

Somewhere Under the Rainbow

By

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A short time ago, our extraordinarily talented music director Rachea Thomas performed her rendition of *Over the Rainbow*, originally written for the 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz*. I found it incredibly moving and felt as if I were hearing the song anew. As a child, hearing it only once a year during the film's annual televised broadcast—sung beautifully by Judy Garland in her role as Dorothy Gale—it moved me to dream of a wondrous and magical world where I wanted to go and stay forever (minus those frightening flying blue monkeys).

In more recent years, another version of the song performed by the late Israel Kamakawiwo'ole made *Over the Rainbow* the longest-leading number one hit song ever; and made Kamakawiwo'ole Hawaii's most successful musician in history, both deservedly so. It, too, is an incredibly moving rendition. But I personally never liked it because, for me, it betrays the meaning of the song, especially by melding it with the lyrics of *What a Wonderful World*, accompanied by the mellow, carefree sounds of the ukulele. The feeling this arouses, at least for me, is more akin to Bobby McFerrin's earlier 1988 hit song, *Don't Worry, Be Happy*. Kamakawiwo'ole's 1993 version has that same laidback feeling of contentment. But the song itself is about discontentment, about longing to go someplace else, to a better place than the one we're in.

I felt that discontentment in Rachea's voice a few weeks ago, although, unlike Judy Garland's version, I didn't hear it as a wish to go someplace else, but the deeper yearning to transform the very world we're in. It was a refutation of the way things are and a call for us to do better and to make things better. I felt sadness and disappointment but also hope and inspiration. For me, the song was no longer about going to a better place—ascending to Heaven “way up high,” removed from the unfairness and pain of our worldly existence. It's not about abandoning our friends and families, or our neighbors, or our responsibilities and our own potential and purpose; It's about sticking around and creating Heaven here on Earth. It made me want to do a better job of making our world what it can and should be. That's the moment today's sermon was born. Some of you may recall when, immediately after her performance, I apologized for removing my smartphone while approaching the pulpit in order to make a quick note, “Somewhere *Under* the Rainbow.”

At the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy realizes things aren't as great “over the rainbow” as she'd imagined they would be, and that things weren't so bad back home as she'd once thought either. “There's no place like home,” she repeats, while clicking the heels together three times before being transported back to her rural Kansas home, surrounded by her friends and family. That's an important lesson, too; that the grass always looks greener on the other side of the hill, until we get there and realize it isn't. But today's message isn't about getting a reality check and learning to simply accept our circumstances. It's about facing our reality and doing what we can to transform our world for the better, establishing Heaven here on Earth.

So, what does such a world look like to me? What is my dream for us down here *under* the rainbow, beneath the clouds and chimney tops, where our troubles *don't* melt away like lemon drops, yet where bluebirds, sometimes happy little bluebirds, still find room to fly and some dreams really do come true? My dream for our world is based on a confluence of ideas that I've learned from those who have most inspired me and shaped my thinking over the years. First among them, as some of you may have guessed, is the brilliant 20th century social psychologist, Erich Fromm, who worked not only to show us what the underlying problems down here under the rainbow are, but also to guide us toward their solutions.

In short, Fromm believed our greatest struggles and challenges are rooted in our ongoing anxiety caused by our conflicting needs for freedom and belonging. To be completely free as individuals almost guarantees we will be rejected by others. Yet to be completely acceptable means giving up some degree of our freedom and authenticity in order to "fit in." The solution to this psychological conundrum is our human capacity to love, which requires us as individuals and as a society to tolerate our differences out of respect and care for one another. This attitude, which Fromm calls the "biophilous orientation," is grounded in our love for life. But, more often, it seems, its opposite, the "necrophilous orientation," grounded in a desire for death and destruction, gets the upper hand, which I believe is the case today and is the reason so many people gravitate toward narcissistic authoritarian figures and leaders. In this way they feel a sense of both freedom and belonging by mistaking the desires and thoughts of the authority, be it a person or group, as their own. They may feel connected to the authority figure or group, yet this feeling is false because their ideas and desires are not really their own. They have given up their freedom, even if they don't consciously acknowledge it.

