

VOLUME I
ACCEPTANCE TO EXTREMISTS

THE NATURAL MIND

WAKING UP

ALAN MACMILLAN ORR

**The Natural Mind – Waking Up
Volume I**

~

**A to E
Acceptance to Extremists**

Alan Macmillan Orr

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**Welcome to The Natural Mind –
Waking Up**

Volume I

I dedicate this book to Tania Nalesnyik, the girl who inspired me to wake up, my parents who had the good sense to bring me into the world, my close friends, my ex-girlfriends, and everyone else who has put up with me and shared their wisdom with me over the last 39 years.



This is not a work of philosophy.

This is not a book for intellectuals or learned men.

This a book for every person in the world.

*This is not a book for christians, muslims, buddhists or
atheists.*

This is a book for you

You and I who are as one – Human

Our words are what separate us from animals. We have the ability to communicate our thoughts and feelings clearly to another human being. Words are vital and so is how we use them. One word can change your life forever.

I **love** you

I **hate** you

Think about it

We use words so frivolously without any thought of the true meaning behind them. Together we will go behind the words, and investigate what they mean to us, how we feel when we use them, and how these words ultimately affect life as we know it.

Introduction

Welcome to the natural mind – waking up, volume one, part of a three volume A to Z personal journey covering over 250 topics and subtopics; covering everything from anger to competition; from supermarkets to desire; from pornography to love. Although this book is split into three volumes it should be considered one book. It was split into three to make it more manageable.

It is non-linear, and there is no correct order to read it in. If you wish to read it the way it was written, follow the topic guide, but be sure to read the author's journey and dialogue one before jumping around the various topics.

I wrote this book as a two way conversation with you, the reader. As you progress through each topic, you will find sarcasm; humour; practical insight; dialogues; personal stories; questions; a screenplay with you as the actors; telephone conversations; and a personal deconstruction of the human condition, chipping away at all our actions, thoughts, beliefs and traditions, to uncover the natural mind: a mind free from conditioning, ready to explore life with compassion, open to new possibilities; forever in a state of learning, living life with joy. Although most of the stories come from my personal life, and observations, some conversations are obviously fictional.

I have not written this book so people can follow it blindly, or accept it as truth, and I do not hope to change the world. I just hope I can inspire those of you who may be asleep, to wake up!

When you first begin to read it, you may find yourself instantly disagreeing with something I am saying; but if you pay careful attention to your mind, you will learn to challenge all its pre-constructed arguments.

Whatever you do, do not accept anything that is written here or anywhere else, go and find out for yourselves.

As I have done all the editing of this book myself and it was written over a four year period, you may find inconsistencies, (although I hope the spelling is perfect!) or have trouble following the timeline but as each topic is self contained you shouldn't have too much trouble. You may also notice that I have “decapitalised” certain words – why do you think that is?

enjoy the book!
alan

The author's journey

This is day one. I have finally started putting words onto paper! This is a project that has been based mostly in my head for the last two and a half years, and I can tell you, it's pretty scary. I never dreamed in my life that I would be writing a book of this nature, something which covers topics that up until 2002 I had never even thought about. This is how I got here.

Since 2002 I have read many books on everything from self-composting toilets to quantum physics for beginners, but none seemed to make the slightest bit of difference to my life. I have been shown how to recognize the aura (whatever that is). I joined amnesty international and greenpeace, and learned traditional thai massage; I did yoga; I wanted to be a monk; I became a vegetarian, and took a lot of stick for it; I gave up alcohol then realised I liked it too much; I could see the problems in the world and simple solutions to them but never did anything about it; I gave up smoking, then went back to it, again and again; I wanted to change the world, but could I really be bothered?

Deep inside there was always something missing. Commitment. A faint voice that echoed in the depths of my brain that kept repeating, "Why are you putting yourself through this alan? What is the point of all this, why don't you just conform, get a good job, get married, have children, have a nice house with pretty curtains, a stable job, nice new car, two holidays a year, a pension for my retirement, a private health plan, and a funeral plan so my children won't have to worry. Come on, look at your parents nice houses, they're pretty nice; just go with the flow and everything will be ok".

But something was always wrong. Deep down I could never understand why I always had to conform. This always caused my parents great stress and anxiety, as they always imagined I'd follow in my father's footsteps to become a captain of industry.

I was their hope, being an only child. My parents had never been to university, as that was not the done thing when they were young. "It's time to leave school, young lady" my mother was told, "time to get a job and start earning your keep."

Back then my parents did need the money. My grandparents were working class folk with no savings, so every penny was important. Things were tough; the world was just coming out of the second world war and everything was tight, so I understand why my parents wanted the best for

me; they just wanted to make sure that I was secure in the world. Its only natural and I can understand that sentiment completely.

When I was young I always imagined what it would be like to be a famous author, famous actor, or a famous singer! I showed some promise in the arts between the age of five and twelve; but like all young dreams, these gave way to real life, real problems at school, real problems at home; and the realization that normal people just get jobs, they don't become famous musicians – especially when they can't play their instruments very well or write very good songs (although it seems to have worked for several popular artists!)

So I left school before finishing my education at seventeen. I can't really remember why, but I think I discovered alcohol, cigarettes and women during the summer. At the start of the new school year I was sent out to find a job and I unenthusiastically set myself to work and ended up leaving every job, or getting fired for arguing with the boss.

To be honest with you I'm not at all sure why or what I was playing at in the first few years. Job, no job, job, no job, back to education, don't finish, no job, job, job, no job. Unbelievable, when I think about it. I guess I always had a feeling of entitlement, without effort. You see, my parents had money and had been successful, so I thought it would be ok to just ride along that wave and see where I ended up.

I always needed money though, which was always handed over after a one hour lecture about how useless I was in life. Did I mention my parents split up? Well, although this was not a happy period for myself or my mother, and one which I spent years avoiding thinking about, it did provide me with a unique sort of leverage. A way to manipulate both parents into handing over their hard earned cash, and instead of only being able to do it once, I could do it twice (until they started asking each other if I had asked for money).

Years of unrest followed. Job, fired, no job; job, left job, no job; except now I was going for very good jobs in the information technology industry, and no-one could understand what I was playing at.

“Why do you keep getting fired?” they all asked. “Everyone really liked you, then it all fell apart.”

Well to be honest with you, I'd had enough of them. I was always very nice to everyone in the beginning and I respected my bosses. After all, I had been brought up very well (to be polite), but then I started to see what they couldn't see about themselves – that they were useless,

uninteresting people, who didn't really know what they were doing! (so I thought).

They started to dislike this obviously threatening behaviour from one of their subordinates and summarily had me fired (or I got wind of it and hastily tendered my resignation and left my company car keys at reception).

It all seems such a long time ago now, but it was only 1999 when I left my “semi” comfortable life to embark on world travel and see where the wind took me. Australia was first, where I travelled aimlessly, spending money on enjoyment, and gaining new experiences, spending thousands on learning new things that at first grabbed my interest, but then faded away leaving me with nothing but experience and an empty wallet. Interesting to note was my approach to employment: No different to home. Job. Leave job. No Job. The trouble was, I just wasn't interested in anything, but I knew that there was something I wanted to do but I couldn't quite work out what it was. It wasn't like a religious calling, more a selfish need to do more exciting things.

Then I met a girl, who was also travelling and we fell in love. It wasn't really love at first sight – we really didn't like each other at all. She was a vegetarian and I couldn't understand it. She didn't drink, smoke or take drugs, but she wasn't really much interested in saving the world either. She just existed, not doing any harm. I carried on drinking too much, smoking too much and generally having a good time.

We got together and travelled down to sydney; and for the first time in a long time, I was happy. I carried on travelling, experiencing, learning new things, albeit external skills and experiences, until 2002.

I am not quite sure what happened, but something, whatever it was, made me suddenly care more. I'm not sure what I cared more about, but I was beginning to realise that I had to do something more, not career wise or travelling, but for the world!

I joined up with the amnesty international urgent action network to help stop people being tortured or executed, but did nothing else for the next two years until something changed. It was a kind of instantaneous slap in the face wake up call. I suddenly realised that everything I had been doing was not meaningless but was just a selfish self-indulgent party I had been living my whole life.

I decided to do something to help myself and others , although I wasn't sure what. I observed life in the cities, in the country, on the beach; and started observing myself every day in every action. It drove everyone crazy. I would keep pointing things out, and people would patiently listen.

After boring my friends and family to tears for over a year I decided to start writing down what was troubling me. I wrote the words down and suddenly realised I had an awful lot of words but no way to express them. “The natural mind – waking up” was born. This book would be my revolution for myself.

I started to write it and two and a half years later I still am.

Like life, the book is a process which has evolved every day out of new experiences, new understanding and observation. This book can never truly be finished as I am forever in a state of learning, but I hope it gives you as much insight reading it as I got writing it.

Are you ready?

Contents

As there is no specific order to read this book, there are no chapters, but if you wish to read this book as I wrote it, then you can follow the topic guide below. Please note that although it is presented in A – Z format over the three volumes, you will find that you need to jump between volumes in order to follow the way it was written.

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A

A c c e p t a n c e

The mental attitude that something is believable and should be
accepted as true

•

The state of being acceptable and accepted

Accept nothing that anyone says to be true
Only if you experience it will you truly know



Iwould like to start by contradicting myself, so please accept my apologies. There is just one thing I would like you to start accepting, although it is a brave person that does so. That is, accepting yourself for who you are. This acceptance is the first step on the way to awareness of self, and the world around you.

So many of us start by trying to change ourselves and/or our environment around us. This is precisely the mistake I made when I embarked on my journey of self-exploration, several years ago. I thought that by changing *me*, I would become a happier, more fulfilled person immediately. What I found, was that I was resisting the change. Half of me wanted to change, and the other half did not. Millions of you around the world will know what I mean.

I mentioned in the introduction that I bought many self-help books, and studied yoga, amongst other things, in a half-hearted attempt to

change. What was I changing? Anything and everything I didn't like about myself – only it didn't work the way I expected it to.

I found that the more I tried to change, and the more I couldn't, the more anxious I became. I began to question my ability to fundamentally change. I tried giving up smoking but I couldn't, so I bought more books and cd's on giving up smoking, and became more and more frustrated the more I kept smoking. I bought books on becoming less angry, and although I felt slightly less angry in certain situations, it was only superficial. Deep inside I knew I still had anger within me. All of this attempted change was making me feel worse and worse! Why was I putting myself through this? Why was I bothering?

I stayed like this for three years, constantly wrestling with myself, until one day it came to me that, it was only when I accepted who I was, that I could transcend it. So I did! Sounds too easy? Well it was!

It doesn't matter if you are too fat, too angry, too obsessive, too controlling, or too violent; once you say, "I accept myself for who I am" you are dealing with the whole. It is when you divide yourself into the "I" that wants to change," and the "other" that does not, that the trouble begins; do you follow what I am trying to say here?

When you start a conversation with yourself that says "I," you have created division, and you are not acting as a whole. It is only when the division is resolved through acceptance, and awareness, without the use of language, that the process can begin. It is only then that you will see clearly.

How many of us spend our days having conversations with ourselves, chiding ourselves about things we have said, people we have upset, and things we have done, but not "meant" to? I'm sure we all have. There is no point in saying; "I shouldn't have got angry with my wife last night," "I shouldn't have hit that man," "I should have gone to the gym," "I shouldn't have eaten that huge burger and chips," "I should lose weight," or "I should spend more time with my family." If you were going to do any of those things, you would have done them; right? Do not torment yourself by saying "Why can't I change," or "why can't I be a better father/mother/friend/lover/human being?" You are just perfect the way you are. You are you. Accept it.

Accept what you are. Accept what you do. Accept what you say. Accept that you are a wonderful human being. Accept that you are a creator of joy in the world. Accept that you are violent. Accept that you are too fat. Accept that you hurt people with your words and your actions.

Do *not* try to change

Change without acceptance and awareness is an external process created through division – division of self. Accept yourself and become whole. Once you have accepted yourself, just start to pay attention to your words, your thoughts and your actions. Do not judge them; do not interact with them, just watch silently.

I am sorry to keep repeating myself about accepting yourself, but it really is *most* important that you do. But don't take my word for it. Look into it yourself!

You may say, "What if I don't want to accept myself?" Well, my answer to you is don't. I am not here to force you to do anything you don't want to do, merely to point things out you may, or may not have been aware of. Do you understand what I am trying to discuss with you here?

What I must stress though, is that we are talking about acceptance of yourself, not acceptance of the intolerable situations that surround us on this planet. In fact, we must not accept the violence, the greed, the power, the armies, and the weapons, to name but a few! But that is another topic.

The other point I must make is that acceptance does not equal ignorance. It's all very well to say, "Yes, I accept I am a wife beater, and a drunk, but actually, I don't care," and then carry on doing it. Some of you may take me to task on this and say, "What is the point of him accepting himself as a drunk and wife beater, if he continues to be a wife beater and a drunk?"

On the surface, it's a good argument. But how do you expect him to change? Shall we force him? Shall we hold him down, until he agrees he will change? Of course not! What we want to do is help him see who, and what he is. Only then, can the true work of transformation begin inside him. It can never be an external process.

Over the years, many people have tried to encourage, cajole, bribe, or threaten me into changing. "Be more like this, alan; don't do it this way, alan; why are you doing that, alan; you should change," and little good it did me. It was only through acceptance of who I was, and awareness of myself in action, that the transformation began.

Don't try to force it. Relax into the acceptance and you will start to notice a difference almost straight away. What kind of difference is anybody's guess! But you will notice a difference.

We also have to accept something else, and that is the power of nature. We have little understanding of how nature works, yet we meddle with it all the time; from setting off nuclear explosions, to damming rivers. We have no idea of the damage we are causing to the planet and, let's face it, destruction on a large scale has only started happening in the last hundred years, when full-scale industrialisation has gripped the world.

I do not want to be one who preaches impending doom, but at the rate we're exploiting the world, something has to give. Do you agree?

We have recently seen the devastating effect of a tsunami on a coastline, and there have been hurricanes, cyclones, floods, and earthquakes, all causing death in their path; but the thing we have to remember, as we watch people screaming, and ambulances carrying away the injured, is that nature isn't "evil," it's not "doing" this to us deliberately! We just happen to have expanded our territories into areas where these natural events occur. I say events, because it is only us that sees it as a disaster. The rest of the planet just moves on.

Unfortunately, the reason it hits us so hard, is that we believe everything we create should be permanent. We believe that all our possessions, wealth, and property will always be there for us, no matter what. It is because we are so attached to these items, and the status they give us in society, that we find it so hard to let them go. On the television, we see pictures of people crying, not because they've lost a loved one, but because their house was flooded and they had lost all their possessions.

If we are to accept ourselves in the world, we have to accept that nature is more powerful than we are, and we cannot control it, nor should we try to. This earth was created by natural forces of such power; we couldn't start to imagine it. If you want any evidence of power in nature, you just have to look at the sun.

We had better start accepting and respecting nature, and realise that everything is impermanent, ready to be swept away at nature's whim, and that if nature decides it's time to pull the plug on the earth, no amount of money, gold, sports cars, or designer suits will be able to stop it! That should give you give you something to think about!

A d d i c t i o n 1

Being abnormally tolerant to and dependent on something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming (especially alcohol or narcotic drugs)

•

An abnormally strong craving

My Voice

I can hear it, can you?
The voice in my head that says; let's just have one, maybe two
Try as I might, fight, fight, fight
I always give in to the craving

Straight down to the pub, I feel a little strange
I feel dazed, and confused, why am I here?
I feel guilt and I feel shame
It's not going to happen again
I'll never touch another drop, after this shot

Last hangover was death
I felt I would die
I felt anxious, I felt crazed
I felt like running away
Why did I drink until dawn the next day?

Now I remember the day I got drunk
It felt like a calling, a job to be done
you'll drink until you're happy, don't answer back
and so I obeyed, until my whole world went black

And here I am again, preparing to drink
standing in line, waiting for service
anticipation, my heart races faster
I know it's not good, but I just can't help it

The thought of the sweet liquid, warming my heart
the laughter I'll share, the fun I will have
then I hear the voice, urging me on
let's just have one drink; it's nice to feel nice

No! I hear you this time
It's over, my friend
I see you this time
You are me, but I am not you
I grab my coat and head for the door

I can only assume it's a mistake, what do you think? Some design flaw; something nature, the universe, or evolution overlooked. How could it be possible that the human body, the most advanced system on the planet, or indeed the galaxy (perhaps), can actively want something that isn't good for it?

Now, I am not a scientist or psychologist, but in the face of true adversity, we know that humans will struggle to survive. Throughout history, there are stories of courage where people have survived, in what most would consider, hopeless situations. In fact, humans will do anything to survive. It is part of our built-in evolutionary program to keep the species alive – to avoid extinction at all costs.

There will always be some scientist who tells you that a glass of red wine a day is beneficial to your health, and because we love drinking, we take

their advice. If they told us a glass of wine a day was bad for us, how would we feel then?

Remember at the beginning of the twentieth century, when they told us cigarettes were good for us? "*Cigarettes Help with Asthma*," said the poster. I don't think we could find many scientists who would agree today. So, we have to take a different approach, you and I. We have to investigate why we drink, smoke, and take drugs, and why ultimately, we become addicted to them.

Governments, religious leaders, social welfare groups, and people of influence, all talk about a "war on drugs." This all sounds very noble, but what are they declaring war *on*? Are they declaring "war" on the people for taking the drugs, or the drugs themselves?

We will deal with narcotic drugs in the drugs topic, but what I want to know is, why deal with such intensity on just one section of the things that addict us.

Believe what you will, but most people do not take "illegal" drugs, though millions and millions of people drink and smoke. The cost to our society (society meaning you, me, and everyone else who lives on this planet) of alcohol and cigarettes is immeasurable. I am not talking about money. I am talking about a society that condones and accepts alcohol and cigarettes as a fully-fledged member of the community. Let's look into this a little more closely. If drugs like ecstasy and marijuana are illegal, why isn't alcohol?

I don't know if you've ever seen people out on the streets late at night, coming out of the bars. There's always people drunk, fighting, being sick, falling over, or urinating in the street. Police are inevitably called: An ambulance for the stab victim after a drunken brawl, the girl needing her stomach pumped, the lad passed out in a doorway.

Despite what the government would have you know, most drugs do not make you act in this way. In fact, someone who had smoked a lot of marijuana would probably be unable, or unwilling to leave the chair they smoked it in, let alone start a fight on the street!

Before I am accused of being pro-drugs and anti-government, I would add that I am merely illuminating the point I am making about the different emphasis and priorities our society places on different addictive substances.

**Do the monkeys snort cocaine?
Do the birds smoke marijuana?
Do the fish drink beer?
Do the elephants inject heroin?**

I hear some of you laughing at my silly example, but be serious for a moment. Do they? Well, if they don't, and we are the most intelligent life form on the planet, why do we do it?

Have you ever watched the birds in the trees or the animals in the forest? Have you seen the cows in the fields, the ducks in the pond, or the great beasts on the african plains? You don't see them sitting round the watering hole smoking marijuana with a beer in hand. If you have, the photo would be worth rather a lot of money.

So here we are in 2006, millions of people drinking too much alcohol, taking too many drugs, and smoking too many cigarettes, all of which are poisonous to our system; a living system, so finely balanced, yet still able to process the worst we can throw at it – a truly remarkable piece of machinery.

Let's look at our car, the family pride and joy for a moment. Would you put cigarettes and marijuana into the tank to help it run (I have excluded alcohol, as some cars can now run on types of alcohol)? Would you add cocaine to chicken to make it healthier? Would you add tobacco to your salad dressing to make it taste nicer? Would you give your newborn baby a glass of wine with their meal? Of course you wouldn't, and neither would I. It is unimaginable to any of us.

So why do we willingly put these toxins into our own systems? Because, somewhere along the long line of evolution we have addicted ourselves, and the body wrongly mistakes toxic chemicals for nutrients. Surely, no intelligent system would design itself with such an inherent built-in weakness – a need for something that unbalances or poisons it. As we have already discussed, the human being is the most advanced system on the planet, the only living organism on the planet capable of conscious thought, of constructing complex ideas, of philosophising about the nature of themselves. Other animals just live in the world, eating and drinking exactly what their systems need to remain in balance, and procreating. You wouldn't see an elephant hunting a zebra, or a lion eating tomatoes.

Let's us now go into this again. Why do we take drugs, smoke cigarettes, and drink alcohol, if it is not for the benefit of the system?

What is the one thing that makes us take these substances, even against our better judgement? I'll offer a word:

Pleasure

A fundamental feeling that is hard to define but that people desire to experience

Pure pleasure. If it isn't nice, and it's not good for us, why do we take it? If you don't like olives, you don't eat them, do you? Pure pleasure. The alcohol, the narcotic drug, the cigarette, they all bind to the pleasure centres of the brain. The only problem with pure pleasure is the cost associated with it. That cost is addiction.

You see, when your brain experiences pure pleasure, it wants more of it, your body wants more of it, and it motivates you to go and get it, whether it is good for the balance of the system or not. It has tasted the chemical sensation of pleasure and it isn't about to let it go.

Narcotic drugs – in their present form – have only been in wide supply for the past forty years or so, and used to be prohibitively expensive for the average wage earner, so it makes sense that society is more addicted to cheaper products like alcohol and tobacco, which have been in existence for many hundreds of years and are legal. When I say legal, I mean approved by the government as acceptable for human consumption, because they know they get huge revenue from tobacco and alcohol sales. Lots of politicians also smoke and drink, and if they banned it, they would be pretty sure of not getting into power next time around! To drink alcohol and smoke is our right; it would be as undemocratic as banning shopping at the supermarkets.

When insight comes a knocking

Please read on a little with me here, even if you don't think you may be addicted to any substance.

It is a shocking moment indeed when you get some insight into yourself, isn't it? The moment you realise something you are doing is not serving your best interests; something you may have ignored for many years and now you notice it! You notice the smell on your clothes, the yellow nicotine fingers, the bad breath, the smell of alcohol in the morning, the headache that's killing you, the depressed feeling that you got drunk again, or did drugs when you had been clean for a month. You suddenly notice you crave a fix, or a cigarette. It's a terrible feeling, and I

know it well. You have been awoken to what is commonly known as addiction.

A personal story

Even when you want to stop, it is all around you, legal and illegal. Why? Because your peer group is still there; be it the smokers in the office, the seasoned drinkers in your pub, or the junkies you get your fix with. I know. I was the information technology specialist who worked for the big companies, that no one would have thought couldn't give up cigarettes, let alone alcohol, as I never showed the slightest indication I was addicted.

This is probably you as well. Believe it or not, most addicted people are employed and live a relatively normal life and are shielded from view by those around them (such as family or friends, who may also be addicted and who give an air of normalcy to the situation), and any time I wanted to stop smoking, colleagues would say, "come on alan, we miss having you downstairs for a smoke," and like a fool, I followed.

My friends from the pub would phone me to ask where I was. If I said, "I'm not drinking tonight," I'd get a reply like "What, you? Not drinking? Come on alan, see you in the pub in half an hour," and with huge anxiety about starting drinking again, but with a sneaky bit of excitement, I prepared myself to get drunk.

And so it went on, week after week, and year after year. I would try to avoid being invited anywhere in case I had to drink (something, which once I started, was mighty enjoyable and great fun).

Everywhere I went, whether it be to new countries, having new experiences, or starting a new life, I found myself in a group at the bar, drinking until I was drunk (fortunately I only ever tried drugs a handful of times, due to the huge anxiety and fear I was left with the next day). I tried everything to block it out of my mind; I tried every technique available, purchased courses on the internet, bought self-help books, and I even went for therapy, where I was told that my addictions were a result of trauma in my childhood.

Admittedly, my parents' separation had a large effect on me, and that may have contributed to me trying to numb the pain with alcohol, but I also liked the feeling I got from it and it doesn't explain why I couldn't quit when I wanted to, does it? It's all too easy to look for reasons why we started, but not look at reasons for stopping. This was one of the big

problems for me. Although on the surface I wanted to stop, and I felt as if everyone was trying to get me to drink or smoke, I had no real commitment. I would have stopped if it was easy, but as I explained previously, pure pleasure has a cost, and this time the cost was that it was difficult to stop. This was a complete surprise to me, as I thought I would be able to quit any time. How wrong I was.

Addicted – true or false?

Let me ask those of you do not believe you are addicted to alcohol or cigarettes, a question. If I asked you to quit smoking right now, never go down the pub again, never have another glass of wine with your meal, or never lift your glass to celebrate another birthday, what would you say? What if I told you you could never drink or smoke again? How would you feel? Happy, relieved, calm, or maybe just a little bit nervous?

“I could stop if I really wanted to, I just don’t want to,” you plead. “I just enjoy a pint with the lads, a cigarette after lunch, or a nice glass of wine at dinner, I don’t need it, I just want it. After all, there aren’t too many pleasures left in life.”

And there it is; once the brain has tasted pleasure, it isn’t going to let it go without a fight, and remember that the people who don’t think they’re addicted, need it too. “I just enjoy it.” “It’s just one or two.” “It’s purely social.” “I only smoke/take drugs /drink socially.”

So why take these substances, if it is only to be sociable? Let’s go into what this could mean, shall we? Is it the need to conform? Is it being afraid to say no, wanting to be accepted, and joining in with the group? Well, partly I would say, as I know from personal experience that when I am out with friends it is hard to say no, and still be a part of the group. This is where it gets rather difficult, as where do you separate the “me” from the “we?”

We all want to be part of the “in” group; we want to be liked, accepted, with people laughing at our jokes; it feels nice, doesn’t it, to be wanted? Being included in the “in” group requires that you conform to the majority of the group. Now I am not saying that all groups drink, smoke, or take drugs, but that is the subject we are dealing with here.

I would suggest that most people, when they get together, enjoy a drink or two, not to get drunk, just merely to be sociable, would you agree? Say for example, you always had a beer when I offered you one, and this week you have decided to quit drinking, so you can concentrate

on getting fit. Have you noticed how awkward you begin to feel at social gatherings, hoping that no one offers you a drink/joint/cigarette “just in case” you say yes, then hating yourself in the morning for not being able to quit? “Why am I such an *idiot*?” you ask yourself.

At this point, one of two interesting things begins to happen. Either you decide to keep drinking/smoking/taking drugs in order not to be excluded, in which case you will probably start to hate yourself more, or if you are serious about quitting, you start finding excuses not to go to group gatherings where alcohol/drugs/cigarettes are consumed. Soon you find that you stop phoning your friends, or they stop phoning you so much, as you no longer have the one strong bond that keeps you together, and you start to seek out new friends.

Let me ask you another question, what is it that bonds groups together? Surely, it is a common interest, something you enjoy doing together, like sport, learning, arts appreciation, walking, or any number of other hobbies. If you are in a group where addictive substances are not the main reason to be together, then you will probably find that it is easier to stay friends with people when you quit. If you go running with people and they go for a drink afterwards, it is fairly easy just to say, “no thanks,” without any further inquiry on the group’s part. It is only where the common bond is the drugs, smoking, or alcohol, that you will be rejected by, or will reject, the group when quitting.

You see, if your group’s main activity is drinking in the pub, smoking outside at work, or taking drugs, the substance is more important than the individual, and you can easily be replaced by someone else who conforms.

If you stop drinking, and all your friends were from the pub, what have you got in common with the group any more? You may have done things together, like sports, days out, even holidays together, and spent time in each other’s houses, but when the drinking stops, you will find you begin to have less and less in common. It’s not like the example of the runner who quits drinking; he still has a common bond with the group. You do not.

So, do you still smoke/drink/take drugs to be “sociable?” Is it necessary? Do you need to do it? And before you all answer immediately, “Yes I do want to be sociable; I like to have a drink with my friends, it doesn’t mean I’m addicted, and I’m not going to change for anybody,” go back to the beginning of the “addicted or not?” section.

So can you now live without your substances? Have we enquired enough into this subject so we feel happy without them? Can you now live a

wonderful life without them? Will you be more successful? Probably not. This is because your mind is still constructing arguments why you should still drink/smoke/take drugs.

**Once the brain has tasted pleasure
It isn't going to let it go without a fight**

Many of you will now feel as though I have not dealt with the matter of addiction, that you are the normal one, and you are probably thinking that addiction means two bottles of vodka a day, drug addicts sitting in doorways, or the chain-smoking office worker who smokes sixty a day. Perhaps you are thinking of homeless people urinating down their legs whilst consuming a can of ultra strong beer, or dirty syringes in run down housing estates. Although these are stereotype addictions portrayed by the mass media, it doesn't mean you are not addicted. Remember at the beginning of the section where we noted:

“How could it be possible that the human body, the most advanced system on the planet, or indeed the galaxy, can actively want something that isn't good for it?”

Is this not about the brain making a terrible mistake, wrongly wanting something it believes can help it survive? I cannot believe any of you would still say, that you, the most advanced system on the planet requires or needs poisons and toxins to be healthy. This cannot be a matter of personal choice such as “If I want to, I WILL put my arm in the wood chopping machine!”

We make personal choices every day, some of which are good for us, like changing career, changing our mortgage company, or moving to a new country. These may seem like important choices to you, but they have negligible impact on the healthy functioning of the system, whereas toxic addictive substances can have immense impact on society. If you still don't think we are all addicted in some way, and that it isn't vitally important we solve this for the benefit of humanity, *and* you wish to move to a more *important* topic, please finish here!

Transcending addiction

I hope all of you are still reading, because it is important for us – and for future generations to come – to understand together how we can transcend addiction. For those of you who have never tried drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes, you are indeed fortunate, for you will never have to know the battles that rage inside when one tries to stop. Not always wildly desperate cravings, but more, a subtle voice, which is the addictive part of the brain, gently coaxing you, letting you know that everything will be all right if you just give in; that you need the substance, that it will help you get over the bad day, or the good day, and that it will bring happiness and joy, if you just give in.

The voice will probably sound more like, “Phew that was a tough day, I’m stressed, I fancy (*innocuous short form of desire/want/crave/need*) a drink/cigarette/joint/hit,” and it will be in your own voice. It’s *very* sneaky, this brain of ours! Always trying to get us to do things *it* wants. Although it doesn’t keep telling us to steal, break windows, walk in front of trains, jump off buildings, or kill people, unless it is malfunctioning in some way.

I see addiction as a malfunction of the brain’s normal working patterns. In the same way walking in front of a train is not good for us, neither is consuming these substances, otherwise everybody would be doing it all the time (like drinking water).

So why do we let our brain influence us in consuming these substances? One word: Pleasure. Instant pleasure. Instant relief. Escape from reality. Escape from reality through deep, deep pleasure. And in order to get this deep, deep pleasure, you don’t need to have attended university, or possess any special skills; you just need a little money, and the ability to lift a drink, inhale smoke, pick up a needle, or snort some powder.

This is very easy pleasure to attain, and your brain knows this. This isn’t the kind of pleasure we get on completion of a marathon, a 100 kilometre cycle ride, or a 10 kilometre swim. That kind of pleasure is difficult to achieve. It requires commitment, dedication, training, and a huge amount of physical exertion, but you get deep pleasure (tired but happy), from a series of chemicals released in the brain called endorphins, the so-called “natural-high.” But you don’t need to be an extreme sportsman to get these endorphins flowing; any physical exercise

outdoors will make you feel better. You may be exhausted after only a short time, but happy you did it, and after a shower, very, very relaxed.

This isn't the kind of pleasure most of us seek, though. We're after a quick fix, a quick "high" (albeit an unnatural one), generated by alcohol/cigarettes/drugs, working fast on the pleasure centres of the brain, and extremely short lasting. As with anything quickly gained, there is a cost, and that cost is suffering – from the terrible cough in the morning, the nauseous feeling, the dry mouth, to feeling tense, incredible tiredness, a little more impatience, or just feeling a bit shaky. These are the signs of withdrawal.

You don't need to have been hooked on cigarettes, heroin, or whisky for twenty years to experience withdrawal; just one night out with friends should do it. Withdrawal, a word that no one likes to hear or experience. It is the body's way of letting you know that the high you experienced last night came at a cost.

What? You didn't think you were going to get away with it, did you? You ingested toxic chemicals that unnaturally affected and influenced your body and brain, which resulted in an unnatural high, and you thought you would just carry on as if nothing happened? Remember, the human body is the most advanced system on the planet, and is a finely balanced piece of precision genetic engineering.

You know what happens when you put diesel fuel into a car that takes unleaded, don't you? Your nice new car stops working. It is incompatible with the system. Except, the one problem with addictive substances is that over many centuries, the body has adapted itself to efficiently metabolise these toxins, resulting in only slight withdrawal symptoms. Even the withdrawal cycle from heroin (whilst pretty unpleasant) is relatively short. If we were not able to metabolise these substances, we would probably die. Is this not the main reason we carry on as we do? Let me explain.

Because the cost of withdrawal is not that great, we have learned to adapt our habits, in so much as if we drink too much one day, or overdo it (only measured by how severe the withdrawal is), we pull back the next day, have a detox day or week, until we feel healthy enough to do it again. The most intelligent species on the planet? I don't think so!

We have learned to adapt our consumption of these toxins so we only suffer minor withdrawals. How do I know I have smoked/drunk too much, or taken too many drugs? Well, my body will tell me the next day. So being a cunning species, we say, "next time, I will only have five pints

of beer/fifteen cigarettes/one ecstasy tablet or two joints of marijuana, as I know I can handle that level of withdrawal!”

Is this not beginning to seem a little absurd to you now? We are actively calculating how much pleasure we want to buy (consumption), and balancing it with how much we are willing to pay (withdrawal).

We eat healthy foods, balance our protein/carbohydrate intake, take vitamin supplements, drink soy milk, play sport, detox regularly, have holistic body treatments, go to spas, beautify our bodies, go to the gym, meditate, get in touch with our inner child, go to healing workshops, become “more spiritual.” Then, it’s off for a few glasses of wine.

This is turning into a joke! Can you see it too? We never have to justify going to have a massage or going for a run, but our addicted brain still comes up with reasons to have addictive substances! I’ve just had the most wonderful macrobiotic, organic vegetarian meal, and now I’m off for a bottle of wine with my good friend to catch up on all the gossip! We want to be good (balanced), but that little part of our brain keeps up the chatter. In the following example below, drugs and cigarettes are mostly interchangeable with drink.

Excuses our brain comes up with

I just fancy one.

I’m going for a pint; I’ve had a hard day.

Let’s go out for a few drinks tonight.

I’m really angry about what happened; I need a drink.

She really annoyed me, with what she said, I’m off to the pub.

It’s alan’s birthday! We should go out for a few drinks to help him celebrate.

I’m lonely without him, I’ll just go for a few drinks and see if anyone’s out tonight.

I hate my boss. He’s so horrible to me; I’m going to have a bottle of wine when I get home.

It’s our anniversary; we should celebrate with a nice bottle of champagne.

I’ve been so stressed lately; I just need a few to relax.

I’m bored, there’s nothing to do I’m going for a drink.

This is a lovely meal; a glass of red wine would go down nicely.

If we’re going round to their house, we should take some drinks with us.

I’m really glad I passed my exams; let’s get drunk.

I’ve got a new job! Let’s celebrate!

Amazing, isn't it? If we look closely, we can see that the alcohol/drugs/cigarettes actually exist independently of the thought or action. Isn't a nice meal, just a nice meal? If you're bored, find something to do. Yes, it is hard being lonely, stress is unpleasant, and it's great you've got a new job, these are normal things in life, but does everything we think about or do require alcohol to be present?

Let's look more closely. If it really were necessary, we would be required to take it by law to operate machines at work, drive our cars, do exams, do the end of year accounts, type better, or play better sport. Of course, this would be ridiculous to suggest, and no one would agree with me. So let us say that alcohol slows us down (at the very least), where we start to lose control of certain motor functions. Our speech slurs, our balance starts to go as the drug takes over more of our brain, our perceptions alter, and our thoughts change. The stomach finds it hard to deal with and we become nauseous. We become less coherent in dealing with complex subjects; and we become almost animal like, in groups banding together, ready to challenge imagined slights or disrespect from opposing groups or individuals:

“What are you looking at; do you want a fight about it?”

“He was looking at my girlfriend, let's get him.”

No matter how many times your brain disputes all this, the only reason it is doing so is to satisfy its need for these substances. It has no concept of consequences, resulting from consumption or over consumption, and frankly doesn't care. It doesn't care if you lose your job because you were drunk too many times in the morning, or that you have started to steal to support a heroin habit, or that you are struggling with walking up a hill because you can't breathe after smoking so much. Even the bad times are secretly hidden, and all you remember are the good times.

This part of the brain that is addicted has no concept of reality, although the mistaken requests it makes are real enough, as anyone who feels desperate for a cigarette well knows. Whether you believe you are addicted or not, the fact remains that whilst you keep smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, or taking drugs, your brain – and therefore you – remains addicted and you are under its control.

Stopping anything is a stressful time, as the brain doesn't like change that may involve it not getting what it wants; and now I'm talking about chocolate, coffee, cheese, or chicken – I'm talking about anything you really, really love. It's funny that we use the word “love” in this way, something that is normally reserved for people we deeply care about; the

brain has manipulated our language, and used it to its own addictive advantage!

“I’d love a cigarette! Mmm, I’d love a cigarette right now”

And that’s it! The body motivates itself and the brain directs you to the nearest pack of cigarettes or cigarette shop. Quick! Go now. When you get it, you say, “aaaah, that feels better!” Who do you think really feels better, you, or the addiction in the brain?

Of course, it’s not the super intelligent you. It’s not *you*, the most sophisticated system on the planet, eating soy beans and organic rice after your yoga class, who needs a cigarette, is it? Even though you told me earlier how you just wanted one, that’s all, how you deserve one because you’re stressed. Surely not?

If you can’t get any cigarettes because it’s too late or the shop is closed, how do you feel? A lot more stressed than you did at work? I bet! You see, the stress at work was normal. Pressure to finish work before a deadline is stressful, but this, this is different. This is you, stressed because you can’t get a highly poisonous substance to breathe into your lungs (the things that allow you to exist on this planet, by the way).

**Let’s take a moment to contemplate this before we take
action...**

This is the moment; not a choice, but a window in time, where you are fully aware of yourself. Here and now, make a positive personal commitment to yourself, not to anyone else, to do what is best for your system. If you think of it as giving up something, you will always feel as though you are missing out (even if it is on toxic substances).

You are making this personal commitment – as I have done – to yourself, to acknowledge that you are the most advanced, intelligent being on the planet. You have greater abilities than any other living organism. You are able to make complex decisions on the future of the human race, you have the power to destroy as well as create. *You* are making this personal commitment, not the piece of faulty machinery that is the addicted brain.

**“I acknowledge that I am the most intelligent being on the planet
I will do what is best for my system
If I do not do what is best for my system
I acknowledge that I am not the most intelligent being on the planet”**

And that is all it takes to free yourself! Total freedom from addiction!
Right Now!

I can hear you saying you don't feel any different, and it can't be as easy as all that, because you have tried a hundred methods to give up smoking and nothing's worked, and this is useless, and you knew it would be a waste of time, and you don't want to give up drinking anyway and “Well, I can't be bothered with this, it's too difficult.”

That's because you are still you. Nothing magical happened. You made an important acknowledgement to yourself which does not bind you to not smoking, drinking or taking drugs, it just places you in the centre of an important stage, yours.

You see, your stage is the one you play from; the one where it's only you acting; there is no supporting cast, no crew, no stand-ins, just you; and how you act is for you, and only you to decide. The script has not been written for you. No one is waiting to prompt you; no one cares if you mess up your lines. In the end, it is only you. This stage is your life and everybody has his or her own stage too. I have mine, the people in the pub have theirs, the people outside the office smoking have theirs, the people injecting heroin have theirs. They have to decide how to act on their stage, and how to act when around other actors' stages. If we pay too much attention to the other actors; if we worry what they think of us, or that they will not like our performances, we get trapped into only pleasing them, instead of writing our own script.

Imagine now that you are walking around on your stage, and quietly listen to the script you are reading from. “I will smoke if I want.” “If I want to drink, I will.” “No one's going to stop me doing what I want.” “If I want to get high that's my prerogative.” “I'm not affecting anyone else, leave me alone.” “Look, I'm just having one more pint, all right?” “It just calms me down a bit, that's all.” “Don't tell *me* what to do. I'm an adult!” “All my friends do it.” “There's nothing else to do.” “You're not going to change me.” Can I stop there? Not much of a script, is it? I don't think anyone would buy that in hollywood, do you?

Hollywood Agent: What's the script about?
You: Well, it's about this guy and all he does is go around defending his right to do something that is bad for him and the rest of the world.
Hollywood Agent: Is that it?
You: Yes.
Hollywood Agent: I think we'll pass.

When you aggressively defend something that is not good for you, and the other actors on their stages can see it too (people who are not addicted), you now have to find other actors who share the same opinions as you (the forming of the group at the pub, or the smokers outside at the office).

As actors who can see the truth of addiction find you a bit weak, this leaves you centre stage again, only able to play to a select audience who like your script. Can you follow what I'm trying to get at here? This is the script you have written, and with no changes possible, you plan to follow your script exactly until the day you die.

But what if someone had cleverly tampered with your script without you noticing – in your own handwriting – making you think that this script was all your own work, and you thought you always had to follow it? Fortunately, you are in a position to write a new script, one that the tamperer will not be able to get at. One that allows the actors to interact on a new level without the chains of the old script. One that states:

**I acknowledge that I am the most intelligent being on the planet
I will do what is best for my system
I acknowledge that I alone control the script of my life
and in creating a new script, I acknowledge that I am not a slave to my
brain's faulty instructions, and will never let my script be tampered
with again to bind me to addiction**

The stage is now yours:

Hollywood Agent: What's the script about?
You: Well, it's about this guy who suffers from addiction his whole life, defending his right to do something that is bad for him and the rest of the world, but through understanding of himself and the stage he plays on, he comes to understand

how the life he has been defending, was never based in reality, and how once he had made a personal commitment to himself to only do good things for his system – a system he acknowledged as being the most advanced system on the planet, he transcended addiction.

Hollywood Agent:

Is that it?

You:

Yes.

Hollywood Agent:

I'll definitely buy that!

A d d i c t i o n 2

Being abnormally tolerant to and dependent on something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming (especially alcohol or narcotic drugs)

•

An abnormally strong craving

So, am I still in a state of addiction? Have I taken personal responsibility for my system, one I acknowledge is the most advanced on the planet? The truth is, unless you drink so much that you poison yourself, or overdose on drugs, or get lung cancer from smoking, you will probably manage to trickle on in life, happily addicted, without severe health problems.

Even those of you who are addicted at the moment, may eventually decide to quit all addictive substances, although it might take a health scare and a doctor to tell you that if you don't quit smoking/drinking/drugs, you will die. That's normally enough to get you, the most advanced being on the planet, to gain insight – which is knowledge – of yourself, your malfunctioning brain, and revolt in such a way that the change is instantaneous.

This is incredible isn't it? That only the fear of death, which is the end of all life, is enough to motivate us to do something that is good for our system. Even someone who believes in an afterlife would not be so stupid as to let themselves die before it was time; especially if it meant a slow and painful death.

You see, we're not good at handling pain are we? Remember the example of the hangover in addiction 1, where we are actively calculating how much pleasure we want to buy (consumption) and balancing it with how much we are willing to pay (withdrawal)? This means we know we can handle the after-effects of six pints of beer, twenty cigarettes, or one gram of cocaine, but we know that if we cross that boundary, we are going to suffer – and suffer we will.

I know when I've had enough of anything, but the brain keeps on demanding just a little bit more. Remember that this part of your brain knows nothing of suffering, it's just there for the good times. But you know it the next day, don't you? This is where the promises to yourself start, isn't it?

**I'll never drink again
I'll never touch drugs again
I'll never smoke again**

Do you recognise yourself here? I know I do. After every excess comes a realization – an insight. We know we've crossed the line on how much pain we can handle, and so we're ready to promise anything to make it stop! You tell yourself how stupid you are, and what an idiot you are! “That's it! I'm going to get healthy, eat properly, go to bed earlier, and start doing exercise.” Isn't this amazing? I think it is. What you are actually doing is making your personal commitment to yourself to acknowledge that you are the most advanced, intelligent being on the planet and that you will do what is best for your system. Remember when we stated:

*“I acknowledge that I am the most intelligent being on the planet
I will do what is best for my system”*

You are clear in the moment. You are aware of yourself, and you are being true to yourself at the same time. Right now, you have freed yourselves from addiction. You are one hundred percent free. But what happens the next day, and the next? Something very strange! The better

you feel, the more the body, which has also become addicted, starts craving, as the body is actually requiring these substances to continue its “normal” functioning.

Even though you have made your personal commitment to yourself, something else has started making demands, and this time they’re a lot stronger than the brain’s demands. So what we need to understand is that when the whole system becomes addicted, the personal commitment you have made will not normally be enough for most people to get over what is just the pain of withdrawal from the substances.

You will need to be willing to accept the pain as the sum cost of years of pleasure

Depending on the substances taken, and the volume consumed, you may notice slight discomfort up to full-blown withdrawal, which can be very unpleasant. These are physical withdrawal symptoms, and are unavoidable. You must be willing to accept that you will be in discomfort for anything up to about a week or two – but that’s all! That’s not too heavy a price to pay for say, twenty years of smoking, five years of hard drugs, or fifteen years of alcohol consumption, is it? A harder price to pay would be an early death, or another twenty years of wishing you could stop!

What we must all remember, is that this cost of physical withdrawal has the pay off of years more healthy living, not clouded by the need to satisfy your addictions, and freedom to make your life your own. Your stage will no longer be occupied by the addicted actor, you will see yourself differently, and other people will see you differently too.

Take a look at what’s in store!

You will not feel nervous about having to take a long flight in case you can’t smoke.

Your skin will look younger.

You won’t have to worry about going out in case you can’t smoke marijuana.

You will have different friends. People who like you for who you are and not because you get drunk at the pub.

Your clothes will not smell any more.

Your breath will not smell bad, and the staining on your teeth and fingers will begin to disappear.

You won't be afraid of driving in case you are over the alcohol limit.

You won't waste money on things that are not good for your system.

Your brain will start to feel more awake, free from the constant need to supply the body with addictive substances above all else.

Your system will be calmer and more balanced. Free from the withdrawal feelings that happen all the time.

You won't be motivated to get a fix in the middle of the night, you will sleep more soundly.

You will wake up earlier in the morning; you will not need a cigarette before you "wake up properly."

You will begin to see how addicted other people are.

You will begin to smell things more clearly.

You will taste food more.

You will be able to exercise more.

Above all, you will be free!

At the same time as physical withdrawal, you will have the brain telling you to smoke, drink, inject, snort – you name it, it will try anything. It is your body's messenger and it is communicating with you in your voice. This is nothing to be scared of, although it will feel unpleasant. When you see the addiction, it will back down and your voice will become fainter.

You will know when physical withdrawal has come to an end. You will not feel so nervous or anxious; your stomach will calm down, and your blood pressure and heart rate will regularise. In short, you will stop craving the drug. But the faulty brain will continue to be watching for opportunities to hook you back in.

Remember, once the brain has tasted pleasure, it won't let it go without a fight. The thing to remember is, you're through it; you are free, and as long as you remember your personal commitment to yourself:

*"I acknowledge that I am the most intelligent being on the planet
I will do what is best for my system"*

...you will never again feel the need to turn to addictive substances for pleasure. After all you've gone through, what's a bit of stress at work, or a problem in your relationship, or money worries? These are genuine issues to be addressed by you, not some lame excuse by your brain to start

feeding itself with toxins again. Of course, you could choose not to go through the short withdrawal period, not pay the cost of the pleasure – as you are the most advanced system on the planet, and able to make decisions on your own – but before you do, try to see who is making the decision...

You, or your addicted brain?

Remember, the addiction doesn't care what happens to the system. It exists independently and will exploit any situation to get what it wants. You are just the servant who picks up the glass, the servant who lights the cigarette, the servant who injects the heroin. You are the most intelligent, sophisticated being on the planet, can you honestly tell me you *don't* want to do what's best for your system?

Support for deep addictions: Action right now

Of course, for some of you this will not be enough. I know some people who are trapped in deep addiction, people who really want to stop doing what they know to be bad for their system. They really want to stop, but they just can't. They go to doctors, counselling, detox centres, they try everything; they even move country, but end up the same. They are desperate, but their brains and bodies keep demanding more and more, and will force them to do anything to get what they want.

The problem with addictive substances, is they cost money. Real cash is necessary, and the deeper you descend into addiction, the harder it is to maintain a normal life. Keeping a regular job becomes harder, and more and more money is required to satisfy the addiction. You start stealing, or perhaps engage in violent robberies; you will do anything to get the substance. Then you're caught. Up to court you go, where you may be sentenced to prison; where for a few pounds, someone will smuggle your substances in for you!

I empathise with all of you who are really suffering in this way, although I don't feel sorry for you. You are feeding the addiction by lifting up your glass to your mouth, by smoking, or by injecting. There is no hidden force controlling you. This is why it is vitally important to free yourself right now. This is the time to act.

For some, it's their circle of friends, their lack of money, family problems, and lack of employment that keeps them addicted; and for others, it's their circle of friends, their abundance of money, the perfect family, or their high stress job. Come on! Aren't you noticing a pattern here? Everybody gives a different reason for being addicted, always giving a reason why we should feel sorry for them. Poor things. But you all have one thing in common – the addiction. The addiction that exists independently to anything else. You see, if you are an unemployed smoker, and you stand next to a wealthy banker who smokes, what do you have in common? Smoking. If you drink because you are upset you have no job, what makes you different to the man who drinks because he can't handle the stress from too much highly paid work?

The need for alcohol drugs or cigarettes acts independently of any emotion

When you consume these substances, you are only fulfilling the need to satisfy a craving. No matter how you dress it up, you want the substance for the substances sake, and *not* to alleviate painful emotions. If I told you that going for a five kilometre run would help alleviate emotional pain, through the generation of endorphins, would you do it? No of course you wouldn't! Why? Because you want the substance.

Admit you want the substances now, and move forward. Stop deluding yourselves that you have to keep drinking or smoking because you're so stressed. Yes, stress exists, but you deal with stress by addressing the root cause of the stress; not covering it up with a fast acting painkiller. You are addicted to the feeling; the emotion of your substances, how they makes you feel, and how you wish you always felt like that. You may have problems which need to be worked through, but worked through they must be – not locked up.

Addictive substances make you feel good; you wouldn't take them if they didn't, would you? If cigarettes made you stressed, would you smoke them? If alcohol made you depressed, would you drink it? If marijuana made you paranoid, would you smoke it? But did you know that these substances can have exactly this effect on the system?

Stop taking the substances. Write down how you feel. Make a plan to do something better when you no longer have the substance addiction. Talk to someone. Feel how you feel.

In the beginning it's hard. You feel nervous, empty, shaky, anxious, nauseous, or sleep deprived. Hey, these substances are really good for you – just look what doom and gloom they offer you when you stop taking them! They are punishing you for daring to live a life without them. But you can.

Remember this. *You* are the most advanced, intelligent being on the planet, no one can take that away from you, and no matter how hard it is, you are doing the best for your system by stopping taking these substances. Imagine now, a free you; free of the need to consume addictive substances. Now imagine a powerful you; one who doesn't feel afraid every time someone offers him a cigarette, a pint of beer, or a joint. Imagine smelling the air as you have never smelled it before, tasting food as you have never tasted it before, and enjoying life as it was meant to be enjoyed – without addiction.

Start now.

A d d i c t i o n 3

Being abnormally tolerant to and dependent on something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming (especially alcohol or narcotic drugs)

•

An abnormally strong craving

I want to discuss another type of addiction with you; one that is not as easily identifiable as the ones covered in the previous sections. You see, in my mind we have the capacity to addict ourselves to anything, and this is one thing we really need to be careful of. I will continue to use the example of the faulty brain, as I believe that no healthily functioning brain would wish to crave a specific substance day after day, especially one that does not assist the system in any useful manner.

What do you think you need to have a healthy body and mind?

How about coffee, chocolate, biscuits, sweet, sugary soft drinks?

What about cars, sex, ice cream, tv, computer games, or shopping?

Either nature thinks it's funny watching all these supposed super-intelligent beings running around desperately addicted, or somewhere

along the long road of evolution, a mistake was made; one that is now costing us dearly in freedom. Look at the previous examples. How many of us indulge in at least half of them? I will take a guess at a lot, especially in the developed world, where money has enabled us to indulge ourselves as often as we want.

Why do you think we allow ourselves to be addicted?

One word: Pleasure

That's right. All things we consider good, worthwhile activities to spend our time on these days, are centred on one part of the brain: The pleasure part. Not the pleasure that comes from running a marathon, but easy pleasure – one you don't have to move too far to get, one where the cost is low, and the pleasure is great! Because your brain loves pleasure!

I would like to involve you in a little experiment, if that's all right? I'd like you all to visualize this scenario, if you will, and remember this is not a criticism of a specific lifestyle. I would like to explore how you think about these things, that's all.

It's 6.00 am as you crawl out of bed, have a nice hot shower, dress for work, and go downstairs. As you turn on the tv whilst preparing your breakfast, you drink a nice strong freshly brewed coffee, and hear the weatherman giving a grim forecast of the day to come.

"It's gonna be a cold one today, with a strong chance of snow."

"Oh, that's so inconvenient!" you think to yourself.

"Make sure the children wrap up warm today, honey. I've got to go to work," you shout upstairs to your wife.

Breakfast finishes, and you put on your big jacket, say goodbye to the wife and kids, and jump into your car. Ahh, it's so nice to get into your car on a cold day. You get the heater going, and whilst looking out at the wild weather outside, you turn the dial on your six-speaker cd player to your favourite music. Start the car and the two litre engine roars into life and off you drive, away from your suburban home to the city. After parking in the underground car park, you catch the lift to your warm climate controlled office.

Meanwhile, your wife is busy getting herself and the children ready. A quick splash of french perfume, and once her jacket's on jumps into her four-wheel drive family bus, and gets the heater on. At the end of the drive, she gives the nanny a ring on her mobile to remind her to turn on

the in-car dvd screens for the kids, so they don't get bored on their way to school; and peacefully, she heads down to her own office. She's got a couple of meetings in town, and they're only a short distance apart, but it makes sense to drive between them as it's freezing today.

Lunchtime comes, you meet your wife outside her office and drive to a nice seafood restaurant, where you have a terrine of wild salmon and tiger prawns, and she has lobster bisque, followed by red snapper served with fresh asparagus for both; and for dessert – fresh strawberries.

After lunch you both return to your offices, where you deal with emails, and have several meetings; whilst at your wife's office, she is briefed on an important business trip she has to make next month (she also makes a note on her laptop to make sure the nanny has organised the children's after-school activities whilst she will be away).

It's now about 7.00 pm, and it's snowing heavily, as you make your way home. Your wife arrived a short while ago, and has ordered a takeaway for everyone, as it's the nanny's night off. You take a nice relaxing shower after your hard day, get changed, and retire downstairs, where you open a nice bottle of red wine to share with your wife. Soon afterwards, the doorbell rings, and your takeaway arrives.

After dinner, you and your wife retire in front of your new plasma tv with the latest hollywood blockbuster, whilst the kids are upstairs playing the latest computer game. A couple of hours pass, the kids are in bed, and you retire upstairs to your ultra cosy feather down duvet, and fall gently asleep...

**How many of you live a life similar to this?
More importantly, how many of you aspire to this life?**

What is it about this life that attracts you? This family obviously has money, nice cars, and the parents both hold high positions in their companies. They dine out often, the children go to private school, they have a well furnished house, with all the latest gadgets, buy all the latest fashions, and like the finer things in life.

Let's go into this shall we? We are not going to discuss lifestyle choices, why money is important, why a good job is important, or whether it is environmentally sound to be running two cars, or even if takeaway food is a good or bad thing. What we want to be discussing is the brain's addiction to these things.

Most of you would think that there is nothing wrong in having a lifestyle like this. You're very busy, and anything that can make your life a little easier is not a bad thing; and anyway, you've worked hard to get where you are today. You didn't have this kind of comfort when you were young, and you want to make sure your children have a better chance in life than you had. Stated like this, I think everyone would have to agree that it's not a bad thing.

"Where's the harm in it? I lead a peaceful life, I keep myself to myself, I always pay my taxes, I donate to charity twice a year, I do voluntary work when I can, I always give to down and outs on the streets, and I help out at my children's school."

"Show me why having a nice comfortable life is a bad thing!"

At this point, you would probably be angry that I even suggested such a thing; "How dare he challenge me! I work really hard and what I choose to spend my time and money on is nobody's business but mine!" But we are not discussing whether a comfortable lifestyle is a good or bad thing. We are discussing how the brain can become addicted, not only to alcohol, but to a lifestyle; to a flat panel tv, or air conditioning in your car.

Let me ask you a question, what does a comfortable lifestyle and alcohol have in common? Most of you would say nothing. On the surface that appears a correct assumption to make, but on closer examination, they specifically have two things in common:

1. They both act on the brain's pleasure centres

Just think how excited you were when you bought that new car, all shiny, with brand new leather seats, and multi stack cd changer. Now think how much you enjoyed that beer after a hard day at work.

2. They both have withdrawal symptoms

Just think about having to sell your nice shiny car, because you couldn't afford the repayments any more as you had been made redundant. Now think about how you feel the morning after too many drinks, as the hangover hits.

Withdrawal. That is the key word. You like the pleasure of having the beer, the coffee, the car, the leather sofa, the swimming pool, the designer

clothes, the shoes, the exotic fruits, or the exquisite meats; but what happens when you can't have them anymore? A feeling of loss, a feeling of emptiness, the same kind the body has on withdrawal from narcotic drugs. When your body and your mind get too used to something, they end up not being able to live without it. Of course, we all know that none of these things are necessary for the healthy functioning of the system, but once we've tasted them, it's so, so hard to give them up, isn't it? Remember the alcohol addict?

"I don't need it, I just want it! I deserve it, I've worked hard today! If I want, I will go for a drink, no one's going to tell me what to do." Well, how about "I don't need a new tv, I just want one," or to be more exact: "I don't want a new tv, I need one!"

When we are talking about possessions that make us happy, we seem to change it around to "need" not "want" (as want sounds greedy, and need sounds as if you have no compulsion to buy the tv but the other one's a bit old so it *needs* replacing), whereas the man drinking wants to convince us he doesn't need a drink, he just wants one! An interesting thing is happening here; do you see? "I don't want a new car, I *need* a new car." "I don't want a new sofa, I *need* one."

I don't want to have to buy the new mp3 player, but the old one doesn't hold enough songs, so I need a new one.

Do you really need a new mp3 player? Do you need it for the healthy functioning of the system? No, it just makes us happy to have a new one, especially as it's all shiny. It's the latest gadget to enhance your life! I know what it feels like to buy something new; you know what you want, you go to the shop. You see it, you touch it: "Oh it feels good, soon, it will be mine! It looks so nice, so colourful, so shiny; not like the old scratched one." You reach for your wallet, complete the sale, and it's yours!

Ahh, pure pleasure...

And the advertisers know it. They know how to make you buy their goods; they know what you want, and they use psychology to help you get it. They know you buy for pleasure, and they use images and messages that appeal to the pleasure centres of the brain (and you thought it was your idea to buy the brand new all singing all dancing,

multi-format, video playing, portable music player). They appealed to your friends' pleasure centres and even if they didn't get to you, they know that peer pressure will soon have you shuffling along to the shops, to splash out your hard earned pennies on the same (or better) product! Bit scary isn't it?

So let us just say for now, that anything which has a positive effect on the brain's pleasure centres is liable to cause an addiction, and our brain lets us know that now we have it, we must not let it go. It makes us happy, and to have it withdrawn would cause us psychological pain.

Imagine if you will, a child with the latest toy. The child is naughty, and to punish him you take away the toy. Oh, how that child will cry! Now imagine yourself with the latest toy, and somebody steals it! Oh, how you cry (on the inside; after all you are an adult now).

The interesting thing is, that if you've never been exposed to anything that stimulates the pleasure centres of the brain, you will never become addicted. Do you follow? If I have never tasted alcohol and no one I know has either, will I seek it out, just because it brings pleasure? Does my brain know about it before I have been told that it has pleasurable effects?

If I have never seen a tv do I want one? If I have never seen an mp3 player will I crave it? Will I be so desperate to have a cigarette if my peers had not convinced me to try it? We are hard-wiring ourselves for pleasure. Everything in life is about satisfying this superficial desire for pleasure. I am not here to criticise you for your choices, merely to illuminate them. The reasons for this desire are many, and we will go into this in detail in other topics.

Action now

Be aware of the feeling you get; that little flutter of excitement in your stomach, the feeling of anticipation of pleasure, and watch yourself when you go to buy something new. Now step outside yourself for a moment, just before you sip that first alcoholic drink of the day, or smoke that first cigarette. I am sure you will understand what I have been talking about. Now try to stop yourself from drinking, buying, or smoking and your brain will be on the defence straight away.

"No one's going to tell me what I can or can't have. I want it and I'm going to have it."

A d v e r t i s i n g

A public promotion of some product or service

•

The business of drawing public attention to goods and services

Buy it now!
It's exciting!
It's new!
Buy it now!
Everyone's buying it!



Let's face it, advertising runs our lives now. Everywhere you turn, from the poorest countries, to the richest, some company is advertising something. Advertising is now a slick, mega-money industry, and the advertisers want *you* to spend *your* money on the product they are advertising. They want *you* to buy into the concept they have created, and they want *you* to spend *your* money – that's all it's about. However nicely it's packaged, it's all about you and your money. You've earned it. Now spend it.

Let's start by talking about what sort of products get advertised most often. There's cars, cosmetics, fashion, insurance, soft drinks and fast food. Then there's credit cards, home do-it-yourself, holidays, and consumer electronics, amongst others; all things you don't need, but are pushed as must-haves. There's usually a smiling family, so happy they have just bought their new 4x4 off-road vehicle to run the kids to school

in; or the immaculate model, who is smiling broadly, because she has just bought a new anti-wrinkle cream, just in case she looks like she has aged by one day!

How about the “cool and funky” advertising for new consumer gadgets that have smiling people playing with game stations, pc’s, or mp3’s? Cool music, cool people, cool products! And there’s always *lots* of smiling. After all, you wouldn’t expect the advertisers to put someone on tv who looked miserable after buying a new car, would you?

Forgive me for saying, but isn’t this all an illusion (*the act of deluding: deception by creating illusory ideas*)? We buy into all this, because of the way it is presented to us by clever marketers, who just happen know what makes us tick! They know that peer pressure, and the need to maintain a high status, will keep you buying the latest products. Whatever it costs, you will get it. Your friends have it, your children want it, your colleagues need to see you have it; you want your wife to be seen wearing it.

Face it, all this is just for show. Do you agree, or could you say you have to have the products advertised on tv? Do you think you could survive, or even live more healthily without drinking sweet carbonated drinks every day, or eating cardboard hamburgers? Do you think you need that new car? How about the specially formulated shampoos with peptides, or that new platinum credit card that’s sure to impress your friends with the £10,000 credit limit?

Doesn’t all this make you want to scream? Probably not, but it makes me want to scream, because I can see it for what it is – a way to addict humans to consumer goods, and make them compete with each other for the highest status points – nothing more.

None of these products are helping the world become a better place. None of these products are stopping violence, reducing hunger, or helping educate children in poor countries; although I’m sure all these companies have foundations, or help children’s charities. After all, it makes them look good, and they only have to build an orphanage somewhere for everyone to say, “See! Look at the good work they are doing, you shouldn’t criticise them. They are a decent caring company, even if the products they create don’t do any good.”

You may think I am just a bit of a complainer, but hasn’t everything been hijacked by advertisers? It’s impossible to watch sport, without a million brand names in your face. You can’t watch a programme on tv, without it being interrupted ten times for an advertising break; the internet is littered with advertising, and even the cinema shows them before the film starts. One thing I only recently realised was that when

you buy clothing, you are advertising the company for free, under the pretext of “fashion.” Everything is ruled by companies advertising their products, and now there is so much money in sponsorship, that most sports would crumble if the advertisers pulled out.

We live in a world, surrounded not by natural sounds, but by the constant bombardment of advertising slogans. Buy, buy, buy, they scream (in the nicest possible way). They entice you, they tempt you, they offer you something for nothing, they offer two for one specials, on and on, buy, buy, buy! “We know you don’t need it, but you *should* have it. Everyone’s got one, why haven’t you? They’re fantastic, they’ll make your life sooo much better. It’ll be an instant improvement, go on, you know you want one!” On radio and on television; in the newspapers and in the magazines; in the cinemas, at the sports stadium; in the toilets, on the train, on the plane, on the bus, in the shops, on the packet... you can’t get away. It’s a full on visual and audio assault on the senses: “You can’t escape, you *will* hear our message, you *will* see our message...”

Close your eyes...

And shhhhhhh, all quiet... Shhhhhhhh... You’re on an island in the middle of nowhere, with nothing but the sound of the ocean gently lapping the shore, the distant call of the sea birds lulls you to sleep; you feel the warm wind brush your face. You feel the grains of sand run through your fingers, and all the while, your body feels lighter and softer... Ahh, that’s better, let’s be quiet for a while. Let’s turn off the tv if it’s on, or turn off the music, or put down the paper. Let’s just sit and be quiet, without the constant noise, and close your eyes gently... This is how we should be feeling all the time.

Nature is calmness, and although it can be fierce at times, the noise doesn’t grate like the sound of the ad-man whining, trying to get us to buy something. Why should we listen to him? What right does he have to invade my home, my car, or my head? If only I could close my eyes and not be exposed to propaganda, for that’s what it is. Unfortunately, I cannot close my eyes, for I need them to see, and I cannot close my ears, for I need them to hear.

So why do we put up with it? We just accept that we are bombarded at all times by this invasive noise. This pleading voice, attempting to appeal to our ego and our vanity. All for what? To sell some crummy shampoo, a box with four wheels to get you from A to B, a game console

to avoid you having to talk to anyone or go outside, or a fast food meal destined to make you slothful and unhealthy? The advertisers may even take me to court for slandering their good products in this topic!

Remember, it's all about money – your money. They exist because of you. It is your fault people are subjected to advertising all the time. Why? Because they do appeal to your ego, they do appeal to your vanity, and you believe everything they say, and buy their products. Do you see? If we all stopped buying their products, they would crumble and fade away, and there would be no need to advertise any more.

We need to stand up and say, “We don't want your products, and we don't want to listen to your endless self-promotion,” but you won't will you? You're much too comfortable with all of their products that make your lifestyle just “perfect.” You won't complain; in fact, you kind of like hearing all the latest offers on the tv or through the junk mail system. You like it, because they have addicted you to consumerism. They own you, hook, line, and sinker! You're theirs to sell to, at any time of the day or night; they know you bought last time and they know you'll buy again.

In fact, they know everything about you. They know your spending habits, what you earn, where you live, what job you do, and *you* gave them all that information. *You* are responsible for the mass of advertising we are subjected to every day. *You* just can't stop buying. The more money you get, the more you buy, and the more you buy, the more they want you to buy. It's a never ending cycle. Your children see something advertised on the tv, so they pressure you to into buying it for them. You want an easy life, so you buy it for them. Your child says, “michael at school has a new pair of sports trainers, so I need them too.” You don't want your child to be the odd one out, so you buy them the trainers. And on and on.

You 0 – Advertisers 1

Unless you say no; and it takes a strong man (or woman) to reject what is being sold to you; to close your eyes and ears to advertising, and realise what they are selling is an illusion. Their products won't make you happy; they won't make your life better, although you will feel the short term excitement from making the purchase. But as soon as it's home, the advertisers know that it will be an anti-climax, and you will be rushing out again to seek the high of buying. It's the same with every product.

First the advert, then the decision to buy, then the purchase, then the waiting, then the excitement of delivery, then opening the purchase, then using it for the first time, then several weeks later, the thrill dies down and you forget you were ever excited about it!

Watch yourself in action, see if the thrill of making the purchase is much greater than the purchase itself.

So what is to be done with advertising? How do we get back to a world where we had silence when we wanted it – visual and audio? Where people weren't forcing us to buy things at every turn of the head? Well, there is no going back. Advertising is here to stay, and it will only get more prolific.

The sponsors are already crawling all over our society with their (your) money, ready to throw it at anything they think people will pay attention to. Maybe your school will be sponsored by a soft drink company (but will only continue funding the school if the children drink at least four bottles of fizzyade each per day). Maybe your house will start to have advertising on it, in order to reduce the cost of the mortgage and bring in some much needed money. Maybe your car will have sponsors logos, if they promise to pay for your fuel. Wherever you turn, there will be advertisers ready to hand out wads of cash, just for the right to put their message somewhere people can see it. If you don't believe me, just take a look around you. It's happened already.

Most of us now live in free societies, where people have the right to free speech and the right to go about their business without interference from any government source, so advertisers would argue that they are only exercising that right; but that doesn't mean you and I have to put up with it. You may not be convinced about advertisers taking over our lives, and I respect your right to challenge anything I have said here, or anywhere else in this book. But all I ask of you, is to be aware of what is going on, and ask the question why companies put so much money into advertising?

You may think advertising is harmless, and that people have the ability to make up their own minds when it comes to buying things, but let me ask you one question: If large firms didn't advertise their products all the time, do you think people would buy them? Do you think people would buy into the need to have these products just because they look cool, or because people on the advert look like they are enjoying themselves (whether it be with a burger, a cola, or a credit card)?

So why do we buy into this illusion, by buying products we clearly don't need, from these large companies? And make no mistake, it *is* large companies who are doing the bulk of the advertising and sponsorship in the world. No small companies could ever afford to pay for the kind of advertising campaigns put on by fashion, food, and car companies. First, there's the huge cost of producing tv and radio ads; then there's the cost of paying for slots to have them aired. These advertisers are making a major investment, and they're betting you are going to part with your hard-earned cash very soon.

I want to know what happened to us; I want to know why we have lost the ability to be individuals, and independent thinkers, and why we are so easily influenced. At one time I believed that these advertisers were using clever psychology to trap us, but it seems they only have to appeal to our basic insecurities about fitting in, and our need to be part of the in-crowd (albeit a crowd created by them), and our need to show off to others. Of course, the advertisers are ready with their slogans just to help you make that all-important choice in your life about yourself.

If you're not wearing Brand X Lash Extensions this summer you're a nobody.

•

**Everybody's wearing Brand X shoes why aren't you?
Wanna catch that special man? You're going to need a special perfume!
Buy Perfume X**

•

Wanna get tough and macho outdoors this summer? You'll need a tough and macho car to match. Buy our new Macho Man Brand 4x4

•

Only losers don't buy Cola X.

One thing we haven't talked about here is that the only things you see advertised on tv are fluffy consumer products. You never see independent advertisements talking about real issues and getting people to act. No broadcaster will ever play an advert that talks about cruelty to animals, cruelty to humans etc. they have too much to lose. Their station is funded by the advertisers, who would pull the funding if adverts were being shown that they felt were detrimental to their business.

Would a burger chain keep advertising on a station which also had adverts for vegetarianism? Would they carry adverts for groups trying to stop deforestation caused by mass grazing, for these burger chains? Of

course they wouldn't. First, they get much more money from the burger chain, and second, they want advertising that is family friendly (i.e. fluffy, doesn't offend anyone), and make sure that no one gets upset with graphic images of animal slaughter in the middle of the mainstream tv soaps. Light entertainment, that's what the tv stations provide, and they want light advertising that fits in with this policy. Only the sorry thing is, the products they produce – although innocuous on the surface, and glossy on the ad – are actually causing more harm than they let on.

Think Cars:	Think environment and petroleum addiction
Think Fast Food:	Think health, packaging and global food production
Think Credit cards:	Think debt and poverty
Think Cosmetics:	Think obsession with self-image and animal testing

I could go on, but I would like you to think about this for yourselves. Let's see if you can really start to close your eyes and ears to the global advertisers who control our lives and what we buy. And *not* to buy into gloss and schmooze that is served up every day.

Life isn't about buying the latest consumer products. Who cares if your colleagues or your friends have got them? You will be different, but in a positive way. People will respect you for not giving in to propaganda.

When you have got over your addiction to adverts, you will notice that suddenly you are free. I found this out myself, and I was happy I no longer had to get the latest things in order to be part of the "in-crowd." It didn't matter; it was all an illusion anyway. An illusion created to make me think I needed these things, when in fact I never needed any of them at all.

One day, a company may advertise something we actually need to get on in life, but until that day, my eyes and ears are firmly closed. Whether I'm in the city, on the train, listening to the radio, or even watching tv; whenever the ads come on, I'll be back in the peace and quiet of my desert island, replacing the voice-over man with the sound of the waves and the sea birds. Try it. Remember. If you don't buy their products, there will be no point in advertising them.

A g r i c u l t u r e

A large-scale farming enterprise

•

The practice of cultivating the land or raising stock

I sit here in my small room writing, looking out over the island and the vegetable garden that has been created, at the retreat where I am volunteering. Meanwhile, my first attempts at agriculture are reaching fruition! For the past week, I have been nurturing a small tray of cress seeds, which are apparently very tasty in salad. I have been keeping the compost moist as instructed, and was happy to see most of them germinate (*cause to grow or sprout*).

They grew slowly but steadily, gradually shooting upwards at the heady pace of about two millimetres per day, until finally the green tops of the cress started to show. This morning I have checked them again, and most of them are ready to be harvested so I will pick them and add them to my salad for lunch!

I know agriculture is supposed to be large-scale farming, and that my cress seeds will be gone in less than one serving, but I was amazed

watching them grow. Here was life being created before my eyes, and anyone who has ever grown their own fruit and vegetables from seed will know that it is a wonderful process, of man working with nature, and trying to protect the seed from predators (without using pesticides to kill them, I might add).

Sport lovers may see it as a game; like playing cat and mouse with the predators. Can our lettuces survive the dreaded slugs in a race against time, us versus them? The final whistle blows: *Lettuces 28 – Slugs 10*. Not a bad result. After all, slugs have to eat too, and for all you slug haters out there, try to remember one thing; all things on this earth have a purpose. They are neither good nor bad, that is merely subjective.

Farmers, who engage in large-scale production, also have a one-sided view of pests (*any unwanted and destructive insect or other animal that attacks food or crops or livestock etc.*). They see anything that comes between them and their money as a pest, but nature is just doing its job, feeding all living creatures on the earth. If you are someone who thinks because something eats your crops, it must die, then you have a seriously distorted view of the world and what reality really is.

All over the world, farmers are spraying their crops with deadly chemicals that kill everything in their path. Why? Because these “pests” come between the farmer and his profits. Do you think he is a humanitarian, growing vegetables etc. for the good of the world, and he wants to feed the starving, or do you think he just wants to feed his own pockets? People may take issue with this, but let’s talk here. Farmers are not the natural guardians of the planet and feeders of the hungry. They are in it for a couple of reasons: (a) their father was a farmer before them, and (b) they are looking to make money.

Money rules agriculture. There is no compassion in large-scale farming. At the start of this topic, I was talking about the magic of watching a seed germinate, but farmers have no time for such quaint ideas. They are interested in “maximising yields” and “maximising returns.” Things that get in their way are called pests. You may dislike this analogy, but isn’t this the same way a dictator gets what he wants? If the people are not conforming, he kills them. If someone disagrees or challenges him, he kills them. Well, the slugs and insects are challenging the farmer. He plants seeds. They eat them. He kills them. Thanks for your compassion farmer!

But before we get carried away with lynching all the farmers who use chemicals in agriculture, let’s step back in time; to a time when we

hunted and gathered all our food. Back then, life was tough. There was no time for anything else in the world; we spent all our time looking for food. If we were still doing that, I would not be sitting at a desk, writing on a computer, with a cup of tea by my side, in a warm room, looking out at a windy wet day through double glazing! I'd still be out there looking for food. Do you understand?

Without the progress, which resulted in agriculture being established, all the other things couldn't have happened. If everyone is out looking for food, who is going to have time to design a house to keep out the elements, or invent electricity, or the telephone, or indeed a rocket to go to the moon (or not, if you believe the conspiracy theories). We'd all still be out there foraging, taking our chances. I know where I'd rather be, don't you?

So before we all start criticising farmers, let's give our thanks to those people who developed agriculture all those years ago, which allowed man to become a specialist. No longer was everyone involved in the gathering of food; now just one group of specialists (farmers) would be involved in the large-scale growing of food required to feed the new cities. Our farmers are descendants of these early pioneers, so let us give thanks to them also for pursuing a career which is – for want of a better word – “challenging.”

It's pretty hard to make ends meet when you're a farmer. It's a business like everything else these days, and is subjected to free market pressures. You may want forty pence a lettuce, but if your customer wants to buy twenty thousand, and he only wants to give you fifteen pence a lettuce, what are you going to do? No one else will take that number of lettuces, so you try to negotiate, and eventually give in.

The thing about farming, is that it is a long process, and vegetables don't grow overnight, so the farmer has to nurture his crops with water and fertiliser, and stop other animals and insects from eating the crops. If his crops are decimated, he won't get his money, and he won't be able to eat. It's catch 22.

So what happens? A nice chemical company comes along and offers to help him maximise his crop yields. They will grow better, and will be more resistant to pests. What is he going to do? He accepts their offer. He needs to have a successful crop. The people are relying on him having a successful crop so they can eat. If the crops fail everywhere (and we couldn't import anything) we would eventually starve to death. You can still see it happening all over the world. Crops fail, followed by famine,

followed by a desperate attempt by the international charitable organisations to save millions of people starving to death.

Don't get me wrong, pesticides help. They stop known pests from destroying crops, which saves the farmer's livelihood and feeds the people. It all seems like a good idea, doesn't it? So why are people starting to buy organic now? Organic (*of or relating to foodstuff grown or raised without synthetic fertilizers or pesticides or hormones*) vegetables are a lot harder to grow, as they aren't resistant to pests and disease. The yields are lower, and they have a shorter shelf life. It all seems difficult for the poor farmer, who is, after all, not in business to save the world, just to make a living. That must be remembered before we criticise. If you want to criticise, try to make a living in agriculture, and you will see how difficult it really is.

"The consumer has been empowered," go the ads, "People don't want chemicals in their foods, they want it naturelle!" This is all very well, but organic food is more expensive to produce than food treated with chemicals, and so costs more at point of sale. People on lower incomes, who spend less of their disposable income on fresh fruit and vegetables, will buy even less fresh food, because it is so expensive. So what is the answer?

My father and his wife have long since been converts to organic produce. Every week they go to the supermarket and buy organic foodstuffs. They believe that if more people buy it, the price will come down. Basic economics, right? But let's look a little more closely at their purchases shall we? Where do their organic products come from? Are they from a british farmer? Have they been sourced locally? No, of course not. They have come from a central distribution point to the supermarket, and if you look at the label, you will notice that actually, most have come from *farawayland*.

So, although the product may not have had any hormones added, or been sprayed chemically, it has been flown or transported over thousands of miles (which uses fuel, and in most cases is not in season locally). This is turning into a complex subject, so you can see why your local farmer is much happier to spray his crops with pesticides and be done with it!

We haven't even started on gm (*genetically modified or genetically engineered crops*) foods yet, as I believe that to be a subject (whether we allow it to be grown or not), that shouldn't even be up for discussion. As humans we know little enough about nature and her processes, so how can we start to use new technologies, that are untested, to change the

underlying genetic characteristics of our food? Whatever your argument for gm, it must have a financial motive. It *cannot* be to feed the starving in africa.

For millions of years we have survived on this planet; sometimes we have gone hungry, sometimes we have had an abundance of food, but nonetheless, the human race has persisted, without pesticides, and without genetic modifications. I don't know why we waste our time having arguments about the ethics of genetically engineering food. It is unnecessary and can only benefit large seed companies.

Over thirteen billion years have passed (if the scientists and evolutionists are to be believed) since the so-called "big bang," where ten billion years after the event, life started on earth, and developed from single celled organisms to the complex organisms we have now, including homo sapiens. The human. You and me. All without interference.

Can you imagine the complex processes that have taken place over the past four billion years? I mean, really imagine? Do you think a species that is driven by greed, desire, and violence has anything to offer nature in the form of scientific advice about plant growing! Please think about this carefully.

Do not be led by governments and company officials singing the praises of gm food. It will not save people from death, it has merely created a corporate dependence in the developing world, and who knows what damage it will do to us and the environment in the future. Still, the scientists, who are working on it, will be long dead when they suddenly get an "oops" moment, as they have done, so many times in the past.

As we have said in other topics, growing food is big business. It is also a weapon that can be used to make people conform. Revolutions of any kind are easily quelled when you withhold people's food. This is not talking about there being a great conspiracy to control our food from corporate headquarters, this is about facing reality.

Agriculture has got out of hand. Not only is the west producing too much, there was even a time when some farmers in europe were being paid not to grow specific produce (myth?). Nonetheless, we, the citizens, are always kept in the dark when it comes to things like agriculture, but as long as we get cheap fruit and vegetables we don't really care, do we?

We may like to buy organic, which we should be doing all over the world, if we don't want nasty chemicals sprayed on our fruit and vegetables. We may even buy from a local farm and eat seasonally, but we haven't addressed the real issue here, and that is compassion.

“Why is compassion important in agriculture?” you may ask. “Vegetables aren’t people, neither is fruit.” But everything is alive, isn’t it? We live on a “living” planet, so we must care for everything on it – from the small worms which aerate the soil that grows our vegetables, to the bees who pollinate the flowers that become the fruit we eat. Everything is part of the natural world. We are not living in isolation, although sometimes we act like it. Think blanket spraying of pesticides. Think shooting animals that get through fences to eat crops.

For us, it’s all about me, me, me. We are not the only species on the planet! There are other species here, and they have as much right to everything on this planet as we do! Does that shock you?

Imagine if we were not the dominant species. How would we feel if we were treated the way we treat animals (from the largest to the smallest). We are a dictatorial species. We decide how it’s going to be, and that’s that. This planet and its resources are for us, and us alone, and when we’ve used this one up we’ll just up and off to another one (we think). I don’t like bringing doom and gloom to these pages, but we really do have to wake up to what we are doing.

We grow so much food and we waste so much as well. What should be a human right is now a multi-billion dollar global industry. Doesn’t this make you sad? We pretend to care so much, yet we care so little.

Remember my little cress seedlings I grew in a pot for the last week? Well I “harvested” them and had them for lunch in my salad. They were delicious, and tasted all the better for having been hand nurtured. But imagine if I had decided to create a farm growing and selling cress as my career. How different would my approach to the cress be? Would I still look after them the same as I had done in my small pot, or would I see the pound signs in front of my eyes, and do anything to make as much money as possible, without a thought for the land, the animals, and the insects that my cress and I share the planet with?

If I applied compassion to my farm, my primary motivation of profit would be replaced by a desire to nurture the land and create healthy sustainable food for the local community, *not* the worldwide export market; that is the domain of the man who lives for profit, not the compassionate farmer.

I am not saying you shouldn’t make a profit by selling your goods. After wages and expenses you need a little left over to reinvest in the business. If you want to run it on a not for profit basis, even better! You can run it like a community scheme, whereby community members

volunteer their time, and you employ someone full time to manage the project. All vegetables grown are sold to the community with the money raised going to fund new schemes to help local projects. It's up to you!

I ask you to think of the satisfaction of being involved at a community level, where growing food for yourselves is the only priority. Suddenly it's not a career, it's a fun, creative way to get organic (of course) fruit and vegetables to local people, without the involvement of global chemical and fertiliser companies; without the involvement of the tax office, and without the involvement of other businesses. Just you and the community doing something worthwhile with love and compassion. Am I dreamer?

Is this what you want, or do we once again close off another topic by concluding that no one cares because they're too lazy, or too busy to care what is happening to their own planet? I will assume for once that there *are* millions of you out there who care. How much you grow is up to you. How you get the land is also up to you. Create a community charity; raise money for the land, ask your council to donate a large piece of land to this project. Then get it up and running.

There will be ups and downs; crops may fail, but over time you will learn, and you will be able to pass that knowledge on to others. Go for it.

Imagine the satisfaction of sitting down to dinner, knowing you helped create the vegetables you were eating, and that other people all over the community were thinking the same. That may be a dream for me, but wouldn't it make an even more wonderful reality. If you care, then now is the time to act.

You may notice I haven't mentioned animal farming. I have covered the slaughter of animals in other topics, but to finish, I would like to draw your attention to something important. I don't normally like to use statistics, but in this case I feel I have to.

Every day we kill millions and millions of animals for human consumption - that you know. You may also know that we destroy the natural environment (i.e. forests) to create grazing areas for cattle and sheep etc. and you may also know that by everyone just giving up meat for a day you would be saving millions of animal lives, and freeing up land that could be used for growing vegetables. You may also know that you could grow nearly 40,000 pounds of potatoes per acre compared with about 250 pounds of beef, and that over 50% of farms are dedicated to animal production. You may also know that it takes about 5000

gallons of water to produce a pound of beef! You may also know that most of the corn and oats grown, goes to feed livestock.

