HOW TO MAKE TIME: A MANIFESTO

MORNING

ALLAN JENKINS

Allan Jenkins

Morning: How to make time: A manifesto

«HarperCollins»

Jenkins A.

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‘This is my manifesto for morning.There is an energy in the earlier hours, an awareness I enjoy. In today’s world we tend to wake as late as we can, timed to when we have to work. But we don’t need to chase the day.’In Morning, Allan Jenkins shows how getting up earlier even once a week or month can free us to be more imaginative, to maybe read, to walk, to write. He talks to other early risers such as Jamie Oliver and Samuel West, to poets and painters. We hear from a neuroscientist about sleep, a philosopher about dawn, a fisherman about light. Allan wakes early, he listens, he looks. He introduces us to a secret world.This is a celebration of dawn and morning: the best time of day.

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HOW TO MAKE TIM

ALLAN J

Copyright

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Dedication

For Henriette
For everything

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Foreword

As cool as the pale wet leaves
of lily-of-the-valley
She lay beside me in the dawn
Ezra Pound, 'Alba'

For years now I have been getting up around 5 a.m. in winter (often earlier in summer). It suits me. I like the energy, the awareness before the day wakes. The quiet before dawn in winter, the shift from night to day in summer. I get things done. I write. I read. I think. I garden in soft light. It is my best time of day.

This short book will explore why.

I will make the case for being alert at first light. To wake in the quiet moments when the day inhales and the night fails. Just you and the stuff that surrounds you. To be extra alive in a way that near silence allows, sensitive to minute moments of change. To be able to gather yourself, your thoughts and feelings, whether it is to sit, to write, to walk, to read, to be inside or outside, to be sowing seed, to garden, to be saturated in experience. The gift of more time in the morning, so easily given and so easily missed. The simple opportunity to start the working day refreshed, renewed. To be whole in a way that near silence gives, to be one with the wild. To be natural in nature. To nurture yourself. The chance to be alive to your breath and distant from distraction. The space to be (by) yourself, before others wake.

It's easy, take it, half an hour, an hour, maybe more when you want. To be comfortable with yourself in a way that being alone allows no matter how many people you share your life with. The opportunity is there every day. Just you and the morning light, like flower or fauna. To learn to allow yourself to build in awareness, even if it's just of birdsong. To be awake in a moving meditation. Try it some time, take small steps, the morning world is waiting. You and the sky or a computer screen, the page of an unread book, the taste of tea. Bring the outside inside. The day can start when you want, uncoupled from demands and distraction. And if this doesn't work for you alone maybe find someone who wants to share the silence.

I will talk to a neuroscientist, a fisherman, a philosopher, painters and poets. I will interview other early morning people. I will examine how changes in light throughout the day, through the year, affect different people, plants. I will report on how time influences behaviour. I will take the first bus. I will report from different latitudes, including the Arctic Circle in summer (from barely three hours of daylight to twenty-four hours of sun) and the effects it has on inhabitants and me.

I will investigate the language of light and morning, the many words from different cultures for dawn and first light and what they mean and how they change.

I will keep an early morning diary from my window. I will describe how the light lifts, the sun rises, the birds sing or not throughout the year. I will observe and report. I will listen and feel.

I will tell the morning's story.

How to make time

Seize the day. Your morning doesn't have to be decided by what time you leave the house. The constant conventional rush: for breakfast, a bath or shower, in time for the bus or Tube or drive or walk to work, to get the kids to school. You can free the day, start in a different way, remove the race.

Build up to dawn, wake a little earlier, try half an hour. Skip *Newsnight* or Netflix, the phone the night before, or whatever it is you watch. They will still be there. Savour the time. Avoid doing the same you always do or the day will fill like an incoming tide. What is it you wanted to do but told yourself you don't have the time? Paint, possibly? Draw? Read more books? Bake bread? Do a little now. It's a start. Take baby steps.

Build on it, slowly if you need. Make it an hour earlier, build up to two, it's honestly even better, open space enough to think and feel. Don't rush it, take your time, you have enough.

Perhaps try to skip social or other media before you sleep and once you wake. Make your early day a holiday. It is easy, honestly.

If winter is too dark and daunting (though I think it is my favourite season), start in the spring, when the light will be there waiting, as will writing, reading, yoga, walking, sitting. Whatever it is you want.

Try having a window open, your eyes and ears, too. If it is dark use only low light. Sit near the window, let the outside in.

Free your morning and mind, later skip the electric light. You will know where you are, where to walk, what to do. You will have mapped out the space you are in. It's simple neuroscience.

Dark to light, an eternal transition, be alive to it sometime, aware, awake.

Don't beat yourself up if you skip it or feel the need to go back to bed. Build it in sometime. There is no right or wrong, only more opportunity. It is magical the morning. A forgiving friend. Yours, too, if you want.

