethnic conciliation by peaceful means." When I joined the democracy movement in Burma it never occurred to me that I might ever be the recipient of any prize or honour. The prize we were working for was a free, secure and just society where our people might be able to realize their full potential. The honour lay in our endeavour. History had given us the opportunity to give of our best for a cause in which we believed. When the Nobel Committee chose to honour me, the road I had chosen of my own free will became a less lonely path to follow. For this I thank the Committee, the people of Norway and peoples all over the world whose support has strengthened my faith in the common quest for peace. Thank you.

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Aung San Suu Kyi: Acceptance Speech, Oxford, June 2012

On 20th June 2012, [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), Chairman of the Burmese National League for Democracy and member of the Burmese parliament, addressed the University of Oxford where she had studied years earlier and received an honorary doctorate in civil law.

The transcript is from the [Oxford Mail website](#). The video can be seen on the [University of Oxford](#) website.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Today, many strands of my life have come together. The years that I spent as a student at St Hugh's; the years I spent in Park Town as a wife and mother; the years I spent under house arrest – when my university, the University of Oxford, stood up and spoke up for me.

During the most difficult years I was upheld by memories of Oxford. These were among the most important inner resources that helped me to cope with all the challenges I had to face.

The memories were in fact very simple ones. Some are days like these, when I went on the Cherwell with friends in a punt, or sat reading on the lawn at St Hugh's, or in the library – not looking at a book, but out of the windows.

But these were very precious memories – because I had lived a happy life. And this made me understand so much better the

young people of Burma – who wanted to live a happy life and who had never been given an opportunity to lead one.

When I see Oxford now, when I see the students of Oxford now, when I met some of them at St Hugh's yesterday, I saw myself again as a young student: carefree, happy, nice. We were nice, the students now are nice. They have been given a chance to be nice.

It's a very simple word, but it's an important one. When you look at their faces, you don't see any hidden agenda there. They were so open, as we were open – because we had been given a chance to be open. We were not afraid – there was no reason for us to be afraid – and this opened us to the world.

I remember small things. I remember so often going in a bus, with my very dear friend Ann Pasternak-Slater, sitting side by side, in a bus on the Banbury Road, our four denim-clad knees next to each other; and Ann looked down, and said: 'It's not fair, even knees are different.' And it was true. I'm not sure quite which way it was, but one set of knees was pointed, and one set of knees was round. These were the sort of things we noticed as students, and talked about, and built a whole philosophy on this little fact that we had different sets of knees, our knees were shaped differently.

The world was shaped differently. But we were not afraid of it. The differences meant that we were all the stronger. We learned how to cope with the different problems that we would have to face.

I have to mention one of my fellow honorands at this time, because when I was under house arrest I was also helped by the books of John le Carré. They were an escape – I won't call it an escape, they were a journey into the wider world. Not the wider world just of other countries, but of thoughts and ideas. And these were the journeys that made me feel that I was not really cut off from the rest of humankind. I was never

alone, because there were many, many avenues to places far away from where I was.

And all this I was able to do to a great extent because of the years I spent at Oxford, the friends I made there.

The most important thing for me about Oxford was not what I learnt there in terms of set texts and set books we had to read, but in terms of a respect for the best in human civilisation.

And the best in human civilisation comes from all parts of the world. It is not limited to Oxford; it is not limited to Burma; it is not limited to any other country. But the fact that in Oxford I had learned to respect all that is the best in human civilisation helped me to cope with what was not quite the best.

Because what is not yet quite the best may still, one day, become the best; it may be improved. It gave me a confidence in humankind. It gave me a confidence in the innate wisdom of human beings – not given to all of us, but given to enough of us for the rest of the world to share, and to make use of it for others.

I have often thought that the saddest thing about Burma over the last few decades has been the lack of campus life for our university students. Campus life means a life in which young people can create their own world – or make the world their own. They have the freedom and the facilities to do so. Our young people in Burma have not had this freedom for the last few decades. University life has been shattered because of a perceived need to keep students in order. That's not possible: everybody knows that students can't be kept in order! So we shouldn't spend our time on such a futile and really undesirable mission. I would like to see university life restored to Burma in all its glory. And I would be so grateful if my old university, the University of Oxford, could help to

bring this about once again.