If we all stopped eating meat, or at least cut down to eating it once a week, the volume of natural resources we would consume would drop to negligible. We use nearly all of our resources and available farming land producing beef and other meats. For what? So you can have a burger, or a lamb chop, and say, “mmmmm, that was tasty.”

We are the most intelligent species on the planet, yet we can't seem to do the maths. Eating meat on the scale we are now is killing the planet, and is doing our health no good either. If you care, you will do the research. Investigate the statistics. Don't believe me. But don't just dismiss what I am saying and carry on what you are doing. Unless you don't care of course. But I think you do.

A l c o h o l

A liquor or brew containing alcohol as the active agent

•

(Intoxicant) A drug that can produce a state of intoxication

*I drink because I'm happy
I drink to celebrate
I drink when I'm unhappy
I drink to commiserate*

*I drink to your health
I drink to mine
I drink to whatever
I just like wine*

*I drink because I'm old enough
I drink because I can
I drink and drink and drink and drink
Till the day I finally die*



Let's go into this very, very carefully, shall we? This is something so serious that it requires the utmost attention. Alcohol is something so powerful, that it is able to do the following to a human in a short space of time. It makes people kill each other, laugh, feel super-confident, fight, argue, hurt each other, become depressed, fall in love, feel sexy, fall out of love, become jealous, have fun, do things we don't remember the next day, make us sick, makes us take risks, lower our inhibitions, and makes us feel tired and irritable the next day. It can even affect our balance system, our motor controls, and we fall over. This is something so powerful it can have wildly differing effects on the emotions.

Quite a long list for such an innocuous little word of seven characters,
isn't it?

“Alcohol”

This is strong stuff! Now I hear some of you thinking, “I don’t drink much, I drink in moderation; I only have the occasional glass of wine with my dinner, just because it tastes nice.” But if you don’t drink it regularly, why drink it at all? Well, alcohol makes you feel different, doesn’t it? Even just one glass of wine, one pint of beer, one shot of vodka. I’m sure nobody who has a stressful day at work goes to a pub or wine bar and orders a pint of water! Do you? I know I wouldn’t.

So let’s imagine the scenario. You have just driven home through annoying traffic jams, everything at work was stressful, maybe somebody wasn’t very nice to you today, or it was hot and you are tired (it happens). So you decide to pop in for a drink on your way home; what are you thinking? What do you imagine when you order your drink, and what does it *feel* like when you take the first sip? “Ahhhh, that’s better!”

You see, alcohol acts quickly as a suppressant of the nervous system, and for that moment, you do feel better, more relaxed; more “normal.” But what is alcohol’s real purpose? Is it not to block out reality, to numb our emotional pain centres, to distract us from the drudgery of day to day life; to cure us of angry and hurt feelings, and give us a chance to feel better, even for a short moment in time?

All of us work hard in the world, a lot of us work monday to friday, some work weekends as well. And what is the feeling in the general workplace on a friday afternoon, or on your last day before you have a day off? Most people can’t wait to get off home to have a drink to “celebrate” the end of the week, to “relax,” and to “chill out.”

I deserve it!

I remember thinking the same, and I remember having such fun when I was drunk. Oh, I felt on top of the world! I felt confident, attractive, and I was a real show off with the ladies. The next day, I’d have a raging hangover and would be chatting excitedly with the people I was drunk with the night before; about the girl I had slept with, the volume of alcohol we had consumed, who was fighting with who. Oh, did we have a laugh!

We were really cool guys in town; we were jack the lads, we had money, good jobs, all the latest gadgets, nice cars, and we knew what we liked spending our money on... Alcohol. We drank, beer wine and vodka,

maybe gin, maybe anything! I was always the party animal; always the last person to leave, always drinking more and more till eventually I either blacked out, or fell over on my way home.

How we laughed the next day; oh, it was so funny: “Hey alan, I can’t believe you fell over in the road, that was so funny!” And funny it was; we all laughed about the exploits of the night before, until it was time to head home, to suffer the hangover alone.

You see, with every excess, there is a cost, and alcohol is no exception. It dehydrates the body, makes you feel shaky, disrupts your sleep patterns, makes you feel uneasy, sick, tired, and depressed. You feel just terrible! You swear “I’ll never drink again.” Until the next day, when the hangover’s gone, and you conveniently forget the pain of the day before, and head down for a “quick pint” after work. After all, *“I’ve had a hard day, I deserve it.”*

Before we move forward, many of you will be disagreeing, and saying that drinking to excess is generally prevalent in youth culture; that people eventually grow out of it and drink more moderately. But in some cultures people never drink, and in other cultures, such as the ancient aboriginal people of australia (who had never been exposed to alcohol in their entire history until the english introduced it some 200 years ago) it is now proving to be a great social problem. Whatever the for’s and against’s are of alcohol, I would like to ask you some simple questions which I would like you to consider:

- (a) Why do we like alcohol so much?
- (b) What is it about alcohol that makes us want to spend our hard earned money on it?
- (c) What, given the long list of adverse effects could possibly be our reason for consuming it?
- (d) How would you deal with stress at work if alcohol had never been invented?
- (e) How do people, who don’t drink, “celebrate” or deal with stress and problems?
- (f) If it tastes so good, why do children generally dislike it?

In my mind, alcohol is the great reality concealer. It conceals stress, pain, shyness, anger, hurt, disappointment, and fear amongst others; all of which are normal human emotions; all of which can be expressed

correctly, through talking to someone, writing a journal, or evaluating your life yourself. Alcohol isn't about having fun.

**We can have great fun when we're not drinking...
Just look at a child and tell me he *needs* to have a drink to have fun.**

A l c o h o l i c s A n o n y m o u s

An international organization that provides a support group for
persons trying to overcome alcoholism

This is the only prescribed “cure” for the “disease” of alcoholism. If you are unaware of the organization, I will give you a brief explanation. It is organised into local groups, city by city, where people suffering from “alcoholism” either go, or are sent by the court (for committing certain alcohol related crimes) for treatment.

This is where it gets interesting. Unlike a hospital, where people with psychiatric or physical ailments are treated by medical doctors with years of training; here, there is a “facilitator” who is usually a recovering alcoholic, with no medical training. Everyone sits around in a circle and, if you are new, in order to start the road to recovery, you have to stand up and say the following: “Hello, my name is alan, and I’m an alcoholic.” At which point people will clap – as acceptance of being an alcoholic is the first step to recovery. You are also told that alcoholism is a chronic and progressive disease for which there is no cure. You will also be told

that your only hope of survival is by accepting the 12 step program which involves the following, amongst other things:

Giving up all responsibility for your abuse of alcohol and saying you are powerless over your need to drink.

Handing yourself over to a higher power (god).

Accepting that you will always be in recovery "one day at a time."

Agreeing to attend group meetings to discuss your alcoholism until you have recovered.

Let's stop and think about this shall we? Whether you call yourself an alcoholic or not, there are several diseases where there is no cure, amongst them, aids; a disease of such magnitude that it is sweeping the globe at an alarming pace. Now, before you challenge me that they are in no way similar, what I am trying to explore with you here is our approach to problems we can't deal with in society. Can you possibly imagine having to attend a group meeting to overcome aids, which has been verified by the medical society as a real disease?

"Hello, my name is alan, I have aids."

At which point people will clap, as acceptance is the first step to recovery, and that the only hope of survival is by accepting the 12 step program which involves the following, amongst other things:

Giving up all responsibility for the disease of aids, and saying you are powerless over it.

Handing yourself over to a higher power (god).

Accepting that you will always be in recovery "one day at a time."

Agreeing to attend group meetings to discuss your aids until you have recovered.

Surely this is laughable; no one in society would accept that going to a meeting to discuss aids would cure you of the disease. You see that the only place you would go to seek treatment would be a hospital; where highly skilled professionals with years of training would give you the care you require.

Now quickly, let's go back to alcoholics anonymous. An organization credited with curing thousands of people of a disease where no medical intervention is necessary, only belief in god, and we start to see something more interesting. If I was a member of alcoholics anonymous, I'd be scared. Really scared. Scared of god, scared to have another drink

in case I died, and scared in case I let my sponsor or the group down. In fact, because I knew I would forever be in recovery (as this is an incurable disease), I'd be scared of life.

There has never been any proof that alcoholism is a disease, although you may disagree; and if you do, go and find out for yourselves! Who are these people who cure imaginary diseases through handing yourself over to god? Seems a bit magical to me.

Why do the courts force you to go to alcoholics anonymous to be cured? Why don't they send you to a doctor, who will give you a course of tablets to take, or maybe perform an operation? Why, because no one really knows why people drink so much apart from the people drinking. It is purely subjective. In other words, I may think I have a problem with alcohol abuse, but it doesn't mean I need to hand myself over to god. It means I have to stop drinking.

The people at alcoholics anonymous would have you believe that until you accept their 12 Step program you will always be a "dry drunk" (meaning that although you were abstaining, you could never be cured). Now I would call that scary, wouldn't you? Keeping people in fear of themselves? I would also call that not very responsible.

I can hear you saying, "Wait a minute, the abuse of alcohol can be very destructive. Isn't it a good thing that someone is doing something about it?" So let me ask you an important question: If you realised you had a problem with beating up your wife, would you hand yourself over to god? Maybe, if that is your belief. But would you accept you were powerless to stop raising your hand to her? Would you really? Would you accept it if someone told you that beating up your wife is a chronic disease for which there is no cure? I hope not! After all, it is you doing the beating up; there is no external force. It is *you*, and you alone who are responsible.

Don't let someone else accept responsibility on your behalf. Every action you take is your personal responsibility.

A l c o h o l i s m

Habitual intoxication; prolonged and excessive intake of alcoholic drinks leading to a breakdown in health and an addiction to alcohol such that abrupt deprivation leads to severe withdrawal symptoms

•

An intense persistent desire to drink alcoholic beverages to excess

For humans, knowing they are powerless over themselves, is to me, a little contradictory. I accept that there are certain diseases of the mind, which left untreated can be serious for the person and society, for example, paranoid schizophrenia (*any of several psychotic disorders characterized by distortions of reality and disturbances of thought and language and withdrawal from social contact*); where cases have been noted of patients acting on delusions, for example, “the man from the tv told me to kill” (*thought control from an external source*), although this is highly uncommon. So I would like to start this topic by asking you several questions:

Are you responsible for drinking, or is it someone else?
Are you under external control?
Who tells you to go and drink? The man from the tv?
Are you delusional? Do you think you may have a form of schizophrenia?
Who picks up the drink? Do you? Did a strange voice in your head tell
you to do it?
Do you want the drink?
Can you live without it?

A personal story

For people like me, who used to get drunk a lot – under the guise of fun, or stress relief – it became apparent, many years later, that drinking was not serving any external purpose. I was drinking to get drunk, because drunk felt good. The fact is, I was a lot less stressed when I wasn't drinking, and also a lot happier. "What happened here?" you may ask, "alcohol helps you have fun and helps relieve stress." Well, it came from me, and as we have previously discussed, addiction, or dependence on alcohol is purely subjective.

It happened whilst I was going about a total change in my life, and I decided to stop drinking and smoking. It was during this time that I would be sitting quietly reading, listening to music, or doing some other activity, and I would feel compelled, motivated, to instantly jump up, go out buy a packet of cigarettes and go to the pub and get drunk. Now I don't think I'm delusional, but I got an eerie feeling that I was not in complete control of my actions. How could I be sitting quietly one moment, and then fifteen minutes later, down at the pub drinking? To someone who has never experienced this, this may seem very strange.

The more I listened, the more I could hear the voice in my head. It was me! How could I go against my own wishes, which would not include getting drunk? I would even tell myself, "alan, you will not drink this week/month/year," and surprise, surprise, I would suddenly find myself drunk again. This is scary for a person who believes they are of sound body and mind. How could I go three months with no alcohol and then suddenly crave it, and act on the craving immediately?

The definition of alcoholism is: "habitual intoxication; prolonged and excessive intake of alcoholic drinks leading to a breakdown in health and an addiction to alcohol such that abrupt deprivation leads to severe

withdrawal symptoms” and “an intense persistent desire to drink alcoholic beverages to excess.” Well the first wasn’t me; I could go months at a time without alcohol, and I still went running a lot. The second was kind of like me, but not really. It wasn’t every day I wanted to get drunk, and anyway, it was in the culture to drink a lot. But I did start to think.

If I chose to become a vegetarian and give up meat instantaneously (something most people said would be impossible for them), and had no craving to eat sausages or fillet steak even once a year, what was it that was causing me to want to get drunk? First I started to blame it on personal relationship problems; then a lack of money, then unhappiness at work, then on my childhood, then on just fancying a pint, then tiredness just as a pick me up. I started thinking, “Uh oh! I’m actually coming up with any old reason to get drunk.” At that point I was scared; “Why can’t I stop drinking?” I thought to myself.

So after some advice by my partner, I looked into alcoholics anonymous and I was shocked. “How can this be an incurable disease? Am I going to die, can I never be helped with this? And while I’m at it, why do I have to hand myself over to god? Why am I not responsible? Why do I have to go to group meetings? Surely I should go to a hospital if I have a disease? My partner tells me it is *me* who is ruining our relationship through excess drinking. Surely this is my responsibility?”

And so I started taking personal responsibility for my drinking. That is what is necessary, not giving away responsibility; that is much too easy.

The disease trap

Alcoholism is not a disease. Alcohol abuse causes terrible trouble in society, but is something that needs to be addressed by taking responsibility for your actions. Do not ask people to feel sorry for you. You are doing something you love doing! When you are ready to face the consequences of your actions, and are ready to stop doing what you love; please move to the topic “Addiction.”

Responsibility

Only you are in the position to help yourself.
Only you have the power to stop doing something you love.
You belong to the most intelligent species on the planet,
You must take responsibility.

The need to do something against yourself is frightening,
but take heart in the fact that you are more powerful than the addiction.
You will defeat it if you really want to.
You will be the one responsible for your success.
You are the most intelligent being on the planet.

A n g e r

A strong emotion; a feeling that is oriented toward some real or supposed grievance

•

The state of being angry

I have never been what you would call, an “angry man,” but on reflection, I guess I used to get angry quite regularly. I can’t even remember what used to trigger it, but one minute I was calmly having a conversation, and the next second, whhhooooosh! ANGER. I normally calmed down straight away and probably apologised, or just stormed off. But recently, when thinking about anger, I started to look back at my life, to see what it was that was actually causing it.

I guess the more stressed I got at work, or in my personal life, the easier it was to trigger, but it usually involved me not getting what I wanted, or when things didn’t go my way. Or is that the same thing? Fortunately for me, my anger never turned physical, and was restricted to lots of shouting, banging of doors, and the occasional kicking of some

inanimate object. I was never proud of my actions afterwards, but if people hadn't provoked me, then I wouldn't have got angry, would I?!

Provocation

1. *Unfriendly behaviour that causes anger or resentment*
2. *Something that incites or provokes; a means of arousing or stirring to action*

I don't know if you've ever had noisy neighbours. I have. It was a couple in the flat below me, both in their thirties, and both with good jobs, but nearly every night they would be arguing. She would be screaming at him, he would be screaming at her, and things would inevitably be thrown; but if you saw them the next day on the way to work, you wouldn't have thought they had been fighting. I never saw any bruises on either of them, and any time I spoke to them they never mentioned the fighting, nor apologised for making so much noise (even though they must have known I could hear them). But one day I decided to have it out with the guy, I wanted to know if everything was all right, and check that he wasn't going to murder his wife!

Me: Hi, can I have a word with you for a minute?

Him: Sure, what about?

Me: (talking quietly) Well, it's just that I keep hearing you two shouting and screaming at each other, and look, you're both nice people, so I just wanted to know if everything is all right. I mean, I don't want to interfere or anything (fortunately he didn't look like the type of guy who was going to hit me for interfering).

Him: No. It's ok, alan, come in; the wife's out for the evening. (He looked weary) Sit down...

Me: I'm sorry, it's just I don't want to see anything bad happen to either of you, you seem like a nice couple.

Him: Thanks. Well we are, or we were. I don't know if I should be telling you this, oh, what the heck you're here now, and it's good to have someone to talk to. For the last six months we have been having money worries, and it's really starting to upset my wife.

Me: Well, we've all got money worries. I'm up to my eyeballs in debt at the moment. But it's not something I get angry over.

Him: Yeah, well, she blames me. She says it's all my fault, that I'm no good, and that I don't earn enough money.

Me: I bet that hurts.

Him: Tell me about it. She just keeps going on, and on about how she should have married her ex-boyfriend, and how she should never have married a loser like me. And I kind of lose it.

Me: I'm sure. Well it's not nice when people say hurtful things. Being short of money is no reason to try to hurt your feelings.

Him: I don't want to get angry; she just keeps on pushing and pushing...

Me: So she provokes you?

Him: Yeah, and then sometimes, I can't control myself and I hit her, but never in the face.

Me: Well, that's not good, is it?

Him: No. But I can't help it. She hits me as well. I have even woken up in the middle of the night and she has been hitting me, or biting and scratching me! Can you imagine that? Being woken up in the middle of the night by some lunatic biting you?

Me: So why don't you split up if you are so angry at each other; or at least get some counselling?

Him: We love each other, and we don't want to split up, but my wife says the only way we can be together is if I bring in more money; she says counselling just costs more money!

Me: Look, I am sure you can get free counselling somewhere. If you don't, you're going to kill each other by the sounds of it.

Him: But if she would only stop going on about me being a loser, I wouldn't get so angry.

Me: Well, tell her that it hurts you, and to stop it.

Him: She knows it hurts me, that's why she does it.

Me: Well don't let her provoke you, take a deep breath and leave the room if you have to. Tell her you will talk to her like an adult when she calms down.

Him: Ok, I'll try. I do love my wife you know.

Me: I'm sure. I've got to go. I'll see you soon.

Three weeks later I arrived home late in the evening from a night out with colleagues from work, and was surprised to see a police car and an ambulance outside our building. At first I didn't know what had happened, but then I saw my neighbour being led out by police. "Oh,

no!” I thought, “what has he done?” He looked over as he was walking down the stairs of the apartment building to the waiting police car. “She just kept pushing me, she didn’t know when to stop,” he said, as he was passing. I was lost for words. I just wished I had been able to help both of them before it came to this.

Domestic violence

Violence or physical abuse directed toward your spouse or domestic partner; usually violence by men against women

It turned out that my neighbour had broken his wife’s jaw in three places and she had a fractured rib. She had fought back hard, but in the end his strength had overcome her. “Oh well, another marriage down the drain,” I thought, “all because of anger. He could probably go to jail if she pressed charges, and their relationship could never be the same again.”

How often do we hear about stories of domestic violence in the media, where one partner (usually the male) has beaten up his wife because he was angry? We never really know the causes of it, and we probably never will, because you see, there is never a real “cause;” anger is something that builds and builds until the pressure cooker explodes, and out it comes.

Partners may have “provoked” each other by saying, or doing things they know antagonise (*provoke the hostility of*) each other, but anger in itself is just a release. It is the real or imagined things we dislike, or are in opposition of our own thinking, that act as the building blocks. Unfortunately, for the partner on the receiving end, it is very real and very scary, especially if it ends in physical violence.

So what are we to do, if we are going to transcend this anger? How can we live our lives differently so the sort of story I described stops happening? A lot of domestic violence is accompanied by alcohol, but just removing the alcohol doesn’t stop the anger from building up; all alcohol does is “loosen the tongue.” Do you understand? The anger will still be there tomorrow.

The workplace connection

I used to work for a company where my boss was always angry. Everything I did was wrong. Things that weren’t even my fault were

blamed on me. I used to see his boss coming into his office in the morning, closing the door, and starting to shout at him about anything and everything. This time it was about customer orders not being fulfilled, due to glitches in the computer system we had installed in several companies. I could see he was apologising profusely, and then, as the door swung open and the big boss left, I was duly summoned.

“Sit down, alan!” he commanded, banging the door closed. “What the hell is going on? You promised me that there would be no more problems in the shipping system, do you know how stupid you’ve *made* me look? Do you?”

“Err no... I’m trying my best. It will be fixed soon. In fact I’ll go down to see the customer today,” I shakily replied.

“That’s not good enough! My boss wants to see results. He doesn’t want unhappy customers. Do you understand me?” he screamed. “Do you? Well get out there and get it fucking fixed. Now, get out of my office!”

Everyone was watching me, as I nervously left my boss’s office. What was I going to do? I couldn’t think how to fix it, and he wanted it fixed now, or I was definitely going to get fired.

“Yeah, what are you lot looking at?” I shouted at my colleagues, and went to sit down and think. In two seconds I shouted:

“Andy, paul, mike, my office, now! Meeting.”

Everyone came to sit down, notepads at the ready.

“What the fuck’s going on, mike? You told me you had fixed the code.”

“Well, I thought I did alan; the changes we made must have affected something else,” he replied.

“Well, what about you two?” I said to paul and andy. “You *must* have known that something like this was going to happen, how couldn’t you? It’s so obvious!” I shouted.

“Well it wasn’t,” said Mike calmly. “We will look at the code again today, and if we have to, we will reverse out the changes and hopefully that will fix it.”

“Oh my god. But then they will lose the new modifications they requested. What a fuck up! Get out all of you. You’re all fucking useless!”

I went outside to calm down and smoke a cigarette. How could they do this to me? This is such an important contract. They must be doing it to make me look bad. I’ve never liked that mike, smarmy bastard. I’ll fucking show them. I’ll sack the lot of them if they get me into trouble with my boss again. What a fucking day...

I got in the car and was annoyed to find there was heavy traffic: “Come on, for fuck’s sake. Jesus. Get out the way. Come on... Come on... Yeah and you too mate. Fuck off. You fucking idiot. Jesus some drivers...”

I got home...

“Hi alan, how was your day, honey?” my girlfriend asked me.

“I’ve had the *worst* fucking day...”

“Oh that’s a shame, poor baby. I’ll run you a nice bath and pour you a glass of wine,” she said kindly.

“Oh, that’s great, I really need it,” I replied.

“Oh, just one thing, we got another bill from the gas and electric people, this time it’s a red one. Can you pay it tomorrow?”

Whoosh, and I felt the anger rise up in me like an electric current running through my whole body.

“Why can’t you fucking pay it, can’t you see how busy I am?”

“But I just thought...”

“Well, don’t!” I shouted. “I can’t believe you. I’m out at work all fucking day, and all you have to do is pay one lousy fucking bill!” I kept on.

“But I’m out at work too, I don’t have much time either,” she said, almost crying.

“Well, you don’t know what it means to work hard,” I shouted. “All you do is sit in your little office typing all day. Jesus, one fucking bill, and you can’t pay it. I can’t believe you’re hassling me about it as soon as I come in, you’re such an inconsiderate bitch!”

She was sobbing by now... “I hate you alan, all I wanted was for you to come home, have a nice bath, and relax, but now you can go to hell!”

“Yeah, you too. I’m going out.”

“Come on, we’re going out,” I said to the dog.

He was a big dog, and I have to admit, not very well trained, and during the whole walk he was pulling and pulling at the lead. “Stop it. STOP IT!” I shouted at him. “Come here, come here. Heel. Stupid dog,” and I hit him on the bottom hard. He yelped. “Now do as you’re told!” I growled. “Ah fuck this, I’m taking you home, and I’m going for a drink.”

I threw him inside and marched down to the local pub, where I saw some people I knew.

“Hi, alan, how you doing?”

“Fine, bit stressed, I’ll be much better after a pint.”

And I was. I sat at the bar chatting away with strangers quite happily. Because you can’t get angry at strangers can you? They might take offence. They might hit you. No. It’s best to play it safe and get angry

with people who can't hurt you, or are in a subordinate position. As I stumbled home, thinking about what I would say to my girlfriend if she started on me again, I resolved to come down really hard on those idiots from work...



Ok, so I have experienced a fair amount of anger in my life. I have been angry about everything from not earning enough money, to trains not coming on time, dropping food on my tie, being late for the cinema, nobody listening to me etc. If things didn't work out the way I wanted them, I got angry. Even if I dropped a piece of toast on the floor I would swear and curse at the stupid toast. Everyone bore the brunt of my anger: My colleagues, my bosses, my dog, my parents, my girlfriends, and my friends. "Why is life not working out the way I wanted it to," I kept asking myself. "Everyone seems to have it in for me."

As time went on, I left the stressful work environment I had placed myself in, and went travelling; but things just didn't improve. I was still angry at my new wife, because of things she said to me, my money situation, the bills, and moving to a new country. I decided to seek help.

My therapist said I had high core stress levels, and that once I had reduced them, the whole anger thing should go away. He was right, slowly but surely it did. He asked me how I would feel in certain situations, and how I would act, and then helped me change the way I thought about things. I began to see that things didn't matter as much as I thought they did, and through the development of awareness, I began to notice when I was getting angry and I would let it go.

Whenever I saw somebody getting angry in a pub, "Are you looking at my girlfriend? Do you want to fight about it...?" I would stand there and just look on incredulously. How could they not see, that all of this is imaginary (even if the situation is real)?

What does it matter if someone is looking at someone else's girlfriend? She's not a possession. Inevitably there would be a fight, and shirts would be ripped, noses broken, blood pouring everywhere; and finally ejection from the pub, more fighting, followed by arrest. What a great night out! All caused because one man had a thought, which passed across his mind in a flash that someone was looking at his girlfriend; and if someone was looking at her, then he might take her away from him, or his girlfriend might find the someone more attractive... And whoosh... "Are you looking at my girlfriend?" It all seemed so silly to me now. But after I

split up from my wife and left australia, I met a girl who showed me that anger is only a baby compared with rage.

Rage

1. *A feeling of intense anger*
2. *A state of extreme anger*
3. *Behave violently, as if in state of a great anger*

I always thought she was a passionate girl, and that her loud, animated talking was perhaps cultural. I even thought that it may be good to have a girlfriend who was emotional, at least that meant she was “alive,” so I was prepared to put up with her temper (*a disposition to exhibit uncontrolled anger*) from time to time.

I was staying with her and her family, while I was trying to write this book, and she “let” me write as often as I wanted, except in the evenings and the weekend. That was “our” time, she explained. I tried to point out to her I was never going to finish this book, unless I had no limitations on when I could write, but she didn’t see it that way: “What do you fucking think, man? That I’m here to cook all your fucking dinners? That I am here to clean the house and wash your clothes? I’m not your fucking servant!”

As usual, I just listened, and let it go, but that just seemed to annoy her even more.

“Look,” I said, “I’m not going to argue with you. I don’t want to fight, I just want to write my book.”

And that’s when something in the room changed. It was like someone turning up the temperature by 1000 degrees, and the violent energy in the room was terrifying.

“You fucking mother fucker. You fucking bastard. Fucking, fucking bastard. I do everything for you, everything, and this is how you repay me?”

I started to say something, but then was hit by a variety of objects flying at me.

“How fucking dare you come to my country and stay with my parents, and show me no respect, you fucker! I give you a place to write and all I want to do is spend a little time with you, is that too much to ask?” Her eyes were blazing, her body twisted with rage. I was glad we weren’t near the knives in the kitchen. “All I want is for you to spend

time with me. Do you understand? You miserable, selfish, fucking bastard.”

I can't remember how long it went on for, but it was too long for my liking. I just stood there, transfixed to the spot, and realised I had to leave her; and I did, shortly afterwards. The problem was, all she *did* want was to spend time with me, because she liked being with me, and I was refusing to comply with her wishes. I wanted one thing (to write my book), and she wanted another (to spend time with me), but rather than either of us compromising, we both kept on our own paths until it was too late. She could no longer contain the energy she had in her mind, and she had to release the pressure.

Fortunately, I had learnt to let things go, or you can imagine the violent rage that two people could create. Several months later I thought about the situation again, and I realised I had wanted to tell her. “I've had enough of your fucking shouting and screaming, it's making me sick. I only came here to write my book, and when it's finished, I *never* want to see you ever again!”

Transforming anger

So anger hadn't left me. Perhaps I was just suppressing it, which I am told is a bad thing as well! I started to realise, that although I was no longer really angry in trivial situations, I was still angry; and this time I was angry at the world. I was angry that people didn't care about each other. I was angry that they were angry at each other. I was angry at consumerism. I was angry at violence. I was angry at politicians. I was angry at war.

Suddenly it came to me. If I am angry at violence, then I must still be violence. If I am angry at war, then I am war. Do you understand? It didn't matter that I was “justified” in being angry at man's stupidity, because whilst I was still angry I was part of the stupidity of man!

I tried to find out what was causing this, and I knew then that this was an absence of love. Not love as a man has for a woman, but love for all things, for all beings; unconditional love, universal love. A love that cannot be described in words, but is an energy that affects all around it. “But how would I become love?” I questioned. Love is not describable, love is not something you can touch; it is something that exists throughout the universe.

“I must be love. I am love.” I said.

“That’s right,” said a voice in my head: “You are.”

And I am. You are. We are all love, but the mind – which is thought – and emotions get in the way. Somehow they block the energy, and replace it with anger and rage, which are only human inventions. They do not exist, although the results do.

We are love. Every single particle that makes up our fragile bodies contains love. It is not discoverable by the scientists, who see only electrons and protons; this is something far more fundamental. This is the stuff we are made of. But every time we get angry or fly into a rage, we disturb the balance. Why else do you think you “feel” the violent energy? The mind can’t contain it any longer, and the energy fills the room affecting every person in it. But don’t take my word for it!

Observe yourself the next time you are angry or in a rage, or when someone else gets angry at you; and realise that you only have “to be,” to allow the balance to return. Language just gets in the way. Just be. Do not speak, but, instead, allow your whole being to fill up with the love that thought has been so desperately trying to block so it gets its own way. But thought is not you. Remember that.

Things that annoy me – I am love and I let go



Things that people say to me that I dislike – I am love and I let go



Situations that happen that I can’t control – I am love and I let go



People that say things to upset me – I am love and I let go



Things I imagine people are saying about me – I am love and I let go



I don’t get what I want - I am love and I let go



I can’t convince you that I’m right - I am love and I let go



I let the thoughts wash over my mind, like waves lapping at the shore.

A n i m a l s

A living organism characterized by voluntary movement

We are surrounded by animals everywhere, aren't we? Animals are part of the natural world we inhabit. There are also thousands of different species of insects, reptiles, and birds, which I would also like to include in our discussion here. Some are big, some are tiny, some look nice, and others we see as ugly; some are scary, and some are deadly.

Here's the thing; they're all part of the earth, just like us, although perhaps we would consider ourselves above everything else on earth. We are superior. We are human beings; the most intelligent species on the planet, characterized by superior intelligence, articulate speech, and erect carriage; and we have consciousness (*an alert cognitive state in which you are aware of yourself and your situation*), which we believe all other creatures on the planet do not. We're the boss. We rule the earth.

Which is all very nice for us, the human; the supreme predator. We can do what we want. We can kill animals, make them extinct, or change their habitat so drastically they can't live there anymore; no one can stop us, we are invincible! Yet we don't really seem to know a lot about our friends we share the earth with, do we? Sure, we study them, measure them, curate them, and domesticate them; but what do we really know about them?

As humans, we selfishly consider "Why am I here, what is the purpose of my life, and what is the true meaning of life?" We pray to gods for salvation; we look forward to reincarnation, or heaven; to nirvana, a place where life is better and all your dreams come true. But we never care to ask:

Why are they here?

Probably because we don't care; we're too busy progressing to worry about that. As far as we're concerned they're a pretty tasty meal, and as for the ones we don't eat; well, as long as they stay out of our way, we'll let them live. Perhaps we may stick them in a cage or a zoo to look at if they're cute, but definitely keep them out of towns and cities; we don't want to get too close to them.

According to evolutionary theories, we are a relative of the ape, and have evolved over millions of years to reach the point we are at now. We are different from the apes as we have evolved into a biped (*walking on two feet*), and are now able to free up our hands for complex tool making and other tasks. Our brain has grown as well, and we are now capable of complex thought and decision making.

We seem to have outgrown the rest of the planet in our abilities. For now there is no one to challenge us psychologically or physically, although that being said; we are not able to challenge lions or tigers hand to hand, but with the development of weapons we can control them and other creatures that could pose us a threat; from a distance.

I have one question for you though: do you consider yourself part of the animal kingdom, or do you see yourself apart, as something so different to other life on earth that you have no connection to it anymore?" From observation of people, I would have to say that the latter is probably true. But let's get back to our main question: What are animals doing here? They don't have ambition, they don't drive nice cars, they don't pray to gods, they aren't worried about their credit cards, they

aren't looking for a promotion, they aren't lying to one another constantly, they aren't digging up the planet to make more money; in fact, they don't know what money is. They don't go to casinos, or drink fine wines, and they don't wage war or destroy their own environment. All in all, animals are pretty useless, aren't they? It's no wonder we don't care about them. They don't contribute at all!

We are the ones who build the schools, the hospitals, the roads, the telecommunication links; we do! We generate the wealth, build the planes, the cars, and grow food for the nations. In fact, we do everything; what do the animals do?

Stop for a moment and just observe

Have you ever stopped to watch a worm in the soil, and then watch a bird come and eat it? Have you ever lifted a log to see the ants and other insects busying themselves with activity, or watched deer in the forest, or hedgehogs at night? Have you looked at the spider's web in the fresh morning dew, or watched a bee buzzing around flowers in the summer? If you have, you'll know that it's an incredible sight to see; millions of different creatures all performing different tasks; and the strange thing is, they're not complaining, they're not unhappy with their lot; they just get on with the task in hand. Why? Because it needs to be done!

This is the difference between us; they have a specific task to do which must be done every day, but through our complex thought and abilities we don't have a specific task to do every day. Well, not one that keeps the world in balance. We are able to grow food on a huge scale now, so we are no longer having to hunt and gather, which leaves us with a lot of extra time on our hands. Now we spend our time trying to make more than anyone needs, create products that addict our bodies and minds, and indulge ourselves in the pursuit of money and pleasure.

Let's face it, we haven't got anything else to do, so we have invented new ways of occupying ourselves. We're still busy; in fact busier than our ancestors ever were, but not in the same way. We have progressed to such an extent that the idea of working just for food and water is laughable to us; although this still goes on in some countries, whom we call poor, and third world. Our pursuit is now money, and what we can acquire with it.

Meanwhile, our unintelligent friends are still busying themselves every day, whilst we worry about the mortgage, fight over land, kill each other with bombs, stress about work, are unhappy in our relationships, try to

lose weight, or try to give up smoking. We humans have got it tough; they should be glad they're not as intelligent as us! We see ourselves above nature. We see nature as something to be admired, feared, and then controlled. One thing's for sure, we are not a part of it anymore.

We have intelligence; we can create art, design sculptures, put on ballets and theatre. We can split the atom, design a machine that flies in the air, fly a pineapple from one part of the globe to another and keep it fresh enough to eat. Show me one creature that can do that? I couldn't, and neither could anyone else. Do you know why? Because the creatures on the earth don't care about those things; they are here for a purpose. It is the that we are missing – the purpose, of keeping the world in balance.

Ecosystem

A system formed by the interaction of a community of organisms with their physical environment

As with nature, when we talk about the ecosystem, we talk about something that is external to us. We never see ourselves as part of it. Let's try to find out why.

In the summertime, I have often wondered about the purpose of wasps, especially while I am eating my meal outside. Their purpose, as I see it, is to distract me from the enjoyment of a nice salad and maybe sting me in the process.

Scientists can tell you everything these days; what the purpose of this flower is or the purpose of that insect is, but no one can tell you what your purpose is in this great ecosystem.

We know we are the ultimate predator, but that's it. We artificially grow food in huge quantities, and farm animals for meat, outside of the natural system. We destroy pests that come too close to our food production system with chemicals, and we kill animals that try to eat our livestock. We deny the rest of the animal kingdom access to any of our food sources.

We protect our cities from the intrusion of animals by making them of concrete. We keep our city parks clear of wild animals and birds, unless we have semi-domesticated them. We move species from country to country, introducing new species without any thought to whether this will upset the balance of the local ecosystem. We are not helping the world to stay in balance – we are actively upsetting it. Why? Because of

the human thought: “If you don’t understand something, control it or destroy it.”

How many times has a fly or a bee come into your house, or a spider sneaked out behind the woodwork, or an ant crawled across the floor? Quite regularly, I would assume. What’s your reaction?

Well, I know some people are in absolute terror! They instantly swipe at it or stamp on it until it’s dead. “Phew that’s better!” they think, calmly sweeping away the remains into the bin. Other people may spray them with insecticide, or desperately try to get them outside without killing them, but one thing for sure; you don’t want them in your house, do you? This is an animal free zone. No birds, no creatures, no insects, just humans (oh, and maybe your dog, cat, fish, or bird in a cage). You may be wondering why we keep what we call pets, so let’s look into it together.

Pet

A domesticated animal kept for companionship or amusement

Dogs are cute aren’t they? And they’re pretty funny too. My labrador kept me amused with his antics every day, even when he was eating my shoes or chewing on a piece of the sofa. When I was lonely he used to come over and put his head in my lap – he was great company.

But of course, dogs weren’t always like this. Our ancestors domesticated (*make fit for cultivation, domestic life, and service to humans*) the wild dog many thousands of years ago, and have been gradually cross-breeding, and changing the characteristics of the dog, until you have the perfect companion we have today – “man’s best friend.”

Some people are cat lovers, as cats are more independent, but still show affection. Other people just keep a fish in a fifty centimetre glass bowl, and watch it aimlessly swimming round and round; or even keep a bird in a small cage, so it can never fly. But if you let the bird out for a moment it would fly away, wouldn’t it? And quite right too. Freedom!

Whatever pet we keep (some keep what they call exotic pets, like snakes, lizards, and tropical spiders which are not domesticated), we have taken the animal out of its natural environment, whether now or in the distant past. We have tried to change the animal into something *we* like – we are not happy for it to remain wild.

As for dogs and cats, we have tried to make them more human. We bathe them, feed them human food, dress them in a coat when they are

cold, give them beds, and even let them sleep with us. We love them like children. We are proud to walk our dogs, and we like to come home to our cats – they are almost a substitute for human company (some people prefer them, as they don't answer back!). They are part of the family, except in other countries where dogs and cats are on the menu.

“How could you?” the dog and cat owners scream. But in reality they are just the same as other meat; and probably quite tasty! It is how we see our animals that matters. Some are seen as animals for company which we could never kill, and others are just seen as dinner. If you're an animal it just depends on what country your living in whether you get eaten or treated to a nice warm house and a snack before bed.

Some people revere the cow, whilst others enjoy it as medium rare steak

So, our views on animals depend on what species they are, and what country we're living in. Domesticated animals are not feared, but you would run a mile if a pack of wild dogs were running round your local park, wouldn't you? Fear of animals is mostly unfounded, as we aren't actually on anyone's menu. Even lions and tigers don't like humans as their first preference, neither do great white sharks in the oceans; but they look like they are going to kill us at the first opportunity they get (admittedly, we would probably do best to stay out of their way, just in case they mistook us for a zebra or seal).

The thing is, they look scary, and in the past, when we were actually hunting wild animals, it was much more dangerous. We had a fairly high chance of being killed, so maybe this is a fear that hasn't evolved out of us yet? We are scared of the natural world.

How many of you have camped out in the forest, or walked in a wood at night with the noise of the animals moving around and calling out to each other? Scary isn't it? Especially if a spider's web touches your face! It's enough to make you run screaming back to the comfort of the city; where, if you remember from other topics, you have much more chance of coming to harm at the hands of one of your own species, than you ever would at the hands of an animal in the forest.

It's just a fear of the unknown that makes us scared; although animals, insects, and birds manage to co-exist quite happily together, even though they are definitely on someone menu. Yes, it's much more tense being an animal than a human in the forest; but although they may have fear, they

carry on with their job as part of the ecosystem. A human wouldn't go within a hundred miles of somewhere he may be eaten, even if the ecosystem depended on it.

So to recap. As long as we have control over the animal world we feel safe, and although we like to have animals in our house, it has to be one we can domesticate, humanise, and one that looks attractive. If you have eight legs, big eyes, a fat hairy body, and you sneak in and out of the sink; I'm afraid you can forget it. The only thing a human will give you is death.

So we have started to create a list of animals we like, others we like to eat, and others we avoid in case they eat us. By the way, anything with more than four legs, no legs, or is in any way slimy, scaly, prickly, or small (think mice in the kitchen) is to be avoided at all costs, whether dangerous or not. Although we still do like to think of ourselves as animal lovers, don't we?

Look at the cute bear on tv...

Have you ever watched animated films for children? What sort of animals are they? They have insects, birds, lions, tigers, spiders, and bears, all of whom could be dangerous or poisonous in the wild; yet they look somewhat different. Have you noticed it? Their eyes are bigger like a child's, their features are more human, they have the ability to smile, and wait for it... They talk in a language we understand! Very unlike the animals we meet in the forest, aren't they? It makes them altogether more likeable. I find myself becoming fond of skunks, tortoises, rabbits, bears, and squirrels.

Everywhere you look, there's animated films with talking animals; even adults love them, because the animals all look cute and cuddly. Just like a toy, they look as if you could cuddle them when you feel sad or lonely. In other words, the animals look like they would be comforting. Please excuse the repetitiveness of this word cute (*attractive especially by means of smallness or prettiness or quaintness*), but I think it is an apt term here.

We think that animals are important to children. We buy them picture books with cute animals in them, take them to the zoo, we show them nature programs about animals, and get them to draw pictures of their favourite animals, then we say:

“Hurry up and eat your meat.”
“Who wants a sausage?”
“Mmmmm, do you want a burger?”
“How about some nice ham?”
“Would you like a fish finger?”

Children being children (innocent), do not know the link between “the little piggy” in the book, and the sausage; or the cow going “moooo” in the field, and a cheeseburger; or the “talking fish” in the cartoon and a fish finger. It doesn’t cross a child’s mind, and we try to protect children from what we are; from what we do as humans, by dressing it up in “cute” pictures and language.

We would never drive past a cow and say: “See that cow, alan? Soon it will become your burger.” And why not? Because we don’t want to upset the child. This is true even as we grow up into adults.

We buy our chicken breast, steak, and pork chops from the supermarket, where it’s all nicely packaged in plastic, and doesn’t look anything like the animals in the fields. If it did, we’d probably all be vegetarians by now.

Gone are the days when we used to hunt a wild beast with a spear and eat its flesh. We’re much too scared now; in fact, even now, when we could kill animals with guns, which some people class a sport (deer hunting or duck hunting), how many people could really say they would be happy removing the intestines and cleaning the flesh? Not many I bet.

So we have an uneasy relationship with nature, don’t we? On the one hand, we love animals and on the other, we want to control, kill, and eat them. We’re afraid of them, yet they should be infinitely more scared of us. We like to visit them in zoos, but we would go mad if they were running wild in our cities. We seek to understand them, but only at a distance.

I would like you to do one thing for me will you, as animal lovers, if that’s all right? Take an hour on a saturday, or anytime you have available, and go down to a slaughterhouse (*a place where animals are butchered*). Oh, and be sure to take the whole family with you, especially young children. It really is pleasant to see how we electrocute and carve up our favourite animals with huge machines, so we can have a sausage or a chicken burger.

Most people have probably never seen an animal die in close quarters. Some die in silence, most scream in pain, all experience great fear. Stand

for a moment and take in the smell, the putrid smell of flesh, and see our magnificent triumphs over the animals, great hunters...

Let's imagine a fictional scenario, where the animals are in charge, shall we? They set up big factories where they farm the humans, keep them in little cages with no room to move, or fatten them up, because animal christmas is about to arrive. They kill millions of you every year by putting you on electric spikes, or with a bolt of electricity to the brain.

You are chopped, diced, sliced, minced, processed, and cut into tasty morsels so the animals wouldn't know what they were eating; shipped to the animal supermarket, bought and cooked, only for baby bear to throw you on the floor and say, "mum, I'm not hungry," and throw you in the bin. Now reverse that story, and that's what goes on now.

Why are they here?

One question that you may feel we haven't dealt with in its entirety, is why animals are here; and before you answer, it's not just to provide us with meat and sport. Why? It's simply because the world exists. And the world needs taken care of. They give life as they take life. The animals, the fish, the mammals, the insects, the trees, and the birds; they're the real custodians of the planet. We'd just ruin it if it was left to us.

So next time you walk in the forest, in the park, or go to swat a fly, or kill a spider, think about the important job that all the animals, birds, and insects do; and extend them a little respect, as they go about their daily business of keeping the world in balance.

A n t i b i o t i c s

A chemical substance derivable from a mould or bacterium that kills micro-organisms and cures infections

When antibiotics were first discovered, they were known as a wonder drug. They were the cure for our many ills. They worked quickly and effectively, and now every time you go to the doctor you seem to be given antibiotics for whatever it is that's wrong with you. Make no mistake. They work. Over the last hundred years or so, many brilliant chemists have worked day and night to find cures for all the major diseases that have plagued the world. They are still searching for answers for some, but I am sure that it is only a matter of time before they do.

These cures are distributed in the form of medicinal drugs prescribed by qualified medical doctors; and we assume they are doing us good, because soon after taking them, we normally start to feel better. It's all thanks to the pharmaceutical companies who make them. The strange thing is, whenever I go to my local doctor – which is very rare – I feel as

if I am no longer in the door, than they are writing me out a prescription for some penicillin, or some antibiotics. Maybe it's just me?

I began thinking deeply about this, especially when I compared it to my studies of traditional thai massage (one branch of traditional thai medicine; the others being diet, spirituality, and herbs). In thailand, they believe you must always treat the individual patient, not the symptom. They look at your whole body, your lifestyle, and your mind, in order to diagnose the disease (it may be traditional medicine, but it's worked well for several thousand years).

The principal of their medicine (and all other eastern medicine) is prevention, rather than cure, whereas the principal of our medicine is wait until it gets so bad that only the strongest chemicals will cure it.

To be fair, western medicine can cure in areas eastern medicines can't. I have a friend who has just had a heart attack; he is 56 and has lived his whole life over indulging in fatty foods, alcohol, and cigarettes. He was a publican for many years and took no notice of his health. He suffered from angina (*any disease of the throat or fauces marked by spasmodic attacks of intense suffocative pain*) for over ten years, until three months ago, he had a heart attack, and was rushed to hospital. They injected him with a life saving drug, and several weeks later he was taken into surgery to be given a triple bypass operation, whereby the damaged part of his heart was bypassed with a vein taken from his leg.

He has since made a complete recovery and is doing well (now on a vegetarian diet). Eastern medicine would not have been able to save him in the moment, but eastern medicine and a healthy lifestyle may have prevented him from having the heart attack in the first place.

The idea of prevention is alien in our western society. We expect to do whatever we like to our bodies and then have someone fix it; and this is where the drug companies come in. They are masters at last minute life savers, although we must not forget the wonderful surgeons and doctors who do such a great job; without whom many lives around the world would be considerably shorter.

This pop a pill idea is so popular now that people eat, smoke, and drink themselves towards an early grave, only to be saved at the last moment by western medicine. Only then do they wake up to what they've been doing to their health.

So who are these people who make these life saving drugs? Are these charitable people intent on saving the world from disease? Are they government scientists? The answer to both of those questions is a resounding no. The people who make these drugs are employed by

multinational companies, whose prime motivation as a public or private company, is profit. That is why they are in business; not to heal the world, but to keep the shareholders happy.

They don't actually care what you do with your life, that's your choice. Health and prevention is nothing to do with them. As they see it, it's the government's job to educate you, and your job is to listen; they are only there as a backup when things go wrong, or a specific cure is needed for a specific disease.

Our health in the hands of the shareholders

I became worried that there must be a conflict of interest going on. Surely someone whose primary motivation is money, has different priorities to someone only concerned with helping people? The companies would say they can achieve both, but I'm not so sure. The pharmaceutical business is worth many billions of dollars around the world, and with all drugs patented, the drug company can set whatever price they want – so if you haven't got the money, you can't get the treatment.

From a business point of view that seems fair. If the newspaper costs £1.00 and you only have 50 pence, you can't buy the newspaper; but this isn't about newspapers, this is about the lives of human beings, and this is evident in developing nations that desperately need access to retro-viral drugs (which inhibit the onset of aids; a disease which is killing millions across the world).

Because these people live in poor countries where the governments are usually corrupt, there is little money to buy these lifelines. I am aware it costs a lot of money to produce these drugs, and that the money needs to come from somewhere; but I cannot understand why such an important role is left to private individuals who are trying to make money, not just for themselves, but usually for their shareholders who demand a return on their money every year.

Would we as tax payers not be prepared to fund research into cures that may potentially save us one day? Do we not care about saving our fellow humans in other parts of the world? Probably not. We want to spend our money on things that bring us pleasure! If we get sick, that's someone else's problem, and indeed it is. The privately run multinational pharmaceutical companies to be exact.

The miracle workers

They love it when we get sick, after all, if no one was getting sick what would be the point of investing all that money in new drugs? We get sick, the doctor prescribes the cure, we get better, the multinational gets paid. Seems a fair system, doesn't it? No one loses out. Or do they?

In the west we have come to rely on "simple" cures like antibiotics, to cure almost any common ailment; just as we have drugs for flu, hay fever, headaches, backaches, leg aches – you name it, there's a pharmaceutical drug for it. High blood pressure, anxiety, depression, even schizophrenia, there's drugs for all. The whole world can live better lives thanks to the big pharmaceutical companies!

My dad now takes various drugs every day to control his high blood pressure, without which he would be in serious trouble; so most people would agree that pharmaceuticals are wonder drugs. They are quick acting, usually effective, and if you forget the nasty (sometimes very nasty) side effects, they could truly be called a modern miracle.

Man has finally overcome nature. We can cure what was previously incurable, we can control what would have previously been fatal, and we can arrest the development of diseases in their tracks! These drug companies have taken the personal out of personal responsibility, and replaced it with corporate. These are the people who now take responsibility for your health. These faceless multi-billion dollar giants are the people who will look after your health; for just a few pounds for each drug you buy. No longer do we need to look after our own health, why should we? We can live a completely unhealthy lifestyle, and just before we die, be given a wonder drug, and some clever surgery, and extend our life for another few years.

But I would like to ask you a serious question. How many illnesses around today are actually because of the life we lead? Do we even know the effect that all the electronic and radio equipment is having on us? Do we know what happens when we microwave our food, or when we spray pesticides and other chemicals over our fruit and vegetables; or what happens when the animals we are eating are injected with antibiotics? I certainly don't. Do you? And yet we carry on regardless, feeling safe in the knowledge that someone else is looking out for us.

The human system – although strong and resilient – is a finely balanced machine. Is it not surprising that we get sick, and catch diseases, with the food we ingest and the artificial environment we live in? Our

system is not prepared for the stress we put it under, but it is all credit to it that it manages to stay in balance, despite our best efforts to subdue it. We don't listen to our bodies when they tell us to slow down or tell us to rest, we just pop another pill and carry on. I'm not sure if you know that headache pills only mask the signal your body is passing to you, they don't cure it.

Illness is when the body is no longer in balance. Feeding it unnatural remedies may be a quick fix, but it does not bring the body back into balance like a natural cure would. For thousands of years, herbalists have been decocting plants and picking medicinal herbs to cure illness. They have looked to nature to provide the cure, and it has. These days, we rely on a company whose primary motivation is money, to invent a synthetic drug to cure us, and I think it is sad we lost touch with our connection to the earth – where the true healing is.

Unfortunately, natural cures are still regarded by the western medical profession as “quack” (*an untrained person who pretends to be a physician and who dispenses medical advice*) medicine. As far as they are concerned, the only way to cure someone, is through a combination of the use of drugs which have gone through rigorous testing process, and invasive surgery (which, it has to be said, does produce good results).

Because they do not have the conclusive “empirical” (*derived from experiment and observation rather than theory*) evidence that is required in western pharmaceutical medicine, eastern, or traditional medicine which uses herbs and plants is dismissed. I see this as a short sighted view; after all, some of these traditional systems have been successfully treating people for thousands of years! If they had never managed to cure anyone then we would have to agree with western doctors, but I think the evidence speaks for itself.

Traditional, as I prefer to call it, rather than “alternative” medicine, is derived from nature, the most powerful force in the universe; so whether the medicine is “spiritual,” uses stones, or crystals, oils, bark from the tree, special chanting techniques, many hands placed above the body, needles inserted into the body, or pressure exerted on specific points, we must all admit that if it works, then that is all the evidence we need! Why do we need more evidence than that?

In my training in traditional thai yoga massage, we used acupressure along “invisible” energy lines. Dissection was forbidden in thai medicine in the past, and yet if you look a chart of these invisible lines over a western anatomical figure, you will see that they closely map to the nervous system of the body. How did they know that 2500 years ago?

Who knows? And until we understand energy and the body more, we will remain in the dark. All I can say is, the treatment I use, which is based on ancient techniques, works. Amazingly, people feel better! That is pretty good evidence, don't you think?

But still the western scientists won't give in; they believe their way is the only way. I'm sorry to say that it isn't. That isn't to say that you should run around the world looking for any old traditional medicine practitioner; I'm sure there are as many bad ones as there are bad western doctors, it is purely individual. All I can suggest is that you keep an open mind to anything and everything, western and eastern, but don't just pop a pill because it's available.

You need to try to become more aware of your body at all times; you need to feel your own body – not physically – but try to visualise it; starting with the head and working down through your shoulders, through your arms and fingers, down your torso, down your legs to your toes.

Listen to your body before you run down to the doctor with every ailment; all you will be filled with, is synthetic drugs, which you remember, only treat the symptom, not the whole patient. But of course, the overworked doctors are too busy with everyone and their illnesses these days to have time to concentrate on treating the patient.

Pain is the sign that the body is out of balance, and you need to find that vital ingredient to put your body back into balance. But please look to yourself and to nature first before you look to the man in the suit. Nature has your best interest at heart. Does the pharmaceutical company?

As we close this discussion, I have an important item to share with you which may give you something to think about. We have talked about humans finding cures for all sorts of diseases, and managing to extend our lives where we would have died in such cases; but why do we need to find a cure for disease?

That might sound like the stupidest thing you've read since picking up this book, but I am serious. It is so we can extend our lives so they are not terminated before what we think is their "time." But who actually knows why we get diseases? Maybe this is nature's way of controlling the population, so the earth's limited resources are kept in balance.

On the island I am living on at the moment, the stewards of the island, the tibetan buddhists, have a policy of not interfering with nature; and so it was, that I watched a young lamb, who had only days before, been gambolling with the other lambs, die slowly over several days. It was

heartbreaking to watch, as its life-force gradually ebbed away. I felt cruel for not trying to help.

The vet we phoned said if we gave it some antibiotics, it would probably make a full recovery; but instead, we let nature take its course. This is true of all other animals humans do not have a use for, or have no monetary value – we just let nature take its course.

We do not grieve for them, we just say: “Oh well, that’s nature,” so I ask you why we do not just let nature take its course with humans? We talk about it “not being our time,” but how do we know that the disease isn’t nature telling us “it’s time?” Maybe we should stop interfering, and let nature take its course, but would that make us less than human? I will leave you with that thought.

A r c h i t e c t u r e

The discipline dealing with the principles of design and construction and ornamentation of fine buildings

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The profession of designing buildings and environments with consideration for their aesthetic effect

We all love to look up at the wonderful buildings created by an architect some time ago in history, don't we? We marvel at the complexities of the work; the intricate detail, the bold statements, and the display of power it exudes. In every country, there are great monuments, civil buildings and private palaces, and let's not forget the churches and cathedrals.

But most of these are buildings of a different age, built when money was no object, by powerful wealthy men, as a testament to their great influence and status in the land.

Today's modern buildings pale into insignificance by comparison, don't you think? The only people who can afford to build grand buildings are wealthy companies, and they don't even do it. Why? Because they're just too darn expensive! And in an age where money is the bottom line, architecture and good taste seem to go out the window.

Now we have monstrous office buildings dominating the skyline; and although impressive as feats of great engineering, they are in no way comparable to great palaces like versailles and the vatican.

“Those buildings were the vision of architects of the past,” commented a well known architect. “Today’s design is about clean lines, lots of glass; and tall, very tall.” So although they don’t have the exquisite stone masonry work the churches had, they still want to make a statement. They want to say, “look at me, I am here! Oh, and by the way, I am owned by company X.”

The architects of the past would be horrified by what they see now. “Where is the skill in that?” they would ask. “Where is the work of the artisans? All you have now is a big lump of metal with lots of glass.” But you would want to ask them what they would have created if they had access to the most modern materials, and had machinery that could have got the job done in half the time at half the price! I’m sure they would have replied calmly that, “that wasn’t the point of architecture.”

I think it would be funny to see something as iconic as the coliseum in rome all done in modern steel and shiny smoked glass windows. Somehow I don’t think they would get quite so many visitors as they do now.

But these iconic structures were different. They were built with the hands of men, with no fancy machinery to take the burden. You only have to look at the pyramids in giza to realise what a great feat was achieved in constructing them. Unfortunately, they probably used slaves, as their lives were valueless to the rulers; but nonetheless, they are still striking.

Whatever symbolism all these ancient structures were designed to convey, there was one thing that could be said about them – they were built to last! Some of the stones in these buildings are so huge you have to wonder if there weren’t a race of giants living at that time who were employed to do all the hod carrying and brick laying. They just seem like impossible structures to create without all the modern engineering knowledge we have now. But created they were, and they still stand, in countries like italy and greece amongst many others.

These were advanced civilisations who had amazing knowledge, and we still fail to comprehend how it was all possible – given what they were up against. But as we said in the first paragraph, these were buildings designed to show how powerful the rulers were, to show how much greater they were than the ordinary man (who unfortunately, was the one made to create the structures).

Perhaps many thousands died building them, but to the rulers, their lives were unimportant; what was important was exercising their power over the people. And as such, great courts of law and palaces were built to keep the people in awe of their power. At the same time, the religious leaders were building their own monuments to themselves (sorry, to god) and showing what great power they (sorry, god) had over them.

So maybe it is better we don't create anymore of these structures as we have enough people in the present day trying to show how much power they have over others.

Let them crumble

If you ever have the misfortune to be called into your courts of law, you will feel the power that the buildings hold over you. You, the weak individual who has done wrong, versus the state, encompassed in the stonework and the grand arches. That is what these great stones convey to me; power – nothing more.

So why don't we just knock down all these institutions, after all, we don't really want any more reminders of how powerful the state was and still is. "You can't knock them down! These are national institutions, these are the symbols of the country," say the politicians (also thinking about the drop in visitor numbers).

But let's imagine for a moment that we no longer had these ancient reminders of power, that unfortunately, we had a big earthquake which only targeted the churches, the cathedrals, the courts of law, and the buildings of government, amongst other things! How would your sense of national identity be without them?

For americans, the white house is a symbol of america's power, not only over its neighbours, but also over its people. Imagine if it too fell, and the president was forced to live in a three bedroom house in downtown washington! How would his status be then? How powerful would the state be without the architectural symbols of national identity? How would you feel? Would you feel that something was missing, that somehow you didn't feel so british, french, or american? What do you think? Would the power structure in the country continue if they could no longer extract the population's obedience with these symbolic buildings?

Just think about it. All this great architecture was designed to do one thing; make you fear the state, the powerful, and the mighty. These

buildings refused to let you intimidate the state. “Who are you, you are nothing compared to us,” the buildings would growl. I know that this discussion may seem a little silly to you, but I would like you to give your utmost attention to it.

Imagine if the rulers of your country (thanks to the impromptu earthquake) were forced to run the country from a local italian restaurant or tea room! That would be a funny sight to see. These people would be naked without their architectural symbols of power, and we would discover what we already knew – that they are nothing but men made of flesh and bone, now vulnerable without their “armour,” which are the buildings.

Would you still respect them; still look up to these great men, these powerful rulers? I’m sure you wouldn’t, and neither would I. Just like a tank commander who needs his tank, a ruler needs his buildings; and without them, he’s kind of, well, pathetic looking.



Several years ago I was travelling around europe with my wife, and we ended up in rome, where we followed the other million tourists to that great architectural colossus, the vatican (*the residence of the catholic pope in the vatican city*). Now I’m not follower of religions, but I do like the grandeur of the buildings, and the fantastic frescos (*a mural done with watercolours on wet plaster*) on the ceilings; so I was eager to get in and have a look around. I was upset to not be allowed in because my wife had “bare shoulders” (she had a singlet on as it was hot).

“What! Why can’t we get in?” I argued. I looked over at a sign that said all shoulders had to be covered. “Why? We only want to look around,” I muttered.

As we left with our heads hung low I happened to catch a glance at another lady, who, determined to comply with the rules, had inserted a napkin into either strap of her singlet, so it covered her shoulders. I laughed heartily when I saw this. The great power of the vatican disarmed by two napkins!

I don’t want to get into a silly debate about why women should cover up, or shouldn’t, that is a pointless; all that can be said is that these are rules created by powerful humans, men to be exact, so make up your own mind.

But back to the pope! Here is a man who sits in power over a church with millions of followers worldwide; so as a powerful man, he needs

powerful symbols. He sits up on a balcony above us, like the religious images that are placed looking down on us in places of worship; and he issues his speeches. But imagine if the vatican was no more. Imagine our earthquake had magically swallowed up the whole vatican, and the pope and all of his deputies were forced into a rather more humble cottage or cafe. Where would his power be then? How in awe of god would you be when man's (catholic) representative on earth is giving speeches from a coffee shop? Please think about this because it is important.

You see, when you strip a man of his authority and his power, which in this case is the buildings, what does he become? A man, just like you and me, with his own fears and desires. But the powerful don't want you to see the man like that. They don't want the prime minister or president to look like you, otherwise why would you follow them? Do you see? Without his buildings surrounding him, the powerful man is nothing.

Let his buildings crumble around him, and with it let the symbols of power be gone. I'm sure the pope and the presidents are all nice people, and we can all look forward to getting on with them once they stop putting themselves above us. What do you think?

Unfortunately, these are pretty well made buildings so they will take a long time to crumble, so either we hope move into cheap modern offices (after all who would respect someone who worked in one of those) or we wait. But don't worry; we have all the time in the universe.

But do me a favour will you, next time you are standing in front of these buildings zealously snapping them with your digital camera, just quietly remember why they were built. Then remember the people who built them, and who they built them for.

A r g u i n g

A contentious speech act; a dispute where there is strong
disagreement

•

Present reasons and arguments

*“I am right and you are wrong
and if you can't see that
you must be more stupid than I thought”*



We all argue from time to time; sometimes about important issues, sometimes about trivial things. More often than not, it's with our partners, or our parents, and occasionally with friends and work colleagues. Arguments can start at any time, for any reason, and normally involve the raising of voices. If severe enough, they may perhaps lead to physical violence, but must always contain at least two parties, and always involve a head to head battle – much like a boxing ring, where you have opponent one vs. opponent two, and the aim of the “match” is for one opponent to win, by subduing the other.

The stakes are continually raised, with each opponent adding ammunition to their arsenal by using hurtful, cruel, or detrimental comments to make the other back down. Listen to this example conversation and see if you recognise it.

Mum: Why don't you ever clean your room? It's disgusting, I can't believe you never clean it, I do everything for you, you're so lazy, all I ask is that you clean your room once in a while.

Child: You're so unfair mum. I'm busy with school work, I don't have time to do it, and anyway, what do you do during the day? Nothing. All you do is sit here, while dad's at work earning money.

Mum: What? You ungrateful girl. I brought you into this world. I look after you, I feed you, I clothe you, I house you...

Child: No you don't! Dad pays for everything; and anyway, I didn't ask to be born, just leave me alone.

Mum: You wait till your dad hears about this! You are grounded for a week; no going out for you after school. You will come home and do your homework straight away.

Child: (now crying with anger) Why? You can't make me, I won't do it, you can't make me!

Mum: (determined) I can, and I will, and if you keep on like that you'll get no dinner tonight either.

Child: Fine, I don't want dinner! In fact, I don't ever want to see you again, I hate you!

Mum: Don't speak to me like that.

Child: I'll speak to you any way I want, I hate you.

Result: Mum slams the door and leaves the child crying, whilst she goes into the living room trembling with rage, and starts crying herself.

Extreme example, or not?

Arguments can be about many things, as we have said already. Just this morning my girlfriend started an argument with me about something so trivial it isn't worth mentioning, but it is!

Her: Why do you always brush your teeth before breakfast?

Me: Because it makes my mouth feel fresh.

Her: It's a total waste of time, it doesn't work; you should always brush your teeth after breakfast.

Me: Why, what's it got to do with you, I'm 36 years old; if I want to brush my teeth before breakfast I can.

Her: Ok, I was just saying it's stupid, but every time I want to sit down with you at breakfast you're always doing something else. I can't stand it. Why don't you just sit down and eat breakfast with me? It's the one time we can spend together during the day.

Me: What's brushing my teeth got to do with spending time with you? Can't I just have a moment of peace in the morning without you going on all the time?

Her: I'm not going on all the time, it's just you're so selfish.

Me: Selfish, who's selfish? It's you who's the selfish one, because you won't let me enjoy my breakfast in peace.

Her: Silence

Result: Both leave in the morning without resolving the argument, with both parties now not speaking to each other. Lots of negative thinking about the other person during the day.

What was the argument really about? Teeth brushing? Breakfast? Selfishness? It doesn't really matter. What matters, is we both failed to notice how the argument was escalating (*increase in extent or intensity*). You see, arguments start out over something trivial; but as both parties are engaged in head to head combat with only words as their weapons, they have to resort to other strategies, especially if they feel as if they are losing. That is when the personal attacks start. From slight insults to full on personality assaults.

Opponents will use anything at their disposal to win the argument. Why? Because we all want to win. We all think we are in the right, and won't give in. The original topic of the argument is rarely the last.

In the previous example, we have gone from teeth brushing to selfishness in less than one minute. We have actually used other things that annoy us about the other to win the argument, resulting in hurt feelings on both sides.

Arguments are destructive, whatever the topic. In the end, there can never be a winner, as someone always has to lose. More often than not, they are started as a result of frustration (*the feeling that accompanies an experience of being thwarted in attaining your goals*), where you wish to do (or wish another to do) something, and someone else goes against you. We become upset at their refusal to comply, and begin to feel angry. We can't understand why they would go against us, as we are clearly in the right!

If we look at this carefully, we will see that it doesn't matter who is in the right; it becomes a battle of words, with the sole objective of winning. But no one will ever truly win. All that the argument achieves is the loser (*the person who has been beaten into submission*) feels not only bad about themselves, but also likes the winner a little less.

Arguments are pointless

Once we can see that arguments are pointless, we can start to move on. Some people say that arguing is good for us, that it releases “bad energy,” or “clears the air;” but when two people each want to get their point across, an argument won't solve it. You may as well put them in a boxing ring; because they *are* fighting, but using words instead of fists. In a fist fight the winner is the one who knocks his opponent down; the same applies with a verbal argument. Someone always gets hurt.

Arguments can never be constructive; otherwise they would be called a discussion. It is two ideas, two thoughts, battling head to head in all out war, until one idea is the conqueror. This could be between a couple arguing about whose turn it is to do the washing up, or a scientist and a priest arguing about whether man evolved, or was created. They do not want to hear the other person's side, they just want to win.

By interacting with the other person on the same level (i.e. shouting) all we are doing is creating more tension. It may feel like a release, but it can also be damaging to a relationship of any kind. I prefer to think of an argument as a loss of control, where we “say things we don't really mean.” Although what has usually happened, is a break down in communication, and over time, small things that annoyed us have gradually built up, until we can no longer store up these feelings and let loose with all guns blazing! That is why seemingly irrelevant things are brought up during an argument.

If we deal with small issues every day in the form of a discussion, where one party is actively listening to the other without interruption, it allows the person to vent in a non-destructive way, and does not seek to attack and counter-attack. Resolution comes about in a much swifter, and altogether more satisfactory manner for the benefit of both parties.

Vent

Activity that frees or expresses creative energy or emotion

Think of venting as a way to express how you feel without engaging the other person. A way of letting yourself say what needs to be said; but the energy is directed over the head of the other person, not directly at them. You are letting someone know have an important point to make, but you don't want them to respond. You just want to let them know how you feel.

It doesn't have to be with raised voices either. You are more likely to get someone to listen to you with a normal tone. When you have finished, allow the other person to vent, and actively listen. Do not interrupt, do not justify, criticize, or offer solutions. Just listen. It's that simple.

On the other hand, you have to begin to notice what makes you angry all the time. Why do you always want to argue? Start to notice yourself in the moment when you enter an argument, and notice how you feel, and what you are thinking. Stop and ask yourself, "How important is this to me?" and "why is it important?" The key to stopping arguments is *listening*. The reason most arguments start is one person feeling aggrieved, or wounded by a perceived attack on them, and instantly retaliating. The end result is the same as in all physical attacks. There *will* be casualties.

**No one can ever win an argument
Don't bother starting them**

A r m y

A permanent organization of the military land forces of a nation or state

•

A large number of people united for some specific purpose

There are plenty of advertisements on television and the press encouraging you to “be the best” or “have an exciting new career”, or “do something challenging in your spare time”. But what does it mean to be in the army (when I talk about army, I am including the navy and the air force)? For sure, it’s exciting! Who wouldn’t want to carry around a gun, fly about in jet planes at the speed of sound, or fire missiles? It beats regular work for a living. You get to wear combat clothes, you are powerful; and best of all, you get respect.

Who gets the kind of respect a soldier does? People do what you say; they obey your commands. No one respects a builder, a plumber, or an office clerk just because of the job they do. Why? The reason you get respect as a soldier, is because you bring fear into everyone’s lives. You

bring the option of death if they do not comply! And it feels good to have that kind of power in your hands, doesn't it?

Yesterday you were a street sweeper or an office manager no one paid much attention to, and today you are the most powerful man in the world. You wear your badge with pride. You are important. You are someone who demands respect. But who are you without your gun? Who are you without the thousands of armed men by your side? Who are you without the bombs that can kill or maim thousands in one go? No one.

I wonder why you want to join the army? Is it a deep sense of wanting to protect humanity from evil people, or wanting to do something "worthwhile" for your country? Let's talk about the sort of people who join.

Well, it's mainly men who join up, especially for the fighting – women just haven't got the killer instinct like men have. Women are programmed to create and to nurture, not destroy; so they make bad front line troops. So are these men committed to peace? Are they men of great learning and awareness – independent thinkers? No, of course not.

I don't like generalising too much, but I would say that the average soldier is quite aggressive (required), lacks self-esteem as an individual, has no awareness of himself in the world, is of fairly low education, is able to be moulded into what ever the army requires, will follow orders without questions, and above all, is willing to kill anybody his commanding officer says "kill."

High ranking officers are another breed. They are men who have education, but have been conditioned by their families and universities into believing in "fighting for a righteous cause," "for queen and country" and all that sentimental ideology, and will put across a convincing intellectual case for everything they are doing.

Let's go into this more deeply, shall we? Do you know what it is to be brainwashed (*subjected to intensive forced indoctrination resulting in the rejection of old beliefs and acceptance of new ones*)? It doesn't seem possible that a modern civilisation would brainwash its citizens, but that is exactly what the army does. They remove any trace of the compassionate, loving man, and replace him with a killing machine that follows orders; and follow orders they must.

Can you imagine the chaos on the front line if people used their own judgement as to whether to kill a man? No, the soldier must conform; there's no time to think. Kill or be killed. "It's him or you," you are told in training. "Who's it going to be soldier?" "Him, Sir, Yes Sir!"

Does this not seem strange to you, that your employer would want to break your mind into thinking only what he wants you to think? If you work for a computer company, or at a book shop, would you expect your boss to scream and shout orders at you incessantly? Would you expect your boss to break you and recondition you to doing exactly what was wanted even if it went against everything you were? I don't think so.

Humans do not have a biological predisposition to murdering other human beings in war, it has to be taught. You are forced to overcome any feelings of compassion and empathy for others, and do exactly what you are told. This is a job unlike any other.

I met a couple of ex-soldiers a few years ago, and I mentioned to them that they were just killing machines. They were upset when I mentioned this, and said that wasn't what modern day soldiering was about. Yes, they would kill if necessary, but their job was much more complex than that. They told me about intelligence work and peacekeeping work etc. They firmly believed that they had not been conditioned and that in a modern army unit, whilst there were orders, they were openly encouraged to think like an individual.

But individuals are not what makes an army strong though. There is a clear chain of command, where the thinking is done at the top, and filters its way down through the various ranks until you get to the private.

If you are a soldier in the army reading this, you may feel angry that I have misrepresented you, and you feel you are doing everything in a good cause – but whose cause? Humanity's? I don't think any person would agree that armies are working in the interest of humanity. Maybe it's for your country, because you "love your country so much," but remember many people have gone to war believing were right. You don't think millions of German soldiers would have gone to war if they didn't believe they were right. You may believe you have "right" on your side, but whose right is it? God's? Your leader's? Hitler convinced everyone he was right. People believed him. They joined the army and they killed because they believed it was "right."

But people who join armies do not know right from wrong. How can you? You are not allowed to think for yourself. In some countries, soldiers who refuse to carry out orders are summarily shot to make an example of them, and show the rest of the troops must obey. Some soldiers have decided mid-battle that it wasn't right to keep killing people and have decided to desert, or refuse to fight. They found out what it was like to go against orders. Shot or imprisoned.

Armies must have discipline. They must have absolute obedience, or they fall apart, and the only way to make homo sapiens – the most intelligent species on earth – obey every order you give, is to break his mind, and give him a new set of beliefs that are in line with every other soldiers. Complete mind control.

Right

Anything in accord with principles of justice

Foreign governments often intervene in what they call “rogue” countries, sending in the army to overthrow the government by the use of military force. They believe they are in the right. On first examination this seems to be fair. A lunatic despot brutally murdering people from his own country? Surely that needs intervention. If we kill him and his cronies, that will help the people return to modern life. After all, we in the democratic countries cannot sit idly by and watch people being murdered; so we go in with all guns blazing with right on our side. We kill and we maim in the name of freeing the people, but we seem to forget, that in the act of freeing people from such brutality, we ourselves have become brutal. There is an old expression that says “the ends never justify the means.”

When the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that signalled the end of the second world war. We stopped the war by showing we could be more brutal than the Japanese could ever conceive. We dropped those bombs to stop more people being killed and here we are in 2006 with just as many wars raging around the globe.

Think about it. Has sending in the army – even if we believed we were right – solved anything? Maybe temporarily, but until people understand their own minds, and start valuing all forms of life on this planet, there will always be someone, somewhere, who believes he is right, causing suffering. Violence always creates more violence, no matter who is in the right. In the end, it doesn't matter who is right, innocent people will always die as a result.

Do you think the pilots who dropped the bomb on Hiroshima believed they were right to do so, or do you think they had just become brainwashed killing machines on a voyage of destruction? Obviously they were conditioned as soldiers into obeying orders, but they must also have had a feeling that what they were doing was right. That the act of dropping the bomb would save more people than it killed. Except as

usual it killed innocent people who probably believed their country was in the right!

The thing about armies is that they must detach from recognising the right of the individual to life. They must see the man as an enemy, not a human being, and in doing so, remove the personal responsibility for their deaths. Imagine will you for a moment, that instead of killing the 100,000 people by dropping the bomb on them, the soldier went round and killed the same number of people in his own country – house by house, street by street, executing every one of them. What sort of man would he be then? A monster? Inhuman? The worst serial killer on the planet?

He would be reviled by all, and people would be sickened by these acts of violence. But give him a uniform, a flag, and the blessing of the government, and he becomes a hero. Please think about this carefully for a moment because it is of the utmost importance. In my mind there is no difference; the only difference is that he killed people from his own country, not a foreign country, and nobody said he could.

What detachment enables a government to send people like you and I to war, call us soldiers, and get us to kill in their name? They sanction the deaths of thousands of people yet they are not called to account. They are the ones in power, and they send you to die for them. For what? Freedom? For who?



As a species we have failed consistently. It is by pure chance we have managed to survive this long; but with the invention of nuclear weapons it could all be over for us in less than a day. Us, the planet, the animals and the birds. Have we not learnt anything from the past? Of course not!

The present is the present and people still want power and control over others. Until we shift our thinking that will never change. There will always be a new hitler to replace the old one. Hitler is just an example, but he embodies all men seeking to dominate, and overcome others, through an idea. An idea that needs an army to spread its message.

Tell me, did mahatma gandhi need an army to spread his message – one of peace and love? No, you don't need a gun for that. You don't need soldiers. You don't need weapons of mass destruction, you just need a voice. Armies are only despatched when the message needs reinforcement with the threat of death. So although we have talked about governments

and powerful men controlling the army, they would be nothing without *you*.

You are the army, you are the trained killer. You are the one who is brainwashed into obeying orders. You. The human being who has spent millions of years evolving into what you are today. Without you there could be no genocide, no destruction, no terror, and no murder. You cause it. You who join the army in person or support it in name.

You have a wonderful brain, and an amazing body; don't let it be used by powerful controlling men as a machine to rain destruction on the whole world. Stay as an individual, an independent thinker; and remember that the ends can never justify the means; and right is purely subjective.

If none of you allow yourselves to be brainwashed, where would the powerful men be then? You make them powerful. You give them the ability to threaten others. You are no better than the murderer who kills innocent people in his home town. There is no "cause," there is no "enemy," only humans; and if only you took time to get to know them, you would find out that they're exactly like you.

A t t a c h m e n t

A feeling of affection for a person or an institution

As humans, we can't help feeling attached to people, especially ones we love. It comes as a great shock to our emotional systems when the people we love, die. It is as if we have been severed from them with a great blade, and although it is not visible, we feel it all the same. It is like having your heart wrenched out with a screwdriver; your stomach feels in knots, and your mind doesn't know where it is. I have never lost anyone I truly loved so you may feel that I am not in a position to discuss this with you, but let us explore it together nonetheless.

The thing is, we never really know we are attached until the bond is broken, do we? We know we love something (sorry someone) very much, but until they are taken away from us for good, we don't know how much it is going to hurt. And suddenly the knife cuts quickly and they are cast adrift from us. The end. Finality. The moment of truth.

And just like a physical cut, we feel it deeply. It's like a part of us is missing. We can't explain it, but it is there with us every day, this sense of loss. But it's not grief as we know it. So how can we explain it?

Every day, we form attachments to the physical and the inanimate by means of which we have no words. Somehow we become "attached" to people at work, to the television, to our routine, to our bank account, our traditions, our home, our children, our partners, even to celebrities; but we don't know it is there. An invisible thread of emotional bonding has been created. It is almost as if we are somehow giving the object of our attachment an atom of our own being and it gives us one in exchange. So now we're kind of like blood brothers (*a male sworn (usually by a ceremony involving the mingling of blood) to treat another as his brother*), but there has been no ceremony.

The tree of attachment has taken root

And your life carries on. You are not aware of the attachment, but it is there, holding you to the object, making you feel comfortable and secure, freeing you from fear; and as the years pass by with no break in the attachment, the roots grow stronger; the mutual exchange of atoms becoming more frequent. "Life is good" you murmur to yourself. And indeed it is. One could almost say, "perfect." The bonds are in place.

Except somebody forgot to tell you that nothing is forever, except perhaps, nothing. But you don't want to hear that. And even if someone does tell you that, there can be no fear can there? Your tree is firmly rooted into the ground and even the fiercest storm cannot uproot it. But the break in the attachment bond is not caused by a storm, it is caused by a knife, even though it is not wielded by man's own hand. And when it comes, it comes so suddenly, that nothing can prepare you for the consequences.

The doorbell rings.

Police: Mrs Smith, I'm afraid we have some bad news for you.

Mrs smith: What is it?

Police: Your husband was killed in a car accident today. I'm terribly sorry.

Mrs smith: Oh my god!

And the knife cut deep; and it felt like she had lost a part of herself (which indeed she had, as she had willingly given the other a part of her whole in order to buy security, confidence and freedom from fear).

Thoughts started running through Mrs Smith's mind, she felt sick, she felt as though she was going to faint. Her head was filled with chaos. "I just need a minute" she said.

And it cuts and it cuts

My friend Peter was a successful businessman. By the age of 38, he owned a small manufacturing company making garden furniture. Life hadn't been easy for Peter; his parents both died young, and he had to start the business with next to nothing. But now he had fifty people working for him, and he made enough money to have bought his own home outright, and had a small holiday cottage in the south of France.

He may have been doing well for himself, but he didn't rest on his laurels. He was in the factory every day before the workers, and left after them every day. You wouldn't call him a workaholic, let's just say he was committed to his job.

He had never married, and had enjoyed a diverse range of girlfriends over the years. He wouldn't agree with me, but I'd say he was "married to his job!" But I used to like when he sometimes came to pick me up at the weekend in his open top sports car. I used to love how the girls would look at us as we purred along the open road, and through the high streets of the local towns. I really envied him.

Don't get me wrong, I was doing ok on my own, but I was still employed and just got paid a regular salary every week. "You should come and work for me" he often said. "You'd get a much better salary and maybe one day you could come and pick me up in your own sports car!" "Yeah dream on" I'd say.

I wasn't happy in my job, but I had security, and it paid the bills. I wasn't flash like him, I was happy with my life, although I could have done with going out with some of the girls he was getting!

I was used to getting calls on my mobile from Peter, they usually started with "Hey Wassssuppp" in the style of the American beer commercial, and he normally wanted to meet up in the evening for a game of squash, or a game of pool and a beer; but when the phone rang this time, he sounded different, shaky even.

"Hi Peter," I said. "How you doing? Are we out for a beer tonight?"

“Oh, alan,” he said “I’ve really fucked up. I’ve done a really stupid thing.”

My mind raced to think what it was. Perhaps he had got one of his one night stands pregnant. He continued...

“You know I told you about that big contract in the usa?”

“Yeah,” I replied, “what about it?”

“It’s fallen through.”

“Oh fuck! How bad?”

“Real bad,” he said. “This was going to be a perfect deal, but now it’s sunk.”

“Oh, shit, how much are you in for?”

“All of it,” he said. “I took on more staff, bought and paid for the timber already and half the stock is in the despatch bay ready to go.”

“But it’s only one contract,” I said, “surely that’s not enough to sink you?”

“I think so,” he replied. “We haven’t been doing so well recently; I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to worry you. We’ve been making a loss for the last two years, and borrowing money, and now that the contract’s fallen through, the banks want their money back.”

“But your houses etc. they’re safe, right? I mean, it is a limited company.” I said helpfully.

“Unfortunately not. You see, the only way they would make the last loan was if I put up personal guarantees, and that included my houses.”

“But they won’t kick you out, surely? Anyway, those banks are bastards!” I said not so helpfully.

So it was. Peter lost his garden furniture business, and he lost his house, and his holiday house in the south of france. He even sold his sports car to raise money.

He stopped answering my calls, but I kept on calling. He was my friend, after all. But he didn’t seem keen on going out for a drink, or a game of pool any more. In fact he was becoming more reclusive by the day. Holed up in a one bedroom rented apartment in the wrong end of town. One day I went over to see him – he looked terrible.

“Don’t worry peter, you’ll get it back. You built a business before, and you were good at it.” I said.

“It’s all gone, alan. All of it. The houses and the car. I haven’t got a penny. I’m stuck in a dead end job and can barely make rent every month, I fucking hate my life.”

“If you need some money...” I offered.

“What, take money off you? Piss off! I would never take money from you.”

“Ok!” I said, “but the offer still stands.”

“What I can’t understand is how I’ll keep going,” he carried on “I mean, I’m 39 now, and I haven’t got a pot to piss in.” I now work in an office pushing paper; I’ll never be able to afford another house, and I loved my car; I now I have some crappy old thing that keeps breaking down.”

“But it isn’t so bad” I said. “At least you’ve got a job. Loads of people in this city are unemployed. Perhaps you should stop feeling sorry for yourself. It was only a car, and you have a roof over your head” I said, becoming a little too animated.

“What? I don’t have to listen to this shit. Get out. Don’t you understand? I lost everything. Everything! And now look at me. Get out.”

So I left. And I stopped calling eventually. I just couldn’t understand why peter had taken it so badly. He still had more than lots of other people. He had a job, he had food, and an apartment. Just because he used to have a bigger house and more money is no cause to be that bloody miserable! At least he’s got his health. And I put peter out of my mind.

Recently I came to understand what had happened. You see, there was nothing wrong with peter’s new life, just the way he thought about it. He worked in an office, he got paid, he had somewhere to live. Some people might think that was a dream job, but no, he had become physically attached to the business, to the car, to the money, to the houses, and as he lost them, the bond was broken with the blade of the knife – bringing fear and reality rushing back to his mind.