Of course, nobody wants to see themselves in this unflattering light. They'd rather see themselves as good, independent, heroic figures working in the interests of life, even as they accept the continued suffering of humanity, injustices in the world, and the exploitation and destruction of our planet. In the ultimate act of sublimation, they even call themselves "prolife," although their main focus, as such, is for people who haven't been born, while ignoring the suffering and welfare of those who have. Sublimation is a psychological defense mechanism that transforms destructive impulses into socially acceptable behaviors by redirecting them into what can be considered a positive outlet—in this case, the antiabortion movement they have self-deceptively named "prolife." (*It is not possible to be against abortion and also be against contraception, sex education, and planning for parenthood. The fact that most in the prolife are against these things proves the movement is a deception. The fact the only solution they seek is a law forbidding abortion, proves it is an authoritarian movement.*)

This is where the dream for a better way comes in. Fromm, says, "We need to create the conditions that would make the growth of [humanity], this unfinished and uncompleted

being—unique in nature—the supreme goal of all social arrangements. Genuine freedom and independence and the end of all forms of exploitive control are the conditions for mobilizing the love of life, which is the only force that can defeat the love for the dead.”¹ To accomplish these conditions, Fromm said the sole criterion of ethical value “*must be human welfare*”² and that “the unfolding and growth of every person [should be] the aim of all social and political activities.”³

So this is the starting point for my vision, that this humanistic ethic become humanity’s ethic, so that all we do is rooted in love—not as a sentiment, but as a tangible expression of concern for others by caring for and respecting them and doing what we can and should to assure that everyone everywhere on the planet, not just 4.3 percent of them, have what they need, what *we* need, to thrive and to fully unfold as individuals, even as humanity as a whole seeks together to achieve its own greatest potential. It is not enough to make “America great again,” or to put “Canada first,” or any other country, especially not at the expense of our fellow human beings living elsewhere, the people of South America, the people of Gaza, the people of Ukraine, and so on. As Will Weisman of Singularity University says, “everyone must do well if everyone is ultimately going to do great, and that’s how we have to look at the world today. We all need to do well for all of us, as a whole, to be doing great.”⁴

This brings me to another source of personal inspiration, the Abundance Mindset, the belief, as entrepreneur, motivational speaker, and founder of Singularity University and Abundance 360 says, that, “Within the next two decades we have the potential to give every man, woman, and child on this planet access to all the education, healthcare, energy, food, water they want.” Yes, this potential will be the result of rapidly emerging technologies, which causes some people to recoil, believing our machines and inventions are what got us into many of the worst problems we’re facing today, which they have, but only because of our own negligence and greed. Yet, I have often noticed that those making this point drive cars, have smartphones and computers, electricity, clean water, toilets, televisions, and all the other common electronic devices and gadgets in their homes that have been constructed from lumber and other materials taken from the Earth. Nearly everyone who does live without these modern conveniences today does so because they are poor, not because they wish to.

Will Wiesman, a believer in the good that technology does and can do, told participants at the 2019 SU Summit, “I’m here because, like so many of you, I believe in my core that an abundant world is possible in the not-too-distant future, and I want to do everything that I can to help bring that to fruition. To me that looks like a world where we feed everyone, where we educate everyone, where we shelter everyone, a world where people feel safe and they feel they have a fair shot at living a good life, a world where there are mechanisms to help curb our deficiencies and overcome our most base impulses.”⁵ I too believe in this future, and I believe it will be here faster than most of us think.

I also believe the age of the Nation State is coming to a fast end. To some extent, given governmental dysfunction throughout the world, it already has. This, I believe, is why there is a rise of authoritarianism, because too many of us are trying to cling to our nationalistic identities, even though everything about the world we now live in proves we are part of one global community. We have a global economy that includes global trade, ports, products, transportation, treaties, corporations, industries, investors, global debt, and a global supply chain. We have global challenges, like pandemics, war, pollution, and climate change. We have global communications, including a world wide web, entertainment, news, sports, and celebrities. We have global science, medicine, satellites, and an international space station. As those in the UK who voted for Brexit discovered, and as those in the US who voted for Trump are now learning, it is not possible to turn back the clock and close ourselves off from the rest of the world. “We all need to do well for all of us, as a whole, to be doing great.” Or, as Dr. King more memorably said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” America cannot be great if the other 95.7 percent of the world isn’t.

