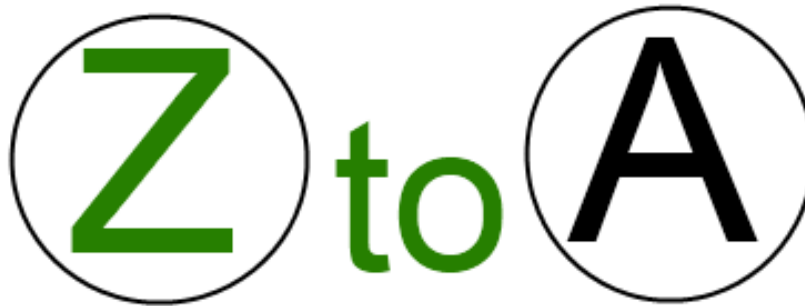


The **ZEN** of the Bicycle

The ZEN of the Bicycle



written by:

Jack Yuen

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Introduction

It's not about the bike – revisited

Lance Armstrong got it right when he titled his best book ***'It is not about the bike: '***. The bike is only the 'scapegoat'. It is like a restaurant where you have a nice dining room to sit down to eat. But the dining room is only a 'front facade'. The kitchen and beyond is where the real essence of the restaurant is hidden.

When I look beyond the bike, I can sense a long list of how my bike can form such a strong facade to hide, help and hinder my search for the meaning of life.

I am a racing cyclist and I still maintain an "A" grade status in all of our club racing – at the Masters level. And approaching 54 years old at the time of this book, I still get a tremendous amount of joy racing against the toughest bunch of Masters Cyclists in Sydney.



I am a member of the Waratah Masters Cycling Club in Sydney Australia. <http://www.waratahvcc.asn.au/>. And our club produces a weekly newsletter called [Tempo](#) that has global readership.

Every week, I write an article for tempo in "Happy Jack's life coaching corner". Over the past year, I have been posting articles every week based on the theme 'Z to A of Cycling' – and this ebook is a compilation of these articles.

I write because I enjoy it. I write for myself mainly – since I probably get to enjoy it most. Although I have created a loyal readership who thankfully encourage me to continue writing...

I do get feedback that some struggle to try to understand what I write about. I understand that feeling – because I struggle sometimes to figure out how I got to write what I wrote!

So, I hope that reading this ebook will be an enjoyable experience for you as it was for me to put together....

... And if you have enjoyed this book, you may find some other interesting things on my blog also. www.jackyuen.net

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Chapter 1

ZEN

Zen and the bicycle.

The ZEN of the Bicycle



Why start from the end of the alphabet?

Well for a start, the yellow jersey always starts last in the time trial. Then there is the old statement in 'self improvement' circles that 'One should start with the end in mind when considering what goals one should set.

But the main reason is that 'Z' is not the end. It is just a convenient place to start.

For a bicycle chain to work, it must be endless. Break the chain and it does not work. When I oil my chain on my bike, I just pick a convenient link and start from there – knowing that the start and end point does not matter. Just the oiling part is important.

So it is with our lives, it does not matter about the beginning and the end – because there is no such thing. Birth and death are just two convenient points in our endless chain of experience that has been misrepresented. We keep looking for the start of the universe and come up with theories about the end. In the Zen world, the beginning is the end and the end is the beginning. The oiling part is the essence of life. It is the injection of the experiences that lubricates our lives as it goes round and round – endlessly.

While life as we know it seems like the bicycle chain that we purchased... and comes in a packet with a beginning and an end. This is just one way of looking at the chain. The Zen way is looking at the chain after it has been assembled on the bicycle: An endless loop, a complete marvel, the thing that drives the bike.

So to get the most out of life, make it an endless chain. No beginning and no end. Or take the other option. Break the chain. Stretch it out and start counting the links from beginning to the end.

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Chapter 2

YELLOW

The defense of the Yellow Jersey.



Le Tour has probably done the most to bring the drama and complexity of cycle racing to the public at large. Anyone who has some exposure to Le Tour hears about the Yellow Jersey – because who wears the Yellow Jersey is the winner of the bike race.

The wearer of the Yellow Jersey is said to draw extra power from the jersey. He gets extra protection from his team mates, gets more prize money, more publicity, more respect, and fame. Yet he still has to pedal the same distance as every other rider to get to the finish in Paris. And he still gets punctures and mechanical failures.

The Yellow Jersey stands out in the peloton, and in this position, he is easy to spot. That means he can't hide. He gets attacked. It is one of the objectives of the race. And for many Le Tour leaders, it becomes a case of 'defending the Yellow Jersey' against all the attacks.

It is much the same in other aspects of our lives. When we achieve something of significance, we get noticed. And whilst we don't have to wear a Yellow Jersey, we are branded by other means. We are put on a sort of pedestal where we can be admired, and attacked at the same time. We get the image that we are different and 'out of this world'. That we have something that no one else has the privilege of having.

Yet we have to walk the same road of life like everyone else. Fame and fortune does not really make us superhuman. It only makes us think we are!. And just like the Yellow Jersey, we often end up defending our position – thinking that defence is the best form of attack.

Yellow Jersey defenders do not last. It is the ones who go out and give it all they have got who gets presented with the ultimate prize – time and time again. This is because they have reached the point when they know that there are no competitors out there trying to 'get them'.

In life, just like in Le Tour, there is only one competitor to be afraid of... And that is Yourself.

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Chapter 3

X-ings

Road X-ings



Road Crossings (roundabouts included) make life on the bike interesting. Once, a lady driver ploughed into me from my left just as I was about to exit a roundabout. She said that she did not see me. She was 'asleep'. ***Then together, we both got an 'awakening'***

Because most of our racing are on 'closed circuits', we do not get the additional challenge of road X-ings. This makes our races 'safer'. Trouble is that we get fooled into a false sense of security and lose alertness to our surroundings. We can 'fall asleep'.