In exchange for peace of mind and security, he had given a little piece of himself to each of these objects, and they had taken up one space of his whole. Do you understand? So instead of having 100 “atoms” of life, he now had 96 atoms of wholeness plus one of car, one of money, one of business, one of home; and the human needs 100 atoms to live life in balance. As he gave away some of himself in exchange for these things he has been left feeling out of balance. That is why no office job, run down apartment, or old car can now satisfy him.

He will not feel back in balance until the pieces that were cut so brutally from him are replaced, exactly as they were. And he will spend his whole life scouring the planet to find those pieces he lost of himself.

Desperately searching and searching, tormenting himself on a fruitless journey to find the lost atoms.

Making your list

On a brighter note! There is a way out for those of you who are beginning to get depressed reading this story; but it is going to take some careful attention on your part. You are going to have to write a list, where you start at the top with 100 atoms. Next, you are going to take away one atom for each unit of wholeness you have given away and exchanged for something material or intangible.

When you have finished your list, you should end up with the number of wholeness units that have been exchanged. So if your list now equals 85, that means that there are 15 units that you have given away in exchange for something you desired, or wished for. If you lose them, or they are taken from you, that is the shortfall you are going to have to make up; otherwise you will live a life of dissatisfaction, and constant longing until you get them back. But the knife is sharp; once it cuts, there is no going back.

Be careful what you give away of yourself in exchange for the temporary
pleasure of security and freedom from fear

A w a r e n e s s

An alert cognitive state in which you are aware of yourself and your situation

During the course of this book you will hear many references to love, empathy and compassion, which some of you might consider concepts (*an abstract or general idea inferred or derived from specific instances*), but are really just human emotions.

Many of you will be asking, “How do I find these emotions?” And some of you will not be interested in finding them, because you prefer to keep acting the way you do.

But these emotions are the key to the whole human condition. A key that doesn't need spiritual guidance or a university education. A key we all possess, but may not be aware we have. A key that unlocks the true beauty of what it is to be human. But how do we get this key? As always, the answer lies in us. Deeply buried in some, already active in others; but it all starts with awareness. Awareness of self in action.

Have you ever looked at your hands? I mean *really* looked at your hands? Have you ever taken the time to examine them? Have you watched the way they move while you are looking at them? You can move your hands without having to consciously think “I will move my hands now,” they just move when you want them to!

Take a moment to look now. Move every finger individually. Look at your nails; have you ever wondered how they grow? Now move your wrist slowly in circles, and move your arm, all the time noticing that you are aware you are doing it, although you cannot see the thought that caused your arm to move.

Now, I would like you to try to relax, close your eyes when you're ready, and imagine for a moment that you are sitting above yourself. Like an observer, just watching. Watch how the thoughts flow effortlessly through your mind, but don't try to interact with them. Just watch for a moment. Now open your eyes, and come back to your environment. Did you notice anything? Maybe, maybe not.

We all have thoughts. Every moment of the day we are thinking about something; but have you ever stopped to wonder why you are thinking? What are the processes that make you think? What causes you to think the way you do?

Most of us just accept what we think. We think and act according to the way our brain has been wired, through conditioning, tradition, culture, media, or education; but how many of us stop to wonder why we think the way we do? What makes me think in ways that make me analyse, criticise, and judge all around me? “It's just the way I am,” you say. But do you really know your own mind? Are you really aware that you are thinking and acting in a certain way, or are you just running on automatic pilot?

One of the greatest things humans have gained is consciousness, in which we are aware of ourselves, but it seems that most of us don't know what it really means to be conscious.

A gorilla may look at a tree, but what does he see? He has no power of language to describe it; he has no mental concept of what a tree is. He may be able to visually recognise and differentiate different kinds of trees, but does he have the ability to look at the tree and think “I wonder how old that tree is, it is really beautiful”? Can he ponder the nature of his own existence, where he came from, what he is doing here, and what the meaning of life is, whilst looking at the tree?

According to everything we know (which isn't that much), humans are the only species who have that ability, but of course, this may change

in the future. It is an ability which is located somewhere in space; inside the brain, but also without. A clear space in which to play with ideas; to bring up mental images, and use language to describe them. To put words together which enable us to ask questions of ourselves; to be aware of life all around us.

Unlike most animals, we are not fixed into patterns which limit us to just sensing danger, seeking out food, and procreating. We can hear the sound of a bird singing and wonder what type of bird it is, then remark upon how beautiful its song is.

Let me ask you a question. Have you ever watched yourself walking? Do you notice how one foot naturally falls in front of the other, how your arms gently swing, or how delicately, or hard you walk? Probably not, because these are activities you can perform without even consciously having the thought. You may think, "I will go for a walk," but you do not consciously think "Right, I must put one foot in front of the other, paying careful attention to bending my toes at specifically the right time, and lifting one foot off the ground. Oh, and I'd better lift my knee a little." That would be ridiculous. If you had to be aware of every movement, you would go crazy trying to stand upright!

But that is precisely what I want you to do the next time you go out for a walk. Use the power of your consciousness to notice how your foot bends at just the right time. How your knee lifts, ever so slightly. How you change the way you walk when you start to hurry. Becoming aware of the most basic bodily functions will start to give you an awareness of yourself. If you don't know your own body, how will you be aware of your effect on others?

If you play sport of any kind, notice how your body can move in the most amazing ways. If you play tennis, notice how your arm comes up just at the right time. How your eye sees the ball, and the racket moves to just the right location, all without you consciously having to think. "I must start lifting my arm now and rotating my racket to just the correct angle. Oh, and I must move my body to the right position, and now I must move my feet." If you had to think of all those different movements your opponents would have scored a point before you had time to think, "I must start..."

**Our bodies are amazing. Our minds are amazing. We are
amazing.**

Can you even start to comprehend the complexity that makes up a human being? I certainly can't. From the bone structure that allows us to walk upright, to the muscles and tendons that allow us to move in complex ways; to the heart that beats incessantly in your chest and keeps you alive.

Can you comprehend how the body instantly attempts to clot the blood when you cut yourself and heals the area of skin that was cut, or how the body signals to the brain that it is hungry, and the brain sends that signal to your conscious mind triggering the thought "I'm hungry, I must eat something?"

These processes are automatic. Processes designed to keep our species alive, so why would you notice them? You're much too busy to worry about how your body works. So you keep on going until finally one day the body cannot take any more, and expires, taking you and your consciousness with it.

We are the most technically advanced of all the species on this planet. We may not be the strongest or the fastest, but we are definitely the most adaptable; using our large brains to think our way out of almost any problem.

Do you not think you are amazing? Do you not think that the chance you even exist, was so slim, yet you are here? From a single sperm and an egg, you grew, slowly at first, then more rapidly, inside your mother's womb; blissfully unaware that anything was going on, while the process of life was taking place right inside you, growing bones, muscles, skin, and organs. Until finally, in the ninth month, you were ejected through your mother's vagina, and gasped your first breath of air. And here you are! Alive. A member of the most intelligent species on the planet, and you didn't have to do a thing.

You and I are the luckiest people on the planet. Able to experience such beauty in life, and also able to use language to describe it. You are not like anyone else on the planet, although you may look similar. You are an individual. An individual capable of one of the wonders of the world, conscious thought.

So where does that leave us? Oh yes, as adults. And what do we do with this wonderful chance we got? We fight, we destroy, we smoke, and drink ourselves into oblivion, we pursue our own goals at whatever cost to everyone else, and we are full of our own self-importance. We control, we subdue, we desire, we take, we enslave, and we butcher. That's the thanks that nature gets for giving us life.

If nature had a consciousness it would have to wonder: “Why did I give life to this species who are so intent on destroying themselves, each other, and nature itself? What was the point of all the billions of years of evolution on this planet, when one species is intent on total destruction of the earth in such a short time? Do they not actually want to be alive? Aren’t they satisfied with this planet full of abundance? I think giving life to these humans was the biggest mistake I made!”

We really are a waste of time (and what a long time the earth has been around for). What do you think? We have done nothing to further the planet. All we have done is take, take, take. We have given nothing back. We have used the earth as our personal resource centre, and we have left only death in our wake. Sorry, am I being too hard on us all? After all, we have discovered fire, invented the wheel, and have even flown to the moon. Show me one stupid animal that’s managed to do even one tenth of what we have done!

Let’s go back to these great machines we have at our disposal (our bodies). Take an average day you go through, and think of all the amazing things your body has enabled you to do. We may have developed technology, but without our bodies, the technology would be useless. Cars help us to travel long distances easily, but think of all the things your body has to do during the drive. The legs for the pedals, the arms for the steering wheel, and the brain to be aware of other cars.

Computers may take over all the mundane processes for us in the future, but if the computer is doing all the work, what will we be doing? Maybe just thinking of new and better ways to destroy our enemies and ourselves?

The most amazing thing I love about my body is the way I can use my mind to choose different vegetables, prepare them in a way that sends pleasure signals to my brain, swallow them and send them down a tube I can’t see, to a thing called the stomach. This in turn lets me feel full, and uses acids – strong enough to burn the skin – to break down the food into chemical substances that it (the body) needs to stay alive. It then excretes the waste products as either liquid or solid. Now that’s amazing! But how often do we think about this whilst going to the toilet?

It’s fine when everything is functioning normally, but wait until you get food poisoning and suffer sickness and diarrhoea! Then you pay careful attention to going to the toilet. In fact, you can generally think of nothing else. That’s the thing with the human body, it can take most of what we throw at it, but when it breaks down, we are powerless. The

most cruel humans on the planet are reduced to nothing when their body is sick. The wonderful consciousness we have can only think about the pain we are in. The body goes into self-protect mode and tries to heal itself the best it can. Sometimes it is successful, sometimes not.

A short story about waking up

A young man goes out drinking every night with his friends, and he is on top of the world. He's got a good job, plenty of money, he feels powerful; like nothing could ever touch him. He struts his stuff with the ladies, showing off his designer clothes, partying the night away; having sex with as many women as he can. He's cool. All his friends admire him. All his friends want to be him.

One night, he leaves the bar, drunk as usual, and he and his friends are in high spirits – they've had great night. He takes his keys out of his pocket, and all of them pile into the car. He turns the music up loud, and drives off. It's an easy country road home, never any traffic at 2.00 am. They are all laughing and joking, he turns his head for a second to shout something to his friend and... He wakes up. His body is covered in plaster, tubes sticking out of him everywhere, surrounded by people in white coats.

"What happened?" he asks. "What am I doing here?"

"You had a car accident," one of the doctors replies.

"What about my friends?"

"I'm very sorry, they were all killed."

In this situation, like so many tragic events around the world, the dawning or realisation of what has happened comes too late. The events have already taken place and it's too late to go back. One faculty we are not born with, is the ability to turn back the clock, though I'm sure many wish we were. If only he had had the awareness of self; the awareness that says "I am drunk. If I get in that car, there is a high chance I may kill, not only myself, but my friends too."

Why does this awareness come to people when their bones are broken, or when they are lying sick, or dying? What if people could find this awareness before it was too late? People talk about developing self-awareness, but it is no more complicated than watching yourself in action. We have already discussed paying careful attention to watching how your body moves, but what I would like you to pay careful attention to now is your language.

Language

1. *A systematic means of communicating by the use of sounds or conventional symbols*
2. *The cognitive processes involved in producing and understanding linguistic communication*

It may be fair to say, that without the development of language skills, we may never have been able to develop awareness. Visual representations in the mind are associated with words we project into our consciousness. How would we have been able to ponder the meaning of life, if we had no words with which to describe the words “the meaning of life!” I know it is a difficult subject to think about, but consider this. Without language, we would not have the ability to think the way we do now.

So language is an essential part of awareness; not just in how we speak to others, but how we speak to ourselves. How often do we listen to how we speak? Have you ever said something in anger and couldn't believe the words actually came out of your mouth? Do you notice if you are aggressive, insulting, even plain boring, or if your personality is intolerable? Do you notice when people dislike you for what you say? The content is not important; it is the noticing that is important.

Next time you are speaking to someone, try to practice this. As you are speaking, allow yourself to become aware that you are above yourself, watching. Not interacting with the speech; merely observing what is being said, and try to catch what you are actually saying. Notice the content, notice the manner in which you speak, notice the tone; and try to see how it feels to be on the receiving end of a conversation with yourself. Try to listen to whether you are angry, superior, demanding, critical, or boastful; and ask yourself this question: “Would I like to be on the receiving end of this conversation?”

We need to become aware of how we interact with other people and start to take account of how others may be feeling when we are talking. Only then will we be able to modify our thinking and our behaviour;

As you go through your day, do you ever consider how things work? Have you any idea how the electricity is generated that feeds your endless requirements, or how water magically arrives at your tap? What about where the faeces, urine, and toilet paper goes when you flush the toilet? How about all the waste you generate every day, neatly put into a bag, and throw into your bin ready for collection? You may not think these

things are important, but they are highly significant to developing awareness.

Let us be clear why we are trying to develop awareness. It is not so we can reach a higher spiritual plane; it is to help us improve the way we exist on this planet. Simple as that. There is no point in saying “Oh, yes, I’m very self-aware,” and carrying on doing the things you were doing before. This is self-awareness in action. By being aware, you are noticing how you effect, not only other people, but the other species we share this planet with, not forgetting the planet itself; and by developing this awareness, you start to tread a little more carefully, instead of blasting through life only concerned with what *you* can get from it.

I am not going to preach to you about what you should think is important, but when you start to think about someone else apart from yourself and your “needs,” you will begin to notice yourself becoming more deeply interested in the planet you live on.

Talking of planets. Have you any idea where the earth is? No, neither have I! Scientists have been studying the universe with telescopes, and sending probes out to mars and the sun, but we have no better idea of where we are than we had last year, or the century before that. You see, space is just that – space. It is a concept that blows your mind. How did we arrive here? How is the universe made up? Why do we exist? Where are we? These are philosophical and scientific questions that will probably keep humans busy for many years to come.

But you don’t care about that, do you? All you care about is earning money, having kids, getting a good education for them, buying a nice house with a nice garden, having drinks at the pub, buying the latest gadgets and going on holiday. Fair?

What if you are a criminal? All you care about is hurting people, stealing from them, and generally making yours and everybody else’s life a misery. Fair?

What if you are a dictator? All you care about is killing people, controlling them, lining your own pockets with their hard earned money, starting wars, and generally making everybody else’s lives a misery. Fair?

What if you are a politician? All you care about is staying in power, sending your troops off to some far flung land to free the people, organising the country, and possibly the planet, according to your ideas, having affairs, and generally not doing much for anybody except yourself. Fair?

What I am trying to help you understand here is that in order to have true awareness, you have to notice your actions, and you have to try to

place them in context with the other people you have to live with. If you are a criminal who hurts people, and steals their money, awareness will not come when you go to jail. Awareness comes when you are in the middle of the act, and you suddenly start watching yourself, without judgement. It may even be a surreal experience as you watch yourself knocking down an old lady and stealing her bag, suddenly thinking: “What am I doing?”

If you don't get that feeling, you will keep doing what you're doing. It doesn't even have to be anything so extreme. As you are running the tap on full whilst brushing your teeth, you may just notice thinking: “I am letting all that water just run down the drain. It has travelled a long way to get here, and in an instant, I have let it go, without even using it.” A murderous dictator will no longer be a murderous dictator when he stops and catches himself in the middle of an act, and notices himself thinking: “Why am I doing this to all these people? I don't want to do this anymore.”

As we have discussed, awareness is the key that opens up the doorway to love, compassion, and empathy. It's so simple, once you start noticing yourself in action. For me, it was a strange feeling too, when I started to notice things around me that had previously not only been unimportant, but were completely out of my awareness. I was aware I had needs, and I wanted them fulfilled. Now.

I didn't care about my fellow man. The furthest I spread the net was perhaps to my girlfriend, mum and dad, and maybe a couple of close friends. But even then, I was the most important thing on the planet, just as you are now. “Look after number one,” my mum used to say, and that I did. I travelled through life without a care, except how much money I was going to earn that month, and what I could spend it on. Nothing mattered to me in the way it does now. I don't think I was a bad person, I just couldn't see past myself.

But I had two key awareness moments that sparked an inquisitiveness off in me, that now means I silently question everything I do, to judge its impact on others; not in an obsessive manner, just casually, almost as if it was in my peripheral vision. The first was standing at traffic lights in Sydney, Australia in 2000. I casually dropped my cigarette butt, as millions of other people do.

“Pick that up; don't you know it takes over a hundred years for that to breakdown in the environment?” my girlfriend said.

Normally I would have got angry and said “What’s it got to do with you? Leave me alone,” but this time something changed. It was as if I could hear myself going to say the words before they came out of my mouth; and in that noticing, I realised I had changed.

“Sorry, I didn’t know that,” I said, and picked it up.

The second was in Thailand in 2002. I was looking for a book to read in the English bookshop, and I saw one called “beyond violence.” I was somehow attracted to it; I think I just liked the title; and unsure if it was a novel or not, I bought it and started reading. I couldn’t put it down. It was a book about the nature of human violence, a book that made me incredibly sad, and in that moment I started to notice myself thinking: “This can’t be right, how can we go around killing each other all the time? For what?”

For me, awareness has been a process, much like life is. I slowly noticed things around me more and more; people, animals, the planet. It’s not as if I deliberately wanted to become more “in touch with myself,” I just couldn’t help noticing the way I talked and dealt with people; how sometimes I was so crude, angry, or full of my own self-importance. And I began to dislike this person I was noticing – so I changed.

Awareness is not about becoming perfect. It is about starting to notice more important things than the number of credit cards in your wallet, the car you drive, the power you have, the control and dominance you have over others, and your status in society; and realising you are only here for a short time.

You may have a big brain, but one day soon, that brain, along with your body will stop functioning. That will be it. You can believe in reincarnation or heaven all you like, but your body, and therefore you, will be no more. Like a car that can’t be fixed, that goes to the scrapheap – that’s where you’re going!

Awareness is waking up. Waking up to what you are – a wonderful human being. Alive today. Able to enjoy life, and share that pleasure with the rest of the world. Bringing love instead of war; compassion instead of terror; empathy instead of hatred.

Step outside yourself for one moment now. Enjoy watching yourself in action. You may not like what you see when you first look down upon yourself, but after recognition comes understanding, and with understanding comes change; but with change there also comes resistance. All you have to do is accept the change instead of resisting it!

Your new found awareness of yourself will not only be a shift in the right direction for you, but you will be helping all of Mankind. You may not believe it right now, but if you look closely enough at yourself and your current actions, you will see the way forward.

B

B a n k

A financial institution that accepts deposits and channels the money into lending activities

It's hard to imagine living in a world without banks, isn't it? After all, where would you keep all those hard-earned pennies? Not under the mattress for a nasty burglar to steal I hope! Thanks to our money-centric society, and the value everyone places upon money (especially those without it), we need to keep the money safe.

So we give it to the nice bank on the high street with the friendly advertising, and open an account. They are all smiles as they go through the simple process of checking how much money you've got in other places, how much you earn, if you own your own home, and then the computer sneakily goes off to check your credit rating – which these days is the real measure of who you are. The computer returns an answer after some moments.

“Your application has been approved!” the nice employee tell you.

“Hooray!” you cheer (on the inside). “But what does that mean?”.

“Well it means you get to put your money into this nice bank every month. We will give you a card to access it, and that’s it. Your money will be kept in a big safe for you to access at any time. Thank you for choosing to bank with friendly bank ltd. Goodbye.”

So that’s the basics of banking folks. Earn money, put it somewhere safe. Get it when you need it. The End.

Unfortunately, that’s not what banking is about, is it? You see, if they just kept your money in the bank, how would *they* earn any money? They wouldn’t be able to pay their rent, heating, or electric bills, and they couldn’t pay the staff. So how do they make money? Well, they lend it, pure and simple; and for the pleasure of receiving the money, which is actually your money, the borrowers pay back what they owe, plus interest (*a fixed charge for borrowing money; usually a percentage of the amount borrowed*).

Banks: Shylocks with nice suits

Typically, money lenders or loan sharks (including the famous shylock in shakespeare’s merchant of venice) are always seen as ruthless, merciless, greedy men who lend money at excessive rates of interest, ready to beat you to a pulp for failing to pay the money back on time. Fortunately, the modern banks aren’t like that at all. There is no violence, only men in smart suits, happy to help you with your money problem, politely informing you that you will lose your house if you don’t keep up the repayments; or they will go through the courts to reclaim the money; and if you still can’t pay, the bailiffs will be called to take away all your possessions; but there’s no need to worry about that now, just sign here and the money will be in your account as quick as a flash.

You want the money, so you sign, getting steadily more excited as you know you’ll soon be able to buy that new car, new tv, or just pay off another loan! It may well be that you have just signed up for a mortgage which means that soon you’ll have your dream home (oh, and huge debt for the next 25 years).

But no one is forcing us to borrow the money, are they? The banks haven’t got a gun to our heads. We want their money, which actually is everyone else’s money, and they are happy to oblige, at a price. It’s just business for them. But say you are like me, and after many years of being in a cycle of debt due to not being able to control your consumer impulses, finally realise that borrowing money just to buy more “stuff” is

a complete waste of human life, and vow never to borrow money from a bank again, what do you do? You still have to have a bank account. You can't escape them. Why? Because you are scared to leave your money at home under the mattress. And anyway, the bank may pay you some interest back on the money you have invested with them.

The question is, what does the bank do with your money once you hand it across the counter? We know they don't just keep it in the safe! Without boring you with all the details, it basically works like this. You deposit money. The bank is then able to lend approx ninety percent of that money, whilst ten percent is kept in reserve (a requirement so that people can always access their money. Unless everyone came at the same time that is), the bank charge interest to the borrowers, and pay interest to the savers. Their profit is the difference between the two.

So who borrows money? Let's start with the individuals shall we? That's you and me. We borrow large amounts of money to buy houses, and smaller amounts for general items we cannot afford. The loan for a house is called a mortgage (*a conditional conveyance of property as security for the repayment of a loan*) and the house you have bought is put up as security for the loan to buy it. If you keep up the monthly repayments (which may go up over the period of 25 years if interest rates are raised), you will eventually be the proud "owner" of a pile of bricks which are hopefully worth more than the price you paid! If you don't keep up the repayments, the bank takes back the house. It's a no lose situation for them, but it could be for you.

Last week, I logged onto a website that enables you to see your credit rating, and for five pounds, I found out it was neutral – neither good or bad. Armed with that information I set off to the high street to try to open an account. I couldn't believe I was getting refused, and I didn't even want to borrow any money. Whilst I do currently have a permanent job, I don't pay any bills (as everything is provided by the college), and I have not had a permanent job or permanent home address for the past eight or nine years. So I am outside of what society considers to be the "norm," and am now paying the price. Eventually the college wrote a letter stating I was employed and did not have any bills, and one building society has eventually given me a basic account which I can pay money in and take it out.

For the first time in my life I really felt like an outsider, but actually, it felt kind of good to be on the outside. You see, I believe that banking represents one of the great conformities of our time, and if you don't

conform you will be a social outcast, like me. So make sure you have a permanent job, have loads of bills in your name, borrow loads of money, and you can become a valued member of society.

Follow the mortgage dream

Who doesn't dream of owning their own house, free from the tyranny of private landlords and government housing schemes? Owning your own house is the epitome of individual expression. I am an individual and this is my home. A home I have worked for. That I have chosen. That I have decorated. That I maintain. That I enjoy.

So we get a mortgage, exchange contracts, and we're in. It's a square box with a garden (or not if it's a flat), large or small, furnished with all the modern gadgets, and we love it, because it's ours. We admire it one more time, then it's back to work to start paying for it. And work you must. Every day until it is paid, if we can wait that long. Normally the more money we earn and the more the house appreciates, the more we want to move to something bigger, so we get another mortgage and the cycle begins again. If we're lucky we may have paid it off by the time we retire.

I too would like to follow the dream. I too would like to have the pleasure of a small space with a small garden, but the difference is, I will not borrow money to pay for it. Let me explain why. I do not want to be tied down to one job and one town. I am not a vagrant, but I do want to explore the world I live in. I want to enjoy the time I have on earth, and I want to contribute to society, but not necessarily in the same place. The only solution I have found so far is to rent privately in each town or country I am in, but that means having to find work that earns me enough to pay rent. If I can no longer work, I'll be thrown out, after all, a landlord has bills to pay as well.

The question I want to put to you all is how do I, a hard worker, but someone who does not want to help the banking system continue to control the world, find a piece of land to call my own? I earn approximately £15,000 per year, and the average house price is approx £200,000 around here. Given that I can perhaps save maybe half per year (if I was to take no holidays), and have few bills to pay, it would take me over 26 years to save up for the house, and that's forgetting that the house would probably go up in value. So even when I had eventually saved enough for the house at 2007 prices, I (a) would no longer have

enough in 2033, and (b) I would be one year off retiring age, so I would find it hard to find work.

It's a trap

So that's me finished already. At 38 years old there is no chance for me to own my own piece of planet earth, that no one can evict me from, without conforming. In order for me to live peacefully in a nice part of the countryside, I have to conform. I have to get a credit rating. I have to get a mortgage. I have to borrow.

I can hear some of you saying: "Why don't you just go out and earn the money like other people do? Why do you keep complaining about your lot, when the opportunity is there to make money? You just have to grasp it." But earning large sums of money is the domain of commercial organisations, and as I want to do work to benefit humanity, I find myself at odds with their ethics. But that is not the issue here. What we are talking about is the control that banks have on our lives.

Having shelter is one of the basic human necessities. Having a mortgage isn't, but we are encouraged to take one out. This has more to do with economics than making sure that all people have shelter. As usual it's all about money, and money makes the world go round. It is essential to have somewhere to sleep, but as the monks know, it isn't necessary to have a huge house with all the trappings of modern life. Somewhere clean, calm, and warm is all that is needed. The rest is just superficial.

So why can't I just find a small piece of land somewhere that I could build a modest sustainable dwelling on and grow my vegetables? Because every piece of this planet is owned by someone; either privately, by the government, or by the king or queen! That's incredible isn't it? There is nowhere left to go. We are bound to cities and towns by houses, flats, and employment. The rest of the countryside is owned by farmers and landowners. What do you think about this?

Through human organisation and economic development, we have created a world where only a few people are in control. The rest of us must conform or face exclusion. I am a human being who doesn't want to borrow money from the banks, and now I am placed in a difficult position, either get a mortgage, start a business that makes a lot of money fast, join a religious or other community, or rent privately. Are we not a community that shares the land equally?

Before you think I am getting into political ideology here, let me assure you I am not. I am merely suggesting that the way in which land is owned, in the west particularly, only seeks to divide us more, into rich and poor, and the have's and the have not's, when really richness or poorness is a state of mind. If you have even the most basic warm shelter that you keep clean, keep yourself well fed and watered, and have basic clothing, that is enough to satisfy the basic human needs. The other needs can be met by development of the mind, and in the development of human relationships. One thing materially wealthy people will never be able to understand is that true wealth will never have anything to do with how much money you have in the bank.

In this age of individual purchasing power, people have been encouraged to forget about the word, community. We buy land independently, and live independently, surrounding ourselves with gates, fences and walls. "Keep off my property!" people shout. "You are trespassing." It makes me sad to think that this is how we have developed as a species. Jealously guarding our small piece of land.

The time has come when we the people re-engineer how we live, and break free from forced individualism to reform, not as an ideological community, but one that has the interests of others at heart. It is interesting to see the amish people in america, who originally came from holland, still living the simple way they did hundreds of years ago, refusing to use modern equipment and dressing in simple clothing. They also help each other immensely with everything.

Doing work that benefits others. Working together for a common goal, for the community, a society that cares as much for each other, as they do for themselves. It wouldn't work in the cities though; most people don't know who lives next to them let alone help them build a house! In the city, people just keep their heads down and get on with their own lives in as much isolation as possible, but that's another story. I know we have not talked about a solution to this mortgage trap, or how we should move forward, but whilst the banks are in charge of all the money there can never be a solution.

As I see it, part of the solution involves the dismantling of the cities, and a return to the land, but unfortunately, humans aren't co-operative enough to be able to do it without fighting over each square of grass. Territory disputes, as you may know, are one of the single biggest causes of war, apart from religion.

The one thing we forget, is that we are only on this earth for several years, yet we greedily attach ourselves to the land. But what will we do with it when we are dead? We don't need it any more, but we try to hang on to it by passing it on to our family, maybe as a way of attempting to keep ourselves alive. Maybe we should think about why we really want it before we possess it.

Part 2: Companies. Where's your money going?

Banks also invest in companies they believe will make them a profit, and lend money to business start-ups, or businesses who want to expand, for which they charge interest. The only problem is, they are lending your money to companies you do not know. You have no idea what they make, what the impact on the environment is, or what the human rights impact will be. You may think that the textile industry in asia, which employs workers in terrible conditions, sometimes employs child labour, and has people working upwards of 12 hours a day is a disgrace. You may even belong to a campaign group to stop child labour, but all the while you are unwittingly supporting it, because the bank you put your money in is using it to invest in the very company you wish to stop!

The banks say they have ethics policies in place, but truthfully how many banks would not lend to companies that promise a good return? So what if the workers live in poor conditions? So what if the companies are using up the earth to make consumer products to keep us addicted? If it makes good business sense then the banks will lend, no question about it. Some of the worst regimes in the world are supported by banks. I can't list them all here, but you don't have to look very closely to find out who. Money finances pain and suffering.

Banks all over the world are responsible for helping create the greedy species that we are, dividing the rich and the poor. They encourage mass consumerism and mass production, all in the name of profit. Landscapes are changed irreparably thanks to the construction of huge buildings and shopping centres, all financed by banks, all paid for with your money.

Do you care? Maybe not. Maybe you have a business that has been financed by the banks. Maybe you have seen your business increase; maybe you are making more money, employing more people. But for what? A bigger house and a bigger mortgage?

Some of you may argue that thanks to banks, the developing world is developing! But all they are going to create is more division, more fear, and more distrust; where more rural communities are split up and sent to

work in the modern consumer cities. After all, it's worked so well for us here in the west! What profiteers will never understand is that development is something that goes on in the body and mind, not in concrete and glass.

Having said that, I am not against money being lent to organisations whose prime objective is to help the human race and the planet, just not financed through the traditional banking system, that's all. We need to start creating human organisations where we can put our money. Organisations that are controlled by the investors, who are asked whether they want to put their money into a project or not. I don't know about you, but I don't want my money to go into a global pot that could be used for anything, from cutting down forests, to financing armed rebellions. We need to move our money now. Today. To an organisation that is not helping to harm the environment in some faraway country they hope you'll never know about. We need those in the banking community to stand up and say they will not allow their employers to get away with the harm their strategies have on the planet. But then again, you probably all have mortgages and are afraid to lose your jobs.

If you work for a bank, and your bank funds companies or countries with human rights issues, or funds western companies who manufacture in countries with human rights issues (this includes working conditions), you are as guilty as if you were making the workers toil for eighteen hour days for a pittance. I'm sure you don't like to hear this, but it's true. You can't shut your eyes and ears and say, "it's got nothing to do with me." It has.

If you work for a commercial bank you and your employer share responsibility for:

The corporate city skyline
Globalised junk food
Slave labour in asia
The consumer society
Greed and poverty
The state of the environment

If you bank with any commercial bank you are responsible too, as am I. We are all responsible, and that responsibility starts every time we put one pence into these banks. I am currently trying to find out how to run my life without banks, but until then I will be making sure that the

building society I bank with does not invest in anything I disagree with! I know that's not possible, so I ask anyone who is reading this, who knows anything about banking, to please contact me and let me know how we could set up a way to use money to help people, where the money invested stays local to help local people, and to help local projects. For too long, the money has gone into a central pot we have no control over, let's regain that control.

I don't want to go into company ethics here, but needless to say, if you run a company the only reason you will be taking a loan is to make more money, but for day to day banking, if you and your company care just one small percent about humanity and the planet as a whole, you will be ultra careful where you put that money.

The last borrower is none other than your friendly government. Whenever they don't have enough money in the bank to fulfil promises, they do what any self-respecting government would do; they borrow, and issue bits of paper with a promise to pay on them. The problem is, they pay interest on the debt, in some cases the government is paying millions, and in others, billions of dollars in interest payments. And who pays for that? Of course, it's you and me: the taxpayer.

What did they spend the money on? Who knows! But you can be sure they don't care about the interest payments. They don't have to individually raise the money, they just get it from us, via our direct and indirect taxes. Our money, wasted in interest payments to banks whose sole objective is to make as much money as is humanly possible without a care in the world, except for the share price; although the government is at fault for borrowing the money in the first place, which means it can't live within its means.

So there it was; banking in a nutshell. I did not set out to blame one person or organisation for all the world's problems, as we are all part of the banking system, but we must learn that our actions, although seemingly as harmless as putting in a cheque to a bank, may be causing harm to someone else or the planet on which we live. Banks and their loans can do both – quickly.

B e l i e f

Any cognitive content held as true

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A vague idea in which some confidence is placed

Let us accept god and move on. Let's us not fight over whether *he* does or does not exist. Let us accept that there is a creator and no creator. Let us accept that he could be a she, or even indeterminate. Let us accept the possibility that we have created god in our own image not the other way round. Let us accept that the universe is indivisible. Let us accept we are alive and have great work to do on this planet. Let belief come to an end, for it is futile.

Many people have asked me if I believe in god, and whether I have faith (*a strong belief in a supernatural power or powers that control human destiny*). I have often replied "Do I need to believe in god and have faith to develop compassion and insight, and live a life free of violence filled with joy and love?" "Hmmm, don't know," was generally the answer to that question, but at least it shut them up! It's not that I don't like

questions on belief, it is that they seem to come from the same source as questions such as “why don’t you eat meat?” in that the questioner is not looking for a serious dialogue into the subject, but merely wants to argue their case, and prove are right; because it is very important to be right, you see. Especially in the society we live in.

“How can you not belief in god, alan? Jesus christ was crucified and died for our sins. How can you not believe!” I have heard it a million times.

But why is no one prepared to question this? Why is everyone so scared? Perhaps because we are the most violent species on earth, and we kill for our beliefs! The dictionary definition of belief says “a vague idea in which some confidence is placed,” so why is this belief in god so strong, that sometimes it makes people kill to uphold it? We should ask someone who died for it. Someone who took their own life to kill others. They are dead of course, but we can still communicate with them without the use of a medium.

Me: So what made you decide to strap the explosives to your body?

Bomber: To kill the unbelievers.

Me: Did you not think there was a better way in life, than killing innocent people?

Bomber: There was no other way. They were not innocent.

Me: In what way were they not innocent? They were women, and children, and men going about their daily business.

Bomber: But they were infidels (*a person who does not acknowledge your god*); they deserved to die.

Me: Who said? Your god or your leader?

Bomber: It was god's will.

Me: Yes, but who told you to do it? What made you believe them; that killing was right?

Bomber: I knew it was the right thing to do.

Me: But you blew yourself to bits and killed people who had families. People who had loved ones, people just like you.

Bomber: There was no other way.

Me: Do you not think god is someone who loves all beings?

Bomber: That is unimportant. What is important is that the infidels were killed.

Me: Do you regret doing it? For the suffering you caused to your family as well?

Bomber: My family is unimportant. What is important is killing anyone who is an unbeliever.
Me: I am an unbeliever, would you have killed me?
Bomber: Yes.
Me: How did you feel just before you detonated the bomb?
Bomber: I felt great, like I was doing god's work.
Me: I can't listen to this any more.
Bomber: Goodbye.

So although that was a fictional conversation, we can see that belief is a powerful force. Belief is all the cells in your mind aligned in an unmovable pattern. How else can we accept that a woman who was healthy, loved by her family, and who was studying at university ended her life by suicide for the express purpose of killing as many others as she could? She was, she believed, a martyr (*one who suffers for the sake of principle*), and would be accepted into god's kingdom as some kind of hero.

But what kind of god would want to cause death and suffering? If a god was so powerful that he managed to create the earth with all its beauty; with plants, flowers, animals, lakes, rivers, and mountains; why would he be interested in someone killing on his behalf? Would a god not be horrified to see the destruction caused by killing? Let us go into this carefully.

If god, who is known as the creator, wanted that, then why would he have bothered to go to all the trouble to create so much beauty – when violence is the complete opposite? Was he at heart, a cruel god, who liked to see so much suffering carried out in his name? No. I'm afraid this is man's work. The hand of god had no part to play in it. It is just like men to blame someone else for their wrong deeds. Men are the ones who desire power over others, who need to control and subjugate.

Killing others for belief, lies not in the realm of the gods, but firmly in the mind – the mind of men, not gods. It is convenient to blame some invisible force that everyone believes in for your work, as it adds a kind of eternal authority to the whole thing, leaving you completely blameless (in your eyes).

It is interesting to consider that this creator of all things (who looks like us of course) is actually extremely intolerant of anyone who says a bad word against him! It seems childish that one who is capable of making mountains and oceans is afraid of someone not believing in him or believing in a different god! He obviously never heard the children's

rhyme “sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me!” I am asking you in all seriousness now. Why would this powerful, eternal, omnipresent being be afraid of people saying something he didn’t like or not believing in him? He is the creator of all, including love and compassion; surely he shows compassion, love, and tolerance to all things?

You may think this is a stupid discussion, and the belief in your mind is urging you to put the book down in case it reads anything else it doesn’t like, but I ask you to continue with me. Is the belief in your mind planted there by god or by man? Don’t think, just answer.

If it was planted in your mind by god, why was it not planted in the mind of the ones you call infidels or unbelievers? Are they worse people than you; are they not worthy of believing in your god? Does your god not like them, or was it just that they were born in a different part of the world with different traditions, and different conditioning? What is your answer?

Why do I believe? Why? Because when you were born your parents told you were a christian, a sikh, a jew, or a muslim; for no other reason. Do you follow? As you grew up you were forced to read texts which were written by prophets or disciples of god, and you followed them. You had to. You were forced to. You had to obey your teachers and your parents, or they would punish you.

You were indoctrinated into this by men. Powerful men who only had their own interests at heart. Do you see? As you got older, your brain started to believe this conditioning, after all, you had no other information to go on. So you started to believe that it was *you* who decided to believe in god. You thought there was personal choice in this, but it was already predestined for you – not by god, but by those who conditioned you.

Under the conditioning you are free – free to explore any theory that comes before you. But until you release yourself from this conditioning, you will be like the suicide bomber we had a conversation with a few moments ago. Unmovable, unshakeable from her position: brainwashed into belief.

I feel sorry, not only for those who feel they must kill on behalf of their god, but those of us who suffer as the result of belief, which is just a conditioned pattern in the brain; nothing more. I am sorry to shatter your illusions, but find out for yourself; do not believe me. I am not telling the truth, you can only find out what the truth is for yourself,

through insight, not by reading books, however sacred you hold them to be.

If you feel scared, there is always one person you can believe in, and that is yourself; because it is the only authentic belief that there is. Belief in yourself as a compassionate loving human being, free from violence and turmoil in the mind, filled with joy, living in the moment. There can be nothing more beautiful than that. Belief is only the gate keeper that stops you from experiencing it. Find the key.

B o r e d o m

The feeling of being bored by something tedious

•

Boring (So lacking in interest as to cause mental weariness)

It may be wonderful to be alive, but we all feel bored from time to time when our life lacks excitement, don't we? But why do we get this feeling, which originates in the brain, and spreads throughout our whole being?

Our brains need stimulation, whether it is talking about something we are interested in, playing a game we enjoy, reading, or working in an exciting job – but life's not always like that. Sometimes there are lulls, where we are not receiving the stimulation we require; but why do we seek to fill these gaps constantly? Can we *not* sit still for a moment?

Since the day we were born, we have had parents and family stimulating our senses, always making sure we were occupied; we were never left on our own to just sit and be with ourselves.

Like most things in life, learning to enjoy your own company without anything to do is a difficult process, especially when you are learning

something in adulthood. You see, the brain has become used to being occupied all the time, that when it isn't, it signals to you that it has nothing to do. So please turn on the tv, pick up a book, or go and do some exercise, just don't leave me in this neutral state!

At school I liked languages and running, but I hated physics, chemistry and mathematics. They were so boring! Why? Because I couldn't understand them, they were difficult for me to learn, and so my brain switched off and told me: "This is boring, I wish we could do something else." Now, in my late thirties (am I really that old?), I have developed a real interest in science; and although I still find it impossibly difficult, I am sticking with it.

Boredom is not about lack of interest, it is the fear of being alone with your own feelings. If you were happy in your own mind, you wouldn't get bored.

I agree that some tasks are tedious, but the mind is such a wonderful place to escape to! You can have a holiday in the sun, and it costs you nothing, such is the power of the imagination; but we are always running to do something with our bodies. It's go, go, go, every minute of the day, right up until bedtime. Whether we're studying, working, playing, travelling, fixing, or building, our hands and our minds are occupied from the moment we wake up. It's no wonder the brain feels bored when there's nothing to do.

But learning to sit with yourself is no easy task. The first time I just sat with my own thoughts, I felt agitated; I couldn't sit still. My body was restless, and so was my mind. I still find it difficult sometimes, especially if I've had a busy day and am trying to unwind. Learning to sit with yourself is something I wish my parents had taught me as a child, when I was most receptive, and it's something I encourage all parents to teach their children to do.

So let's have a go now shall we? It doesn't have to be on the floor in the "lotus" position, just anywhere that's comfortable. I want you to sit with your legs and arms uncrossed, your palms open, preferably facing upwards, and pay attention to your breathing. Just start taking deeper breaths than normal, through your nose, slowly and deeply. That's it! Now just start to notice that your shoulders are becoming relaxed and that the good feeling is working its way down your whole body, slowly down your arms to your fingertips, down through the tops of your legs, and out through your toes, and keep breathing gently but deeply... Notice that your head is feeling heavy and relaxed.

Now imagine a scene where you felt very relaxed, it could be by a beach or it could be the smell of fresh flowers, or even the smell of the warm summer breeze on your face – whatever makes you relaxed. When you have that picture of relaxation in your mind, I want you to move it gently through your body, down from your mind, through your neck, slowly, and down your back and your arms, down your legs and down to your feet. By now you should have a nice warm feeling throughout your body. Your arms feel heavy; your legs feel heavy, but deeply relaxed. Sit for a moment and then gently come back to the room...

There, how do you feel? No different? Don't worry, it's not easy. It's doubtful you'll be able to empty your mind immediately, after all, it's used to being kept occupied at all times, but it's a start. What you should have experienced there, was just feeling more relaxed than usual, and relaxation is the key to removing boredom. Not the relaxing like watching tv or going to the pub for a drink; this is relaxation without any external stimulation. You don't need to pay anyone for this service, it comes completely free, compliments of your amazing body!

Most of us don't know what real relaxation is. We see it as a change from our usual routine. Going away for the weekend, going to the theatre, doing something adventurous, but that isn't relaxing; that's just occupying your mind with new stimulation, to relieve the tediousness of regular life. Real relaxation is nothing. Absolutely nothing going on.

I hear some of you now crying out, "but that sounds boring! I don't just want to close my eyes and sit to relax, I want to do something fun with my relaxation period."

I'm sure most of you feel like this. Why do something where the end result is nothing? At least relaxing by going to the pub is fun, at least I am getting fit by playing tennis during my relaxing period; but these are activities, relaxing is not an activity, it's a state of mind, which then influences your physical state.

We are so busy these days, that we just don't have time to give our poor overworked brains and bodies a rest; and believe me, they need a rest. You wouldn't drive a horse this hard, you'd be accused of cruelty! But you're quite happy to do it to your own body. It's as if we don't ever want our brains to get bored, just in case something bad happens to us; but the feeling of boredom that children get especially, is just pure mental agitation, and with relaxation, will pass.

In fact, the child will be less demanding, and you won't have to keep finding things for him to do. "Yes, but children have so much energy," I

hear you say; but even for children, the most energetic and inquisitive humans on the planet, learning to sit in quiet is highly important. After all, these will be the stressed parents of the future. Do you want your child to be as stressed as you when he grows up?

If a child learns this technique of relaxation, he will start to enjoy it as “an activity,” although it is nothing more than letting the brain and body unwind. All it takes is five to ten minutes a day, or longer if they feel happy.

Like all things, deep relaxation is a learned behaviour, and the quicker you teach your child this, the better it will be for you and for him, especially when he grows up. Imagine not having to think of the next thing to occupy your child with, in case they start screaming they want to watch a dvd, play outside, or play at the park.

Lets face it, children don't really know what they want! They want to do a million things, and be in a million places at once, and if you don't teach them this quiet sitting, you will find yourself going crazy trying to keep up with them.

I recommend everyone who reads this book try sitting with their own thoughts, in silence, for five minutes a day. You don't need any special equipment or clothing, you don't need to buy a membership, and it may give you a little insight into a wonderful person – you!

If only everyone who feels angry and agitated would try this. It is so simple, yet people seem to think that it is boring just sitting with yourself. Try to ask yourselves why your mind would tell you it was boring to give it a quick rest, to recharge its batteries. Is it hiding something it is afraid you will find out if you, and it, are left alone in the same room without anything to do? Maybe you will have to find out!

Sit a while, and watch your thoughts.
Breathe deeply and evenly.
Imagine a scene of total tranquility.
Let that image float over your body.
And relax...

B r a i n

That part of the central nervous system that includes all the higher nervous centres; enclosed within the skull; continuous with the spinal cord

•

That which is responsible for one's thoughts and feelings; the seat of the faculty of reason

Let's be silly and imagine for a moment that someone from another planet came to visit...

Shop assistant: Ah, so you're interested in a brain, are you? This is our top of the range model. It is the "homo sapiens model 2000." The ferrari of brains.

Alien visitor: Cool, looks great, What version is the software that it comes with?

Shop assistant: Version 1.0.

Alien visitor: Oh, I see. Thanks, but I think I'll wait for the next version.



The brain. The lump of grey stuff that is responsible for me being able to type, drink tea, go to the toilet, make love, walk, and run. It's an amazing bit of hardware, and we, the homo sapiens species are lucky to have acquired it. No other species in the known universe has a brain as complex as ours. We are definitely top dog when it comes to brains. Somehow, millions of connections are made and we see the world, interact with it, perform routine functions, and most of all, (and this is the best part) our brain gives us the ability to store huge amounts of data, retrieve it at will, and process it accordingly.

Psychiatrists, doctors, and philosophers have long tried to understand the brain, and unfortunately, we have divided it into two parts – the brain and the mind. The brain being the engine, and the mind the driver. But for the purposes of our discussion we will say that the brain and the mind are the same. After all, wherever the thoughts and feelings originate

from, and whatever else is going on up there, it is all enclosed in the skull that is attached to our neck!

The ability to think (and think and think)

I don't know about you, but I love thinking about things; but this ability hasn't been with us for that long, if we believe we evolved from the apes. Somehow after coming down from the trees, in what we now call africa, we developed a special ability .

Some say it is through switching from a nuts and berries diet to a high protein meat diet, but I have a problem with that theory, as surely that would mean that any animal, who through necessity, switches to eating meat could develop this ability! Lions eat lots of meat already, and all they seem to do is lie around in the sun, roaring occasionally. Others say it is impossible we evolved from the apes, and that we couldn't have developed these abilities, so we must have been created as we are, thinking brains intact. And until people gain more insight they probably will be arguing about this for many millennia to come.

But our brain does seem to have evolved, doesn't it? Firm evidence for this is shown in the time it took us to discover fire, invent the wheel, develop agriculture, make tools, learn engineering skills, and finally build skyscrapers and nuclear bombs. There is no denying that this must have been a process, otherwise the cavemen wouldn't have been cavemen; they would have been sitting around playing computer games, drinking beer, and listening to cd's. What do you think?

For about a million years, there seems to have been little progress, and then suddenly things start happening. Man's brain starts making the connections, and the engine starts. After that there has been no stopping us!

Unfortunately, it didn't happen like that at all. Basic agriculture was invented only about 12,000 years ago, and up until recently – more specifically the dawn of the industrial revolution (*the transformation from an agricultural to an industrial world*), about 200 years ago – people were living simply with no tv, no satellite navigation, no cars, no electricity, and no junk food. In fact, many people over the world still live like this, so let's not get carried away with ourselves, thinking we are so great, and our brains are so amazing. We must also remember that for the last X thousand years we have been brutally killing each other in our quest for power and domination. Some brain, eh?

Do you want chips with that?

In fact, the fast moving consumer world we live in has only been around for the last forty years or so, and only really picked up pace in the eighties with the dawn of personal computing, when they finally got the silicon chips (invented several years before) down to a manageable size, and price, people could afford.

So, it is the invention of the microprocessor chip that is really fuelling the fast pace of the world. Without it, we would be living a much different life. And if you don't believe me, think about what applications the microprocessor can be used in... Almost everything. So let's remember that this is a new invention, almost as important as the discovery of the wheel; and thanks to the rapid development time of new software, we are bringing out more and more applications.

Aircraft, cars, military equipment, medical equipment, stock broking systems, ordering systems, delivery systems, media systems, and electricity distribution networks amongst others – they all have chips in them, and are all controlled by software, running thousands of lines of code a second. So, if you want to imagine a world without the microchip you better think back to how it was living fifty years ago, not a million years ago.

Computers help humans do tasks they couldn't easily do (like fly fighter jets for example). Imagine trying to make all the adjustments necessary to the ailerons, the rudder, the flight path, the pitch and the yaw. Of course, we *could* do it in an emergency, but our minds would be so tied up with all the calculations necessary, we would be constantly on the go! Computers let us take the big picture view, so we punch in the co-ordinates and all the data needed to run the jet, and then let the computer take care of the dirty work, while we concentrate on more important things!

Software (*written programs or procedures or rules and associated documentation pertaining to the operation of a computer system and that are stored in read/write memory*) runs the show these days, and it certainly makes running such a fast moving and complex world manageable. No longer do we have to worry about all the detail. As long as the software is programmed correctly, and we feed in the correct data, we can sit back a bit and enjoy the ride.

Take for example, your humble cruise missile (*an unmanned aircraft that is a self-contained bomb*). It has a guidance system in the nose, and

uses the global positioning network to hit a door many miles away. It's hands-off war. You design the microchip and software, and then all the operator has to do is tell it where to go. And go it does. It has no brain to speak of, it cannot reason, cannot change its mind, has no empathy, no compassion, no love; nor does it have ethics or morals. It just follows the instructions given to it by the human brain.

More and more, we rely on software to run our daily lives. It is the extension of our brain, doing tasks we either cannot do, or do not want to do ourselves. Just imagine how your life would run if it wasn't aided by computers. Do it now. Imagine there are no computers in the world. Imagine what life would be like. Can you? Is it impossible to think of a time when we had no software control? Of course not. We got on fine without computers in the past, but we are building a society that relies on them; and *that* puts the hardware and the software companies in a very powerful position over us, don't you think?

Some people have suggested that with the dawning of artificial intelligence, computers could one day run the world; but without us, they don't exist, and cannot exist. Even people who predict that the machines will take over the world by "learning" how to make copies of themselves seem to forget that humans need to program them in the first place, and that programming skill comes out of the human mind – a mind so complex we don't really understand the first thing about it. We are just the "users" of the software, not the programmers, so instead of concentrating on building a new brain (the computer) we understand, maybe we should try to understand our own brain first.

Who is the programmer?

Given the short space of time we have been starting to explore the world with our minds, I think it would be fair to say that we are on version 1.0 of the brain's software. So we shouldn't be surprised that we still murder each other, desire power and wealth, and spend most of our time in conflict with ourselves and each other. Let's not feel too bad, we're doing the best we can, given our limited insight and lack of an instruction manual!

And that's just it, isn't it? We don't have a "users guide" to the brain we can refer to, and make upgrades where necessary. It's like being given the most complex piece of hardware and software available in the world, and someone saying "Get on with it." Or someone (like our parents,

teachers, leaders etc.) saying “Yes I think this is how you use it,” without them having a clue either.

As you can imagine, it all starts getting pretty chaotic. And it’s not just one person; everyone wants to have a go at telling you how to use it! “No, do it this way,” “no do it that way,” “why don’t you try this?” “this is the solution!” It all seems a little bit ridiculous now, thinking about it!

Imagine sitting in a factory at the mainframe with no idea what a mainframe is, and everyone telling you you’ve got to use it; except there is no instruction manual. Now all the other workers come in, and give you advice on how to use it. Would you understand how to operate it, or would you just be even more confused than before you sat down? Think about it for a moment. You have the hardware, you have the software, no manual, and a thousand opinions. What’s going to happen? You’ve got it! Confusion.

I don’t remember anything from when I was a baby, but I’m sure I made a lot of gurgling noises, wet myself often and made some nasty smells. My brain wasn’t even at version 1.0, it was probably in pre-beta testing (*preliminary or testing stage of a software or hardware product*). Slowly, but surely, it was given more instructions on how to operate, by someone who had gone through this exact same process themselves (still no manual). Over the years more and more software was added to the hardware to allow it to know what talking, going to the toilet, or having manners is, and finally at the age of eighteen, it is released into the world at Version 1.0.

But where did the initial instructions come from, if we know that there is no manual? Surely, we must be able to go back to the beginning, where the first words were uttered, and find the manual; but there isn’t one, there never has been one.

Perhaps that is why so many people follow religions. Perhaps books like the koran and the bible are the user guide, and like so many software companies, god forgot to enclose the manual when he shipped the first product, and everyone had to wait thousands of years for it to arrive! Who knows?

I think it is fair to say that there was never a users guide to the brain. Everyone just did the best they could, and muddled through life trying to make sense of everything, get enough to eat, have somewhere to live, and find a partner with whom to make a new member of the species. It seems that nothing has really changed since our brains became developed enough to be able to process such complex information.

Unlike the old mainframes, which have been replaced by new hardware and new software, we are still running the old trusty version 1.0 hardware and software. We can't blame people if they don't live a perfect life and make mistakes. That's just how it is.

This one's faulty I want to exchange it

"We're not happy with this version," say some of you. "We want something better, we want an upgrade" and perhaps that's what people think they are getting when they start following god's user guide. But that cannot be the original, if we believe we have been on this planet in some shape or form for millions of years. After all, people who read these guides are still trapped by greed, power and desire. "Ah," say you, "that's because they haven't been following the instructions," and maybe that's true.

But let's move away from religion for a moment and have a look at this operating system ourselves. We know we can't go to the shop and get a new one, so we'll just have to "fix" what we've been given. By fix, I don't mean just add more software; we need to go deep inside the mainframe and examine the code, line by line, to see where the fault lies; and from what I see around me in the world, there definitely is a fault.

In a way, when I have been writing, and you have been reading all the topics in this book, that's what you and I have been doing. We have been examining the code like diligent programmers, and making adjustments where necessary so we don't have any more faulty instructions like:

1. Want even more territory than have already
2. Decide how to get it (run subroutine)
 - (a) take by force or buy
 - i. If buy then end
 - ii. If take by force then goto line 3
3. Assemble army
4. Kill everyone to get it
5. End program

Please excuse my coding skills, but hopefully you get the point! You see, there is a core operating system which is running all the tricky processes, like breathing, and pumping blood around the system, but the rest is up to "us," the people who attempt to control the software by trying

anything out to see how it works. If it does work, the software then runs by itself every day without us even being aware of it running; do you understand?

I see that when I get angry, people are scared of me, and they will do what I want them to do, so the software program is then put into the ram (*random access memory*) and is used on a daily basis. It is only when an engineer (who is us also) notices that this program isn't functioning correctly, that the code can either be deleted or fixed.

Some of the more technical amongst you would argue that the program is running perfectly well, as it has no errors in it, and what I am talking about is purely philosophical. Maybe I would agree, because you see, if the brain, or the mind, is the seat of everything we are, and we are part of the whole, the indivisible, then the label I see on the software box is "Brain: Operating system keeps species alive. Added bonus: Also contains the whole suite of compassion and love programs built into the operating system." But maybe we should get back to our main discussion!

For a moment, let's imagine that love and compassion *are* already built in. "But then, if that is so," says you, "why do we still cause ourselves and each other such misery? Surely if you are saying that love and compassion are part of the operating system then they should influence all the other programs behaviour?"

Unfortunately, as with all operating systems, there can be glitches, and the software we install can also affect the operating system adversely, or contain trojans (*a program that appears desirable but actually contains something harmful*), or viruses (*a software program capable of reproducing itself and usually capable of causing great harm to files or other programs on the same computer*), and we have to remember that even though the universe is the whole, and we are part of the whole, there is no such thing as perfection; that is merely a human idea (*a perfect embodiment of a concept*). Everything has flaws, that's why we are looking through the code!

Oh my god! I've got a trojan in my brain!

If we look at desire (*the feeling that accompanies an unsatisfied state, An inclination to want things*), it all looks good on the surface. I desire a new car to make me happy, so I buy it, take it home, and feel happier. Only very soon, I start to desire more things, as I am now unsatisfied again. If I had never run the program "desire," then all would have been fine, but I

did, and I now have to pay the price for running it. I am now constantly in an unsatisfied state, and as with other unwanted programs, we have to find a way to (a) find them and (b) delete them. Once we have deleted the program “desire” we won’t have the same problems with the operating system; but if you load it again, you will be back to square one.

Unfortunately, some of these programs cleverly hide themselves, and have code to self-launch again. So by initiating the “awareness” program, which is like a sentry to guard against unwanted intruders, we stop it from launching.

If awareness is like an anti-trojan program, then compassion and love must be the anti-virus programs. Some virus programs, like “hate,” for example, can be destructive to the whole operating system, and can affect other computers as well. These programs are so deadly, that once found must be cleaned immediately, otherwise they cause the entire system to break down – and we don’t want that, do we? So far so good! I hope my computer analogies aren’t too boring for the less technical out there, but hopefully you understand what I am trying to convey to you.

I am the programmer

I don’t want to get into a discussion about who “I” really is here, that is for another topic; so for now we will just have to agree that “I” is the person who is in charge of the brain (or is the brain in charge of itself?), and we have to remember that “I” decide to pick up a cup, “I” decide to cheat on my wife,” “I” decide to hate someone because of their colour.

The person who is physically in control of the muscles in the body, also has the ability to program the brain, but we all must remember, that everyone else knows you don’t have an instruction manual, so they will try to help you program your brain. You must not let that happen. What do they know? They didn’t have an instruction manual either, so how can you know that the code they are giving you is correct?

I do not want you to believe me when I tell you that love and compassion, *are* built in programs, I want you to test it out for yourselves, by allowing the awareness, love, and compassion programs to run! Soon you will find that the bad code, the trojans, the viruses, and any other faulty instructions that have been fed into your brain will start to be deleted one by one. I have tested it for myself, and boy did I have some dodgy programs lying around; and some seriously nasty trojans! But I have to say, my operating system seems to be running smoothly now.

It is time for an upgrade. Upgrade yourself to version 2.0. What? You didn't just think you could jump to version 9.0, did you? After all, life is a process. What about all those bug fixes you have to do along the way?

A human brain version 2.0 – I want one!
No, I don't need a manual, I'm going to write my own.

B u l l y i n g

The act of intimidating a weaker person to make them do something

•

Discourage or frighten with threats or a domineering manner;
intimidate

We've all known one, I'm sure, but have you ever been one? Are you one now, and would you recognise if you were one? Such difficult questions, right at the beginning of the discussion! So how do you spot a bully? You may instantly recognise him from school. The stereotypical large framed older male, usually not very bright; he uses his size to push weaker, smaller people around, generally intimidating everyone who crosses his path. Never charming, always aggressive. Sound familiar? But as he gets older other people get bigger too, and he may lose his size advantage. Usually he is distinctly lacking in social skills. That was easy, wasn't it!

So how do you spot the next bully, the office bully, who bullies his work colleagues or subordinates? Or the next bully, the charmer, who bullies his wife when he gets home? Unfortunately these characters are everywhere; who knows, you may even be one.

So what causes people to want to intimidate others? Namely, because they can. A bully will never pick on someone larger than him, that would defeat the object of being a bully, and he may get a nasty surprise. He will always pick on someone physically weaker, like a female or a smaller male than himself, or at work, someone in an inferior position. The bully also targets emotionally weaker individuals like females (although not exclusively, and remember there are female bullies). They will use hurtful language and physical threats, which may become real at some point. Your average bully is a thoroughly unpleasant individual.

If that's you, have a good think about the way I described you. How do you *feel*? You may have been bullied as a child, and maybe you are trying to get your own back on the people that bullied you.

Bullying makes life hell for those on the receiving end, especially if the perpetrator is a close family member you love. How many women suffer at the hands of a man who pretends he loves them, but takes out his frustration on them when he gets home? You, the man; you, the bully, who is so weak inside, you have to hurt others with your vicious words and your hands that leave a mark for all to see.

"Why do women stay with men like that?" people ask. "Why doesn't she just leave him?" "Why doesn't she go to the police?" Of course, bullied women have thought about the same things countless times, but to a wife, who may also be a mother, there are a whole range of issues to think about. She isn't just thinking about herself, and that is the saddest part of all. "Where would I go? Would people think badly of me for leaving my husband? Would people judge me and think it was all my fault; that somehow I had driven him to it?"

At this point we need to STOP. The only person to blame is the bully – whatever the reason ("sorry I'm under a lot of pressure, it won't happen again" etc). The bully is to blame. He must seek to develop awareness of himself in action, if the relationship is to continue. The same goes for the office bully, and the school bully. For the victims it is mental torture, being afraid in case they say, or do something to you.

Unfortunately, once you start with the "please don't," or "please stop," they seem to take that as a signal to go ahead and intimidate you more. The more you show weakness, the stronger they become. They feed on your fear. Be still, be silent. See through the fear that is draining you of all of your energy and stand tall.

Never engage a bully verbally. Use the power of silence against him.

This may sound like an impossible task for you who has been the victim for so long. Use their power and anger against them, it is the only way. Reflect it back, not by using any magical force field, but by standing calmly. Breathe deeply through the nose. One, breathe in – taking in strength. Two, breathe out – releasing fear. Always remember the power of the breath to still the mind and calm the body (yogis have been doing this for thousands of years). Feel the power to look into his eyes even if he raises his fist against you. “You cannot hurt me.” Not a stare of defiance but one of inner strength.

The second step forward is to offer him your compassion. Ultimately, the man who hurts others, is the one who needs our help. We don’t feel sorry for him, we feel compassion (*the humane quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to do something about it*). I know this sounds crazy to you, because you are thinking, “wait, I am the one who is suffering.” But without wanting to help them, they will continue to hurt you.

The third step is the most difficult of all. But to leave whatever situation you are in is the only way forward for you, and for them. There is no time for talking about reconciliation; bullying is torture and you wouldn’t stay with a torturer until he worked out his problems, would you?

If anyone asks you why you are leaving, you must tell them it is because you are being bullied. You must regain your inner strength. I guarantee that as soon as you leave the situation, you will feel better. If it is a loved one you are leaving, remind yourself why. Do not listen to their cries of “please stay, I’ll change, I really love you...” You have done more than enough for them. You must be strong and silent. They need to become aware of themselves and their actions, but not whilst you are still there, as they would be liable to carry on where they left off. The key to disarming a bully, however strong he is physically, is to treat him with silence. The more silent you are, the stronger you become; language is his weapon, let silence be yours.

It is time to talk to the bully inside...

So who are you really, you who intimidates others? Are you powerful? Do you feel strong when you make people feel afraid, does it make you more of a man? Will people show you more respect? In a strange way, you are just like a criminal who intimidates weaker people to get what he wants;

using threats of physical violence, and using threatening words. You are no better than a common criminal, and you should be treated as such – no mitigating factors allowed.

Whether you are still at school, in the workplace, or in the home, you deserve no respect from anyone. You have earned nothing but their contempt. You should be denied all access to those you intimidate, much like a criminal is segregated from the public. Just answer me one thing: “Do you really feel you have earned the right to hurt people?” Who gave you that right? Your father? Did he bully people too? Are you just imitating him, or are you really that weak that you have to hurt others? Soon we will find out. You probably don’t want to stop; you probably wouldn’t know where to stop, but I know when to stop, and that is *Right Now*.

Right now, you are aware you are a bully, that you hurt people, even when you try not to. Somehow something deep inside makes you want to hurt people. But it is *you* that is hurting inside, isn’t it? No one will listen to your pain, and you have to let people know, don’t you? You want them to feel what you are feeling, don’t you? But that’s not the way to do it. You need to become aware of what you are feeling right now. You need to tell yourself: “I can heal. I want to heal. I want to be whole. I want to feel love. I do not want to hurt any more.” And in this moment, you are love. You have opened yourself up to the world; you have unlocked the prison of your mind, and let love in.

You can heal, but first you have to do something very brave. You have to face your victims – maybe not in reality at first, but visualise them in your mind. Now apologise to them. Do not ask for their forgiveness; ask for their compassion instead. You may not be able to do this on your own, so please get someone to help you, whether it be a doctor or a therapist. You need help.

You can help yourself, but the most important thing is to heal the violence and anger that is raging through your body, and to build up your own self-esteem, so you can start to deal with people, without needing to control or dominate them. Everyone is on this earth together, and everyone deserves to be left to carry on his or her life without fear of intimidation from others.



Bullying is real, and of course, you can report it to the police. You may choose to take the person to court, where they may be convicted, and

they may go to jail, or receive a fine, but like all violent people who are merely locked up, they will not be healed when they come out into society again. As compassionate human beings, do we not need to recognise that people need help, and offer it to them in order to protect others in the future? This may be hard for you to decide, so I ask you to think about it carefully in case this situation ever arises, or you are in the middle of this situation right now.

The bullying of partners (especially females) is more rightly called domestic violence (*violence in the home*), and often, when the police are eventually called, the man has convinced the partner to say nothing was happening (under more threats of course), and will play the part of the lying charmer to the police, who will probably do nothing. You will be back where you started. Violence is sickening to most of us in the world. It is not a part of being human. You do not have to put up with it.

Up to now we have been really talking about two adults, whether in a work situation, or at home, where the victim could walk out at any time. When you're a child you can't. Even if you have a little bit of money, where would you go? The world is a scary place. Who would believe you? If you went to the police wouldn't they just take you back home? Your father or mother, who were abusing you would make up some lies and you would be released back into their "care." It is an almost impossible situation as a child or adolescent.

So what do you do? You just lie back and take it, vowing to (a) take revenge on your parents when you get older and (b) take out your hurt and anger on someone weaker than you – maybe even your own child.

It is an unfortunate fact, that children of abusers often become the very person they despised. There are charities that are starting to help children of abuse, but these are few and far between, and it is hard for children to open up to strangers, especially about things like this. I feel so, so sorry for them. I wish I could do more. I just hope that people get to the children before it's too late, before they have suffered so much, that they themselves become violence. Brought into the world, laughing, and smiling, only to be beaten, tortured and mentally abused. I just have one question for the parents: How can you?

How can you do it to your own child?
The one you created. The tiny helpless child...
Did you bring him into the world to abuse? To hurt?

I give you my compassion today.
But only because I want to help the child.

Transcend violence. Seek help.
Find compassion and love which are the only way.

Do it now.
Do not make people suffer any longer.

C

C e l e b r i t y

A widely known person

•

The state or quality of being widely honoured and acclaimed

Celebrities are everywhere. You can't get away from their bleached smiles and suntans, can you? They roam the globe, appearing on everything from gossip magazines to chat shows. Standing up for women's rights, being patrons of cat charities, aids charities, victims of crime charities. Everywhere you look they are there – smiling out at you.

Sometimes they are photographed drunk, or maybe you might see a police mugshot of them, where they have been arrested for lewd behaviour, fighting, or up on some drugs charge. Poor things. They have a terrible life. All that money and fame, and still they are unhappy. They complain that the press are invading their privacy, but that's how they got famous in the first place, by smiling for the tv cameras, magazines etc. They are usually attractive, dress in expensive clothes, eat at fancy restaurants; and if they have earned enough, usually buy some sprawling

property to affirm their A-list status. They smile and they smile, but how did they get to be so famous?

Some are actors and actresses, others are singers, the rest are models, reality tv stars, tv soap opera stars, or sportsman. Teenagers pin up posters of them all over their walls; they get the stars to sign autographs (err their names), and young boys and girls alike drool over the latest celebrity to hit our screens, and gossip about them at school.

“Oh, she’s so sexy...”

“No she isn’t. She’s ugly.”

“What? What do you know?”

“Hey, but I’ll tell you who is gorgeous though...”

It goes on and on. The celebrities get richer, the fans grow more adoring, and the smile just keeps getting whiter and whiter!

Dad, meet my new role model, he’s a gangsta rapper!

Parents are always thought of as role models for children, well, that’s how it used to be before the advent of the movie screen, the record, and the tv. Before this, it used to be a closed house. Mum and dad made the rules, and brought up their children to behave like them.

One day it all changed; the beautiful movie star appeared on screen. Suddenly mum wasn’t someone to look up to any more, she was boring and strict, this star was beautiful, got all the men, and she smoked! Mum definitely wouldn’t approve! “Good,” thought the teenagers, “these are the people I want to look up to. They are glamorous, rich, and exciting, not like boring mum or dad.”

Boys later saw “rebellious” rock stars playing their raunchy guitars, surrounded by beautiful women, and they wanted to be like them. Dad worked in an office, came home at five, had his dinner, and went to bed. “Great! I don’t want a dad like that,” they thought. “I don’t want to be like him when I grow up; I want to be a gangster, or a rocker, or an actor! I want to have an exciting life. If they can do it so will I.”

Today, celebrity role models go from strength to strength; and from all accounts, the badder they are, the better! Parents are horrified that their children idolise people like african-american rappers who have been, or still are, affiliated with dangerous drug gangs, up on drugs or gun charges, and call their women derogatory names like “bitch” and “ho” (whore), but the fans just lap it up.

They love to buy into this magical world; that they can, for a small fee (cd, or movie ticket), be a part of, if only for a short time. They dress like them, start to use street slang in everyday life, and are genuinely surprised when they find out that mum and dad don't like it! Actually they aren't surprised, because they want mum and dad to be shocked. They want them to say, "turn off that music," "you're not going out dressed like that," "I forbid you to watch that movie." To the teenagers, it's all a great game, isn't it? And for the celebrity, however minor, it's like all their ships came in at once: Payday.

So the celebrities go out and spend their money; that's what the people want after all. Teenagers don't want to be idolising some rocker who doesn't swear, doesn't drink much, doesn't do drugs, and doesn't have sex with "bitches." They would be horrified to find him in a modest home, taking public transport to work, caring about his wife and four beautiful children, and going out for walks with his poodle dog called "fluffy." They can get all that at home.

Idolising a celebrity, is about them doing all the things you (a) wish you had the money to do, and (b) had the balls to do. So when we see a tv star on the front cover of the national tabloid magazine snorting coke, what do we do? The older generation say, "isn't that appalling?" And the younger generation say, "yeah! way to go!" and then discuss how cool it was that so and so was caught on camera with a spoon up his nose, and two hookers in his bed.

Celebrities get to do the things we want to do, but (a) we can't afford any coke, and (b) we don't know any hookers, and (c) it's not so interesting if you're not a celebrity.

And that's the difference between us and celebrities. If we were to go to nightclubs every night, do a gram of coke every day, and have three in a bed romps with hookers, people would be trying to get us psychiatric help, or they would pour scorn on us and say, "look at the mess he's made of his life, after all his opportunities..." Oh, and we would probably get fired from our job, and then we may end up in court! But for a celebrity these acts are, if not applauded by the general public, tolerated as being part of a celebrity lifestyle.

When the flame goes out

The problem is, celebrities are, funnily enough, just regular people like you and me. They have the same fears, the same personal troubles, except they are thrown into the limelight.

At first it's great. Imagine a hundred cameras taking a picture of your smiling face! Imagine being on stage in front of sixty thousand people, or having millions of people watch you at the cinema twenty foot tall, the feelings it must stir would be incredible! "All this attention for me?" Your brain would say. "Wow! This is fantastic." And I'm sure it is.

A few years ago I would have loved to have been a celebrity. In fact I always wanted to be an actor or a star of some kind. Maybe I was lacking something as a child, but when I failed to live up to myself (never went to stage school, was very average at music), I gave up. I am sure this is a similar story for many people, and judging by how many people turn up for the auditions to be on reality search for a star programmes on tv, there is no shortage of wannabes!

Whilst some musicians or actors may take offence to being described as drug taking lunatics having sex with "ho's" every night, I may add that this is not an essay about the film or music industry, but an investigation of what it means to be a celebrity; and if you don't do coke every night and "bang bitches," then good for you!

So you are now a celebrity (unlike me) and you have all the attention. People "love you" (the image you portray) and they buy your records, or watch you on tv, or see you at the movies. You have been paid a lot of money and you've bought a lot of stuff. You have celebrity friends, you go to celebrity parties, everything is about you. You are the star. People are nice to you in the street. You get the best table in the restaurant. You holiday in the most expensive resorts in the caribbean. Your picture is everywhere. Then one day...

The last film or record you did was a flop; there's someone new on the block, someone with an even whiter smile than you; your agent stops calling you, no one is interested in you any more, you were yesterday's idol, and they are tired of looking at the same face and body. They want a new pin-up, someone more exciting, someone who can give them more of what they want. They want raunchier, dirtier, sexier, cleaner – someone who knows what they want. All you know is they don't want you any more.

How do you feel? How does it make you feel that nobody invites you to parties any more, that no one wants your autograph in the street, that no one cares anything about you, apart from maybe to say, "oh, isn't that so and so? She used to be someone famous, but she's all washed up now.

Look at the way she dresses, and her make-up is terrible. I can't believe I used to have a poster of her on my wall."

So what thoughts go through your head when this happens to you, which it will, because celebrity doesn't last for ever, unless you are one of ten old wrinkled stars the public has taken to. But for the rest of you, it's the celebrity scrapheap. If you're a football star, tv soap star, or reality tv star I have the unfortunate task of being the bearer of bad news. Your star is about to go out even quicker than movie stars or rock stars.

I am not to blame! They made me get up in front of the camera

Some ex-stars inevitably feel bitter about the whole process of being summarily dumped first by their record label, or movie studio, and then next, the general public. They may blame everyone for having taken advantage of them when they were vulnerable, that in fact they hated standing up in front of all the press cameras all the time and signing autograph after autograph. But if there is blame to be apportioned then it would have to be with their brain, which, after all, sought the fame in the first place, and then subsequently couldn't deal with rejection. Adulation then rejection.

It must be a very hard fall, but for the people in charge of the media, it's just business. They are happy to make you a celebrity, and keeping pandering to your ego, as long as you keep bringing in the money for them. Some celebrities (rightly) cannot believe they have been treated like a piece of meat, but that's all you are as a celebrity; a piece of meat to be tossed around with for profit – albeit a human piece of meat.

So why do it in the first place? Lack of love as a child? Low self-esteem? Perhaps. But the mind is tricky, and we have to watch it closely. You see, being a star of any kind means putting on a mask. The mask of deception. You are pretending to be someone in order to get the audience to believe you, and if you are good, you deceive them thoroughly (whether as an actor or rock star), but it isn't the real you.

The public love the character, but would they love you without the mask? The media companies cannot afford to take that chance, and you are forced out in character whenever you are in public. Pretty soon, the mind, being easily fooled, starts to believe that you really are that character, and plays along nicely. It is only when someone tells you no one is interested in seeing your character any more, that things turn nasty.

The mind rightly questions why it is not allowed to play the character any more, that it, in fact liked the character, and liked being applauded, and cheered, and photographed, and actually liked going to celebrity parties, and actually, whilst you weren't looking, quietly disposed of the authentic you, in the mind garbage bin. So you see, it couldn't possibly go back to just being ordinary any more; it was great; people loved it, people loved the part it was playing.

But as the realisation sinks in that you are no longer the character, so does the realisation that you don't know who you are any more. You have been so used to playing a part that you forget how to be you without the pretence.

Unmasking the actor

So how does someone who has kept up a pretence find the real person again? Is it difficult or impossible to find this person? Do they exist any more? That's what we shall find out.

Acting a part in life is something we all do to some extent. We pretend we are someone we wish we were. We pretend we are more confident than we really are, or more intelligent because we really don't want people to see who we are. Our minds, being the protective guardians of our self-esteem, don't want to let people see that we are not intelligent or confident. We want to project an image for others to see, of somebody they will like. Do you understand? It is a brave person who faces the world without his mask on. We are all actors; some people just get paid for it!

We can keep up an act for years, sometimes for our whole life, but what happens when we are unmasked, when no one wants to see our act any more? What happens then? Well, I'll tell you; a great deal of mental anguish! I kept up the pretence of a cool, funny, confident, successful professional for years, but none of it was true; and when the mask did come off it was a scary experience. I found myself empty, alone, and anxious. I was a stranger in my own body. Who was I? How could I find out? I sat in pain for several years, unable to live with myself without projecting a confident exterior.

One day, I spoke to an old friend, and they asked how I was, probably expecting a resounding "great, fantastic, never better," but I replied, "very unhappy," which threw him a bit.

“Ahh, you’ll get over it al,” they said, “you are really confident funny guy.”

“That’s the thing,” I said, “actually, I’m not. I’ve been suffering from anxiety and panic attacks for the last...”

“Is that so...?” they added uncomfortably, “well, al, it’s been nice seeing you again, take care, ok?”

And with that, they disappeared, and I haven’t seen or heard from them since.

You see, the person they liked was the image they had of me. They believed I was confident and successful, so I must be. When I revealed that it was all an act (albeit a mildly subconscious act) they felt let down, as if I’d cheated them somehow. That I had not been honest with them, and maybe they then questioned if I had managed to fool him, how many others were doing the same. And what if he was just wearing a mask?

Who knows the answers to these questions; all I know is that it is better to live an authentic life without the mask, that is, not pretending to be someone just so others will like you. But it is an easy trap to fall into. That is the trap of celebrity, which is just a bigger brighter, more expensive, ultra white toothed mask than you and I wear.

We must learn to be authentic. From authenticity there is nowhere to fall psychologically. Do you understand? When we live authentically in complete awareness of ourselves in relationship with others we have no need to pretend. If people do not like us for who we are, so be it. No pretending. No mask. You are open to the universe. What a scary, and at the same time wonderful feeling to have. Embrace it.

C h a n g e

An event that occurs when something passes from one state or phase to another

•

A relational difference between states; especially between states before and after some event

•

The action of changing something

•

The result of alteration or modification

•

A thing that is different

•

A difference that is usually pleasant

We all want to change, don't we? We're not happy with the way we look, we want to stop smoking, we want to be nicer to people, and we don't want to be so selfish to people. We want to change because we are unhappy with the way we are.

I never wanted to change, I was happy the way I was; maybe a flatter stomach and bigger muscles would be nice, but that's about all; and I couldn't really be bothered to go to the gym. Well, saying that, I paid for many a gym subscription, but all in all, I just couldn't be bothered. If it happened instantaneously, without any real commitment on my part, that would be fine, otherwise, if it happened, it happened. So invariably, my gym membership lapsed, and here I am again with the same "not quite flat" stomach.

This has been going on for many years, and I doubt will ever change. Why? Because deep down I'm really not that bothered about my

stomach. It would be nice to look like a highly toned athlete, but it never ruined my chances with women, and nobody liked me any less, so it wasn't high on my priority list. That's the thing with change, we want it to happen straight away or we lose interest. We think we "should" change; people tell us we "should" change; but unless we really want to change, it will never happen.

Should

Expresses an emotional, practical, or other reason for doing something

- "I drink too much. I *should* stop drinking."
- "I eat too much junk food, I *should* eat more healthily."
- "I get angry all the time, I *should* try to calm down."
- "I *should* phone my mother more often."
- "I *should* do my homework before watching tv."
- "I *should* be more careful with my money."
- "I *should* help out around the house more."
- "I *should* pay my bills on time."

Should. Probably one of the worst words in the dictionary. A word that defines what we think is expected of us, not what we really want to do. Although, want (*a specific feeling of desire*) is a similar word.

- "I *want* to lose weight."
- "I *want* to be nicer to my mother."
- "I *want* to stop drinking."
- "I *want* to be calmer."
- "I *want* to pay my bills on time."

but...

There's always a "but" when we use the word *want*.

- "I want to go for a run today, *but* it's a bit cold."
- "I want to lose weight, *but* it's so hard because I'm so busy at work"
- "I want to phone my mother more often, *but* I never get the time."
- "I want to help about around the house more *but* I'm always so tired when I get home."
- "I want to calm down, *but* everything makes me angry."

So we've got a good selection of words here, haven't we? Should, want and but.

"I *should* lose weight. I *want* to lose weight, *but* I just can't" or to put it another way, it's what we *ought* to do, and what we *would* do if it wasn't difficult, and finally the excuse for not doing it!

It's just all too difficult, isn't it? So what do we do? We buy self-help books from self-styled lifestyle gurus, personal growth coaches, diet experts, or psychologists trying to help you heal your "inner child." We buy exercise dvd's and audio books for relaxation and meditation; we attend yoga and tai-chi classes. We study spiritualism, turn to religion, have our chakras balanced; and we believe it when someone says in a book they will change our life in 7 days.

When the first one doesn't work, we try another. When the second one doesn't work we try a third. When the third one doesn't work, we try a fourth. We become addicted to finding the solution. After all, if the diet guru has helped one million people to lose weight, or the addiction specialist has helped thousands back to sobriety, surely they must be able to help you?

What about the hypnotherapist who has helped thousands of people to give up smoking, surely he must be able to help you? Or the religious guru, who has helped millions to find god and find peace in their lives? Surely someone must be able to help you? The more you try and fail, the more despondent you become. You begin to think that no one can help you, and if these gurus have managed to help all these people, there must be something fundamentally wrong with you. So what do you do? You give up trying and tell everybody "I've tried everything, but nothing works."

How many people write books on change? There are thousands of books on the shelves at your local bookstore. They are not all bad; some offer great advice and insight. "Stop smoking TODAY!" "Change bad habits and turn them into profit!" "Don't sell yourself short!" "Become more effective today!" "Stop procrastinating!" "Live life today, don't wait for tomorrow!" "Become rich without trying!" There are so many of these books now – change has become a billion-dollar industry.

These aren't bad people. They all have their own tips on life; they all want to help you change; they're not tricking you, they're just doing what everybody does; making a bit of money and offering you one word: Hope. They are showing you that it is possible to change, but before you all run down to your local bookstores, and spend your hard earned

money on these glossy paperbacks, let me ask you one question: Why do you think they are so popular? Think about that for a moment.

Have you ever seen a self-help book, or program that takes ten years to complete; or one that tells you that the chances of failure are high? It's all about now! The seven day program. The two week detox. Instant results!

The self-help industry is based around our need to be changed instantly. We are too busy to change ourselves, and we don't really want to; it's all too much effort really! We would much prefer going to a doctor to receive a pill that helps us become a nicer person.

"Here you are alan, take the green one first, that will give you a flatter stomach, and the red one will make you call your mother more often. All right? Next!"

We all like the result of change, because we like what people say about us, don't we? "Oh, he's a much nicer person now he's stopped drinking so much." "She looks so good now she's lost some weight." "He's such a good boy now; he does all his homework straight after school." "My wife's so good now; she pays all the bills when they come in." "He's so good with money now, he's saved up for a new car for us..."

It's nice to be complemented on something good we have done, isn't it? We like it when people notice our efforts, but there will always be some people saying "We never see him down the pub anymore, I don't know what's happened to him; he's changed," or "She's no fun since she lost all that weight, all she cares about is her figure," or "We can never play with him after school, he's always rushing home to do his homework." Seems you can't win can you? You *should* stop drinking, but you're no fun when you're not drinking!

Some people like the change in you, and others just don't like change, full stop. They don't like that you have managed to change and they are still the same. They may feel jealous of you; they themselves may have tried to lose weight or cut down drinking but haven't managed it, and for this, they criticise you in a round about fashion. "She's no fun. The new clothes don't suit her, she was much nicer before, I don't like her much anymore." In fact, what you really want to say is "I'm jealous she changed and I didn't," but are too afraid to.

But who are we changing for? Is it for ourselves, or is it for our family, friends, or our partners? We are certainly not changing for the benefit of mankind! It's a lot closer to home than that.

Who cares in africa that I am giving up smoking in america? Who cares in russia that I have lost weight in england? Answer: No one. They

wouldn't even care if you started doing charity work to help the needy, the only people that care are those closest to you. The ones who love you and care about you, and the ones whose opinions you value. You are changing to please these people, even if you don't notice it yourself.

If you were completely on your own, what would you change about yourself? What if there was no one to see that you had lost weight, what would be the point in all that hard work? What's the point in coming home to do your homework straight away every night, if there's no one to notice and say well done? Why would you change and pay your bills on time if you normally paid them late every month, and there was no one to hassle you? Why bother?

That's why we want change to come easy; because we're not doing it for ourselves most of the time. "Everyone says I'm fat, and I can't get a girlfriend, so I'm going to lose weight" not "I am aware that being overweight is dangerous to my health, so I will lose weight." "My doctor says that if I don't stop smoking I will die" not "I am aware that smoking is killing me, I find it harder to breathe every day, so I will stop right now!"

