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This book is not a manual for self-treatment. Anyone who needs psychiatric treatment should seek the services of a professional therapist.

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# 1

## The Journey

As we go through life, we like to look for one answer to the challenges we face. We may believe this answer to be the recognition of our flawed nature or the expectation of divine salvation. Finding the true love of our lives may be our central hope. Yet our situation is always changing and our questions are many. We may discover a very acceptable solution to one of our problems, but find that our next problem requires a completely new one.

We may look for answers in philosophical, psychological, and spiritual realms. Our travels through these realms may have us asking many pivotal questions about life. Is there meaning to our lives; what might it be? Does each of us have a predestined purpose, or are we expected to create one that suits our whims and fancies?

Sometimes life is easy, and we coast through it without concerns or tribulations. We consider ourselves laid-back, easy-to-please, and entirely contented with life. It is mysterious to us why others are always so worried and anxious. "It'll work out, it always does," we might tell such people.

Yet our own lives may lose their sparkle as we lose our confidence and energy. At these times, we yearn for more excitement and stimulation. Filling up our lives with activities, friendships, and new challenges may fill the void for a while, but even these begin to seem like diversions after a while. We long for something more substantial and satisfying.

Religious solutions offer hope of a blissful afterlife to those who are moral or kind to others in this life. Expectations of such unprovable rewards may give way to other mystical concepts such as reincarnation or union with a divine being. Such otherworldly promises may capture our imagination and direct our

lives for a period of time.

In the psychological realm, we may realize that we are not always in the same state of mind. Just as people can have different personalities and experiences in hypnosis, we find that sometimes we get into altered states of consciousness. We can go from feeling totally confident in ourselves to becoming dejected, discouraged, and confused. At times, we may find ourselves doing something that is in conflict with our morals, personality, or usual goals. We can lose control of ourselves, and become angry, hateful, or accusatory.

Experiences such as these may make us question who we are. Do we really exist, or are we just figments of someone else's imagination? Our true nature and our role in this mystifying universe are unclear. Perhaps we are not exactly whom we imagine ourselves to be.

Altered states of consciousness can be created by a variety of drugs. Cocaine, opium, mescaline, angel dust, and crystal meth can put us into a different world. LSD can give us hallucinatory euphoric experiences or make us psychotic and paranoid. It may be difficult to differentiate our delusions from reality.

Some answers may be found in neurology, physiology, and biochemistry. If drugs can give us outlandish experiences, and psychiatric medications can alleviate our anxiety and depression, then we might conclude that our experiences and our personalities are rooted in a biochemical matrix. Our explorations in this area lead us to a better understanding of the role of natural dopamine, glutamate, serotonin, and endorphins in the workings of our brains.

This journey that you are on will lead you through uncharted areas. Occasionally you will discover something that will change your life drastically. It will feel to you that the world has been turned upside down. At other times, you will work on developing your talents and life skills, slowly progressing toward

*Sweet Nonexistence*

becoming the person you want to be. No matter where you are on the journey, the next vista beckons to you.