When you are out on the open road, notice how you are more alert when you get near a road X-ing. It may be a traffic light that is changing, or a car nudging out past a STOP sign. It may be a forced decision on unfamiliar roads to turn left or right or to go straight. Whatever the situation, a road X-ing represents a point

on your ride when you have to make decisions. And these decisions will make a difference to your ride.

It is the same with the X roads of your life. They introduce decision points that impact your life journey. Remember your first date? What about saying "I do."? What to name your first child? Which house to buy or rent? Maybe your first bike or car crash. The death of a close friend, a divorce, a sacking...even your choice of which racing bike to spend your money on. These are the times when you are most in touch with your 'humanity' This is when you leave the safe comforts of life... and venture out into the uncertainties that are on offer. Often, it is these times of uncertainty that make life worth living. Otherwise life will be dead boring.

... And just as larger roads have more complex X-ings, people with 'larger lives' also have bigger decisions to make and these happen more often.

Life happens at the X roads. Sleep is what the in-between bits are called.

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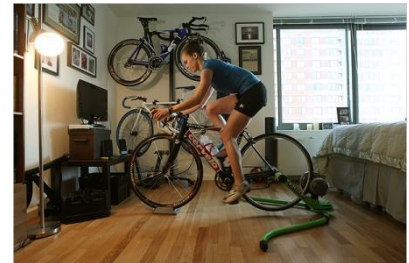
Chapter 4

Wheels

The spinning Wheels

A bicycle has two **W**heels. The one at the back has the drive cogs and is the business end of the bicycle. The front wheel is just along for the ride. That is what it looks like on the surface.

However, we all know that the front wheel has the important task of steering the bicycle. If we don't use the front wheel, we will not be going anywhere. Just like when you are on your home trainer – the back **w**heel spins, but you are not going beyond your lounge room!



Also the stability of the wheels increases as it spins faster and you can only keep the bicycle upright when both **w**heels are spinning. (And doing a 'track stand' is not riding a bicycle. It is doing a stunt).

When I consider a pair of spinning **w**heels, I see an important metaphor of life. We have a pair of spinning wheels that keep us upright and going somewhere. And whilst they may not be shaped like **w**heels, they spin along giving us drive and direction.

The mind or head is the driving **w**heel. We say that someone has that 'driven' look because we see it in their faces. The cogs turn in our heads when we crunch the numbers and figure things out. We plan things in our heads. Our dreams are in our heads. All of our senses (sight, smell, hearing, taste and touching) are located in our heads. Even our ego resides in our heads. We think – therefore we are...

It is in our heads that things happen. It is the engine room of the human being and it is in a continuous spin. When our heads stop, we 'fall over'.

So engrossed are we with our driven wheel, we do not pay enough respect to our 'direction' wheel. In our life, the front **w**heel is our heart.

The heart is what gives us direction. There are those who think that we lead with our heads, but in reality, it is our heart that does the leading. It simply does not matter what visions and grand plans you have in your head, when you do not '**have the heart for it**', it will just not happen. When there is a breakaway up the road and the chasing bunch has not got the heart to chase, it does not matter what the riders think... the break will not be caught.

When you 'fell in love', it was the fault of your heart. When you had those huge arguments and when you made those life-changing decisions... it has always been your heart that pushed ahead. When you 'feel something', it is not your head – but your heart leading the way.

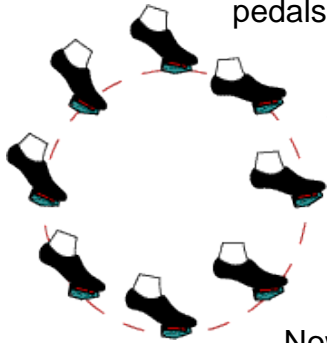
... So if you want to get anywhere in life, you need both the heart and the head spinning in the same direction. Unfortunately, many of us live our lives like on the home trainer. The head spins away in all directions – but the heart is like a lump of lead: Fully planted on one spot – not going anywhere.

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Chapter 5

Upstroke

When I first started riding a bike, I had ‘runners’ on my feet and only knew to push the pedals to make the cranks go around. Then I was introduced to toe clips and straps, and eventually to ‘**Look**’ clip-in pedals. I was told that to ride properly, I had to be able to pull up on the pedals – as well as push down.



Pushing on the down stroke and pulling on the **Upstroke** was supposed to increase the pedaling output. This Up/down pedaling style still dominates in some sections of the cycling community. I have never ridden a fixed wheel bicycle – but I am told that riding a fixie means having a ‘round’ pedaling action. The round pedaling movement certainly looks and feels more smooth and fluid.

Nowadays, I have graduated to a round pedaling motion (even though I sometimes go ‘retro’ and go Up/down). It is a case of guiding the pedal around the circle rather than pushing and pulling it through. It feels better and I don’t get as tired.

Life also goes around with a lot of pushing and pulling. The boss thinks he will get the most out of you by pushing you hard to perform – while at the same time pulling you along with the carrot of a pay rise. The ‘stick and carrot’ system has become a way of life. But like the Up/down pedaling, it is a jerky and ‘un-natural’ action. It is just so ‘retro’!

Just as the fixie bike rider guides the pedal around, **life goes smoother when we relax a bit and just let the natural rhythm of events unfold.** When I got sick of all this pushing and pulling, and I just let life events go around, it felt like I was ‘gliding’ through life’s Journey.

There is a lot to be said in support of ‘going with the flow’ rather than pushing \$#@& uphill!

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Chapter 6

Valve

The Valve



The **V**alve on the inner tube of a tyre is an amazing invention. It lets air in and that air stops itself from escaping by pushing back against the valve. The only way that air can be released is by an external power source that forces the valve open.

Just like the bicycle inner tube, we have valves. Instead of the single valve, we have 5. And we call these 5 valves our five senses. Every day, we get life data 'pumped' through all 5 valves! We give many names to the stuff that gets

pumped in. (Information, beliefs, feelings, experiences,...)

And just like the bicycle tube, all these things get pumped into our inflatable consciousness and get trapped there – by the valves that let them in.