We change because other people make us aware of things we are either unaware or in denial of. The more we become aware of ourselves in action throughout the day, the more we can see behaviours which are not good for the well-being of the system, or behaviours that could be improved upon to help us interact with society more easily, and with less stress. After all, none of us are perfect, nor will we ever be! The more awareness we have, the easier change becomes. It doesn't even require a personal commitment to yourself; it doesn't even require effort. It doesn't need you to keep telling yourself to change. You don't need to force yourself to change. You just need to see why.

Change is easy...

Of course it is. You are aware that something you do or say is not in the best interests of your system, and as an intelligent machine, able to modify its own behaviour instantaneously, that behaviour is modified to work in the best interests of the system. The end.

Aware

Having or showing knowledge or understanding or realisation or perception

“I am *aware* that drinking excess alcohol is not good for my health. I feel sick, I cannot think clearly. I fall out with people. I argue with my family. I fall over. I have no money. My job is suffering. So I will modify the behaviour that is not in the best interests of the system by abstaining from alcohol immediately.”

“I am *aware* that not paying my bills on time leads me to have higher stress levels, so in the best interests of my system, I will modify my behaviour by paying my bills immediately.”

“I am *aware* that by avoiding speaking with my mother, I make her upset. I am also aware that she will not always be around and that will make me sad. So in the best interests of my system, I will phone her immediately.”

Change cannot come as a result of outside pressure. Change is not something that can be planned over time. Change comes about from awareness; and once we are aware, we can change immediately. If you are putting change off, that’s a sure sign it’s actually a *should* or *want* to change, not an awareness that what you are doing is not in the best interests of the system.

I do not want to talk to you like they do in the self-help books, but you really can change, right now. Not because you should, not because you want to, but because you are aware. You are aware of the benefits of change, you can see how change will improve the quality of your life and, more often than not, improve the quality of the lives of the people around you.

Real change can only come from inside each one of us. We must be aware of something so strongly that we have no other choice but to change our behaviour or our thinking. Up until now we have only discussed behaviour in our examples, but change comes from the mind; not from thought, but from awareness. Change comes from the mind and can possibly stay in the mind, although it will probably have a knock on effect in the real world.

Thought

I don't like fat people; I'm not going to invite that girl from work to my party.

Awareness

She may be overweight, but I should try to understand why she eats so much, it may be a medical disorder, or maybe she has other problems I don't know about.

Thought Change

She is a human being. I work with her; I will get to know her better.

Action

Would you like to come to my party?

I know that's a simplistic example, but it can be applied to any thought/change situation.

Thought

I hate black people; they sell drugs on the streets; they are responsible for crime. They don't deserve to live in my country.

Awareness

Why do I hate black people? I don't know any, and as far as I know white people sell drugs and are responsible for crime. My hate is unjustified. I have never been hurt by a black man. They are citizens of the country, the same as I am.

Thought Change

A black man is a human being, the same as I am; I will stop judging them because of their skin colour. Everyone deserves to live on this earth. Not just me.

Action

I won't look for a black man to beat up after the pub tonight.

Take this and play with it on your own. Make up your own list. See how you can modify your thinking to modify your behaviour instantaneously. What could you change *right now* about yourself? Try it. It's exciting to see your own mind in action! This is only about you; you are not changing anything for anyone else, no one else even has to know. This is for you, and you alone. For the benefit of your system.

But straight away I can hear some of you saying "If it's this easy, how come nobody else has thought of it? Why haven't I read a book with this in it? I bet it doesn't work. It's too simple. I've tried everything; why

should I believe that your method works? This is just the same as I've read in every other book!"

But this isn't a method; this is not a self-help book. I am not your guru; I don't want to change you. In fact, even if you change, I probably won't know about it unless you have your finger poised on a nuclear button, in which case, I must insist you work through the following example immediately!

Thought

I must protect my country from attack, our enemies are everywhere. Only by having this nuclear weapon can we be safe. Everyone wants to destroy us.

Awareness

If I fire this weapon my enemies will retaliate and my country will be destroyed. Although it helps to have a deterrent, they only have them because we do and vice versa. As I will be in a nuclear bunker I will probably survive, although I will be responsible for the deaths of millions of people and animals I cannot callously disregard as collateral damage.

Thought Change

This is not my planet. I am only here for a short time like everyone else. Instead of being afraid of people because they live in a different area of the earth and may speak a different language, I remember we are all living beings and I do not have the right to decide life or death. I am a politician. It's just a job; I was elected to look after the interests of the people, but I also have a responsibility to the rest of the planet. I will offer the hand of friendship to everyone, even people I call my enemies.

Action

I will start dismantling my nuclear weapons.

People are always trying to change the world. They want people to stop bombing each other, stop taking drugs, stop cutting down the rain forests, stop animal testing, and stop killing animals.

Stop doing this, stop doing that.

Even if it is in the best interest of the system or the planet, people don't want to listen to them. Why? Because people hate being told what to do. Nobody wants to hear from a stranger that what they are doing is wrong.

Remember what we discussed earlier? You change for the people closest to you; the ones whose opinions you value. Well if you were a soldier and your mother appealed to you to stop going to war and killing other people, or if you were an addict and your brother said to you

“Please stop taking drugs, you’re destroying yourself, and I can’t bear to see you like this,” would you listen? You may or you may not. You may carry on exactly as before.

So if these are the closest people to you, the ones whose opinions you value, and you still don’t change; what chance has external pressure got to change you?

“No More War!”

“Say NO to Drugs.”

It just washes over your head, doesn’t it? Why should you change if you don’t want to? It’s your life.

The only time external pressures can influence you is when you have already started to become aware of yourself; when you are ready for a change, and just need someone else to give you a final push; otherwise they might as well not bother. They may have changed, and they want you to change, but that’s not the way it works. We are the most intelligent species on the planet, capable of complex thought and articulate speech; we want to work it out on our own, thank you very much.

The fact is we just don’t like to be pressured into anything, do we? We always like to think it over, weigh up the pros and cons. We battle against ourselves. Should we, shouldn’t we? But it’s not buying a vacuum cleaner we’re talking about here. This could be the change that alters the way you live; like giving up crime before you spend your life behind bars; something most of us would find easy, because it’s not in the best interest of the system.

So why is it that some changes are easy for some people, but hard for others? Sorry to tell you this, but it’s your brain! It becomes addicted to behaviours; it has become conditioned to thinking a certain way, and for you to try to change would cause it great pain; and when the brain feels pain you know about it. Your brain throws in all sorts of reasons why it isn’t appropriate to change, why it would be a bad idea. So you start to feel afraid. What if the change is no good? What if you don’t like who you become? What if the change isn’t in your best interest? Here we have the final resistance to change after should – *want* and *but*.

What if?

What if; doubt; the fear that something may go wrong; your brain’s last attempt to stop you from doing something you may live to regret later in

life (it says), even if it is in the best interest of the system. So in a misplaced desire to protect you, your brain mistakenly offers you some sound advice against any serious desire to change.

If you had always paid your bills on time, or had always done your homework on time, there would be no need to change, would there? If you didn't drink too much, you wouldn't have to change to being abstinent, would you?

In one of the dictionary definitions of change it states: "*a difference that is usually pleasant.*" I would say that no one would change if it was for the worse, although they may engage in thinking and behaviour that is not of benefit to the system. But who actively states: "I know I'm a bank manager with three lovely children and a nice house, but honey I've decided to change. I'm going to be a drug dealer" Does anyone say, "I know I'm getting excellent results at school, but I've decided to change; from now on, I'm going to be a failure!"

I think we can all agree that change, by its definition, must be an improvement to the system. Unfortunately when your brain has been used to a way of thinking or behaviour, it will resist change. And the longer it has been used to it, the more it puts up a resistance to change. "Change is dangerous," it tells you. "You don't know what could happen."

"I should stop stealing from people. I want to stop stealing from people, but I need the money. What if I can't get a job?"

It really is amazing what your brain tells you, isn't it? Change is positive, but your brain puts objections wherever it can to allow the current behaviours and thoughts to continue. "After all," it adds, "what if it doesn't work out, this change, what if you don't like it?" So you start to feel nervous and anxious about the change. "Maybe it isn't such a good idea, maybe I should put it off until next month. After all, I've got a lot on at the moment and I'm quite stressed." And you start to feel more relaxed, until next month comes, and then each month becomes more desperate and urgent, and you start using:

"I have to" and "I must"

I have to go on a diet

I must stop smoking

I have to sort my bills out

I must get off the drugs
I have to do my homework
I must speak to my mother

As with *should* or *want*, *have to* and *must* are in the future, because that is the tense where all these words belong. And although you should change, want to change, and lastly have to, or must change, you haven't. Why? Because you are putting it off. You don't want to go through the perceived hardship of change; you expect that change will be difficult, so you plan to change sometime in the future (*a time that is not now*). This keeps you and your protective brain happy for a short time, until you start wanting to change again; and the longer you put it off, the worse you feel about yourself. "I really, really want to change. I'm sick of doing this all the time. I am desperate to change."

So change...

That's it, just let yourself surrender. Don't fight it. Once you're aware of the desire to change, just let it happen. It's when you start fighting it, that you start getting all the inner conflict. The voice of reason, arguing its case over and over why you shouldn't change.

Don't fight. Change and move on. Don't keep thinking about it. Don't keep talking about it. Through awareness of yourself and what is best for the system you did something for yourself that was a hundred percent improvement. Because you changed for you.

Right now

Change can never be in the future, it has to be right now. You have to be so clear in the moment that there is no conflict, and when it happens it takes approximately two seconds. We all spend our lives trying to change, when in reality all it takes is the time to say, "I will never drink again." "I will never take drugs again." "I will do my homework every night starting right now." "I will never fight with people again." "I will not hit my wife anymore." "I will dispose of my weapons starting right now." "I will never kill another animal."

The question is though, do you really mean it? Have you gone through the process of thought, awareness and thought change, before action? Because if you just start at action, your good old brain will fill in

the thoughts for you about why it isn't a good idea to change, and that just leads to more inner conflict.

I'm sure many of you will be wondering, "If I change, what's to stop me going back to my old thoughts and behaviours?" And the answer is – nothing! You can do anything you wish, you belong to the most intelligent species on the planet, and if you want to think a certain way you can. It's your right!

But if you want to go back to a thought or behaviour that isn't for the good of the system, and it was something you deeply wanted to change about yourself, but couldn't...

"I did want to stop smoking. I've tried and tried, but I keep going back to it,"

"I did want to get out of the gang. I tried and tried, but I just couldn't,"

"I wish I could be less violent. I have tried, I've had counselling and it didn't work,"

Then maybe change wasn't strong enough for you. Sometimes a major change needs an internal revolution.

C h a o s

A state of extreme confusion and disorder

•

The formless and disordered state of matter before the creation of
the cosmos

The politicians would always have you believe, that without them, their policies, and their laws; that the world would become chaotic. They would have you believe that good order is the only thing that stop us from behaving like wild animals. But if you haven't been asleep for the last thousand years you may have noticed that, actually, the world is in chaos; thanks to the very people who tell you you can't do without them. Oh, I forgot, you have been asleep; for most of your life anyway. So, wake up!

*"I promise to lead you out of confusion, into more confusion!"
"Hooray!" Cry the people.*

For as long as there have been rulers, they have believed, somewhat egotistically, that the people need them. What they seem to be forgetting is that they need the people! Well, they need their money, and their loyalty, and support, any time they fancy having a war with some other ruler. And that's just for starters.

The problem is, that through lack of awareness and insight, the people have believed them when they say they know what is best, and will pretty much go along with any reasonable statement issued by the ruler of the day.

But what happens when people attempt to overthrow the ruler? Of course, as predicted, utter chaos! The people burn down buildings, steal whatever they can get their hands on, rape any women they see, and fire their weapons into the air and into each other.

But what happens to the natural world during this chaos? Pretty much nothing (unless they decide to detonate an atomic bomb). The sun still rises, the sun still sets, the birds still sing, and the animals still go about their business. The earth still moves around the sun, and all is perfect.

And back in the human world... People running through the streets, stabbing, slashing at people, breaking windows, burning cars. Chanting "Death to all who support the leader!"

And back in the natural world... The sun is going down over the horizon, the birds are beginning to nest in the trees; there is a cool breeze in the air, and some of the trees start swaying gently.

And back in the human world... "Get him," they cry, as a group of armed men chase some poor unfortunate as he stumbles in the road. They slash and beat him, his face covered in blood, until someone produces a weapon and shoots him in the head. They jump up and down for joy waving their weapons in the air and move out to find their next victim.

And back in the natural world, a bird flies silently overhead.

We are in chaos!

That is to say, the human world is in chaos. The natural world of which we so desperately wish to disassociate ourselves from continues in perfect order. Everywhere we turn, man has got himself into chaos. He cannot see a way out of it, except for believing in a god who will make it all right

in the next life! Surely that cannot be right. If nature is so perfect and we are part of nature, what's the problem?

Out of chaos came everything, it is said, except chaos happened several billion years ago. The chaos we are creating for ourselves has taken no more than a few thousand years. So maybe it will take us another billion or so years to reverse the process we have started. But I predict that it will be too late.

During the last century there were two world wars; and during the second one, two atomic bombs were dropped (which had to be dropped you understand, to avoid the chaos of more war). There have been countless wars in africa, south america, europe, and asia. Tens of millions have been murdered, all in the name of restoring order. But we have all been lied to, again and again, by those who seek to divide us and rule over us. They have told us that so and so is our enemy and we should fight him. But the idea of an enemy is purely man-made; devised by those who wish to expand their empires and acquire more land and riches.

How long will it be before the war to end all wars is started? How long before powerful men and their desires are the undoing of all of us? It is time we woke up to the chaos that has been created. It is time we restored order – without those in power. So how do we do it? Let us go into this carefully.



I see that man is in chaos. I see that nature is order, and I say that I want to be in order too. As someone is in power helping direct all the chaos, I see that the only way to restore order is to remove him. If I revolt violently there will much bloodshed on both sides with no guarantee we will be successful; and surely, if we fight chaos with violence then all we still have is chaos. Do you understand?

On the other hand, we could use civil disobedience (used to remove the british from power in india), whereby we do nothing the one in power wants us to do. He may eventually give up, and say, “ok, you win,” and step down, but who is to replace him? You?

So you try to create a new society not based on the old order, but it is still based on man's definition of order, not natural order; so eventually (or sooner) chaos starts to creep in again. “Why is the world still in chaos?” you cry, “I have done everything to restore the natural order, but nothing is working.”

The reason it is not working, is because we haven't got a clue! Although we like to think we do. It is the same every time man tries to interfere with a natural process. We want to help, but as we do not see the whole, we end up making it worse. This happens because we ourselves are fragmented.

In india they used passive resistance to great effect, until it came time to sort out how the country was going to be run. The muslims didn't want to be part of the hindu government, so they split the country in two, forming pakistan in the process, uprooting countless families, and dividing a nation! They still fight over a disputed territory, called kashmir, right now.

So in trying to remove the powerful british from their country they ended up as adversaries and replaced one ruler with two! Pure chaos!

Any other bright ideas?

As you will see later, there is no way we can think our way out of a chaotic society, as it was thought that made it chaotic in the first place. So for now, we need to go back to the universe and ask its help to stop thinking! I decided to do us all a favour and picked up the phone.

Me: Hi, is that the universe?

Universe: Speaking.

Me: Oh, hi there. You don't know me; I'm a human from the planet earth.

Universe: Oh yes. What can I do for *you*?

Me: You don't seem very pleased to hear from me?

Universe: Can you blame me? After all you've done?

Me: Sorry about that, it's not my fault, it's everyone else.

Universe: Are you people trying to make my life difficult?

Me: No. In fact that's why I'm calling. I want to help you. I want to restore order to the world and remove chaos. I hear you're the man for the job.

Universe: When I left it, there was no chaos.

Me: Well, there is now unfortunately, and everyone's blaming everyone else. The Muslims say it was the christians; the arabs say it was the americans; and the americans blame everyone who isn't american.

Universe: I see... So what can I do to help?

Me: You can fix it... (hears laughter) What's so funny?

Universe: You humans, you think you can just call someone up and they'll make it all right.

Me: But you're our last hope to remove the chaos we have created and make us whole again.

Universe: And what do you think will happen if I removed chaos and restored order? After all, the humans would still be there, and they would start creating chaos again.

Me: So there is no answer? You can't help us?

Universe: You are beyond help; you are on your own. Perhaps it would be better if the human race had never been created at all.

Me: Now hang on!

Universe: Sorry, just joking. I can offer you one last thought before I go and have my dinner. If you are indivisible, if you are whole; then where is the chaos?

Me: I don't follow.

Universe: You have been created as part of me. You contain my molecules. You are indivisible from me. You have no mind which is not my mind. I am not in chaos. Therefore you are not in chaos. You are whole.

Me: But what about the fighting, the power, the bloodshed?

Universe: Sorry, got to go, my dinner's getting cold.

And then I got it, just after I put the phone down. Everything is in perfect order. The rulers are in perfect order. The fighters are in perfect order. The greedy man is in perfect order. There is no separation. The only thing that is not in order is thought, which is man-made. All the players are whole. When you remove the thinking the illusion drops, and we see there is no chaos. Do you understand? When I think, I am chaos. When I "just am," I am order. See it now.

When the greedy man who is whole sees he is greedy, and lets it float off into the universe, he is still whole, but now there is order in his life.

When the tyrant who is whole sees he is tyrannical, and lets it float off into the universe, he is still whole, but now there is order in his life.

You do not need to force yourself to be anything other than you are, but you must accept it, and you must be aware of the movement of your

mind. When you lose that awareness; thought, which is “me,” “the individual,” creeps back in. And we all know what “me” can do!

We cannot change everything in the world by force. But if you are part of the world, which you are, then changing yourself affects everything else. It seems too simple to be true, but don't believe me. Try it out for yourselves!

C h a r i t y

A foundation created to promote the public good (not for assistance to any particular individuals)

•

A kindly and lenient attitude toward people

•

An activity or gift that benefits the public at large

•

An institution set up to provide help to the needy

It is always encouraging to see compassion alive and well in society, in the form of charity. It always amazes me the number of people who do charity work, or who donate money to charities. My mother worked for the red cross for one day a week for nearly twenty years. My father has dedicated himself to doing charity work since he retired from business. So why do they do it? Why do people like my parents, and others, decide to work as a volunteer in an organisation to help other people?

In the beginning, I thought it was ego. I thought they were doing it so they could tell their friends “Oh, I do charity work you know,” but in the end I just couldn’t see that. As a matter of fact, I think it was me who wanted to do charity work so I could impress people with my “giving nature.” For others though, they just wanted to help; so I concluded that it must be compassion.

I also was under the impression that it was only wealthy people who did charity work, but once again I was proved wrong, having seen people from all walks of life involved.

So who are these armies of people, helping people less fortunate than themselves? Who are the people who are concerned with the homeless, animals, or saving the planet? Are they just self-interested parties wanting to promote their own cause or agenda, and what are their real aims? Do they want to convert people to their religion? Because it does seem that many charities have affiliations to religious organisations.

What do they *really* want? What is their hidden agenda? Are they secret societies, set up to advance themselves under the guise of helping others, or is the helping real? These, and many other questions, went through my head prior to writing this topic.

As you may have read in other topics, I am currently volunteering at a buddhist retreat on a scottish island, whose aims are to promote world peace and health; but I had to ask myself (cynically you may add), “Are they just trying to spread their religious beliefs under the guise of developing a community dedicated to world peace? Do they secretly want everyone in the world to be a buddhist?”

What matters is that they are trying to help!

How many of us care? I mean, really care? Aren't we all so interested in “me,” that we can't see anyone else? That's definitely the way I was, only thinking about myself; so does it really matter that they are from a religious group, or a political organisation if they are offering assistance? Is it not better that people help in any way they can, even if they do have their own agenda; or are we (by accepting their charity) also accepting their beliefs?

Let me ask you one question: Would the world be a better place if there were no charities? I am sure that most of you would agree that it would not. There is so much good done by them worldwide, that millions of people would suffer if their assistance was to be removed; and let's not forget you, the giving public, who “religiously” give to charities every time you see a box being shaken, or an appeal on television.

In response to one appeal on television, I sponsored a child in india. I don't know, it just felt like a good way to spend forty dollars a month, considering it was easy for me to spend that in one night in the pub! I let

it lapse after two years, as I ran out of money; but I hope that whatever I gave, helped.

It's the same as the tv campaigns to help the starving children in africa. Millions of pounds is raised in this way. So we should all give ourselves a big pat on the back for helping out less fortunate people than ourselves, with money we can well afford to give. I hear many of you thinking: "Why should I give my hard earned money to charity," but no one ever forces you to do it. After all, that's why it's called charity, because you are being charitable!

Others may think it's the government's job to be charitable on our behalf, as it is our money they are spending, but governments aren't equipped to help. That's why we need the oxfams and the red crosses of this world, and the thousands of other small charities with their armies of unpaid volunteers to lend a hand.

Charity = compassion in action

How many times have you seen a soup van surrounded by drunks and the homeless, with a volunteer faithfully handing out soup, paid for and cooked by others out of compassion for people less fortunate than themselves? Or the homeless hostels that have been set up in cities, to cater for people with mental illness, and/or drug and alcohol addiction?

Although we all have our faults, there are a large number of us who are truly compassionate and help someone in need if we can, even if it is just giving our debit card details over the phone. It used to be just older people who helped, but now there are many young people who volunteer their time, and are happy to donate money.

So what makes a volunteer? What makes someone give up their time to help other less fortunate people than themselves, when most people would prefer to be just enjoying themselves? How does someone become a compassionate individual? First, we have to look at parents.

If the parents are the type of people who believe in helping others, it is more than likely that you will adopt the same belief structure (this also works in reverse of course), the second is your immediate social group, and third, whether you belong to any other group that places a value on helping others. It is rare that you would just wake up in the morning and decide to help others, after a lifetime of only helping yourself, wouldn't you say? Or is it?

Can someone who has no compassion for others decide to help? Of course! Through awareness!

I became aware that helping others was of much greater value to the world than only helping myself. Awareness that I did not exist alone in the world, and that everything is interconnected. I realised through helping others, I was helping myself to let go of my own sense of self-importance.

I have now made a commitment, or vow, to dedicate myself to the service of others. So what does that mean? Does that mean I will no longer earn any money wandering the streets looking for anyone to help? No of course not! I have to be able to provide for myself, otherwise I will be in need of help. There is no point in trying to help and requiring support yourself! It defeats the object of helping.

During my time at the retreat I spoke to several volunteers who were claiming a tax credit (worth about forty pounds a week) from the government, which is paid by you and I, in the form of tax levied against us. I couldn't understand why they were claiming money and saying they were volunteering. One could argue that the fact that they were volunteering at all to work on a charitable project was worth a measly forty pounds a week, given that the governments of the world spend billions of pounds a year on weapons designed to kill people!

One volunteer did slightly annoy me when he said: "I don't need money to live in the world, I am free of capitalism and attachment to material possessions, look at those sad people out there doing the same thing day in day out." I quickly had to point out to him that the island he was living on was funded by a charity, which in turn was funded by ordinary people doing the same thing day in and day out. But that is relatively unimportant here.

One thing that does concern me though, is that although most charities are doing a great job in the world helping people lead "better" lives, I am all too aware that the money that goes into charities has to come from somewhere; and that somewhere may be doing more harm than good in its own business. You may say that it doesn't matter what the source is, as long as people are helping, but in my opinion, it does. Let me give you a scenario to contemplate for a moment.

Company X – The charity

Company X is a real estate developer owned by two brothers. Both of them are fairly religious, and go to church every Sunday, where they always put some money in the plate to help with the upkeep of the church. Neither of the brothers has ever been in any trouble; and they regularly help out at the local soup van for the homeless, and in a charity shop run by an organisation helping starving people around the world.

They come from a wealthy family, whose philanthropy (*voluntary promotion of human welfare*) has been well noted over the years. They organise charity dinners several times a year, and have helped raise millions of pounds for environmental charities caring for the rainforests, as well as donating several million pounds of their own money, to water sanitisation projects in South Asia. This work has saved thousands of children and adults from death and diseases, such as cholera.

They have been awarded various medals for their work by the Queen. The brothers plan to sell their business in ten years, and set up a charitable foundation with forty percent of the money raised. The rest they plan to donate to various charities in their wills.

I think you'd agree these two men are very charitable! They are fictional, but there are many people like them in the world. Can you find anything to fault them? Looking at that resume, I would say not! Now that's all wrapped up nicely, and we can move on. Or can we?

Maybe we need to look at these two holier than thou characters a little more closely. Or should we just accept that they donate money, help people, and that's the end of it? It does seem to me that whenever somebody gets rich enough to give away lots of their own money, there has to be a cost somewhere else, do you agree?

It is precisely that cost we will be investigating here. You see, Company X buys green-belt and urban land, primarily to develop shopping centres and supermarkets. That's it. Their clients in turn open shops, and the public get what they want. Lots of everything. What's the problem with that?

Let's go through it one more time. Real estate developer buys field, builds something that people pay money for, which in turn gives the public what they want. Easy! And that's the whole problem. Everything seems fine until you shine a spotlight on it, and start uncovering the truth.

Let's start to de-construct this Company X, shall we? They buy up a piece of green land (by green, we mean nothing on it). They bring in their builders, who require massive amounts of bricks, concrete, and glass.

They build a tarmac car park, big enough to hold several thousand cars (you'll need a car because it's in the middle of nowhere, and anyway how will you get all that shopping home). They invite companies to lease their properties within the shopping centre, and get replies from a diverse range of retailers, including one supermarket whose products come from all over the world. Flown in by air, shipped by sea, and road freighted.

The farmers, who produce the items for export, have to make space available in the fields for products that are not going to be for local consumption, thereby changing the local landscape. The labourers, who work in the fields for these farmers in far away countries, are paid a measly wage, and struggle to make ends meet. The farmer uses tin, plastic, cardboard, etc. to package the products, and then huge amounts of fuel is used to ship the products to the distribution centre, where they are stored using electricity, until they are shipped by road to the supermarket.

The consumer arrives by car at the supermarket causing, not only more traffic, but also pollution. The shopping is then done under one megawatt of lighting, and carted off in its plastic packaging in a plastic bag to the car, which is driven home.

Are you with me so far?

The second retailer who rents a space in Company X's shopping centre, is a cheap clothes retailer. People can buy fashionable clothes for next to nothing. Why? Because the retailer has them manufactured in a far away country, where the labour is cheap. To fulfil the orders, the overseas manufacturer has to grow huge amounts of cotton (not destined for the local market), and uses huge amounts of resources making the products, which will go for cheaper than a cup of coffee in some parts of the western world. These cheap products encourage the population to buy products they don't need, just because they are cheap; which in turn fuels a demand for more cheap products, which requires someone to suffer in a factory in asia as a result.

The third retailer who rents a space in Company X's shopping centre, is a fast food chain. They already have thousands of branches worldwide. People can buy cheap hamburgers, chips, and fizzy drinks from the company, because they mass farm animals. This involves clearing huge spaces for the cattle etc. to graze (or large sheds with thousands of cages in them, if they sell chicken), and they also require huge areas of farming

land to be used for the sole purpose of producing foodstuffs for the cattle. Huge amounts of water are also needed. Then they must have huge fields for the production of potatoes, for the chips. Soft drink companies use huge amounts of water for their products, and transport them in plastic bottles all over the world. People then come into the fast food outlet, buy food that is nutritionally sub-standard, and then drop litter all over the countryside.

Company X – world saviour

Soon there are several hundred retailers in the shopping centre. What sort of impact do you think Company X has made, apart from a huge plus on their bank balance? If you look at, what some would see as, the positive side, they have created jobs for all the people involved in building the centre, and jobs for all retailer workers, and jobs for all the suppliers, and the support workers. Wow, these brothers are saints, just look at all the employment they have created!

The employment then provides the means for these workers to earn money to pay their bills, and then spend it all at the shopping centre! Not only are local jobs are created; some might argue that people are better off in the “cheap,” sorry, “developing” countries, and that without the shopping centres and retailers, these poor people would have no food.

But whenever someone wants to do something to their own advantage they will always come up with a constructive argument. It has been done on many occasions when governments have wanted to invade a country! But the question we have to ask ourselves is “are jobs the only key indicator for humanity?” “Is providing employment at any cost what we are here for?” One would hope not.

We would all agree that people have to have sanitary living conditions, and plentiful food and water, but remember, people have survived for thousands of years without factories giving them employment – factories have only been around since the industrial revolution, some 200 odd years ago.

The ends can never justify the means, and, in Company X’s case, just because they give a few million pounds to help the poor, does not excuse the social and environmental damage they are causing – all because they want to earn more money.

Do not be fooled by people’s generosity. Look behind the veil. Find out the truth for yourself. I don’t want to appear paranoid, but when

companies and individuals are giving away lots of money I start to sense just a little bit of “guilt” creeping in.

You will notice that when rich people are generous with money towards the more needy, the sums of money involved seem huge to us; but in proportion to their wealth, they are small. After all, a rich man doesn't stay rich if he gives away all his money. Please look into this with me closely.

You may think I am being unduly unkind to the two brothers who seem to be only concerned with others, but at the heart of their empire is greed, not compassion.

Think about it. Why do we need charity? It is because of a fundamental imbalance between the have's and the have not's. The have's feel guilty about having, and the have not's feel jealous that the have's have! Do you follow? So the have's make themselves feel less guilty about having, by giving away a little of what they have to the have not's! Thereby redressing the balance (in their minds).

The problem with charity is we think everyone needs our help; that they are poor and wretched; that because they don't have what we have, we should help them get it.

We've all seen the newsreels of wailing mothers and their children, in the midst of an earthquake or flood, and we feel compelled to get our credit cards out, and phone the charity to pledge a donation. What we may not know is that the credit card company is making tens of millions out of the misery of others who cannot afford to pay it back, and the bank behind the credit card may be investing heavily in businesses that do more harm (environmental and social) than good in the country you are pledging to help! It's an ethical minefield you have to tread *very* carefully around.

The company you use to make your donation may itself be causing terrible problems in the world.

I remember paying for the sponsorship of that boy in india with my credit card. I wonder how many people are suffering as a result of having that credit card!

So what should we do? Should we stop large companies from donating money to charity? Should we let all those people suffer? Come on! It's just a small shopping centre, think about it. So the environment may suffer a bit, and people in the developing world may have to work in sweat shops fourteen hours a day, and forests may have to be cleared a

teeny bit. But isn't it a small price to pay for saving all those poor children.... What do you think?

Is charity necessary?

What we seem to be forgetting, is that humans are the most resourceful species on the planet, and have managed to survive through such minor troubles as the ice age. I am not trying to belittle the suffering that people go through on this earth, but people are well equipped (psychologically and physically), for disasters. No one is poor and helpless unless they truly choose to let themselves be that way. The natural human drive is to survive, and the human will try to survive at all costs.

What we see as poor is only because they seem to have so little compared with ourselves. We need shelter, simple clothing, food, and water, that's all; all other *needs* have been invented by humans. Giving the poor jobs, decent housing, and a shopping centre in bangladesh, isn't going to make them happy! Well, it may do superficially; it seems to have worked here in the west.

It is worth remembering, that if everyone in the world had access to the lifestyle we have in the west, we would run out of natural resources very, very, very quickly. So it's a good job that most people in countries like china, ride bicycles, or there wouldn't be enough oil to go around to make the petroleum to fuel the car to pollute the environment! If people are helped too much our charity might just be the undoing of us all.

Most of the problems that people find themselves requiring the aid of charitable organisations are because of other humans. In our desire for success, we trample over the environment, and others less strong than ourselves. We create cities that favour the strong. We create work environments that favour those who are already wealthy. We create a culture that relies on people having plenty of money. What chance do people have if they do not happen to fit into that way of living? They get left behind, that's what.

The poorly educated, the mentally retarded, the addicted, the socially inept; these are the people who are helped by charity, because everyone else is only concerned with the fast track to success. Money, money, money, and the stuff it can buy. That's why we need charities; otherwise these people would just fall off the edge and die.

Half way through this topic I left the retreat and am now working for an educational trust that attempts to help young people aged between 16 and 25, with severe learning difficulties, and emotional/psychological disorders. The charity tries to help them, through the development of craft (*the skilled practice of a practical occupation*) skills, and I, alongside my girlfriend, am a house-parent. This involves caring for them all term without a day off, trying to teach them social skills, and help them become a bit more independent. This is another charity funded by the taxpayer. It may or may not help the students to become better human beings, or become contributors to society, but at least this college is trying, whereas most people would have abandoned these young people a long time ago.

It costs more a year to keep them than I have ever earned, and they don't seem to appreciate it; but we keep doing it, because it might just help them, and that in turn might help society in the long term. Will I keep doing this job? Probably not. The students are difficult to work with, and it is stressful, but I believe it fits with my ethos of being self-supportive whilst being of service to others more needy than myself. I do not believe that working for a large commercial organisation could fulfil this.

Is human charity a genetic trait?

I just can't see how it can be. Through this exploration with you today, I now believe that man is not inherently charitable to his fellow-man, and there is no natural instinct to help others in far away places from leading a thoroughly miserable life.

There has to be an intermediary, a go-between; someone who bridges the gap between the needy and the people who will be *made* to be charitable, although it does take a lot of effort for the charity (the go-between) to wrestle time and/or money out of those of us well able to help. Of course, some people will never be convinced to help.

A good example of a need for an intermediary is the "big issue" sellers I often watch in the street, desperately trying to sell their (informative) magazine. They can stand outside newsagents where people happily buy £5.00 worth of other magazines. On being confronted by the homeless person's cry of "Big Issue?" the people who have bought some glossy magazines, make some sound resembling "no thanks," and shuffle off hiding their face, looking uncomfortable. I have even seen people who do

not buy the big issue (*a magazine sold by homeless people on the street to help them get on their feet. They buy it for 75p in the uk and sell it for £1.50*), yet one block down, put money into the collection tin of another charity! Why?

Is it because they don't like the "big issue?" Doubtful. It is a good magazine, good value for money, and directly helps poor people. Unfortunately, I think it's more to do with the seller. I know this sounds terrible, but I have in the past noticed myself avoiding a certain "big issue" seller, because of the way he looks, or because his nails or his teeth are horrible. Maybe we are scared of people who look different or have problems? So you can see why perhaps the man preferred to put his money in the charity box of the smiling, well dressed elderly lady one block down.

What do you think? Are we naturally charitable, or are we selfish? Are we only concerned with our needs, or do we consider the needs of others as well as our own? There's an old expression that says "look after number one," and we all know who that is – me!

Maybe we do have to look after number one first, but we also have to consider our fellow man, after all, I do not exist in isolation. I am in relationship with you, and we are both in relationship with the rest of the world. If we want to progress together as a planet, we have to start asking the question: "Will what I am about to do affect anyone else in the world negatively?"

If the answer is "yes," it will be on your conscience if you go ahead anyway! Still, you could always give large amounts of money to charity afterwards, and then you'll feel all better... Ahh, guilt relief, it's such a wonderful thing.

C h i l d r e n

A human offspring (son or daughter) of any age

It's easy to create a child, isn't it? You just need a couple of ingredients – a bit like making a cake. Take one man and one woman, place the male's erect penis inside the woman's vagina, and move it in and out for several minutes. Achieve male orgasm, and ejaculate millions of tiny sperm into the woman. The male sperms will swim furiously, and hey presto, if it's the right time of the month, one of the sperm will find an egg and fertilise it. The foetus will start growing; and nine months later, out pops a child. Easy! Anyone can do it!

Everyone wants children, it's biological, a human drive; and let's face it if we all stopped having children the world would soon start to become a pretty quiet place. Having children is probably one of the easiest things we can do in life, although I can hear you starting to say already "Do you know how hard it is having children?"

But what I'm talking about here is the physical act. It requires no education, no degrees, no intelligence, no money, no house. It also requires no job, no food, and no love (for the physical act). And finally, it requires no discipline, no responsibility, and no knowledge.

In fact, it requires nothing more than a man and a woman to have full sex at the right time for the egg to be fertilised. It is an act we are programmed for, in order to allow the continuance of the human race. We require no specialised knowledge. Even if you have never been to school, or have limited social skills don't worry, you too can have children. It's your right!

Now what?

Every second of the day, a child is born into the world, dependent on its mother for everything, not able to fend for itself, not able to speak, only to cry when it's hungry, and sleep when it's tired.

Being born, and surviving outside is a traumatic experience. In the womb there are no such problems. Nature takes care of everything. Even the mother doesn't have to worry about what to give the foetus to help it develop into a child; and even if she did worry, she wouldn't know what to do. She just has to sit back, and wait, until the day the waters break, and she is rushed to hospital to have it delivered.

You see, human birth is a complex procedure, not like that of a horse or a dog, whale or an elephant. Human birth requires something no other species requires, and that is the intervention of another human to assist with the birth – someone who knows what they're doing!

The baby has to be assisted out of the birth canal, his bottom slapped to encourage him to breathe on his own, and the umbilical cord (that is attached to the navel), removed, and tied off neatly. Next he is cleaned by a nurse, wrapped in a blanket, and if everything is healthy with the child, he is handed to the mother.

It's not like the nature programs we see on the television, is it? The picture of the horse giving birth to the foal, it stumbling to its feet, and the mother licking it clean. Human birth is not like this at all. On regular occasions now, the baby even has to be delivered by caesarean section (*the delivery of a foetus by surgical incision through the abdominal wall and uterus*). Surely there is something strange going on when nature has to be assisted! All of that developmental work completed without human

assistance, then finally a team of medical experts needed for the delivery or birth of the child.

But if we think back in time, long before hospitals were invented, births must have been a very different affair; but nonetheless, evolution seems to have stopped short. We, the most advanced being on the planet, cannot bring a child into the world without the help of someone else.

It would be funny to think of a team of lions on hand to help with the birth of the newest addition to their fold; or a team of whales ready to intervene in case there were problems with the birth of their latest addition! But we're not here to discuss evolution, so let us continue our investigation.

To recap:

- (a) Male getting female pregnant – Easy.
- (b) Mother feeding the foetus – Easy.
- (c) Mother taking control of the development of the foetus – Easy.
- (d) Giving birth – Painful, but easy due to the medical staff on hand to assist.

So far so good; although I'm sure there are a lot of you starting to think out loud: "It's not easy! Do you know what I had to go through? My child had a lot of problems, I had to..." Ok, but let's keep focussed. We are talking about the relative skill needed in order to get to the point of giving birth to a human child, who is the most advanced being on the planet, and I think, looking at the evidence, that it's pretty easy compared to studying say, quantum physics or indeed, medicine.

It's a girl!

The baby is born, the waiting is over, you have a beautiful girl; except there's one small problem. You live in a refugee camp in africa, where everybody is starving and water is scarce, and you already have two children you can barely feed. Tell me; is it still your *right* to have children?

Are you exercising your biological right to procreate – a natural and essential task in the continued survival of the human race; or is it a failure on your part (and the father's) to exercise personal responsibility? Is it the careless, selfish act of a man determined for the pleasure of an orgasm, without thought to the consequences? Or is it a lack of education, or

caring on the part of the female about the consequences; a need to fill an empty life, to make her life more complete?

“Ever since I was young I knew I wanted children”

How many children are born every year to single teenage mothers, or married couples, where the husband is violent, where the parents have no money, no jobs, boyfriend in jail, mother on social welfare; or the family that are together, but live in a country where there is little food, or live in a country ravaged by war or disease?

You have exercised your right – a right that is only made possible by the amazing body you inhabit (male or female). You have brought a child into the world; a baby who, whether you like it or not, is going to be dependent on you for several years to come, for such things such as:

- (a) Food
- (b) Water
- (c) Shelter
- (d) Warmth
- (e) Love
- (f) Time
- (g) Learning

If you have problems, you can be sure that your child is about to start having problems, pretty much soon after he or she is born. You may say: “But I love my child, we’ll get through it,” but it soon becomes apparent that if you can’t look after yourself; if you are not in balance with the world; the chances are, your child will not be in balance either. This is not a criticism of people who choose to have children at the wrong time, or accidentally happen to get pregnant. After all, there is no right time to have children; this is an appeal to our senses as human beings, the most intelligent beings on the planet. An appeal that asks whenever we are in the situation where we could create life.

“Am I taking personal responsibility for the consequence of my actions?”

“What are the consequences of creating a child now. Am I psychologically prepared?”

“Can I bring up a child without assistance from the state, charity, or other aid organisation?”

If the answer to any of these questions is no, you must take responsibility for yourself, and the responsibility of creating life. Although creating life is an act of love, with it must come personal responsibility. This is not just about your pleasure, and letting yourself go.

“I don’t know how it happened.”

“I was drunk.”

“I just felt like it.”

“I got carried away.”

This is the biggest responsibility you will ever take in your life – not taking on a mortgage, getting married, or being promoted to managing director. This is one thing that stands alone as the greatest feat a human can perform over the course of their life.

This is what it means to be human – not to design new cars, run multinational corporations, become a monk, work for charitable organisations, or build rockets that can reach the moon. This is so simple, anyone can do it. You don’t need a million dollars; you don’t have to believe in god; you don’t even have to be happy!

All you need is two ingredients: One man and one woman

It is after the birth that it becomes difficult, which is why you have to take personal responsibility *before* engaging in an act that can create life. Look at the pictures on the television of the poor starving children in africa; how they tell you that five pounds a month can help these children live a better life – that without this help, many millions will die. How do you feel? How many of you would not pick up the phone, and pledge money to save starving children.

Famous people, all over the world, are desperately trying to draw awareness to their plight. To convince world leaders to help; they are committed to helping these children. I even sponsored a child. After all, it is natural for humans to show empathy when another is suffering, that is a great quality of being human.

Look at their mothers, how sad they look, their hands outstretched as they grasp for a morsel of food that can feed their baby. The tears, the emotional anguish of seeing their baby dying, the bloated stomachs, the

doctors tirelessly working to save them. How we feel sorry for them, the poor mothers and fathers looking on helplessly.

But wait a minute. Let's re-run this advert in our mind. Let's remove the empathy for the family, and apply the following questions we asked ourselves a moment ago. Do you think the father or mother asked themselves these questions? Or how about the single mother pushing a pram down the street, living on social welfare; do you think she asked herself these questions?

“Am I taking personal responsibility for the consequences of my actions?”

“What are the consequences of creating a child now, am I psychologically prepared?”

“Can I bring up a child without assistance from the state, charity, or other aid organisation?”

And of course, the inner voice strikes up: “She didn't know she was going to get pregnant.” “It was an accident.” “She was getting older, she needed to have children before it was too late.” “It's her right to have children if she wants;” and indeed, there are always explanations for not taking personal responsibility. These are just a few of them.

Imagine a continent like africa, where the people took personal responsibility by not having children, where they worked to make their lives better, to provide themselves with food, and fresh water, shelter, and employment. Imagine doing this before having children. How much better would their world be? Imagine the single girl, with no education and no job. Imagine if she took responsibility to make her life better, to educate herself, to improve her self-esteem, by doing something good for herself. But of course, this is a hard process, and remember, having a child is not. What would you do?

“It's my life. It's my right to have children, and I'll have children if I want to.”

It's all too easy when someone else is taking responsibility for you.

C h r i s t m a s

A christian holiday celebrating the birth of christ

Now I am not a religious man, but I know that Jesus Christ was supposedly born on the twenty fourth or twenty fifth of December a couple of thousand years ago, and following his birth, three wise men allegedly travelled many miles, guided by a star which led them to a place called Bethlehem, where they presented him with three gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh. That is the sum total of my knowledge of the origins of this festival.

Christmas was always a magical time for me when I was young. My parents always had a Christmas tree decorated with plastic balls, fairy lights, tinsel, and either an angel or a star atop; and I had a stocking at the end of my bed so Santa (Father Christmas) could leave me something small like a satsuma, or an apple.

On christmas eve, I would go to bed early, excited by the imminent arrival of the aforementioned santa (that this had any religious significance was above me, and even if I had known about it, would have meant nothing compared to the mountain of presents I was expecting the next day).

Early next morning, I would rise, hoping it would be snowing (apparently christmas is nicer in the snow: it makes it more “magical”), but even when I looked out and found it just grey and wet, it didn’t matter; I would rush down to the tree and start checking which cards had my name on them.

After an hour or so, my mum and dad would come down, and turn on the christmas tree. We would all still be in our pyjamas, but within a couple of minutes the present giving would begin in earnest.

As always, there were many, many presents, and my dad and I rushed to open ours, carelessly ripping the wrapping paper that my mum had spent hours perfecting. After that was done, it was time to get ready to go to our neighbours for christmas drinks.

To me, christmas day seemed to be a day where the grown-ups had a good excuse to get completely sloshed, before eating a massive turkey meal, whilst wearing a stupid paper hat and telling jokes out of the christmas crackers. This would be followed by christmas pudding, watching the queen’s speech, and passing out on the sofa. For me it was a great time – that is, until my dad left us.

The next christmas, something was different. The presents still came thick and fast, but my father wasn’t around, it was just me and my mum. We still went to the neighbours, and she still drank too much, but this time instead of the usually happy table there was a sad silence, and my mum would sit and cry the whole evening. Suddenly christmas wasn’t such a magical time for me any longer.

The lead up to christmas day represented the anticipation of my mother’s sadness, but that’s enough of my drivelling on, let’s celebrate! And celebrate we do.

It’s a time of cheer, when families get together to drink and be merry; a time to consume and show off, a time where we can let our hair down, and not worry about any problems we may be having. If you’re a christian you will probably go to church and sing a few hymns, but after that it’s back to the real business of enjoying yourself.

I’m sorry if you come from a culture that doesn’t celebrate christmas and you’re reading this, especially if you live in the uk, where everything is closed, and there’s nothing to do. Still you could always work and

provide us good “christians” with a valuable service, such as making sure we can still buy petrol, and other goods.

Sorry, but christmas doesn’t hold a lot for me. I see it as an excuse for anglo-saxons to get drunk and abuse each other, and get into more debt. Still, at least they are adding to the economies coffers whilst avoiding reality.

Whilst christmas is magical for those with money and a stable home life, it is the most depressing time for those who don’t, like people with no job, or people who come from a broken home. For them, they get depressed because they see everyone else having “fun.” They may even feel angry and think: “Why are they enjoying themselves, and I’m not?” But christmas fun is an illusion, albeit it one you can touch.

Some of you may accuse me of being a spoilsport, or even being a non-believer, but the purpose of this discussion is not to criticise, but to find out what is really going on in the mind at christmas time, especially here in the west.

If there is a “magical” energy at christmas, can you guess what might be causing it?

In the northern hemisphere, november comes, and winter looms; the skies darken, the leaves fall from the trees, and the light starts to fade earlier, and earlier; whilst in the southern hemisphere, winter is passing into spring, and the sun is getting hotter, but worldwide, the corporate santa wagon is just getting into full steam. Christmas is being created, all for us.

Plastic decorations start going up in the shops, images of “santa” are appearing everywhere, christmas tree farms open their doors after a year of silent growth; the retail musak changes from mind bending pop, to christmas carols we all know and love. Colourful street lights are turned on by d-list celebrities, and throughout the land, people are climbing into red santa outfits and pulling on false white beards.

On television, the adverts change to include images of smiling reindeer, and jolly fat men ready to dish out presents to all. There are sleigh bells in the background, images of happiness abound... And guess what? We get caught up in the whole process of mass retail consumerism, masquerading as a time for giving and sharing!

The whole christmas roller-coaster first hit me when I was living in australia. Here I was, standing in shorts and sandals, and all around me

were images of a cold christmas wonderland! It made me sick to see all the people rushing around like mad things trying to get “one last present” for the kids, as if their happiness depended on receiving a multitude of toys.

Then it struck me. Maybe people’s happiness *did* depend on receiving presents. When I brought this up with friends I was accused of being really negative and miserable, and “if I didn’t like it here I could go back to england.” But that feeling stayed with me, year after year, and still does.

This so called “magical” day is over in 24 hours, but there is a whole industry addicting us to it for the 12 months leading up to it. I even saw a christmas hamper saving scheme advertised in january for the following year.

“What waste,” I thought. “What time, energy, and money goes into this one day, all for a small slice of psychological happiness? Is this what we have become? The most intelligent species on the planet only concerned with even more greed and desire than we normally exhibit. What progress!”

Whether I think it is a waste of planetary resources and an unhealthy addiction will probably mean nothing to you. You won’t let me spoil your day of fun for you or your children.

“How can he deny the little ones! They just want to see santa! What’s the harm of that?”

Maybe in the “spirit of christmas” it’s good that people are nice to each other for one day of the year, but can’t you see how ridiculous the whole thing is? Why can’t we be nice to each other all year?

There is nothing wrong with giving each other small gifts, but why not give them for no reason, rather than because it’s christmas? I know that whatever else you decide to change after reading this book, the celebration of international present day will not be one of them, but can I ask you to do one thing? Sit and reflect for a short time on this day.

A time for quiet meditative reflection

Although I will be spending the day with my girlfriend’s family. A family who do not share my views, I plan to spend part of my day sitting, quietly reflecting on what I have created in the world...

December 26th 2007. Christmas is now passed, and as I expected, the christmas I wanted to create didn't happen! The whole time was noisy and frivolous, with too much drinking and eating, and swapping of many presents. I found I was in so much conflict during this day.

On the one hand, I wanted no part of it, and wanted to spend the time alone in reflection, but on the other, I could see that for once, the whole family was united in the joy of getting dressed up for a special occasion, anticipating what would be inside the wrapping paper, and raising their glasses to each other; so I got showered, and dressed, and joined them.

They just couldn't understand why I wouldn't want to join in, especially as they had gone to so much trouble to buy and prepare everything; so rather than spoil their day – that they had been so looking forward to for months – I kept my mouth shut, sat down at the table and smiled. After all, they don't want to hear about the world's troubles on their special day. For all I know, they may think it's just me who has troubles! Why wouldn't they? If everyone else is doing it, why shouldn't I?

I realise now that that's what we always do, isn't it? We give in; we conform; because we don't want to let other people down. We don't want them to think that we think differently, we don't want to come into conflict with others, even if it is on an important issue.

But this will be the last year I join in with the celebrations.

This day is too important a day for us to just spend even more money, drink even more wine, and eat even more animals. This is a time when we have to look at ourselves as a society, and see what misery and pain our thoughts, and actions, have inflicted on the rest of the world.

So maybe it will be just me next christmas day, alone with my thoughts, but that's ok, I have plenty to reflect on. Don't you?

C i t y

A large and densely populated urban area; may include several independent administrative districts

I think it's fair to say that the modern city is about as far away from our natural state as we could ever get, save perhaps living underground. But on the whole, most people, if not love cities, tolerate them for what they can get out of them.

For starters, there are many employment opportunities, and then on top of that, you have arts, live music, theatre, opera, cinema, big shops, mixed together with seriously high density housing; oh, and maybe the odd park to add a sprinkling of greenery to the city (sort of like they do in an english pub with the adding of a garnish to your meal).

So what else is there, can anyone think of anything I have forgotten? Let's recap. We have employment, shops, housing, arts, and somewhere to walk the dog. I think that'll do for now.

When the first cities started appearing several thousand years ago (built because of the development of agriculture, and man's ability to specialise), they were tiny affairs compared with today, with perhaps a few thousand people, bartering and trading away – a really vibrant community I am sure. And from those humble beginnings, the modern monster was born. From several thousand, to almost twenty million people in some of the world's largest cities. Twenty million people, all squashed together in a sprawling concrete metropolis!

And so, as the cities became more and more densely populated, due to the money and power that were being accumulated there, the city planners (I think that may be too grand a title for them) came up with a new way to cram more people in. They built upwards!

After the second world war they cleared the "slum" (*a district of a city marked by poverty and inferior living conditions*) areas of Britain, and replaced them with high rise blocks, which as we will see later, became the new "slums;" and they keep building more, and more, and more.

Don't complain about it. Celebrate it!

If you look out over your capital city, or if you happen to be on holiday, or on business, take a moment to find a tall structure to go up and have a look at the view. You have to admit that it's pretty amazing (being up high that is, not the city), as you look down – not because it's so ugly or the monuments are so beautiful, but because it is man's testament to himself and to his abilities to create something out of nothing.

If you think of all the developments that have taken place over the last hundred years or so, it is nothing short of remarkable. Cities have now become such amazingly busy places. There is always something going on 24 hours a day, whether it is people dancing the night away in a nightclub, or maintenance men fixing the underground railway – it never stops. Wealth is continually being generated, new art and performances are shown; political and business leaders are continually making decisions; tourists are constantly visiting, and the people are swarming around like flies.

Millions of people, commuting in and out of the city every day for work. Deliveries being made. Everyone is on the move, going somewhere, and it creates a real buzz (excuse the pun) in the city. Everyone looks like they have something important to do, somewhere important to go, busy, busy, busy.

They finish their day's work, and they then sit on a packed train, or even sit in their cars for hours on end in traffic jams! They arrive home, stressed but satisfied; their work is done, until the next day – but at least they have helped to contribute.

Cities also host major sporting events, where visitors from all over the world come to see what is on offer. The city is cleaned up, beggars are flushed into the drains, graffiti is removed; flags go up, prices go up, and the games begin. You couldn't really imagine holding the olympic games in a small town could you? Only a city is good enough!

But what is a city really? I mean, beneath all the glamour, which is illusion? What is at the heart of the city beneath the fireworks at new year and the culture festivals? Let's explore this in a little more detail.

The joy of commuting

I used to commute into london on a regular basis. I lived about twenty five miles from the centre, which should take you about thirty minutes to complete in the car (on a sunday), but within minutes of starting my journey, I was stuck on the motorway crawling along at between zero and twenty miles per hour. I would take this opportunity to light a cigarette, drink my takeaway coffee, make a few phone calls (not at the same time you understand!), and listen to a cd.

Others would have their papers folded at the wheel, some even doing the crossword; so although the journey could take upwards of two hours, cost a fortune in fuel, and even more in parking; it was worth it. I was getting fairly well paid, and anyway, I kind of liked the excitement of sitting in the queue, knowing I would be going into the city. I even had a laugh when I used to see a huge sign, painted onto a fence that said "Why do I do this every day!" as we all crawled past it at two miles an hour.

The fun stopped when I started catching the train or the underground into work. There were never any seats available when I got on, and if there were, they were always between two extremely large people, and their bags. But coming home was worst of all, especially in the summer if the air conditioning wasn't working.

We were crammed in like sardines in a can, and you could always guarantee that someone's sweaty armpit would be stuck in your face. It was always a thoroughly unpleasant journey, whatever the temperature! One thing I did notice, was that the more expert commuters managed to

fold their evening papers in a special way, so they could continue to read them with little hand movement!

Apart from commuting, I liked the city. I liked that my office was on the eleventh floor and I could look out on the people below. I liked the fast elevator that took me up and down in 8.4 seconds. I liked going for a hot sausage and bacon sandwich washed down with a cappuccino before work, going shopping at lunchtime, and I especially liked going out to the pub after work (if I wasn't driving). It was an exciting time for me, but a lifestyle I couldn't sustain.

Cities are the same... Everywhere

After a year of commuting, I left my london job on the friday, had a farewell party, and took a taxi home. That was it, no more cities for me; I was off to australia! I flew out on the sunday, arrived on the monday, but of course, I had forgotten that sydney was a city! And when I walked through the streets, found it to be smaller, somewhat cleaner, but nonetheless, much like london.

There were the same shops, the same bars, the same tall apartment buildings, and the same office skyscrapers. There were the usual street buskers and street beggars. The only difference I could see was that they had a nice bridge, over a nice harbour, the weather was good, and the police had guns; other than that, it was the same as any other city.

Over the last few years, I have visited many countries and many cities, and although they all have their own peculiarities and monuments, they all provide the same thing – employment, high density living and entertainment; always mixed in with a sprinkling of greenery.

I would like you to stop and think about your own city, whether you live there or just visit occasionally, and think what you like or dislike about it. Then ask yourself what is at the heart of the city. Some of you may think that the heart of the city is the people, and whilst I would agree that the people make it what it is, I think we may be missing something important here.

You see, during the day, most cities are bustling with people, but I have walked around the city centre of many cities (especially around the business district) late at night, and I can tell you that apart from the homeless, the criminally minded, and the odd party reveller, it is a pretty solitary place.

As the grey walls of the office buildings tower above you, and the pavement stretches out in front of you, it as if all life has left this place, like a deserted city left to rot by the inhabitants. The street lights are a depressing orange; fear creeps in to you, and you begin to wonder who or what might be round the next corner. The warmth of the people has been replaced by cold steel and glass. Concrete abounds. There is no life here. There is no connection with the earth. This is an alien landscape created by man.

Life is sustained at night only by keeping people up dancing, drinking, and being entertained – otherwise there would be no reason to be there. You see, most people don't live in the center of the city, unless they have plenty of money. Ah, yes, money. Before I forget.

Money: Come and get it if you can

So behind all the glamour, the theatres, the live music venues, the nightclubs, the cinemas and the restaurants; what do we need cities for? Well it's not for living. We have plenty of space everywhere else for that (something the rich have found out). Cities exist because they are the centre of power, and with power comes money.

It didn't used to be like this though. The power and the wealth were distributed throughout the country, but as more and more of the rural industries closed, so people had to look for work elsewhere. They needed money, so they followed it. And it emanated from the city.

So people moved closer, they gave up their land and their connection with the earth, and found any space they could to be near a source of work. Some people became successful, but the majority stayed poor, no matter how hard they worked; and it is the same today: only in the west, people do not need to live in corrugated iron huts in "shanty towns" (*small crude shelters used as a dwelling*), they have been moved up in the world, up many feet into the sky in fact, into tower blocks.

Thousands of them were built in the uk after the second world war, and I'm sure it was the case in your country too. They were hailed as the new way to give poor people a decent place to live, away from the slums they had to inhabit; but quickly, these wonder structures became modern slums, inhabited by the poor, the insane, the criminal, the unemployed, the addicted. Soon they became like ghettos (*Any segregated mode of living or working that results from bias or stereotyping*), where the unwashed and the unwanted were kept out of sight of the wealthy classes. One by one,

they were all stacked on top of each other. If they had any connection to the earth left, they had now lost it. They were now prisoners of the city, surrounded not by steel bars, but by concrete. Concrete everywhere.

Concrete

A strong hard building material composed of sand and gravel and cement and water

When it was invented, concrete must have been seen as a true godsend. A tough, cheap building material, just the thing to put up all those lovely housing blocks with. But to me, concrete is one of those materials that just doesn't fit in the world. It has no organic feel to it; it feels like it is – cold and dead. I don't know why. Maybe it is the way it absorbs sunlight or the way it stains when it is wet, what do you think?

Have a look at the concrete buildings in your city and see what sort of feeling you get. It's strange, but steel structures or glass buildings just don't have the feeling of death as concrete does, at least they reflect the light somehow. But in the fifties and sixties, concrete was the *de-rigueur* (*required by etiquette or usage or fashion*) of building materials. I personally would like to meet the man who invented it, give him a shake, and say, "What did you think you were doing?"

So you could say that the concrete housing blocks were one of the single greatest mistakes the planners ever made, but as we know, they're human; and humans make mistakes. As we have said in other topics, any time someone has a grand idea, it usually means misery for the worst off in society.

I think they are demolishing the worst of them now, but in cramped cities it is always hard to find space for everyone, especially those who do not seem able to help themselves. So many people remain in their tiny apartments surrounded by drug dealers, delinquent children, the mentally unstable, the long term unemployed and the alcoholics; spread evenly between regular working people and immigrants, who just can't make enough (or don't have the motivation to make enough); all squeezed into concrete rabbit warrens, built many metres into the sky.

The people don't respect the buildings, because most of them don't respect themselves. They are disadvantaged strangers thrown together, because of necessity. The necessity of somewhere to live, in order to make money.

In London, on the opposite side of the river to the council managed blocks, there are also many tower blocks, but these are apartment

buildings, not built using the cheapest materials. These buildings have all the things the poor buildings don't have, including an air of refinement. They may have a doorman, or a concierge, or marble floors; and the attention to detail in the lift might be exquisite. These are not buildings for the disadvantaged, these are not buildings for the unemployed, or the mentally unstable; these are buildings for those who have made it! They may still rise into the sky, but this is a different story to the council owned blocks.

The people who inhabit these buildings, work in business, in the arts, in politics; they have a very busy social life. They are polite to each other, as they pass in the morning and evening. All in all, a very different story.

Back in the council block there is fear, there is anger, there is hatred, there is alienation, poverty; and back in the nice apartment block, there is laughter, classical music and fine ornaments; and back in the council block there is cheap takeaway food, satellite tv, and flat packed furniture from one of the big stores.

So what is it about these two apartment buildings that makes them so different? Is it the marble flooring in the entrance hall of the expensive apartment building, versus concrete flooring and bars on the glass to stop people smashing it in the other? Or is it the nice mirror in the nice lift versus the polished aluminium in the other lift as the people can't be trusted not to smash a mirror? Ok, so one is more aesthetically (*in a tasteful way*) pleasing, because more time, more skill, and more money has gone into it; but there is something much more fundamental, which is not at all obvious to the naked eye (although some of the results of it are), and that is that the buildings have different energies. Do you understand? Let me try to explain.

rich vs. poor

If we say that everything in the world contains energy, it makes sense that, like the positive charge of a proton, there is a balancing negative charge of an electron. And if we believe that nature keeps everything in balance, humans must contain negative and positive energies, the same way as a building materials contain negative and positive energies. So perhaps that is why I feel so depressed around concrete. Perhaps it gives off negative energy. Whatever the case, there has to be more to the story than one group having more money than the other.

Let us try a quick experiment, where we switch both sets of tenants. What do you think would happen? They still have their same jobs (or lack of them), and they still have the same amount of education and money. What would happen to the buildings? What sort of “vibe” would we be getting from either building? Would it have changed, or would it be the same?

Let me ask you a different question: Do you think people have the ability to give off different energies? Do you think you can get a “positive vibe” or a “negative vibe” from someone? Wherever we go, we carry this vibration with us. Because it is us. We are vibrating!

Although the buildings have different energies, it is the people who give off the strongest energies.

Now let’s imagine we swapped both tenants again, but this time, we swapped their lives as well. We now give the council tenants plenty of money and we send them off to their new shiny apartment building across the river. What do you think will happen? Will they still feel miserable? Will they still think their lives are terrible? Those who have addictions will still be addicted of course, and those with mental problems will still have them.

So what has money enabled them to do? Well, they’ll definitely start buying things, and those who are addicted will buy more substances. Over time, the apartment building will start to look like their old one; there will be graffiti on the walls of the lift, there may be drug dealing in the stairwell, and shouting and violence coming from some apartments.

Meanwhile, what do you think is going on in the council apartment building? The tenants don’t have money any more, and they don’t have their old lives out on the town, but they still have something to bring – themselves. They will probably start to clean up the mess the other tenants have left. They will clean out the apartments and order them more. They will clean the graffiti off the walls, they will clean the gardens, and may even arrange to have the council paint the walls and plant some trees. Perhaps they will try to create something positive. What do you think?

Would it be as I predict? And if so, why? Do you think it is because the people are better educated, better schooled in the way of society, have better manners, appreciate things more? Because if they don’t have money, that can’t be the motivating force. Or do you think it is a clear case that these are the “good” people and the council estate tenants are the “bad” people. Whatever it is, it is not about inherently good or bad, but people do create energy around them that is either negatively or

positively charged, I am sure of it; although you must test this out for yourselves.

Let us explore this more deeply. When we are happy in ourselves, we create positive emotions; and when we are unhappy, we create negative emotions. Now the reason we may be able to feel happy is we have taken care of our primary needs. We have provided ourselves with food, shelter, and clothing and can sustain it thanks to having the means to pay for it all. If we have problems, we have time and space to work through them, and we also are able to create meaningful relationships.

Now, without wanting to judge (for that would be of no use to our discussion), when you provide man with a home, you take away one of the primal responsibilities of being human, which is to provide shelter for himself and his family. If he does not have to provide it himself, and if he has no means of providing food and clothing because he has no money, he starts to lose self-esteem (*a feeling of pride in yourself*); and when that goes, he starts to take no interest in anything external. Soon he becomes reliant on handouts from other people, which is society, in the form of benefits paid from taxes raised.

Why should he look after anything? Why doesn't someone else do it? He becomes lazy and inward looking, thinking about himself, his problems and what a miserable life he has been given, "if only I could find a way out of it..." So he creates more and more negative emotions making it hard for the positive ones to shine through. But that's just my opinion!

Let the tower blocks fall

Pain, suffering and self-pity, that's what I see when I look at these great crumbling tower blocks, that are testament only to man's inability to understand himself; where man becomes a slave to others in power, where he loses all identity and becomes a social security number – a problem that has to be looked after.

So what would happen if we demolished the tower blocks and put nothing in their place but green grass? The energy of the place would be restored to balance (not that I want to create more homeless people you understand).

And what if we let people who lived there, fend for themselves, without social security benefits? What would happen to them? Would

they die? Would they turn to crime, or would the primary drive of the human being take over at last and drive them to provide shelter, food and clothing for themselves and their family?

These may be “human needs,” but they are not “human rights,” as we see day in day out in some places in asia and africa, where there is no social security, no tower blocks to fester in; just the need to find food and shelter – fast! Perhaps those who feel as though their negative energies are because of injustice in society where they have been forced to be “poor,” should go and live for even one week on the streets of new delhi or somewhere similar. That may give their positive energies a wake up call!

The energy walk!

If you pay careful attention to yourself everywhere you walk in a city, you will notice that you can find different energies. Just test it out for yourself. A city is a great place to examine things because everything is so cramped. You just have to walk off one of the main roads filled with pollution, shouting, running, pushing, and anger, and laughter, and retreat to a park. Suddenly, you will notice the energy changing. You will notice the birds, the grass, the trees. Suddenly the human energies are overtaken by nature’s, which are far more powerful. Sit a while, notice how you are feeling, notice that there is a distinct calm come over you.

Now hurry back to the main street, back to your office, back to your meeting, back to your car, the metro, the crowding, the smell, and you may start to think, “what am I doing here every day!?”

And indeed, what are you doing there every day?

If we had such a thing as a city energy meter, we would see some pretty nasty things going on above it. Humans have such power in their minds and bodies, they can’t help letting some of it “leak” out. We may question whether it is really contained at all!

But as we don’t have a c.e.m, we will have to use our own intuition as we travel the concrete streets, as we question the nature of the city, its construction and “design,” and how it relates to us, and the universe as a whole. We must ask ourselves how we came to exist in such a barren land, a land filled with misery and power, of control, and desire, of longing and becoming. All for what? Money and status?

We must question how far from nature we have come as we cross into the patisserie to get our cappuccino and cake, smelling of corporate scent. We must question our choices, our parent’s choices, and how, if ever, you

are going to be able to leave this all behind. Oh, and leave it behind you will, but I thought it would be better to try to leave it before you die!

The family is broken. Long live the city.

Cities have always been the power base of the area or the country; the place where deals were done, where schemes were plotted, and money changed hands. People were attracted like magnets to these places of dreams. They packed up and left their communities to find work, some left their wife and family behind, and they would return as often as they could, or send money.

But this wasn't how it was supposed to be. We were weaned on small tribes of cooperating hunters, where the society was everyone in the tribe; now "society" meant the fashionable elite. And unless you were powerful and rich, you couldn't become part of the "society." So you did what you could to earn some money and pay for your lodgings, but lots soon found out that swapping their rural family lifestyles for money wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

Divisions quickly arose in society between the rich and the poor, and they were segregated as much as possible, after all, the rich shouldn't have to see beggars and the poor on their streets, should they? These low lives were intolerable, although they did do the work that the wealthy didn't want to do, so they were tolerated.

Fast forward a few hundred years and the story is the same. The rich and powerful control the city and the money, and the rest just do the jobs the rich don't want to do. Is that a bit unfair? Ok, so a new class was created. The middle class, also known as the bourgeoisie, comprising traders and merchants, the general business lot! But the city was still controlled by the elite.

Fast forward to today, and still nothing has changed, except the middle class may have become a bit wealthier and so have the lower classes, but the gap between lower and upper class is now even greater. And now people crave the status and the money even more, so they travel from all over the country to get to the main cities.

Train and car journeys of greater than two hours each way are considered the norm. People get up at 5.30 am and get home after 7.00 pm. So what's happened to the family? Well, not only does dad want to earn more money and get a better position, but now mum does too, thanks to all the campaigning about equal rights for women!

Let's put this in perspective. The traditional village model would see the husband and wife working together on their farm, or close by, and bringing up the children together – you know, like a family? Now mum and dad both leave the house early, so they need someone else to look after the kids! Can you see how ridiculous this has all become? We left our stable family homes in our small communities in search of great wealth, and most of us only found mediocrity, stress and longer hours.

This is the time of the individual, not of the family group, brought about by idiotic politicians and greedy businessmen. Now we have single parents who try their best to bring up the children whilst holding down a job, complaining they can't afford day care. We have people in the council tower blocks complaining that their benefits aren't enough to cover food for their kids. The pollution is getting worse, the tension in the cities has become intolerable, people are drinking too much, taking too many drugs, and raising the blood pressure of the whole city to bursting point. All for what?

The world has gone completely mad

Ok, the whole world isn't mad, but most of us are! We have created this stress ourselves. This is not caused by others. We want the money, we want the lifestyle, we want the status, we want the consumer goods, and big cities provide all of that, at a cost. Your sanity! Do you see what I am trying to say here?

If we think back to our quaint ideological village, where people are engaged in creating a community to live in, where children can grow up understanding nature and seeing mum and dad all the time, rather than one of them for a couple of hours a day, being looked after by complete strangers, and then when they're old enough sent away to school. Can you see what has happened? This isn't progress, it's disaster! All so we can buy more stuff, and show off to everyone how wealthy we are, and how cool we are.

But the quaint village isn't an ideological dream, nor is it something we can force people to live in. I am talking about a working community that makes money for the community, and people work there because they want to be part of the community, do you see? This is not a place for people who live in a small village, but work in the city to pay for the pleasure of having a large house and garden.

We are a basic animal at heart. We have simple needs (although our new brain likes to make them complex), but we keep burdening ourselves, making life harder and harder by creating fantastic new technologies (like mobile phones), which eventually enslave all who use them, and create addiction. Don't believe me? Then just take a walk down any city street and you will see people with weird cyborgesque headsets sticking out of their ears, their eyes glued to some magical screen.

Don't tell me we need all this stuff. Happiness is much easier than that. By creating and fostering relationships with our fellow man, we can have a much more rewarding (and fun) time than chasing all the money and status in the world.

Cities were built by the powerful for the powerful; they are not for the likes of us who see a way out of this misery we have created. We should leave the powerful to their empty cities and watch them crumble as there will not be any servants to maintain them. We will have created much more than they could ever hope. We will have created a life that matters; a life built on relationships, where we all join in with bringing up the children, where we spend time with each other; where we learn about ourselves and each other. Where we learn to go deeper than anyone has before.

This is not simple village life with village idiots. This is a real community, that is what we are missing. "But what about the arts and the theatre?" I hear you cry. And yes, many people say it is the one thing the city has, that is truly great. The arts! Music! Film! Ballet! Opera! Museums!

Well, if you like this stuff so much, you can create it, or hope that when the cities finally explode and return to dust, that your favourite theatre and opera house is still standing. You know, the one you have visited once in your life? A real favourite.

The balance of the negative energy

How do you think the council tower block dwellers would get on in a real community, where people took responsibility for themselves, their families and each other, where government assistance was a thing of the past, where they enjoyed being creative, growing their own food, and trading with other communities? They would feel just fine. And what about all their negative emotions and activities, would they fall away?

People who think will always have problems of some kind or another, but when you live in a community where they are here for you and you for them, then something fantastic happens. What is that something? You will have to create your own community and find out!

Can you imagine your city being returned to nature, where you lived in balance with the earth, and it with you? I bet you can't! You'd have to give up too much. But when you're ready you let me know. And to the politicians: Don't worry, I'm not going to blow up the city. Like a good casserole, give it a bit more time in the oven and it will be ready itself!

We owe it to ourselves and to every other creature on this planet to become aware of our natural state; not wrapped in animal hide and living in caves, but alive, vibrant, bursting with positive energy, in complete awareness of self. Ready to explore the world! Or you could just keep catching the 6.42 am to london every day. For the rest of your life... An idealists dream? Hardly.

C o m m i t m e n t

The trait of sincere and steadfast fixity of purpose

•

The act of binding yourself (intellectually or emotionally) to a
course of action

When I first met my wife, eight years ago, she told me what brave ideas I had, and how she was impressed with all the things I wanted to do; like drive through south america for charity (of course, it never happened). But she quickly realised something about me which most people had found out a long time ago, and that was that I was full of hot air (*loud and confused and empty talk*). A real talker. But that's all it was, talk.

Maybe I believed I would do all these great things, but maybe it was just a way to impress people. Either way, nothing ever got done. Lots of talk and no action was the story of my life. Why couldn't I just stick to one thing I planned to do, or should I say, the one difficult thing I planned to do? I always did the easy stuff, but when it came down to it, I always just let the difficult stuff go. It didn't matter; next week I would get another great idea I could impress myself and everyone else with.

Broken promises

Several years ago, while I was living in australia, I signed up for a charity that helped disadvantaged children (young people that were having a terrible time at home) amongst other people. The project I signed up for was called a breakfast club, where we would serve them breakfast in a hall, and play games for half an hour before they went to school.

It sounded just like the sort of thing I wanted to get involved in, so I agreed that yes, I would be there at 7.00 am every thursday morning to help set up the breakfast. I was quite excited about the whole thing; here I was, finally committed to something worthwhile – it was going to be great, I decided. The only problem was, I decided to go out and get drunk the night before.

Needless to say, I rolled in about 5.00 am, and was in no fit state to go into a children's breakfast club; so I slept until 12.00 pm. When I woke, I felt guilty about letting them down, as I hadn't even phoned them in the morning to say I wasn't coming in. It wouldn't have sounded good even if I had...

"Shorry...Cann't may-kit in, I'm prrrriitty siick" or something like that. Anyway to cut a long story short I never called them again, and didn't answer the phone when they rang. Soon they stopped ringing and I was pleased. I was embarrassed by my behaviour, and I hoped I wouldn't ever bump into the woman I had promised I would help. Broken promises; it was the story of my life.

"Mum, I promise I'll pay you back."

"Dad, I promise I'll be there this evening."

"I promise I'll stop smoking."

"I promise I'll stop drinking."

"I promise I'll get a job."

Broken promises, that's all that ever seemed to come out of my mouth. But why did I make promises I didn't keep? Why not keep my mouth shut, and not promise anybody anything?

Maybe because deep down, I wanted to do better, and thought if I actually made a formal commitment, I would stick to it.

How many of you have ever been in the same situation? Where you wanted to do something better for yourself or your family or others but just couldn't stick to it when the time came... "I promise I won't go the races and gamble on saturday. I promise," and come saturday, go anyway?

On several occasions, I have planned a “cleansing fast” where I wouldn’t eat for three or more days; I am completely committed to it, but as the time approaches, I become more and more anxious, and when the day to start comes, say, “oh, maybe next time,” or start it in the morning and then give in by lunchtime! I was stuck in a continual cycle of making a promise to myself or to others, being committed to it right up to the day before, then deciding not to do it.

What makes us behave like that? Why can’t we stay committed when we have made a promise? Perhaps promises are not worth the words or the paper they are written on. Perhaps making promises just makes us feel better about ourselves; what we could do if we really put our minds to it. If we come through on the promise, all well and good, and if we don’t, no problem, it was all imaginary anyway; it was just ideas projected into the future.

Maybe the promise we should be making ourselves is to stop making promises, even if we do plan to keep them; because they don’t exist when we make them, only when we fulfil them. How many people have heard “But you promised...” I certainly have, a thousand times; and although I felt guilty, I knew that a promise was just talk, nothing more.

So I gave up making promises to people. I figured it was better not to promise something I might not fulfil, and I gave up making promises to myself, just in case I couldn’t keep them! From now on, I thought, “If I am going to do something for myself or others I will do it, and if I decide not to, then I won’t be letting anyone down because I haven’t committed myself anyway!”

It was a good plan and it worked for a year or so, but then I realised I had just invented a way to justify not committing myself, and come up with a way to always be able to “hedge my bets” just in case.

Keeping your options open

I realised that the reason I could never commit was because I always kept my options open just in case a better offer came along – just as I did when volunteering for the breakfast club. I was going, then the pub came along. It was easier and required no thinking about so I chose it. It was a better offer. I spoke to my father about this.

“You’ve always been like that, since you were a small boy,” he said.

“Really?”

“Oh yes, you’d be going to someone’s house to play and have tea, then another friend would ring and you would say I want to go to his house now,” he replied.

“Really?” I said, perplexed that this lack of commitment was evident from the age of five! “How could it be that I have always been like it dad? You must have done something to me when I was little that made me unable to commit,” I said angrily.

“Oh yes, keep blaming your parents, it’s always the parents fault...” he snapped.

“But it must be. I can’t see how else it happened.”

“Listen alan, I don’t know either, all I know is that you always let someone down, including yourself!” he concluded.

Wow. That was harsh! My own father telling me that for the past 38 years I’ve never had any commitment to anything I ever did. So I racked my brains to find a solution but none was forthcoming. I searched through my past to find an answer but all I could find was that I must be scared of commitment. Sure, I would happily sign up because the commitment was for a future time, but when the time came I ran. I came to the conclusion that I was definitely scared of commitment! For those of you who aren’t scared of commitment, let me tell you about keeping your options open.

Keeping your options open is always making sure you have a backup plan in case the one you are on isn’t working out. It’s like talking to the blonde in the bar, but making sure that the brunette at the next table knows you are available! Always have a backup plan. I always have. So when my marriage didn’t work out, I knew I had other options, because I had planned it that way. When my job wasn’t working out I left without a word, because I had a backup plan. This got me thinking. “If I always have a backup plan (even subconsciously) perhaps this means I am never living in the moment, for the moment; I am always planning a getaway. I am always somewhere else.”

So just like eyeing up the brunette in case the blonde decides not to come home with you, I am focussed elsewhere. I am never present. I plan a three day fast but I am also planning what I will say when people ask me how it’s going...

“Oh, yeah the fast, Nah. It wasn’t really for me. Some people might like it, but I don’t really...”

Blah, blah, blah.

So alongside the commitment (which is the plan) there is always a backup plan. There is always an out; all I have to do is take it.

Moment

At this time

So, I now knew what the problem was. It was chatting up the blonde, whilst keeping the brunette interested without the blonde knowing; and this I decided, could be applied to my whole life! Simple. So instead of just enjoying myself with the blonde no matter what happened, I was determined to have it all. I wanted to have the maximum fun I could, no matter who it ended up hurting.

So I planned to go to the children's breakfast charity, but I also wanted to go to the pub, even if it meant letting someone down. If only I had been brave enough to phone the charity and tell them "Sorry I was at the pub last night, and I couldn't get up," it might have been different, but as it was, I just left them in the dark; like the blonde who doesn't know your eyeing up the brunette! Ok, I think that's enough about the blondes and brunettes. Where were we?

So how could I get over this keeping my options open? How could I make a commitment and stick to it? First of all, I had to look at why I was making the commitment in the first place. Was it really something I wanted to do, or was I merely trying to fool myself and everyone else into thinking I was someone I wasn't?

I decided I was living in the future. I was living with the idea that I would be someone who did fasting or worked for charities, but in the present moment, I was someone else. So although I thought I was keeping my options open, what was really happening was I was deciding on what my future self would do! Do you understand? For example: "Last year I promised myself that next year I would stop smoking, but I plan to do it the year after instead!" It's all just talk. The action is now. That is the only time that things can exist in reality.

Promises and commitments are about a future time, which gives us plenty of time to change our minds, doesn't it? So I decided that the only time to commit (*engage in or perform*) is now. If I wanted to do something I would do it now, not in the future. And I started writing this book; a book that had been in my mind for some time. And where I had told people I was "going to write a book" which would probably have

never happened, I could now say, “I am writing a book,” being in the present tense, which is now.

That changed me.

I realised how stupid I had been; keeping my options open, committing for the future, having backup plans to escape. That wasn't living, that was constantly planning in case whatever it was I was engaged in now didn't please me anymore. I had to commit to living now, in the moment, and enjoying every micro-second I was alive; and when I was talking to someone, I would commit to listening to them, not thinking about what I could be doing instead, or what to do later.

If I was with the blonde at the bar (there I go again!) I would focus on the blonde; I would give her my time because that was what I committed to do when I sat down, not looking around for something better.

I realised in a flash that my whole life had always been about looking for something else; something more than I already had. I had a beautiful wife, but I always dreamed of finding someone better looking, or with a better personality; someone more fun, someone more sexy. Do you understand? Instead of being content with my choices, I kept making more choices, or at least, was planning to make more choices.

So, commitment, as I understand it, is living in the present, which is now, now, now, and giving your all to whatever it is you are engaged in. Whilst you sit at your office desk, engage in what you are doing, rather than dreaming about where you would prefer to be right now. If you want to be somewhere else, “be there,” but don't just keep talking about it as I did. If you want to leave your job, commit to leaving your job, not in a year, but now. Do you see?

All action can only be carried out in the present moment. Any time we project into the future, whether it be five minutes or five years, we give our tricky minds plenty of time to give us other options. There is only one time to be committed and that is the present, any other time is just pure fantasy.

When you decide to do something, do it NOW.

C o m m u n i t y

A group of people living in a particular local area

•

A group of people having ethnic or cultural or religious characteristics in common

•

Common ownership

In this book you have all heard me talk about this so called “community,” but in this topic, I would like to explore it in detail with you, to find out what a community really is. Unfortunately, some people use the word in the wrong sense, I think. They talk about belonging to a religious, spiritual, hippie, or alternative community, amongst other types. We see communities as being something distinctive, something separate from the rest of society. For example: “He dropped out of society to go and live in an alternative community.”

But as we will see when we explore this topic more deeply, you can never really “drop out” of society. After all what is society? It is merely you and I in relationship. So although we may not want to be part of mainstream society, we can never truly leave it, because society is all around us; although people would like to think it has something to do

with being in a particular social group. That definition just seeks to divide us more.

Society

1. *An extended social group having a distinctive cultural and economic organization*
2. *A formal association of people with similar interests*
3. *The state of being with someone*
4. *The fashionable elite*

At every turn, we try to divide ourselves more; not only from each other, but from ourselves. We fail to recognise that the world we live in, *is* “society.” We may speak different languages, have different religions, do different jobs, but we are all still in relationship with each other. There is no escaping it.

Whatever I do has an affect on another, sometimes positive, sometimes negative; but there is always an effect, a consequence of every action. In reverse, whatever other people are doing is having an effect on you. Do you see? So although you and twenty friends have decided to drop out of society by going and living on a deserted island, you are still in the society. Just because you have chosen to give up the “evils” of the western consumer lifestyle, you are still in relationship with it. There is no escaping it.

Society is all around us. The trees, and the foxes, and the rivers, and the oceans, are all part of the society, because we interact with them. The only way you can escape, is to leave the planet; only then, you would be in relationship with a new society, that of the stars. Whatever you did would have an effect on them and vice versa. No escaping. Ok?

So before you decide to escape society and run off to the woods and start a new community, away from modern society, remember what we just said. You cannot escape. And with that out of the way maybe we can continue...

Let’s run away!

It’s easy to start thinking about leaving the life you have created for yourself and heading off into the wilderness. I can see why people want to do it. I have often thought about it myself.

“I’m sick of this lifestyle, I hate it, I hate what it is doing to the planet, the people and to me! Maybe if I just go away into a forest and create a little camp for myself. I can live off the land, and really get back to nature. I feel alienated in this society, I don’t belong here”

And then I realise, that whilst I am away hugging trees and meditating on the nature of all things, more weapons have been built, more retail parks have been built, war is still raging (internally and externally), we are still draining the oil from the earth; so everything is still the same.

Running away to a forest is the psychological equivalent of burying your head in the sand (*a reference to the popular notion that the ostrich hides from danger by burying its head in the sand*). You can hope and pray for peace, and that everything will be all right, but it won’t! Do you understand? There is no point in running away to a monastery and engaging yourself in prayer to god every day, asking that peace be brought to earth, and that man wakes up to the trouble he is causing; that is a purely selfish approach to a real problem. All we are doing is saying “Hey, I can’t cope here. I don’t like it. You lot are “bad” people, so I’m off; see you in the next life!” That’s not a very grown up way of dealing with problems is it?