My dream for the near future, down here under the rainbow, is that we will all soon realize nations no longer serve a purpose in our global society and only lead to unnecessary conflict, government gridlock, and incivility. This failure must eventually lead to new and novel ways of meeting our needs and dealing with each other.

California, for example, the fifth-largest economy in the world, receives billions less in federal funding than the hundreds of billions in federal taxes it pays each year. Oregon and Washington also pay more in taxes than the funding they receive. Together, these states form an economic powerhouse capable of funding their own priorities—from climate initiatives to infrastructure—without federal interference. Silicon Valley’s tech dominance, Seattle’s global trade networks, and Portland’s sustainability initiatives all illustrate the potential of regional leadership. By forging direct partnerships with other nations or city-states, to be precise, including those in other countries, this “Cascadia Corridor” could even participate in global trade agreements, climate pacts, and technology-sharing initiatives. Such alliances would position coalition states as key players on the world stage, independent of federal constraints.

Critics might argue that withholding federal taxes would deepen national divisions, accelerating the fragmentation of the United States, but if it’s already divided, fragmented, and failing, this point is moot. There’s also an ethical imperative to act—particularly on existential threats like climate change. We can’t wait. Federal dysfunction has left millions of Americans vulnerable to environmental disasters, economic inequality, and eroding civil liberties. The GOP has denied and ignored climate change for decades, yet President Trump is now blaming California itself for the unprecedented lack of water and number of fires such negligence has led to. So, rather than being left to the whims of POTUS, States like California, Oregon, and Washington, with the resources and vision to lead, should step forward, not as secessionists, but as innovators, especially as the Age of the Nation State continues to wane.

Yet another inspiration in my life is my college philosophy professor, Dr. Wallace Roark, who taught me a lot about thinking, including logic. He often cited the Greek particles, $\mu\epsilon\nu$ $\delta\epsilon$, which translate “while (on the one hand) but (on the other hand).” In his attempt to teach his students to become better thinkers, he taught us to always consider ideas that are contrary and contradictory to other ideas, especially to our own ideas. After he retired, Dr. Roark wrote a book on logic entitled *Think Like an Octopus ... on the one hand, but on the other hand, and the other hand, and the other hands, and so on.*

Dr. Roark’s dream for his students, his dream for me, has become my dream for the whole of humanity, that we become better thinkers. I am often saddened that, with all our scientific advances and increased understanding of the world and the human condition, humanity, by and large, still clings to ancient superstitions, readily embraces baseless conspiracy theories, engages in anti-science and obvious logical fallacies without shame or awareness, and is more often guided by emotions than sound reason. This is even true of many of the liberals I know, who are supposed to embrace reason, which is a definitive quality of liberalism. Many of them, based upon a false dichotomy between feelings and reason, argue that those who use reason and logic must be out of touch with their feelings.

I consider this nonsense. Unless one is a complete sociopath, we are all fundamentally emotional thinkers. Feeling comes natural to us. Logic doesn’t. This is because the emotional layers of the brain are more ancient, established, autonomic, and powerful. But thinking happens in the neocortex, the new part of the brain, that is not autonomic or very powerful. It’s also the part of the brain that uses the most energy, so we tend to rely on less energy intensive instincts, feelings, and heuristics than to take the time to rationally think things through. As psychologist Daniel Kahneman suggests, we tend to think fast, not slow.

Being logical doesn’t mean we don’t have feelings. Nor, if you stop to think about it; if, that is, you think slowly about it, you’ll probably agree that the problem with the world today isn’t that humanity is too rational. It’s not that we think too well and feel too little. So, my dream for the near future is that people across the board become better thinkers, especially by avoiding obvious fallacies and by becoming less fearful about entertaining new ideas, including those we most disagree with.