You will remember times when you went into a 'tail spin' over something. There are times when you start worrying about something and just can't stop worrying. There is this song that you heard on the morning radio and it remains with you all day. You have an argument with your spouse and none of you can win the argument. So you both keep trying. We all know somebody who steps off the bathroom scales totally dejected by the weight gain – only to pop on two extra bits of toast to feel better!

These are all examples of the '**Valve Effect**'.

The stuff that the valves let in cannot get out - because it stops itself from escaping. There is a quote that goes "**the mind that created the problem cannot be the mind that solves it**". Maybe the lesson here is to be careful what you let in.

So, as with the bicycle valve, the only way to release the air that has been pumped in is for an 'outside force' to trigger the release. That is why we have doctors to help us release the toxins in our bodies, counselors to straighten out our nightmares and coaches to move our performance to another level. We cannot push our own valves. It is always pushed by someone, somewhere and somehow.

And finally, when it is time for us to end our game on earth, the final 'outside' push comes. **Whoosh!** And all that we have pumped into our lives is suddenly released and we collapse like a deflated inner tube. It is not 'ashes to ashes' – but Air to Air.

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Chapter 7

Tube

YouTube and iTube



The bicycle is built around Tubes. The frame structure is made up of Tubes and the wheels go around on tyres and Tubes. The bicycle shows us that life is all about Tubes.

Our physical bodies are also mainly Tubes. There is a long tube that starts at your mouth and ends at the junction between your legs. Your blood vessels are tubular and so are your nerves. Even bones are essentially Tubes.

We are fed entertainment and information via the Tube, and in some places you take the Tube to work. And when (and if) the national broadband gets to your home, it will connect you to the optical fibre Tubular network.

The Tube structure is handy because it is strong and directional. It is not a coincidence that we see so much evidence of Tubes in action in our lives – **because Life is Tubular.**

From conception to death, we go along a windy journey. But that journey is directional and limited to the confines of our own personal Tube. Our individual experiences are very limited and we tend to go round and round with the same people doing the same things in a spiral. It is like we are bouncing off the walls of our personal Tube as we travel forward.

Our personal Tube has been set up as a guidance system. It will take you where you are meant to go. There is no way out. You may look over to someone else and wish that you had something that they have. Your own personal Tube will not allow that. You may get a slight taste of being 'master of your own destiny'. However, you will find that some superior force will always bring you back to the reality that you are trapped in your own Tube of life.

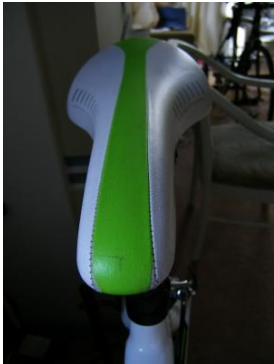
My advice is to settle into the Tube and enjoy your own personally crafted ride. ***It is your iTube.***

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Chapter 8

Saddle

Saddle up for life



Instead of Sex, I am happy to just write about the humble **Saddle**.

When I bought my wife a 'racing bike', she took one look at the 'racing **Saddle**' and said "Not on my life!"

To the un-initiated, the long skinny, sleek look of a racing **Saddle** brings about visions of extreme discomfort and pain to the tender regions of the body. And the first time they actually sit on it, all their suspicions are confirmed. And they wonder why we seasoned riders stick to the uncomfortable looking saddles – when logic would favour a wide padded

one.

It is the same in life. We think that logically, life should look and feel comfortable and be well padded with lots of things. We long for an easy ride through life. The dream of winning the lottery and then life would be so much easier. If only we had the perfect spouse and kids. If only we have more of this and that. And despite all the evidence that as we have more, the problems get bigger and more complicated... we still cling to the dream that more is better.

If we are to learn the lesson of the **Saddle**, we will travel through life with much more enjoyment. The lesson of the **Saddle** means that we have to toughen ourselves up by riding through the initial pain. It is only then that we can have a direct experience of **'less is best'**.

Take all the fluffy padding away and we are left with the sleek bare essentials. It defies logic... but It brings about less rubbing and chaffing, more freedom of movement and more enjoyment of the ride. Similarly, once you embrace the 'harsh realities', a light weight and uncluttered life lets you travel with a lightness of being.

As 'real bike riders', we know that sitting on less - works the best. Yet we do not take this lesson off the bike. We do the opposite and we sit on as much as we can – then wonder why it gets so damned uncomfortable...

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Chapter 9

Reflectors

The Law on bicycle Reflectors.



Legally we are supposed to have a rear **R**eflector on our bicycle when we ride at night. The bell and the rear **R**eflector are mandatory – but not many of us have it on our bikes. That means that we are all riding illegally. We argue that our voice and the flashing tail light are more effective – and that the law is dumb.

So why don't we all get pulled off the road for daring to disobey this law? The answer is in the "Law of Reflection".

We think the law is dumb and we should not be penalised for disobeying it. This same attitude is reflected back by the police. So they also think it is a bit dumb and could not be bothered to uphold the law.

When you get up in the morning and feel awful, the **R**eflection in the bathroom mirror obligingly shows a frightful character. Mirrors line the walls of gyms to show off the rippling muscles. The exercises feel real bad – but the mirror shows a firm figure in skin tight wraps that reeks of attraction. This is what you wanted to see when you decided to go to gym classes. The mirrors just give you what you want.

Put a red **R**eflector on your bike and shine a light on it. You will see a red **R**eflection. Change that **R**eflector to a white one and shine the same light on it. What do you get? Not red light. You get white light!

When you start off the day in a bad mood, you feel like you got up on the wrong side of the bed. You get angry at other people. They get angry at you. You hurry to catch the train – only to find that the train is late. You forgot to take your umbrella – and it starts to rain. You feel like the whole world is against you. What a shit day.

Yet on the next day, you jump out of bed as the alarm sounds. Get on your bike for a early morning training ride. Have a nice shower afterwards and a healthy breakfast. You even get a seat on the train. And when it starts to rain – you think "I am lucky. It did not rain this morning when I was out riding!".

Every day starts out exactly the same. We choose what style of reflector to put on and that determines how the day will pan out. When Ernie takes your photo, all he can catch is your reflection. How that photo looks to you is all in your judgment. This is the Law of **R**eflection.