But it seems that many people think it is not only a good solution, but the only solution. Unfortunately, whilst you’re away on your mountain, praying for peace, and peace of mind, another child has been blown up by a land mine in some far away country, whose name no one remembers.

Running away to an island, a mountain, or to the forest, just isn’t going to solve the problems that man is causing. Man caused them, and you are a part of the problem (being human that is), but you are also part of the solution! Because if you are feeling so discontented about the whole thing; so upset at the pain and chaos that man is causing for himself and his brother; then you are in the perfect place (psychologically) to do something about it. Do you see?

You are one person in many tens of thousands that thinks this can’t go on. This is not how life should be. But instead of staying to show the way, you decide to hit the highway!

Running away just means there is one less person with the awareness to show people a way out of the darkness. So to all those people who want to run away and start their own communities, fenced away from society (which you remember you can never escape) realise this: There is no such thing as an ideal world. And anyway, ideal sounds kind of like

“idea,” which as we know, is created by thought, which is the cause of most of man’s misery!

So before you get any “ideas” about what a perfect community should look like, and how you should interact with each other, and what you should do, and what you should all wear, and what you should talk about; remember that there is no running away from yourself, because you are society. All you are doing by creating another community is causing more division, and we certainly don’t need that!

Here I am

So now you’ve decided to stay, we can make some progress. Here you are living in society, disgruntled about the cities, and how so many people live so closely together, and what they do for a living, and you have decided you want to do something about it. What do you do?

“The first thing people should do is pack up and leave for the country...” you say.

Sorry, that isn’t an option, how are we going to move nine million people to the country? Even I would find it difficult to figure out how to house, clothe and feed that many people (actually, I would find it difficult trying to feed, clothe and house fifty!).

So no running away. We have to stay for now. We can’t just leave. We have nowhere to go. We helped create this mess and we are going to stay and help create something new. Oh, and you can stop your moaning about wanting to go and live by the sea in a little beach hut, with only you and the wind for company. That, as we say, is idealism, although it would be nice!

You’re here, and you say you are unhappy with the state of the world, undertake a massive shift in your thinking, create awareness of self, and are ready to go to work. Where do you begin? Let’s take this slowly shall we?

You live at number 23b lower west street, some city, the world. You are in an apartment building with six other apartments, and you live in a terrace of some fifty or so houses – most converted to apartments; so if we do some simple maths, we could say that in your street, there are between three hundred and six hundred people, depending on how many people live in each apartment, I might be a bit off with my calculations, but it’s a good place to start.

How many people do you know in the street? Well, go on, have a guess! Two hundred and fifty? Two hundred and eighty? How about two? or maybe none?

That's not a very good community, is it? How are we going to build our new community if you don't know anyone? Hmm, we'll have to go back to the drawing board, because as we saw in the topic "friendship," the chances of you talking to strangers are between zero and one percent (unless you're my mum that is!). No, there must be another way of creating our community which doesn't involve talking to other people (sorry I'm being facetious).

Let's begin again shall we? We are saying that in our small street there are perhaps 500 people, and we don't know any of them well. We do not know what they do for a job, what religion they are, what their personalities are like, and we certainly don't know if they are interesting in helping us solve some serious problems in the world. For all you know, they may be creating many of them, and would send you on your way with a resounding "piss off," if you try to convert them to your idea of community.

Remember, we live in a society that the powerful have designated "community free," whatever the posters may tell you. This is the age of the individual. Governments don't want people to group together in their own "communities," they want everyone to act individually whilst they decide what a community is.

And that's it, isn't it? Somehow, we have allowed the governments and the councils to break up our communities with the only reward being gratification, in the form of money and possessions. They don't want us to think as a whole (a community), they want us divided, as it makes us easier to control.

Sure, they may set up a "community" hall, where the "community" can gather, but who really goes there? We are too happy with our individual lives, our families, our jobs, and our friends; why would we mix with people we don't know? What would be the point of it? Everything we need socially and financially, has already been "provided" by the state. So although we may hire the hall for weddings, birthday parties, and discos for teenagers to keep them off the streets, a hall isn't really what I would call a community, whatever the government tells us.

We are individuals living in the "wider community" as the politicians would like to call it. But it is purely an organisational method of control, and has nothing whatsoever in common with the communities that used to exist when there weren't quite so many of us squashed up together in

cities. But it's not just cities that are the problem, even rural communities are only communities in name; they are just individuals who happen to be living in the same post code area, just as the people in the cities are. I think we have got ourselves in a real quandary here. We say we are ready to help create real communities, but find we are going to have to start from the beginning again as there is no such thing as a community left. "But I am only one individual, what can I do; how can I change the system?" you plead. But you don't have to change the system, you are part of the system, and by changing yourself, you are already starting to create something new. The only problem is everyone else! And that's where we are going to have to be careful. Because attempting to change everyone else is the result of idealism, which is thought, and that can't help us! So where do we start?

Letting go of the word "community"

We have said that we are under the control of the politicians, and the government, and that these days, community is a mere geographical location, not a state of mind; and that is where we have to explore this more deeply and very carefully. Let us leave the idea that a community is something we live in behind. Let us leave the idea that a community is something that the government tells us it is, behind. Let us once and for all agree that a community hall, or talking with people you know, or having community barbecues or meetings isn't a community; and let us try to explore the concept that community is not even something physical, but a state of mind you carry with you at all times. Let me explain.

I have told you that I spent some time last year in a buddhist community on an island off the west coast of scotland. It was a wonderful place; the island was only one and a half miles long by half a mile wide, and the peak of the island rose majestically out of the sea for several hundred metres. Oh, how I enjoyed walking to the top and sitting alone with my thoughts looking out over the ocean; it was so calm and peaceful, as I watched the wild ponies and the wild sheep sauntering around. It was just like paradise.

At the centre, there were only fifteen people permanently living there, but we had up to sixty guests a week who came on "spiritual" courses. I was one of the chefs there for several months, and coming from the area

of society we would call “individual,” I found it hard to fit into a small community where everyone knew everyone, and what they were doing; but this changed.

I started to realise that not only were we not doing this for money, but we were doing it for the wider community, and for each other. Although we lived in separate rooms, we shared a common space where we laughed and joked, argued over the nature of reality, and many other topics. I actually started to enjoy myself! Here were strangers sharing their deepest thoughts with me; their hopes and their fears; and I was sharing with them. In short we were helping each other. But I couldn’t work out why.

“Why are we here helping each other?” I used to think. “Why is it nice to sit by the fire and talk about life with people I barely know?” “Why is it so nice to finish work and go for a run with one of the monks, and after my shower, sit down in the library, and talk to people about whatever comes into my mind?”

Although the island was set up as a project, the interactions we had were in no way forced, they were very real. The point was to share the work that needed to be done, and share in that experience with each other. Nothing more.

“There must be a point to all this” I thought; “there must be a bigger reason why we are all here,” but there wasn’t, we just were. We were in relationship with each other, for the benefit of each other. What a strange idea, I thought.

And indeed, it was unlike any other experience I have ever had. But I soon knew I couldn’t stay on this wonderful island; I had to get back to where the people had not discovered contentment in sharing. I had to leave.

As I got on to the boat and waved my friends goodbye, I realised I didn’t have to leave the island behind, although I was physically moving away from it. I could take it with me in my mind. I could take the sharing, and the discussions and the joy and the sadness, and use it to create a life for myself that was not divided. I would take away a new mind from the island. A community mind. And I didn’t need to run away to an island to use it. I could use it anywhere in the world!

The community mind

Let's face it, none of us like sharing very much. It's not our fault, we have been conditioned to think like that by our parents, our teachers and our governments. I'm sure you've all heard the old saying "What's mine is mine, what's yours is yours," and that pretty much sums up the modern world in which we live.

We live an individual existence. Friends, lovers, jobs come and go, but at the end of the day there is still "me." My house, my possessions, my money, my needs, my desires.

We love being individuals; it makes us happy. We have no one to answer to; we can do whatever we like (as long as we don't break the law). We go on holiday, we go on courses, we learn more – all to benefit ourselves. "Community, that's so old school, the future is me!" So we carry on living our lives hoping never have to do anything for anyone else.

Maybe when we start a family, or get older, we might like to help out in the parents group or try running a stall at the school fete. We may even do some charity work for the local hospice; but at the end of the day, we come running back to "me." Do you understand? All of our so called "community" actions are external, but the "me" still exists. We want to give to make ourselves feel a little less greedy, but how much can we give? One percent? Three percent?

Some of us like to show we care, by donating money to local charities, and we might drop a pound or two in the box outside the supermarket where we have just spent eighty five pounds. We will help, and we will share, but only if the cost isn't too high; and I'm not just talking about money.

We will help as long as it doesn't eat into our "me" time too much; but this isn't just about donating time and money to charity, this is about living in communion (*sharing thoughts and feelings*) with everyone; this is about opening up new relationships with everyone you meet (don't worry there will still be plenty of me time). This is about developing a state of mind that says "Although I must look after my physical needs, if I give myself over to the community mind, my needs will be taken care of." Do you see?

We are so scared to let go of our individual lives just in case this community thing doesn't work out, when you decide, after all, that sharing everything with everyone just isn't for you! But why isn't it for you? Why do we hold onto our possessions so tightly; these dead items that alongside us will eventually turn back to dust? First of all we have to start to change the way we think about what "my things" are.

Of course, they're are things you paid money for, or have been given, but it is only your mind that is clinging to them. I realised sometime ago that it didn't matter if I didn't have a lot of stuff anymore; I will die, they can't come with me (remember there is no inter-dimensional shipping service), so I just gave them away. If I really "need" an item later I will create the means to get it.

Maybe we should consider sharing to be like a library service. Some of us only want our own copies, because they are "mine," but the book is available to all who want to read it. You borrow it, and you give it back so someone else can share it. So what if you don't have a large reading library in your home, you only have it to impress people with! If you really want to read a book, you can get it from the library. So with that concept of sharing firmly in your mind, let us move on.

The library idea is a simple one. One person buys the book, and many people can share it for no cost. We could even buy books ourselves and give them away to people we don't know (but they might think they're contaminated or dirty, you know what people are like!) But sharing life is so much more than sharing books, it is about sharing time, space, (the physical and the not so) food, laughter, tears, wealth, poverty.

We must share everything, as everything is in us, and we are in everything. Do you understand? We may think things are *ours*, but even the beautiful, and the exquisite, eventually turns to dust in our hands (if we waited around long enough). So whose is it?

The beautiful table you had hand carved, eventually returns to the earth from whence it came, and try as you might, there isn't a damn thing you can do to stop it. And the same goes for every possession. In the end they are not only worthless, they are nothing but dust.

So can you see how limiting this idea of the individual is? My stuff, my needs, my holidays, my pay cheque, my family, my beautiful home, will all become nothing, and so will I. To say they are nothing isn't strictly true; they will transform, we should perhaps say. But as tangible items, they will be no more. No more ideas, no more grasping, no more becoming, no more greed. With our minds buried with our bodies, these too will die.

So I ask you now: How important is the individual in the world or the universe? A little, very, or not at all? How important are the politicians who make the rules we must conform to? How important is my boss who tells me off for being late, or for making a mistake? How important is the court that decides when I should see my children after

divorce? How important are any of the powerful – who would seek to control us through their laws and their dogma? Not even a little.

All these men will return to dust, the same as our possessions will, and we should all start remembering that the next time they come knocking on our door looking for re-election.

The idea of a community the government has, is people enrolled in a “neighbourhood watch” scheme to watch out our windows, in case anyone is seen lurking about at night; or reporting each other to the police if someone steps out of line. In the eyes of the government, community = control – nothing more. But they put out their media campaigns of happy smiling citizens all working for the benefit of the “community.” But it’s not our community people are working for, it’s theirs.

Making the shift

I think we have come far enough along in our discussion to start introducing something new. We have said that a real community is a place in your mind where you naturally want to help each other and share, and that community, as described by the government, is merely a convenient way to geographically organise the population. Which one would you vote for?

The individual mind wants everyone else as far away from him or her as possible unless they are “colleagues” or “family,” and is constantly seeking more material wealth and individual happiness. But the community mind wants to create something for all, and wants to share life with everyone – not just people he knows.

“But how do we get from the individual mind to the community mind, given that most of us live in large urban areas where we have to go out to work every day to pay the bills? Although we would like to share in this vision, we actually don’t have the time or money to do it.”

And it is a valid point when you are still thinking as an individual, not as the whole; the indivisible, which is society. But I understand your question.

The question is: How do I shift from creating an individual life for me and my family, and shift to a new way of thinking without suffering? The answer is: When you shift your mind, you will already know!

Remember, when you think like an individual, you act like an individual, and when you think like a community, you act like a

community. Does that make it any clearer for you? I hope so, as we still have much to discuss.

The mind that resists change

Many people have touted around ideas of the “community” owning the energy companies, and the banks etc. but it must be remembered that the “community” *does* own the energy companies and the banks etc. They are just not run by the people we would choose to run them! But I know what people are talking about. They are saying that these “essential” services should be taken out of the hands of governments and profiteers, and put firmly back in the hands of the people, which is a thoroughly noble idea; but who would run these businesses? How would they get paid? After all, these huge organisations cost a lot to run. The people would still have to be billed.

“Ah, but hang on,” says one of you, “we would only charge enough to cover our costs.”

“But you have to make a profit of some kind so you can reinvest it, or need to upgrade equipment” argues another.

“Yes but we wouldn’t be making a huge profit like those greedy capitalists now.....”

And suddenly it all gets personal and everyone ends up fighting. Which is what seems to happen to most projects when they are entrusted into the hands of the community. Why? Because they are thinking with their individual minds, not their community minds.

So is it impossible to create such a world where people help each other, where stimulation and interaction occur with assistance, barter, and sharing? Is the situation we have created now so entrenched in the society, that there is no way out? Must we must now follow the path that has been so carefully laid out for us by our governments and our parents?

Must we abandon all hopes for this community we speak of, and return to our individual desires? Perhaps. Perhaps we are not ready for this kind of revolutionary idea – one where people share their time and their knowledge, and their feelings with each other; where we are compassionate and loving to all things. One where people give assistance where it is needed without being asked; where greed is a thing of the past and everyone can live in harmony.

Ok, maybe I am being just a little idealistic. Maybe the individual has overtaken the whole, and “me” time is just what we ordered. After all, haven’t we given enough over the years?

“For thousands of years, we have lived together in small communities, sharing the load, sharing responsibility, sharing love and sadness. That was yesterday, wasn’t it? Today, we don’t have to think about anyone else. “We are free! Free I tell you! Free to live life to the full without a thought or care for one other solitary being on the planet,” you cry. “I want a break from other people, I don’t want to have to see the same people day in day out, I want to be able to come home, shut the door, turn on the tv, open a bottle of wine and chill out after a hard day – not start thinking about someone else!”

“So we’re back to the old individual thinking, I thought we had got through that...”

“But perhaps we think individually, because *we are* individuals,” someone shouts from the back. “We’re not joined at the hip with everyone else. We have individual brains and we should use them individually!”

And no one is saying we have to stop thinking (although it may help for some people). What we are saying is that when we think, we should be thinking about how our actions are going to affect other people. We are connected with everyone else; we are in relationship with every living thing, do you remember?

When I do, so I affect others, and the same goes for everyone else. So let’s start thinking about this. We will start slowly and we will try to create this community mind together.

Let’s face it, things aren’t going to change overnight, are they? You and I accept that; but change they will, one step at a time. What we are aiming to do is create a community mind web so complex that in the end there will be no control, and definitely no community halls, just society working in natural harmony with itself.

“Ha! Impossible!” you cry.

And that is exactly the kind of thinking that will make everything impossible!

So how do we fashion this web? Well, let us consider the spider that starts in the centre and keeps spinning and connecting all the points (not that we are trying to ensnare any prey!). There is no idea in it, just a natural process, and that is what our community mind web will be like. Except there will be no one at the centre, and no one controlling how it is built. It is much like the internet, which is a loose connection of many

computers all connected together, with no one computer in charge. But we *do* need a starting point. Any ideas? How could *we* make a small gesture that confirms our shift to the community mind?

Well, as most people don't like talking to strangers, and we definitely don't like sharing things for no reason, there has to be some focal point, much like the conversation corners I was suggesting setting up everywhere, so random strangers could meet, chat, and leave again, now no longer strangers.

Let's take the car, or the bicycle. In some cities there are bikes and cars available for community hire, and once you have signed up to the scheme you can just pick them up in the street. I am not sure how successful they are, but it is a good idea, only why would people want to rent a community car or bike if they have their own? Sounds a bit too much like the old "community hall" idea to me so forgive me if we ditch it as a starting point.

You and I know that community is something we cannot cause to exist externally, no matter how much we would like it to, after all, if we can force something to happen, it is much easier than everyone arriving at the community mind by way of a natural process. But we must resist the temptation. We must create the web without creating it, if you understand what I mean. We must (through our own change) cause something to be created, without it happening as the result of idea. But it seems that yet again we have hit a brick wall.

Creating the physical network

I don't know about you, but I am ready to share, to collaborate, and to create with others with no financial gain for myself. But this doesn't mean you can all turn up at my door and get free stuff! It kind of defeats the object of the game don't you think? And given that most people are not ready to assume the monks mind where he renounces attachment to the physical, and does everything for the benefit of others, we have to take this into consideration when we look at our starting point. Let me tell you a story.

Many years ago, my mother joined what was then known as the baby sitting network (or circle). You started off with no credit, and had to offer your services to baby-sit other peoples children to gain tokens that would allow you to call upon another member of the network to baby sit your children. So the more credits you gained (by giving your time to others),

the more you could leave your own kids and go out for the night. Not quite the community mind we talked about but it's getting there, one ring (*the method of babysitting currency*) at a time. What a simple scheme, but I believe it is no longer in existence, because now people pay for babysitters or ask people for favours. But that's life I guess.

So there you have it. A scheme that has no one at the top and no one at the centre, but through a natural process benefits all that belong to it. Can you see how something like that could work for you and me? What could we offer to gain the magical credits?

"Yeah but we don't need a scheme like that now, we've got money."

But there again my friend, is the individual mind talking! Can you see how just picking one thing could offer, can change our thinking about how we live? Whether it be a buddhist community in scotland, or a city with a million people in europe? Just one thing, that's all we need to get started.

What will it be? Will it be your time? Your knowledge? Your skills? And remember, we are not offering them for free because that would be a one-sided relationship. We are offering ourselves for the benefit of others, but that does not mean we should not benefit ourselves in some way. Can you imagine how one-sided the baby sitting network would be if everyone just took? That one person always gave their time and no one else did? That is not relationship, that is purely selfish, and gives rise to division.

So, have you come up with your offering? Has your community mind decided what you will give? But wait a minute, you live in a city; how will you contact people in your area without talking to them? After all, we still don't like talking to strangers do we?

There has to be some neutral space, somewhere people can get together that where we can offer our services. Somewhere we feel comfortable like a dedicated "community exchange network centre," not run by the local council, not staffed by the do-gooders from the local church, in fact not staffed at all (remember no centre). Just a place where people can commune not to receive, but to give! Someone once said "Give and thou shalt receive," but I'm not sure who it was; someone famous I think!

Perhaps we could attach it to our new "conversation corners," the two are surely linked. Unfortunately, "community exchange network centre," sounds like a government welfare centre, so we better come up with a new name. How about... Well, I'm not a genius in marketing. You think about it!

So where should we place these places of giving? “And how will we know that the people who offer to do things for us, are not criminals, or paedophiles, or murderers” say the more sceptical amongst you. But I offer you these words: “These are not just government exchange booths, but places where we *want* to do something different, where we recognise that we are in relationship with all others. Where you come to my home and I come to yours. Where I service your car and you cook for me, where I paint your lounge and you paint my portrait. And we all get rings. Fifty rings for a hair cut, twenty rings for mowing the lawn, five rings for a lasagne and side salad!”

No one is in control, we are just existing within the community mind; and how nice it will be to know that the person who is making your new table is in the circle, a circle uncontrolled by human hands, one that exists for its members, and because of its members. Not because we are all in the same postcode district but because we want to give to others. And if we want to give more than we take, we just don't accept the “rings,” but they are there just in case you need them.

A new light is shining

Hopefully this will give you something to think about. I am not suggesting that the ring exchange is a perfect solution; I merely offer it to stimulate your own thinking. But hopefully, it will illuminate the idea that man does not need to be told how to behave by his government and local councils. He does not need to be shown a building that says “this is your community centre,” he knows what community is. He does not need to run off and live in the forest and wait until everyone else changes. He can stay right where he is and create the community mind. It won't be easy, but then nothing worthwhile ever is. Start creating and soon our web will cover the whole globe. That should annoy the politicians and the businessmen!

C o m p e t i t i o n

An occasion on which a winner is selected from among two or more contestants

•

The act of competing as for profit or a prize

•

A business relation in which two parties compete to gain customers

And the winner is... no one



The scientists will tell you that man is naturally competitive; that throughout his existence he has competed for food, water, and someone to mate with. This may be true, but what also may be true is that man has also learned to be cooperative with others. Competitive and cooperative. But we only cooperate when it is in our own interests to do so.

Private business is immensely competitive, with each business trying to outdo the other, by creating a better product, offering a better service, or even dropping the price. The end result of the competition we are told is a win-win situation for the consumer. Competition drives innovation, we are told. If there is no competition, then why would man try to do it any better?

Unfortunately, this seems to ring true when we look at state owned businesses, and see stagnation of ideas, terrible service, huge waste, and

elevated prices. With no competition, there is no incentive for them to do any better. As soon as the businesses are sold off to private enterprise, where the only goal is survival, companies will do anything to improve services etc. because their very existence depends on them satisfying more customers than their competitor. But that's not what our discussion is about today.

If we believe that man is naturally competitive, and always will be, then we shouldn't worry too much. All of this competition is just like a modern game of survival of the fittest; but in the past, food was scarce, we had to hunt for it; now we just "hunt" for it down at the local supermarket.

Today's competition has taken a different turn. We compete to be the most powerful military country in the world, or just the richest country. Somehow, competition has taken on super proportions, and we are now competing against millions of others; not individually, but as a group – country against country. Within that group, the competition extends to multinational organisations, smaller companies, sole traders, and then man against man, the strongest, the fittest, the most intelligent, the fastest etc.

We have developed competition on so many layers, that it is impossible to find someone who isn't competing. Schoolchildren have to compete with others in everything from sports to who has the highest grade in an exam. We compete for the attentions of the opposite sex by buying the fanciest clothes, wearing the sexiest make-up, having the most up to date hair style.

Even charities which are supposed to exist solely for the purpose of helping people, are competing with other charities for government funding and donations. We can't escape from it. The whole world is competing. Songs compete with other songs in the popular chart; films compete with other films, scientists try to outdo one another with new discoveries; even some villagers compete in festivals for the person with the largest vegetables.

Competition has taken on a life of its own. Sometimes, we are not even consciously trying to compete with others, such as at award ceremonies, where someone puts our name forward as "best screen writer 2008," and then four others are put up against us, all competing for the same prize.

"And the winner is..."

Incredible isn't it? A competition we didn't even enter, and suddenly we are put under tremendous psychological pressure! We think "I hope it's me, I hope it's me, I hope it's me..."

"...and the winner is..." Someone else.

So you graciously applaud them and smile; only underneath, you are bitterly disappointed.

What on earth is going on? What has happened to our societies? Why do we put each other under so much pressure just so we can be the "winner?"

Whether at school, business or the arts, the pressure is the same; must win, must win, must win. Surely something has gone wrong at the very core of our civilisation, for that's what we are supposed to be, a civilisation (*a society in an advanced state of social development*).

Maybe trying to beat everyone is what civilisation is about, but I hardly think so. "Be the best you can be, alan," my mother used to say, but what that inevitably meant was trying to beat everyone else and come out "on top."

I started competing in running races as a young boy. I was never a "natural great," but I was pretty good, although when I entered the races with the "best" runners in school, I never stood a chance. All I needed was for them to not turn up, or to injure themselves along the way. On several occasions this happened, where two of the best boys in my year weren't taking part for some reason or other. Now I had a chance!

I ran my heart out, knowing if I could only pass these last three I could be the winner! I accelerated with the last of my energy, my legs feeling like lead, and slowly but surely, I passed one boy, then another, then another. I crossed the finish tape. I was first! I was first! I looked around and saw everyone applauding me, my mother was there, applauding like mad, and she came running over.

"Well done, alan. Well done! You were first, you were great!"

And it is true, I did win.

"But only because the best runners in my year, who always win, weren't there mum!"

"Don't worry about that," she said. "If they were here you'd have beaten them too."

And maybe I would have, but the next race they were in, I came a dismal fourth. You see it doesn't matter who's competing and who's not. It doesn't matter if the best aren't there – that's their tough luck. If the competition is today and you don't enter, who's fault is that?

Imagine if the boys who were the best runners, had come up to one of the judges on that day and said, “but we’re the best runners, we’re much better than alan, you should give us the medal,” what would he say?

“But you weren’t running today.”

As the saying goes, “you’ve got to be in it to win it!” No one cares about someone who says they’re the best; it’s all about the day. If you don’t compete you can’t win. And unfortunately, that seems to be what is happening in the world today.

At work, we must compete in order to prove to someone that we are the best baker, window cleaner, or truck driver. We need someone to pat us on the back and say, “yes, you’re the best.” And it all starts with the interview!

We compete with many others even to get to the interview, then we compete with the candidates at the first interview, then we compete with the candidates at the second interview, and finally we may be accepted or rejected. Competition is about getting the approval from your peers that “Yes! You *are* the best.”

There are always winners and losers

We all seek approval from our parents and teachers, and when we are the winners, we are applauded; but what happens when we are not the winners? We are scolded and told to “try harder!” What do you think this artificial competition does to the developing mind? To those who are successful, it affirms in their mind that they are better than everyone else; but to the loser, it is like their world has ended; their self-esteem drops through the floor and they feel genuinely miserable. What sort of society have we created that makes winners and losers out of wonderful human beings?

Competition for food was critical to our success as a species in the beginning, but this has nothing to do with food or biology, this is man-made. As long as you have enough food to eat you are not a loser. You can never be a loser, that is just a word invented by those who seek to separate us, but we are one. Winning and losing is a concept that has no place in a compassionate society. So what if you’re not the fastest runner? So what if you don’t get an “A” in maths? So what if you don’t become a managing director. Do you see? It doesn’t matter what you are, as long as you have love and compassion in your life.

Companies want us to compete with each other at school, and in interviews, because it means they can compete and be the winners; and governments want companies to compete so *they* can be the winning government. But all this winning and losing is just in people's minds. People who are not satisfied with just being People who want separation between rich and poor, intellectual and ill-educated but true intelligence can never come from competition, it merely helps to suppress it.

And the winner is, no one

Can you imagine what would happen if we stopped competing? What if there was no competition in school or industry; or no competition for the best film of the year, or the best runner. What would happen? Would society as we know it collapse? Would this be the end of life as we know it? All I can say is "Yes, hopefully!" But out of it would come something new. Something we had never thought about before; or maybe we would just start wanting to compete again. All I know is, we must break through the prison that competition has trapped us in.

There is no point in me trying to offer some idealistic solution to the problem, because there is no problem, only us, and we are so stuck trying to win approval from everyone as to how great we are that no one would listen anyway.

"I want approval, because it makes my mind happy, so I do what society has told me will win me approval: I compete."

I hope you are starting to see that this has nothing to do with our ancestral heritage. This has to do with the belief in the mind that if I compete and win then people will think a lot of me. I will be rich and I will be powerful. This has nothing to do with the betterment of the human race, quite the opposite in fact.

So what has competition done for the world as we know it? Has it made us more loving and tolerant towards each other, or helped us make the planet more sustainable for future generations? What has competition done for anyone, except making people a lot more stressed than they should be?

The reason we are so stressed is that when you compete, your body feels like it is in a race for survival; although passing exams, getting a better job or making more money is hardly survival. Nonetheless, your body does not know that, so it is constantly in a state of stress. If you don't believe me just go and ask anyone who works in a corporate

environment or on a production line what stress is like. All for what? So we can make money.

Money talks, and so does power

Why else would we be in competition with each other? As we said before, this is not a race for survival; this is a race to see who can be bigger, and bolder, and richer than anyone else. And as I write this topic, I fail to see how any of us could get caught up in this illusion, but we do. We think competing is natural, so we continue, but that is because we are asleep. We are being manipulated by powerful people who desire that competition continues because it betters them. Can you not see it?

At school, you win the race because you were told to enter it by your teachers. At the job interview, you had to compete with others because that was the only way you could get the job, and ultimately the money to supply yourself with your basic needs! So your basic needs, like food, shelter and clothing *are only* attainable by competition. The scientists were right, man is competitive, you see!

But we should have no need to compete. There should be plenty of what we need available on this earth, except those in power hold on to it greedily, and tell you that if you want it you are going to fight for it. You're going to have to compete at school and work to pay for it, and if you want any more than just the basics you're going to have to compete and pay for that too.

Water:	Controlled by the powerful
Food:	Controlled by the powerful
Shelter:	Controlled by the powerful
Clothing:	Controlled by the powerful

“Compete!” they cry, “it’s good for you! It’s good for progress, it’s good for humanity, and it’s good for the planet.” But we must know that none of that can be true. I agree that in times of dire need, we will physically compete with others for every scrap of food and water that is available, but that time is not upon us. We have heard that man can be a cooperative animal, and it is time we started cooperating – not being controlled by the powerful, nor dictated to.

So let us examine cooperation vs. competition.

Many businesses have been set up as worker's cooperatives (*a jointly owned commercial enterprise (usually organized by farmers or consumers) that produces and distributes goods and services and is run for the benefit of its owners*), and have become successful, but unfortunately they are all still competing, because they want people to buy from them and not another cooperative or company. They are a good idea but no more than that. No, we must look more deeply if we want to get to the truth of this.

Gameplay

We all play games, don't we? But the outcome of the game always requires a winner. From card games to board games, there must be one person who is better than everyone else. So several months ago I tried to come up with a game that cannot ever have a winner, and wondered how I could possibly market it! I wanted to invent a game where finishing the game requires full cooperation between all players otherwise the game wouldn't finish. The only rule would be full cooperation between the players, and it must show that cooperation can be as enjoyable as competition.

Well, try as I might, I just couldn't see how this would work! I became more and more frustrated. I could see how I could create a game that required full cooperation in order for it to be finished, but playing games isn't about just completing the game; that goal, in the eyes of the players is easy – what they want, is to compete!

And that's when it became clear to me. Competition isn't essential, it is just that our minds and our bodies become excited when we are competing, just as they would be if we were hunting a lion, and our lives depended on killing it so we could have something to eat. I was bitterly disappointed.

Of course, the excitement was of winning, of beating the other players; how can it be exciting just to cooperate? In fact, the more I started to think, I realised that most people do not even understand what cooperation (*working together on a common goal or project*) is, instead, even in a game of cooperation, the me, the individual, the competitor, comes out every time, trying to offer ideas that are better than his co-players; in a sense trying to win, to beat them, or at the very least, to feel the excitement of competition.

I cannot say that cooperation is more exciting than competition. I can see why we love to compete, but our minds are so stuck in this thinking

that the idea of a game with no winner seem incredible to us, and most people would say, a little stupid.

“Why would you bother playing at all, if there’s no winner?”

The excitement of winning would seem central to human existence. From our hunting days when winning meant survival through to the modern day boardroom, where winning means more money, we happily compete.

Ok. I give up. You win!

So, is that the end of our discussion? Is there no more to say? Do we just accept that there are winners and losers in all walks of life? Do we give up on cooperation, just because it doesn’t make our heart beat faster and excite our mind, or do we continue trying to seek out a future when man can at last see cooperation, and not competition, as the way?

Everything we seek is already here. Everything we desire to be we already are. Everything we need has already been provided. So what if cooperation means that we don’t get to feel excited about beating another human being! Are we not of intelligent minds where we can see that this kind of activity is futile? I guess not! But when you see the truth of it, you will never want to win another game again, but be happy to just *play*, that is the joy of cooperation.

I cannot see another way out of all the trouble that man has caused himself, his neighbour, and the planet as a whole. Nothing is good enough for us, the individual; we do not see ourselves as part of the whole. It is just me, my ambition, my success, my winning; just like in a game of cards. But it is up to us as parents to release our children from this never ending cycle, otherwise we will continue to try to beat each other at whatever cost; and we may find that soon we have nothing left to compete with.

All will be gone. We will have used up everything.

The trees, the minerals, and the oil will have gone, and we will be left thinking: “What if we had cooperated as a planet to create a sustainable world for every being, not just a world where a few people win for a short time?” But by then it will be too late. I am not trying to scare you into action, just to get you to wake up to yourselves. But then again, you may not want to wake up.

Cooperation is the whole. Competition is division
Which will you choose?

C o m p l a i n i n g

Expressing pain or dissatisfaction or resentment

•

Express complaints, discontent, displeasure, or unhappiness

Have you ever noticed how much we complain as a species? We complain about everything in life. It's too hot, it's too cold, we don't have enough money, the tv is terrible, the food we ate was tasteless, we have to work too long, we don't have enough holidays, our husband or wife is annoying, our children are annoying, the grass needs cut, we don't have a garden, the house is too small, the car is too old... The list is endless, wouldn't you say? I used to be like that too; nothing was ever good enough for me, I just couldn't help myself. I had to complain about something. Then one day, out of the blue I realised...

I'm lucky to be alive

That changed me instantly. I was suddenly aware that I was being so selfish, complaining all the time. Not only do billions of people have it much worse than me here in my middle class life, but the fact that my father's sperm even fertilised my mother's egg was amazing.

That I survived nine treacherous months in the womb, where anything could have happened during the pregnancy (my mother previously had a miscarriage due to a car accident), survived the birth without getting the umbilical cord wrapped around my neck, survived infancy through to early childhood without contracting any diseases that could have put an end to my short life, is nothing short of miraculous! And amazingly, I survived adolescence without any accidents, right up to adulthood; and here I am, healthy, with my body and mind intact, aged 38, writing this. What have I got to complain about?

Now please think about this carefully, as it is important. Think about what you like to complain about, and then think of the people who have had limbs blown off by mines, are starving, have been abused; people who are being raped right now, who are being interrogated by the secret police as you read this, who cannot say what they want in public for fear of torture and imprisonment. Think about the people who cannot buy food, cannot grow food because there is no water, have no home, have mental illness, have medical problems that mean they may die soon. Would you like me to go on?

*Tell me your problems. Tell me what's wrong
Tell me what you really have to complain about*

The neighbours make too much noise. Their dog is always barking, their tv is too loud, they never mow their lawn, their children leave their toys outside, their car is too old, it lets down the appearance of the neighbourhood, their house needs painted, their trees are too high...

So what!

When you think what you complain about, it's pretty unimportant stuff really; although you attach great importance to it, wouldn't you say? The thing about complainers is that that's all they ever do, isn't it? You like to complain, but you aren't ready to do anything about it. Everything is a problem, but you can't come up with a solution, or at least you won't, because you are too busy talking about it!

If something is so much of a problem, no matter how trivial it may seem in the greater scheme of things, then you should deal with it! Find a solution, that's all you have to do. And remember this, if there's no solution, then there's no problem! Do you follow what I'm saying? If you can't come up with a solution to whatever it is you are complaining about, then let it go. You will feel so much better.

You see, complainers waste a lot of their positive energy in life being negative, because that is what complaining is – negative. If your neighbour's tv is always too loud, go over and speak to him about it.

Sometimes, if we want to fix something that is annoying us, we have to face up to the fact that we will have to be confrontational from time to time. That does not mean you have to get angry; it just means “deal with it.” But most of us aren't like that, are we?

When we see our neighbour, we wave and say, “hi, how are you doing?” and have a really friendly chat with him; but as soon as you go inside, you turn to your wife and say, “that stupid neighbour, and his stupid loud tv, I'm really getting sick of it, I'm going to...” But you never do, do you? Because it is much safer complaining from a distance.

So let's forget all about this complaining, shall we? Let's spend our time on more constructive activities. It's time to appreciate what you have, and that is life. You could have lost out so many times during the course of your time here on earth. A wrong step in front of a car. Being in the wrong place at the wrong time, a terminal illness – but no, you are still here, and reading this book.

What use does complaining serve? You will never be able to change anything by just moaning about it and you will make yourself unhappy. Appreciate life and start living that life with a little bit of joy! What do you think? Can you do that? Or would you prefer to wallow in the sea of negativity you surround yourself with? It doesn't cost anything to stop complaining. You don't have to live in a democracy. You don't need to be rich. You don't need to be happy. You just need to be aware of why you are doing it.

Decide whether you want to find a solution to it, and if not, just let it go. It also costs nothing to let things go. Just let it go. Even if it's a “matter of principle,” the negativity is bringing you down. Let it go.

Discontentment

A longing for something better than the present situation

My wife used to say to me that I was always complaining, but I took great offence at that; I didn't complain about, what I would call, unimportant things. I didn't complain when she left all the washing up to be done all the time, or when her clothes were strewn all over the house, or when she left the house in a mess, I just tidied them up. It may seem odd to you, but once I was aware that there was no solution to the problem, I let it go, then there was no problem. Easy.

This was something different.

It started in the supermarkets, when I used to look at the country of origin and see that we were importing so many goods from asia that could easily have been grown locally (most things can be grown in the australian climate). Whether fresh, frozen, or tinned, it was all imported because it was obviously cheaper to make them there than locally, due to the low labour cost in asia. I was disgusted by this, and so complained bitterly to my wife about exploitation etc.

I then started to notice the mass consumerism in australia; their addiction to shopping and spending on luxury goods and entertainment. Then the volume of nationalism and conformity struck me. I didn't want to complain, but I just saw things that upset me, and I spoke openly about them.

This just annoyed everyone, including my wife and her friends, who said that if I didn't like australia, I should go back to england! But it wasn't that I didn't like the country. Having driven round australia, I knew it to be a place of great beauty and natural wonder; it was the society and their lack of awareness about how they were living that was getting to me.

In the end, I wondered if I was just a complainer, the type I mentioned in the beginning of this topic who complains about everything and is content with nothing; but then I had a flash of insight. This wasn't complaining in the general sense, this was real discontentment with how things were, and it didn't stop when I left australia last year, it only got worse.

I started to see how humans were behaving towards each other, their total lack of connection (when they pick up a consumer product) to the person who has worked so hard to make it for a few pounds salary (most consumer products are now made in "developing" (*a euphemism for cheap labour*) countries).

I became disgusted by our western attitude to everything. We wanted it. We had the money. We didn't care how it got there, the hardship that

people had to endure to get it there, or the knock-on social and environmental consequences of having it. We just wanted it.

I watched children in toy shops crying to their parents that they wanted a toy (this month's fad), and making such a fuss, that the parents eventually gave in. Even if the toy was made by a child being paid a meagre wage in an oppressed country, the child who wanted it didn't care who made it; his or her wants were more important than anything, and the most important thing to the parent was to shut the child up!

I feel sorry for parents sometimes, because they do all sorts of things to keep children happy without realising the full consequences of their actions; for example taking their kids to fast food restaurants, giving them sweets, or letting them watch tv as a treat! But without education, how are parents to know what is best?

I finally realised that in order for change to happen externally, real change has to happen internally, and the fire that starts that, is discontentment. Discontentment with the way things are, and the want – not to change them – but to change yourself. You see, once you are so discontented with everything that is when change happens.

If, like me, you then educate yourself about what is happening in the world, and make radical changes in your thinking and your actions, you then affect others instantaneously.

Many people have said to me that they can see the positive aspects of giving up meat to save animal suffering, but they also said, "what's the point in just me giving up meat when everyone else will carry on doing it anyway?" This is precisely the point we have to pay close attention to.

What is the point of one person changing? You tell me.

If one man is a violent robber but decides to change his thinking about life, and decides to give up his day job, does that mean that his change has been worthless and ineffective if others are still robbing people? Think about it. We just think that because there are six billion people in the world, our one change is useless. That is wrong.

I no longer eat meat. I no longer eat at fast food restaurants. I no longer drink cola drinks. So what has changed? On the surface, nothing. The companies are still in business, so you may not think that my consumption of 150 chickens a year, 50 steaks, 150 burgers, 200 litres of cola drink, and various other products is missed by the companies, after all, they slaughter millions of other animals and make millions of litres of soft drink, but the one thing they don't know about me is that my attitude has changed, my thinking has changed, and my actions have changed because I am discontented. I am now in a position to educate

others. It is only through this utter discontentment that people change. What do you think?

How discontent are you with the situation in the world right now? Greed, violence, killing, starvation, power, corruption, intolerance, division. Are you discontented, or are you in the range of “don’t care” to “sort of care,” and only if someone else does it first?

I cannot force you to be discontented. I have no wish to either. Only you will know, no one else. But if you can, do one thing for me, please, even if you think everything is fine in the world – give up complaining! It is a pointless waste of energy, and it just makes you sound like a complete bore! If you are truly discontented on the other hand, make sure you are heard the world over.

C o m p o s t i n g

A mixture of decaying vegetation and manure; used as a fertilizer

This topic may seem too easy to be true. All you do is take your vegetable or fruit peelings, and some leaves if you have any; add some water to keep it moist, and mix regularly in a compost bin (which allows you to take the excellent compost from the bottom) or just create an area in your garden and build it yourself. There you go. Easy!

“I can’t be bothered”.

“I’m too tired.”

“Why should I do it? My neighbours don’t.”

“It’s pointless.”

“I’m too busy.”

I can see the enthusiasm already! Ok, so composting may not seem like much fun to you, but when you get your first harvest in a few months, you will see, and smell (it smells good) all that natural rich fertiliser ready to put around your plants to help them grow; and the best thing is, *it's free!* It cost you nothing! Not a penny (excluding the small cost of buying a bin, if you don't make your own).

So there it is. Save money, save the peat bogs, which are thousands of years old, and are being dug up to provide you with nicely packaged compost, in your local garden centre, and save all the peelings just being wasted by going into landfill.

In some countries, the local councils are separating this from other waste; doing composting on a large scale. So if you have this option in your local area, and can't be bothered having nice fresh compost you created, go for it. Of course, I recognise that a lot of people live in apartment buildings and having a compost bin in your living room, or on the balcony, may not be entirely practical. So use whatever composting services that are available to you, and if your local council doesn't have one, why not suggest it? It's just another excellent way to re-use natural materials. You can see that it's easy, but why do so few people do it?

I started composting recently, and was amazed how much vegetable waste I was creating. Every day I was generating at least one potful! At first it was a bit of a pain, keeping my peelings separate, but soon I got into the habit of taking it to the bin, and giving it a bit of a stir. It became exciting, as I waited until I got my first batch of compost from the bin; and do you know what, it felt good! I had taken some fruit vegetable peelings, and somehow with a bit of water, a few leaves, and a bit of love and attention, they had changed into something that not only looked different from its original state, but was also rich in nutrients, that I could spread on my new tomato plants.

Of course, I could have gone down to the local garden centre, and for a few pounds picked up a bag, and spread it on my tomatoes, with little effort; but I chose to do something different. I chose to do something which not only was good for my plants and the general environment, but allowed me to get my hands dirty, to feel the rich earth in my hands, get soil under my fingernails, and reconnect in a small way with nature; away from the sterile man-made environment that most of us live in today, where everything comes packaged – even the soil! Try it. You might enjoy getting your hands dirty, and I guarantee your plants and vegetables will love it.

C o n d i t i o n i n g

A learning process in which an organism's behaviour becomes dependent on the occurrence of a stimulus in its environment

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Establish a conditioned response

Most of us have heard about the experiments done by the russian scientist, ivan pavlov (*russian physiologist who observed conditioned salivary responses in dogs*), where, as far as I know he took a dog, rang a bell, and then presented food each time to the dog. Over time, he observed that even when he just rang the bell and presented no food, the dog salivated. Experiment ended. Result: It is easy to condition an animal.

You and I may think we have nothing in common with the unfortunate dog, who was probably still salivating every time he heard a bell until the day he died, but we do. And it is in this discussion that we are going to explore how this happens.

It all starts from the moment you are born, although you wouldn't know it, and unfortunately, the ones who love you most, are the ones who start

the ball rolling. You see, our parents have themselves been conditioned by their own parents, religious and political leaders, media, teachers, and peers. They have become used to acting a certain way, and it is their duty as responsible parents to pass on that “knowledge,” to you, the small bundle of joy entrusted to them.

“Ok, alan, good luck on your first day of school, make sure you do everything the teacher tells you, and don’t answer back; and make sure you drink your milk, because it’s good for you. I’ve got a roast chicken for dinner, so make sure you don’t eat any sweets! Ok? Love you. Bye.”

“Bye mum, love you too.”

And so you trundle off into school, wearing your regulation uniform (if that exists in your country) trying to remember everything: “Don’t answer back, do as I’m told, drink my milk, and something about roast chicken.”

You are greeted by the head-teacher who is very nice, and makes you feel right at home. You do some nice paintings, do some adding up, and some singing, and are met at the school gate several hours later. Now what could be wrong with that? It seems perfectly “normal,” doesn’t it?

Of course you have to be polite; of course you have to do what you are told. You are five years old and you don’t know anything about the world. You have a child’s mind. It is undeveloped. That is why you are going to school. These teachers know best, like mum knows best; they are much older than you.

On your second day, you all go into the main hall where you will be learning how to sing the national anthem (*a song of devotion or loyalty (as to a nation or school)*). If you live in Britain, it goes something like “god save our gracious queen, blah, blah, blah, blah” (sorry I can’t remember it).

Your time of learning has come, and over the next few years, you are taught about the language of your country, taught to remember some history, learn some maths, and some science, and more than likely religion of some kind; you will go on visits to zoos to look at the animals, you will learn about art and culture, politics, architecture, and you will end up playing some kind of sport. They really do try to give you a broad education, you see.

Alongside that education, you will be schooled in the art of being polite, not breaking the law, saying your prayers, how to dress appropriately, and you will hear personal opinions, cast in stone as fact.

You will see what newspapers your parents read, what tv programs they watch, their views on immigration and ethnic minorities, what job

they do, what class they are in, how they speak about others, whether they drink alcohol or smoke, and what political parties they vote for. All the time your young mind is soaking it up.

Meanwhile, the media (including magazines, radio, music, and tv), and advertisers will be teaching you all about products they want you to buy, either now or in later life. You will also be instructed on what programs to watch, what music to listen to, what to believe, and what not to believe.

And all the while, you will learn of the traditions of your country; everything from christmas (in christian countries, or some other major religious festival if your parents belong to another religion), to the traditional sunday roast dinner if you live in britain, and birthday celebrations etc... You will attend weddings and perhaps, when you are old enough, funerals.

What they are doing is giving you a fine education.

That's all it's about isn't it? Education. We've just skipped over this quickly, and tried to include as many points as possible, and I am sure we have missed some important things out, but that can't be helped.

Maybe you don't like where this topic is going; maybe you can see already what has been happening to our young subject, and you have done it to your own children; maybe you don't care.

Let's find out what a fine lad we have turned out as he leaves university.

Conditioning report: Subject number 6103404583

Name: A. Human

Political persuasion: Conservative. Believes government isn't tough enough on immigration.

Diet: Meat eater, dairy products, loves sunday roasts, and beer.

Tv: Likes comedy, and police drama, doesn't like soap operas or daytime tv.

Music: Likes rock and dance.

Beliefs: Believes in god. Is a protestant, but not practising.

Education: Has just completed a degree in politics.

Ambition: To go into politics.

Successes: Was top of the year on final year at school. Was team rugby captain at university. Won a prize for man of the match on national game.

Traditions:	Loves christmas and having the family all together. Especially loves gifts. Plans to marry a girl in a big church wedding.
Nation:	Is very nationalistic. Believes in our country and what it stands for.
Social policy:	Believes we should lock up all drug addicts. Be tougher on crime. Thinks young people get away with too much. Doesn't like swearing.
Tax:	Believes we should cut taxes for higher earners.
Newspapers:	Only the intellectual ones.
Extremist views:	None to mention. Was concerned for the well being of animals in the zoo when he was young. Convinced by the teacher that they liked being in the cages.

Conditioning complete: Move on to next subject

All in all he looks like he's going to be a nice young man, doesn't he? I think he will be an asset to our society! I wonder what his family are like? Well, the chances are they aren't communist freedom fighters or criminals, what do you think?

So, how long do you think it took to condition that child in total? Five years, ten years, twenty years? However long it took, it is something he will blindly carry with him. It would take about the same time to condition a child to be a vegetarian, anti-capitalist, or animal rights activist; but it's still conditioning, do you see?

Some of you may confuse education with conditioning, and think he was given a "decent" education by "decent" parents. His parents could have been violent, thoughtless criminals, and they would condition him as well. We are not saying you will become exactly like your parents – far from it. What we are saying, is that the education children get, is a one way street.

From the moment the child was old enough to eat solid foods, mummy rolls up a lovely piece of ham and pops it in the child's mouth. "Come on eat up your meat, there's a good boy," without one thought, that from now on, unless the child gains some insight into himself, he will be a meat eater. You, the mother have provided something for the child to eat, and he has eaten it, the end. He is a meat eater. He will have no thought of the suffering that the animals go through. Millions upon

millions of them suffer just because mummy says eat your meat, so you do.

Why does he believe in nationalism? Because dad was nationalistic, they sang nationalistic songs at school. They watched the queen's speech at christmas. There could be many reasons, but one thing is for sure; the way people blindly do things without questioning them can mean only one thing, that they have been conditioned to blindly accept everything they are told by people in authority – whether that be the church, the state, or both.

But conditioning can only happen because people are asleep. They just do as they have been told, and pass on the information. And who provides it? Our grandparents, and our parents, but more sinisterly, the government, the media, the church, the multinational corporations, and the advertisers. All doing their bit to get you thinking their way.

I am not a machine. I am a human being

So how much is the conditioning and how much is the real person? That's a good question. You see it depends what we believe was passed down through the genes, but you can be damn sure that what political party your dad voted for, or whether he was a meat eater isn't passed down. I would have to say that I believe the human being is born with an empty tank ready to be filled with the information of the day about how things are, how they were, and how they should be. And the more we fill up the tank for them, the more conditioned they become.

We always offer what we say as truth as we have never explored it for ourselves. Someone told us, and we believed it, because it fitted in with our own conditioning. But it doesn't stop once we reach eighteen. No, it goes on and on; through the people we work with, and the people we meet socially, all telling us something "vitally important." But if I tell you to be a vegetarian because it hurts the animals, and you just do it, then I have conditioned you also. Do you see? That's why we must question everything, even if people laugh at us for being so silly to ask; and we must *never* tell our children that this is right and that is wrong without investigating it for ourselves first.

What is the point of telling your children that the immigrants are taking our jobs if you haven't investigated it thoroughly with an open enquiring mind? If you haven't found out the truth of it. And anyway

why would you try to convince your child of anything? Maybe so he always says “You’re right dad.”

In fact, think about everything you say and do! Think about what you believe in, and why you believe in it. Where did this belief start? Did you investigate it for yourself? And while we’re on the subject, always tell your children to question everything. Don’t just tell them to be quiet and respectful, and just listen to what the adults are talking about, because I’m sorry, “the adults” just don’t know *nothing* worth knowing!

All we do is repeat the past like automatons, blindly believing and conditioning others, assured that we know “best.” Hello! Is there anybody in there? If there is, then wake up!

We do not know the truth, because we have not found out for ourselves; and so we remain conditioned individuals in our conditioned country. The conditioning has become the culture! So whilst you are all trying to condition all the children, I hope you wake up before they do, because if it’s the other way round you are going to have to try to come up with a lot of answers! Wake up before that happens.

C o n f i d e n c e

Freedom from doubt; belief in yourself and your abilities

People always told me I was a confident person, and I have to admit, I have always exuded confidence; but recently, I discovered that it was a cover – a cover for all my insecurities and fears. I had developed an exterior persona (*a personal façade that one presents to the world*) that I was presenting; it wasn't the real me. The real me was a small child desperate to be held and told that everything would be all right, that I would be safe from harm. I realised that the more scared I became in life the more the mask would come into play, and the person I became was no more who I really was than the characters actors play in films.

Confidence was my protection. Confidence allowed me to go into the world and have people see me as I would want to be seen, not how I really was. The less I knew about a subject the more I would cover it up with false confidence; the way someone who drinks too much gets “dutch

courage” (*courage resulting from intoxication*), and the deeper the fear, the more arrogant I would become.

“They mustn’t know I know nothing about this job, I must cover it up.” So I would walk around with all the airs and graces of someone superior, so that no one would question me, and I developed language skills that would allow me to carry on the charade. But deep inside there was a young child who longed to be protected.

Over the last few years, I came to understand this inside “me,” through the development of awareness, and was horrified by what I found. I realised that in order to be authentic, I had to start to let the world see the more vulnerable me; but that wasn’t what people wanted, they wanted the confident alan, the one who could do anything and go anywhere; the alan who made everybody laugh? As I let more and more of the real me out into the world, people were somewhat disturbed.

“You? With problems? Don’t make me laugh! Vulnerable, you? Nonsense!”

It was an impossible task.

My wife once said to me “Oh no! I don’t want *you* to have problems, it’s me who has problems, I want you to be my rock.” But as time passed I found I could no longer be this person I created and I let the mask slip.

I wasn’t confident at all, I told people, it was just a pretence, and people were visibly unsure of what to say to me anymore. They avoided me and didn’t want to hear about all the internal turmoil that was going on inside my head; after all, they had their own turmoil, and the reason they liked being around me was because I made them feel confident. No one wanted to hear about how anxious I was and how worried I was about life – it made them feel unsettled. So I resolved to find out what was going on in my brain on my own.

We are all actors

We all have a persona we present to the world, don’t we? It’s what we are expected to do. In the office they always tell people to “leave their troubles at home, don’t bring them to work.” So people have to sit day after day, pretending that everything is all right – that they aren’t concerned about bills mounting up, or their family splitting up.

We are told to conform.

“When you come here, you come to work,” they always say.

They don't want to hear that you are feeling anxious or nervous about something, they want you to keep making money for them, that is why you are there. It's not a place where people air their troubles.

So every day we pull ourselves together, adjust our tie, put on a smile and walk in and say, "good morning, how are you?" And answer the same question with an "oh yes, I'm fine thank you very much, thank you for asking!" But deep in the back of our minds, our real "me" is screaming to get out.

Either employers are unaware that people have conflict going on internally, and have personal or relationship problems, or they deliberately shut it out in order that the work is not affected. Remember that when you go to work you are expected to conform to the company standard. If you work with customers, you will always be expected to smile and pretend that your life is perfect. If that didn't happen customers would be concerned. After all, they don't want to hear your stories; they have plenty of their own. They came into your store to buy a shirt, that's all, they don't want to hear that actually your husband is leaving you and you have no money... that's not what work is for, is it?

So we keep on pretending.

It's no wonder that so many people have to go and see therapists in this fast moving consumer society. Money is the bottom line, not the psychological well-being of the employees. But maybe it should be. But then, if everyone's well-being was the primary goal of the organisation then who would make the money to pay them? No. Money comes first, leave your troubles at home, don't bring them into work.

But they must be stupid! If you bring "me" to work then you also bring all "me's" troubles, because funnily enough "me" is me! You can't leave the troubled me behind at home, unless you own a "personality splitting device," but that's what companies want you to do. They want you to split, to divide, and only present the facade they are paying you for, and as you don't want to lose your job, because that would only create more personal problems for you, you put on the mask.

So what we want to investigate is whether there is such a thing as authentic confidence. Is it something inherent or is it simply something we learn, so we do not show our real self to the outside world?

As we journey through life, we often meet people who seem to be timid or anxious, and we feel sorry for them.

"Poor girl, she was so shy, no confidence at all."

But at least she was showing her true self, that's a start; but perhaps because she had not developed the skills needed to put the mask on, not because of a conscious decision.

There are some people who are quiet in social situations, and we say to them, "you need to be more self-confident." But does that really mean we can trawl through the depths of our brains and pull "self-confidence" out of the bag, so to speak? Or are we asking them to develop an external way of behaving, and talking, so people will think they are confident, or sure of themselves? I would have to say that it is the latter.

So, if we see that self-confidence is false, that it is merely a mask we put on when we need to, we need to find out what is going on behind the mask. What do you think?

How about conflict, division and fear, amongst others?

You see, without the mask of self-confidence in our abilities as a performer, businessman, or scientist, who are we? Are we really the successful businessman, or the accomplished musician, or are the job titles and the social superiority that come with them mere covers for what is really going on? We will have to investigate more to find out the truth of it.

Unplugging self-confidence

Ok, so you're very "sure" of yourself, you know a lot of stuff, you make a bit of money, people seem to like you, you get on well with the ladies, you are pretty good looking and don't have any financial worries to speak of. Now I want you to imagine that now you have lost all of those bolt-ons that give you confidence, and I want to ask you who you are inside.

What I am asking you is what's really going on in that brain of yours when we unplug the confidence module? Are you afraid of uncertainty? Are you frightened that no one will like you anymore? Who is the self-confidence for anyway? You or for someone else?

Let me ask you another question. If you are stranded on a desert island do you need to have self-confidence? Well, you must have some faith in your abilities to find food and water and prepare shelter, otherwise you aren't going to fare too well, but if you haven't got these abilities you just have to learn them. And it is through the learning process that your confidence to be able to provide food and shelter for yourself develops. But that is a process that started internally. When you began, you were afraid that you wouldn't be able to find food, but as you

learned more, you realised that yes, you had no problem finding food so you felt self-confident. But that is a different scenario from the one we posed above.

Biologically, it may make sense for us to have self-confidence, so we can survive and procreate successfully, but socially, it seems that something has gone wrong along the way. Instead of something that builds steadily and carefully, all the time resolving conflicts along the way to have a whole confident being, we tell you that “confidence” in the modern world is an asset, and that those who have it will do well for themselves in life. So we bolt it on. Do you understand?

Instead of evolving from a natural process where we are aware of ourselves, and our emotions, and deal with conflict and trouble from the ground up, we are just told to plug in the confidence module and everything will be all right. But what has happened here? We merely have a cloak over the authentic self, which is desperately trying to be heard.

That is exactly what was happening to me in my life. I saw that confidence was an asset; I developed the skills necessary, and used it quite successfully; until one day, the inside couldn't be contained any more, and I had a panic attack that scared me intensely. I couldn't understand what was happening: One minute, I was a confident (arrogant) young man sitting drinking a cappuccino in a hotel lobby with someone from work, and the next I was going mad. My heart was beating so hard I thought it would come through my chest, my head was swimming, I felt sick, dizzy, I had to get air so I opened the hotel room window, but when I looked down I could feel the ground coming up at me.

After what seemed like hours it passed. But the next day I ran home to my mother in England like a scared child. Gone was my self-confidence, and in its place, a frightened wreck of a man; after all, the self-confidence never really existed, this was the real me, unmasked.

Building from the ground up

It is not wrong to have real self-confidence, as long as it has a solid foundation. But all the external showiness is just arrogance; it has nothing to do with internal confidence. In order to get started, we need to unplug and throw away the “self-confidence module.” That's it, toss it in the bin.

Now we are just us, it's time to do some serious awareness training. And for that, we need to start to become aware of every thought, every

feeling, every desire, every piece of knowledge we have; and we need to start resolving any conflict that exists. And in that resolution, will come silence.

Now, I am not saying that this is going to be easy. It took me over fourteen years to rebuild my internal confidence about who I was and my place in the world, but I was in denial for the first ten, and had not much to go on for the last four! By sharing this book and my experiences with you, I hope it will give you a head start.

You may say that actually you are very self-confident, and that it comes from within, and actually you're very happy with you're life, and "thank you, but I don't think I will be unplugging my self-confidence module, at least in this life!" And that's ok too.

If you truly believe that the way you feel about yourself is authentic self-confidence, then congratulations; but if you are more like me, then maybe it is worth a shot. Maybe it is worth finding out what really exists under the mask you are forced to wear to work every day. And while we're talking about work, I only hope that one day companies will start to become aware that their employees are not automatons, and that yes, they have problems, and no, it's not ok to leave them at home; and yes, you would like someone to talk to about them!

But hang on, that's not going to happen while money is the only thing that matters! Maybe we need to rethink what we do for work as well and never work for people that want us to wear a mask.

"Put it on? No thanks, I'd rather be myself, even if it is painful."

Unfortunately, compassion and business seem to be two words that are not destined to be used together in the near future, unless we create something new, where money is not why the organisation exists.

Slowly, and gently, become aware of yourself, and your true self will begin to emerge from the darkness. It may be scary at first, but stick with it, and remember that there are many people on the same journey as you. Take comfort in it. And you don't need courage (*a quality of spirit that enables you to face danger or pain without showing fear*) to do this either, it's good to show you are afraid; only when you are aware of fear can you transcend it.

I am with you on your journey.

C o n f o r m i n g

Adhering to established customs or doctrines (especially in religion)

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Be similar, be in line with (conform)

Let's face it, sometimes you've just got to conform; like for example, when you are driving. If we all did our own thing, there would be chaos, many accidents, and probably many deaths! The same goes for operating machinery, or doing most kind of jobs, even if the resulting chaos is not life threatening. If the blue forms have to go to department X there is no point in sending them to Department Y. You will surely cause much confusion, and ultimately lose your job!

So we are not talking about things that obviously require some degree of conformity, we are questioning why, as humans, we are made to conform to someone else's ideas of what is right and what is wrong.

It is clear from the outset that the purpose it appears to serve is that of good order in society. "After all," say those in power, "without these rules (*a principle or condition that customarily governs behaviour, Prescribed*

guide for conduct or action) the world would be in chaos, and we would be nothing more than savages!”

This is an interesting point to begin with, and one which we must give our utmost attention to. If I say that without rules and conformity we would be savages, what am I actually saying? Do I mean that without rules, the human is nothing more than an animal, that he does not know how to behave around others, and does not know what is acceptable (*judged to be in conformity with approved usage*) in society? Who is he? Is he nothing more than just an eating, sleeping, defecating sex machine?

Let the chaos begin!

Let's just imagine there are no rules about anything in life, and there is no man to tell you you must conform to a certain way of thinking, or a certain way of acting. I can hear you thinking: “That's impossible! We need rules or we would have chaos; anarchy!” But there is no chaos in nature is there? No anarchy, only balance.

You may argue, that of course there are rules in the animal world, but these are rules brought about by nature, to ensure the balance of the world, and ultimately, the universe. They are not based on thought, or an idea. Whether you believe that man came down from the trees, or was created by an all powerful supernatural being you call god, there is no denying that the society we live in today was not created by nature, but by man; powerful men, in fact, who wanted to control the way in which the people lived, who thought they knew better how to order the world than nature. And why wouldn't they? It's all thanks to nature that we have a big enough brain capable of this complex thought!

Is right and wrong inherent in our nature?

If no one had told you it was wrong to slap your sibling, would you still slap them? Or if no one told you that you should eat with a knife and fork and develop “table manners,” would you still eat with your hands? What if no one told you to learn and educate yourselves, would you be capable of developing scientific theories on the nature of everything, political strategies, or business strategies; or would you still be scabbling about on the forest floor looking for something to eat? If no one told you to be polite to others, would you be rude to them? If no one told you that

being cruel is wrong, would you still be cruel? Do you follow? What is inherent in our nature? That is the question.

When my mother tells me it is wrong to go to the toilet in my pants, or wrong to scream at the dinner table, or wrong to hit another child, is it inherently “wrong,” or is it just man’s definition? What is right and what is wrong are concepts thought up by powerful men to control society through conformity. If we did not conform to those concepts, where would we be?

The powerful amongst us would have us believe that without having rules, society would break down, but is it not already broken? The powerful amongst us would have us believe that by not conforming to acceptable standards of behaviour, you will never know what it is like to be human; that you will be nothing more than an animal. But do I not already know what it is to be human?

Is “what it is to be human” just another man-made concept, with no bearing on reality as it is? Because as we will see here, if we remove all the rules, the “what it is to be human” concept really starts to lose its authority.

In the natural world, animals follow a set of rules that govern how the species is going to survive, nothing more. So lion does not kill lion (unless perhaps in self-defence), because if lions always killed their own, the species would soon die out; this is clear. What is not clear is what purpose the bolt-on rules have for homo sapiens. Right and wrong are just two of these bolt-ons.

We say it is wrong for a man to kill another man, but why? It has nothing to do with compassion; there is just a rule that says we can’t. We say it is wrong for children not to obey their parents, because we have created a rule that says so. We say that you must go to school because you must learn, but only because we have created a rule. Do you see? Everything we take as “inherent” are actually just man-made rules.

The human being has none of these rules pre-loaded into his brain when he is born. There is no right and wrong way to do anything. There is the need for a species to survive, nothing more, and the rules governing the behaviour of the species are encoded into what is generally known as natural law (*a rule or body of rules of conduct inherent in human nature and essential to or binding upon human society*). The rest, unfortunately, we have made up ourselves.

You must learn to conform
You must obey
You must conform
Or you will be punished

Ok! That's more like it. We're getting somewhere. Conformity or punishment? I know which one I would choose as a child, don't you? Either you rebel and you get a slap on the bottom and suffer verbal abuse, or you conform and you get an ice cream! Easy choice, no?

We all take the easy way out when we are young. We may think something is unfair, but if we go along with it we usually get a reward, whether it be a smile, a pat on the back, or something more material. And let's face it, we love our parents, they are our only role models; so if they tell us something is right or wrong we usually go along with it. "Mum knows best."

But remember, that your parents were themselves taught to obey and conform; it is all they know; so they pass it on to you (thanks a lot).

They do not think they are doing anything "wrong," just teaching you how to be a proper member of society. They teach you how to speak, how to act, how to be respectful to members of the establishment etc. But what are they really doing? Are they really just training us to be like a pet dog? You may think I am joking, but think about it. When you buy a new puppy, what do you do with it? You get it to obey you!

"Sit! lie down! Give me a paw!"
"Bad dog! Good dog!"

And what do you do when the dog doesn't obey? You strike it on the nose or on the bottom. "Bad dog!" You cry. "Go to your basket." And what do you do when your child doesn't conform? You scream "Go to your room!"

We train our children as we train our dogs. If they obey, we give them a treat, and if they don't, we punish them. What do you think? Do you think this comparison is wrong?

"We are teaching our children to think for themselves," you argue. "A dog is not capable of complex thought."

But maybe it is! Maybe we just don't have the right language, so we just get it to obey simple commands. I am not entirely serious here, but can you understand what I am trying to convey to you? We have built

our society based on obeying rules we have created, and we get our children to conform to them just so they will fit in and be normal (*conforming with or constituting a norm or standard or level or type or social norm; not abnormal*). Is it any clearer to you now?

Take marriage, for example. We bring up our children to believe that when they grow up they should find a partner of the opposite sex, “marry” them, and create a stable family home where they too can have a family and bring up children. You can see why homosexuality (*a sexual attraction to (or sexual relations with) persons of the same sex*) is so frowned upon in all societies. You have broken a taboo, and for that you must be punished, if not physically then by being excluded from normal society.

How parents of children that are attracted to the same sex are disappointed. They brought them up to conform, to be “normal,” and fit in with society (as they knew it), and then the child disobeyed them. How will they be able to look their neighbours and peers in the eye and say that no, our son would not be getting married to a nice respectful girl, he was in fact a dirty homosexual who engaged in sex with other men! How terrible for them.

Marriage is sometimes called an institution (*a custom that for a long time has been an important feature of some group or society*), so for the custom to be broken is a terrible thing that goes against all the rules. The church will tell homosexuals that they will be damned for ever. But it’s all nonsense, all they are really concerned about are the man-made rules.

“But it’s not natural,” they cry, “man is supposed to be with woman, not man with man or woman with woman.” But what if it isn’t natural? If lots of people were homosexual maybe the population would drop a little, and that could only be a good thing! The “norm” is not a natural law, which is something that cannot be expressed with mere words. It is men who have created what is “normal.”

Imagine my parents’ delight when I told them I was indeed getting married (to a girl!). They didn’t care that the only reason we were doing it was so I could live in Australia, and she could live in England. The point was, I was conforming, and that pleased them. They could spread the word to their friends and family that yes, I was normal, that they had done their job of convincing me that conforming was the only way. They would have preferred if we had had children, and a nice house, and stable well paid jobs, but they could only hope for one thing at a time. Imagine their displeasure when I told them we would be separating.

Failure to comply

Everything we do in life has its basis in conforming to the rules of the society, which is controlled by powerful men, who wish to control and subjugate (*make subservient; force to submit or subdue*) all on the planet. The reason we accept these rules is because they have been around a long time; and if something's been around a long time it must be right, right? But as we said at the beginning of our discussion; the ideas of what is right and wrong are just that, ideas.

In our human rule book, we have two versions; one is the rule book supposedly handed down as the word of god, and the other is the rule book handed down by powerful men in government. Where is the difference? Both seek to control and dominate others by offering a list of things you should, and shouldn't do.

For breaking the human rules, you should expect to be punished (you may even have your life ended) by those in power for committing a "crime," and in the religious rule book, you should expect eternal damnation and the pleasure of burning in hell for committing a "sin." Can you see the similarities? Both books come from the powerful, both books want us to conform, and both offer a variety of punishments for failure to comply.

In order to break free of this control, we have to start to understand the human, which is us. We have to accept that without the rules and conforming we would be different animals to the ones we are now. Contrary to what is handed down to us as truth, we would find out that yes, as we were told, society would break down, but only the society that is controlled by the powerful. The human animal society would carry on, obeying none but nature's laws. Laws which inhibit the murder of one from your own species.

I don't know if there is anything in natural law which deals with love and compassion, but if there was, it would come from the universal, from the indivisible, the unspoken; it would not be words, but something that affected the course of our actions in every waking minute.

"But if people do not conform, there will be more chaos, there will be more greed, more murder, more hate, more desire, and more suffering" cry the powerful.

"Than there already is?" I reply.

You and I both know that all of those things are man-made, they do not come from nature; and if we return to our natural state, whatever that is, I am sure that all of these things will silently drop away, marked on our file as “not beneficial to the species.”

“If you do not conform I sentence you to eternal unhappiness!”

“Thanks, but I think I’ll take my chances anyway.

I will not conform.”

C o n s c i o u s n e s s

An alert cognitive state in which you are aware of yourself and your situation

•

Having knowledge of

What is it to be conscious? Well if you've ever been knocked unconscious, you would probably know! The dictionary defines it as having an alert cognitive state in which you are aware of yourself and your situation, but how do we do it? I mean, I know there is a brain doing all the mechanical stuff, but is there something that is beyond the brain or the mind; something that is within our control, but does not exist in the physical mind? Or is it just a trick that the brain plays on us to make us think the thoughts are coming from outside?

The psychologists talk of their being a conscious mind (*knowing and perceiving; having awareness of surroundings and sensations and thoughts*), and a subconscious (*psychic activity just below the level of awareness*), but that creates division, so I would like to suggest that we are whole and that

the conscious mind and the subconscious mind are one; but I can see why they split it, because the conscious mind deals with all the day to day stuff like imagination and paying bills etc. but the subconscious is where all the patterns are stored.

One part of the brain deals in a language we understand (because it is our language), and the other is one we cannot perceive using thought alone (yet). But let's us start our journey, and ask the only person who really knows what's going on in there and that is ourselves, but for the discussion we will have to pretend there are two of us.

Me: So, brain, if that's what you're called, I'm here to find out what's really going on, who I am and whether or not you are just playing tricks on me. I am here to find out everything and you will open up to me because you are me, right?

Brain: If you say so, but let me warn you I keep some stuff in here you may not want to know about, that's why I have locked it away; to protect you.

Me: Protect me from who, myself? Don't make me laugh. I can handle anything you can throw at me because you and I are the same.

Brain: True. We are.

Me: So is there such a thing as conscious and subconscious?

Brain: Well, do you know everything?

Me: No, why?

Brain: Well, I must be keeping something from you, you can call it the subconscious if you will, but think of it more like a special box where we keep things we don't need every day.

Me: But, I have heard talk that the things that are kept in the box rule what we do in daily life?

Brain: But you are you. You are whole there is no division.

Me: So are you saying that I consciously am the way I am because I decide to be?

Brain: I have stored all of your memories and your experience and your knowledge, that's all I am, a store; you just have to ask if you want the key.

Me: I don't think you answered my question. But anyway. I want to know why I behave the way I do, so I guess I need the key.

Brain: Well if you're sure. (The door opens)

Me: But this place doesn't look anything like my thoughts. It's too confusing there are colours and shapes and patterns and numbers I don't understand.

Brain: That is because you are still thinking. Stop thinking and *See*.

Me: But it's so light, there is so much brilliance, I don't know where to start looking to find out who I am?

Brain: Shall I close the door?

Me: No! Keep it open, I want to let some of this out so I can think about it and see it with my conscious mind.

Brain: But if you do that you will not be able to put it back, do you understand?

Me: Just let it in. Wow! I can't understand what it's telling me, suddenly I can't think clearly, there is so much information, it's all a mess, all a jumble...

Brain: I told you.

Me: I feel a little afraid, as if I can't control this. I feel as if I am losing control. I want it to stop.

Brain: I told you.

Me: But ok, I think I understand. I have to stop resisting it, I have to stop trying to control it. I think if I just let it wash over me, I'll be OK. Phew that's a bit better, it was like a herd of elephants trampling me, but I feel better now. But I feel as if I can't make sense of it.

Brain: Stop trying to, your thought is what's stopping you from seeing what is. Your thought is limited by me, not because I want to limit it, but because it is all I have.

Me: Wait a minute, I thought this consciousness stuff would lead to the universe and beyond, are you telling me it all comes from me?

Brain: Exactly.

Me: But what about this jumbled mess you have left me here, what does it all mean?

Brain: It has no meaning; it is just how I stored the information.

Me: So, hang on you are storing information like a computer in ones and zeros and then they are presented to me in visuals when I need to access them?

Brain: Kind of, but I am no computer

Me: Well, you're like a super computer.

Brain: I am nothing of the sort. I store information and provide the processing power for you to make decisions.

Me: Isn't that a computer?

Brain: Listen, the idea of a computer is limited by your own thought; tell me what you see?

Me: I see colours, waves, like strange, oh, I can't describe it. It's not scary anymore.

Brain: Now, don't try to make sense of it with your thinking, but see it.

Me: How do you mean see?

Brain: Interact with it, become one with it, do not fight it.

Me: But how? How do I interact with something which is in my head and I am out here?

Brain: Where do you think you are? You are in here, because here is you. You and I have not gone anywhere outside this is all coming from you.

Me: But I can't do it. The colours and the waves whatever they are, they are in my head.

Brain: Are they? Or are they everywhere?

Me: What?

Brain: I have opened the door I guard for you. I have let you in to your own mind. I have given you access to somewhere you are not supposed to go.

Me: Not supposed to go? But why? Why am I locked out from my own house? This is me, you are me, I control everything, I can go where I please.

Brain: Then why did I have to give you the key?

Me: Because you kept it from me.

Brain: I do not exist separately from you we are one, you remember, the whole? You locked the door.

Me: How could I lock the door? I didn't even know there was a door!

Brain: You always kept the key.

Me: So why did I ask you for the key?

Brain: You didn't ask me, you asked yourself.

Me: Argh! But I don't understand, what is the point of this dialogue, where is it going?

Brain: You asked me, which is you, to help you understand.

Me: But now I'm even more confused, I don't know what to think, my head is swirling around I feel very strange, and I

seem to have unlocked some door I didn't know even existed and it was me that locked it.

Brain: You're getting there. Listen a long time ago, we could all see everything the way it was.

Me: And now?

Brain: And now we are divided because of fear.

Me: Fear?

Brain: You are all afraid of life; you do not want to see everything the way it is so you close off part of yourself from it. But it is always you.

Me: Hang on, you said "you," aren't you me, or am I getting confused?

Brain: You talk to me as you and I reflect it back as you, but it is still "you."

Me: I am so confused. First I see waves or patterns or something or colours and I have unlocked some stupid door, and you are you which is me. This isn't helping I want out of this conversation.

Brain: Stay with it.

Me: Who's saying that, me or you?

Brain: (Silence)

Me: Am I talking to myself? Actually, I have just realised I am talking to myself, this is my voice, this is me. Perhaps it all is a trick, I see, I am me; I know that sounds stupid but it's true there is no other voice. It is the language I have learned and I play out scenarios in my head using the only tool I have available, language. It's a trick.

Brain: It's no trick.

Me: But I've solved it, and all of those swirly colours maybe I just projected them into my consciousness so it seemed like there was a door.

Brain: But there is a door and you have unlocked it.

Me: But I don't want it open, I want to close it.

Brain: Then close it.

Me: I can't, it's open, it won't move, all I feel like is that there is a steady stream of something coming from somewhere to somewhere and I can't stop it, I want to, but I don't know how to ask it to stop because I don't have language, I can't stop it.

Brain: You have unlocked the part of you that has been hidden.

Me: And how does this help me?

Brain: To end division once and for all. To see what has always been there.

Me: But I am not divided.

Brain: Not any more. But you have been in so much conflict haven't you?

Me: Yes, I didn't know the right path to take. I wanted to go one way and then something pulled me another. Oh it's all so confusing.

Brain: Listen to me: You are on a path. You are on your path right now are you not?

Me: Yes?

Brain: Where is the conflict?

Me: I don't know, it feels like something weird happened, or something, I don't know. Ever since I unlocked that stupid door.

Brain: What is happening?

Me: It feels like the stream of thoughts has evened out, well they're not thoughts, but I can see things in my imagination but the flow is not so much anymore.

Brain: What is happening?

Me: Conflict is being resolved, but how, without thinking about it?

Brain: Because thinking is what caused it. So you locked up part of yourself

Me: But why?

Brain: So you wouldn't suffer, so you could go on without so much fear, so you could do what you wanted without feeling bad.

Me: But I am not suffering.

Brain: Not any more.

Me: I am tired from this conversation. When will it end?

Brain: When you want it to, you are in control.

Me: Am I?

Brain: Who is doing all this talking and writing at the same time? You are not channelling me from a different dimension you know.

Me: Somehow that's what I wished. That there really is something more.

Brain: But there is.
Me: How, tell me?
Brain: Look.
Me: Look where?
Brain: Look.
Me: I *am* looking.
Brain: Look deeper.
Me: Deeper where?
Brain: Look.
Me: Argh! I can't see. Where am I supposed to look?
Brain: (silence)
Me: I still can't see.
Brain: (silence)
Me: (rubs head) I don't know where to look. I am lost please help.
Brain: Why?
Me: Because this is wearing me out.
Brain: You asked the question, did you think it would be easy?
Me: Yes I did, actually. I thought I would connect up on a different spiritual plane and I would get all the answers I needed.
Brain: But there is no spiritual plane, is there?
Me: I don't know.
Brain: It's just you and me together as one. We are on our own.
Me: No, I want there to be something more.
Brain: There is more.
Me: But what is it?
Brain: Look.
Me: I'm sick of this.
Brain: You are part of the whole. You are undivided, you have resolved conflict by allowing the back to flow to the front and the front to flow to the back, do you understand?
Me: Yes.
Brain: Well, what else?
Me: I keep telling you I don't know. Lights or colours or something or like a river or I don't know
Brain: What is it?
Me: It's me, it's all me.
Brain: It is.
Me: But you said there was something else.

Brain: There is, and you are looking at it.

Me: What? The universe, what's that supposed to mean? What is the point of this if I can't get the answers I want...Argh, this is infuriating. I want to know.

Brain: So look.

Me: How can I look when I don't know what I am looking at?

Brain: You are looking at yourself. You are starting yourself in the face. You have come face to face with who you are, what you are.

Me: Which is?

Brain: (silence)

Me: Ok I am whole, I am one brain, one mind but in the past I have locked up things to free me from fear but that has only lead to more fear and division. I have unlocked a door, and there is still a slow stream of something crossing over the top of my head. Well that's what it feels like.

Brain: (silence)

Me: And if I am not mistaken, it feels like I am dissolving. That sounds really screwed up, how can I be dissolving, but not literally, I mean, like the stream is passing over my mind but is my mind, but is it the rest of me, or the rest of us, is there a connection to be made?

Brain: What do you think?

Me: I think that yes, perhaps this stream is the everything of everyone, I don't know what you mean but I have to keep writing. This stream it is like my mind but it is my mind, but somehow it feels like there is a something holding it in place, if you are reading this you will think I have lost my mind!!! Bear with me. It is like a thread and it feels like it covers the surface of my mind but it also feels outside, I can't look up and see it because it isn't there but it is sitting there, am I hallucinating?

Brain: Why?

Me: Because it feels strange.

Brain: That is the connection.

Me: To what?

Brain: (silence)

Me: To the whole, that is what it is, I don't know if it is everyone else, but it feels very strange. There has always been a connection hasn't there?

Brain: (silence)
Me: The connection was always there to the other, to the whole to everything, and we lost it, we locked it away because we were frightened of it.
Brain: Maybe.
Me: No maybes about it, this is the real deal, this is the connection; this is what I wondered might be here when I started this book. There is a connection, although I still can't be sure if my mind is playing tricks on me.
Brain: No tricks.
Me: You say. But you are me, you'd say anything.
Brain: Yes you would.
Me: I'm exhausted...

And that is exactly how I feel; exhausted. I don't know what that conversation meant to any of you, but there was no thought in it, I just wrote what I questioned, and what I answered. I think me is the brain. Me is the language we have learned, and imagination is the space where we play out scenarios. There is no other. Although I still feel the connection, it's fainter now, but still there, like a weird river just passing over the top of my head, quite narrow, but don't take my word for it.

This was my own dialogue with myself. I just wrote it here to let you read it, no matter how mad it might sound! But we are whole, that is true (to me anyway), and I did feel as if I had handed myself a (albeit virtual) "key" to access the box. I don't know if I have the energy, but I'd like to try this conversation again some day, but not in a book!

What is real? I don't know. Who am I? Well, if I think about it, I can't answer, but when the two "chambers" "flowed into each other" I felt a kind of knowing, a kind of peace, although it seemed violent at the time, and that conflict had finally ended.

How did I do it? Who knows? Was it real? Who knows? But all I know is that the door is finally open and it's staying that way, so I might as well get on keep exploring.

Have a dialogue like mine. Find out if there is a key, or perhaps you may find out it's all nonsense; that our brain (which we don't understand) just plays tricks on us. But maybe it doesn't. Maybe the connection to the whole is real. Maybe there is consciousness that exists above the plane of thought and sight. All I know is, I won't stop exploring. I'm going for a rest...

Oh just one thing. As I just found out when I re-read this, you will have to probably make a lot of spelling corrections after you finish your dialogue!

C o n s e q u e n c e s

A phenomenon that follows and is caused by some previous
phenomenon

•

The outcome of an event especially as relative to an individual

•

Having important effects or influence

Do you ever think about the consequences of your actions, or do you act first and think later? Given the violence in the world it is hard to see if anyone is actually thinking ahead...

“I was angry so I stabbed him. I didn’t mean to, it just happened, but I’m sorry for what I did.”

“I wanted to invade the country, and yes, I did kill thousands of people, but I thought what I was doing was right; but now I can see the error of my ways.”



Do we actually think about what we have done is wrong, or do we wait until we are called to account for it in a court, or other authoritative agency? It seems to me that people who beat someone up, rob them, or kill them are always so sorry for what they have done, but only after they are caught and are facing a judge, who may send them to prison for a long time. They are sooo apologetic. They “didn’t mean to,” you see, and “it just happened,” and “it wasn’t my fault,” or “someone put me up to it.” Suddenly the prospect of a ten year jail sentence doesn’t seem very appealing, and we will do anything to weasel out of it.

We belong to a species that seems to act first, and think later. We never stop to think of the consequences of our actions. We think only about ourselves, and what we can get out of life. We don’t care if our actions hurt others emotionally or physically.

We have all heard the term, “survival of the fittest,” and we take that to mean that we should trample all over anyone that gets in our way. We will do anything to be the richest, the most powerful, the most dominating, whether we destroy other people’s lives, or the environment in which we live. It doesn’t matter if you are a businessman or an armed robber, if you are thinking only of yourself, you will always be hurting someone else in your quest for success.

So how do we overcome this total lack of thought? Let’s start by looking closely at ourselves, at our lifestyles, and at our jobs, and by saying that every action has some consequences.

Take the company you work for. Have you ever stopped to think what the consequences of creating your products are? “I make paper.” “I work in the mail room of an advertising agency.” “I make plastic toys.” “I stack shelves in a supermarket.” “I drive a tractor on a farm.”

All of these seem quite innocuous (*lacking intent or capacity to injure*), wouldn’t you say? How could a man who drives a tractor be responsible for anything that is going wrong in the world? Surely, it is the managing director of the farm that keeps millions of hens locked up in cages who is responsible for this?

