

# Index Finger Points the Way

by Jim Gold

Tom Nokle came home for winter break from his senior year in college. As a pre-med student planning to specialize in chiro-therapy, the study of the hand, he had lots of anatomy questions. Eating his eggs at the breakfast table, he asked his mother, a teacher of biology in high school, “In your opinion, what is the purpose of an index finger? What’s it really used for?”

She adjusted her apron. Standing near the stove, she pointed to his eggs. “Index finger points to the self,” she explained. “On a deeper, philosophical level, it is the ego finger. As a dual-purpose finger, it can point both forward and back, forward to consciousness, back to self-consciousness.”

“That’s pretty good, Mother. I didn’t realize you knew so much.”

“Silly child. What about my PhD in Metaphysics?”

“Yes, I forgot about that.”

“With such a faulty memory, it’s no wonder you keep coming home for guidance.”

She stirred her oatmeal. “As the higher finger of consciousness,” she continued, “it points to knowledge, union with the universe, and oneness. The index finger never changes. It is always the same, the All-In-One finger. It’s my guide through daily life and the universe. That’s why I point it at you when you do something wrong, or right. It points the way. That’s why I love it.”

She pointed to her oatmeal.

Tom put down his fork. “I never thought it was so dignified. Our professor in anatomy class just called it a digit.”

“That’s what they’re paid to say by the computer companies and math departments,” she sneered. She dipped two pieces of bread into the egg batter that had been sitting there, sprinkled them with cinnamon, slid them into the frying pan, and lowered the flame. “But, paradoxically, especially when pointing backwards—you know, retrogression, selfishness, as opposed to large or divine selfishness, which is really selflessness in disguise—it is also the finger of the self-conscious ego.”

She sprinkled a bit more cinnamon on the French toast, waited a moment, then flipped

them over. “As such, it creates tension, fear of judgement by others, fear of audiences, fear of the public. It pushes you to show off, prove yourself, and as such, to be different--or appear to be from who you really are. This kind of index-finger pointing is a common problem in humans.”

She turned off the flame, and spatula in hand, removed the French toast from the frying pan and laid the pieces on two separate dishes.

“That will always be your big challenge. How to rise above the machinations of your index finger, free yourself from self-pointing, and move toward the objects your index finger points out.”

The aroma of fresh French toast scented the kitchen. Tom got up and paced the floor. “But how long will that take, Mother? I don’t have all day, you know.”

She laid their French toast on the breakfast table.

“You’ll be going back to college in two weeks,” she continued. “That should give you time to figure it out.”

She untied her apron, sat down, and tasted her French toast.

Tom took a bite of his. “Ma, this is delicious. What’s in it?”

“I have my own ingredients—a bit of barley, rum, potatoes, and some cheese. But I also add a secret ingredient.”

“What’s that?”

‘It’s a secret.

He took another bite and his eyes closed in pleasure. “I love it,” he said. “So sweet and juicy, full-bodied and wholesome. “I want to make it for my friends at college.”

“Good idea.”

“How do I do it.?”

“I’ll give you the recipe. That will help you cook and create a very good French toast. But the secret, the magic formula that creates this fantastic French toast, I cannot and will not give. The secret stays with me.”

“Then how will I cook it on campus?”

“You’ll figure it out.”

“But—”

“No buts. You have most of the recipe. But that extra fantastic something, you’ll have to find it on your own. When you do, your French toast will be just as good. Only different. Do lots of research and thinking. You’ll figure it out. Your medical and philosophy courses will help, especially your anatomy of the hand course and your study of digits. You’ll find

your own way of doing things, and, as a future doctor, your own way of treating others. You'll figure it out. Then you'll be making the best French toast ever! Your index finger will point the way."

Tom went off to college and started make French toast for his friends. His first attempts tasted like burnt rubber. His friends suggested gluing them to his tires. The next time, in frustration, they threw the toast into the garbage can. They threw his new attempts in his face the next day. Then they threw eggs at him. "This has no taste, no magic, no nothing," they sneered. They threw his toaster pan into the garbage can, too. A day later, they threw Tom into the garbage can, too.

But he wouldn't give up. He kept trying, making French toast for teachers, drunks, and lawyers, he even started handing it out to passers by on the street. But nothing seemed to work. Instead of getting better, his efforts got even worse.

He offered a morning helping to one of the sanitation men, who, after tasting it, said that he was thinking of grinding Tom up with the rest of the garbage.

At that point, Tom realized it was time to change his environment. He left Boston College, tried the University of Chicago, which rejected him, and ending up washing dishes in the kitchen at St Bridget's College in Olaf, Minnesota.

On Sunday, at the community breakfast, the nuns generously asked him to make his French toast their Sunday communal breakfast. During this experiment in compassion, which they named The First Breakfast, they tasted and chewed with sympathy and compassion. The second time, they added extra spoonfuls of syrup, honey, sugar, or molasses. During the third breakfast, after some vomited across the sanctuary carpet, many thought a good Roman style crucifixion was in order. (College historians later called this meal The Last Breakfast.)

Tom moved from place to place and was employed over the year in many depressing kitchen and restaurant waiting jobs. But he never gave up. Discouraged, down, he returned to college. After graduating from Dumpster University in Dreary, Colorado, with a fine arts degree in Sanitation Arrangement, he took his first job as a sousousousous chef in Dreary's downtown Kato Lakko Diner. After the owner, a kindly man named Aristotle Pappatikkidapoulis, gave him a chance to cook, he offered his French toast to morning patrons.