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Chapter 10

Quick Release

The other side of the Quick release



In the old days, bicycle riders had to carry spanners to undo the wheel nuts when a wheel or tyre change was needed. Then someone invented the **Quick release** and the simple action of a cam revolutionised the wheel change. One swing of the **Quick release** lever and the wheel 'drops out'.

But apart from the **Quick release** ability, the cam activated system has another very important function. And it is the exact opposite action of clamping the wheel onto the bicycle drop outs. In fact, the ability to clamp the wheel securely is just as important as the **Quick release** function.

This duality (or complimentary functions) governs our lives. This is symbolised by the Ying and the Yang in eastern cultures. Good and bad, night and day, joy and pain, early and late, are other common dualities.

The lesson to be learnt from the Quick release is that we often forget to look at the other side - and then to accept that the other side has a valid existence. The classic example is when you have an argument with someone. You lock your attention onto your view of the argument. You argue that it is a **Quick release**. But if I was to call it a **Quick clamp**, wouldn't I also be right?

There is always the other side. In fact there is usually many 'other sides'. That is why lawyers take sides. Their existence depends on duality and ambiguity.

And if you are able to accept the other side into your life, then there is no need to judge things. You do not need stress out deciding which one is right – because no single one is right. Everything is right.

Just like how I am now never late. Whenever I arrive, I am on time. The other day, I was over an hour 'late' for a business appointment. When I arrived, my client said *"How did you know to be an hour late? It has been chaos here the last hour and we would not have been able to do anything anyway. Your timing is perfect!"*.

Don't stress, there is always the other side.

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Chapter 11

Pedal

The lesson of the left Pedal

Many years ago, had a fight with my left **P**edal. I just would not screw off the crank. The right **P**edal came off quite easily – but the left one stubbornly would not budge.



The guy at the bike shop had no such trouble. One firm push with the **P**edal wrench and the bloody left **P**edal spun off! “It is a left hand thread” He said. “It unscrews the other way...” Now I know that the left **P**edal has to defy convention to make it stay on the crank arm. If it was a conventional right hand thread, the friction of the pedaling action would unscrew the **P**edal.

Just like the left **P**edal, much of life is opposite to what you think it is (or should be). We now know that the world is round – but only a few centuries ago, it was flat. The sun used to revolve around the earth. Now, we have discovered that it is the other way round. We see a white bike on the road and assume that it is white in colour. Now, we know that colours work in opposite. The paint on the bike is every other colour – except white. It appears to be white because that is the only colour that it reflects back. It absorbs every other colour.

Many of us think that when we die – it is the end. Then there are others who think that life begins after we die. You will find when you actually go through the experience of dying that neither is the truth.

The wonderful thing about life is that it does not really matter what you believe in – it still works. The fact that I was wrong about the threading of the **P**edal – did not stop me from riding the bike. People still went sailing when the world was flat. We still had night and day when the sun revolved around the earth. So white is not white – so what? And whatever you believe happens when you die does not stop you from being alive right now.

The only difference (and it is a huge difference) in discovering what is beyond our ‘blinkered world’ is the ability to play on another level. It is just like the bike mechanic being able to remove the **P**edal so that he could to put a better one in. Now that the world is round we can go ‘around the world’ without falling off....

... And if we do not actually die – what a totally new game of life that would be!

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Chapter 12

Ordinary

An Ordinary day on the bike

Last Sunday, I had an ‘**Ordinary**’ race. I did not even last the distance – pulling out of the race just after half way. Some days I just feel **Ordinary** and other days I feel ‘*full of beans*’. And this happens both on and off the bike.



Usually, the immediate reaction is to try to figure out what is wrong. I was riding back with Peter (who also had an **Ordinary** day) and he thought that it was caused either by diet (lack of nutrients), training (lack of) or just part of the aging process.

We go looking for something to blame when we put in an **Ordinary** performance. I recall following the Tour on SBS - and as soon as the leader of the race has an ‘**Ordinary day**’, the commentators start theorising on problems that may be causing the sub-par performance. It seems like in this day and age, we should be able to mould and train our bodies into super reliable machines that keep on producing at the highest level.

Our lives are meant to be **UNRELIABLE**. But we continuously fool ourselves into thinking we have the power to control things. When I am at a newsagent, I see more people buying lottery tickets than customers buying magazines and newspapers. All these ticket buyers think that they have a pretty good chance of winning. If they deeply believed that they have a much better chance of losing their money – then they would not bother buying a ticket. And if everyone stopped buying tickets – then the lottery would not work.

When I get an **Ordinary** day, I enjoy it for what it brings. I don’t try changing it. I have learnt that even if I go into a ‘**make it happen**’ frenzy – things still do not go the way I want. It is like when my wife cooks my dinner. If I try to make her do it, I will get nothing – or I will end up getting ‘*more that I bargained for*’. But if I don’t even think of getting her to cook dinner, she calls me and says: “*Darling... dinner is ready.*”

The funny thing is that you always get what is best for you – whether you like it or not. So, some days... it is best for you to have an **Ordinary** day. Get to like it.

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Chapter 13

Nipple

Connection via the Nipple



My young grandson Ashton is on the breast, sucking on the **Nipple**. At his age, the Nipple is the connection between him and his food and comfort source. Very soon, he will grow up and the nipple will (temporarily) have no more interest to him.

When a wheel smith builds a wheel, the **Nipple** is the connection device between the spoke and the rim (usually). He will play around with the **Nipples** a bit at first until the wheel is balanced. Once the wheel is true, the **Nipple** is no longer the important connection device. In fact, if the wheel has been built well, the **Nipples** should not need to be touched again. It is only if there is a problem with the built of the wheel or if the wheel is damaged – that the **Nipples** should ever be used again.

Connect and forget. This is what all good things are about.