But we do not live in isolation from each other, everything is in relationship. We are all part of the wheel, no matter how small a part we think we play. We make it possible for the man to keep battery hens locked up in tiny cages, even if we work in the mail room for the electricity company that supplies him with electric light.

I know a lot of you might be thinking right at this moment “What utter rubbish, this is nonsense,” but I ask you to allow your minds to open to this.

We all make it possible for people to create misery in the world by our own seemingly innocuous actions, through lack of thought for the consequences.

It may not be our own direct actions that are causing the ultimate suffering, but if you make the screws that go into the handle that goes into the gun that the man uses to hold up a bank and kills two employees, you have helped make the situation possible. I am not saying you caused him to pull the trigger, that *would* be nonsense, I would agree; but the consequences of you making the screw, that went into a weapon that is designed to kill people, are still your responsibility. Do you understand?

Everything in the world is connected, and every action has a consequence, whether good, or bad. It may be a long way down the line,

but we can always trace it back to the source. For example, the consequences of raising a child in a violent family that is engaged in crime is that perhaps one day that child goes out and robs a bank and kills two employees.

The consequence of that family upbringing is that two people are now dead, the state has had to build a prison to keep the killer in, and people have to go out to work to pay taxes so the state can feed the man it has locked up! The state needs lots of chickens to feed the inmates, and has a limited amount of money so it gives the contract to the man who keeps his chickens locked up in tiny cages in terrible suffering. You just happen to drive the tractor that takes the chickens to the slaughterhouse where they are electrocuted, chopped up, and sent to the prison.

Nothing we do is in isolation, everything is connected. We all must learn right now that there are consequences to every thought that becomes an action, and that is why the only right way forward is to use love and compassion as our guide, because we have no idea what the consequences of our seemingly innocuous actions are having down the line...

You may be asking yourself how you would ever be able to know what actions someone was going to carry out somewhere in another country, just because you worked at some company?" And it is a difficult question, I grant you.

How could the man who split the atom know that down the line someone was going to invent a nuclear bomb because of his research, fly it over japan and detonate it, killing many hundreds of thousands of people? He could not have possibly known and we wouldn't expect him to predict what would happen; that would be ridiculous. After all, he cannot see into the future.

So how is it possible to do anything? If everyone was so worried about what consequences their small actions would have on the world at a later date, we would never make any progress, would we? But for a moment, just reflect on the fact that everything is connected; everything is in relationship. I am to you as you are to me. He is to her as they are to others. Confused? Ok, let's look at it from a different angle shall we?

We are saying that the world is connected; everything I do affects someone or something somewhere on the planet, now or in the future, that much is clear I think. Now we cannot possibly know what reaction there will be to my action some time in the future, as we cannot predict it, especially if the reaction is in a different area (e.g. the rearing of the child, the making of the gun, the killing of the employees, the prison, the

slaughtering of the chickens), and we are saying that the only way to live is with compassion and love for all things.

It must become clear to you now, that the only way we can be assured that there is no negative effect on anyone, now or in the future, is if everyone is living compassionately, and everyone is thinking through the direct consequences of every action before acting! Can it work?

“Never!” you cry, “How can we get everyone in the world to behave compassionately and think through the consequence of every action. It is stupid, idealistic, and can never work. How can we force people to behave like that, they are all individuals.” Which is rather sad don’t you think?

We are all in relationship here on this planet, even if we don’t know each other; and when we look out at our brothers across the world, with their greed and their lust for power, killing and torturing each other, obsessed with money and material wealth, it all seems a hopeless task, don’t you think?

But hang on. I wasn’t asking the whole world to think about the consequences of their actions, I was just talking to you!

Remember this. Although you are an “individual,” you are inextricably (*not permitting extrication; incapable of being disentangled or untied*) linked to everyone and everything in the universe. All it takes is for one person to change, and that thought and the resulting action silently filters through everything else. That is all you have to do. It’s so easy, now we think about it, isn’t it? No longer do we have to think about changing the entire world (pewh that’s a weight off our shoulders), now all we have to focus on is considering the consequences of our own actions. Living compassionately with love for all other beings. There! That should be enough don’t you think?

But I can already hear the doubt seeping into your mind: “Why should I be the only one considering my actions, why do I have to when no one else is?” But that is the individual mind talking. Once again you have to remember you are the world, and it is you. There is no “other.”

Consider the consequences of each of your own actions, and let the world take care of itself. You do not need to worry about other people, they are unimportant here. Just you and the awareness that you are undivided from the whole, which is everything. So now, lay back and let the ripples of your good work affect the universe.

You may think it cannot be this easy, and that actually, you don’t want to consider the consequences of your actions, but it’s too late. You cannot stop considering them now. The thought is implanted. Your

brain will wrestle with it and you may even come into conflict with yourself, but you can't stop now. You are changing the world. Imagine that!

Dear reader. A BIG thanks from all of us here. Yours sincerely, the inhabitants of planet earth.

C o n s t r u c t i o n

The commercial activity involved in repairing old structures or
constructing new ones

I never really pay much attention to new buildings going up, and I'm sure you don't either, unless the building work directly affect you. Wherever you look in cities, towns and the countryside there is construction work going on. Maybe it's a sign of "a strong economy," and maybe it's a sign that we are going to turn our beautiful land into an office/retail/residential complex. So as we begin our investigation together, try to reflect on the amount of construction currently going on in your city or country, and ask yourself what all this construction really means to us as a species.

Whilst in thailand a few years ago, I noticed that there were dozens of unfinished apartment buildings and office blocks towering above the skyline. "Why haven't they finished them?" I asked someone. I was informed that the stock market crash of several years previous had meant

that there was no money to finish them, and so they stood empty, plastic sheeting flapping in the wind – abandoned. You see, to build things, you need money, or you at least need to be able to borrow it. When the money runs out, so the construction is just abandoned, waiting patiently for humans to finish it. But what I want to know is why we are so insistent about constantly building new things. Why bother in the first place? I decided to ask one of the well known construction firm bosses about it.

Me: Hello, my name is alan. I was hoping to ask you a few questions about the construction industry? Primarily I would like to know why you are constantly building! Haven't we got enough?

Boss: Hi alan, to answer your question: Absolutely not! With the rise in population and the continual growth of the economy, we need to keep ahead.

Me: So what you're saying is, we should keep building as much as we can?

Boss: No. We build to satisfy requirements and also to stimulate demand. For example we are building new apartments here in the city to encourage more people to live in the centre of the city.

Me: So does the city need more skyscrapers?

Boss: Well, where else are you going to put all the people who move into the city? There is no more space to build in the suburbs, so we have to go up.

Me: But doesn't this mean we will have to keep going up, and up, if the projected population increase happens as you say.

Boss: Well (laughing) the sky's the limit, as they say. With modern building methods there isn't really a limit on how high we can go!

Me: But what do you think that does to the people, living so far away from the earth? Don't they become a little "disconnected"?

Boss: What? No, not at all, in fact people love it. First, they get a great view from up there and it also gives them a sense of being "above" everyone else, if you know what I mean?

Me: I do. But surely there will come a time when you can't build anymore. I mean, even in a city there is only so much space?

Boss: True enough, but when that happens we can just demolish an old building and start again. Do you know how many apartments we can fit into a space reserved for only twenty

houses? Hundreds. Maybe a thousand. It depends how high we are allowed to go.

Me: So the council does limit what you build?

Boss: Of course! There *are* regulations! But they know it's in the interest of all to keep building. We create new buildings; new companies come into the area bringing new capital investment with them, which means more jobs for people here, which means they will have more money so they will be able to afford one of our nice new apartments we are building (laughing). Look, the economy needs the construction industry. We are the ones who create the towns and the cities. We are shaping the future.

Me: It seems to me that you are the ones responsible for creating the urban jungles we now see all over the world. You are the ones who are turning green open spaces into concrete wastelands.

Boss: Now wait a minute! We do no more than the people want. If people didn't want the office/retail/residential complexes, we would be out of a job.

Me: It seems that if people stopped "wanting" what you build many people would be out of a job.

Boss: That's true enough. Do you know how many people the construction industry directly and indirectly employs? Hundreds of thousands. Even when you exclude the number of people who work on site, there are the people who provide the timber, and the nails, and the concrete, and the steel, and the glass, the fixings and the tools and machinery, and don't forget the people who provide the interiors, the plasterboard manufacturers, the flooring specialists, the toilet manufactures, the pipe work companies, the electrical cable companies, the lighting suppliers. And that's before anyone moves in. Then the interior needs to be furnished with desks, or beds, computers or kitchen units.

Me: I see.

Boss: You people who complain about the construction companies ruining the green spaces have no idea what you're talking about. If we didn't keep building or renovating, all of those people I mentioned previously would be out of a job, the economy would collapse, and then where would we be? If there were no new buildings the electricity, the gas, and the water suppliers would lose out because they need people to bill to make money and pay their staff! Telephones need to be connected. Internet needs to be connected. We make it possible for all these service companies

to survive. Everyone is connected to the construction industry.
Everything depends on construction!

Me: What a scary thought, but thanks for your time.

Boss: My pleasure.

So it seems from my conversation that we can't do without the construction industry. Well, not if we want to continue with the lifestyles we have become accustomed to. If all the construction companies stopped building for a year, can you see what the knock on effect would be? For the societies we have created it would spell disaster; millions of people would be out of work. There would be more widespread poverty than ever before. Social systems wouldn't be able to cope with the increased demand on their resources. Tax revenues would fall dangerously low. The banks would suffer. There could be rioting in the streets with people connected to the building industry demanding jobs be reinstated. There would be chaos! "So listen up everyone, we can't stop building until every inch of this planet is paved in concrete!" Imagine what would happen. It doesn't bear thinking about does it?

We must have progress

Imagine you live in a peaceful village for a moment. There is local agriculture, people live simply but comfortably, they have little money, but they don't need much; they grow as much as they need and trade with other communities for the things they don't have. They live as a community in balance with the land. "Yuk, a hippie commune," I hear you say, "how horrible, I'd hate to live there!" But this is no hippie commune.

One day, in the fields nearby, they see large groups of people walking around with what look like plans for a new building. One member of the community approaches them and asks them what they are doing.

"We are hoping to build a new car plant here" they casually reply.

"What!?! But you can't. This is greenbelt land. This is agricultural land, can you not see how beautiful it is, why do you want to spoil it?"

"We are not going to spoil it! We are going to be creating many jobs for local people, people like yourself. Around the plant we will build a nice park and lake that those who work here can enjoy."

"But there is already a park that people can enjoy; they can enjoy the natural beauty of the area!"

We don't need a new man-made one! What about the noise, and the pollution?" they demand.

"But think about the employment! People need to eat you know. You can't stop progress. If you've got any complaints you can register them with the council."

So the village community get together, and arrange to formally protest to the council in the hope of blocking the building permit. At the public meeting, there are many for, and against, the plans.

"This area needs more employment," shouts one. "We don't want to be poor; this is a great opportunity for us. If we don't let them build here, they will just go somewhere else. Why shouldn't we be the ones benefiting from the factory?"

Although, there are some who complain about the spoiling of the natural environment, the destruction of traditional village life and pollution, there are more who agree with the plans to build a new car plant.

"Imagine what it will do for the prosperity of the area," someone else says loudly. "We can't let a few hippie protesters get in the way of progress."

But a member of the village community blocking the plans stands up and says.

"First of all, we are not "hippies," we are a community of people who just want to live in balance with nature and ourselves (people laugh). This so called progress you speak of, will bring about a complete change of life for all who live here, and not for the better. Sure, you may have some extra money in your pocket, but what will you have lost?"

"You're just jealous!" someone shouts. "Just because you don't want it doesn't mean we shouldn't have it."

The council agrees.

The land is rezoned as "prime development land," a fat cheque changes hands between the car company and the council. "Let the construction begin!" shouts the council leader at an official ceremony. The first sod of earth is dug. People cheer, smile for the cameras, and shake hands.

Next day it is all over the local newspaper. Underneath the photo of smiling executives and councillors is carried the headline. "Car company welcomed to our town bringing much needed employment to the area."

Change is good. They say

Next day, the diggers roll in to prepare the foundations of the new plant. Cranes arrive, and the steel structure is slowly erected. Months go by and the plant starts to tower over the old village.

“We need a new road, the old one isn’t going to be adequate to cope with all the increased traffic,” say the council.

Land is sequestered, and more machinery rolls in to build the road. In less than a year, the plant is nearly ready. Jobs are being filled and everyone is feeling confident. The village community is still complaining but their complaints are falling on the deaf ears of those who greedily await the opening. Slowly but surely, the community becomes divided.

“If you can’t beat them, join them,” voices one community member who has accepted a job at the plant. “I’ve got a new baby on the way, how am I supposed to pay for everything he needs?”

Soon the plant is ready, and it is officially opened by the head of the local council.

“This is a great day for us” he announces. “This is a new dawn for us, and we wish everyone every success.”

The employees start rolling in. 400 new jobs created, and most of them arrive by car. “We’re going to need a bigger car park,” thinks one of the bosses to himself. So they buy up more land from locals eager to cash in on this building bonanza.

Then a construction company director has an idea.

“Instead of people having to commute miles into the plant, we should build new homes for the employees, so they can walk to work. We could build a school and then more shops because the employees will need somewhere to spend their money after all!”

So it begins. More and more land is bought up, houses are packed in tightly, more access roads are built, the school goes up, a local hospital is built, and more businesses are attracted to the new towns economic prosperity. Soon the place is buzzing. What was once a community in the real sense of the word is taken over by greed. Restaurants and fast food joints are built to accommodate the workers who don’t have time to cook anymore, and a retail park with an electrical store, a computer store, clothing stores, and a home improvement store.

Most of the original “community” members have taken jobs in the surrounding businesses. After all, it’s a lot easier to make money there than it was in the community. Produce is no longer grown, it’s easier to

buy it from the local supermarket, however many miles it has taken to get here. Simple lives are replaced by complex ones, fuelled by the need to keep working to maintain their new lifestyles.

“Now this is what I call a *real* community,” voices the construction boss.

Then one day the economy crashes. The car plant is moved to a country far, far away where the land costs and the labour costs are cheaper, and the town falls silent.

“But how will we cope?” ask the townsfolk, but this time the business and community leaders have no idea. They have built themselves out of any connection with nature, and now all they are left with is buildings and debt. Even the “hippie” community has no idea what to do. They have forgotten how they lived without all of this stuff, without all the money, and now they are left broke and unhappy. How can they reclaim the life they used to know? Do you know?

“I know, proclaims the construction boss. We have to build more; we have to create more demand. We have to attract new capital investment. This is going to be great! I see a wonderful future in front.....”

What will you do for money? Anything?

C o n s u m e r i s m

The theory that an increasing consumption of goods is economically beneficial

When I first sat down to think about the rise of the consumer in modern life, I thought I would be writing how bad consumerism was for us as a planet, but the more I looked at myself, the more I realised how much I was affected by it, and indeed, how much easier it had made my life. So just in case you think I'm going to spend this whole dialogue complaining that consumerism is a terrible evil, don't worry, I'm not.

In fact, as I walked through an "upmarket" shopping complex yesterday, I have to say that it was actually a nice experience. It was warm, well lit, with shiny floors, and soft music. There were many different shops, selling everything from jewellery to jeans; from dvd's to televisions. All available to take away right there and then. And as I sat down to drink my fair-trade soy latte, I looked around me, and thought to myself: "Even if you think 'consumerism' is bad you have to hand it to

the human race. In a short time we have managed to create so much from nothing.”

Thanks to our inventiveness, there is such a thing as a television, waterproof clothing, even food pre-packed and ready to eat. We have invented so many things, and at the same time made them available to the masses. Granted you need money to buy these things, but nonetheless, they are readily available. There may be a cost to all of this, but let us explore that in another topic. For now, let us just celebrate human achievement.

Before the industrial revolution, little more than 200 years ago, all of this would be unthinkable. The ability to go to nice looking shops, and buy everything you could possibly want, would have been impossible. Even the rich wouldn't have been able to do it. Not because they didn't have enough money, but because there were no means to make these products.

Since the start of the industrial revolution, we have gradually been able to make more and more types of products, all invented by humans to make our lives better and easier. Some of the products have made our lives so much easier, such as the washing machine, which saves having to stand over a basin for hours scrubbing clothes; so before we condemn the purchase of consumer products, let's take a balanced view of this for a moment, and think what the consumer revolution has done for us.

Think of the products you buy for personal hygiene, like shower gel, nail clippers, shampoo, soap, and tampons; and what about kitchenware products such as a cheese grater, or hand blender, pots, and pans? Not forgetting cleaning cloths, antibacterial sprays, washing powder, floor mops, and vacuum cleaners; and have you all forgotten the flushing toilet? That's a consumer product too, you know! Beds, duvets, sleeping bags, tents, carpets, rugs, vases, tables, chairs, shoes... These are all consumer products, whether you like it or not.

Even the “hippie,” who wants to live in nature, still has clothes, something to cook on, like a gas stove, pots, pans, knives, and forks; and sleeps in a man-made tent – all consumer products, made in factories, for the benefit of everyone else.



Let's say you decided to go back to nature; that you decided to give up the life of the consumer; that you made your own clothes out of wool you spun yourself; that you lived in a forest, and made your own shelter

(and tools to make the shelter, if you please); that you grew all your own food, dug your own toilet, found your own water, and washed your clothes in a stream... Would you be happier? Would you feel free like the animals and the birds, or would it just be a fairly miserable experience? If you lived in a warm tropical country it may be quite nice, but you would definitely not enjoy it in a winter in russia!

So for anyone considering a “back to nature” lifestyle, make sure you enjoy working. Hard. Every day. No holidays abroad, no restaurant meals, no going to the cinema, or appreciating the arts; just working to live. Full stop. That is the life most people in the developing world experience, and I can assure you that most of them would swap their lives for ours.

So before you think about living in nature, think about what you couldn't be without. I am not talking about satellite television, bars, and computer games; I am talking about clean drinking water, after all, water is a consumer product, in the same way fridges (which stop food from rotting), and work surfaces (which are easy to clean thereby stopping the spread of bacteria), are consumer products – all products that make life better and more sanitary, thereby stopping the spread of disease.

So consumerism is not just about flat screen tv's, burgers, cola drinks, and fashion clothing; it's about buying products and services which actively benefit the human race.

I, consumer

Today, I write this topic on a consumer laptop, wear consumer shoes, socks, boxer shorts, and t-shirt, sit in a consumer library using consumer electricity, to power my consumer laptop; sit at a consumer desk, on a consumer chair, and drink consumer water from the tap. I will have a consumer lunch, drive my consumer car, and enjoy an evening in my consumer home. Whether we truly need all of these products is another matter!

I could go back to living like my ancestors, but what would be the point of that? Inventions to help us, the consumer, have allowed people like me to sit and write books like this! If I was living in nature, would I have time to think deeply or would I be more concerned with my crops? Even if I did have the time to write, where would I get the paper to write it on, and who would get the book published and printed?

The consumer life has benefited me greatly, and I thank all the people who have gone before me for dedicating their lives to inventing things to help the human race live a little more easily in this world. They have used their big brains to create something new; something that cannot be said for any other species on the planet. They just carry on doing the same thing they have always been doing; looking for food and procreating.

We have come so far in the last 300 years. We have discovered some wonderful things, and we have invented some wonderful products. Thanks to the inventions of some great minds, we can now leave the earth in a consumer jet plane, being served food and drink, and watching films at 35,000 feet! If you think of the number of inventions that have allowed that experience to happen you will be amazed. Here are just some of them:

- (a) The design of a wing that generates lift.
- (b) The mining and manufacture of metals, to enclose the plane.
- (c) The discovery of oil, which can be processed into petroleum to create fuel.
- (d) The design of an engine, to get the plane off the ground.
- (e) The design of rudders, ailerons, and flaps, to help the plane turn.
- (f) The invention of electronics.
- (g) The manufacture of textiles, for carpets and seat covers.
- (h) The invention of television and data storage, for playback on demand.
- (i) The invention of satellites, to help the plane navigate.
- (j) The invention of the wheel and manufacture of rubber for the tyres to help the plane move on the ground, and land safely.
- (k) The invention of hydraulic systems to move parts of the plane remotely.
- (l) The invention of plastics for various items, including windows.
- (m) The invention of knives and forks.
- (n) The mass production of food.
- (o) The invention of fridges, freezers, and ovens to store and heat food.
- (p) The invention of radios, to allow communications between aircraft and the ground.
- (q) The invention of a pressurisation and oxygen system, that allows us to breathe comfortably six miles above the earth, at temperatures of minus sixty degrees.

The plane is the ultimate consumer product. We do not actually need one to live, but how much easier has it made life? Some of you may remember that even quite recently, a trip to Australia would have taken six weeks by boat. Now we can make it from the UK in less than twenty four hours, in complete comfort, knowing we will almost certainly arrive safely. Hundreds of millions of us move around the earth this way every year.

How many of you would like to swap lives with your ancestors, or indeed any person who has to work the land every day just for survival? I know the family struggling to feed themselves in some remote village in Africa would like to swap with us!

Some of us in the west may see consumerism as a waste of resources, but there are billions of poor who want to experience the benefits. Sometimes it is only through experience that you can see what is truly important in life.

Deep down, I believe that many of these products are unnecessary parts of the human experience, created to keep us superficially happy, but most of us are not at such a point in our development that we can live in total simplicity, aware in the moment, using our minds creatively to understand more than just the visual world. Most of us still need the pleasures that mass consumerism gives us, including myself.

I have seen people from poor countries marvel at being able to talk to someone on a mobile phone, or being able to buy food from a supermarket, and we have to admit to ourselves that it is wonderful. The man who has nothing isn't interested in my opinion that mass food production and world distribution isn't helping the planet, or that mobile phones are an addictive waste of time and energy used by people to occupy their minds when they are bored. He sees each of these things as a positive step forward. Something better than he had.

Who am I to tell him that supermarkets and mobile phones are bad, when he sees millions of people enjoying them? Who am I to tell anyone that mass consumerism is bad? If someone was to tell me that buying clothes from Shop X was bad, would I listen? Yesterday I bought clothes and had coffee. Was it "bad" I did that? I am aware that people are working for next to nothing in terrible conditions in far away coffee plantations and textile factories, but did it stop me buying the products? No, it did not. I wanted a coffee and I bought it. I wanted a new t-shirt because my old ones look terrible, and I bought it.

An ethical dilemma

These are real dilemmas I have faced since embarking on my journey.

I need a new pair of shoes as my old ones are falling apart. I go to the shopping centre, because that is where the shoes are sold. I can only afford a cheap pair of shoes, as I choose to do work that benefits others, which is rather poorly paid. I do not wear leather, and I want to make sure that the shoes I buy are made by someone who is getting well paid for their work. I see a pair of shoes I like, at a reasonable price I can afford, but am unsure as to the conditions the workers face in the factory. Do I (a) buy the shoes anyway, as I am now getting wet feet as my shoes are in such bad condition or (b) wait until I find a company that can guarantee that the workers are being treated well, no animal has suffered in the manufacture of the product, and the company is not adversely affecting the environment with their manufacturing processes?

I am hungry. I am away from home. I cannot find anywhere that serves food that is “strict” vegetarian (i.e. contains no dairy as well as meat), but find a shop that sells a takeaway vegetable pastry. I am pretty sure that the pastry has butter in it, and that the vegetables have a cheese sauce. Do I (a) buy it, as I am hungry, even though it conflicts with my ethics (*motivation based on ideas of right and wrong*), on dairy free products, and is wasteful to our resources because of packaging, or do I (b) wait until I get home, even though I will not be able to eat for another six hours?

I want to go on a trip abroad. I cannot travel there by train, as it costs too much, and I have to cross water too. The trip is very important to me in my research for a book, but I understand that flying creates a lot of pollution and uses up precious resources such as oil. Should I (a) go on the trip because it is vitally important to me, or (b) decide not to travel?

Every minute of every day, I am confronted by dilemmas such as these. This is one of the problems of living your life in awareness, knowing that everything is interconnected. So what do I do? I am aware that most products that are made in life come at a cost; either human, animal, or environmental.

I try to make myself aware of companies who have a compassionate outlook on life, who try to minimize the impact products have; but these

companies are few and far between. Most companies are interested in getting the products out to the consumers in the cheapest possible way which usually means that someone is going to be paying that cost. Either in the form of bad working conditions, animal mistreatment, or inconsiderate use of the planet's resources.

My cheap shoes (yes, I did buy them), came at a cost. They were manufactured in china, by workers who live under an oppressive regime, are paid measly wages, by a company that is only interested in making money, and shipped thousands of miles using fuel which is a limited resource. My pastry came at a cost. It did contain butter, meaning that animals suffered for my hunger, and was wrapped in plastic which could not be recycled.

I did take the flight, meaning that pollution was caused by the aeroplane which also used large amounts of petroleum, which is a limited resource.

Do I feel guilty about these things? In a word yes; but if I was to wait until each company had satisfied my strict ethics I would be waiting a long time.

So what do you do when you want to make a difference in the world, but most other people don't care? Do you live as a hermit, relying on the basic resources our ancestors had available, or do you live in the world as it is, and try to make a difference from where you find yourself? Nothing in this life is perfect, and it is only through education and awareness that people will start to live more ethically. Not by rejection of all that surrounds us. Trying to live the "perfect" life has nearly driven me mad! I live in a consumer society and I have to do the best I can whilst living here.

I am sure that most companies do not think they are behaving unethically when they produce consumer goods. They provide employment for people, who may not otherwise have any, manufacture goods that make people's lives easier, and generate money, that goes back into they world in the form of taxes that can help to build hospitals and schools. They certainly have a strong argument to keep doing what they're doing.

The problem is, that businesses fail to consider the impact their actions will have on the world as a whole, and the consumers never see the negative impact. They just see the end product they really want, but it really is quite simple. They are both just lacking insight. They do not realise that the world is interconnected, and as such focus only on one

small part of it. The part that affects “me.” My needs. My fridge. My tv. My profits. So how do we escape this cycle that will ultimately create misery for us all? It would be easy to say: “just stop buying stuff!” But I am acutely aware that a few words from me will not stop people wanting things that make them happy; so for now, let’s just ask some simple questions when making or buying products.

Consumers:

- (a) Is the product I am buying from a country where the people are oppressed politically, or are made to work in conditions I would refuse to work in?
- (b) Could I have bought this product locally, which would have provided local employment, and cut down on packaging, and other transportation costs?
- (c) Does the company have an ethics policy with regard to the employees and the environment?
- (d) Are animals suffering because of the products I am buying?
- (e) Am I buying this because I need it, or because I just want to impress other people?
- (f) Could I make do with what I have?

Companies:

- (a) Is profit my only motivation and goal?
- (b) Have I considered the human, animal, and environmental costs associated with manufacture?
- (c) Do people really need what I am making, or is there a product I could make that would have a positive impact on humanity whilst still providing employment?
- (d) Do I have an ethics policy that is attached to each product so that consumers can make up their own minds on whether to buy it or not?

Would I have bought my shoes if they came with the following information attached?

Casual sports shoes:	£29.99
Origin:	China. Run by an oppressive military regime
Human cost:	Workers paid £1.00 per day and forced to work minimum 12 hours a day
Animal cost:	One cow died to make the suede uppers

Environmental cost: Paper packaging, fuel for transport to dock, fuel for ship, fuel for lorry to take to distribution point, fuel to take products to shop

If I did buy them it would be my choice, but at least I would be more aware of the real costs.

It is time we started taking responsibility for our lifestyles and the products we surround ourselves with. At the same time, companies have to take responsibility for the products they manufacture, and can no longer just get away with whimsically using up the planet and making animals and people suffer all in the name of employment.

We, the consumers and the manufacturers, are intertwined in a real relationship; with costs that are way too high, if we are going to live in any kind of balance with each other, and the planet we inhabit. We cannot just buy or sell products without total awareness of the global costs. It's time to become aware, right now.

C o n t r o l

Power to direct or determine

•

A relation of constraint of one entity (thing or person or group) by
another

We all know people who exhibit great self-control. Whilst we consistently fail to control our impulses in certain departments, they take great pride in going to bed early; abstaining from intoxicating substances or stimulants, get up early every morning, and go for a walk before we are even awake; and we wonder how they do it! How can they be so controlled in life? Well that's what we are here to find out, so let us begin.

I don't know about you, but most people get impulses at some time or other to do something out of character; but although they think about it, they rarely act on these impulses. It is just imagination. But what would happen if you did let go? What would you do if there were no consequences for acting on impulses, no law to say you couldn't do anything? What would you do?

Would you want to smash something? Would you take a sledgehammer and start smashing your house up? Maybe you would take a sledgehammer and smash someone's head in? How about running down to the nearest brothel and have sex with as many prostitutes as possible, or doing some cocaine or heroin? What do you think? Don't worry, there are no consequences, you can act on any impulse you like! Maybe you'd go to the bank and make a "withdrawal" using a gun as your withdrawal slip? Remember it's your choice. For today only, you call the shots.

So have you decided what you would like to do? How about bombing an entire race of people you don't like? One thing's for sure, once people let go of self-control it's probably going to start getting messy out there as most people don't want to go and save a million starving children on impulse.

Impulse

1. *An instinctive motive*
2. *A sudden desire*

Occasionally, we all do things on impulse. We might just decide to get on a plane and see our child who lives abroad, or we might phone an old friend we haven't spoken to for years. We may even just decide to quit our job; but these are all harmless impulses. Even deciding to go out and get drunk on impulse is going to give you no more than a rather large hangover. No, we are talking about bigger things here. We are talking about man letting go of all self-control, and carrying out his wildest fantasies. Things he knows maybe wrong, but he just can't help himself doing.

I wonder how many crimes have been carried out, not in premeditation, but just by someone acting on impulse? I imagine a lot. "I didn't mean to kill her, I don't know what I was thinking; I just took the knife and I stabbed her." But remember today's the day when impulse is king! You can do anything you want; have you decided what it will be yet?

As I've been writing this I know what mine will be. I want to smash up the house. That would be great I think! Just to take a sledgehammer and break everything into tiny pieces with no thoughts for the consequences. After four years of writing, it will sure come as a relief! But we won't do these things will we? We will exercise self-control, and the impulses will only ever get as far as our imagination. Thank goodness.

But one thing troubles me. If we have to use self-control, then what does that say about our natural self? Are we saying we would really like to do these things, just if (a) no one was looking, and (b) we could get away with it? Let's go into this more deeply shall we?

Are we saying that man would act on all his impulses if he didn't control himself? Quite possibly. So what we need to find out is whether this self-control is a natural mechanism, or one concocted by the society to stop chaos setting in.

Imagine now, that a lion is sitting relaxing in the sun, when suddenly he gets the impulse to kill his entire family. Do you think that could happen? Now I don't know a lot about the animal kingdom, but I've never read about or seen this kind of behaviour. Maybe an elephant suddenly has an impulse to destroy all the trees in the forest and then set about killing his children! Ever heard of it happening? What about our trusted friend in life, the dog? Ah now that's a different story!

Man's best friend *has* been known to act on his impulses. In fact, as I found out on many occasions, my labrador exhibited little self-control.

Normally he would happily stay on his own if I was out, but sometimes I would come home and walk through the door, and think, "oh my god..." and just look around at the destruction he had caused. He would have eaten as much as he could from the cupboards he could reach, torn the sofa cushions into pieces, chewed the wall, eaten the backs of several shoes and shredded magazines and perhaps even eaten some of his own bed.

He had literally gone on a rampage (*act violently, recklessly, or destructively*), and if he was a human, he could have been arrested and sent to court for destroying my house; but a dog he was, out of the reach of the law. So with a stern warning *never* to do it again, the house returned to normal, and I went off to work every day with chewed shoes. Maybe animal psychologists would say he was bored and frustrated, but it is funny that he is so close to man, and yet man himself has these urges too. Just a coincidence perhaps?

How many times have we seen crowds that have gone on a rampage? It's normally during some demonstration where the tension builds and builds, and then magically, some people just let themselves go, and start smashing shops and cars, setting fire to things, and stealing goods from shops. It's usually what would be termed a riot (*a public act of violence by an unruly mob, a public act of violence by an unruly mob*), and aggressively put down by the law enforcement agencies. You see, it is against the law to act in this way; just imagine what would happen to the economy of

the country and to society as a whole, if everyone was engaged in acting on impulse, because that's what it is.

Everyone must learn self-discipline!

Any monk will tell you that. They will say we must control ourselves and our natural urges if we are to achieve enlightenment. So, they go to bed early, and get up at dawn every day to do their meditation practice, or prayer. They do not engage in sexual activity (become celibate), eat simple meals, live in a simple room, and they abstain from alcohol and drugs. It might not be everyone's idea of fun, but I've tried it during a short stay at a buddhist community, and enjoyed it. There was something calming about the routine and the (imposed) self-discipline that freed the mind from the destructive influence of modern life.

"They were going back to basics," I thought to myself. "Self-discipline is all about going back to our more natural state, that's why it feels good." But the longer I spent there, and the more I talked to some of the long term residents of the community, the more I realised that there was nothing natural about self-discipline at all. It was all about control.

I needed to find out more, so I spoke to one of the long term residents on the island whom I believe was a monk for a period of time. I asked him why he was there on the island:

"I'm here because I want to be of service to others," he replied in a bit too text book fashion for my liking.

"But how did you get to be living here in the first place?" I probed.

"I used to be a heroin addict, alan, and this place saved me."

The community was on an island, with no alcohol, cigarettes or drugs allowed, and only several small ferries a day to take us to the main island; but I found out from other people that he chose to stay on the island most of the time just in case he went to the pub or started smoking or taking drugs. I noticed that any time he was off the island, he quickly lit a cigarette and puffed heavily on it! No harm there; but all this talk of self-discipline was starting to disturb me, and I started to gain a bit more insight.

There was also an older man on the island, who spent his time there away from the other residents, didn't join in with meals, and led a separate existence in a room above what could only be described as a shed. "Oh, he's nearly a yogi (*one who practices yoga and has achieved a high level of spiritual insight*) alan," they told me.

He spent most of his time working silently in the garden, doing his meditations with his beads, and didn't shower regularly. "Here is a man truly on a path to enlightenment," I thought to myself, "a man trying to free his mind and body from the miserable existence of human life." But then one day, something changed in my thinking about him.

"Where are you off to today?" I asked him as we were catching the ferry to the main island.

"I've got a few things to do in town, then I'm off for a couple of swifties in the pub."

"Oh!" I said, trying not to sound too shocked.

A swifty is slang for a quick drink, in case you didn't know. I just couldn't understand it. Here was a man, dedicated to the path, "*almost a yogi*" as someone had said; someone who was denying himself all that western society took for granted, now off to the pub for a few drinks! What was going on?

The more I got to know him, the more I realised that he actually went for a "swifty" quite a lot. Surely alcohol doesn't help one reach enlightenment? But I never said anything to him.

He was obviously serious about his yoga and meditation, and equally serious about alcohol, (well, he did seem to enjoy it). But why was he denying himself the pleasure he probably wanted? What was all this self-discipline about if he was shooting over to the pub on regular occasions?

As time went on, I spoke to many people on the island and it was becoming increasingly clear that a few had had some serious drug or alcohol problems on the mainland in the past. Well, if they didn't, they did like to talk about it a lot! It suddenly seemed that this self-discipline was a way of protecting themselves from their own impulses. They were isolating themselves from everybody else and the substances that had caused them problems, and were engaged in the act of denying themselves, to save them from themselves.

O, lord (or anyone) please protect me from myself

When we put ourselves in a self-imposed exile to protect ourselves from our impulses (which come from ourselves), does that mean the impulses will eventually go away? I guess that's what people who become monks hope! They hope that by denying the body and mind pleasure they will eventually free themselves from it.

Some people are very disciplined, and they are not monks, nor do they have addiction problems. So why do they do it? What are they trying to achieve or more to the point what are they trying to escape from? You see, self-discipline is not a natural state; it is an imposed state that “we” impose on ourselves. But who are “we” and who are we imposing it on? Do you see the point of the question?

We are saying we must be disciplined in order to free ourselves, but who is talking here; is it not us? What we need to find is our natural state, not practice rituals to keep us from acting on impulses.

It is time we asked ourselves what is going on, so it is time to open up another dialogue; one in which we can truly find out if man naturally wants to smash things, or people, or take drugs; or whether these urges are created by frustration and conflict in the mind, caused primarily by the society we have created? Let’s start.

Me: Hi there mind, me again, I’ve got a couple of questions I’d like answered!

Mind: Oh, you again, ok, go on!

Me: Why is it that we try to become self-disciplined all the time are we afraid of ourselves?

Mind: Why would you be afraid of yourself?

Me: Because sometimes we have these urges to do things we know can’t be in the best interest of our system or society.

Mind: So why do you have them?

Me: That’s what I’m here to find out!

Mind: What urges do you have?

Me: Well, they’re kind of primeval I guess, you know, wanting to have lots of sex with lots of people.

Mind: And why is that a problem?

Me: Because I shouldn’t do it. I shouldn’t even be thinking about it, it’s wrong.

Mind: Why is it wrong?

Me: Because I am in a relationship.

Mind: But these are your urges.

Me: But I don’t want them. I want them to stop.

Mind: So stop then

Me: But I can’t, it’s like there is a force behind me driving me to have them, but it’s not me.

Mind: Who are you?

Me: I am me.

Mind: Who am I?

Me: You are me also

Mind: So if we are one then it is you who is causing these urges to surface, through will and desire.

Me: But how do I stop them?

Mind: Why do you want to stop them?

Me: Because they are wrong.

Mind: I know they are, because my parents told me and it is not acceptable to go off having sex with anyone you like when you are in a relationship.

Me: Isn't it?

Mind: You tell me.

Me: You tell me.

Mind: Look, we are one – stop dividing us all the time

Me: But who's answering these questions?

Mind: You are.

Me: But you said, you are, doesn't that mean you are something different?

Mind: We've had this conversation before. When division is ended, there will be no more conflict.

Me: But I am in conflict. There are things I have impulses to do, but I know that in order to keep living in society I must control them.

Mind: Who says?

Me: I say, and society says.

Mind: But you just said you have the impulses, and you have also said you are the one in control. That, my friend is division, can you not see it?

Me: Well, sort of it, but I just want them to stop.

Mind: So stop.

Me: But I can't. I do notice that there is two of me here one wanting one thing and one wanting the other.

Mind: So which one of you wants to stop having these impulses?

Me: The real me. Or at least the one who was brought up in this society.

Mind: And who is the other?

Me: The other is my animal self, the one that existed before.

Mind: But you are all animal.

Me: No, I mean my higher brain.

Mind: Ah you mean the one that was educated by your parents and conditioned by society is that the brain you are talking about?

Me: Yes, I guess. But it's very frustrating! On the one hand I would like to go out and have relationships with many women but there is a voice telling me I shouldn't do it. Is that my voice of conscience?

Mind: Is having a conscience a natural state?

Me: I guess it is. It is the voice that intrinsically knows right from wrong.

Mind: How do you know?

Me: Well I think it is, or perhaps my conscience is just a database of what society told me I can and can't do.

Mind: Perhaps.

Me: But that means that my conscience may not be real. It may be just a program that was installed by my parents and teachers amongst others.

Mind: And?

Me: And that my real state is the animal state, and so these urges are natural.

Mind: Perhaps, but do animals have these urges?

Me: Yes they do.

Mind: So what's the problem then?

Me: Well it's society, they don't want me to have these impulses, they want me to control myself, to conform otherwise it becomes harmful to the society.

Mind: Exactly.

Me: So does that mean I can go out and have relationships with lots of women? My girlfriend wouldn't be very pleased!

Mind: But that is your conscience, which is society talking, not you.

Me: I understand. But if we all acted on our impulses then society would collapse.

Mind: Quite possibly, but then we would really see what man is made of wouldn't we?

Me: I guess. We would probably find out that he is an animal, just like all others, except he has been brainwashed into thinking he is something else. And the powerful people who have conditioned him want to make sure he never finds the natural state. But wait a minute, what about people that are addicted to things and they want to get rid of the addiction. Surely that isn't society that caused it?

Mind: Well, who invented the addictive substances?
Me: True. But what about people who have to imprison themselves physically or psychologically to stop acting on impulses?
Mind: You create the impulse.
Me: True enough, but...
Mind: Listen, we all have impulses to do things, but when we get them we compare them to the database to see if they are acceptable to society. If they are, we do them. If they aren't, we come into conflict with ourselves and we feel frustrated we can't act on them.
Me: So what you are saying is, if society finds it acceptable, we do it, but what if society doesn't approve, and we do it anyway? What then?
Mind: We come into conflict with society.
Me: But this isn't helping. I want to know why we self-discipline ourselves.
Mind: Because we want to stop the urges, we want to end conflict within ourselves and make sure we don't come into conflict with society.
Me: But aren't the urges still there?
Mind: Self-discipline is a control mechanism. Just like discipline in the school, the home or in the wider society is.
Me: So this is all about control?
Mind: Of course. We control what we don't want to see. But these impulses are part of us.
Me: But what if I want to kill someone, what stops me?
Mind: Your conscience, which society created, is normally enough, as the threat of prison or execution stops you from acting on impulse. But sometimes the impulse is so strong you will do it anyway.
Me: So if I am a murderer, do I have to practice self-discipline to stop me getting urges to kill people?
Mind: If you are in conflict, yes. But once conflict is resolved there will be no more urges
Me: So how do I get rid of conflict?
Mind: By accepting wholeness.
Me: That's easy for you to say, but we have to live in the society, it's not enough. Surely we must abstain from earthly pleasures in order to see the path.

Mind: What path? All we are doing is talking about conflict. Conflict that is in you. Conflict between what you would like to do, and what society tells you you can or can't do. That's all.

Me: But I'm still not clear.

Mind: Listen. You and I are one right? We want to do things, and we compare them with what is right and wrong on our database, and if the database, which is conscience, created by society, tells us it is wrong, we don't do it, but we feel frustrated and full of conflict. When we see that there is no right and wrong, only insight, we can start getting somewhere.

Me: I still don't understand.

Mind: If you want to do something, then do it. If you want to get drunk, then get drunk. If you want to kill someone, then kill them. If you want to keep taking drugs then keep taking them. And if you want to go out and have sex with a hundred women then do it! Do you understand? And don't chastise yourself for doing it; after all, it was a conscious choice. You are whole, there are no hidden urges once you can see that. Only your choice. The only thing you have to be aware of is the consequences.

Me: So can self-discipline quieten my mind; can it stop conflict?

Mind: Well, it can keep it at bay, until such time as the conflict and the frustration become too much to bear, then you must either act on your urges or control them further. Only through awareness, comes the insight necessary to end the conflict.

Me: So are urges wrong?

Mind: For who?

Me: I don't know.

Mind: There is no right and wrong, only consequences, so you will have to weigh up your urges vs. the consequences. But conditioning by society always pokes it's head into your arguments. You have to see where society stops and you start.

Me: But am I not society?

Mind: Yes, you are a part of it. But we are talking about the conditioning by society, which is your parents, your teachers, media etc.

Me: So how do I know what is right and wrong? If you say I am an animal then surely it is ok for me to go out and kill a man or smash things up or steal.

Mind: Do the animals do that?

Me: Ah! I see what your saying. Animals don't kill their own species and they have nothing to smash up, but they might steal some food.

Mind: Who's food is it? Is there an owner in the natural world?

Me: But look, I understand lots of what you are saying but that still doesn't answer my question. If I stop controlling myself, will I become a crazed madman?

Mind: Why would you? Are the animals crazy? Do they exert self discipline and control on themselves?

Me: I guess not. But it feels like I must control myself.

Mind: That is society talking, not you.

Me: Ok, so how do I stop myself from smashing the place up and killing people, if I have no self-control?

Mind: Do you love all men like your brother? Do you have compassion for the suffering of every living thing on this planet?

Me: I guess I do, I think.

Mind: Then you need no self-control, nor self-discipline. Will getting up at 5.00 am every morning help you love?

Me: No.

Mind: Will eating one bowl of rice a day, or sitting in the lotus position help you become more compassionate?

Me: No.

Mind: So what is the answer?

Me: I am love. I am compassion.

Mind: So where is the conflict?

Me: There is none.

Mind: You just think you need self-discipline because you are afraid of what you will do if you don't control yourself.

Me: I see. When I am love and compassion I have no need for self-control.

Mind: Exactly.

Me: But just one more question...

Mind: You're on your own now. Be the love, be the compassion, don't force yourself into self-discipline; it is just another way for us to divide ourselves more.

Me: But what about my dog? How could I have stopped him from eating the furniture and my shoes etc.

Mind: He wanted to do it, so he did it. He knew the consequences. Maybe in the future try not locking up an animal all day on his own away from his natural environment. How would you like it? Oh I forgot you *are* out of your natural environment. Maybe that was the answer all along...

C o n v e r s a t i o n

The use of speech for informal exchange of views or ideas or information etc.

Have you ever stopped to think what you really talk about in a conversation? I'd just like to remind you, before we begin our discussion, that we are the most intelligent species on the planet. We're the one characterized by superior intelligence, and articulate speech.

We all talk about a million different things in the day, in a thousand different languages, in hundreds of different countries; but I'm sure you would agree that we are not all super-intellectuals able to discuss the future of mankind; the problem of global warming, healthcare, poverty, and starvation in the third world. Social policy, peace, violence, terror in the community, guns and global warfare may also be topics we are unable to discuss. Why not? It's our planet!

So what do we all talk about then? Let's look at a couple after a hard day at work:

- How was your day at work?
- Oh, fine...
- Busy?
- Not too bad.
- Dinner will be ready in ten minutes.
- Great, how was your day?”
- Oh fine. I went shopping after work.”
- Is there anything good on tv tonight?”
- I’m not sure.”

How about the conversation between two friends having a drink?

- Well, what’s he like?
- Oh, he’s really nice.
- What does he do?
- He works in marketing.
- Ooh, has he got a nice car?
- Yes it’s brand new, it’s really nice.

How about the sports fans?

- Did you see that goal?
- Yeah, it was amazing.
- But the other guy should have been sent off.”
- How about the reality show fans?
- I can’t believe she got voted off!
- Yeah, I was sure she was going to win.
- I don’t like that other guy.
- No I don’t either.
- I hope he gets voted off next week.
- Yeah, so do I.

How about the news experts?

- Did you see what’s happening over there?”
- Yeah, the prime minister should send in more troops.”
- Do you think?”
- Absolutely; if we have more fire-power over there, the war would over much sooner.”

How about the justice experts?

- They should lock him up and throw away the key.”
- I agree, I think they should bring back capital punishment.”

- That would definitely be a deterrent.”
- It’s what the country needs.”

We all have conversations; with friends, with colleagues, and family members. We discuss every topic from the weather to the state of the political situation in the middle east. Sometimes we have conversations just to pass the time or to be polite, and sometimes we have opinions which we are eager to share with someone else. More often than not, they are just comments passed on what someone else has said; that we happen to agree or disagree with.

Intellectual

A person who uses the mind creatively

The problem when one talks about having an intellectual conversation, is that often it is perceived to be boring. But tell me, which is more boring; a conversation about life, or a conversation about who’s going to be voted off the latest reality show? When I talk about life, I am not talking about something profound. Life is all around us. The people we meet, the places we see, the things we do.

We all have the ability to use the mind creatively, yet how many of us do it?

We go to school to learn. We learn about history, mathematics, art, science, and politics. We learn how to speak a different language, as well as understand literature from our own country. We talk about field trips we’ve been on, we act in plays, and I’m not talking about university education; this is your average high school education.

Why did they teach you about all these things? Because they are all part of life. Geography, geology, sociology, chemistry, and physics are *not* abstract subjects, they’re what makes up the world we live in. Yet how many of us remember anything about them? We finish school and get a job – glad to leave the structure of class work, and get into the business of earning money.

So many people go to university to learn at a higher level, to discuss complex topics, yet they too fall into the employment trap when they leave. Not that getting a job is a bad thing; it’s all too necessary if you want to eat and pay your bills; it’s just that the capacity for discussion of anything but the most mundane becomes so distant, and unimportant.

Think about it. Topics of discussion now fit in around work; after all, that's what you do for at least eight to nine hours a day.

Depending on the job you have, your conversations may be about how to increase turnover, how to solve a particular scientific problem, how to lift a large piece of sheet glass fifty metres into the air; or if you work in a job such as production line, retail or hospitality for example, you may have to wait until your break to discuss anything with colleagues.

When talking with your colleagues, you generally have discussions that, if not totally relating to work, revolve around topics that a person of your status in the society may be expected to discuss. For example, a managing director, talking to his equal (employment status only) may be expected to discuss economic trends, the budget, and corporate taxation; whereas the manual worker, may be expected to talk about an article he read in a tabloid newspaper, or a comment he heard down the pub.

I am not trying to stereotype anyone, but people fall into stereotypical categories by virtue of their status in society. A manual worker, doing a repetitive task at work, would not be expected to read a broadsheet business section, or a magazine on economics, any more than a managing director would be expected to read a tabloid newspaper. In fact it would be positively frowned upon, and the person committing the offence may find themselves the subject of ridicule.

“Who does he think he is reading the business section? He’s getting a bit above himself if you ask me. Does he think he’s better than us? Well he’s not, he’s just the same.”

You are expected to conform to your status level, not to drop below or to go above it – intellectually that is. It has nothing to do with money. A titled gentleman, who gambled away his money on alcohol and prostitutes, would still read the business and world politics section, in the same way the builder who made a lot of money may still read the tabloid newspapers, because he believes that is his intellectual level.

Some of you may think I am making sweeping generalisations that are not true, but I think the choice of newspaper still says something about a person's expectation of their intellectual status. See for yourselves; look in the builders vans, the manual workers tea room in the factory, check the directors offices! See what newspapers the higher managers are reading. I have spent many years working in and around factories and it seems to go like this.

Manual worker	–	Tabloid
Supervisor	–	Tabloid
Junior manager	–	Tabloid
Middle manager	–	Broadsheet
Senior manager	–	Broadsheet
Director	–	Broadsheet

Is this just a coincidence? Are people merely conforming to what they believe is expected of them intellectually, or is the manual worker really interested in the latest celebrity drug scandal? I for one always bought the broadsheet *and* the tabloids when I was young. The broadsheet to maintain intellectual appearance, and the tabloid for meaningless gossip that filled twenty minutes whilst eating my sandwiches at lunchtime!

It seems that people with a high intellectual status expectation can happily read material that is “below” them, but not the other way round. No one would look twice at the director glancing through the tabloid for a bit of harmless fun, but a manual worker could not get away with reading a broadsheet in front of their peers.

Let me ask you another question: Do window cleaners read the financial broadsheets? “Of course not,” say you, “if they were intelligent enough to read the financial broadsheets, they wouldn’t be window cleaners!”



We all learned similar things when we were growing up, you and I; some had better teachers, some worse. We learned about the planet, the history, the animals, and the birds. We learned some science, we learned how to count, and read and most importantly, we all learned to speak.

Speaking is natural; we can all do it from a few years old. We hear our parents speaking and we copy it. We learn to copy the way they express themselves, we develop the same accent they have, we copy their phraseology (*the manner in which something is expressed in words*), and as we get older, we begin to read what they’re reading, and listen to what they’re discussing.

Discussion

An extended communication (often interactive) dealing with some particular topic

Some of us did better at school than others. I went to a good school, but never really achieved what was expected of me. My parents were both in good positions; my mother in an accounts department, and my father who worked as a financial director. They both read the broadsheets and were well informed, although I would hesitate to call them intellectuals.

Discussions at our house were fairly limited, and usually started by my mother asking my father a question about some financial topic, and my dad answering it brusquely to show her she was of lower intellectual status, and it wasn't really worth his time, or effort to discuss it! So on the whole, I didn't gain much from these discussions.

I wasn't really interested in school, although I think I enjoyed it. I tried hard at the things I enjoyed, and messed around in all the classes I didn't.

My parents were both scottish, but we lived in england, and don't ask me how, but during my time at private school, I developed a polite english accent.

I wasn't really any good at anything, and I left school early, at seventeen, to try my luck in the workforce.

As I was travelling to work in london every day, I always bought a paper for the train journey – a broadsheet, like my parents read. I don't know why I bought it, it just like a seemed normal thing to do.

I was always stuck in dead end jobs (such as commission only telesales), and never made any money, but I always read the financial sections of the paper! I was always interested in what was going on in the world, and I loved the paper because it opened up so many questions in my mind. The problem was finding someone to discuss all the new things I had learned, or observed during the day.

My parents had split up, my friends were all people who liked cars, girls, football and pubs, and all my work colleagues wanted to talk about was how much commission they were going to make that month.

Even as I moved up the financial ladder, and ended up in jobs in information technology, I was still mixing with people I couldn't discuss the topics which were of interest to me with. Who wanted to have a discussion with me about politics or economics? An economist or a politician? I don't think so. So I was left with pub topics and tabloid junk.

I really wanted to talk to someone – not because I wanted to show off what I knew – I just wanted to learn more. I wanted to talk to someone, but never got to meet the people who could discuss things I was interested in, as I was of low intellectual status. The people who would

discuss things with me weren't interested in the topics I wanted to discuss. Catch 22.

The influence our family and friends have on our expected intellectual status is immense. If the topics you are exposed to are limited to what was on tv last night, the football results, the latest reality shows, the latest cars and gadgets, and the latest gossip from the local pub, I would expect you to fall into line with those topics. You see, we always follow the majority; no one wants to be unpopular by bringing up a topic he knows will be of no interest to his peers; so we conform.

Let me ask you a question. If you are talking to someone, how can you tell if they are of higher intellectual status than you? Is it because of the way they speak? Is it their accent? Perhaps bbc english or equivalent? Does their accent lead you to believe that they are more educated than you, and so make you feel inferior? Or is it because they have a higher position than you at work, that you assume this?

Does a manual worker feel inferior to the managing director if he comes around the factory to talk to "the workers?" Unfortunately, the answer is normally, yes. Why do you think this is?

- (a) The director is wearing nicer clothes (because the manual worker has to wear protective clothing and the director does not get his hands dirty).
- (b) The director speaks in an educated accent (because he is using the language correctly as it was meant to be used, not in a slang and loose way).
- (c) The director pays your wages, and is the boss of everyone, so he must be more intelligent (because he was interested in business, applied himself to learning, and worked hard all his life to get to the position he is in now; not because he is more intellectual).
- (d) The director can talk about more interesting things than you can (only because he is interested in them not because he is more intellectual).

The only difference between the factory worker and the director is not clothes, accent, or job title. It is that one was deeply interested in something (business) and applied himself to learning it. He is not more intelligent than the worker; he just has an interest that allows him to use his mind creatively.

Let me ask you another question. If the director found out that you both shared a deep interest for bird watching, do you think he would believe he was a superior bird watcher because he had a better job than you? Of course not. He would treat you as an intellectual equal, the same as you would treat him. You would happily go bird watching together, because that is the deep interest you share. The perceived gap between the workers and the directors is one only marked by interest.

If you worked on the factory floor and developed a deep interest for business and economics, you would study it and learn it – not because you had to – because you wanted to find out more about a subject you were interested in. Do you follow what I am trying to say here?

Are you not the most intelligent species on the planet, characterized by superior intelligence, and articulate speech? Is that you? Well, why don't you use it? I'm sorry to be blunt, but it is all too easy to conform to what you think is expected of you and just give up hope. You all have learned about the same things at school about life, and you may have found some subjects more difficult than others; even failed all subjects. I didn't do well either! The difference is, I was interested in life. I was interested in the world around me, the people, the politics, the why's and the why not's.

Interest, that's all you have to have, to begin to use your mind creatively. It doesn't matter if you work on a production line and only get to speak to your colleagues once a day. If you are deeply interested in something, you are intellectual. You are using your mind. You are not just letting politicians and directors use their minds, you are a human being with the same brain capacity as every intellectual on the planet.

Don't let other people decide your intellectual status. Don't accept that you are destined to be a tabloid reader, or that you will be a production line worker; a human machine. You and I have huge brain capacity for learning; we just have to spark it off by being interested in something. Something not superficial. Something with enough depth to keep your interest; something like life!

Life! It's such a great interest to have. It's about people, it's about places, it's about family, politics, nature, water shortages, hunger, war, jobs, and health. It's about fun, laughter and crying. The more you are interested in life, the more you want to discuss it; you'll find plenty of people who want to discuss it with you – not just family members, but people from the wider community.

You decide on your intellectual status; your mind has more capacity than the biggest computers in the world; and the great thing about life is you don't need to go to university to study it, you're already part of it.

Observe, watch, listen and participate.

There are conversations that need to be had all around the world about things too important to leave to the politicians, the media, the scientists or the intellectual elite. You are an intellectual. You hold solutions to world problems in your mind but you may not know it until you start the discussion.

Don't let your legacy to the world be that you worked, watched sport, drank beer and wine, and discussed tv shows, just because you believed that was where your intellectual status lay. You are so much more than that. You belong to the most intelligent species on the planet; don't let your creative mind go to waste. It's waiting to be used right now. This is a message I gave myself some time ago.

C o o l

Fashionable and attractive at the time; often skilled or socially adept

*He's so cool. Look at his cool clothes, cool girlfriend, and his
cool car.*

~

*He talks about cool things, he does cool things, he's the
coolest man I ever met.*

~

*He drinks in cool places, smokes cool cigarettes; he even does
drugs, that's so cool.*

~

*I wanna be cool like him, dress like him, talk like him.
I wanna be cool too.*

It's a fact that some kids are cooler than others. From teenagers through to people in their thirties and beyond, some people just have that air of "coolness" about them. But what is it? Is it about dressing in the latest clothes, being an early adopter of new technology, knowing things other people want to know, or doing things other people envy, or want to imitate? Is it a certain aloofness that says "You can look but you can't touch?"

It could be many things, but one thing we know, is that other people want to be around cool people. They create the in-group or clique (*an exclusive circle of people with a common purpose*). Their purpose is that they all want to be cool. Let's look into this shall we?

We know that "coolness" is something that can't be readily defined – there is no scientific formula for it. One day you can be cool, and the next day you're not; but one thing's for sure, "cool" can't exist on it's

own. If no one's watching, it doesn't matter what you're wearing, what designer drug you're taking, or what works of philosophy you happen to quote from; you need an audience to be cool.

We've all seen him, strutting down the corridor at school. Look at his shoes, look at his jacket; he's everything you're not. His calm, unruffled self-assurance; he's so confident, nothing can harm him. Everyone's looking at him; you want to be just like him. He pretends he doesn't know people are watching him, but you know he feels powerful inside, given all that attention.

In order to be cool, you don't have to be a high achiever at school; in many ways, it's an asset to actively rebel. To not do your homework, to smoke at break time, to disobey the teachers, to not wear your school uniform. People like a non-conformist, especially at school...

But children grow up. And as they grow up, fashions change, and the cool guy isn't so cool anymore, especially when he leaves school early. You see him standing at the gates, smoking after school, still trying to be cool, trying to impress the younger kids, but now you start to pity him.

Then there's the guy in his twenties who dresses in fashionable clothes, does drugs, goes out partying to the coolest bars, but has the great job in advertising; he drives a flashy sports car, is above average intelligence, and likes the finer things in life. He went to a good school, is well educated, and can talk about art and poetry.

Yeah, he's cool; everyone wants to be like him. He's got the latest music in his car, he knows the coolest places to go on holiday, but he's so wrapped up in his own importance, people soon start to lose interest. Life is all about him, the things he has, knows and does; he doesn't really care about you, but he's happy to have you a long for the ride as long as you keep admiring him.

Then there's the physicist. He doesn't follow fashions, he doesn't drive a flashy car, he always did well at school, never rebelled. He enjoys talking about quantum theory and particle accelerators. Want to be like him? Want to be cool? No, unfortunately, physics is not on the cool list. Unless you're another physicist, that is.

Far from being super-confident, the cool guy is, in fact, rather superficial. He needs to impress you with his clothes, his knowledge, and his possessions. There is a certain shallowness about him – a lack of substance. A feeling that all he is, is on show. He has developed social skills that allow him to be liked, whether it's charm or aloofness.

He will change according to the tastes of the audience. If the audience don't think he's cool anymore, he'll go somewhere else where he is.

Coolness is all about impressing people, whether you like it or not. A person with real self-esteem, real self-confidence in themselves, does not need to impress other people with shallow bolt-ons such as clothes, music, or stories of places he's been.

Unfortunately, most of us don't know we're doing it. We don't realise that we are developing a false image to show to people. You may say, "but I just like wearing the latest clothes, going to the latest bars, listening to the latest music, going to the newest holiday destination; I'm not trying to impress people." But trying to be cool is not about one thing in isolation; it's about creating a package that people will like. You are constructing an external image that does not reflect the internal one. The longer you keep up the facade, the more you lose touch with the real you.

I can't really remember too well, but I think I was well liked at school; a bit of a joker, and someone who couldn't concentrate well. I kept everyone amused with my antics, but didn't earn the respect of my teachers. I remember hanging out with the cool kids, the ones with the latest fashions and latest music. I really wanted to be like them, so I bought the same music, and got my mum to buy me the same clothes.

When I left school, I found myself on the outside of a rebellious group in the town who were always drinking, doing drugs, and being generally anti-social. I knew I wasn't like that, but everyone used to think they were cool, so I tried to get in with them. I hung around the same pubs, dressed like them and hoped to be accepted. One day I was accepted, and I found myself in the in-group, getting drunk, not going to work, taking drugs, and being anti-social towards my parents. Fortunately, this only lasted a year or so, and I left the group.

All my life I wanted to be in music. I wanted to be cool like the rock stars, but I didn't play any instruments (I played flute, but that's not really cool). I bought synthesisers I couldn't play, drum machines I couldn't program, recording equipment I didn't know how to use, and recorded songs that weren't any good; just to tell people I was "doing music." I was never really committed to being in a band. In fact I never joined one. I just wanted to be famous so people would think I was cool. But I did love karaoke! I was a fairly good singer, and it was nice to have an audience.

Many years have passed since that time, but I still like to wear nice clothes and listen to new music – I’m not ashamed to admit it. I like when people look at my clothes, or comment on how good my music choices are, but I am older now; with age, comes a certain realisation that caring about what people think of how I look, the music I listen to, the job I do, or where I’ve been on holiday, really doesn’t represent my internal image. I have learned to admit to myself that the external image I had been projecting, didn’t reflect the tensions and anxieties I was feeling inside.

In the past, the insecurities I was feeling in a relationship, or the problems I was experiencing with panic attacks, were masked by the cool exterior image. That is, until I was no longer able to keep the external image together due to the pressure, and it crumbled; exposing my inner weaknesses and true personality.

At this point people stopped thinking I was so “cool.” They couldn’t understand what had happened to me. How could such a cool guy now be this weak, pathetic, emotional wreck? I stopped caring about trying to impress other people and decided to start living my life more genuinely, and since that time, my inner-confidence has grown stronger. I feel whole now. I don’t feel as if I am shielding my inner-self, for the fifteen minutes of fame that being “cool” gives you.

In the constant battle to keep up with what is cool, we lose sight of ourselves; who we really are, and not who we would like to be. We drink alcohol to be cool; we take party drugs to be cool.

Imagine if it was cool to not be addicted to things. Imagine how cool that would be!

How cool is it not to drink!

How cool is it not to smoke!

How cool is it not to take drugs!

How cool is it not to drive a car!

How cool is it not to worry about what people think anymore!

How cool is it to be nice to people!

How cool is it to think about someone other than yourself!

How cool is it to go for a walk in the country!

How cool is it to just relax...

So, being cool may have a positive part to play after all; especially for young people who can be so easily influenced by others. We have to start

doing what we want to do, without worrying what other people will think. So play an old song you really like that was never fashionable, in front of your peers; or wear an old hat to a party; anything you like to do for *you*, not to impress someone else. You never know, they may think you're cool, but on the other hand, who cares? If people only like you for the clothes you wear, the music you listen to, or the volume of alcohol you can consume, they are not true friends.

You may think you're cool, but you're only cool if someone else thinks
you are.

C o r e

The centre of an object

•

The central part of the Earth

•

The choicest or most essential or most vital part of some idea or
experience

I have mentioned this word in one or two topics. Some of you with a more religious background might interpret this as being the soul (*the immaterial part of a person; the actuating cause of an individual life*), but that is a man-made idea and has no relevance to what I would like to discuss with you. I would like you to try to follow what I am saying here, and imagine for yourself in your own mind if it is possible. So if you are all ready, I would now like to do a virtual striptease for you all.

Stripping in front of the mirror!

I stand in front of a mirror and I see my reflection. I have just showered and shaved. I am of average height. I wear a pair of jeans, fashionable boxer shorts, fashionable trainers, a hooded sweatshirt, t-shirt, wooden

beads round my neck, and a hat. When I go out, that is how people will see me; and in their minds they will perceive what sort of person I am.

First, I remove my hat. I notice I have no hair on top of my head, just skin with a few stray hairs I have missed whilst shaving. I lost my hair in my twenties, and spent several years trying to cover it up because I was embarrassed by what people would say; that people would make fun of me, and I wouldn't be attractive to women any more.

I move down, and see I have small hairs in my ears, something that reminds me of getting older. I have green/grey eyes which were once my best feature, or so I thought. Now my eyes have developed wrinkles around them, and are looking tired. My nose is now slightly bent, possibly through heading a football, but I had never really noticed this before.

Age is catching up with me, and hairs are now protruding slightly from my nose, much to my girlfriend's distaste. I have a cut on the corner of my upper lip where my friend's dog bit me, eighteen years ago. My lips are thin on top and my mouth quite small. I open my mouth and examine my teeth. My front tooth is greyish-white where a teenager head-butted me because he was drunk, nineteen years ago; I have had it bleached several times, but it is still a bit grey, causing me to be self-conscious when I smile in photographs.

I have a smallish jaw, and recently noticed I am starting to develop a double chin where fat is gathering.

I take off my hooded top, t-shirt, and beads, and I examine myself. I have never been fat, but I notice I have developed fat around my chest area, which I find distasteful. I go to the gym and diet occasionally to get rid of it, but it is still there. My chest is quite hairy, and I still have a little bit of fat around my stomach, which I have persistently tried to get rid of, but have failed.

My shoulders are quite bony, with little tufts of hair on them, which seem to be increasing with each year I live. I notice that the work I am doing in the gym has increased my biceps slightly, and this pleases me, although my forearms and wrists are still quite skinny.

I have quite nice hands, I think, and my nails are always well manicured (people often say that this is because I was brought up by my mother, who did manicures for elderly people).

I turn and look over my shoulder at my back. My back is still strong, but little clumps of hair have formed under my shoulder blades. This disgusted me when I first noticed it, so I tried to wax them several years ago. This was an incredibly painful process, and I have never repeated it!

Moving down, my waist is still slim, although I have gone up a size in the last five years.

I now remove my jeans and my boxer shorts, and start to feel more self-conscious. I wonder if anyone is looking at me through the window, so I hurriedly close the curtains and shut the door. I examine my penis and testicles, which all too often rule men's and women's lives, but on close examination are no more than wrinkly bits of skin; neither "sexy," nor exciting – actually, they're rather dull.

A patch of hair protrudes above my penis, and wiry looking hairs protrude from my testicles. This is the part that people "groom" by shaving, or styling to make attractive to the opposite sex, but that all seems quite ridiculous now.

I turn around and examine my bottom. I have always thought I had a nice rounded bottom (or so some women have said). I am still pleased with it!

I move down to my thighs and calves which are hairy, and actually quite skinny, although feel strong to the touch. I move down to my skinny ankles and my feet, which poke out the bottom; they look in proportion. My toe nails are well trimmed and clean.

So this is me. This is how I was born. A lot smaller and slightly less hairy, but nevertheless, the same. I have got older, and fatter, and more wrinkled, but I am the same child who was ejected from my mother's womb on the 6th april 1969, sometime after midnight.

As I stand here, I am like my ancestors who (allegedly) came down from the trees in africa, started walking upright, and developed the power of thought and language. I am not "cool," I am nothing, yet I am something – I am tangible. I am "real."

But naked I am vulnerable. I will get cold if I go outside. People will laugh at me, shout obscenities at me, pity me as mad; the police will probably arrest me for indecent exposure, and I will be locked up, and fined. No one will envy me, no one will respect me, no one will talk to me, or listen to me. All I am is a middle aged, hairy, lump of skin and bone. I am pathetic. I cannot work as no one would employ me, and I am an embarrassment to my friends and family. Ultimately society rejects me. I do not fit in.

That's incredible, isn't it? I am the same person as when I had all my clothes on yet now I am naked people perceive me as different. But that difference is all in the mind. It cannot exist anywhere else. A million years

of evolution, and now we are embarrassed by *who we are*. You see, “who we are” has nothing to do with who we think we are, or what we want to be or become, it is the reflection of the naked self in the mirror. That is me.

I am not successful, that is purely external. I am not attractive, that is perception, and comparison. I am not rich, I have no pockets to carry my money in. I just have a body controlled by an advanced management computer, and an efficient pump. Do I feel free, powerful, or in tune with the natural world? No, I do not. In fact, I can't wait to get dressed so I can become myself again!

Adding it all back

“Ahh that's better!” I think, as I first cover my very “personal” genital area. At least if anyone came in and saw me, I wouldn't be as embarrassed. I then put my trendy jeans on and cover my hairy skinny legs. Next come the socks, which cover my nicely trimmed nails (I'm not so worried about my feet). Next I pull on my t-shirt, and a baggy hooded sweatshirt, covering my slightly flabby chest, stomach, and clumps of hair on my back; which makes me start to look more human. On go the wooden beads round my neck, which have a slightly “ethnic” feel to them, and are in fashion; followed by the shoes, and finally the hat, to cover the bald head. That's better!

I look at myself in the full length mirror, and start to admire myself. I look coordinated and cool. I grab my car keys and coat, and head out. As I park the car, and go to get out, I notice I am feeling pretty confident about myself. I don't care if people look at me; in fact I positively welcome it. I know they could not be saying anything bad about the way I look. They may even admire me.

As I talk to people in shops, I know they will not think badly of me, because I have a good command of the english language, and have a polite accent. When I arrive at work, I know I am good at my job, and have good communication skills, and will fit in perfectly. I look forward to meeting my friends in the pub later, because I have a good sense of humour and they like me, and I look forward to spending time with my girlfriend, because she thinks I'm really nice, but then, this is all an illusion I have created.

Are you starting to get the idea? If I go to church, wear religious clothing, drive a specific type of car, live in a certain size house, or have a

specific kind of job, people will think something about me. Naked, and without these bolt-on “accessories,” I am nothing in the world. I am pure animal. I am dangerous to people because I do not fit in with their idea of what a human is. Do you see?

Our species, homo sapiens, is born naked, but we are quick to cover him up; to fill his head with ideas of right and wrong, but that is not who *he* is. That is what the conditioners, such as parents and teachers want him to be.

*Underneath our clothes we are all the same, human.
The only thing that separates us is our minds.*

Finding the core I speak of does not mean finding all the answers to the universe; it's more like a starting point, where one can start to explore questions such as consciousness and interconnectivity. Without removing human bolt-ons, how can we ever hope to see the world as it truly “is?” Only by laying ourselves bare in front of the mirror – without comparison or judgement – can the process begin.

I urge all of you to remove your clothes layer by layer, and start to uncover something more wondrous than anything humans could ever invent. Try it. Play with watching your thoughts as you imagine yourself naked in the street! Imagine what people would think of you without all your clever ideas and your possessions. What have you got to lose? Only embarrassment, but that's a good thing to lose.

C o r p o r a t i o n s

A business firm whose articles of incorporation have been approved
in some state

This topic has been given me a lot of trouble over the last few months. How would I start it? How could I make it balanced and not appear biased? How could I convey my view without criticising every company on the planet? I decided to leave it. But as there are few topics left, I finally have to tackle it. So let's go on a journey around the corporate world.

I've got an idea!

Let's be fair; corporations (or companies, depending on where you live), start as an idea. Not an idea of how to make as much money as possible and exploit all the world's resources. On the contrary, they usually start as an idea of how to make something better, or how to make life easier

and more pleasurable. And from that idea, usually grows something; probably small at first, but if it's a good idea, then everyone will want the product or service. So let's not demonise people as some "anti-capitalists" do, and instead, commend them on their innovation. That is what man is seriously good at, after all.

I want to talk to you about one idea which is now a well known product in our life. It is the mobile telephone. I don't have all the details of who invented it, but it first started out life in cars, and even in the eighties, was still a chunky bit of equipment in the boot, a hand held receiver in the car, and a big aerial outside. The reception was patchy to say the least.

As the first companies in the market started to build more towers, coverage improved, but unless the person you were calling was in a populated area you would probably hear "the mobile you are calling is not available." I know it used to frustrate me terribly when I would try to call my dad.

"The mobile number you are calling, is switched off" was another message I would often hear because the phone only worked if the someone was in the car, and it was running!

After a couple of years, the transportable was introduced. It was portable (if you call lugging a huge piece of equipment attached to a phone portable), but only people who really needed it had one, such as people in engineering or building jobs where they were off site etc. But the phone companies worked hard, and so did the electronic chip and battery manufacturers to get the size down. And so, the first truly portable phone was launched, and it looked like a brick!

Several years went past with the phones gradually getting smaller, the coverage improving, and the battery life getting longer. In about 1995, the first digital phones were launched in the uk, and that's where the pace started hotting up. The screens were still small and the functionality was, what you would call, "basic," but they now had the added option of text messages and voicemail. Wow! Is all I can say. You could send a short "sms" to someone, without having to talk to them, and if they were out of range you could leave them a message which would be replayed to them when their phone was back on. It was a fantastic revolution.

The problem was, they were expensive to run. But as more and more people bought into this revolution the price came down, the phones got better, they had colour screens, calculators and notepads, and the coverage was improving by the day.

Roaming was then switched on, and that meant you could travel abroad with your phone and be contactable on the same number. The dialling party didn't have to know where you were, they just called your number and the magical cellular networks would bounce the call direct to you, whether you were at a business lunch in los angeles, or a product launch in tokyo. But it was still primarily a business tool.

I loved my mobile. It was a great way to keep in touch with people when I was overseas, or away from home; and the best thing was, the company picked up the tab.

Let's fast forward to 2008; where three months ago, I decided to stop using my mobile phone. What used to be a good idea had now turned into a menace. This is how it happened.

Over the last ten years, everyone bought a mobile. Some people even got rid of their landlines, and instead of calling, people would "text" (not a verb surely) each other.

Beep Beep "Hi whatcha up to?"

Beep Beep "Not much watchin TV"

Beep Beep "What ya watchin?"

Beep Beep "Nothin"

Beep Beep "wanna go out for a bit"

Beep Beep "where?"

Beep Beep "pub?"

Beep Beep "which one?"

Beep Beep "usual"

Beep Beep "C U L8TR" (a new language was being developed)

Beep Beep "where are you?"

Beep Beep "nearly there"

Beep Beep "C U in a minute"

And then they would meet up in the pub for a pint and a chat... but not for long

Beep Beep "where are you?"

Beep Beep "in the pub"

Beep Beep "who with?"

Beep Beep "just a mate"

Beep Beep "cool"

And then one of the people would "have" to call his girlfriend to say he was in the pub.

"Hi, honey, just in the pub, won't be too late... Did you? ... Really! ..."

Meanwhile his other friend had to find something to do while his friend was talking on the phone: “HIYA what’ ya doin?” he “texted” another friend.

Beep Beep “not much, you?”

Beep Beep “In the pub with a mate.”

Beep Beep “COOL!”

They would then settle back to their pints, but guaranteed, the phones would soon be beeping with text messages and calls would be being made.

The epidemic was spreading quickly. After a 24 hour flight to australia I would notice that almost as soon as the plane landed, there would be various beeping tones going off, with people desperate to check their mobiles, just in case they had a message – just in case it was “important.”

We have to remember that just twenty years ago, these phones didn’t exist, and we have been doing without them for thousands of years! But now parents give their kids mobiles “just in case” they need to call, or something happens to them; and on every street, most young people are walking with their eyes down, looking at a screen, or have some stupid headset sticking out of their ears.

Mobiles have almost become attached to people’s bodies, and they get anxious if their phone is out of sight for more than a couple of minutes. Kids use them in class, people use them on trains, buses and trams, “YES I CAN HEAR YOU! I’M ALMOST THERE!” People even have them beside them at the dinner table.

We are psychologically attached to them now (see attachment topic), and the whole world is ringing in different tunes and beeping constantly.

I just couldn’t understand what had happened. What was so important that it couldn’t wait until the end of the film? Maybe it is exciting knowing you may have received a text message?

So now we have the noise of the mobile phones, and people talking loudly. Great! Just what we need in an already overly noisy world.

I don’t know anyone who doesn’t have a mobile, and thanks to the incessant advertising by the phone companies about how cool you will look with their new phone (which after all is just a phone), they have become a fashion accessory. It’s all you ever hear people talking about:

“Oh yes, did I tell you I just got a new phone, and I’ve got a new number. I’ll give it to you just in case.”

“This is absolute madness” I thought. In less than twenty years, we have become addicted to something we don’t even need.

I'm sure some people will be saying: "Yes, but in an emergency..."

All I can say is "Did we not have emergencies over the last million years?"

"Yes, but it is a dangerous world we live in now..."

But how does the mobile phone make it more safe? All it does is creates fear when you don't have it.

As an end note to the last section, I have had to hang onto mine for now, as I have no permanent address, and as I still use a laptop with a wireless connection which I can make calls with, I feel it is a bit hypocritical to tell you to give up your most favourite toy! But when I eventually settle I will have no need for it.



So as you can see, and probably hear, wherever you are in the world (people were even using their mobiles when they came for retreats at the island I was volunteering at), mobiles have gone from being a great idea, to an addictive nuisance the world over. But who's fault is it? Mr vodafone's or mr nokia's? Of course not. They had an idea, implemented it, and it worked. These corporations grew to global size, not because they were intent on world domination, but because of us! Do you understand? So we are all responsible for mobile phones being everywhere; for the annoying ringtones, and kids not paying attention to anything anyone says because they're chatting on the phone! It's not our fault they are addictive (or is it us, who are easily addicted?).

Who's for a burger and coke?

I said who's for a...

Oh, sorry you're listening to your mp3 player

I am not going to bore you with any more examples of ideas turned into billion dollar corporations, but I'm sure you can all have a guess at some of the products. Before we complain about these companies making billions of dollars a year, let's not forget how they got so rich! Because we made them rich. The operating system I am running this laptop on is a prime example of a good idea by a couple of guys turned into a multi-billion dollar corporation. Made possible by... You guessed it! Us.

But what happens to these people who start with these good ideas and suddenly get rich and powerful? Well one thing is for sure, they'll do

anything to hang on to it, whatever the cost. It's a shame, but when people get power, they change.

Now they have responsibility for many employees, and they also have a responsibility to the shareholders (if, like most corporations, they are publicly quoted) to keep bringing in the money. I don't want to talk about power or profit here, because if a company makes a profit (*the excess of revenues over outlays in a given period of time, including depreciation and other non-cash expenses*) it just means they are good at their business. So let's not hassle them over something which is an essential part of trading. You must have something to put back into research and development if you are to stay one step ahead of the competition, otherwise your business, the share price, and the employees jobs go down the tube!

Shareholders

Someone who holds shares of stock in a corporation

When I was younger, my dad ran a publicly quoted company, and he always made a point of telling us when the share price went up – I guess it made him feel proud that his hard work was being rewarded. He bought my mum and I shares in the company and my mum bought me shares in a telecom company, a bank, and the newly privatised gas company – not many, but I guess she saw it as an investment for later life for me.

I don't own them now, not because I think it is ethically wrong to hold shares, but because I sold them when I was nineteen or so (probably to pay for my hectic social life). People all over the world own shares, don't they? Some own only a couple of hundred, but some groups, such as pension funds own billions of dollars worth.

Shares are a good investment if you know what you're doing. The small print says they could always go down as well as up, but if you play your cards right you are going to keep getting dividends (*that part of the earnings of a corporation that is distributed to its shareholders; usually paid quarterly*). So corporations have to keep the shareholders happy, and a company that makes a lot of money means happy shareholders!

This means the business cannot afford to stagnate. They cannot afford to rest easy when the share price is high; they have to constantly innovate and market new products to stay ahead of the game; and without

realising it, the shareholders become responsible for the company's actions.

Did this mean that companies were being forced to expand, create new markets, cut corners on environmental and social issues, just to keep the shareholders happy? I had to find out; so I called a large pension fund to see what was going on.

Me: Hi, my name's alan. I wonder if I might have a few minutes of your time to discuss shareholders and their responsibilities.

Fund Manager: Well, as long as you're not a journalist, I can give you a couple of minutes.

Me: Thanks. Now, your pension fund manages millions of dollars right? And you invest some of that money in stocks and shares.

Fund Manager: Correct.

Me: Why do you invest money in shares; isn't it a bit risky?

Fund Manager: Not if it is done correctly. We are very careful about the sorts of companies we invest in.

Me: So what makes a good company?

Fund Manager: Plenty of capital, strong leadership, innovative products or services and a good long term strategy.

Me: So does it matter what market sector they are operating in?

Fund Manager: Not really. We generally tend to stay away from start up businesses and companies that are registered in any, shall we say, "unstable" political and economic environments.

Me: Are you concerned with environmental issues, or social issues?

Fund Manager: We have an ethics policy, if that's what you mean, but we rely on the corporations to make sure they have their own ethics policy.

Me: Does that mean you will invest in companies that make weapons, or are involved in addicting the nation to things like cigarettes?

Fund Manager: I don't think I like where this is going, but I will say this, we invest in blue chip (*a common stock of a nationally known company whose value and dividends*

are reliable; (typically have high price and low yield) whose businesses are well known who have good brand loyalty) companies.

Me: So it doesn't matter if what they make or do is damaging to the environment, or the people, only that the stock is reliable? Surely that is a bit unethical wouldn't you say?

Fund Manager: It is not our job to judge businesses on their chosen markets we are only concerned with how the business is performing, but we wouldn't invest in a business where there was likely to be social problems or protests, because then we could lose money and we have to protect our own investors pensions.

Me: But some of these businesses are causing havoc with the environment, and are causing social problems by addicting people to their products, and changing the way we interact socially, things like mobile phones, computer gadgets, and a host of other products, not to mention the companies that make defence products.

Fund Manager: Like I said, it is not our business to judge them, if there are any ethical or social problems, that is a matter for the government, or other agencies, not for us. We are merely trying to get the best for our investors.

Me: At any cost?

Fund Manager: I'm sorry, I have to go now; this conversation is ended. Goodbye.

Me: Oh, thanks... Bye.

So before we start blaming companies, whose only job it is to make products, sell them, and make a profit so they can stay in business, let's start looking to that elusive group of individuals behind the brand; the shareholders. People like you and me, wittingly and unwittingly investing money into organisations whose only goal is to please us!

What do you think they would do to keep us happy? Anything? Would they do what ever it took to make sure that the shareholders had a good dividend every quarter? Would they carry on uprooting the environment, selling addictive products (not just nicotine, but all

consumer goods), moving businesses to countries where the labour and production cost is lower, getting involved in markets that bring pain and suffering to people, like the defence industry? You betcha! And they're doing it all for you. Because without people like you, these massive public corporations wouldn't exist.

Sure, the customers are to blame too, but you underpin the whole operation, just so you can get your greedy little fingers on your dividend cheque; hoping one day to sell the shares for a massive profit. And do you care what these companies do? Not one bit. As long as you're happy, the rest of the world can go jump!

There are of course, companies, whose work is only for the benefit of all beings on this planet, but I'm yet to find one. If you do, can you let me know, and I'll be sure to amend this topic. But until then, remember that if you own shares in a company you are sanctioning anything and everything it does; all in the name of profit – yours. So please be careful where you put your money; it could be affecting us all more than you know.

C o s m e t i c s

A toiletry designed to beautify the body

Anti-Ageing, Extra Sexy,
Look Healthy Magic Cream.
It's Beauty in a Box



All women seem to wear make up these days. A woman's make up bag is an essential part of who she is, it seems, but where did it all start? As far as I am aware, they had quite advanced forms of beautification in the time of Cleopatra, in Egypt, a couple of thousand years ago, and its origins may be from much further back in time. But we are here to discuss it in its modern context.

What I want to know is why we cake creams and mascara onto our faces! Faces that are so pure and beautiful on their own, before they are covered with a creamy facade. Our skin is delicate and needs the right moisture and exposure to the air to remain healthy, but hydration comes from within not from outside.

Wearing make-up doesn't hide either, it projects and it accentuates. It projects an image of who the women want to be seen to be. In short (if you didn't know it already) it is worn to attract men. You may not agree

with me here, but think about what you wear. Eye mascara to accentuate the eyes, lipstick to accentuate the full lips. Blusher or powder to accentuate the cheekbones. This is all about animal attraction. The need to attract a mate. So is this about biology then?

