



A Review on “Jonathan Livingston Seagull”

Genre: Fable

Author: Richard Bach

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Pursuit of Perfection: Jonathan Livingston Seagull

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If stories are read for their obvious meaning, this is not the book you should go for. Most of the stories written aren't that simple either. One might be reminded of Joseph Conrad's view that the meaning of the stories of seafarers doesn't lie in the kernel. Likewise, the book at review in the present edition doesn't offer a straight forward meaning. Well, the book that I am speaking about is Jonathan Livingston Seagull by Richard Bach. To cut a long story short, it is a fable and like any good fable, operates on layers of meaning. On the one hand, the book looks as simple as an elegant flight of a bird. On the other, it could be as disturbing as the fluttering of the feathers as the fledgling tries to (manage the mechanism of the wind) gain control over a hostile surrounding.

Jonathan Livingston is the name of our protagonist a seagull who ventures into the uncommon. The very thought of exploring the blue skies sets him apart from other gulls. When for most gulls, it is not flying that mattered but eating, Jonathan Livingston Seagull loved to fly. “Why is it so hard to be like the rest of the flock, John? asked his mother. Why can't you leave low flying to the pelicans, the albatross? Why don't you eat? Son, you're bone and feathers!”. His father too butts in with common sensical advice. “If you must study, then study food and how to get it. This flying business is all very well, but you can't eat a glide. Don't forget that the reason you fly is to eat.” If this advice looks quite common to us, it means we are one among the flock. Is our socializing all about making us belong to the herd? But it is not so for Jonathan. If for other gulls flying is a means to an end, for

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Jonathan, it is end in itself. Jonathan wants to know why a Seagull cannot fly like a falcon. There will be norms set for each group to define itself. Over time these norms become limitations, especially to the ones who want to test their boundaries. Low flying is not for the gulls. Why can't you leave low flying to the pelicans, the albatross?

Seagulls never fly in the dark, you'd have the eye of an owl! You would have a falcon's short wings. Jonathan Livingston knows that he is not made the way a falcon or an owl is made. He "blinked. His pain, his resolutions, vanished." But he realizes that necessity is the mother of invention. He brings his forewings "tightly to his body leaving only the swept daggers of his wingtips extended into the wind." He now falls into a vertical dive from five thousand feet at a speed of two hundred fourteen miles per hour – the speed was power and the speed was joy, and the speed was pure beauty." This was the opening up of a new age in the history of the Flock. He is unique because only he knows "how much more there is to living." But for achieving this feat that no gull had achieved in the past, Jonathan had to pay a heavy price. He was declared an outcast by the Elder of the family for having violated "the dignity and the tradition of Gull Family."

Like a true hero, Jonathan didn't regret his solitude as much he did their refusal to believe the glory of flight. While his ever readiness to fly and conquer took him to another world, Jonathan realized that the trick was to stop seeing himself trapped inside a limited body. One needs to overcome space and time to be in heaven for "heaven is not a place and it is not a time." "Overcome space, and all we left is Here. Overcome time, and all we have left is Now."

Heaven is perfection and to achieve that, one has to keep working on love. Jonathan realizes that to love his folk is to make them realise the beauty of exploring one's possibilities. With this intention, he goes back to his folk to spread this message. He says to the young outcast Fletcher Lynd Seagull that one should fly so much that they could forgive the Flock and work to help them. Jonathan's creed increases albeit the reservations of the younger gulls who think that he is touched by divinity in order to achieve such a masterclass. Jonathan

would instruct an increasing number of outcasts: “your whole body from wing tip to wing tip is nothing more than your thought itself, in a form you can see. Break the chains of your thought, and you break the chains of your body too.” The more Jonathan becomes a symbol of the perfection of light, the more he is treated different from his own Flock. He is now considered a sacred Gull or a divine Gull and raised to a god head, quite against the principles that Jonathan live in Seagull lived throughout his life. Here we realize how, in Richard Bach's words, “the forces of rulers and rituals slowly will kill our freedom to live as we choose.”

This tiny volume presents the philosophy of life. What are we really? How can we realize that which we could be. Jonathan wants to be who he truly is and achieves it whereby he learns to move on to the next level of consciousness. This 'most celebrated inspirational fable of our time' helps us know that we too could be Jonathans if we dared. A tiny volume that teaches us the life skills. A compelling read, indeed.