Take any relationship - whether with a spouse, work colleague, friend, partner, client or riding mate. The best ones are those that work like a nipple. A bit of twisting and turning at the start... then some fine tuning, before finally locking it into place permanently. Once it is in place, there is no need to keep 'working' on the relationship to keep it from going 'pear shaped'. It is a trusted relationship that keeps going on and on.

It is also like getting a custom fit on your bike. It is a bit of trial (and some error) at the start before you get 'connected' to the bike. But once it is done, it is best to leave it alone – and get onto bigger and better things (like enjoying more time on the bike).

Thus, this is the rule of the **Nipple**: ***“Get screwed right in the first place – and you never need to screw around ever again”***

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Chapter 14

Matter

The Things that Matter

What **Matters** most to a successful bike racer?

We like to tell our spouses that what **Matters** most is to get the latest and lightest carbon fibre bike with 22 gears.

“Look at all the pros at Le Tour” we say, “This is what they have!”

To those of us who are more budget conscious, we may say, “what really **Matters** is a really good set of wheels. It is more ‘bang for bucks’ than the carbon frame”



The truth is that none of these things Matter.

When Cameron Meyer dared to catch the sprinters out at the TDU, it was not the bike that made the difference. It was not his team, the temperature, the circuit, or any of the things that we usually pick as the things that **Matter**. I have to admit that these things seem to **Matter**, and that is why we are led to believe that they do.

To lead a successful life, what seems to **Matter** most are: Lots of money, physical beauty, lots of flashy ‘play things’, big house, good children... and the latest racing bike! Deep down, we know (and we can see evidence when we look) that these things are certainly attractive, but somehow they all seem to ‘miss the spot’.

Nowadays, I feel really successful when I finish a race. And in the same vein, I will also feel successful when I finish this life. So what **Matters** most is not the beginning, nor the end – it is what goes on ‘in-between’.

There are so many things around me that I can see, touch, smell, taste and hear. Yet they do not really **Matter**. (if it is Matter – then it does not Matter) If I cannot breath the ‘oxygen’ that I can neither see, touch, smell, taste and hear – then I am dead! Oxygen is the ‘in-between’ element that really **Matters** to life as we know it. It is in the space around all the tangibles – yet it is not tangible and it **Matters** a lot.

Our senses fool us because they force us to focus on only a small slice of what life is about. They are like blinkers that are mounted on a horse. What really **Matters** is outside the realm of our 5 senses.

But we do get a lot of pleasure out of our 5 senses. This is why they are there. So they serve a very useful service. But it is also a trap – like the rabbit on a greyhound track.

Consider this: What really **Matters** to a greyhound is outside the track. What **Matters** to the owner of the greyhound is on the track!

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Chapter 15

Limit Screw

The benevolence of the Limit screw



The travel range of a derailleur is determined by Limit screws and the chain's world is confined to a zone within these Limits. The logic seems simple. The Limit screws are there to save the chain from falling off the cogs. We set the outer Limits to allow the chain to safely travel over the 10 or 11 cogs without falling off the edge and then forget about the Limit screw – because it has done its job.

Decades ago, in the days of the 10 speed, the Limit screws allowed the chain a total of 5 cogs. Nowadays, the same Limit screws will let the chain travel over twice as many cogs. Somehow, Limits that are set down for us will force us to look closely at the space 'in-between'. And the result is more cogs in the same space. But Limits are Limits and we start to run out of options.

What if there were no Limit screws? Now that would be a better deal. Limitless options! Complete freedom.

But somehow, this is not how life works. If we took the Limit screws away from our derailleur, we would probably use less of the cogs that are available. We would constantly be thinking "how many cogs until the end and the chain falls off?". We would then take the safe path and not go to the two outermost cogs – to give us the safety buffer. We would constantly look at where our chain is along the cluster – and counting the shift changes. Soon we will say: "Give me back my Limit screws!"

If you wake up one morning and there was no Limit on what you could do, you would end up doing nothing by the end of the day. (You spent too much time thinking about all the choices). Yet, if you had a 'handful' of things that you Limited yourself to do, you just get stuck into it – and get it all done. This is just how life is.

We are born into a life full of Limiting screws – because it makes life a simpler and richer game to play. We can live a life 'without Limits' (which some people dream about) – but just like the derailleur sans Limit screws, we will find it too daunting and distracting. Ultimately, just like the folks at Silverwater Jail – we like the comfort of the electric fence!

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Chapter 16

Kickstand

The lesson of the Kickstand



I had a **Kickstand** on my very first '10 speed'. It was supposed to be the best alloy **Kickstand** on the market. Then I ordered my first custom built Road Racing bike. And when I arrived at the bike shop to pick it up – there was no **Kickstand**! “*What about the **Kickstand**?*” I asked. I certainly got a funny look from the bike shop owner. DUH!

The bicycle is designed to move forward and the **Kickstand** is only useful on a bicycle standing still. My first bicycle was burdened with a **Kickstand** wherever I rode it – yet I only realised what a wasted item it was when I upgraded to a ‘machine built for speed’. I learnt that I never ever used the **Kickstand** when I was peddling my bike, and when I stopped, I could always lean this speed machine up against something or simply leave it lying on the ground.

And just as roads are built for bicycles to move forward on, time is created for human beings to move forward along. My son, Kenny has been in France for the last 9 months. He travels light. Everything he owns is contained within a couple of backpacks – and he keeps moving on. That is the way that we are supposed to travel through time - Lightly.

But most of us are burdened with a **Kickstand**. Baggage - that weigh us down as we try to move forward in life. We get the feelings of being ‘trapped’ and ‘not going anywhere’. We get ‘rooted’ in the same spot as if that is the safe and stable position to be in. Just like a bicycle resting on a **Kickstand**.

When we do not embrace change and uncertainty, it is like we have activated the **Kickstand**. Stopped and supported by something that is supposed to make life safe and stable. But like the **Kickstand** on a bike, it is a precarious stability – because a gust of wind can blow the bike over. Better to have the bike lying on the ground in the first place, because it is not going to fall anywhere.

We do not need a **Kickstand**. Not only is it a burden, it also gives us a false sense of security!