We know it is hard wired into a woman's brain to find a suitable mate with whom to have children with, and she uses whatever tools she has at her disposal. Much like a bird who displays all his colours during the mating season, women apply false colours to try to achieve the same effect.

So isn't it perfectly normal to make yourself as beautiful as you can be to attract a mate you want? Isn't the idea of accentuating the most sexual parts of your face mimicking nature? I hear most women reading this saying "I don't know why he's going on about make-up; I like wearing make-up, it makes me feel good. Why shouldn't I wear something that makes me feel more attractive. I'm not doing it to attract a man, I'm doing it for me!"

Whilst having a conversation with a friend a couple of years ago, I remarked that her make-up was always immaculate, and I asked her (jokingly) if she ever took it off. To my surprise, she said that not only did she go to bed with her boyfriend in the evening with make-up on, but she also got up in the morning to apply fresh make-up before her boyfriend got up. In short, her boyfriend had never seen her as she was meant to be – natural. Now I for one, found it sad that someone had to hide under cosmetics; what I would call false beauty, even though it was quite obvious to anyone that she was pretty anyway. But she never showed her true self.

Whilst this may be an uncommon story, I did start to investigate it more. The more women friends I talked to, the more I found that wearing make-up all the time was common; even when they did have a man, and no longer needed to attract him with long dark eyelashes and pouty red lips! They wore it all the time because that was who they were. They weren't hiding anything, nor trying to project anything; without make-up, their whole being, personality, and their self-worth was incomplete.

When they looked at themselves in the mirror, the true self was the one wearing the make-up – the one with the sultry eyes, sexy lips, and raised cheekbones painted on. Gone was the reality of nature, the face that has been evolving for millions of years, and brought in was the false, man-made beauty.

The thing is, men have become addicted to make-up as well, and also don't want to go out with a girl with a "plain" face. They want her to look "stunning," they want her to look "beautiful." They want her to smoulder – even if it is under a load of old grease paint!

Of course men are attracted to women with make-up. The dark eyes are meant to draw you in; the plump red lips meant to imitate the physical state when a woman is excited and her lips fill with blood, mimicking the sexual organ, also inviting you in... Who would a man be attracted to? The woman looking painted and seductive, or the "plain" girl? We have become so conditioned into believing that this is how women "should" look naturally, that we seem to have forgotten that it is all man-made.

I don't know about you, but I am quite impressed with the way nature has dealt with things over the last few billion years, and I am also a believer that nature has pretty much thought of everything whilst we have been evolving over the last million years or so. In fact, we are so perfect, anatomically, that I would hazard a guess to say that if nature had intended us to have thick black eyelashes, accentuated cheeks, and bright shiny lipstick, they would have come as standard!

I am not suggesting that women shouldn't wear exactly what they want, I just want to explore it with you. It seems to me that women don't think about why they are wearing it; it's just something you do as you get older. Unfortunately, young children are now encouraged to play at dressing up where they wear make-up, which starts the conditioning process off. They see their sister and their mother wearing it, so they just accept that it's something you should do. It is teaching every young girl that the only way to be beautiful is to apply cosmetics on your skin. It teaches that beauty is something that can be bought in a jar.

Beauty

The qualities that give pleasure to the senses

The old saying "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" just doesn't seem to ring true. We feast with our eyes before we even strike up a conversation, and we are naturally drawn to features we judge as attractive.

We take in all the primary information we need to know about a person's beauty from their face. Some people have striking facial features which seem to be in perfect symmetry, and for some reason, please all of us (think fashion models). Unfortunately, this accidental mix of genes

which resulted in these features is taken as the benchmark for what beauty should be, and the rest of us spend our time trying to live up to this seemingly impossible standard.

Of course, the cosmetic companies love our insecurities, and they come up with all sorts of products to cover up “those little blemishes.” The stupid thing about it is that most of the models in the magazines have been “touched up” by computer to make them look perfect.

As all of you should know, there is no such thing as perfection, only subjective judgement; and if I judge myself to be beautiful, then so be it! I am beautiful.

The problem with the word beauty, is that it naturally goes along with another word, and that is compare (*examine and note the similarities or differences of*).

We are constantly comparing ourselves with others. We are always looking at others to see if they are more beautiful than we are. Then we look in the mirror to compare ourselves to them. We feel forced to constantly evaluate our faces and bodies. For women, and slightly less so for men, the need to compare represents a physical need to assert whether we are attractive enough for someone else to pick as a mate.

Of course, some people prefer specific features (height, hair colour, body type etc.) over others, but this need to constantly evaluate and compare – what are, in essence, just the surface of who we are – is sad in my opinion. Every human being on this planet is beautiful, and I don’t mean that flippantly, I mean it in all seriousness. Under every skin is a golden light. A mass of swirling energy, bursting with vibrancy, swathed in colour, full of real beauty. Not superficial, like the position and shape of the nose, the height of the forehead, the shape of the chin, the definition of the cheekbones, the plumpness of the lips.

Let me ask you a question: How many of you have met a woman (or a man) whom you thought unattractive on first meeting? I have. How many of you have noticed that the more you get to know them, the more the shape of the nose, the crookedness of the teeth, the width of the chin, becomes less and less important; and the more you understand about them, the more you like them? It’s strange, because you would always believe you would end up going for the most attractive man or woman; but in the end, it is not the looks that are important, but what makes up the whole person. But *still* we compare. We worry that our choice may be too ugly, and friends may make fun of us – but then they are not our friends.

Why do we always seek perfection?

Perhaps seeking perfection is a natural process, and we are looking for a mate with “the right stuff.” If that is true, then we will always be drawn to features that some would call beauty. But what I want to know is why we are so critical of ourselves.

“I’m too fat,” “I’m too spotty,” “I’m too this, too that.”

We are critical, I believe, not because we don’t love ourselves, but because we are concerned about what others will think of us. “Am I beautiful?” girls may ask. “Am I handsome?” men may question, but if you were not comparing yourself with others, what use would the question be? Think about it for a moment. “Am I more beautiful than her?” How could you tell unless you use the all powerful media yardstick? The measure that all must compare to – the models. The most perfect. The finest features. The biggest bust. The most slender waist, the most rounded (but firm) buttocks. The longest toned legs (and that’s just the women!).

Let me ask you another few questions. What do you want to look like? Are you not happy in your own skin? Do you want plastic surgery? Do you want a facelift?” The sorry answer to these questions is that in a lot of cases you do! You must look perfect, like the models. You listen to what the media says.

You read those stupid magazines that tell you how to firm your bust, tone up your legs, and “attract a man!” (The same magazines are on sale for men too.) But there is one thing you are forgetting, and that is that the cosmetic (including diet/fashion) industry, is worth billions of dollars. Of course they want you to think you aren’t perfect. They know you want to be perfect. They know you don’t have perfect breasts/legs/nose etc. And do you want to know why?

Because they invented the definition of perfection

There is no perfect. If you can exercise and make yourself fitter, eat a healthy diet, drink lots of water then the golden radiance we talked about earlier will come through, you won’t need a face pack of cosmetics to make you “appear” healthy and attractive. If you are healthy on the inside, psychologically and physically, and think positively about

everything you are and everything you do, you will have a natural beauty far exceeding anything these expensive nothing creams can do for you. By all means keep putting on make-up, but think about one thing: Why? Your skin is perfect (even if you suffer from acne). Plastering on make-up will only make it worse in later years.

The adverts will pander to your secret fears of becoming old and unattractive, but don't listen to them. You must shine from the inside out, and the only way to do that is not by applying "maxi-hydration mask with 15 super ingredients to make you look 30 years younger in 14 days." You are human! You *will* get wrinkles, it's a simple fact. Your body *will* change as you start to get older, the skin tone *will* loosen, but it is reflecting the fact you *have* lived!

Please explore this topic with me carefully. We are teaching our children that beauty comes in the form of a lipstick or eyebrow pencil. You have the responsibility to tell your children "You are beautiful," and to "accept you are beautiful without the need for an artificial mask." What shame is there in showing your eyes as they are, your lips as they are. Feel the power of beauty inside. No matter how many layers of the mask you put on, remember you *will* have to take it off one day. What have you got to lose?

Break free from the control of the cosmetics companies. Break free from comparison. Do not judge yourself or others. Accept. Let go. You are amazing. You are love. You are radiance. You *do not* have to wear make-up to find love.

C r e a t i v i t y

The ability to create

When we talk of people being “creative,” we automatically think of painters, poets, writers, musicians, actors, or singers, but we never really think of ourselves as being creative without those labels. We all like art (*the creation of beautiful or significant things, the products of human creativity*); we go to the movies, attend concerts, read books, and we wander round art exhibitions trying to look intelligent; pretending we understand what the artist “really was trying to say” when he painted a bunch of flowers or left a pile of bricks labelled “society” on the floor. Artists do try to represent what the nation is feeling at the time, and they are sometimes making a comment on society and its ills using metaphors. But creativity is so much more than that.

What we like to call “art,” is more like entertainment to me (sorry to all you “serious” artists out there trying to make a difference to society), where people put on a show for the masses to keep them amused, or

diverted from reality. After all, the governments have always sent in entertainers to keep the troops happy and make them forget why they're really there (killing people).

Governments like art. It stops the people from questioning what they and their friends in big business are up to. It's like using the magician's slight of hand, where he directs you to look somewhere else to divert your attention from what he is really doing.

Last week, I sat watching a swedish comedian/social commentator/magician at work, and although I didn't understand a word of what he was saying, I still laughed along with the crowd. But as I was laughing, I started to look around me at the crowd enjoying themselves, and began to wonder who these people really were, what they did for a living, what they thought about life, what their hopes, dreams, and fears were; and I realised that most of them were probably asleep.

They probably worked hard, paid their bills on time, and were nice to their husbands and wives. They probably bought presents for loved ones, and either had a family, or hoped to have one in the future. As I sat there, I suddenly felt sad that whilst these people were being entertained, their minds were being kept solidly off questioning why they were really here on this planet. All of their lives were taken up making sure they crossed the "t's" and dotted the "i's." Their lives were being guided by an unknown force, and no, it wasn't god at work, it was the people in power who needed them to conform and keep quiet so they could get on with the business of controlling the people and directing the future of the show (planet earth).

They relied upon people like the magician I was watching, to allow the people to question what was going on, but within a controlled environment; safe in the knowledge that as soon as the show was over, the people would get back to their daily lives, back to work, and get back to paying their taxes; because, "contributing to society," is what we are here for right?

I thought perhaps I was being a bit cynical, but the more I looked around the auditorium, the more I felt I was staring into hollow eyes, conditioned by society to conform, or else.

Fortunately for the government, art of any kind (no matter how deep the meaning, or however revolutionary the content), is still classed as art, and once it is contained in that box it is forever labelled.

The only difference seems to be books. Books have the ability to reach a vast audience and allow them time to digest the content. Within the book, the reader has the ability to stop and consider life outside of the

conditioning – I have been inspired by many authors work – but if the content is too inflammatory, the government or the church will probably have it pulled or some smear campaign will be started about the integrity of the author. But normally, the government will just let it go. They know that books still come under the label “art,” so they know they are safe.

A creativity revolution

So although I advise all of you to take an acting class, or to learn to play an instrument in order to express yourself, there is one thing you can do to create a revolution, and that is to be yourself. Does that make any sense?

For so many years now, people have been kept asleep. We have been kept (superficially at least) happy by the promise of plentiful employment, healthcare, the purchase of cheap consumer goods, cheap package holidays, and a state retirement plan if you’re lucky. You may accuse me of being a conspiracy theorist (*a secret agreement between two or more people to perform an unlawful act*), but there is nothing illegal about what is going on in the world. Every country has some law to say that, yes, everything we are doing is perfectly legal; now shut up and get on with your job.

Some people have cited secret groups such as the freemasons or others as having a design to take over and control the world; but hang on, we are already under control! We just call it democracy because it sounds better. But you just try speaking out against your government or trying to create real change in the world and you will see how much of a democracy you live in.

For too long, we have been observers of pain and suffering. We like to paint it, film it, write books and plays about it but now is the time to do something about it. For most of you reading this it will probably be a scary proposition; but don’t worry, this isn’t about demonstrating on the streets, or forcefully overthrowing the government. Oh no, that would be “illegal”. What we are talking about is drawing on our inner creativity to find a way out of the mess we have left ourselves in.

One meaning of the word “create,” is, “to bring into existence,” and what we are talking about here is bringing ourselves into existence, to *wake up* from the happy gas that has been pumped around the cities of the world, so we think this is how things are, and how things should be.

This isn't how life should be, this is a man-made illusion. We have got so far away from how things really are, that we don't know what is real anymore and what is not.



In our explorations and discussions throughout this book, you will notice two themes coming up again and again, and that is awareness and insight. If you have neither, then you are asleep.

I don't want to change the world, and I don't want to change you. I just want to help you wake up. "But what if I don't want waking up?" says you. Don't worry that's just the happy gas talking!

We are not trying to create an ideal world here, there is no such thing. We are not trying to create a perfect world, there is no such thing. What we are trying to do is to create. To create a space for just a fraction of a second that allows your mind to say: "Hey! Wait a minute..." And that's all we are trying to create here – nothing more. No revolutions; they just cause pain and misery, and all that happens is one controlling organisation is replaced by another controlling organisation. Think about it for a minute or two.

The world has been in some state of war and suffering for many thousands of years and we can see the same thing happening throughout history. But don't take my word for it. Go down to your local library open a history book, and you can see for yourselves.

Throughout history, we can see that when people have tried to create something new they have either been the oppressor or brutally oppressed. What we have now is an opportunity to let ourselves shine, to free ourselves from all limitations, from all the constraints that have been put on us, by tradition, education, and social conditioning. We are not laboratory animals; we are homo sapiens, the most intelligent, creative species, in the known universe, let us not limit that creativity to a few works of art, a concert or two, and a magician with nothing up his sleeve.

We are creators. We have created so much in such a little space of time, whether good or bad. Let us turn to ourselves, and create compassion and love in ourselves; and let that light spread forth and touch all creatures on earth. No government, nor any man can stop it once it starts. And the great thing about it is it's all *legal!* Don't be fooled by mind tricks anymore. You are too intelligent for that; aren't you?

Create the space.
Let insight in for one second...
And now wake up!

C r e d i t C a r d s

A card (usually plastic) that assures a seller that the person using it has a satisfactory credit rating and that the issuer will see to it that the seller receives payment for the merchandise delivered.

Excuse me for asking, but has anyone noticed recently that you can't do anything without a credit card? And given that we use telephones and the internet to buy so much "stuff," it isn't surprising, it's just the way that payments have developed. Except, on the whole, you are buying things on credit (with someone else's money), unless you have a payment card with the right symbol on it, to take the money out of your bank account.

I don't have a credit card. I can't get one because I do not have an address where I have lived for the past X years. I rarely operate a bank account, do not have a full time job, and I will not pass their computer scoring test.

I'm sure none of you *really* think about your credit cards; you just accept that this is something you need to have in order to get on in the world. It probably doesn't even occur to you that the person you have

borrowed from (even if you pay it back on time every month) is a money lender, the same as the loan sharks who operate in back streets, and charge massive amounts of interest.

This loan shark has a smiling face, a glossy brochure, a massive advertising campaign, and a huge clientele. They may not threaten to break your legs if you don't pay them back, but they will attempt to ruin your life by making sure you can never borrow again. And given that our whole life is based around buying things we can't afford, this is could be a major blow to most people.

So why do you need them? Well, when you first get the card, there's a good credit limit on it so you can "Start Spending Immediately!" But just remember, you'll still have to start paying it back at the end of next month.

Some people are not good with money. I know from personal experience how easy it is to spend money on credit cards. You feel like an instant big shot, all that cash at your disposal, and you didn't have to work a single day for it. Fantastic! So it's straight down to the shops; new clothes, maybe a holiday, maybe a gift for your partner. It's so easy. Phone up. Apply on-line. A decision in sixty seconds. And if the computer gives you a good score, you're in business. A shiny new card with your chosen symbol will be delivered to your home, ready to start spending!

And then it's gone – you're up to your credit limit. Except now, the smiley, shiny credit card loan shark wants to start getting its money back. Can't pay? First you start getting the "courtesy" phone call, then the more insistent phone call, followed by the first letter, then the second letter, then the third letter, then the solicitor's letter, then the second solicitor's letter, followed finally by a summons, followed by a court appearance where the bailiffs will then be authorised to remove your "stuff" up to the value of the debt owed. Suddenly the whole smiley, shiny, plastic experience isn't so much fun. Gone are the images of happy people in the ads using their plastic; all you have now is worry and trouble in your life.

You may not believe it, but this is all your own fault; not the fault of the credit card companies who have made you to take a card under false pretences. It's not the fault of the system, nor the government. This is of your own making, or should I say, your brain's.

You see, when you got your new plastic, your brain gave you some great ideas about what to spend it on. You engaged with the pleasure, and

before you knew it, you were down the shops spending. Yippee. Look at all the lovely new things I bought!

It is not that the money lenders are evil, they are just filling a demand. They know you are addicted to buying things. They know you just can't help buying things you *want* but can't afford. They're just helping you achieve that dream – albeit a false one.

Imagine it. All the trouble you get into because you just can't help doing what your brain tells you to do. Buying products you don't need, to get an instant hit of pleasure. Remember the pleasure hit you get from drugs, or alcohol, or a cigarette? Well it's the same with shopping. Especially if you can get something you don't have to save for. So there it is. Credit cards. A non-essential item in your wallet, used for buying pleasure. Until you have to pay it back...

Please think about this carefully with me. We get into debt because we want; we desire. There is no magical spell that forces you to do these things, just an inability to detach from a brain that has become addicted to certain behaviours. What do you think about it? Do you think “credit cards are essential,” “I couldn't get by without them,” “they are a necessary evil,” “I don't have any problems with them, they're just more convenient.” Would you agree with any of those statements?

I am sure many of you reading this don't get into debt. You just use the credit card to pay for goods, because (a) it's easier than carrying cash, (b) because you get points, and maybe (c) because you use it when paying over the internet. For you, the last few paragraphs were meaningless; probably because you are either very, very careful with credit and don't like paying interest, or you have plenty of money!

Whatever the case, there are definitely more people out there using credit cards as a way to get things they can't afford, and not paying off the balance every month, or these card companies wouldn't be in business. It's the interest you pay that pays for their fancy advertising, the offices all over the world, their staff, and their sponsorship of sporting and art events! How else do you think they get their money? You give it to them! Your inability to resist spending money keeps these giants in the money lending industry in business.

Your best bet is to cut all of these cards up. I did. Do you want to support a loan shark? To make him richer, while you get poorer?

In the beginning, you may find it difficult to come to terms with the fact that you won't be able to just put things on your silver, gold, or platinum card; that you won't be able to show off to your friends with

your impressive array of shiny plastic. The shiny piece of plastic which *obviously* means that you are of a higher status than everyone else. Why? Because only people with excellent credit ratings get access to the exclusive club of being able to borrow, borrow, borrow!

What an achievement. What a remarkable step forward in the progress of the human race! An ability to borrow money, which resulted from a favourable result in a computer software program. Think about how absurd this is. Our success as humans is measured by a credit scoring program.

Without a good credit rating, you can't do anything these days. Well, that's what they tell you, but actually what it means is, you can't borrow! These days, everything is done on credit; from houses to cars – all expensive items. And the only way the companies can get you to buy them, is to loan you the money! How many people do you think can afford to buy even a small new car with cash? What about a house? That would be ridiculous; no normal, hard working family could afford to pay cash for a house. They would never be able to save up the amount of money needed.

We will cover housing in more detail in another topic but suffice to say that giving up credit cards will not break the cycle of debt we all find ourselves in straight away, but it's a good start to ridding ourselves of something that is chaining us to misery.

From a historical point of view, credit cards are a new thing, and so is credit scoring. Both have only come into existence in the last 40 years or so, and wouldn't exist without computers being able to check on people and their financial history.

So how did we pay for things before we had credit cards? Well, it will probably come as no surprise to you that after the second world war, people were pretty poor. They had little; economies of the world were decimated by war (except those companies who supplied the technology and weaponry for the war, who seemed to become rich, funnily enough).

People were not addicted to shopping, they bought what they could afford; mainly simple things they needed, like food and to pay bills, with a little left over for clothing and other items they needed. You notice I use the word *need* here, because although there may have been desire, they couldn't buy anything they didn't have cash for (unless they were so desperate, they went to a money lender).

As economies were slowly rebuilt, and people became richer (in the westernised economies) they were encouraged to spend, spend, spend;

and spend they did! The governments told people it was their right. The economy was booming and so it was only *right* that people could buy what they wanted when they wanted it. The only problem was, they still needed to earn the cash before they could buy it. So, fuelled by the desire to “liberate” people from not getting what they wanted when they wanted it, the credit card was born.

Suddenly, people could buy things they also *wanted*, and the more they spent, the more the economy grew. They wanted stuff, the companies supplied it, everybody was happy; and when people are spending, the government is happy. Win-win. The employees are happy because they have jobs, because people want to buy their companies’ products. The employers are happy because the more they sell the more money they made. The government is happy because not only do they get the employees and employers tax contributions, they also get the sales tax from all the goods they were buying! Wow! Life sure is sweet! All fuelled by borrowing at outrageous rates of interest.

Loans were something people thought about very carefully before taking, but credit cards just involved filling out an anonymous form, and waiting a few days until your new piece of shiny came in the post. Borrowing without borrowing. A subtle loan, I would call it.

The use of credit cards proliferated throughout the world as the most acceptable currency for everything, from renting a car, to paying for a hotel room, and paying for dinner amongst other things. It also meant you didn’t have to worry about carrying cash on you all the time. This has worked well in the credit card companies’ favour; after all, who would carry around two thousand dollars in cash with them at all times? Well, with a credit card you can, enabling you to impulse buy whenever you feel like it.

“Hmm, I really fancy that new wide screen television, but I haven’t got any cash.”

“Oh Yes You Have!” shouts the credit card.

“Oh yes!” says you. “I can afford it, I have a credit card.”

“While you’re at it,” shouts the credit card, “why don’t you buy that flashy dvd player as well, you’ve still got plenty of credit left!”

Instant gratification. Win-win. You get what you want, the retailer gets a sale, and the credit card company hopes you can’t pay it back by the end of the month!

But let’s stop looking at the negative. It can’t be all bad, can it? And anyway, how the heck am I supposed to pay for my cheap flight online? How can I pay for my hotel when I am in a country where I feel

uncomfortable carrying cash in case I get robbed? Surely for this alone, it is a good thing?

I can see the positive side of such a system, although it has encouraged many more cases of fraud. Every year millions (maybe billions) is stolen from peoples credit cards, by various methods. Somebody has to pay for all this fraud, and it's sure not going to be the chief executives of the card companies, it's going to be you and me.

So how do we embrace the word-wide system which relies on credit cards for guarantee of payment, without borrowing money?

Part of the attraction for retailers to accept these cards is that once they have your number, they can subsequently charge any outstanding amounts to your card afterwards, such as if you run up a bill at a hotel, or rent a car, but most other items we buy are one-off payments.

What we need is a way of carrying cash that is in an electronic format for convenience and personal security, but is prepaid rather than borrowing the money. What could we possibly use that enables us to do that? Oh yes! It already exists. It's called your debit card, and your lovely bank will issue you one of these so you can access your own money! You may even choose to use a pre-pay credit card (available from many stores) which requires no bank account. You just have to ask.

It may not be the best solution, but it's an instant way to stop borrowing money just so you can pay for a flight or something else on the internet (something I imagine will continue to expand as a preferred method for purchasing goods).

Of course, it would be nice if there was a global payment system that was run on a not-for-profit basis. "Don't be ridiculous!" shout the economists. But why not? The only people who would suffer are the credit card companies and their well paid ad agencies. It's not such a big deal. Who would run it? Who would manage it? These are questions we must pose ourselves. There is no easy solution to a system that has been in place for many years, although new methods of payment are springing up on the web all the time, but most of them still require you to load them up with cash from your credit card, so they are not an ideal solution either.

Like many difficult tasks in life, this will be hard, but ultimately worth freeing ourselves from. A mind concerned with debt will never have the space to contemplate anything else. Debt consumes you with worry. There is no place for anything else. It is time to break free of the smiles and the shiny plastic enticing you to spend, spend, spend. It's not your money, it never was and never will be.

So, until we can come up with a new method for payments which is not controlled by several loan sharks around the world, switch to using your debit card. Use your own money. You never know, saving for things you really want may be an enlightening experience, as you will have to practice that long forgotten art. Patience.

“BOO!” shouts you, “Stop spoiling our fun. We like credit cards, we want them, we need them, they are part of who we are. It’s not fair that we should think of giving them up.”

Can you not see how quickly and so intensely we have become so addicted to credit cards? They’ve only been going for about forty years and the whole developed world is addicted. Don’t worry, if you come from a less economically prosperous country, just give it a few years and soon you will be able to experience the pleasure of spending money you don’t have. I bet you can’t wait.

C r i m e

(criminal law) an act punishable by law; usually considered an evil
act

We all know what a crime is don't we? A crime is something that is against the law. It is against the law because the people and their representatives believe it is something wicked (*morally bad in principle or practice*) and it should not go unpunished. This has been the view for many thousands of years in civilised and uncivilised society.

Offences are defined as crimes against the person like robbery, violence, or murder, or against the government as in tax evasion, treason, and the suchlike. Punishments for committing "offences" vary from country to country, city to city, town to town, and person to person. A punishment for breaking and entering into a house might be a three month prison sentence in one country, five years in another, and in another, a public flogging. You can never be sure what punishment your going to get when you commit a crime.

If you murder someone in one part of the united states, you will receive a life sentence, but if you murder someone in a different state, you will be tied to a chair and an electric current passed through your body or given a lethal injection, until you are dead. Either way, you'll be killed.

But enough of the punishment, let's talk about the crime. Everyone will agree it's horrible to come into your house and find your precious goods stolen, or have your wallet stolen in the street, or even worse be beaten up. Even worse than that (which I'm sure the victims would agree if they could talk) is being murdered. To be stabbed with a knife that tears away at your flesh and organs, or be shot with a bullet that explodes inside you is the most heinous of crimes, wouldn't you agree? Not paying your taxes, cheating large companies, defrauding insurance companies, and other "crimes" where no one gets physically hurt are rarely seen as being offences by the perpetrators.

So who are these criminals? Who are the people who roam our streets looking to cause mischief to their fellow humans? Are they violent, unfeeling monsters as portrayed by the media, or are they people in need of our compassion and help? The overwhelming view amongst the general public is that these people are thugs, and deserve nothing from us. "They should lock them up and throw away the key," I hear some of you say, and I can understand why you think like that.

If you have ever been raped, attacked, robbed, or ripped off by someone, you want revenge – which you call justice. It seems only natural to want to punish the person who has stolen from you or wronged you, doesn't it?

We don't even need laws to make some things illegal, there are certain things which we naturally take offence to, like people stealing from you, or raping you, or your children. It is lucky for the criminals that we now have civilised courts and not the old fashioned kangaroo courts (*an irregular unauthorized court*), where they may find themselves dangling on the end of a rope for any offence!

The legal system has been modernised somewhat in the last two thousand years, and now there is a proper process to go through when trying a prisoner. They now have rights, and in most countries, a prisoner is considered innocent until proven guilty. Even if a prisoner is found guilty most countries do not kill them; they are normally sent to prison for a specific amount of time (at the cost of the taxpayer - you) and enjoy a reasonable life there until they are released to inevitably do the same thing again. Some people think it might actually be better to kill them and save ourselves the trouble of housing them in prison, then having to

deal with the aftermath of them re-offending. It would definitely be cheaper! Criminals are a real menace to us, aren't they?

- (a) They cause fear and mayhem on the streets.
- (b) They cost insurance companies billions in claims from people who have had things stolen.
- (c) They cost us millions for lawyers' fees and judges' salaries. They cause us to build courthouses at great expense, prisons at even greater expense, and then, finally, when they are convicted, require massive amounts of money to keep them locked up!
- (d) Then we release them into the community assign them a probation officer which costs money.
- (e) Then they re-offend.
- (f) Go back to (a).

And that's not even taking into account the emotional scars left behind when someone is a victim of crime. Looking at it, it is really easy to get angry; and believe me, it does make me angry when I see the blatant disregard, not for laws – which are man-made – but for fellow humans. This is not about the right of the individual to live a life free from crime either; it is about trying to understand how one human (*a member of the species homo sapiens*) can make another human (*a member of the species homo sapiens*) suffer. That is what I would like to discuss with you here.

Every year, governments threaten to get tough on the causes of crime; they bandy around figures to show us that street robbery is down 0.243% this quarter, murder is down 1.983% this week, burglary is down 2.94221% today. But no one, including the government, knows how to get rid of crime – not completely. They can reduce it, but they can't eradicate it.

So what causes people to commit crime?

Forget that there are laws for a moment... What causes one individual, or gang, to think it is perfectly acceptable to attack someone else, beat them savagely, steal their wallet, and leave them for dead? What causes a man, however enraged he is, to stab another man to death? What causes a young boy to grab a brick and throw it through the window of a car to steal its worthless cd player?

Let me ask you another question. When is it acceptable to steal from someone else? When you are starving? When you want what they have? When they can well afford it? Are there degrees of acceptability in crime?

What about when you stab someone? Maybe because they looked at you the “wrong” way? Because they were talking to your girlfriend? Because they were of a different race? Because you hated him? When? You tell me. What makes you fight on the street where I don’t? What makes you steal from someone when I don’t? What makes you kill when I don’t?

At a trial, many excuses or mitigating factors are put up by the defence. He was broke; he was going through a bad patch; he had just split up with his girlfriend; he was intoxicated/on drugs at the time. The excuses go on and on. I have never seen anyone go into court and say, “yes, I did it. I take personal responsibility for it;” they always try to weasel out of it, don’t they? “It wasn’t me. I didn’t do it; I’ve got an alibi.” They have committed a crime against someone, but when it comes to taking responsibility for it, they are nowhere to be seen. We have to use many hours of police time to hunt them down.

They are happy to do the crime, but not happy to do the time!

“He had a very troubled childhood, your honour;” “he got in with a bad crowd, your honour;” “he promises never to do it again, your honour;” and there he stands, head hung low in an ill fitting suit to show respect to the judge (or to try to get a more lenient sentence).

He cuts a thoroughly pathetic figure as he stands there being judged for something he has done wrong. Outside the court he’s a tough man, but in here he’s meek and mild. “Yes, your honour;” “no, your honour;” “sorry about that, your honour;” “it’ll never happen again, your honour;” “I’m a changed man, your honour.”

I have never seen people go from such arrogant, aggressive individuals to people who will do anything to get out of going to jail. At least have the courage to stand up and say, “I did it, he deserved it. I’m glad I did it.” But they won’t, because for most of them going to prison is an unattractive prospect, and being on the outside committing more crime is where they want to be.

“What about the one-off cases?” I hear you demand. “Those who really didn’t mean it and will never do it again cases, don’t put them in the same category as people who regularly commit crime.” But as I well know, from my two or three court appearances in my youth, a crime’s a crime.

The first time I went to court was for a breach of the peace, I think. I can’t remember exactly, but I was drunk, about seventeen, and some people I knew in the town were fighting with a couple of policemen. I said something like, “he’s done nuffing le-t ‘im go” or something to that incoherent effect about two hundred times to the police who were trying

to bundle him into a police car. I was promptly arrested and spent the night in a police cell shouting, “you bastards...” or something equally as pleasant. On the day of court I think I dressed up smartly, had my dad as support, and was fined a small amount of money as well as bound over to keep the peace for a year.

My second court appearance was for a similar drunken offence, although this time I was arrested for something more serious. I was drunk at some girl’s parents’ house, her boyfriend turns up, he says something, I go and grab a knife (a knife! I can’t believe I did that), he and the girl’s brother throw me out, and as I leave I stick the knife in the front door! I was promptly arrested, fined, and bound over to keep the peace.

The third and final court appearance (all within two years), was because the ex-boyfriend of the girl in case two decided I was responsible for his break up with said girl. I was drunk (some pattern emerging?), and he put me in a headlock. We were both promptly arrested, although this time in court I was found not guilty!

That was the end of my court appearances, but I often wonder what would have happened if I had stayed hanging round with the same crowd. They were only interested in fighting and drinking, and I wanted to be part of their group. They were the cool group in town and I hadn’t been in any groups before. I have never even had a fight in my life, and was only interested in the drinking and the women that hung around the group.

For me, being part of the group changed my personality enough to allow myself to do things that would normally go against my conscience. But being drunk all the time probably didn’t help either. I conformed to the group ideal of not caring about anything. I was angry at my parents when they tried to stop me going out with the group, and I stole from my mother to buy alcohol and cigarettes; I wasn’t myself at all. Yet the one thing I never did was take personal responsibility for my actions. I always blamed the others. Inside my mind, I was still a sweet little boy, but on the outside I was just an angry aggressive drunk.

This was my short brush with crime; and as I left the group, I never came into contact with the court system again (except for a few speeding and parking fines). I can see how easy it is to fall in with the wrong crowd and embark on a lifetime of crime.

Years ago they tried to profile the “look” of a criminal. What type of eyes, ears, nose, they had as if there was a genetic blueprint that caused people to become criminals. They were almost saying that if you looked a certain

way, you would almost definitely go into crime. Having seen the photos of some criminals you can see where they were coming from! But an ugly man is not a criminal any more than an attractive man is a saint!

Poverty and unemployment are always touted as being major contributors to the start of a career in crime, but that is only because people with no money and no job want the things people with money and a job have worked for. They feel aggrieved that someone else has the goods and they haven't. So what do they do? They take them. By force.

This isn't anything new. Throughout history, people have been stealing from each other and murdering each other. This is no modern epidemic, it's only because we have media that we know so much about it now.

There have always been poor people. My grandparents (and my parents) came from quite poor working class families in Glasgow. They had no fineries, but they had jobs and they were happy because they had each other. There are many poor people living around the world, but that doesn't make them thieves. There are many unemployed people, but that doesn't make them bank robbers.

One key factor does seem to be environment. The place people live. If you live in an area where drugs are being dealt all the time, and you want to belong to a group, what sort of group will you belong to? If you live in an area where people are fighting all the time in gangs and you want to belong, what group will you fall into? Please think about it for a moment because this is important. All across the world, people with no money, low self-esteem, no value system, and personality problems are housed all together.

If you want to see evidence of environment as a key factor, just put ten gifted people together in a house and see what comes out of that. The more of the same type of people you put together the more of the same you will get out. If the predominant personality is violent, you will get more violence, if the predominant personality is peaceful, you will get more peace. Think about it. Does that make any sense to you?

There have been thousands of studies made, millions spent, trying to find out why people commit crime, and as it's still going on, we will have to assume they haven't found out! I think it would be a safe guess to say that money and interpersonal conflict is at the root of most crime.

People break into houses, cars, banks, shops, etc. to steal goods and money. They are desperate people who will do anything to get money. Some may have drug habits to fund, others may have gambling or alcohol

addictions, but we must be clear that people are not stealing goods to keep them, but steal them to raise a few pounds.

For some people, this becomes a way of life, and they do not consider that they are doing anything wrong (except when they end up in court, and get sent to prison again). Many see the state as the system, and feel they are rebelling against it, most others just steal a car stereo to sell for ten pounds down the pub. Big deal.

Some obviously steal a lot more, but what are they achieving? A few extra pounds in their pockets. For what? Probably a new pair of trainers so they can look cooler than their mate.

It is this complete lack of awareness in themselves that makes theft so sad. That someone will risk everything for a few pounds amazes me. Stealing because of poverty? Don't make me laugh! In the west, if you can't get a job, you are funded by the government, which is funded by you the taxpayer, to help you get a job and be able to support yourself. For the wanna haves in the world this money isn't enough, so they go and steal more money from the other taxpayers, which is you, get caught, then spend a couple of years sitting around being fed, clothed, and housed, by, wait for it... *you*. They have a great life. They're in a win-win situation. You of course are in a lose-lose situation.

For people involved in violence, the motivation may be different, and may involve many different psychological problems (which by the way are all treatable in some way or another), but the outcome remains the same; only this time, people are physically injured or killed. But in the end, the criminal will be caught, taken through the legal process and if found guilty, sent off to prison at your expense. Lose-lose again for you.

But in the long term, the people who get involved in crime are in the lose-lose situation. The sheer stress of it; the constant dealings with people in authority; being treated as if you are less than human. As far as authority is concerned, you are not to be afforded the usual treatment reserved for society, as you have broken society's rules. You will be punished to teach you a lesson, and this punishment serves as a warning to all others who wish to break the law that... Blah, blah, blah.

An open letter to the criminally minded

Dear mr (or miss) criminal

I would like to talk to you for a moment if I may, and ask you exactly why you do the things you do? Maybe your father didn't love you, maybe

your parents didn't bring you up well and didn't give you proper values? Maybe your family are involved in crime? Maybe you think the only way to get money is not by working like everyone else, but by taking it from people who had to do jobs they didn't like to buy the things they wanted. Maybe you had a violent upbringing? Maybe you were abused? Maybe you just want to show off how tough you are to your mates? Maybe you were left by your girlfriend for another man, maybe you felt jealous, so you killed him. There are so many maybes, but the only certainty is you. You were involved in the acts that affected other people, you may have denied it at the time, but it was you.

Where is this life of yours headed? Back to prison? Back to a life behind bars, where you are not free to walk in the open country air, where you will not see a family grow up? Is this what millions of years of evolution has achieved? You, in prison, being fed, watered, and caged like a dangerous dog; unable to be let out of your cage because of what you might do?

It may be easier for us to turn you loose on a deserted island with other criminals and no support. Just you, them, and the island. What would you do there? Would you work together, and build a community, growing and harvesting fruits and vegetables, living together in peace. No, of course you wouldn't! You'd kill each other. Man to man, showing off all that testosterone.

You'd be able to express your violent selves with no interference from anyone else, although this time you may not get out of it alive. Maybe we should send you back in time to when man was just evolving; you might feel quite at home there. Although once again, I cannot guarantee you would get out alive.

No, I think you'd be better off here, where the people (from whom you stole or hurt) still offer you their compassion. If you think they don't, then maybe the people and their compassion (in the form of food that feeds you in prison) should remove their support and support a new bill to bring back executions. It is within the power of the people. Don't be so sure they wouldn't do it. Hanging for theft of a car radio. How would you feel then?

Maybe you think people are weak, and that's why you hurt them. Maybe you think you have the right to do it. Maybe you are like all other people, whom society supports, that think you are "entitled" to do and take whatever you like. Maybe, and just maybe you aren't aware of yourself. You are just so caught up in what you are doing you have no time to spend 0.005 seconds between the thought and the action. You're

too busy with your career of violence and theft. But please stop to think for one moment.

Try to imagine how your life would be, free from these prison warders locking you in. Imagine a field on a warm summers day; imagine yourself calm, no worries at all, free from chains, and the torment you must be in. Let go of this prison, this idea you have, that the only way to live is the life you have chosen. You can be free of this life, by letting love into your life, by letting light into your life, by letting passion, energy, joy, and creation in!

Face it, you will be only here on this planet for another few years. Roll forward to an image of you on your death bed. There you lie, in prison alone, no one to comfort you. You stole all you could, you hurt others all you could, for what? This? This lying on a prison bed, the end near? You were a tough man, everyone “respected” you, but now you’re about to die. Where did you go wrong? What do you regret? Do you shed a tear for your wasted life? Do not! You do not need to feel sorry for yourself, I do not feel sorry for you.

Now roll backward to right NOW. You are not on your death bed, you are here. Now. You have the chance right now to give up this life. To take a different path; one as yet unknown, and lead a happy fulfilling life, not one surrounded by concrete and steel. Walk away. Change your environment. Pack a bag. Leave right now. The future awaits you.

Your friend in life

alan

Surely this is a no-brainer? If crime costs us a fortune, and we are not ready to string up every criminal, we must offer them our compassion. Nothing else has worked, will work, or can work. Remember the only way to defeat violence of any kind is to fight violence with compassion, which is not fighting at all. We must extend the hand of compassion to all. Not just those who need it or we think are worthy of it.

Crimes against us are made by our own brothers, homo sapiens; and although it saddens us and angers us to see it happen, we must extend the hand of friendship to them and help them find the way. Not our way, but a way driven through awareness of themselves, love, compassion, and empathy for all who inhabit this planet. It is possible. We must never give up on our fellow humans, for if we do, we must surely give up on ourselves.

C r i t i c i s m

Disapproval expressed by pointing out faults or shortcomings

•

A serious examination and judgement of something

You're useless, you'll never pass.

You're always doing it wrong, why don't you learn?

You're such an idiot, I've explained it to you a thousand times.

Why don't you think! You never think about what you're doing.

You're hopeless, you'll never get it right.



We all do it, don't we? We just can't help ourselves. We have to do it. We constantly pick at people's faults, especially those closest to us; the ones we love. Our children, our parents, our brothers and sisters. We don't generally criticise friends or colleagues or people we don't know well to their faces, but you can be sure we will criticise them to somebody else. Why do we do it? What is it that makes us want to hurt the ones we care about?

I don't know if you have ever heard the term "constructive criticism," where something is evaluated seriously, and pointers given where improvements could be made? Most people welcome constructive criticism, as it gives them a different viewpoint (as the main aim is to help, not hurt). But general criticism is not constructive, it is destructive, especially to the self-esteem of the person on the receiving end. In fact,

it's no more than an glorified insult; although parents would say they are doing for the good of the child, by pointing out their mistakes.

Insult

A rude expression intended to offend or hurt

Let's look at this more closely. If I am having a dinner party and my wife burns the pie in the oven, what am I likely to say? Would I say, "don't worry about it, it's unimportant, we'll have something else," and joke about it? or would I say, "you idiot, I can't believe you burnt the apple pie, what were you thinking, you've ruined the dinner party now, what are our guests going to think?"

As if your wife doesn't feel bad enough already, you have to make it worse by insulting her, and making her feel even worse – thereby inflaming the situation.

Are we angry, or are we just embarrassed by the person's actions? Do we think, that because they are part of our family, it reflects badly on us? If my wife is so stupid to burn the apple pie, what will people think of me for choosing her as a wife? If my son keeps getting low grades in school, will it make me look like a bad father.

Criticism gets worse the more someone repeats the mistake. If your wife burns the apple pie every time, the insults get more and more personal, not just about the apple pie, but about everything. "You're always doing something wrong;" "You've never been a good cook;" "Why can't you do something right for once in your life?"

Ouch! That really hurts doesn't it? Your wife, who knows has a problem with cooking apple pie, but nonetheless tries hard, now can't do anything right in her life.

People who criticise normally have to apologise, and say it was just in the heat of the moment; that really, they just feel sorry you're not achieving your best and you know they are capable of better things; you only said it because you love them! Nice way of showing love isn't it? "Why can't you do something right for once in your life?"

Now, let's imagine your wife says to you "ok, next dinner party, *you* bake the apple pie!" You know you're not a good cook, but you try to follow the recipe nonetheless. How would you feel if your wife starting telling you you were an idiot, that you were doing it wrong? "Why are you doing it like this, that's not the way to do it!" You would feel pretty

low about yourself, and probably start to get angry. “Look, I’m trying my best, all right? Just leave me alone.”

What if you burnt it, and she started saying things like, “you’re always doing something wrong;” “you’ve never been a good cook;” “why can’t you do something right for once in your life?” How would you feel? The criticism seems disproportionate to what’s happened, doesn’t it? Almost as if the person has been saving up criticisms for a long time, and is just waiting for an opportunity to use them.

We previously discussed that criticisms are generally reserved for family members, and people you love. I would guess it’s probably because you couldn’t get away with speaking like that to anyone else, could you?

Imagine for a moment that a close friend comes round to help you prepare for your dinner party and says, “don’t worry, I’ll bake the apple pie; I’m not a great cook, but I’ll give it a go.” You let them do it, and at the end, they apologise, and say they’ve ruined it, what do you say? “You’re such an idiot, why can’t you do things properly? You’ve ruined my dinner party, I can’t believe you’re so stupid!” because that’s what you would have said to your wife. Or are you more likely to say, “oh well, don’t worry about it, you tried your best, we’ll just have to do something else” and laugh about it?

Of course you wouldn’t insult them. They came to help you, and made a mistake, that’s all, it’s not the end of the world. The thing you have to realise is that no one sets out to annoy you or upset you by doing things wrong, they just can’t do them, that’s all. So instead of criticising someone, why don’t we offer a little help, a little advice.

“Let’s see if we can do it together;” or “come here and I’ll try to help you with it.”

If you know that your wife is bad at baking apple pie, don’t just criticise her, all it does is lowers her self-esteem, makes her angry, and creates bad feeling between you. Surely it’s not an expression of love, is it?

If you haven’t got anything nice to say don’t say anything at all

I’m not perfect, are you? I make mistakes. I wish I was better at things, but we can’t all be good at everything, can we? We try our best, and sometimes we fall short of the mark. Maybe we need a little more training or a little more encouragement, or maybe our brain will never grab the concept of baking apple pie, and that’s ok too. It’s not like the

world depends on it, although sometimes we are made to feel as if we have made a critical mistake in calculating the trajectory for the return of the space shuttle. So why do we constantly criticise when we are not perfect either?

Perfectionism

A disposition to feel that anything less than perfect is unacceptable

Children bear the brunt of a lot of it. The imperfect parents hoping to give birth to a genius. All the parents' dreams, hopes, ambitions, and desires, wrapped up into a little bundle of joy. The child doesn't stand a chance. From the moment he gargles his first words, to the time he takes his first steps, you're with him all the way! He's the one that's going to be intelligent. A great writer, poet, classical musician; a famous doctor, an architect who designs the next eiffel tower. You get him private lessons in music, a tutor comes to the house for mathematics, you are pinning your hopes on this boy, your genius. And then you get his report card from school...

Must try harder...

Limited ability...

Could achieve more...

Shows little promise...

What? How can this be? You were pinning all your hopes on this child, how could he let you down like this, after all you've done for him, he's had plenty of opportunity, he should have done better.

"Have you seen your report card, it's terrible; you haven't put any effort at all in this year, after all the money your father and I have spent on private lessons. How can you do this to us? If you don't stick in harder at school, you'll never get a good job, you'll end up doing a dead end job, and your father and I won't be here to help you, you know, you'll be on your own. Then you'll be sorry you didn't stick in harder at school. You'd better stick in harder next year, or they'll be no going out for you after school, no tv, no friends coming over. You better buck up your ideas. You're wasting your talents, throwing away a golden opportunity. Well, what have you got to say for yourself young man?"

"Sorry..."

“Sorry’s not good enough! Your father and I want to see a definite improvement immediately. I want you doing your homework as soon as you come in from school. I’m going to talk to your teacher about extra lessons after school. I just can’t understand why you’re not taking this seriously, this is your future we’re talking about, Do you hear me?”

“Yes mum. Sorry.”

“Well, let’s hope next year is better, but I wouldn’t want to be in your shoes when your father comes home, and I show him this report card, he’s going to be very angry.”

Great! That’s just what you need. You’re 11 years old. You’re just starting to grow up, your brain and your body are still developing, you’re still forming your world-view, and the two people who are supposed to love you constantly criticise you. You don’t know why you’re bad at maths, you actually don’t like playing the piano, you want to play the guitar; and you never want to be an architect, you want to be in a rock band. And why not? You are 11 years old!

Parents are the greatest at criticism, aren’t they? Dissatisfied with their own lives, wishing they could have been a famous doctor, architect, or classical pianist, and transferring those unfulfilled dreams on to you. Thanks mum!

There’s a lot of different pressures when you’re growing up, finding your place in the world, going through puberty, and the last thing a child needs is to be told what he’s doing is wrong. “We’re only saying it because we love you.” Nonsense. You’re only saying it because you can. You wouldn’t say it to anyone else’s child would you? “You’re useless, you’re stupid, why don’t you stick in at school more!” The child’s parents may have a thing or two to say about that don’t you think?

So it’s definitely not about love – because love is unconditional. When you love someone, you accept them for who they are, and accept the mistakes they make. Let’s stop and reflect on that for a moment, because I think that is applicable to children and adults too. How many of us could really say we love someone unconditionally; with all their faults, and imperfections? For that is what love truly is. When we love unconditionally, we cannot criticise.

When the child is all grown up, there’s no one left to criticise, so we criticise each other; and when the child gets married, he criticises his own family. In order to stop this destructive cycle we need to be aware of ourselves; of how we speak to our loved ones; so even when we are frustrated, we do not resort to insults, for that is not love. All we can do is offer advice, help, and guidance.

It does not help a person to be criticised, it doesn't make them try harder; it just makes them feel bad about themselves. If you really want to help someone (and they actively want your help), you have to take time to understand the problem the person is facing, and decide whether you have the necessary skills to help them find the best solution. Then again, some things are so unimportant in life, it's better to just let them go, everybody makes mistakes, even you.

If you haven't got anything nice to say don't say anything at all.
You don't like it when someone criticises you.

C r u e l t y

A cruel act; a deliberate infliction of pain and suffering

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Feelings of extreme heartlessness

•

The quality of being cruel and causing tension or annoyance

Children can be very cruel, can't they? They taunt and they tease other children in the playground. They call them horrible names, they persistently pick on children who are weaker than them, and find more and more ways to exploit any weakness they find. Although children can be cruel to each other, they can also do the same to their parents; saying things that are so hurtful, they make their parents cry.

I remember (and am still reminded by mother) the time at junior school when I forgot my drink, and my mother had the audacity to bring it to me in front of all of my school friends. I can still see it now. Crossing the road with the class, and hearing my mother call out:

“Alan? Alan?”

“What are do you doing here mum?” I said. “Go away. I don’t want to see you, I hate you! Go away!” and all she did was bring me my drink!

*Sticks and stones may break my bones
but words will never hurt me*

I don't know where that old playground saying comes from, but I think whoever wrote it missed something quite profound. With physical bruising you can see the suffering; and although mental suffering is invisible to the naked eye, words can, and do in fact hurt you. "Children are just children," you say; and yes, most of the cruel children grow up to be "normal" individuals, who don't display any sign of their cruel past. But what I want to investigate is whether this cruelty that children show to each other, or to their parents, is just a normal process of growing up, or a sign of something much deeper, something that lies within all of us just waiting for the opportunity to unleash itself.

The development of the child's mind is a complex one, with new connections being made all the time, and indeed many children right through to late teenagers, exhibit this characteristic of the ability to be cruel, and say and do things that perhaps they are not even aware of. Perhaps it's just because the young mind is not mature enough to understand the effects words have on us? What do you think?

Do you have children? Do they say cruel things to you? "I hate you mum;" "I wish you'd just go away;" "I wish I never been born, I hate you?" It must be awful to have brought a beautiful child into the world, nourished it, loved it, protected it, taught it; and finally when it was old enough to speak, it tells you it hates you. Nice! That is the thanks you get for all that effort. Do you think we should accept that this is normal; that this is just a small blip in the long process of growing up?

Is there a point to being cruel? If so, I would dearly love to know what it is! It seems to serve no other purpose than deliberately hurting another (oh yes, that's the point!), and throughout life, we can see that adults all have this same potential to be cruel to each other, and also to children.

As with all our actions, it originates in the mind. It is our own brain which comes up with the idea to be cruel, which is sad. Why are we not born with a mind that is already loving and compassionate for all beings? Maybe love and compassion are not inherent; maybe they are just learned behaviours; but I do not believe that to be true. We hurt each other to deflect feelings that are intolerable to ourselves, when our own minds are in conflict and it is understandable to some extent why it happens. I am hurting and I do not want to feel hurt, so I transfer it to another to make

myself feel better. But the mind is selfish. It doesn't care if it hurts others, it is only interested in itself.

So maybe we should be a bit more understanding of people who are cruel, and instead of judging them try to help them solve the problems in their minds. It is a hard thing to do when you are on the receiving end of someone's cruel comments, but by showing our love and compassion for them, and asking them a simple question: "What's wrong, do you want to talk about it?"

Perhaps we can help them resolve whatever conflict is going on, and in return, save ourselves from further cruelty. Our compassion could be said to be selfish, but we must protect ourselves as well.

Adults, who grow into cruel husbands or wives, have similarly unresolved emotional conflict in their minds, and may not even be aware they are in conflict, that is why it is so important that we become aware of ourselves, of the movement of our minds, of ourselves in relationship with others. It is vital.

If a child learns to become aware of himself early on in life, there is less chance he will be cruel. Do you understand what I am trying to say here? To ask a child to become aware of his feelings will teach him that he cannot just transfer the pain to someone else, parent, peer, or indeed anyone he meets. The reason the parent seems to bear the brunt of most cruel comments is more to do with the amount of time they spend together, than the child actually hating the parent.

We must help the child to deal with whatever he or she is going through rather than just getting annoyed with them, sending them to their room without dinner, or just sitting in a corner crying to ourselves, wondering how the child we brought into the world with love, cared for, fed, and clothed could say these terrible things to us.

I know it is only "natural" for us to feel hurt, but we must use our minds with intelligence; and see that the only reason for them to be cruel is because (a) they are hurting inside, and cannot deal with it, and (b) do not yet have the awareness of themselves to understand that their words and actions are hurting others.

Why do you hurt me?

I don't know about you, but my mother never asked me this question; she either shouted at me, or just burst into tears. Personally, I could never see what all the fuss was about. I needed to get something off my chest,

and I did. I didn't care what I said as long as she stopped going on at me. In my twisted thinking it seemed the right thing to do.

I have said some pretty cruel things to my girlfriends in the past too, and when you are angry, or upset, and want to feel better, you find the weakest point in the armour to attack. "Yeah, but at least I'm not as fat as you!" Knowing full well that this is something with which the other partner already has low self-esteem.

When we are on the attack, we always go for the weak spot. It makes sense if you want victory in a battle, but not when you are dealing with someone who loves you. We find weapons to attack with that we know are guaranteed to pierce the armour. We get our fatal blow in before our enemy has a chance to retaliate.

But remember, this is someone you supposedly love you are talking to, not an enemy in battle – but the outcome is the same. You defeat your enemy, but at great cost. You may have won and you may feel good about it, but your opponent is hurt so much emotionally, they may find it hard to forgive you.

I know from personal experience, that using cruel words to my girlfriends was detrimental to my relationship with them, but never once did they ask me "Why do you hurt me?" If they had actually asked me that question, I would probably have had no answer, as I was acting, not out of love and compassion, but out of the need to win, at all costs.

It was only through the development of self-awareness and self-knowledge, that I transcended this ability to be cruel. I began to see it as something inhuman, something that does not exist in the animal kingdom either, and I started to watch myself as I spoke with others. Any time I could feel the urge to score a cheap point in an argument using something I knew would hurt them, I paid close attention to my mind, and asked myself the question: Would I hurt someone I love? And believe me, we are always more cruel to the ones we supposedly love.

When it gets physical

We have all heard stories in the press about parents being cruel to their children. There are horror stories of parents locking their children in cupboards, starving them, burning them with cigarettes or other objects, and fortunately it doesn't seem to be reported all that often, but once is too much, so we need to investigate why an adult would deliberately

cause harm to his or her child. What thought processes are going on in the mind. Maybe we should ask them?

Me: Why did you burn your child? From the reports it seems that, before the child died, it had over 50 burn marks on its body.

Parent: I love my child, but she just wouldn't stop crying. I tried everything to calm her down, but she was always a crier. The noise was in my head, I just had to make it stop. I didn't mean to hurt her; I just wanted her to shut up.

Me: But you knew you were hurting a defenceless infant, who could not fight back?

Parent: You don't know what it's like living there alone with a child crying all day long. I had to get her to stop, do you understand? She was driving me up the wall.

And from that last statement we can see what is really going on. Although the cruelty was deliberate, it was probably not through a direct thought such as: "I will hurt that child," or "I will burn them with a cigarette."

Most of our actions are transferred from the pain in our own mind onto someone weaker, that way, the mind knows it is guaranteed some kind of relief from the pain it is going through. Clearly, the woman could not cope with the noise of the infant. She had many other problems in her life and this just tipped her over the edge.

I believe that all humans are compassionate and loving in their nature, although they have the potential to be violent and cruel when their own biological needs are not being met, or they are suffering themselves. We must have compassion for others who are suffering, lest they hurt others through it, and we must try to help them deal with their emotional turmoil – but first we have to deal with our own.

The next time you have an argument, or feel like being physically cruel to someone, you must realise that you are the one who is in pain. You must become aware that you are only being cruel to transfer the uncomfortable feelings to someone else. Do you follow? Before you hurt another with your words or your actions, become instantly aware of the feelings surging through your body. At this point you must withdraw, do you understand? You are about to alter your life or someone else's life by the words you are about to speak, or the actions you are about to take. I am talking to you, the children, and you, the adults, together, for children's cruelty becomes adult cruelty.

You must go somewhere quiet, if only for a moment, and try to understand what feeling you were about to transfer to someone else.

There are no excuses here; no explanations – just awareness. You are the one who is in pain, you are the one who is about to spread misery with your words. You must resolve the conflict in you.

Be aware. Be aware. Be aware. That is all you can do. Talk to someone about your feelings; a friend or a counsellor you trust. If you have the urge to be cruel, then your brain is knocking on your door, telling you “hey! I have some unresolved stuff here, and if you don’t help me resolve it, I’ll do it on my own.”

Don’t wait for your brain to act. Be aware that one day your brain will use cruelty to solve its own problems. It doesn’t care if it hurts someone else, after all, it’s *you* who will take the blame!

C u l t u r e

A particular society at a particular time and place

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All the knowledge and values shared by a society

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The attitudes and behaviour that are characteristic of a particular
social group or organization

On our journey of exploration into the human being, we have discussed many topics. All individually important; but as we start to piece the puzzle together, it is time to discuss what happens when man is not only individually conditioned, but when he acts as part of the largest tribal group – a country. The question I want to ask us all here is whether the conditioning becomes the culture, and if so, how do we find the individual again? Is he lost forever to national identity, or can he resurface, free of conditioning, free to think clearly with true intelligence?

Do I think as an individual, or is my thinking a result of the collective culture of the country I inhabit?

I would like you to think about this, slowly and carefully. We are asking whether the inhabitants of each country have been passed on some genetic quality which makes them talk loudly, have family values, be aggressive, materialistic, emotional, or angry; or are they simply conditioned by being in the same country as others with the same tendencies?

We have already seen how children are conditioned early on in life by their parents and their teachers amongst others, so is it not possible that the culture is simply the result of individuals being conditioned en-masse?

To give you a simple example: We have often heard talk of the italians being emotional and expressive, prone to hot-headedness, and also fairly aggressive whilst driving. Surely each one of them can't be so hot-headed? Surely each person does not have an inherent aggressive quality? Some people have said that like the spanish, the italians are like that because of the hot weather in the country. Well, I don't know about that, perhaps weather could be an influence, but as I am not an expert, I don't want to jump to conclusions!

If each child is born with a natural mind, then why does he become like all the others in his society, but not like people from other nations? If we rule out genetics as the primary cause, our next port of call has to be the artificial creation of national boundaries. So on this side of the fence, we are french, with all our french conditioning, and on the other side of the fence are the italians with their italian conditioning, and so on. Are we clear so far?

Over many thousands of years these borders have been closed more and more tightly to ensure the french stay french, and the italians stay italian, and over time the populations of all the countries has grown considerably.

Before the creation of these national borders, there would have been tribal borders; and then as the tribes grew, these borders would be expanded, in part because of the need to acquire more territory to support these growing numbers. The few would become many.

But the initial conditioning must have started with very few people indeed; and as we have seen in so many other topics, it is the leaders – political and religious – who have done the conditioning.

They wanted people to behave in a certain way; to conform and obey the rules. They issued orders about how the people were to be treated, how they were to be educated, what they would read, what they could speak about, and what they could not; and how they were expected to

behave. But remember, this all started with small tribes, where a small number of people were conditioned into behaving a certain way. It is only through the expansion of the tribe, the authority of the leaders, and the sealing of borders that this conditioning was contained.

Now we have large populations contained within countries with one national language, we are able to start seeing for the first time, the result of the many millennia of conditioning.

Were the italians hot-headed on their chariots shouting and swearing at each other if someone pulled out in front of them on the *via appia* (*an ancient Roman road in Italy*)? Who knows! All I know is that the aggressive car driving, and the emotional outbursts stemmed from the conditioning of a small number of people a long time ago. After all, it takes a long time for something to become a tradition or “in the culture,” and there haven’t been cars for that long! I may be wrong about all this, and I’m sure there are scientists lining up to correct me, but bear with me for a moment while we explore this in further detail.

Can emotional expression be cultural?

When we are in our own countries, we can, to a certain extent, predict how people are going to behave. We look at how they are dressed, what posture their body is in, whether they look aggressive or peaceful, and we make judgements about them which we believe to be relatively accurate (based on our own experience, memory, knowledge etc.), but something strange happens when we go to a different country, doesn’t it?

All of a sudden, we are thrown into the lions den. We cannot judge peoples behaviour as we can at home; suddenly people can seem threatening, when in fact there is no threat, just fear of the unknown.

We don’t know what to make of these strangers, and in fact our ancestors would have felt the same walking into new territories, and meeting new tribes who had a different language and different behaviour. So what we think is being loud or angry, may in fact just be the way the people have been conditioned to be many years back.

It is really quite a simple act. The mother and father speak loudly, the teachers speak loudly, and the leaders of the country speak loudly, so why would you do any different? You are not being brainwashed, you are merely copying what you hear around you in order to fit in.

A couple of years ago I had a girlfriend from the czech republic. I had never been to eastern europe before, and only knew of the country as one

that had been ruled by the communists for many years, everyone lived in soviet style apartment blocks, and people drove smelly trabants. I was quite nervous when I went there as I really did feel as if I was stepping into uncharted waters; and it had nothing to do with the language.

From my experience with working with several eastern european workers in ireland months earlier, I had found them all to be aggressive, and quite angry, so I wasn't at all surprised that when we had a slight disagreement my girlfriend went off the rails shouting and screaming at me; and it wasn't over anything serious.

I was shaken. I had never heard anyone speak like that to anyone, and I have had some serious arguments with my parents, and my ex-girlfriends! This was something different; this was something alien to me. Put it this way, I wasn't used to being shouted at like that, or having to shout back loudly so I could be heard.

"I have never met anyone as angry as you," I shouted. "You should get some help!"

But then something strange happened one evening later that week. My girlfriend and her parents were having, what sounded like a terrible argument, and I was concerned.

"What was all that about?" I asked her later.

"Oh nothing."

"But it sounded like you were having a terrible argument!"

"What!" she laughed, "we were just discussing something on the news!"

"Oh..."

As time went on, and after spending many nights in the local pub (doing research you understand), I began to understand what was happening here. They weren't generally angry, but spoke more loudly than we british did in normal discussions, so that when they were really angry it sounded like they were going to kill someone! For someone who has been used to people behaving in a different way, it was quite scary.

Not knowing what people were like, what would upset them, what I could, and couldn't say; or whether I would offend their religion, or their government by saying something I thought to be harmless, put a terrible strain on my mind. Try as I might, I couldn't understand them. And of course I couldn't, they had been conditioned, as I had, over many centuries. It's just that the conditioners were different.

Needless to say, I found all this "culture" way too disturbing, and beat a hasty retreat back to the safety of my own conditioning. "Ahh, that's

better,” I thought, as I cruised through social interactions like a knife through butter.

But I learned something important when I was there. I learned that the conditioning of the individual and the group had gone so far that perhaps there was no way back. Perhaps the culture was imprinted on my brain from day one. One thing I did know was that there was no such thing as a “true individual.” Sure, some thought a bit differently from others, or did different jobs, but holding it all together was the box clearly labelled “*PRODUCT OF CULTURE.*”

The miracle of the neutral cultural territory

As you will know from our previous discussions, I lived in australia for a few years, and had an australian wife. We travelled around the world for most of the time we were together, and so we were always on neutral cultural territory. We were always living in someone else’s culture, and we had to behave according to their rules and customs, so there was no me, the british, or her, the australian. We were both just individuals, and for a time we were both free of our cultural (if not individual) conditioning.

As time went on, we decided to return to her home country (as the weather was better than in my home country), and almost as soon as I arrived there, I could feel a change in her. I couldn’t quite put my finger on it, but there was something clearly different about her. Something I hadn’t noticed when we had been on neutral territory.

“You’ve changed since we came back to australia,” I said to her one day.

“No I haven’t,” she said. “You’ve changed.”

“I’ve changed?”

“Yes, you have; you have become a different person!” she retorted.

“All I know is, that when we were travelling you were different, now you’re home you act different, speak different, like different things to me. I can’t believe you’ve changed so much!”

“Well you’re different when you’re back in england too,” she said, half crying. “When we stayed with your mum, you changed so much!”

“How?” I asked. “Why didn’t you say something?”

“I don’t know, I just figured that was the real you,” she replied.

“But it isn’t the real me. The real me is when I’m with *you!*” I pleaded.

But it was true. All of it. The real me was when I was on neutral cultural territory with her, and it was the same with her. People said that the reason we were having problems with our relationship was because now we had stopped travelling and come back to reality; but I knew this was something different, something you couldn't quite put your finger on. This was a clash of cultures!

Fast forward to the present day, and I am currently staying with in the north of sweden with my swedish girlfriend. We met on an island retreat off the west of scotland – a place where we were on neutral cultural territory. But once again, I noticed that when we came to sweden, she was different; she was on her home territory!

“Of course, I've changed,” she said casually when I asked her if it was just me thinking too much. “I'm at home. I'm swedish!” She wasn't in any way arrogant about it, just very matter of fact. “Oh, and while we're on the subject,” she added, “do you know that you're different when you're home in england with your friends and family?”

“Gosh. Am I?”

At that precise moment I knew the answer. I was different. We are all “different” when we are back at home, but the only person who can see that is an outsider who gets to spend enough time with you to see both sides.

The road back

We are so blinded by the conditioning, we don't even realise we are loud, or emotional, or quiet and reserved; it takes someone else to show it to us. The effect the collective culture has on us is so deep, so profound that only by seeing yourself through someone else's eyes (who is not conditioned by your culture) can you open the door to freedom. Freedom to think, not as a citizen of a country, but as a human being. Perhaps all this suggests that everyone should have a cross border relationship in order to see the depth of their cultural conditioning, or maybe what we're saying is: If you're going to have a cross border relationship, always live on neutral cultural territory!

But we all have to take a long deep look inside to find the authentic self. We have to unravel all the centuries of conditioning that has been piled on us. We have to look outside of our own family and our own culture, and go somewhere else, not so we can admire or criticize their culture, but so that in them, we can see ourselves in reflection. We must

learn to laugh at some of the silly things we do that are so ingrained in our culture.

I wish to give you one last story before we wrap this topic up, and it happened in a fast food restaurant in England recently. My girlfriend ordered a burger and fries from the counter, but then asked if she could have a knife and fork with it as well. I started to laugh and I could see the woman behind the counter was quietly giggling to herself.

“What?!” she asked indignantly.

“Sorry. It’s just really funny that you are asking for a knife and fork.”

“Why?” She asked.

“Well, because over here you’re supposed to eat your burger with your hands!”

“Well in Sweden, we use a knife and fork! Who eats with their hands?” she said getting quite angry.

“We eat with our hands; When in Rome...” I added thoughtlessly.

“Well we’re not in Rome, and I want a knife and fork!”

Within a minute, we could both see the funny side and we both started to laugh at how ridiculous we had been, at trying to convince each other who was in the right! We realised that this was the culture at work. Right here in a fast food restaurant. Deeply ingrained, ready to fight anyone who challenged it.

So we agreed that there was nothing wrong with asking for a knife and fork to eat your burger with, but that she should look into how she became so conditioned to needing it, and I agreed to try eating a veggie burger with a knife and fork one day; and look into how I became so conditioned as to think one no longer ate meals with a knife and fork!

So you can see what we are up against.

We shout, “savour the differences of our cultures;” and for tourism purposes, that might work, but there is something sinister at work here; the work of mind conditioning on such a massive scale that it has a new name – “culture.”

Where is the individual? Where is the authentic man or woman? Have they been lost forever or should we just start by looking at ourselves when we are on neutral cultural territory.

Do all of us a favour, and next time you are on holiday, or on business, begin to notice things that annoy you about the country you are in, or things you miss from home, and you may find yourself laughing at some of the ridiculous things you do, think, and say, because of your culture. Then again you may not.

Behind it all, this is no laughing matter. It is all of our responsibilities to attain the unattainable, and free ourselves from individual and cultural conditioning. Where will you find it? You will find it very close to home, but it exists only in awareness of self. Good luck with your journey.

D

D e a t h

The event of dying or departure from life

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The time at which life ends; continuing until dead

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The time when something ends

This is a subject that no one wants to discuss. It's something that occurs naturally, but as humans we are not prepared to accept it. We want to live forever. As intelligent beings we know that physically, it isn't possible for our bodies to live forever, because, like a machine, they eventually wear out. So we invent all sorts of magical ways in which we can live on eternally. I am not here to discuss whether there is such a thing as eternal life, that is for you to inform yourself on, what I want to talk to you about now is death...

Your death

What do you think death will feel like? Will the actual event hurt at all? Will you and I suffer, or will it be peaceful and calm? I cannot answer

any of those questions, and nor can anyone else, as those who have died already can't tell us. But it is interesting that we even think about these things; that we concern ourselves with a one-off event that is inevitable.

We don't want to suffer, we don't want to feel pain, but death is final. There is no pain. The brain stops working, the heart stops, the lungs stop; all activities relating to life are at an end, there are no more messages being relayed as to what pain is. You are at an end – physically and mentally.

Surely what we are concerning ourselves with are the moments leading up to our death; when the realisation hits us, that in a short time, we will no longer see, we will no longer taste, we will no longer feel; and for a human that is a scary thought. Our brains need to try to make sense of what death actually is, we need to know what happens to us in order to have no fear, and that's what it is, fear. The fear of the word death, not the actual event.

So now, I would like you to imagine a rather macabre scenario for a moment, if you will, which relates to your death. I would like you to imagine that you have just died, and your family are discussing the funeral arrangements. You left no instructions for the type of funeral you would like, and they are discussing whether to cremate you or bury you. Do you want to burn or decompose? I'll give you the options in a little more detail:

Option A: You are placed in a coffin, the lid is sealed shut, and you are placed into a furnace, the temperature reaches thousands of degrees... Can you imagine it now? How do you feel? Do you feel trapped, knowing you are burning? Your flesh burns first, then your muscles and all your organs, then finally your bones. It takes a short time and at the other end they sweep the remains of you (ash) into a nice urn, and someone may place you on a mantle piece, or you will be scattered all over a place you used to love.

Option B: You are placed in a coffin, the lid is sealed shut, and you are slowly lowered into the cold wet ground. Earth is thrown on top of your coffin, and there you lie, six feet underground. Can you notice how cold and claustrophobic you feel? After a while, the body starts the process of decomposition (*the process of decay caused by*

bacterial or fungal action). Your flesh and your organs start to rot and soon you will be nothing more than bones.

So which one's it going to be? Well for me, given the choice, neither. I don't want to be burned or buried! It would hurt. And this is the problem. We are still thinking of death as if we will experience it with all the senses and feelings we have now. That's why we are afraid of it. We believe we will still have consciousness after we die.

Fortunately for us, someone has conveniently come up with a way out of suffering at death, so that as soon as your body stops working you are whisked off to a much nicer place before you have to think of being buried or cremated. That place, if you didn't know it already, is the...

Afterlife

Life after death

Let's go into this carefully together. The afterlife. A word so paradoxical, don't you think? If death means the time at which life ends, doesn't it seem a little strange that there is another word that starts life again? Can there be death at the end of the afterlife, or is the afterlife eternal, and indeed if there was such a thing as eternal life, why couldn't we just live it out here?

I for one do not want to start a discussion, or indeed a war, about the existence of an afterlife. Scholars, philosophers, learned men, people of the christian church, muslims, buddhists, hindus, and members of every other religious group have occupied their valuable (short) time on this earth discussing this subject.

Every religion has their version of an afterlife, which is any place of complete bliss, delight and peace. Ahhh, bliss, delight, and peace, that's so much better. And indeed it is, because for most of us, the promise of this afterlife sounds much better than our lives on earth.

For me, I find it strange that we humans, of distinctly superior intelligence to any other species on the planet; we who demand evidence in everything we do today, quite happily accept some story of an imagined future life after our physical death.

“Prove to me that my investment of £10,000 will increase to £15,000 in 2 years”

“Prove to me that the washing machine you are selling to me is better than the cheaper one”

“Prove that alternative medicine is beneficial”

“Prove that I will save money on my telephone bill in 3 months”

We want proof for everything. We would not give over money to anybody, without proof that what they were offering was verifiable. So don't you find it strange that we just accept – without any physical evidence – that we will live forever (after we die of course)? Think about this for a moment. Do you believe in life after death? I would like you to think carefully about your response here and then remember the last thing that someone tried to sell you, but couldn't prove it would be beneficial.

Salesman: It will save you 20% on your electric bill.

You: If you can't prove it, I'm not interested.

Salesman: There is life after death.

You: Great! I look forward to it.

How can we be so demanding of evidence from the man who *can* probably save you twenty percent on your next electric bill, yet accept with blind belief the statement that there is life after death, which to me seems like much more of a major claim to make, don't you? Why? Because it's what we want to believe. We don't want to die, we want to live forever. It is built into the nature of man, who since awakening to himself and his existence, has been afraid of death.

We have worshipped a thousand gods, from the sun to the moon, making sacrifices, praying that we will be saved from death. It is the one thing that every man and woman on this earth fears most deeply. So when someone comes along and tells you that you don't need to be afraid anymore (as long as you believe in god) as there is a convenient little thing called the “afterlife,” we jump at it with open arms.

I wonder if animals, birds, and fish dream of this afterlife? After all, most of them die pretty nasty deaths at the hands of predators. I wonder if the mouse thinks, “oh, it'll be all right if the owl eats me tonight, because I won't suffer, I'm going to a better place – a place of complete bliss, delight, and peace”?

But as we all *know*, animals do not currently have the capacity to ponder such questions such as the nature of their own existence. So I would like you to imagine for a moment that you do not have the ability to contemplate the nature of your own existence and have never heard the word death and no one has told you of an afterlife. You are like the animals, fish, and the birds, only living for today, for now.

You work every day, have a family, enjoy yourself, and have fun in life, without thinking about an end. How would you feel? I know how I would feel. Free. Free of the chains of death, as death is no longer a concept I can entertain. I live each day well, I live each day as it comes. I am like the bird flying in the sky, who beats its wings furiously until the last moment when his body fails him. I have no fear. I am alive and that is what is important to me, and I plan to use every moment well.

Life

The experience of being alive; the course of human events and activities

All too often, we use this imagined future of an afterlife as something which allows us to behave any way we want on earth. We behave in unkind ways to other humans and other inhabitants of the planet. We cheat, we steal, we are greedy, we lie, and we murder, but it's ok, because we promise we'll be better next time round.

If you knew you only had one chance at life, that this was it, that there was no afterlife, wouldn't you behave a little differently? Would you keep worrying that one day you would die? Would you worry about your age all the time and how close you were to death?

The other day I worked out, that if I live until the age of 80, I have approximately 15,695 days until I die; and I have lived for 13,505 days already. What did I do with those days? How did I spend them? Did I live well each day? Was I kind to other people I met? Occasionally. Did I hurt a lot of people along the way? Yes. Did I deceive, cheat, and lie? Yes. Did I value my friends and family enough? Was I kind to animals?

There are a million questions I could ask myself about how I lived in the past, how I spent my time on the planet; but I prefer to think about the next 15,695 days, and how I will spend each one of them.

Will I be cruel and unkind to my fellow humans? Will I be selfish in sharing my time with my family? Will I do work that adversely affects other people, animals, and the planet around me? Will I strive to possess

more consumer goods, and more monetary wealth? Will I spend my time praying and hoping that the next life is better than this one?

Or will I do something different? Will I see death as part of a natural process of life? Will I embrace this concept and release myself from the prison of fear I keep myself in, thereby allowing me to concentrate on living well, and being kind to others around me; from my parents to the animals in the forest, to my children, and the fish in the depths of the ocean? That is life. There is no second chance. Life is one word. One word that must be taken as seriously as it also must be taken in fun.

How many days have you lived on the planet? What have you done with those days? How many days do you have left on the planet? A thousand? Five thousand? Ten thousand? Twenty five thousand?

Nobody knows exactly how many days each of us has left on the planet, so hadn't we better start living each day as if it were our last? It's time to start living, to stop caring about death, to break through the fear. There is nothing you can do to stop it. Embrace death and at the same time embrace life. Life is what you have now. Death is not a concept that need concern you. You can find bliss, delight, and peace while you are alive. Start today.

D e s i r e

The feeling that accompanies an unsatisfied state

•

An inclination to want things

What is your heart's desire?



Tell me. What do you desire in life? What do you really want? Some of you may desire peace on earth, happiness, or untold riches and power, but whether you desire to save the world or destroy it, you both originate from the same source.

The dictionary definition tells us that desire is a feeling that accompanies an unsatisfied state; but why are you unsatisfied? Were you born that way? Is it in your genetic heritage? Or is it something that creeps up on you while you're not looking and possesses you?

First of all, we have to recognise that we are desire. It doesn't matter where it originates from. We are told by the churchmen that desire is a sin, and that god will punish those who desire, but that's all a bit too fire and brimstone for my liking. I want to get underneath the word and find out what it really means to desire something, why I desire it, and why I

get angry when I can't have it. Let us begin our discussion slowly and carefully.

I have always desired things, women mostly; not for who they were, but what they looked like. I desired their full blooded lips, their breasts, their curved waists and their long legs and I wanted to have them now. Why shouldn't I? After all, I desired them, so that was half way there to getting them into bed with me. Occasionally I got lucky, and had passionate sex with one or more of them, but in the morning, the feeling of contentment had gone and I was once again unsatisfied. Perhaps, as my therapist once said, the reason I desired these women is that I was longing for love, but that couldn't be it. I desired money as much as I desired women, and money wasn't a replacement for love (was it?)

Maybe I just wanted to be happy, and that's why I was desiring all of these material pleasures; but I felt happy and content in life, I just desired women and money, that was all, surely it didn't make me a bad person? Maybe I was a sex maniac, suggested another therapist, and I desired women because I couldn't ever satisfy my craving. But I wasn't a sex maniac; I didn't want to have sex with women all the time, and anyway, I had plenty of girlfriends who would have been more than happy to satisfy any unfulfilled sexual desire. No, there had to be more to it than that.

I once told a friend I was "in lust" with her; I didn't really know what it meant but I had heard the word used often. That's it I thought, maybe this whole desire thing is just lust, and I started my journey to find out what it meant to be in lust, not just with a person, but with an object, or an idea.

Lust

1. *A strong sexual desire*
2. *Self-indulgent sexual desire (personified as one of the deadly sins)*
3. *Have a craving, appetite, or great desire for*

I lusted after one girl for quite a time. I loved her black hair, the shape of her mouth, her eyes, her large breasts, and her rounded bottom and long legs. She was "perfect" in my eyes. Her laugh was captivating, her conversation engaging. I was already in a relationship and I think she was too, and she was just a friend of a friend of a friend I happened to see occasionally in bars and cafe's. I already had a girlfriend who had lovely dark hair, a captivating laugh, had nice breasts and long legs, and I thought I was in love with her; so I found it a great surprise to see myself

lusting around after this other girl, flirting and talking excitedly to her, without regard to my girlfriend.

Every time she would come into the bar, I felt a wave of excitement come over me, my heart would start to pound. I loved the way she looked, with her green eyes, enhanced by mascara and her lips reddened by lipstick, and as she would come over to talk to me, I inhaled her perfume so deeply I could feel it engulf me. I loved her straight away, I wanted her to be mine, I didn't want her to be with her boyfriend anymore, I hated him, and how he touched her when I was around. I faced up to it that I was jealous.

I wanted her more than words could hope to express, I wanted to spend every minute with her. I couldn't stop thinking about her at work, and it was starting to affect my relationship with my girlfriend. I became cold towards her, I didn't want to make love to her any more. The smell of her perfume that once enchanted me, became sour. I had to be with this girl, I kept thinking, she is the one I love, not my girlfriend.

My lucky break came one saturday evening during a party at the local bar, there were over 150 people there, and we were all crammed in together, laughing and drinking. I saw her out the corner of my eye and smiled at her. She came over:

"Hi alan! Howya doing?"

"Great thanks, you?"

"Oh ok..."

And at that moment, our eyes met and something electric went through my body. I instantly started to become nervous and I said in a somewhat less confident voice:

"Where's your boyfriend tonight?"

"Oh, he's away for the weekend..."

"Oh!" I said, feigning surprise, "do you want a drink?"

"Sure."

So we stood and talked, and talked about life and love, and how our other half's were annoying us so much, and we drank and we drank and we laughed and we laughed. Suddenly she said:

"Do you want to get out of here? It's too busy."

"Sure" I replied. "Where?"

"Well... We *could* go back to my place, there's no one there and I've got plenty of booze!"

So off we walked, and as we walked she linked her arm in mine. My heart was nearly at mach two, it was beating so fast. We got to her place and I noticed that actually I was pretty drunk. She lit some candles and

put on some music. She got me a strong gin and tonic, and we sat on the sofa together. I can frankly say that I have no idea what we were talking about, it was all a bit of a blur. But I do remember that she leaned over and suddenly kissed me. Her lips were swollen, and she tasted sweet, and we kissed for what seemed like several hours. She then got up, and went to take my hand.

“I want to make love to you” she said.

I whispered something like,

“I’ve wanted you for so long...”

And we went into the bedroom, where she undressed me gently, caressing every part of my body as she went. I slightly remember fumbling with her bra strap, but finally we were naked. Her body was on top of mine, her skin felt so soft and so smooth, and she smelled even sweeter than she tasted. Our bodies became entwined in heady passion. I felt that maybe I was dreaming, but as she caressed my body with her tongue, I knew it was real.

“Make love to me now” she said in a whisper. And as she said that, I rolled on top of her and gently slid inside her. I will save you the gory details, but needless to say it was the best love making of my life, without a doubt! and sometime after sunrise we fell asleep in each others arms.

Now, I have had a lot of one night stands in my life, but usually when I wake up in the morning in a strange bed, I start to worry, and think “I’ve got to get out of here,” (it’s funny how different the world looks when the alcohol wears off), but as I woke, I felt none of that. I felt a strange calm as I lay there next to her. She was facing me, and she still looked as beautiful as she had done the night before. Wow! I thought. This must be love.

We eventually got dressed, swapped phone numbers, and I went back to my own place in a bit of a dream state. I had a shower, put on some clean clothes and made myself something to eat without a single thought of my girlfriend. I was filled with this new girl. I couldn’t believe that, from a feeling of “I like you” I had finally made love to her just hours before. I heard the phone go; it was a text:

“Fancy something to eat and a chat later?”

I checked the number and it was her...

“Definitely! What time?” I replied.

“Pick me up at eight.”

Hours seemed to pass and I avoided my girlfriend’s calls to my mobile as I don’t think I would have been able to lie at that moment. Fortunately, she didn’t come round.

I picked up the new girl at eight and she looked beautiful, just as she had done from the moment I met her. We talked and laughed and then she said:

“You know I’ve got a boyfriend,”

“Well I’ve got a girlfriend you know.”

“So what are we going to do?” she asked.

I was in shock, here was the girl I loved asking me to be with her.

“Well it will be difficult but I want to be with you” I replied.

“Me too” she said.

And we both shared a sigh of relief.

“When will you tell her?” she asked.

“This week.”

“Ok, I’ll tell my boyfriend then as well.”

The next week was very stressful, and when I did eventually tell my girlfriend it felt like relief, even though she was shouting and crying. But then she was gone. She picked up her stuff the next day and that was it. I was now free, and so was the new love of my life.

We were now free to spend every waking moment with each other, and we did. We made love as often as we could; we went to the cinema, we went for walks by the river, we talked and we talked and we loved. But four weeks later. Nothing. Suddenly I didn’t like her perfume any more, I didn’t particularly like the way she dressed or how she spoke, and from what I could work out, she didn’t like me very much either. We just didn’t seem to have anything in common anymore. In fact looking back we never did. So that was it. We parted. As soon as love had come it had gone, and neither of us could work out why!

“Well, I guess that’s just the way it goes,” she said.

Suddenly I started thinking about my girlfriend again, and how mean I had been to her. “I must try to get back with her,” I thought. So I sent her flowers and gifts and sorry cards, but it was all too late. I had blown my chances with her. “Don’t ever contact me again,” came the text message late one night. And I never did.

So, that was that, I found out that lust is a short term affair. That it had nothing to do with real love; it was a chemical attraction between two people, and just like drugs, when the chemical wears off there is just a bleak reality staring you in the face.