There’s a lot of anxiety today about Artificial Intelligence, some of it justified, some not. But I have much hope for how AI can help my dream come true. As with all technologies, it can be used for good or ill, but, as with all tools, it is meant to assist us in our efforts. In Harvard Business Review’s *The Year in Tech 2025*, there’s general agreement that AI will take over some of the mundane jobs humans now perform, but this will mostly free human workers to concentrate on more important tasks, not replace them. The Review says, “In 2025, companies must evolve and change to become more ‘HumanAIzed’ in their own way, embracing and adapting to the fusion of humans and machines. Good leaders will inspire their people to understand and embrace this new form of collaboration.”⁶

Focusing on such collaboration, not only in the workplace, but in governance, is also the point of the new book, *Genesis: Artificial Intelligence, Hope, and the Human Spirit*, written by

the great polymath and statesman, Henry Kissinger, his final gift to us, along with his coauthors, Erich Schmidt and Craig Mundie. “Even the wisest leaders,” they remind us, “propelled by instinct and tempered by caution, sometimes govern on the basis of fleeting passions.”⁷ Although AI should not make our decisions for us, it can be used to help us see past our biases and faulty reasoning to make better decisions. “AI’s value in governance, so far dormant,” they write, “lies in its potentially perfect knowledge.”⁸ This is the same advantage for all of us. By collaborating with AI, we can become better thinkers by making more rational decisions. So, I hope this is the beginning of a new age, not only of machine intelligence, but of human intelligence and reason.

Finally, my dream for us down here under the rainbow, is that all the advances I have imagined so far—the widespread adoption of the humanistic ethic, making human welfare and individual unfolding the purpose behind all we do; creating regional and global city-state coalitions that better meet our needs and address our greatest challenges as one unified global community; and becoming better thinkers who are less swayed by our own emotional biases and faulting reasoning, let alone the primitive beliefs and instincts and fears that prevent us from achieving our full human potential, will ultimately lead to much greater peace and civility in our communities and throughout the world.

The humanistic ethic, naturally, will guide us toward doing what is best for humanity and the individual, which should result in a far more civil society in which we treat those we disagree with respectfully, setting aside our differences to work together toward our common goals and to address our common challenges. Likewise, by establishing global collaboration between the world’s mega-cities, we will eventually shun our outdated nationalist identities and recognize ourselves for what we really are, one human species. Instead of relying on varying degrees of human rights from country to country, these coalitions can insist on all partners adhering to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights already agreed upon by numerous countries.

This more peaceful and civil society can be further fostered by using AI to help us think like an octopus. Instead of social media platforms using algorithms that only present us with more extreme examples of same ideas we’ve already seen, social media companies, having made human welfare and individual growth their main priority, can create AI driven algorithms that present us with opposing views. Back in the day when our schools still taught civics, the US had a rule in place called the Fairness Doctrine requiring broadcast media to present opposing sides of a political viewpoint. So, as with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the civics courses are still there, along with rules we know can work; we just have to start using and abiding by them again.

Today we stand not only under the rainbow but on the precipice of transformation. Rather than yearning for escape, let us commit ourselves to making a better reality. Imagine what can happen when we fully embrace our humanistic ethic of love and respect, when we forge innovative coalitions that transcend borders, and when we harness technology and reason

as allies in pursuit of our highest aspirations. Together, guided by our profound interconnectedness and a vision of abundant possibilities, we can indeed build a world worthy of our most heartfelt dreams—a world in which compassion triumphs over fear, wisdom prevails over ignorance, and humanity truly blossoms into the best version of itself. Let us be the visionaries and builders of this brighter, kinder, more inclusive world. Because, in the end, there truly is no place like home.

¹ Fromm, Erich, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, A Fawcett Crest Book, Greenwich, Connecticut, 1973, p. 32

² Fromm, Erich, *Man for Himself*, An Owl Book, Henry Holt & Co., New York, NY, 1947, p. 13.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁴ Weisman, Will, (former Executive Director) Singularity University's Annual Summit, 2019

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *The Year in Tech 2025*, Harvard Business Review, Boston, MA, 2025, pp. xvi-xvii

⁷ Kissinger, Henry A.; Schmidt, Eric; Mundie, Craig. *Genesis: Artificial Intelligence, Hope, and the Human Spirit* (p. 89). Little, Brown and Company. Kindle Edition.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.