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Chapter 17

Jockey Wheel

The guidance of the Jockey Wheel



When I got to 'J', I had many options. There was the 'the image created by the bicycle Jersey'; 'the mystery of the rain Jacket'; '...the strange being called Jack (me)' any other options bubbling in the background.

Instead, something guided me to write about the Jockey wheel. To refresh your memory, the Jockey wheel is that part of the rear derailleur that rides the cogs of the rear cluster. It is the part that physically 'flicks' the chain across the rear gear cluster- and then holds the chain in position.

Our lives are full of Jockey wheels. There are the prominent ones – like your spouse, boss, children, parents, customers, friends and the world economy. Then there are the teachers, coaches, TV, movies and talk-back radio. The list goes on and on.

Our energies and attentions are 'flicked' across the endless choice of obligations, desires, duties, pleasures and dark moods, by these Jockey wheels of life. No wonder you feel worn out. This is also how your bicycle chain feels. No wonder it also gets worn out rapidly.

However, it is not the Jockey wheel's fault. It is only a part of the rear derailleur that moves whenever it gets pulled. It is not the cable that runs the show either. The handlebar control levers activate the cables. Then it is the rider's fingers that start the whole process. But this is not the full story, because the bike rider moves the fingers. Then who moves the bike rider? Where is the ultimate guidance that leads to the behaviour of the Jockey wheel?

So the Life lesson is to '...look beyond the Jockey wheels of life that seem to control your days on earth'. It is not their fault for behaving as they do. Ultimately, someone is pulling their (and your) strings.

...And just as the Jockey wheel has no concept of the bike rider, we really have no (outward) idea of who is pulling all the strings. Religions and other life gurus have their ideas. But just like the bike rider just 'knowing' when to change gears, we know truly (but is buried very deep) who is pulling our strings. We just don't like admitting to it.

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Chapter 18

Index shifting

The deadly lure of Index shifting.

Once upon a time, friction shifters controlled which cog you wanted the chain to be on. Then Index shifting was invented and now it is all about automatic clicks. I used to have just the right amount of touch on the friction lever to shift the chain over single or multiple cogs. It was a bit of an art form. I have now lost that touch.



With Index shifting, you just give the lever a shove. It replies with a reassuring click, and you are slotted into perfect alignment with a cog. So simple that you don't even have to think about it.

And we apply this principle to our lives. The sooner something gets 'Indexed' – the easier our lives seem to be. Our hard drives are split into directories and folders. It copies what our filing cabinets are best at achieving – a folder for each categorised stack of information. Whenever we meet someone new, we instantly try to Index them. They get Indexed by sex, race, social grouping, occupation, education, attractiveness, and whether they ride a bike or not.

Jobs to do are Indexed into “now”, “later”, “whenever”, “perhaps”, “maybe”, “when I find the time”, “for the too hard basket”, and “I will try”.

The time management gurus Index all activities into “important” and “not important”, “urgent” and “not urgent”. Students try to Index which subject will be “in the exam” and which ones are “forgettable”. At work, we have “in trays”, “out trays”, “pending trays”, and the “desk top”.

Indexing is a wonderful lure for an orderly life. But life is not meant to be orderly. Even though we fervently wish for a life with “all our ducks in a row”, it is never ever that way. The chaos of life means that we spend a lot of our life between the cogs. This is where we think we should not be (sick, poor, lonely, stressed etc.). They call it “when the wheels fall off” – but it should be called “when you fall off the cogs”.

With Index shifting, we are confined to 10 or 11 predetermined positions - a very limited choice, with no room for variations. It is a very un-natural thing. Ultimately, bicycle gears will be a limitless choice of ratios - just as life is a limitless choice of possibilities (but we keep trying to deny this). The day that we can embrace life without an Index, the jagged steps in life disappears and it becomes a smooth flow of possibilities.

Just like a "Smoothie". It is hard to swallow all the bits and pieces before the blending process. But after the mixer has done its job, it is so smooth that you can suck it with a straw!

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Chapter 19

Headset

The well worn Headset is limitation in motion.



With sealed bearings, simplified housings and stem, Headsets have improved and the worn headset is not as common nowadays. In the past, they used to have ball bearings rolling around in retainers. The balls used to wear into the cups and create pits in the bearing races- locking the front forks into the 'straight ahead' position.

And one sure way to test if there was a wear problem with the Headset was to lift the stationary front wheel off the ground and swing the handlebars around. If the front forks had a slight click as it 'self centred' in the 'straight ahead' position – then there was a wear problem. It did not usually seem to cause a problem when the bike was being ridden – because the bike usually goes straight. But it can cause a turn to get a bit difficult.

The Headset is supposed to allow for smooth directional movement – not keep clicking the forks into a predetermined 'straight ahead' direction. But anything that is subject to constant pounding will wear.

Like the Headset, our lives are subject to constant bombardment. We get worn into set directions that usually involve charging straight ahead. It is like a default. We are not usually aware of it...and it can make changing directions rather difficult. It is just like we are not aware of a worn Headset when we are charging around on the bike. It is only when we stop and take the pressure off the handlebars... that we are able to feel the faulty click.

We do not realise that we are in a rut because we just do not stop and have a look around. In games like basketball, the coach calls for 'time out'. This is so that the team can change tack. We just do not take enough 'time outs' in our lives – and as a result, we keep clicking into the old patterns that drive us ahead into the wasteland of barrenness.

So stop and check your Headset. Can you feel the click?

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Chapter 20

Gear

A 11-speed Gear cluster is not better.

At the track, all the bikes have a single speed. James rides with the fastest group at Homebush on a single speed bike. I once was overtaken climbing the hills of Akuna Bay by rider on a single speed bike. So what is it with the desire for the ultimate Campagnolo 11 speed Gear cluster?



We are caught in the illusion that more is better. So therefore, the more Gears that we can carry around, the more options we have. We then can have more speed, more control, more 'bling' and more weight. But is to have more, better than having less?

As we go about our lives, we accumulate lots of 'Gear'. There seems to be several reasons why we do it.

