

On Meaning and Who We Choose to Become

Editor's Note: This is the first essay published under ****On Meaning****. What follows is an attempt to think carefully about the moment we're in and who we are becoming within it. And the way forward.



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Something has felt different for awhile now.



Not loud, not explosive at first , just quietly unstable. As of more recently its only gotten louder and more volatile, ramping up to a battle cry from the collective soul of the world. To break the spell. The systems we were told would hold us no longer do and were never going to. For some cultures this has always been a quiet truth. For others, the illusion has only recently been exposed. The identities we built around have cracks in them. Even the language we use to describe our lives feels slightly outdated, as if language has not caught up with the new world.

There was a time when meaning felt inherited, or earned, or maybe destined. A path to discover. A role to step into. A structure to follow. A given set of universal truths.

Lately, it feels less like something inherited and more like something constructed. Piece by piece. Choice by choice. Attention by attention.

Meaning has not disappeared. It is simply no longer mandated.

There's nothing fundamentally wrong with people.
Given a story to enact that puts them in accord
with the world, they will live in accord with the
world. But given a story to enact that puts them
at odds with the world, as yours does, they will
live at odds with the world. Given a story to enact
in which they are the lords of the world, they will
ACT like lords of the world. And, given a story to
enact in which the world is a foe to be conquered,
they will conquer it like a foe, and one day,
inevitably, their foe will lie bleeding to death at
their feet, as the world is now

DANIEL QUINN
WORDFORN.COM

We build it.

When the frameworks around us weaken, two things tend to happen. Some cling harder to what is dissolving. Others begin experimenting, quietly and imperfectly, with new ways of living. New ways of working. New ways of defining success, belonging, and purpose.

We are in that experimental phase now.

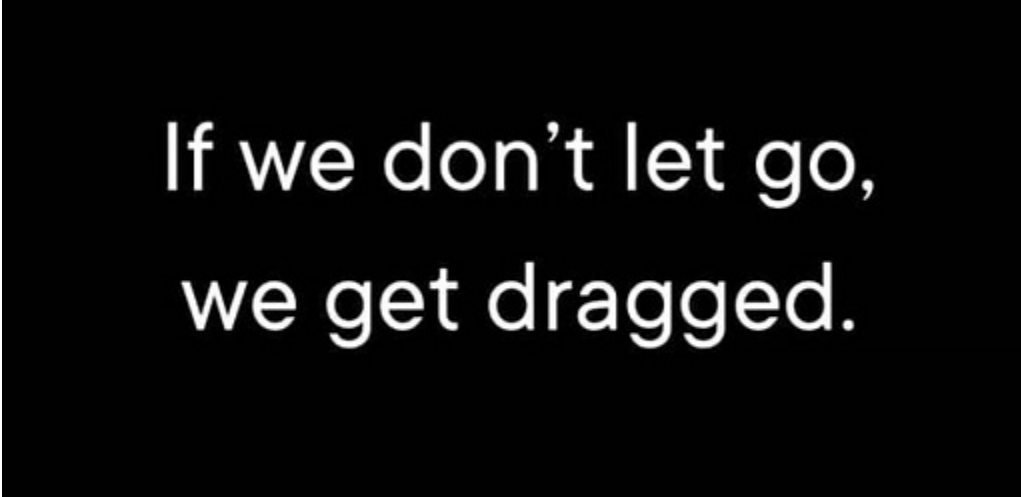
The old narratives still exist, but they no longer feel fixed. Hustle feels hollow. Cynicism feels lazy. Blind optimism feels naive. What remains is the work. Deciding what is worth carrying forward and what must be released.



For me, this shift has always been there.

I have spent a lifetime trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. Every few years my perception of reality cracked open.

A slow loosening of assumptions I did not even realize I was carrying. The cultural myths that conditioned us began to reveal themselves. Ideas about what a creative life was supposed to look like. What success meant. What stability required. What kind of structure I needed in order to feel legitimate.



If we don't let go,
we get dragged.

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I used to believe meaning would arrive once I found the right container, took the right actions, found the right platform, the right title, the right moment. Now it feels clearer that meaning does not arrive. It accumulates.

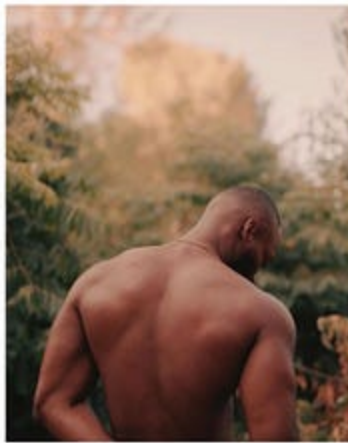
Through our creation.

It gathers in the choices we make when no one is watching. In the risks we take when something no longer fits. In the quiet decision to orient our lives around integrity rather than approval. In stripping our thinking and actions from inherited conditioning.

Creativity is not just output. It is interpretation. It is the act of deciding what matters and then living accordingly. Defining our own truths and values.



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Meaning was never something waiting for us at the end of a path. Or bestowed by the gods.

Perhaps it gathers around our attention, shaped by what we choose to see, what we refuse to inherit, and what we are willing to build instead.

The old narratives are crumbling. What replaces them will not be accidental.

It will be constructed in quiet decisions. In creative risks. In the willingness to question what we have been told are fixed and absolute truths.

If the world is reorganizing itself, then so are we.

Who we become in this moment will not be determined by what we inherit, but by what we choose.

By what we build together, based on the values we define.

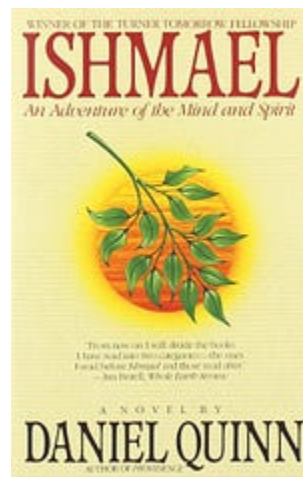
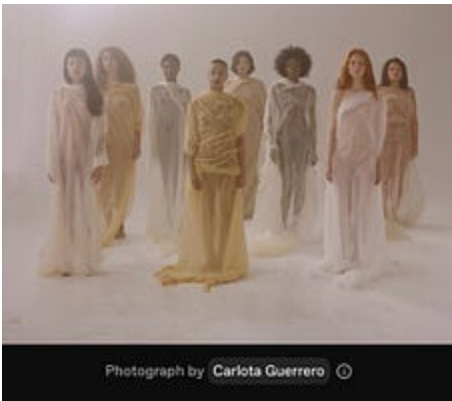




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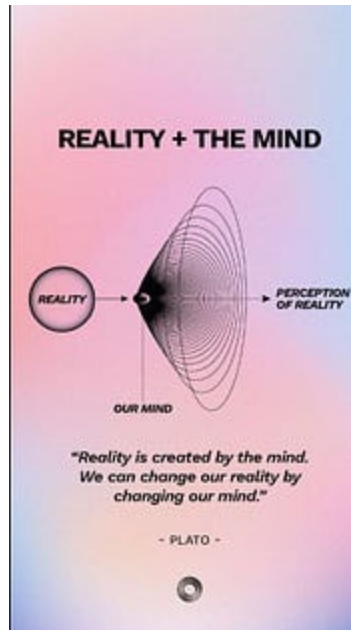
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Kyle Doggima in Bianca Saunders for I-D's Fall 2021 issue. Photo by James Brodribb



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