I would like our young people to know what it is to feel that the world belongs to them and they belong to the world. To be able to stand at the threshold of full adulthood in full confidence that they will be able to do their best for the world and in the belief that the world also wants to do the best for them.

Oxford taught me to value humankind, because when I was in Oxford I was the only student from Burma. I think I was only Burmese person resident in the university for the first couple of years. And all my friends were non-Burmese – of course English students, but students from all over the world, from Ghana, from India, from Thailand, from Sri Lanka, from all over the world.

And I never felt that they were different from me. We were all the same: we were all students of this university, which has some magic that makes us feel that nothing separates us – neither religion, nor race, nor nationality, nor even different levels of excellence in academic affairs.

Oxford is a place of tremendous broad-mindedness. Nobody discriminates against anybody else because he or she may be different, or may not have achieved as much as others. Every human being is expected to have a value and a dignity of her kind or his kind.

And that's why throughout the years when I was struggling for human rights in Burma I felt I was doing something of which my old university would have approved. And to feel the approval behind me has helped me a great deal.

Burma is at the beginning of a road. It is not the sort of road that you find in England: it is not smooth; it is not well-maintained; in fact, it is not yet there. It a road that we will have to carve out for ourselves. This is a road that we will have to build as we go along.

Too many people are expecting too much from Burma at this moment. They think that the road where we are standing is like one of those highways on which I travelled from London to Oxford – and almost got carsick! – very straight and very smooth. Too smooth and too straight perhaps for me, because I not used to such smoothness.

But our road is one which is, as I said, one we have to build for ourselves, inch by difficult inch. And I hope that you will all be with us while we are doing this. I hope that you will understand that this road is there in our hearts and minds, but not actually there yet in real fact. And that we will need your help and the help of others all around the world to make sure that it leads to where we want our country to go.

And where do I want my country to go? My first trip abroad in 24 years but not really this one to Europe, but to Thailand, towards the end of May. And I stayed in a hotel called the Shangri-La. And I think every Oxonian, or most every, knows that in Lost Horizon Shangri-La was described as “something a little like Oxford”.

So where do we want to go to? Where I want to go to, where I want our people to go to, is a place which will enable them to see for themselves how wide open the world can be, and how to find our own place in the world – which is also open enough and wide enough for everybody to be included.

I would like a bit of Oxonian Shangri-la in Burma.

This is what I would like to work towards: very practical, because it's based on hard work, and knowledge, and modern research, and of course funding. We mustn't forget funding, which is a very important part of building any kind of successful institution these days. And I mention it because I would like all our friends, all our well-wishers, to remember that investing in Burma should be done with a sense of

responsibility, and to remind those who are thinking of making use of the new opportunities that Burma is offering to remember that we, the people of Burma, need to benefit from these investments as much as investors themselves.

Please help us to make sure that all investments in Burma – business, development, humanitarian, all these in a sense are investments – that these investments are democracy-friendly and human rights-friendly. That these investments will help to promote in our country the kind of values for which you stand – the kind of values that you taught me.

Today has been a very moving day for me. Moving because I have found that the past is always there, it never goes away, but you can select what is best from the past to help you go forward to the future. In my college, my old college St Hugh's, I found that I could recognise every bit of it: even though there were very many new buildings, yet they had merged in with the old. It was such a harmonious picture of the old and the new standing together as a promise for the future.

I was very proud to be back in my old college, and warmed by the reception given to me and my team by the principal of the college and his family, and by the students. The warmth of the students was wonderful.

I felt that I was back again in my young student days. I didn't feel any different to them. And in a sense I am no different now to the young student who was at Oxford so many years before. But also I am different, because I've had to face different experiences.

But I bring all these experience back to me here at Oxford, and I find that Oxford is big enough and broad enough to contain my new experiences as well.

The road ahead, as I said, is not going to be easy. But Oxford, I know, expects the best of its own. And today, because they have recognised me as its very own, I am

strengthened to go forward to give of my very best in meeting the new challenges that lie ahead.