- **We are hoarders.** Someday, it may become useful. So we hang on to it. In my experience, very little of these things is of any use. It just takes up space.
- **More is wealth.** Our social worth is determined by the things that we own, so the more (and bigger) it is, the higher our social status. This can be an addictive game to play. But that is all it is – a game.
- **Got to have the latest.** So all our old toys become obsolete as we clamber for the latest and greatest. At least, there is ebay to get rid of some of the old toys.
- **The productivity game.** We can do more things with less effort. Therefore the more Gear that we have, the more that we can do. We usually end up actually doing more. But as a result, we live less.

I am sure that there are other reasons too, but for whatever reasons, we just seem to love more Gear.

When I do the B2B on April 10th, I will be taking my 25 tooth ten speed Gear cluster. Yes, more Gear is good when there are tough hills to climb. But Gear is really an option – not a necessity. I could take my 5 speed cluster with a 25 tooth ring and still make it over the hills. When we can lose our attachment to more Gear, 11 speed is not better (or worse) than 1 speed. It is just different. Just like I am not better or worse than you – just different.

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Chapter 21

Forked

Get Forked!

The front **Forks** straddle the extreme ends of the front axle, around which the front wheel rotates. It is the front **Forks** that provide the stability and direction for the bike.



Much has been said by the sages of our times about the **Forks** on our roads as we journey through this thing called our life span. It is at these **Forks** that decisions have to be made about the direction that we have to travel. These decisions are so powerful because they become commitments. It seems that commitments are what we fear – simply because it determines the path that we have to travel on.

The best example of this in modern times is the 'de facto' relationship – as opposed to marriage. Why do we have to come to a **Fork**, and choose a permanent relationship or a temporary one. It appears to be easier to delay this decision by choosing to just live together – no firm commitment by both parties. Just make the

road take longer to reach the **Forks**. Make it meander through the fields and dales instead.

But it is at the **Forks** that life should be lived. Just like your bike ride lives at the front **Forks**, a life lived without **Forks** is a boring life. It is no accident that the front **Forks** straddle the two extreme ends of the axle. The same way that when we hit a **Fork** in our lives, we usually have to choose between the two opposite extremes - be it the 'dark' side or the 'light' side (as in Star wars), success or failure, married or single, rich or poor, sad or happy, male or female, life or death.....

Have you ever noticed that when you have a difficult choice to make, you can feel overwhelmed? A feeling of constipation? Then as soon as you have committed to a direction, you suddenly feel 'lighter' and more 'purposeful'? It can be a great feeling.

You will find that the more **Forks** on the road of life that you create (just for the practice of having to make a decision), the easier it is to get on with life. Ultimately, you will discover that they are not really **Forks** at all – because it does not matter which way you choose. Your ultimate destination does not change.

So get some fun back in your life and start to love getting **Forked**!

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Chapter 22

Empty Bidon Cage

The misleading case of the Empty bidon cage



I don't see it very much at our club races. I see it a bit more at State and national championships. And it seems to be a ritual when I watch the professional bike racing on TV. And it is the act of chucking away the last bidon just before the sprint to the line. It is like the **Empty bidon cage** is the key to sprinting success.

On the surface, it seems to make sense -throwing away excess weight so that the bike can go faster.

A deeper analysis reveals that most final sprints to the line are held over flat finishes. It is not how heavy or even how streamline the bike is when you are in the mad rush to the finish line. It is more about positioning, patience, focus, determination, fearlessness and a stroke of luck. Then why

do the sprinters chuck away the drink bottles to **Empty** out the bidon cage? Like all things in life, what we see is misleading.

It is not the weight that the sprinters are worried about. When used correctly, the act of **Emptying** the bidon cage is an anchor (a term used in mind bending technologies like NLP). It prepares the riders mentally for the sprint. Like throwing down the gauntlet in ancient times, it signifies the readiness for the battle of the sprint.

The act of throwing away the drink bottle will not make any difference to your sprint if you think that it will make you lighter. So for most riders who just copy the pros, they are just fooling themselves. I think that even the professionals just copy each other – not knowing the real reason why it is done.

There are many other things in life the **Empty bidon cage syndrome**. Such as: everyone is trying to become rich by doing property and the share markets- so that must the way to go. In reality, becoming rich is exactly the opposite. Also, there is the recurrent theme that artificial stimulants will elevate performance. The truth is that the drugs don't work – it only makes you worst (as the song goes).

Go figure!

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Chapter 23

Derailleurs

Push and pull – the two different Derailleurs

It is said that besides death and taxes, the third certainty in life is change. What is not certain is how that change will come about.



On our bikes we have a front **D**erailleur and a rear one. They both instigate a gear change – but in two totally different ways. The front **D**erailleur simply gives the chain a push and lets go. It then stays out of the way. The rear **D**erailleur does it quite differently. It never lets go of the chain. Instead it provides the chain with continuous guidance – as it pulls the chain across the gear cluster.

If you think back through your life, you will remember how you were either pushed or pulled through the many changes that occurred. Children are often receivers of the pull method. Parents just will not let go and the young child is guided through that stage in life by a controlling parent who is always present. Primary and secondary school teachers use the same method of leading children through change.

Then when we go to university, we are exposed to the push method. Lecturers pretty much push out information – and you are left to fend for yourself. Independence can be a shock to the system when you have been used to someone looking after you as you go through the changes in your life.

Your spouse will display that most bipolar behaviour of push and pull. One minute, they will push you out of the way and give you that silent treatment and the next minute, they will pull you beside them and whisper ‘sweet nothings’. They know that both systems work. They just don’t know why it works.

Leaders throughout the world have always been divided on the best method of leading people. Some lead from the front and others from the rear. The reason why the jury is out on this question of push/pull leadership – is that both systems seem to work.

The front **D**erailleur just pushes. But it does the job of a front gear change. And the fact that it can stay away of the chain after the job is done, is a good thing. However, the rear **D**erailleur uses a totally different method and it is just as effective.

