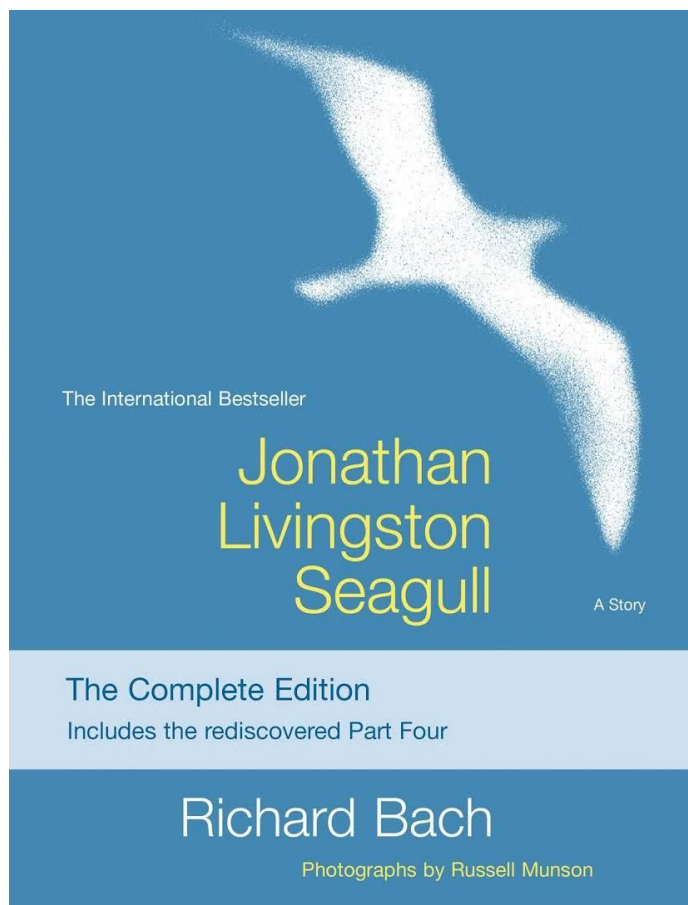


Favorite Quotes:

“The gull that sees farthest flies highest.”

“Jonathan Livingston Seagull discovered that boredom and fear and anger are the reasons that a gull’s life is so short.”



Summary: this is a famous fable about a seagull learning about life and flight, and a homily about self-perfection. It was first published in 1970. The book tells the story of Jonathan Livingston Seagull, a seagull who is bored with daily squabbles over food. Seized by a passion for flight, he pushes himself, learning everything he can about flying, until finally his unwillingness to conform results in his expulsion from the flock. An outcast, he continues to learn, becoming increasingly pleased with his abilities as he leads a peaceful and happy life.

Table of Contents

- [Part One](#)
- [Part Two](#)
- [Part Three](#)
- [Part Four](#)

Part One: Breakthrough & Exile

Note: For the sake of brevity, the name “Jonathan Livingston Seagull” will be abbreviated as JLS herein.

Overview

In Part One we are introduced to our protagonist, a seagull, by the name of Jonathan Livingston Seagull. From the very beginning, we learn that JLS is “no ordinary bird” and has taken to the practice of advanced, high-speed flying.

Quotes

- “Most gulls don’t bother to learn more than the simplest facts of flight,” i.e. food, safety. . . but “more than anything else, JLS loved to fly.”
- “Such promises are only for the gulls that accept the ordinary. One who has touched excellence in his learning has no need for that kind of promise.” [referring to JLS’ earlier promise to conform to the behaviors of the flock and not practice high-speed flying]
- “He was alive, trembling ever so slightly with delight.” [referring to how JLS was feeling right before an early morning dive run]
- “Jonathan Livingston Seagull discovered that boredom and fear and anger are the reasons that a gull’s life is so short.”

Notes

- p.3 - JLS is described as “unashamed” related to being “no ordinary bird”.
- p.17 - JLS makes a Breakthrough: he achieve terminal velocity of 214 mph during a dive by shortening his wingspan and using his wingtip feathers for high-speed maneuvering. His Breakthrough is not appreciated by the Flock. In fact, they exile him due to the public danger he introduced when he flew through the flock that morning at such high speed.
- p.37 - as an exiled Outcast JLS is later escorted to another realm of consciousness by two starbright gulls. This other realm also provides a metaphor for Heaven.