Three months later, after the owner went bankrupt, Tom was hired by a local mobster Dumpster graduate, Jonny Bones aka Dr Posthumous, to make French toast for his enemies. "I've tried other means of enemy removal for years," he told his associates. "This should do

it.”

After his first success in Dreary, Tom went international. He introduced his French toast-making method to France, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Australia. As his skills improved and governments fell, he kept moving on, always working to perfect his French toast art and hoping he would find the magic formula, the secret ingredient that would make them fantastic.

Years went by.

One day, at the age of sixty-four, while working as a cook in the restaurant of a three star hotel in Yerevan, Armenia, Tom was preparing the French toast for his breakfast customers in the Star of Armenia back alley restaurant.

This time, however, for some strange reason, Tom tried something different. Maybe “tried” isn’t the exactly the right word. Rather than being conscious, it seemed to happen naturally, almost effortlessly, by itself, as if it had fallen from the sky, but of course only after years and years of work, false tries, and skewed attempts. It’s as if all those years of experience, of suffering, of searching for the culinary clue to excellence, the magic wand of French toast supremacy, the secret ingredient that would catapult his French toast into a superior category, suddenly coalesced—into his index finger!

Yes! His index finger had become the vehicle through which the totality of his inner being suddenly expressed itself. When he accidentally stirred the French toast batter with his index finger, the power of his whole body poured through it, straight into the batter, imbuing it with the essence of his personality, artistry, creative abilities, his essence and unique view and approach to the world. As this uniqueness entered the batter, he batted it, stirred it around, and thus filled it with the bat-flying creativity of his mind.

And Tom realized that, instead of stirring the batter slowly and carefully with a spoon, what he required was light, fast strokes with his index finger.

Light, even very light stirring was the key to moving the mental enzymes of fast-jumping “exhilarants” into the batter. This way, when the French toast was cooked, people would immediately be elevated into exhilaration. When his customers took a bite, exhilaration immediately struck. They started dancing! Right after breakfast!

A few days later as he was cooking breakfast in the Star of Armenia kitchen, he heard a gigantic roar coming from the dining room. Tom, and the hotel manager, ran out to see what had happened. A man lay on the floor, screaming, laughing, and kicking his legs in the air with joy, a look of utter ecstasy on his face. “Barev, vareev!” he cried “Schnoorhagalutzion! Schnoorhagalutzion!”

What's he saying? Tom asked the manager.

The astonished manager said, "Good, good. Thank you, thank you." The manager broke into a broad smile, laughed joyously, grabbed Tom, shook his hand, hugged him, and started dancing an Armenian hora around the room.

Tom started to cry.

From then on the ascent began. One success followed another. Restaurants started to clamor for his services.

What was the secret? Why were his toasts so great? The mix. The mixing of the ingredients. For years he had mixed the ingredients with his hands. Then he had tried using his fingers, first all of them, then one at a time. The week before, he had only tried that index finger. His whole personality now seemed to point straight through it, and its fluidity and creativity entered directly into the French Toast. That was the secret ingredient! His French toast began to flower and sing, shining on the pinnacle of cuisine. And those customers who tasted it, tasted, not only Tom's years of suffering on the cross of creativity, but the joy of final salvation, where all the worlds of past and present came together in one grand unity.

Armenian, English, Turkish, Bulgarian, even the dead came back to life for a taste of his French toast—witnessed the man who toasted him in Sumerian using a south Erek accent, but who had been dead for many years.

Today Tom is known as the best French toast maker in the world.

Although his mother passed away years ago, he used his Pear After Life (PAL) cell phone to call her. "Ma, I made it. Fantastic. Best French toast ever."

"Glad to hear it, my son," she answered. "You never gave up. That's good."

"How's it going up there?"

"It's quiet though I'm adjusting."

"Any words of encouragement from your perspective?"

"Well, my advice from here is: If you want to do something, never give up. Up here, the Big Boss speaks to us every morning, gives us a pep talk. He has a longer perspective, and He says the same thing. 'Even if it takes an eternity, never give up.'"

"Sounds good, Ma. I like it."

"Yes, and I can tell you, because I have a good perspective from here. Time is an illusion. Everything of importance really lasts forever. The paltry, stupid, unimportant stuff falls away and disappears, proving how worthless it really was to begin with. It shows you how many are willing, and how important it is, to wait for a good piece of French toast."

“Yes, Ma, it took a while. As you told me when I wanted to become a cook at age nine, ‘A mix of patience and hard work with eggs and batter are the ingredients for successful French toast.’”

“How did you organize it and put it all together? How did you finally do it?”

“It’s totally opposite to the way I used to cook. But the old approach never worked. My excitement, enthusiasm, exhilaration have always been suppressed, drained out of cuisine, and especially by French toast batter, through the fear of making mistakes, not cooking perfectly, being compared to the pros, and great chefs of the past. It was a fear-based approach. All my life, my self-image was that I couldn’t cook has been I can’t cook, especially French toast!

“But that’s all over. Now I can!”

His mother savored her happiness. “Wonderful,” she finally said. “You’re a smart earthly lad. How do you explain it?”

“Index finger pointed the way.”

*from Carlos the Cloud*  
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