A lexicon of dawn

Afrikaans: *aanbreek*
Azerbaijani: *sübh*
Basque: *egunsentian*
Bosnian: *zora*
Bulgarian: *разсъмване*
Catalan: *alba*
Corsican: *alba*
Croatian: *zora*
Czech: *úsvit*
Danish: *daggry*
Estonian: *koit*
French: *aube*
German: *Morgendämmerung*
Hawaiian: *ao*
Hungarian: *hajnal*
Icelandic: *dögun*
Irish: *breacadh an lae*
Italian: *alba*
Japanese: *Yoake*
Kurdish: *bandev*
Latvian: *ausma*
Lithuanian: *aušra*
Luxembourgish: *Sonnenopgang*
Malay: *subuh*
Maltese: *bidunett*
Maori: *ata*
Polish: *świt*
Portuguese: *amanhecer*
Romanian: *zori*
Russian: *рассвет*
Samoan: *vaveao*
Serbian: *зора*
Spanish: *alba*
Swahili: *alfajiri*
Swedish: *gryning*
Turkish: *şafak*
Urdu: *Sahar*
Welsh: *wawr*

Other usage

Old English
uhta
‘the last part of the night, the time just before daybreak’. Also *dagian*
verb, meaning ‘to become day’ (root of ‘dawn’, the time that marks the beginning of twilight before sunrise)
Middle English, also Scots Gaelic
greking
‘In the grekynge of the day, sir Gawayne hente his hors wondyrs for to seke’ (Malory, *Morte D’Arthur*)
Irish
le fáinne geal an lae
‘the bright ring of the day’
French
l’heure bleue
Spanish
madrugar
verb, meaning, ‘to get up early’
proverb, *Al que madruga, Dios le ayuda*, ‘God helps those who rise early’
US Pennsylvania Dutch
the blush

A manifesto

Early morning gives me time, hope, space. At a moment when they are all at a premium. The city (largely) sleeps. Interference is low, distractions minimal. My day opens up. Stretches languidly. My mind is clearer. My thoughts easier to read. Anxious urgency is removed. The light is almost elusive. I feel my way around, the room, my home. I become like a cat with whiskers. I pour tea. I fill the pot by sound not sight, a reassuring glug. It is curiously comforting to decouple from incessant electric light. I am aware of the air around me. I have hours on my own, free to follow my feelings. I am liberated from the day's demands. More at one, if you will, with the more natural world. Perhaps just sitting, watching my thoughts scroll by. I can write, walk, gaze out of the window, soak it in, enjoy it, luxuriate. There is time to wonder what I want to say. Time to drink good tea while people around me sleep. Time to hear the blackbird signal dawn (midsummer sunrise 4.42 a.m., London, and gone 8 a.m. by midwinter).

Early morning connects me, moves me, makes me more awake. I listen to more isolated sound while the day and light lift. My room more slowly makes its presence felt. My day, my world, knock politely. There is time to wait, rising sun on my face as I write. Cool light as I walk or garden, free from chatter, except my own, perhaps today a loop over Hampstead Heath, just me and the bumblebees, another early walker in the distance. I'll nod, quietly say hello if we pass, a brotherly sisterhood of sharing with other early morning appreciators. An hour's open-hearted meditation on morning, light and life. Stopping to admire the fading greening, perhaps catch sight of a solo heron. I am back before breakfast, in time to wake others up. Time to read, say, Ted Hughes's 'The Hawk in the Rain', to catch undone things from days before. Time to build in new memories, sow new seed.

From night to day, dark to dawn, winter to spring, there is enchantment for me in transition. This is when the owl flies, the curlew calls, the earth inhales or exhales. Flux, a natural thing. From boy to man, child to adult, it is in the letting go, watching, observing, not trying to control the change, where enchantment, even the miraculous, happens. Before breakfast was when I roamed by the river, ambled through fields and woods as a child, in search of young mushrooms and magic. Seeing the dog fox returning to his den, hearing the call of the wild, I knew anything, everything, was possible; reality's grip lessened for a moment and therein lay the charm. No longer defined by home or who my parents were, there were other possibilities on offer. Whatever I wanted. My imagination soared with the shift in light.

Decades later it still holds true. You can do near anything you want to, be almost anybody you want, the rest of the world is asleep. Loosen your shackles. For an hour or two feel free. There is nothing holding you back. Dawn is an enchanted world behind a hidden door, there if you want it, fine if you don't. 'Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me,' says Thoreau. He's right.

Sunrise graph

My morning: Allan Jenkins

First, could you tell me a little about yourself?

I am a writer, an editor, a gardener. At twenty, as a single parent, I could sometimes skip sleep completely if, say, my young daughters were unwell. Now I need maybe seven hours, perhaps a nap at the weekend.

What time do you wake up (and why)?

Some time before 5 a.m. in summer, a little later in winter. I sleep with sliding doors open, no curtains. It is usually the birds that wake me, even gulls a joyful thing. It is the time I write or summer-garden, though I sometimes get caught up in social media, before my wife gets up.

Do you have a morning ritual?

I like to make tea in the dark. I think my senses may be heightened. Earl Grey in a pot, no milk.

How does being awake early affect your life?

It gives me time to be me, before the day begins.

What time do you sleep?

Mostly around ten-ish, give or take.

Does your sleep vary through the year?

I am up earlier in summer, more energetic, more excitable and so are the birds. I don't know that I get more done.

Has your sleep pattern changed?

Maybe less sleep with age, though it is more likely I have carved out time to write and/or garden that I don't have in the evening when I need to cook and digest the day.

Is the light important?

It is everything. I think I am addicted. The shift from night, the sometimes timid start of day. My world wakes. Particularly if there is sun, of course. I write by an open window facing south-east; the light draws me outside, catches the vase of flowers beside me (there are always flowers). Most mornings I take a photo, same photo, same view, of the sunrise. I tell myself it is like Monet's water lilies or haystacks but I think I am mapping my life in mornings.

What do you like least about being awake early?

I can lose an hour reading useless links to politics or old YouTube, purely because I can.

What do you like best about being awake early?

The energy, the time it gives; it feels like a gift (apologies for romance but it is true). Sometimes it allows me to escape to the allotment, feed it, water it, sow seeds, connect with land and wild.

How would you sum up your thoughts on your mornings in 100 words or less?

Sometimes I feel it is my secret, like Narnia, outside time or at least the rest of the day. I cannot believe everyone doesn't know about it and take an occasional step through the wardrobe.

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