Part Two: Enlightenment

Overview

In Part Two, JLS is now flying with an elite flock in what is perceived to be seagull Heaven. It is here that JLS continues his education, his practice of high-speed flying, and pursuit of perfection. He also, for the first time, assumes the role of a mentor to another bird: Fletcher Lynd Seagull.

Quotes

- “The only answer I can see, Jonathan, is that you are pretty well a one-in-a-million bird.”
- “There is no such place [as heaven]. Heaven is not a place, and it is not a time. Heaven in being perfect.”
- “You have less fear of learning than any gull I’ve seen in ten thousand years.”

- “The gull that sees farthest flies highest.”

Notes

- p.59 - one of the most revered, wisest birds within the new flock is named Chiang. Chiang’s final words to JLS: “Jonathan, keep working on love.” When I read this, I literally got the chills on the airplane. For some reason it really touched me. I think in our collective pursuits of perfection and doing great things in life, our hearts can be overshadowed by our minds and we can lose sight of love. Love takes work. And Chiang’s words are an insightful reminder.
- p.62 - JLS starts teaching Fletcher Lynd Seagull who has a “blazing drive to learn to fly”.

Part Three: *Perfection, Outcasts Return & Evangelize*

Overview

In Part Three, the new Flock continues to perfect their flying skills and decide to eventually return to Council Beach where the original Flock resides to evangelize their controversial philosophy of life. Their belief system is further solidified in that each gull is, in fact, an “unlimited ideas of freedom.” Their message attracts a new follower away from the Flock: Terrence Lowell Gull, who becomes student #8.

Quotes

- “Each of us is in truth an idea of the Great Gull, an unlimited idea of freedom.”
- “Love is to practice and see the real gull, the good in every one of them, and to help them see it in themselves.”

Notes

- p.74 - the new students have a hard time believing that “the flight of ideas could possibly be as real as the flight of wind and feather.”
- p.80 - the Outcasts return to Council Beach and after one month the first detractor comes forth: Terrence Lowell Gull
- p.81 - “SET ASIDE” becomes the rallying cry against all ritual, superstition, and any limitation of flying freedom. The only difference, the very only one, is that they have begun to understand what they really are and have begun to practice it.
- p.89 - the recurring theme of practice is evident, i.e. DOING THE WORK, the routine of self improvement
- p.90 - the real, unlimited LUke is your true instructor

Part Four: *Dogma*

Overview

In Part Four the philosophy of JLS begins to take on a life of its own—and not in a good way. The Flock begins to value DOGMA over the practice of flying. The founding birds of JLS and Fletcher are revered but not heard. Shrines are built. Status symbols appear. The idea of ONENESS becomes their chant. The younger birds become skeptical of the whole thing and begin to rebel.

Quotes

- “Who are you, anyway?”
 - “You can call me Jon.”
- Last Words: “In your 21st century, hemmed about with authority and ritual, it's strapped now to strangle freedom. Don't you see? It's planning to make the world safe, not free.”
 - “He lived his story, last chance.”
 - “My time's gone. Yours isn't.”

Notes

- p.101 - Fletcher dies doing what he loves: FLYING
- p.104 - The Flock creates an elaborate story to capture the passing of the original seagulls; more shrines, replicas of shrines, very little flying, and status symbols, e.g. flying with a branch in their mouth. Emphasis on very little FLYING.
- p.111 - the younger birds become skeptical of the Jonathan story - they don't believe them - how could someone fly 200+ mph? They discard the beliefs and resign themselves to the grim acknowledgement that life is futile, illogical, and without purpose, meaning and therefore no joy.
- p.121 - not sure why but my eyes are welling up at the ending: Anthony seagull decides to kill himself and at the last minute another seagull whizzes by him at unseen speed—this flash, this inspiration, this purpose—causes Anthony to change his mind, and he's excited! The beauty.