So, what is the lesson? If there is anything to be learnt here, then it is simply this: **There is no right or wrong way for change to happen. You can be pushed or you can be pulled. Either way, you will be changed. Change is what matters – not how it is done.**

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Chapter 24

Cadence

Cadence – another holy grail

When I started riding a bike, it was just jumping on and started pedaling. When I first read about **Cadence**, I could not even pronounce the word. It took me a while to come to terms with Cadence, and it was on uneasy terms. I have a speed monitor and a heart monitor for my bike – but I hardly ever use them now. However, I have never had a **Cadence** monitor.



Cadence is an observation – not a rule. Some cyclists just feel more comfortable pedaling quicker, and others feel better pedaling slower. If Lance Armstrong has a high **Cadence**, it does not mean that everyone has to pedal quick.

There is no need to get obsessed about your **Cadence**. You know what is comfortable, and that is all you need to know. I like changing things as I go about my life and I pedal a bit slower nowadays – but I find that it also makes me pedal harder and as a result, I feel stronger. I may keep this preference or try something a bit different a bit later on....as I feel like doing.

In life, I came across a large variety of people who operate at different speeds. The most obvious is with speech. Some talk slow and others rattle away like a machine gun. Some hardly say anything and others chatter non-stop. The result is the same. You get the same message – just in different ways. It is still important to realise that the person who speaks the fastest and has the most to say will still end up with the same result as their opposite. This is because the listener will only hear what they want to hear.

Cadence is just a measure of how quick you pedal. It has no other relevance to your performance on the bike. It is not sacred in any way – nor is it the secret to climbing that dreaded mountain.

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Chapter 25

Bottom Bracket

Baffled by Broken Bottom Bracket Bearing

Noises on the bike can be a source of frustration to many cyclists. That creaking noise that signals something wrong - but source unknown.

A while back, I got an irregular loud cracking sound from the **Bottom Bracket** area. But it did not happen every time I pedalled. The noise would go away for a while, then it would come back with a vengeance – before quietening down again. I checked the cranks. I checked the pedals. I shook the bottom bracket axle. I was baffled by the origin of the noise. Using my Logic sense, I made up my mind that it was a crack in the axle that was making the noise. And it was when I got to investigate how to replace the axle – that I got more baffled by the **Bottom Bracket** technology that is around nowadays.



The old square taper axle **Bottom Bracket** assembly has now been replaced by a multitude of alternatives. There is “octalink”, “ISIS”, “Hollowtech”, “Ultra toque”, “BB30”, “BB90”, “Press fit” and others. The bearings are “inboard”, “outboard” and anywhere in between. The axle lengths and shell widths also vary. Then there is the English or Italian thread.

I was further baffled by the logic of the threading of the **Bottom Bracket** Shell. The English seems to have used engineering logic to overcome the ‘precession’ process (that can cause the **Bottom Bracket** bearing retainer to unscrew itself). The left hand bearing is right hand thread and the right one is left hand thread. But the Italians defy engineering logic and make both sides right hand threaded. Yet, I have not heard of any Italians getting unscrewed as

they ride along.

I am slowly taking on board this lesson of the bottom bracket: ***“There will be no end to the things that we can think up and logic is there to be defied”***.

When we defied the logic that the earth was flat, we found that it was round. Our inventors continue to push the boundaries and come up with a growing array of baffling inventions that tease our fantasies. Since our lives are fantasies, what we can think about can suddenly materialise into our realities. That is why ‘reality shows’ are so popular. They turn realities into fantasies and vice versa.

Whilst there seems to be the logic of “cause and effect” in our lives, we continue experience baffling things that defy this. Day after day, we are shown the effect on our lives if only we were rich. We would be happy and free. Yet, we all know of many rich people who are anything but happy and free. Bike riders have fallen just a few centimetres and broken bones – whilst people have fallen tens (if not hundreds) of metres and come away with just scratches.

... But to complete my story about my **Bottom Bracket**. It all got too baffling for me so I took the bike down to the Bike Shop instead. They opened up the **Bottom Bracket** and told me that my logic was wrong. The axle was not cracked. It was the bottom bracket bearings that were causing the noise. So.....

Anything can happen - anytime and anywhere.

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Chapter 26

Ascending

The ultimate joy of Ascending

We are finally at the end – and it is the start of the alphabet. And most things end and start with **A**scending. When we learn the alphabet, we start with A and it is an uphill battle to Z. But along the way, we are rewarded with stories told by pictures – all strung together in a sequence. It is one step followed by another – but they are all linked.



Every mountain has a story to tell. And because every mountain has two sides, there are usually two different stories available. However, the two stories are linked, as one follows the other. The **A**scending is followed very quickly by the descending. Most cyclists dread the climb. **A**scending does not provide the same feeling as descending – although they are both as scary and enjoyable.

The truth is that both sides of the mountain are there to be enjoyed. It is just that the **A**scending part seems to bring on more thoughts of pain. And this is because we all expect to be able to climb like *Contador*.

Once we accept the fact that we all climb differently, and we do it at our own pace – ascending can be fun. As we push our way up the mountain, we feel the gradient of every bit of the mountain. At the same time, we feel every bit of our body – stretched to its limit. Slowly but surely, we **A**scend to the summit - to a place where the pressure and

the pain will be relieved by the ability to move on without any more effort.

The first time up the mountain is the scariest. Then the more times we do the climb, the ‘flatter’ it becomes. We can start to savour the play between the mountain and the body. How one uses the other to create a story worth experiencing. In time, cycling without having to **A**scend mountains seem lacking.

It is the same when we jump off our bikes to carry on with the other things in our lives. Sometimes, life seems to go uphill the minute we get out of bed in the morning. But the battle is not in the upcoming dramas that have to be played out. It is in the allowing of the battle to be fought under our own terms. Whatever the expectations that are placed on us, we must resist them if they are not what we are capable of doing – and more importantly what we want to do.

We will get a lot more done and enjoy the ups and downs of life a lot more, if we approach life like we were **A**scending a mountain.

Do it at our own pace. Stretched to our limits, but willingly so – because it will lead to a place where the rewards are sweet.

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