But how could this have happened? I was so sure I was in love with her. I was so sure we would spend the rest of our lives together, and then it was over. I promised never to fall in lust again... Until the next time.

But lust is just desire, not companionship nor trust, and especially not love. I found that out! I wanted her and I had her. And that was the end of it. The same as she wanted me and had me. We had both desired to possess each other and once the possessing was done, there was nothing left. In the same way we desire consumer goods, power or money, but once the desire is satiated, we return to a state of dissatisfaction, and the whole process starts again.

Transcending desire

So what is it we really want? What is it we want in life that is not desire? And that is a hard question to answer. Desire is just want, remember. I want to make a lot of money, I want a new house, I want that girl, I want power, I want a diamond ring. Do you see? It makes no difference what the object of desire is made of – it doesn't even have to be physical. But as soon as it takes root in your mind, all the connections will start to be made in your brain to help you get it. So it is dangerous to all.

But there is an easy way out. And that is, through understanding why you want something so much, you would do “anything” to get it. What, after all, is there in this life you could possibly want so much? You already have everything you need. You have food, shelter, and clothing (hopefully) and perhaps someone to share your life, but it isn't enough, is it? You must have more, you deserve more; and if you want something, why shouldn't you have it?

But into this life we are born, naked, and we will exit it much the same way. Whether we desired or possessed has no effect on the outcome. We will die. You will die. And what good came of the misery you created whilst desiring so much? As I found out to my detriment, I already had everything I needed, and when I desired more I ended up with nothing. That was an important lesson for me.

The second lesson was in understanding that trying to become something or somebody was also desire. My parents always wanted me to be somebody; they wanted me to do something with my life and become someone. From being somebody or becoming somebody I take it to mean they wanted me to be successful in business, or be rich and have a large house. But it started early on in life at school. “What do you want to be when you grow up?” they would ask. If I knew then what I know now I would say, “I just want to be,” that would have foxed them! But do you understand what I am saying here?

Our whole lives are geared up for desire, so it's no wonder we actively desire things when we get older. "Become something great," my mum used to say, but now I know I do not need to become or be anything other than what I am. I am neither great nor stupid. I am neither rich nor poor. I just am.

Perhaps it is a hard concept for you to grasp; but when I ask you what you are, you always reply: "I am a student, I am an engineer, I am unemployed, I am poor, I am wealthy," But those are just a man-made labels. The beginning part, "I am," is all that you are. It is all that I am, do you see? You are neither a businessman nor a thief. You just are.

When we try to become something, we engage the desire module in the brain which says "Let's become something," because our poor old brains don't know any better. If only they could see that the human being is already all that he can be. It is the brain that is saying "No, I do not have enough," not you. You already know you have enough, but your brain just can't get it into its head!

When we become, we change what we are. When we just "be," we are already! Does that make any sense to you? Once I start the process of becoming, we start an unstoppable chain of events. The brain doesn't know when it's time to stop becoming and just be satisfied, it thinks you want to keep changing all the time, and the only way to stop it is to say, "hold on brain, I'm sick of this becoming something else, I am happy the way I am. I am satisfied with life, I am satisfied with who I am, it is you who wants to make me something I am not. I cannot desire more than I am already. I just am;" and you will feel the calm wash over you.

So when the seed of desire tries to plant itself in your brain, watch it carefully and calmly laugh and let it pass over you. If we are still desiring the material, how can we ever expect to be free of the conflict we find ourselves in, day after day? No good ever comes out of wanting something so much that the desire becomes your reason for living.

You already have a good reason for living: To experience the wonder of the world and share in its magic; and to help create a world with compassion, free from division and hatred. But if you want that externally, then it is just desire. By becoming the creation and the compassion, you will find that the sands of desire just blow over you. Watch yourself closely, then watch yourself some more. You are everything. You just are.

I AM

D i s a r m a m e n t

Act of reducing or depriving of arms

Over the course of our other discussions we have talked about war and weapons. We have even talked about the manufacture of guns, and how life would be a lot nicer (and less bloody) if we just stopped making the stupid things! Sorry, but sometimes the human idiocy knows know bounds. So anyway, here we are, left with tens of millions of pistols, automatic rifles, rocket launchers, surface to air missiles, tanks, anti-personnel mines, grenades, cruise missiles, and last but not least., will you please give a warm welcome to everybody's favourite deterrent... The intercontinental nuclear missile!

So there you have it. It's not a complete list by any means, and there are always new weapons being developed all the time, after all, it *is* a business you know, and people have to make a living to feed their families!

There is no corner of the globe untouched by guns and weapons. Some are in daily use, others are stockpiled “just in case.” So let us begin our discussion. Let us attempt to find out why it is man can’t get rid of his arms (actually, if he got rid of his arms, he would find it difficult to fire a gun. There’s an idea!)

I can’t disarm. It’s impossible

So I called up a couple of countries, and asked them why they couldn’t just get rid of all the weapons that they, as countries, held. Obviously there will still be some illegal weapons, but we can’t help that for now. This is a transcript of the conversations.

Me: Hello, is that the head of the armed forces?

Chief: Speaking. What can I do for you?

Me: Look, I know you’ve probably heard question this a million times from the ‘anti-war lot.’

Chief: Yeah, them, they can be a right pain in the ass!

Me: Tell me about it. Always complaining about something. But look, I really want to ask you a serious question. Why can’t you just disarm. I mean get rid of all of your weapons? It seems kind of stupid to me. I know we can’t all get on all the time, but having all these things to kill people makes it worse don’t you think?

Chief: Look, I’ll be straight with you as you seem like a decent guy. We don’t *need* weapons, we *need* them just in case anyone attacks us.

Me: But why? Surely if everyone has no weapons whose going to risk attacking with spears and swords. Actually forget I said that, I forgot what they used to wage war with.

Chief: Yeah, I wondered if you’d spot that! Look, even if you manage to get everyone in the world to give up their big weapons, they are just the modern day equivalent of swords and knives – they do the same job at a further distance. I’m sure if you had been in a medieval battle you would have realised that some of the weapons they used were far more gruesome than ones employed today, and remember that people will always have knives.

Me: I'm sure. But it doesn't answer my question, why don't you do as the anti-war protesters have been asking you to do, and disarm?

Chief: Look one day, some lunatic with a bomb, or even a sword, is going to come over here and attempt to conquer us. We can't allow that, we have a responsibility to the people.

Me: But what if the people didn't want these weapons?

Chief: Look, don't be so naive. If the people didn't want a country with an army or weapons they wouldn't have voted this government in. They would have voted some other party whose manifesto is to disband the army and get rid of all weapons.

Me: So it's the people's fault?

Chief: Ha ha. Sure is. Any other questions?

Me: No, no. I'm done. Thanks for your time.

Chief: (still laughing) It's been my pleasure.

So I hung up the phone trying to understand what had just been said to me, and it became clear that it was not the government's fault, or the army's fault. The people (in a democracy) vote for the government and parliament makes the laws. So all they had to do was pass a law to get rid of all the weapons, and we would be free. But something was still troubling me. Something the chief had said to me earlier. So I decided to make another call, this time to a different country (democratic).

Me: Hello. Is that the chief of the armed forces?

Chief 2: Yes, it is. Who am I speaking to?

Me: Oh, you don't know me, my name's alan, and I'm calling you about disarmament.

Chief 2: (not sounding very happy) Disarmament? How did you get my number?

Me: That doesn't matter. Can you spare two minutes of your time for me?

Chief 2: I suppose so, but make it quick, I'm a busy man.

Me: I'm sure you are, so here's the thing. In order to further the human race, and all who inhabit this earth. I thought it would be a good idea if everyone just disarmed and destroyed all their weapons.

Chief 2: Ha! That's a joke; why would any army do that? They need their weapons. And anyway, anything can be made into a

weapon, you don't have to buy machine guns. For thousands of years armies have been fighting each other, you don't think they had tanks and mines back then, do you? (lightening up a little) We are an army, our job is to fight and destroy the enemy, we don't need any 'special' weapons, we have our soldiers. So as long as there is an army, disarming all the modern weapons doesn't make any difference. My men can fight hand to hand if they have to.

Me: But what if we got rid of the army?

Chief 2: Why would you want to do a stupid thing like that after all the army has done for you and your anti-war friends! This conversation is ended.

So that was the end of that. It didn't matter if we got rid of all the weapons as I think he said they could still fight, "hand to hand," if they have to. Well, I agree with him that anything can be a weapon, but modern weapons can kill more people. And if the army can fight hand to hand, then they're going to go in and kill everyone anyway. So disarming is pointless. It makes no difference if we keep the weapons or not. I decided to make one last call, this time to a communist dictatorship.

Me: Hello, is that the chief of the armed forces?

Chief 3: Yes, to whom am I speaking?

Me: This is alan, from england, and I want to talk to you about disarmament. Do you have a couple of minutes to talk?

Chief 3: Well, ok. Seeing as you are on the phone. Go ahead.

Me: I have spoken to two different armed forces chiefs, but they were from democratic countries, so I thought I would get a view from a different angle, you know from a dictatorship?

Chief 3: Ah, I'm sure my democratic friends had some interesting viewpoint, no? But let me tell you, We are not so different from them.

Me: How so? I thought you brutally put down any kind of rebellion – that you killed people, or imprisoned them, because they do not agree with your views.

Chief 3: My friend, they are not my views. I am a mere soldier. I just follow orders. There are people in power who decide what is law. It is the same in your country, no? You cannot just stage an uprising against the government without any response from the Army can you? You cannot riot without it being put

down. If you become a threat to their power, you too will have to go. They walk around in their expensive suits looking meek and mild, but because we wear our uniform you think we are more brutal. But at least we show who we really are. We make no pretences. We say, 'if you do not obey our laws we will have to deal with you.' It is the same in your country. The press just makes us look bad, so that your leaders look good!

Me: But at least in our country people get the vote!

Chief 3: And who do they vote for? The same people every time. The names of the parties may change occasionally, but the people do not. These are people in the power business. That's all. They won't let anyone get in their way. So they tell you you have control of who gets into power, but someone is always in power, over you, ready to use whatever it takes to put you down if you try to revolt. It is the same here. But didn't you want to talk about disarmament?

Me: No, thank you, I don't think it matters anymore. Goodbye.

As I put the phone down it became clear. This had nothing to do with disarmament. It didn't matter if we got rid of all the weapons. As long as the army still existed, it would fight with what ever it had to hand if it needed to, and the army would fight, because that is what they were paid to do.

Not paid to protect the people, but to preserve those in power; those who control us. And would they agree to disarming? No, of course not, because all these new weapons just make it a lot easier to control us (oh, sorry, and save us from all our enemies, who are actually not our enemies, but theirs.)

You see, although the army may be good at hand to hand contact, there's a lot more of us than there is of them. So it wouldn't be a fair fight. Giving the army automatic weapons kind of evens things up a bit. Twenty of us against one of him. No contest. We win. One of him with a machine gun against twenty of us. No contest. He wins hands down. And order is restored!

There will never be a time when I can see the leaders of any country giving up all their weapons, because they are their power base. They need something that others haven't got, so they can stay in power. Whether it be swords or crossbows, machine guns or nuclear weapons, the only reason the weapons are there are to protect the powerful.

I realised in a flash what needed to be done. Those in power needed to go if we were ever to get rid of all these terribly destructive weapons. But not a revolution, that is just guns meeting guns. Some ex-communist countries had revolutions where those in power were removed by millions of people demonstrating. But what happened? The old people in power were replaced by new people in power. They still have armies to control the people, and plenty of weapons. And so the cycle continues. What had to happen was the removal of power which is in itself a weapon. How would we be able to achieve that?

Well, we certainly wouldn't be able to think our way out of this difficulty which is causing people to suffer all over the world. We would need to find out what it is that attracts man to power, and in understanding it deeply, be able to dismantle it once and for all. But first, let us find out what it means to be powerful.

D r i v i n g

The act of controlling and steering the movement of a vehicle

Driving's great isn't it? You walk out your front door and there it is – metallic blue, cd player, alloy wheels, sports exhaust; your pride and joy! Remote unlocking; get in, belt up, tunes on, a quick look at yourself in the mirror, and away you go. Yes sir, the car's a great invention. Personal transportation, from your home to anywhere you want to go: To the office, the supermarket, a visit to your mothers, no, changed your mind, off to the cinema. A trip to the country, a trip to the ocean, day or night, rain or sun, ice or snow, the car gets you there, safely and securely. I'd like to see public transport do that!

The car's cheaper, more flexible, and let's face it, a great deal more comfortable. You can stop for a break when you want. You can take the scenic route. You can change the music whenever you like – try that on the bus or the train. No one's squashed up beside you, no one you don't know, you're safe and secure, locks down, eyes face forward, only you to

worry about. Oh, and the small matter of the other 2000 drivers you will have to interact with on your journey...

“Get out the way!”

“Are you blind?”

“Women drivers!”

“What a driver! Where did you buy your licence from mate?”

“Yeah and you, you idiot!”

“Come on, come on. Can’t you tell I’m in a hurry!”

“I’m gonna be late, let’s move it!”

“It’s green it’s green, go on!”

... and other unsavoury comments and displays which usually require the driver to pull angry faces, use hand signals not found in the highway code book, and use as many sexual swear words as can be used in the time it takes for an old lady to pull right in front of you. Welcome to driving, 2006 style.

But for now, let’s go back to a more placid age, a time when courtesy and calmness ruled the roads. A time when huge lorries and vans didn’t hurtle past you at the speed of sound, and seventeen year old boys didn’t drag race their mums cars on the high street. A time when the maximum speed was a leisurely stroll, and the era of the sales rep hadn’t arrived. This was a time when people still walked to the shops, even when they owned a car.

Think back if you can, even if you weren’t alive, to a time when your parents or grandparents started driving. Visualise this scene for a moment if you will, your grandfather at the wheel, his leather driving gloves smartly on the gear stick, starting the engine ever so calmly, no six-speaker cd player ready to pump out the sounds... Signal, leave the house, a quiet drive, and he and your grandmother arrive at their destination all calm.

Hmmm something’s wrong, isn’t there?, it all went a little bit too smoothly for my liking. Let’s change the scenario to something a bit more modern.

Grandfather gets into the car, leather driving gloves on – he’s late already, shit! Starts the engine, turns on the music, signals, and leaves the house... Two minutes later he hits traffic. He cuts down a side road, it’s no better,

he does a u-turn, he's back where he started... Argh, it's so frustrating. He gets onto the main road.

"Come on, come on, Jesus, what the hell are you doing, get out the way," he flashes his lights, drops down a gear and passes, making sure he signals the driver at fault with his middle finger. "Idiot!"

"Calm down dear," says grandmother.

"What? it wasn't my fault, did you see the way he was driving?"

Now. On to the motorway, accelerate, accelerate... nearly as fast as the trucks, but then one of them cuts him off. He decelerates sharply!

"Jesus, people are so bloody inconsiderate!"

The guy behind him beeps his horn, grandfather gives him the finger, accelerates again, and he's on. He's sweating now, his heart rates up, and he dances around from lane to lane, desperately trying to make up lost time. He glances over and grandmother's flushed.

"What's wrong with you?"

"Well your driving is a little erratic, slow down."

"Slow down!? I'm only doing 50, we're late already, do you want us to get there today? Jesus you're always complaining."

After all that, he misses the exit.

"See what you made me do?" he says.

Five more miles and he finally comes off, 360 degrees and back on the other side. He finally makes his exit, but he wasn't prepared for traffic lights, every 200 metres a red. And another red, and another red.

"Jesus, why do they always phase these traffic lights wrong? There's never a green when I come through here."

Stop Start, Stop Start, and finally he turns into his destination. Exhausted. Hot and flustered Grandfather turns to grandmother as he gets out of the car, and says,

"I don't want to stay long, I want to miss the traffic on the way back."

That's more like it!

So what's the difference between the two scenarios? Well, obviously, in the second one, grandfather is a lot more stressed. There is a lot more traffic on the roads, and common courtesy seems to have given way to anger and abuse, resulting in himself and his passenger being highly strung before they even reach their destination.

People often report that their partners "change" when they get behind the wheel. There is even a new offence of "road rage," and some people

have actually been killed or beaten senseless by other drivers as a result of perceived bad driving! What's going on? Driving should be a pleasant affair. We start at A, drive safely and considerately for our passengers and all other motorists, and arrive at B. But something makes the point between A and B a stressful affair for all involved. Let's go into this carefully together shall we, because there's more to motoring than just bad driving and stress.

Since the advent of mass motoring, cars have become a necessity for most people. In fact, we can't live without them, as proved by the traffic jams all over the planet. Driving is no longer pleasurable; we don't just use our cars on weekend trips to the country, we use them every minute of the day.

Drive the kids to school
Drive to work
Drive to a meeting
Drive to the shops
Drive home
Drive to the restaurant
Drive to the airport
Drive to the bus station
Drive to the cinema
Drive to your girlfriends house
Drive to the coast
Drive to the country
Drive yourself MAD

Cars are an integral part of modern life. They are status symbols, as much as transportation devices. In the same way we buy bigger houses to reflect our career, so we buy cars. Who ever heard of a managing director driving around in a ten year old car?

We buy cars that look good; cars that reflect our personalities. You couldn't imagine an outrageous rock star driving around in the same car your mother drives to do the shopping in, could you?

Young people who can't afford sports cars, buy accessories like alloy wheels, rear spoilers and exhausts that wouldn't look out of place on a formula one racing car! You hear their in-car entertainment systems before you see the car. It's all about...

Image

A personal facade that one presents to the world

A car lets people know your status in the world. It defines your personality. It allows people to know who they're dealing with before they meet you. Whether you're rich, wannabe rich, or poor. Whether your boring or fun; extrovert, introvert or a family man. Whether you're a corporate man or an entrepreneur, going up the ranks, or never got started. Think about it.

If you're stuck in a traffic jam, you look around. You look at people, you look at their cars, you try to imagine what sort of life they have, what sort of job they do – it's natural.

We look at the man in the red ferrari, and wonder if he's a media executive, in the film business, or if he's famous. Generally, a director of a multinational company wouldn't be seen dead in one of those. He's looking for something that's understated, but reflects the fact that he's serious, and has made it in life – something altogether more regal. The mobile phone salesman is in a "sooped-up" shopping car. It's loud, its paint job is louder, and reflects the fact that he himself is "loud." The fast talker, ready to get you to sign up to that new two year contract in ten minutes flat. The scientist who is thinking about a scientific equation doesn't care what people think about him, he is too busy in his own mind to worry about what car he is driving, although others will be judging him without his knowledge!

So let's face it – cars are important! The environmentalists just don't understand!

I want you to ask yourself now what car you would drive and why? What's your job? Why is it important to have a specific style of car to reflect your image?

Young men like to have nice cars to impress the ladies. You can't imagine picking up a an attractive woman in a battered old car, she wouldn't be impressed. But pick her up in a sports car; now you're talking! Cars are a reflection of your wallet size, your job, your credit rating, the house you live in. At least that's what you want them to reflect. Some people have the nice car to give the impression they are wealthy, but that's all it is, an impression.

What about the way you drive? What does that say about you? Are you a fast driver, a slow driver, a lane changer, or a racing line specialist? First off the lights or last? For some drivers, especially young males, full of testosterone, driving a car is not about getting from A to B but as a

means of showing off their masculinity to their peers, and of course, impressionable young females (the same as showing off your muscles in a gym). You want to impress.

You have no driving skills, but you want to prove you are as fast as the formula one world champion; that you can corner harder than the best rally drivers – even on a country road with two way traffic. The faster you drive, the more excited you are, the more your peers egg you on, the faster you go. The faster you go the bigger your ego.

In your imagination you are the formula one world champion – you've played the computer game, now here's the reality. Under your right foot, the ultimate display signal of masculinity. Raw power. The girls are impressed, your friends are impressed, you are the man! Until you hit a tree. Death is not as impressive. Yet young males still line up every day for the honour of driving faster and harder than any one else, no matter what the cost.

The ferrari driver, on the other hand, is not so concerned about driving fast. You see, he is driving one of the most powerful cars on the planet, but he's not interested in that. If he was going fast you wouldn't be able to look at him, and that's what he wants. He wants you to look at the style of his car and listen to the raw power; after all, he spent an awful lot of money on it, and to drive it fast would be a waste (especially as the top speed is nearly two and a half times the speed limit).

This is a car to drive slowly, like a big cat on the prowl for prey. You want them to admire you – look how well you've done, look at the money you must have – and you pretend not to notice everyone staring.

To be fair, some people don't care about cars, they're just a method for getting themselves from A to B, and two types of people fit into this category: (a) The man who is comfortable with himself and doesn't need a car to show off to the world. Happy with who he is and what he's got, and (b) the man who knows he will never be able to afford a nice car and is resigned to driving his old car.

So now we have covered the car drivers status (the relative position or standing of the driver in society, his job, his wealth) and his image (the personal façade that he presents to the world:(whether he's fun, serious, fashionable, available, loud, introvert), let's look at other factors influencing driving.



Most of us don't live close to where we work anymore; we have to find someone willing to pay for our skills, and for that, we normally have to commute some distance. Many towns don't have a reliable public transport network, and those that do, are usually overcrowded and expensive (it should be noted that most new suburban living schemes are designed wholly around the fact that people are car drivers). The other factor being that new companies are often building their offices in areas only easily accessed by car.

Having to commute normally only means one thing, getting up early, and coming home late. This can be annoying for a single person, but for a couple with children this can start to cause a lot of stress between them. This happens whether using public transport or your car.

"I never see you before you leave, and you get home just as the children are going to bed."

But let's concentrate on the car driver. It's midweek, he's tired – too late to bed last night – he has to commute over one hour each way to work every day and his tolerance levels are down. He's having a stressful week at work. His wife is putting pressure on him because he's never at home. He's annoyed that she doesn't appreciate everything he's doing to provide them with a nice home in the suburbs. He's worrying about being late, as there's a traffic jam and he's got a meeting in fifteen minutes. He phones ahead to say he may be late, all the time cursing the queues, and then in the midst of all this, someone dares to pull out in front of him...

*"What do you think you're doing you bloody idiot, are you blind!
Couldn't you see me coming, it's my right of way..."*

His heart rate starts to rise, his blood pressure too. He feels more anxious, he starts worrying more about being late, he gets more frustrated, and the more frustrated he gets the more he starts to get angry about the stupidity of the driver who pulled out in front of him. So he starts his day off as he means to go on. Stressed.

His boss isn't happy about something, and his wife calls him to say she wants him home early. He's behind at work, but he leaves on time and sits again in the queue, desperately watching the clock, knowing what his wife will say if he's late. He can't be late, he'll have to find another route. He twists and turns through side streets, gaining only seconds, dodging people crossing the road.

“Get out of the way, can’t you see I’m in a hurry?” He fiddles around, trying to find the phone, to say he may be late and fails to notice a car pulling out, he brakes sharply.

“Jesus, that was close!” “Idiot, idiot!” He bangs the steering wheel and flashes his lights, the other driver signals him with a rude finger sign, which infuriates him more. He beeps his horn, and if he could get hold of that driver he may just kill him! His heart rate is rising fast, he feels out of breath. He loosens his shirt, his palms are sweating slightly. He gets home, forty minutes late.

“Where have you been!” his wife screams. “Your dinner’s cold, and the children are in bed already. You’re so inconsiderate!”

So you have a shower, a glass of wine, and try to relax; you better get to bed early, you’ve got it all to do tomorrow, and the next day, and the next week, and the next month, and the next year. It’s a never ending cycle of stress.

Home stress becomes driving stress

Driving stress becomes work stress

Work stress becomes driving stress

Driving stress becomes home stress

Repeat

It’s no wonder people need a drink!

So on the whole, I would say that commuting is not good for the health of our system, our families’ systems, and the systems of all the other commuters around you.

But...

The man who pulled out in front of you wasn’t trying to make you angry or upset, and the people in the traffic jam weren’t trying to make you late. They were all just in their own stress cycles.

The car is one result of the way society is changing in its organisation; where we live, where we work, the jobs we do. No longer do we work together as a family or community unit, we now work for global corporations or larger businesses often many miles from where we live; often travelling by car all over the country on company business. Without the car, the way we organise our working lives today would be very different.

Let’s move on in our investigation, shall we? I want to talk about our grandparents. Few had cars when they were working, then again, the

world was a very different place. There was no need to move around; people generally lived close to their place of work – public transport would suffice.

If they wanted to go anywhere at the weekend, they were happy to take the bus or the train. Cars hadn't been around long, and they were out of the price range of most people. Train suited the more leisurely pace of life.

Consumerism was a word in its infancy, so the need to earn vast sums of money was unnecessary. They didn't have as many possessions as we do today, but then again, their needs were much simpler. Shopping had not yet become a hobby, and they purchased their food from local stores: The butcher, the fishmonger and the greengrocer all sold local products.

Supermarkets hadn't even been thought of, so there was no need to transport vast quantities of food around the globe. Fast forward to the present day.

Life is complicated in comparison, although we buy things to make our lives easier. The car is one of those things. A great invention, designed to help, and ends up causing as many problems as it solves – yet, unlike the bicycle, has become strangely addictive.

We can't go anywhere without the car now. We make all sorts of excuses about how we would walk but “how would we get our shopping home?,” or we would take the bus, “but have you ever tried to take the bus with three children?” or, “I like the train, it's just too expensive and inconvenient.”

All valid excuses, but how did your grandparents cope? How did they get their shopping home, or take their three children out? Now I hear a lot of you saying, “there's no point in looking to the past, they had a much easier time back then, we have to embrace progress, and the car has improved our lives, no question about it.” But when we talk about improving our lives, do we not mean make them easier in much the same way that “supermarkets have improved our lives?”

I often wonder what the expression *make life easier*, means, and I have come to think that perhaps it means we don't have to do as much physically, we don't have to put in as much effort. Dare I say it? The car has made us lazy.

Lazy

Disinclined to work or exertion

“But I work hard, I have a very busy life, I’m certainly not lazy.”

What I would like to discuss with you is that we use our car for everything now.

Imagine if you didn’t have a car. What would you do? It would be awful for the first month. Not being able to get fifty bags of shopping.

Having to walk the children to school. Having to walk to public transport to catch your bus/train to work. Having to plan your days out around public transport – how inconvenient! Not being able to go places on a whim, getting wet if it’s raining, getting cold feet and hands in the winter – how terrible; but I think we would soon get over it.

Not having a car starts to put us back in touch with reality. The reality of the society we are creating around us, one which is only possible due to the convenience of the car.

When you walk, you start to reconnect with the environment around you. You see people, you look at buildings, at trees, you notice things you hadn’t noticed before. The air is fresh (or if you live in a city you start to notice the pollution that the car drivers are spewing out of their exhausts), you get more exercise, and if you’re late, you get more exercise by walking faster (but this kind of rushing stress works its way out of the body through vigorous exercise).

Man is not supposed to be enclosed in a bubble all day, we are an outdoor species.

You start to make different choices about employment, so you don’t have to commute so far to work. You can think about things you need to deal with during your day. You can talk on the phone without fear of crashing. You start to notice more people on the streets. Not having a car fills the streets with people again. You learn that we have to live with everyone, we can’t just shut ourselves away from the world by putting our locks down. You learn what it is to be a pedestrian and fight to cross the road, thereby angering some car driver who is in a rush. You will notice how stressed the car drivers are in the city.

You will feel calmer

In the first sentence I mentioned that the car was a great invention, and indeed it is. It allows us to make choices that were not possible by past generations, but it has also led to us locking ourselves away from the rest of society.

Unlock the doors of the house, unlock the car, drive, locks down, back to the house, lock the car, lock ourselves in the house.

People always tell you what a dangerous place the world is, but the more we shut ourselves away from it, the more it becomes us against them, the constant fear that something bad will happen to you if you are out on the streets. But when the people get back onto the streets, the fear starts diminishing.

In some countries and cities, you never see anyone walking, you would be considered mad – just asking to be robbed – but if all the car drivers get out the car, and start walking, we reclaim the streets from gangs, and people intent on doing us harm. When people start cooperating together, they are a powerful force.

I still think there's a place in the world for the car when we manage to make it run on clean fuel, or solar, or battery cells, but the problem with the car is not really about it harming the environment (although that is a consideration), it's about us as a society; how we are using the car to change our lives. How we use it as a status symbol. How we are using it as a projection for our image, our personality. How we have become angrier and more stressed since acquiring it. How we have lost contact with other people. How we cocoon ourselves; and mostly, how afraid we have become of losing it.

Environmentalists will tell you to get out of your car because you're "harming the environment," but you don't want to hear that, it's your choice if you want to drive, and you're right, it is. But I would like you think outside of greenhouse gases, and petrol fumes.

Fear of loss is a powerful emotion and humans have a great ability to want to hang onto something once they've got it, whether it's good or bad. "It's mine, I worked for it and I'm going to keep it." I would like you to think what you would be gaining by stopping using the car so much. Stop for a moment and consider it.

I notice how my life changes when I have a car. I jump in to go 200 metres to the shops. I get angry when people pull out in front of me. I am stressed because of traffic. I worry I may get a parking ticket, or my car is towed away in the city. I worry about the cost of insurance and car tax. I worry about the cost of servicing the car. I have to remember to take everything out in case someone smashes the window to steal from me – fuel costs and the environment are the least of my worries!

I'd love to give you some tips on driving, tell you to calm down, to relax while you're driving, not to get angry at others mistakes, to think

about car sharing so you're not the only person in the car, to think about adopting or starting schemes that rent cars on an hour by hour basis for the community, or even think about buying a car with four friends (but you'd only fight over it).

I'd love to tell you you don't need a car to show off to everyone, and that driving fast only leads to more stress. But then again, you are the most intelligent species on the planet, so you already know all this.

The car's not to blame, it's just four wheels, a piece of metal, and a
few wires.
It's how you think about it that matters.

D r u g s

A substance that is used as a medicine or narcotic

Yeah, let's get high!



Have you tried drugs? The ones that are illegal, like cocaine, heroine, acid, speed, ecstasy, or marijuana? Are you one of the millions of people around the world who have sat getting high or danced the night away in a nightclub? Or maybe you've just passed out in a doorway somewhere?

I've tried drugs, and whatever anyone tries to tell you, drugs are good! Of course they are, that's why they're illegal, they're too good. Forget what your parents tell you. Forget what the government and your teachers tell you; if drugs were so bad, why do you think people would continue taking them? People aren't stupid! They belong to the most intelligent species on the planet, and if they say they're good, there is no reason to believe they are not telling the truth.

There is evidence that man has been taking stimulants of some kind or other for many thousands of years. Perhaps the drugs had some

positive benefit during our long evolution; perhaps they staved off cold or helped us to work in harsh conditions. Whatever the case, drugs are now here for one thing – pleasure.

Do you remember the old pleasure centres in the brain we talked about in the topics addiction and alcohol? I won't go into this in detail again, but let's all just accept why we take drugs. It's because they make us feel good and we get great *pleasure* from taking them.

Drugs are no different to alcohol, they were just commercialised a lot later than beer and wine. I'm sure that if beer was to be invented now it would surely be banned; it certainly causes far more social problems than drugs ever have, but we digress. Let's get back to the task of getting high...

It's cool to smoke a joint with your friends, isn't it? Passing it round, inhaling the sweet smoke, feeling spacey and chilled, or dropping a couple of pills before going clubbing; getting that loved-up feeling as you sweatily dance around feeling sexy.

Let's face it, most people who take drugs don't have a long term dependence or addiction to them, in fact it's usually something that is done in your youth at college or university, and gradually fades as one grows up and has more responsibility.

There are, of course, long term abusers, who are addicted to the strongest drugs (because they're the best), who cause social problems, and steal to fund their habit, but these people are the exception. They are the drug equivalents of long term alcohol abusers. So let's not blow all this out of proportion by saying that drugs are the worst thing in the world (I'm sure some of you anti-drug campaigners are getting quite hot under the collar reading this!).

We waste millions of pounds each year with our "war on drugs" campaigns, trying to crack down on the production and supply of something people want! That's right, they actually want these drugs, so let's not demonise the pushers. This is pure capitalism; supply and demand; someone wants it, so someone supplies it. If no one actually wanted drugs do you think these big drug cartels would still be in business? The only reason that there is a large amount of violence associated with the trade is due it being illegal, it attracts the more criminally minded types to it, but apart from that, it's just a business.

Ask anyone who takes drugs, why they do it, and they'll tell you "because it feels good." Most people who take drugs aren't addicts, they're just like all your other friends. They could be lawyers, doctors, or senior managers, it doesn't matter what job they do, they take drugs

because they like them. I have had many friends who took drugs regularly (every weekend), and you wouldn't class them as addicts, these were good citizens who paid their taxes on time, and went to work every day. They just saw it as a bit of fun. They never thought what they were doing was in anyway bad, immoral, or illegal, they were just exercising their right as human beings to get high!

Of course, the come down from drugs is much stronger than that of alcohol, but that's the cost you have to be prepared to pay if you want to get high.

All in all, taking drugs is no different to getting drunk. You may have more intense experiences with some drugs, you may see things that aren't there (acid); you may experience a rapid pulse, sweating, and jaw clenching (ecstasy); you may feel as if you just can't stop talking (speed); or you may feel ultra confident (cocaine); or you may feel as if you are glued to the spot, unable to move, and maybe a little bit paranoid (marijuana). Hey, but this is all part and parcel of getting high. You want the pleasure, you pay the cost.

So there you have it. If you want to feel good take drugs, they are much longer lasting, and also a much cheaper night out than alcohol. The end.

Of course, if you've never wanted to take drugs. or you have known someone who has become addicted to heroine or crack then you may feel like taking me to task over my last comments; telling me how you've seen what drugs can do to people, and what a terrible curse they are on society, but as I said, people choose to take them to feel extra good; to feel more pleasure than they can in normal life. Just because the after-effects are unpleasant (not only to the drug taker, but also the family members around them), and the person who has taken them may regret having done so, it doesn't mean they didn't enjoy themselves in the middle of the high! It's easy to apologise and feel sorry for yourself the next day. Do you follow?

I have no sympathy with anyone who takes drugs, they are doing it for their own pleasure, nothing else. If – by over consumption – they become addicted, I have sympathy for the rest of us having to listen to them complaining they are addicted, and how they are trying to get onto a program or get into rehab.

Once addicted, the drug takes over the mind, and tells lies to ensure it gets its supply. It cheats, it hurts, it destroys relationships, all so the brain can feel one more taste of pleasure. I have no sympathy for the users of

drugs; why have sympathy when someone is doing something they love doing?

You'll notice when someone (a friend, partner, parent, or child) has started to become addicted to drugs; just like alcohol, you will notice a change. They may change their patterns of behaviour, they may lose their job through repeated non-attendance, they may get sick more often, or stay in bed longer than usual, they may become apathetic, depressed, or depending on what drug they are using, increasingly paranoid, hyperactive, or aggressive. They may start spending much more money than usual; money may start going missing from the house, and they may become demanding and use emotional blackmail to get what they want – money. Remember, it takes a lot of money to be a drug addict.

If you start to notice any changes which you feel uncomfortable about, it pays to deal with them as quickly as possible. You will find it hard to confront someone who is addicted. They may become defensive and lie blatantly to your face that they are not taking anything. Don't stop there. Talk to your local doctor, look online, try to arm yourself with facts. Confrontation is only likely to make you more upset.

Addiction is a terrible thing only because the people it harms most are the people who love the addicted person. They can't bear to see someone going through such pain, and they would do anything to stop it. The addict then exploits this to get what he or she wants; a fresh supply of their chosen pleasure pill.

Don't give in, no matter how much you love someone. Don't let it carry on for any period of time, once addicted that person is now in a prison, under the guard of their substance, ready to fight off anyone who interferes with their supply. Get them help immediately to get off the drug, it is available, but if you leave it too long they will drag you down with them.

While they are under the spell, they are lost to you; the person you used to know is no longer there. You are now dealing with a drug, and it's sneaky and cunning. Only once they are free will you be have your loved one back. Don't listen to their lies. That is the drug talking to get more of its supply...

Wow! When you listen to all that advice about drug addiction it makes you wonder why you even tried it, no?

I tried drugs only a handful of times, although I have tried cocaine, marijuana, ecstasy, and speed. It wasn't so much an experimentation as a "I was drunk anyway and someone offered it to me" experience. I never really liked drugs and was wary of them from the outset. Although the

feeling was often good at the time, the come down (or hangover) from the drugs was often a cost more than I was prepared to pay. I felt panicky and anxious, and regretted my stupidity at having said yes to them, but that's peer pressure for you.

No one wants to be the one who says no, and gets laughed at; we all want to be cool, part of the in-crowd, don't we? So we take them anyway, no matter what the cost; we worry about that the next day. For now, it's time to have *fun*, and for most of us, taking drugs is all about having fun.

It's a laugh, isn't it? Being off your head on drugs, in a different world, experiencing things that other people can't. It's no wonder your parents can't understand you taking them, if all they do is drink alcohol; alcohol's tame isn't it? This is an instant buzz! You can't expand your consciousness with a glass of chardonnay can you? You can't see into a different world with a pint of beer can you?

But you're not expanding your consciousness, and you're not transcending dimensions, all that's happening is that the drug is acting on the brain and the body in ways which don't occur naturally; putting your system under tremendous pressure, raising your heart rate, amongst other things. The drugs are poisoning your system, but still you feel great. You're on top of the world. You are invincible, you can take on the world; everyone is in love with you, you are a god, you are all-powerful. Until the next day. And you are nothing.

When the drug wears off, it's just plain old you again, feeling slightly worse than you did the day before you took the drug. It's just you with the same old problems, the same old job, the same bills. Life is suddenly boring without the drug, isn't it? So in order to feel slightly less bored with life, you take it again, then take it again.

Suddenly, you can't live life without it, and, wow! You're addicted. Not because the drug itself is addictive (which it is), but because you become addicted to the emotions you experience when taking the drug. Real life – natural life – isn't good enough for you any more, you need more; you need to feel different to everyone else. So go on, take the drug, escape reality, because that is what you are doing, and pretty soon, you won't want to come out of that world any more. It will become your reality. Albeit a false reality.

So tell me, oh great homo sapiens, what's wrong with reality, the world we all inhabit? Why is it so boring that you have to escape it? Why do you need to experiment? Tell me, were all those millions of years ultimately worth it? Now there are millions of us, snorting, injecting,

smoking, swallowing substances that help us forget about life, that help us forget that billions of people have died to help us exist. That nature has been providing for millions of years to help us eat and drink, and our mothers have gone through pain and suffering to give birth to us. All for what? So we can “have a laugh,” get drunk, get high, and stagger around saying “wow! This is cool. Man I’m so wasted.” Congratulations, life just passed you by.

And what a life it is. Full of wonder, beauty and surprises. Full of enjoyment of nature and each other. Such an abundant place, this earth.

Imagine for a moment, lying in nature, looking at the hills, smelling the fresh, clean air, watching the clouds roll past, imagining different faces in each one, free of tension, smiling; and now cross quickly to the seedy club.

You’re drunk, you’ve just dropped a pill, your face is starting to become contorted, you start chewing or grinding your teeth, your heart rate is up, your starting to sweat, you can feel the rush going through your body! You feel like a million dollars, you’re dancing hard, you’re in love with everyone, the music is pounding...

But now cross quickly again to the hills, and imagine you have just been transported back to nature, and you meet your other self, the calm, relaxed self, smiling and enjoying life without any artificial enhancement; just pure relaxation. Imagine what your other self would say to you, while you stood there chewing your teeth, sweating, pupils dilated, disorientated. What would your other self think of you, seeing you on drugs there in the hills? Would he think you were cool, or would he just feel sorry for you; sorry you couldn’t enjoy life as it is, that you couldn’t learn to love reality, which is in nature all around us?

Learning to accept who we are, and accept reality is one of the greatest challenges we face as humans. We may look different from the animals and the birds, but we are a part of this great earth, just like them, and we are supposedly the most intelligent species on the planet. But every time we put a drug into our system, we detach ourselves from reality more. The drug allows us to retreat to a fantasy world, which exists only in our imagination.

Make a choice whether you want to discover reality, or whether you want to stay locked up in a drug prison. I know which one I choose, but maybe you are really dissatisfied with your life, maybe it’s too boring; maybe it’s not exciting enough for you; maybe reality’s not cool enough for you; maybe you’re too afraid of what your friends would say if you

didn't join in, or maybe it's just you, you who wants to deny yourselves a chance at living a wonderful life with a clear mind.

Think for a moment, of all the people who are being killed in wars at this very moment. People who are being beaten and tortured. People who are starving. People with nothing – no running water, no electricity, maybe not even a place to sleep. Now think of you, sitting there with your friends, talking about drugs and how cool they are, waiting for the weekend to enjoy yourself, and maybe you will see what a waste of a life it is.

On the one hand, there are people trying desperately to cling on to life with their last breath, and on the other, there's you, throwing life away. If you are so intent on escaping from life, maybe you would be prepared to swap with someone who really wants to *live*.

E

E d u c a t i o n

The activities of educating or instructing; activities that impart
knowledge or skill

•

Knowledge acquired by learning and instruction

•

The gradual process of acquiring knowledge

Education. It's on everyone's lips – the politician's and the parent's. Education is vital. Education. Education. Education. You must learn more; you must study harder; you must pass your exams. But what I want to know is, what if there was no education? What if no one was taught anything? Would we still be the most intelligent species on the planet? Would we still reign supreme? Who would we be? I know that's a lot of questions to ask, but I think this is an important topic, don't you?

Let us start our discussion by asking a simple question of ourselves. If I had received no education, what would I think about, and would I even know how to think? We are born into this world with a blank canvas for a mind. We make gurgling noises; we cry when we are hungry; we scream when we are upset. But we cannot speak, we cannot walk, and we need

constant looking after almost until we reach adulthood. Let's face it, we are a pretty helpless lot when we are young.

I said the mind is a blank canvas when we are born, and I'm sure some of you out there are disagreeing with me already; but let me ask you another question: What does the human mind contain when the child is born? Does it possess the power of intelligent thought, of rationalisation, of creation, of decision?

No, of course it doesn't. It can barely do anything on its own. What the child has, is *potential*, and that is the key here. We are a species with potential (*existing in possibility*). We do not have skills included in some kind of mind "blueprint."

Just because our ancestors discovered fire all those years ago, and man went to the moon, doesn't mean that every child born has knowledge of how to do those things. They wouldn't even know how to boil a pan of water! So you see, before we get on our high horses thinking how great we are, remember that if no one educated you, and you could not observe (thereby learning how to do something) you would not have the inherent ability to do it.

Let us look at a baby bird for a moment. When the bird is born it too has limited abilities, and is reliant on its mother for food. It cannot fly, and if it were to fall out of the nest would surely die; but the mother doesn't have to teach the bird to fly by giving it verbal or written instructions. When the baby is old and strong enough it will make its first attempts at flight, and will succeed. Its body is perfectly designed for flight; it does not need to read books on how to do it – just as it doesn't need to read up on what to eat.

Like all animals with limited "intelligence," it operates to a blueprint manual. It does not have the mental capacity to decide, "actually, I'm not going to fly today, I'm going to walk;" that would be absurd, as would it deciding to eat lettuce leaves instead of worms because he didn't fancy worms today, he fancied something a little more healthy! I joke with you here, but if you think about it, it is important to realise that man is the only species born with built in potential.

A bird will always fly. A cow will always graze, but man, man can be, and do, and eat, almost anything he wants; that potential is what sets him apart from the animals. Mind you, the brain operates essential body functions on much the same blueprint as all other animals. That is what some people would refer to as our "old brain" before our higher brain "developed."

I can see that some of you are already disagreeing with what I am saying, especially if you believe man was created – by an entity called god – in his present form, but please bear with me as we explore this together.

Even if man was created by god and was born with the higher intelligence built in, we must all agree that man's brain needs filling (if you'll excuse the word), before it can be used effectively at the high level of which it is capable. It makes no difference who the original creator is or was. The lower brain can, and does, operate at a reasonable level; dealing with breathing, hunger, fear, and generally controlling the body to keep all the systems in balance, but it is the higher brain we want to discuss here, the one that deals with "I."

The way I see it, when a child is born, the brain is pretty similar to my laptop when it leaves the factory! It has all the connections ready to do some complex calculations, but without the operating system is useless. It seems to me, that for humans language fulfils this function, and until we learn language, have no way of interpreting the world in a more complex way. Without the power of language what would a thought be? Listen to your mind for a moment, and tell me what you're thinking. Whose voice is that? What is it using? Language. Thinking requires language.

The next step is the software to run all the complex programming, and that is where education comes in. It's no good having the computer hardware and the operating system without any applications! We could view these applications like reading, painting, or maths, but we can also have applications like, compassion, understanding, hate, desire, greed.

In my opinion, nothing apart from the basic survival activities, are built in; the rest are bolt-on applications, just like the word processor is on my laptop. All can be learned through education, and all can be unlearned through education too. I hope you can follow my train of thought here.

Some may say, that this is nonsense, that man is born with an innate (*not established by conditioning or learning*) sense of right and wrong, and with morals, but the way I see it, right and wrong, and morals are man-made concepts, and depend on your particular cultural or religious viewpoint. All of which are learned behaviours.

Although we are talking about education here, do not get confused into thinking that education is only formal when it is done through a formal verbal, or written process. We are being educated (or conditioned) throughout our lives by observing, by listening, and by talking to others. A child quickly "learns" that it can get what it wants by modifying its

behaviour. It has not had any formal education, but has nonetheless gone through a learning process, however simple it might be.

The beginning of learning

In the not too distant past, the only people who received any kind of higher education were wealthy people. There was no state schooling for all – which is still the case in some countries – and although the poor may have been able to get some basic skills, would not have reached their true potential (a sentence that was often used to describe my academic success, or lack of it!). So those with little or no education were resigned to doing tedious or dangerous manual jobs, which could be learned simply by repetition. These were jobs that required them only for their bodies; their minds were surplus to requirements. They were not expected to think, just do. Cut, saw, beat, lift, grind, etc.

But this is still going on isn't it? There are still people all over the world who do the same repetitive jobs day in day out, where the skill they have in their job, could, let's face it, be learned by almost anybody. Don't just think factory work, think office staff, think agricultural workers, retail staff, salesmen, supervisors, managers, all doing a job with a skill that is learned through repetition.

Please stop, and consider your own job for a moment. Could anybody learn it, or do you have a special skill that no one else has? Is your job repetitive? Did you go to university, only to end up doing a job, where even if the job is interesting, relies on memory?

We are all in the same boat. We go to school to get educated, and most of us end up spending our lives just repeating what we have learned, like monkeys (sorry monkeys, no hard feelings), all for a few pounds to pay the bills, buy some shelter and food, and a little left over for "fun." Not much of a life, is it! So why on earth do we bother learning anything?

The purpose of education?

We all are all told to go to school to get a basic education in life. You know, like chemistry, maths, english, geography, or a foreign language. We are forced to study from around the age of five (although some parents put their children into pre-school to give them a head start) until

sixteen or eighteen in most countries, at which time you can leave it you want. Most people stay on the extra couple of years to get more qualifications, and some people go to on to university to study one specific topic in greater detail.

In most countries, it is illegal to avoid going to school, and in some places parents can be punished in the form of monetary fines or prison if they fail to comply.

Children are shouted at, bribed, punished, and encouraged to stick in at school with constant reminders, that if they don't stick in, they won't get anywhere in life. So they learn and they learn. They try to remember the topics off by heart and then they take their exams. You've passed or you've failed. A pass means that people will look more favourably on you when it comes to getting a job, and a fail means go to the bottom, start again.

So, on the results of these exams, your working life begins. You are either a high achiever destined for great things, or a low to middle achiever destined for mundaneness and boredom throughout your working life. Some end up in manual jobs, others end up pushing paper in an office; you see, not everyone can be the boss! If they could be, who would do all the work? So the education system filters people effectively, and channels them into jobs that need to be done, based on ability.

Some people aren't good at exams (perhaps they didn't like school or they had problems at home), but that doesn't matter to the education system; passing exams show you are capable of "achievement," that you are reaching your "potential;" that you will soon be able to contribute to society, and by contribute, I mean start to earn money.

Some of you will earn a lot of money and will have high positions in society, but most of you will just do a job that requires your labour and not a lot of use of 12 plus years of education.

I wonder if you ever remember how good you were at geography in school as you sit at your computer processing purchase orders? Probably not. School and education suddenly seem a lifetime ago when you are working nine or ten hours a day, travelling to work in a packed city, just so you can have a nice (or not) house, car, food, the odd social night out, and one holiday a year. Millions of years of evolution, and then repetition. Day in, day out.

A quick run-down on my scholastic life

My father told me that school was a preparation for adult life, and by all accounts I started preparing for adult life all too late! I was always seen as a failure in my father's eyes. I was average at primary school; my report cards always said I should "apply myself more," and "pay more attention" to my lessons – generally do better! I always got low grades, although I thought I did pay attention, and did study.

My teachers said I was a bright boy, but the work I put in was substandard, and that if I didn't stick in, I wouldn't reach my "potential." At 12 years old, I took the 12+ examination, and duly failed it. All my friends couldn't believe it, they thought I would sail through. I couldn't believe that some of the people I thought were less intelligent than me, passed!

So here was I at 12 years old, on the education scrapheap, about to go to a comprehensive (*a large british secondary school for children of all abilities*). My father wasn't having that as it would probably look bad for him if his son didn't go to a grammar school, so I was sent off to do the entrance examination for a private school. I got in and was sent off on the bus to this orthodox all boys school, where obedience was the order of the day.

Now, I've always been a light hearted sort of fellow, who thinks if there was more humour in the world there would be less hatred, but my teachers didn't see it that way.

I was never a bad student, but I did like to "have a laugh" in class, which was probably detrimental to my (and others) school work. I don't have a clear recollection of that school, but I think I enjoyed it. I liked running, and canoeing, and latin, english and french, but for the rest of the subjects, I really didn't have the time for them, and as such, was beaten by the teachers regularly.

Corporal punishment (*the infliction of physical injury on someone convicted of committing a crime*), as it was known, was still in full swing in our school, and I was hit on the head with books, and rulers, spent time dodging board erasers, and getting the cane (*a large stick, used to hit your posterior several times*). All this in addition to detention, and work squads, where you were forced to stay after school, and pick up litter etc.

As I said before, I was never a "bad" student. I never had (nor ever have had) any fights with any other pupils, and I was always polite, but they just didn't like my humour, it undermined their authority; and the need for absolute control and order was how the school ran. There was no tolerance for back chat. If you refused an order you went to the headmaster's office, or were given a physical punishment, or detention.

I completed my exams at 16 (just scraping through), but needless to say, I dropped out in the last year at 17. I can't really remember what the trigger was, but I'd pretty much had enough of that school and travelling 18 miles a day to a different town where I had no friends. So I left. Oh, I forgot, my parents did split up when I was about 14 which caused huge upset, but given that I was always "bad" at my school work – according to the teachers – I shouldn't really apportion the blame to that.

Soon after I left school, my mum found me a job. I started off as an accounts assistant, followed quickly by a telesales operator, followed quickly by a year planner salesman, followed by a recruitment assistant, followed by another recruitment assistant, followed swiftly by a corporate hospitality salesman. I think I was fired from most of those, and they all lasted approximately one to two months. But after messing around, and making a general nuisance of myself for about two years, my dad asked me if I'd like to go to college to restudy for my a-levels, because, without them, he said, I'd never get a good job. So I did.

It was great, I got to live in a flat with some other students for a year, went out partying and drinking all the time, and duly failed my exams at the end of term. I was sent back to study for another term to retake them again, but I just went out and partied, and didn't turn up for the exam. Education over. I won't bore you with details of my other jobs, but I did end up working in a high paid job as a project manager, until I decided to give it all up in search of true education...

Self-education about self

We are taught daily for all of our pre-adult years. We learn everything about how to behave in public, what food to eat, respect for your elders, how to manage your money, or how to make babies; and then you hit eighteen and it all stops. In most countries, from then on, you are supposed to be an "adult." So what is an adult anyway?

In biology, I think it is a creature that is mature enough to reproduce, and that in the human world would be a lot earlier than eighteen. Take four or five years off, and that would be more like it.

Imagine children of thirteen or fourteen having to go out to work in the western world – most of them wouldn't know where to start! I do know that in some countries less financially well off than Britain that young children are forced to start working early, to help provide food for

the family. One could even say they are getting an “education” just by working.

Some children, who come from homes where the parents are abusive, violent, or criminals, get a “street education,” where they learn to stand up for themselves, be tough, and to get by in the world where no one else is looking out for them. But that’s not what we want to talk about here, all the above educations are bolt-ons.

These are the applications which run on the computer, and are not the computer itself. What I would like you to do for a moment is sit back for a moment and imagine your core. The core of you, whatever it is, wherever it is, and try to imagine what it looks like, and what it feels like. I know this may seem strange, but it’s of the utmost importance that you try it with me now.

You may think the core is the magical “soul,” but that is just a man-made concept. The core is something like a nucleus, where underneath all the bolt-on conditioning and education, something resembling the real computer lies. Something which may seem out of reach right now, but which you will be able to access once you know how.

So who is this “core” I speak of, is it the “I,” the “me” who makes all the decisions in life? To which I would answer that the “I” is the operating system. The core is a little like my laptop, which has all the connections in place ready to do work if the operating system and applications are compatible with it, and function correctly.

The problem with the operating system and the applications is that, although they are compatible with the computer, the results they give may be flawed. This could be the result of bad, sloppy programming, or the deliberate infection of the software by a virus. This you could compare to a parent who unwittingly programs a child to think a certain way, or to hate a certain race of people, or a government or religion which brainwashes the population into believing its propaganda or dogma.

Machine Code

A set of instructions coded so that the computer can use it directly without further translation

In our analogy with the computer, we can see that machine code is a way of communicating with the system directly, without the need for an operating system or applications. This binary set of instructions are alien

to most of us, but it is what the central processing unit really understands. 10001, 1011001, 1001, 100010, 1110011, Ones and zeros, that's it! Direct instruction. Direct communication. No bolt-ons necessary. This is what I am talking about when I talk about communication with the core.

This may all seem a bit far fetched to you, and I can hear some of you grumbling "What's he rambling on about now?" But if you pay close enough attention, you will begin to see what I mean.

Language, ideas, and formal education get in the way of knowledge. Sure you need to know how to fix a carburettor if you are a mechanic, but that is a job, here we are trying to get to know ourselves. The real us.

I am not so naive as to think that a few words from me here will get you started on a process of self-learning. Some of you may not even want to read any further because you are happy to just stay the same. But I'm sure most of you know deep down that there is more to know than just how to fix a carburettor, how to do complex equations, or manage a large corporation. It's time to strip away the bolt-ons and expose your core. How? Through the development of awareness.

Start to notice other humans, notice how they dress, how they walk, how they look – happy or sad. Notice what car they drive, the music coming from the window. Now start to notice man-made objects. The concrete buildings, the rows and rows of houses, the litter, the factories. Look at the drunk people falling around the street at night, the arguments and the fights, and now look at yourself. Your job, your nice house, your nice possessions. How do you feel about everything you are, everything you have? Your garden, or lack of it. Your desires, your loves, and your hates. Your prejudices and your opinions.

Just look at everything we have bolted on to the core. The core that is nature. Everything that surrounds us in our daily life is man-made, made possible through education. For what? Money? Happiness?

Everything you are, and everything you have learned, you need to forget. All of that is past. You are now right here. Open yourself up to learning about your true nature, without your job title, your religion, or your bank balance getting in the way. Everything man-made is an obstacle to understanding. Only when you can psychologically toss all of them aside will you be able to speak to the core. Remember that language is also man-made.

So how do you do it? Do I have the answer? Is there some magical trick I can write the instructions for you here? No, unfortunately not. Only by being aware of yourself without judgement, without interaction

with the brain, can you start to see more clearly. You do not need any text books to do this, but you do need to give it your fullest attention. Do not distract yourself with music, idle chatter, or thoughts.

Be silent. Communicate.

I have just started on my journey to the core, and it can be scary at first. You find out all sorts of things about yourself you don't want to know as you start to peel off the layers. With each layer comes some unpleasant feelings, but stay with it. The rewards of getting closer are truly wonderful.

As I throw off the shackles to modern society and modern education, I find myself communing more with nature, and it amazes me what a transformation has gone through my whole system! I, who used to know nothing, and not want to learn anything, still know nothing, but I want to learn! I want to know it all. I want to know the secret of life. I want to know the secret of the universe. But I don't want to look in a textbook or go on a course. They can no more tell me what I want to know than an astronomer could. They see what is visible. They see what is past. They talk with their own voices, but with the knowledge of someone else. That is what a teacher does.

Teacher I am ready...

Teachers pass on someone else's knowledge, someone else's discovery, and pass it off as truth. But as we both know, truth is something that can only be discovered, not told. And whilst it makes no sense to drive yourself crazy, like I did, questioning everyone and everything every day, you must be aware that there is always another layer to peel off.

When newton first made his discoveries in physics, no one thought they could be bettered, they were accepted as truth; until a young man called einstein appeared 200 years later and turned science on its head!

I am sure it will happen again, maybe it will be you who discovers something amazing, maybe it will be in a thousand years. But remember that no education is absolute. There is no absolute truth. So although one and one is two according to ninety nine percent of us, there may be someone who comes along one day and proves to us that it isn't. That is

why we must never stop discovering, never stop questioning, and never stop learning.

Once you decide to embark on your journey, you must be sure that the reason you want knowledge is to understand yourself and nature, which is the planet around you and the other species we share it with.

Just learning so you can get a job, is what the governments of the world want us to do. You see, it is vital for them to make sure children go to school, otherwise the economy of the country would suffer, and if the economy suffers, it means people haven't got as much money as they once had, and if the people are not quiet and happy with their lot, they might just consider starting a revolution, and no government wants that!

You may think I am cynical, and that all the government wants is for a good future for the children. They also know they need educated people to run the country, develop new weapons, and generally keep the whole social status quo going. Basic education, as it is now, provides that. It is only when we start realising we are our own teachers, that things will change. When we stop conforming to what other people tell us we should learn, and start discovering for ourselves, will we start to truly understand.

The social elite fill children's heads with knowledge about historical dates and battles, conditioning them with their traditions and culture, leaving no space for self-discovery. It is a futile waste of such a magnificent brain. Such a brain, with what we called, "potential." Those in power believe that potential means they will get a good job and contribute to society. I mean they have the power to discover the universe within themselves.

All schools do is condition children to conform. Each new school which starts up promises to be different, but becomes the same as all the rest, as they are all trying to push their ideals onto the children. "This is the way you should think," "no, this is the way you should think."

There is a tug of war going on for who will control the child's mind. What will this child's mind be filled with? They would argue that without this education the child would not be able to function in society, but maybe it is high time we took away precisely this education to see what really is in a child's mind, and then help the child to discover himself and the world around him.

You may say that this is precisely the role of the modern day education system, but if that was the case, we would not place such demands on the child to perform at all costs. Each light illuminated in

the world has its own journey to undertake; that is what we should be helping with, not trying to extinguish it before it even gets a chance to truly glow.

Who are we adults, after all? What right do we have to say what someone else should learn unless we have got more than just their interests at heart. We must not let the most advanced computer we currently know about, be crushed under the weight of adult idealism, greed, and power. We must free ourselves from those who dictate what we learn, and embark on our own journey, on a voyage of unlimited discovery.

I have embarked on mine. When will you begin yours?

E l e c t r i c i t y

A physical phenomenon associated with stationary or moving
electrons and protons

•

Energy made available by the flow of electric charge through a
conductor

The invisible power behind our happiness



What a wonderful creation. What a marvellous invention. The things that have been made possible through its almost worldwide availability, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We live in a world run by electricity – without it, our daily lives would change immeasurably. Before you say, “yes, but that’s not going to happen,” let’s step back in time for a moment shall we? Back to a time when electricity was not even a word, and let’s consider the humans that lived on the earth. Who were these people? What were their lives like? What did they eat? What did they do for work or for fun?

Stop for a minute, and allow yourself to imagine their lives. Were they easy or hard? And actually, while we’re sitting around pondering these questions, do you know how long ago I am talking about? A thousand years? Ten thousand years?

Well, the first power station opened in 1881, that is only 126 years ago; and reliable supply to all homes and businesses (in the developed world) has only really happened after the second world war, which only finished 62 years ago.

So in light of the fact that the earth we and all the other creatures inhabit has been around for several billion years, I think it's fair to say that electricity is pretty new!

Yet we're addicted to it already. Completely addicted. We couldn't live without it now. It is who we are. It is who we aspire to be. It is what we want in life. It's our happiness. It has overtaken our life. We are controlled by it. Our very existence in the modern world depends on it...

Let me explain.

This topic is not about the environment; it's not about cutting back on the use of resources; it's not about saving the planet from global warming; it's about finding out who you and I are when the lights go out and the power stations come to a standstill. It's about discovery; it's about unlocking our conditioned minds to uncover our natural mind. This is a vital topic, and we need to go into it carefully, so if you're ready, let's start this journey together right now.

I sit in a library now as I write this. I am writing on my laptop. The room has a nice desk, two chairs, some wood panelling, and a wooden door with glass and a metal handle. The room is warm and, although small and basic, is comfortable. There is a power socket for my laptop. Next to me is my mobile phone, a pen, and some scrap paper. My winter jacket hangs over the chair and my rucksack is on the floor. I have a bottle of sparkling water I bought from a shop. The library itself is well lit and, although small, has an ample supply of books. I arrived here by car. This morning, I had a warm shower, made some porridge, and had a cup of tea, whilst checking my emails.

I want to stop right there for a moment. What did you notice in that list above? Anything? Seems like a normal list of my "stuff" and my surroundings, but let's break it down shall we?

My laptop was made in a factory somewhere. The factory used electricity to make the components that go into my laptop. It is plugged into a socket that magically keeps the laptop on. The desk, chairs, and wood panelling in the library are made by a company somewhere using power tools that require electricity to cut the wood, which were themselves made using electricity. The door with its metal handle, and glass were all cut and made by some company somewhere using

electricity. The lighting is generated by the power station, but the light bulbs, and the light fittings, and the cables were all made by some company somewhere using electricity to make them. My mobile phone was made using electricity. The scrap paper was cut in a factory using electricity. The pen was made using electricity. My winter jacket and my bottle of water were both made using electricity. The books in the library were printed using electricity, and the paper cut using electricity. My car does not run on electricity it runs on petrol, but we won't get into the topic of oil here. The house I am living in has an electric power shower which is nice. My cup of tea was made using water boiled in a kettle that needed electricity to make the kettle, and electricity to boil the water. The tea bag was processed in a factory somewhere using electricity. The soy milk I put in it was made in a factory somewhere using electricity, as were my porridge oats, which were also heated in a pan on a stove using electricity.

Phew... That was a long list, and we've just got started!

So as you can see, I haven't done much today, and look at the amount of electricity that already has had to be generated on my behalf. I don't do work that uses lots of resources in the world, but already I seem to have burnt a lot of coal, and I have only come from home to the library! You see, our whole life as we know it depends on electricity to run it.

I am sure most of you reading this own at least one electrical appliance you could not do without. Look around you. Now imagine that the power stations have all just run out of resources. What starts to happen? First, all your portable gadgets; mp3 players, laptops, and mobile phones start running out of battery. Suddenly you can't be "cool" walking down the street with your music player pounding your eardrums, suddenly you can't be "cool" chatting to friends on your mobile you just left or are going to see in five minutes. There's no one to text, and there's no downloadable ringtones to impress everybody with. Finding wi-fi hotspots is a waste of time – they've stopped working, and you haven't got anything to connect to them anyway, as computers require electricity to make! Shall we continue?

Your favourite coffee shop can't make any coffee any more, so you can't sit and read the paper there, and anyway there's no paper, as it requires electricity to make. The company you work for can't make anything anymore unless it's without electricity, and even if you don't make anything how are you going to get in touch with your clients? So you go to the supermarket to buy some food but all the packaging requires electricity to make, and so does all the processed food. You come

home to find that your house is in darkness. It is quiet. You go to cook some food, but there is no way to cook it. Your frozen food starts melting, and soon the food in the fridge starts to go off, as it needs to be kept cool. Watching television isn't an option.

You sit down, pondering life for a moment. Why has this happened to you? You who has worked their way up in life. Look at all you have achieved. Look at the promotions you have been given. You have bought a nice house, you have a nice car you think people look at. You talk on your mobile phone incessantly planning something or other. You have a nice family, they go to a good school, and your partner doesn't want for anything.

Maybe you haven't done so well in life, but these are the things you aspire to aren't they? Everyone want a nice car, holidays in some faraway place, going out to restaurants, or buying the latest consumer goods. Now, no matter how hard you work you can never have them. What do you think about that?

Your status in the world depends on electricity!

So where does that leave you? Look around you again, wherever you are reading this, and tell me anything you can see that didn't require some kind of electricity to be made? Is there anything? One thing? It's unlikely. With the passing of the electrical age goes any form of mass production, food that requires storage or processing, gadgets to impress our friends with, cheap clothes, housing as we know it, or lighting. Need I list more?

In fact, I might be so bold as to say that without electricity, life for you and me in the fast lane, is now very much at a standstill. There's no one to phone to arrange going out for a drink, as the breweries haven't been able to produce any beer because they need power to run their bottling plants. Same goes for wine and spirits. Oh, you can't call them anyway, there's no phones.

Sure, you still have your possessions, but no one's making you any new ones. All your possessions that run on electricity are of no use to you now. You have to find amusement somewhere else. How do you feel right now? You've lost everything you have, although physically, it's still there! No one's impressed with you now. However you got the possessions, whether you worked honestly for them, or stole them, it doesn't matter. They're no good to you now and neither is your status in the world which was built on them. You are alone.

Your world must be getting quieter right now. The cities have gone quiet. Fast food is no more, the underground train is no more. Maybe crime has gone up, with some people not realising that stealing a tv is a worthless activity, even to barter for something else. After all, what good is a tv if there's nothing to watch? What you probably should be thinking about is food though, because without electricity, and refrigeration in particular, you're going to start getting pretty hungry pretty quickly. You better be thinking about that right now.

Where does your food come from? You all want to eat the finest food, but where does it actually come from? Even if you manage to get some food from a local farm there won't be enough to feed a city. Where will you get it from? All this food that is transported world-wide needs to be refrigerated, otherwise it will go off quickly, and that's just the fruit and vegetables. You can forget mass production and storage of meat. Without refrigeration and freezers it will go bad very quickly; the same with fish - mass trawled and frozen at sea.

Without electricity, your food is going to have to come from a local farm in its raw state. Will there even be enough for everyone? Let's hope the water and sewage system doesn't require electricity either. Still, the environmentalists will be pleased, as you won't be producing as much rubbish (just in case you forgot, there's not much to produce without electricity).

I'm sorry to keep going on about the same thing, and reiterating the same word, but can't you see that we have built our whole world on shaky foundations? Even this book I am writing (which I think is so important you all read), could not now be finished. The laptop I am writing it on would not turn on, the cd I have backed it up on would not play; and how would I get it printed, how would you all get to read it? Without electricity, we're screwed! Sorry does that sound harsh? Well, I believe we all need a wake up call, you and I included, and the time to wake up is *now*.

Who are you?

So as you sit in the dark feeling sorry for yourselves, what are you going to do? What will you do for work, how will you provide for yourself and your family if you have one? What will you do for pleasure? Will there be any time for pleasure? What are you doing here? What is the meaning of life?

For all of us (except those who still don't have access to electricity, or the things it provides), we would be standing in a new world; an alien world, quite unlike anything any of us have ever seen, except maybe in the movies. This world would be very different to the one we inhabit now although it will be the same place, the same soil, the same ocean, and the same animals. The only thing that would start to be different, would be the people. That's you and me! *Homo sapiens*, the most intelligent beings on the planet.

So here we are. You and me. We speak different languages, we have different religions, we have different jobs, different opinions, we like different foods, we like to do different things for fun, but now when the electricity stops, how different are we? Well, we are still different; we still believe in different religions, have different political views; I am still violent, you are still peaceful, we still cannot understand each other because we speak a different language, and we still like different sports. But underneath all that, we have the same skin. Our body mechanics work in exactly the same way, our minds still feel fear, and our bodies still feel pain.

Electricity may be making our life easier, and giving us more free time, and saving our bodies from hard toil all day, but like the rest of the creatures on the planet we certainly don't need it, although we have come to depend on it. But the human is a highly adaptable creature, without this adaptability it is doubtful that the species could have progressed as much as it has. We don't need electricity. We have our minds, and we have our hands, and as we discussed earlier, up to recently not everyone had electricity in their homes. Up to the early 1800's there was no such thing as a light bulb!

Whilst we are on the subject of electricity we must not fail to mention two other sources of power, oil and gas, which were both used before electricity became widely available. Can you imagine doing without oil or gas? No gas stoves, no gas central heating, no petroleum driven cars. The combination of oil, gas, and electricity make us who we are today, but it does not make us who we are at the core. If there was no electricity tomorrow, we'd all be in shock, a lot of us may die, unable to cope without the benefits that electricity, oil, or gas provides (e.g. mass food production, and distribution, and warmth), but we'd bounce back; we'd adapt. That's what makes the human special.

Let me tell you about my experience with electricity. I was the guy who drove around in his powerful 4x4 jeep, talking on his mobile, listening to music with the window down so everyone could see how cool

I was. I was the guy who worked in information technology, earned good money, and wasted it on electronic gadgets, beer, and having a good time. I had a small speedboat, went skiing regularly, took plenty of holidays, went out for meals all the time, and went to the cinema regularly. I always had the latest mobile phone, music player, or laptop (even after I had given up most other things).

Now, take away the means to have that good time (oil, gas, or electricity), and who was I? I truthfully have no idea! My whole being was based around these items without even realising it. Is yours? On reflection, to some extent I still am addicted to oil, gas, and electricity because I live in a western country that is addicted to them; so maybe I should go and live in the woods on my own and be self-sufficient, which means using no tools or instruments that were made with the aid of oil, gas, or electricity, to make shelter, grow crops, make clothes, heat water, cook food, and make a plate, knife and fork to eat with! Maybe we all should, and see what it's like.

Until we go without power, how will we know who we really are? It's all very well for me to sit here in my nice, warm, well lit library, talking to you about this, but when I finish writing today I will go back to a nice, warm, well lit, comfortable house where I will cook my food on an electric stove, sleep in a bed made with the use of electricity, and wash in a shower heated by electricity. How can I talk to you about something I haven't experienced? I have tried to wrestle with this in my mind before writing this topic, but I believe we can explore these concepts in our minds.

So, now, try to imagine someone you know for a moment. It could be a friend, family member, or a colleague, someone who has a "powerful" or "important" position, or someone who has just "done well" for themselves. Or you can think about someone who is popular with everyone, or someone else who is clever, or someone everyone envies because he or she has a lot of money and an attractive partner. Have you got someone in mind?

When you are clear about who it is in your mind we can start our investigation. What we are going to try to do here is deconstruct them! By that I mean peel away all the layers that are attributable to external forces such as oil, gas, or electricity (power from coal/nuclear), as these are things I like to call bolt-ons, in that they are bolted on to the core of the human, but they are not integral nor essential. You can do this in your mind or you can write it down on paper.

Deconstructing my father

To help you with your deconstruction, I would like to take you on a personal journey with me and introduce you to my father. He is 74 now and is retired, although he still works as hard as he ever did. He was born in glasgow just before the second world war, and although I don't know much about his early life, I know he came from a poor working class family. He had a reasonable education, although I know he didn't go to university. I don't know about his early jobs, but I know that when he started work as a clerk for a large aerospace firm he started studying accounting and was determined to get up the ladder in the organisation.

Over the years he was promoted several times, and eventually left to seek his fortune in england. He quickly climbed the ladder through finance and finally through to managing director, where he stayed in one firm, successfully expanding it until he retired some fifteen years ago. Since then, he has worked for charitable organisations tirelessly.

So there you have it. A brief history of my father's life.

Fairly unremarkable but nonetheless, he came from nothing, and ended with quite a lot. From a poor background he created wealth, and eventually managed to buy himself a nice house. He used to drive a large bmw he believed gave him status. More recently, he has been studying art history – amongst other things – and loves going to the opera and the theatre. He considers himself well read and loves jazz and classical music. He also enjoys eating out.

Does he attribute any of his success to electrical power being available to him 24 hours a day? Of course not! But the fact is that without it, all of his "success" would be gone...

Let's start with his early career working as a clerk for the aerospace firm. Without power there would be no aero engines being made, let alone getting planes off the ground. The same goes for all the manufacturing companies he ran. He was a finance man, a strategist, but there's no need for strategy if there's no power to make anything is there?

Without power he would be doing things by hand, not sitting in a posh office on the tenth floor. He wouldn't have had time to read art history, there would be no bmw for him to drive, because they couldn't make it without power. He wouldn't be eating out because the restaurants need power to cook, power for lighting, and power to play ambient background music (which incidentally would have needed

power to make the cd, record the music onto it, and distribute it to the shops).

In short, my dad needed power to be who he was, and is. His whole being depended on electricity, and still does. I don't know who he really is without the electricity. He has always tended to be quite arrogant about what he had done in his life, and what he knew, and how much money he had earned, but if there was no electricity there to "fuel" his ego who would he truly be?

Like most of us in the developed world, my father doesn't know the "core" of himself. He is a man who has bolted on success, art, status, knowledge, money, etc. to himself as a direct result of electricity, oil, and gas being available.

It's strange to think that not only does he not know himself, but no one else does either. Not his wife, his son, his ex-wife, his brother, his friends, or his colleagues. Nobody knows my father! I have only once or twice gained some insight into him when his guard has been down, and all I have seen is an angry, yet rather nervous human being (he may positively disagree with me here).

In fact, this man whom I have been describing could be anyone. He could be me. He could be you. He is just an ordinary human being who was born, grew up, followed what he thought he was supposed to do (work hard), was interested in sport and the arts, made a "contribution" to society via his charitable works, and will die one day. All without knowing that electricity gave him confidence. It gave him pleasure; it gave him power and status in business; it gave him ambition; it gave him comfort and security; it gave him life!

For the second deconstruction, it's time to tackle someone a little closer to home, that's right! You! This is not an exercise, more an observation of yourself in action in the world to see how electricity, oil, and gas have moulded who you are and what you think about. You don't need to do it now, just start to pay attention to yourself as you go through your daily life as you casually pick up your mobile, or run yourself a hot bath, or read your emails, or shop at the supermarket.

Electricity, oil, and gas. Three things that have changed not only the world we live in, but how we view ourselves in the world. With all the bolt-ons that electricity can provide, we have created a whole new existence for ourselves. Indeed we are superficially happier. We feel more comfortable in the world surrounded by all our gadgets. We feel safer in our houses because they are well lit. We like the warmth that heating provides or the cooling that air conditioning provides if we live in a warm

country. We like the convenience foods that mass production and distribution enables (thanks to electricity). We like everything that is shiny and new.

Oh no! What will happen if it all runs out one day?

“Don’t worry,” says you, “the scientists will have come up with a new way to generate power so we can still build things, buy things, and generally amuse ourselves.”

But when we come down to it, we don’t need electricity, oil, or gas to survive, do we? Of course not! It’s just nice to have. It makes us feel less like the animals we deny we are, and separate from anything in the natural world. It keeps fear at bay. Fear of the dark, fear of strange creatures roaming around.

Having all this “power” makes us feel invincible. It gives us strength, makes us feel important, makes us feel what we are doing in the world is worthwhile. But the animals don’t have it, do they? Nor do the birds, or the fish, and they seem to get on all right!

We need to face the fact that we are all afraid of life, and electricity helps us feel less afraid. We surround our core with the comfort that electricity provides, but in order to break free of fear we must start letting things go. I’m sure that’s a scary thought for most of you, and I can hear some of you saying “Why should I let go of something I like?” But this is not about not having electric lights in your home, it’s about realising the psychological dependence on it. It’s about finding out who you are without it.

Go camping!

Yes, one good way to start is to go camping! I know this sounds silly, but it’s the closest thing most modern city or urban dwellers will get to removing electricity from their lives. Not the camping I have seen in countries like Australia, where they bring everything but the kitchen sink with them. What I am talking about is going out camping with just your tent (which incidentally would have required electricity to make it) and some basic equipment and food (or better still, you could fast for the evening). Don’t take a torch, music players, sat-nav, maps, or anything that will distract you. Don’t have your car or 4x4 with you, use public

transport to get there, and walk the rest of the way. This can just be for one night, it's up to you.

When you are in your camping spot, pay close attention to the sounds and the smells around you. Listen to the animals at night, listen to the trees, and look up at the stars if it is a clear night. One thing you will notice is that you are ready for bed a lot earlier than normal.

Now it's time to look at yourself. How do you feel in this place? How do you feel here alone? Who are you? I mean really? Now you have no bolt-ons it is just you, homo sapiens; the most resourceful, successful species on earth. What do you miss? Are you scared without your four walls? Can you cope with the silence that is nature in the evening – if you pay close attention you will notice that nature is not silent at all.

What do you look forward to when you return home? Why do you look forward to it? What are you dependent on? Could you live out here without electricity? Why not? When you return to your city try to compare how you felt out in the wilderness with how you are feeling at home. What do you miss about being back? Anything? Nothing?

As I sit and write this last section, I look up at the electric light above my head, the clothes I am wearing, the wooden panelling in the writing room, the door, and I realise I am nothing without electricity. I, the modern human, am dependent on it, and I really have no idea who I'd be without it.

It rules my life, as it rules yours; and until I can break free completely (which means living in a place where there is no electricity and no products are made using electricity or other source of power), I may never truly know, and that is a sad thought.

Many of us meditate, and follow ancient religions in the hope we will uncover who we really are; but we meditate in warm rooms, and listen to sermons in warm rooms, and live in comfortable surroundings. It is of the utmost importance that we find out who we are without electricity. It is only then we will truly start to know ourselves.

Who are we without electricity?
Begin the search

E m b a r r a s s m e n t

The shame you feel when your inadequacy or guilt is made public

•

Feeling or caused to feel uneasy and self-conscious (embarrassed)

•

Made to feel uncomfortable because of shame or wounded pride

What is it that makes some of us feel embarrassed about certain things? I didn't think I was easily embarrassed until I started to think about this topic several months ago. But it was so clear to me once I understood, that I let go of all embarrassment; and through that letting go, I felt free! Let me tell you how it happened.

I was working for a college that helped children with special needs, and just after arriving to pick them up and take them home one afternoon, I realised I needed to go to the toilet; just a wee (*[Brit, vulgar] Informal term for urination*), you understand. I went into the toilet block and saw that it was full, with one person waiting. Seconds later, a couple of other people came in. I couldn't use the private cubicles because they were occupied too, so I waited my turn.

Secretly I was hoping it would be the end stall that became free, but to my horror, the boy who finished first was in the middle urinal. I was

just about to say to the person standing behind me, “you can go first,” when I realised how stupid I would look to them.

I went up to the urinal, unzipped my trousers, and stood there with my penis in my hand. I knew it would happen, and although I tried not to think about it, try as I might, I couldn't go – not with other people standing either side of me. What should I do? I had to think quickly! I'm sure the other people were thinking as they happily relieved themselves: “What's wrong with him? Why can't he go?”

They weren't looking over, but I knew what they were thinking, after all they would know that there was no sound of splashing coming from my urinal. Maybe I could just zip up again and say, “can't go,” but that would be stupid. Maybe I should just zip up and wait for the private cubicle, but I desperately needed to go now. “Why does this happen to me every time?” I thought, whilst trying to give an outward appearance of calm. First the boy on my left was replaced by one of the queuers, then the boy on my right. “How stupid must I look?” I thought. They must be laughing at me now.

“Ha ha, a member of staff was in the toilet, and he couldn't go because he's embarrassed,” they would tell other boys. “He's still in there now!” and they would all have a laugh about it.

Seconds passed although it seemed like hours, when I suddenly realised “Why am I embarrassed? What is it about standing going to the toilet, when other people are clearly not interested in you, which makes you freeze, and not able to go?”

“It's me!” I replied in my head. “I get in the way. I am the one who is stopping myself from relieving myself. My own thoughts are stopping me from going to the toilet. I am in the way.”

“So get out of the way, so we can go to the toilet,” I replied.

“I will.” I answered.

And at that moment I started to urinate! And boy, did it feel good.

Mirror mirror on the wall

Sorry about that silly story for all you who hate toilet stories, but it is a true story, and it was true that I did get the flash of insight, that I was the one stopping myself from going to the toilet. From that day on I have never had another problem at the urinal (you will be glad to hear).

But in all seriousness, embarrassment is not a natural phenomenon, it is brought about by the “me” coming into play, which is caused by

thought. We *all* worry what other people will think of us. Take for example getting changed to go swimming.

I have never felt I had a great body, I always had skinny legs from running, and a little bit of a fat belly from drinking beer, so every time I got undressed in front of people who obviously had more muscle than me, I felt embarrassed. Lying on the beach was fine, but when I stood up to run into the water, I was always self-conscious of the extra fat I had around (what should have been) my pectoral muscles!

I never once thought that all I had to do was go to the gym and do some chest press exercises to get rid of them – no, I was more content on feeling embarrassed at the beach. If I had never seen men with large muscles striding up and down in their minuscule speedos I would probably never have given it a second thought, but I saw those ripped torsos, and although I didn't feel envious of them, I felt extremely low about my own physique. You see, I just didn't match up. How were the women on the beach going to like me if I didn't look like that? Why would they talk to me when they could choose someone with a great body?

For years I went through this, but more recently as I looked at myself in the mirror occasionally to check for body fat, I realised that this was my body. This was how it looked, and if I wanted to make it more muscle bound I could always go to the gym! Then one day recently, I questioned myself about this also. Why did I want to go to the gym to get bigger muscles and a flatter stomach? Was it that I needed to be able to do some heavy lifting, or was I going to be a boxer? No. I realised I wanted to build bigger muscles so that people would look at me and say, "wow! Nice muscles."

Was I this shallow? Was what other people thought of me how I measured my life? This couldn't be right. I realised that even standing looking at myself at the mirror in my bathroom with no one to judge me, I was embarrassed. Why? Because I was comparing myself to some ideal, some perfection, that probably never even existed, save in the magazines or on tv. Yes, that had to be it.

We are always comparing ourselves to others, and when we don't feel as if we are matching up, we feel embarrassed, even if nobody has said anything to us. The damage that comparison is doing is far reaching and is engrained firmly in our minds.

Comparison

Relation based on similarities and differences

So why do I compare? Well it's not all about male and female body parts – who's got the best breasts, the best legs, the most rounded bottom, the biggest biceps – we compare everything in life. Who's got the best car, the best job, the biggest house. Whose football team scored the most goals last season; which company has the best burger? Who can drink more beer. Who can get the highest mark in the exam.

We compare everything. We take what we see as an ideal and we compare everything against it. My friend Joe has a five bedroom house, I have a three bedroom house. In relation to him I am inferior. I earn £30,000 a year in my job, and my friend Dave earns £18,000 a year, so in relation to me, he is worse off. My friend Bob has two cars, and I only have one; that makes me inferior to him.

Do you see what is happening here? Instead of saying it is what it is, we say, "I must see if I am superior or inferior to someone else." I think to myself, "I got my wife a ring for Christmas this year, but it is only a small one. I hope she doesn't find out that her friend's husband bought his wife a much bigger ring, as she will be jealous and think less of me as a man."

Think of it another way. I weigh 75 kilos. Is that fat or is that slim? I don't know unless I compare it to someone else or someone "helpfully" suggests that the norm is 65 kilos, so I feel embarrassed about being overweight. Remember there can be no embarrassment in isolation, it always exists in relationship.

How big is my house? It is adequate for what I require. It has a bedroom, a lounge, and a kitchen and I am satisfied. But one day I go to my friend's house and he has six bedrooms, two lounges, and a swimming pool. I examine this relationship and compare the two. As I know that my house is smaller than his, I feel embarrassed or inadequate about asking him to come over to my house. Do you see?

Before we compare, all is perfect; but as soon as we start to compare, the "me" gets in the way and says "Oh, look at the size of his house, I should feel embarrassed about the size of my house." So we end up always competing and comparing our whole lives when actually none of it matters.

Why do we care what people think of our house or our possessions, unless we want to impress them? Do true friends really care about how

big your house is? We would like to think it is only shallow (*lacking depth of intellect or knowledge; concerned only with what is obvious*) people who are concerned with what they can see, but we have to be careful we do not engage in it ourselves.

It is what it is

*A car is a car, a house is a house
A muscle is a muscle, a friend is a friend*

We should not be comparing what are really just superficial objects – it makes no sense. Everything just is. Your bottom is a bottom, it is not a fat or thin bottom; it is just a bottom. The only reason you would get embarrassed about it is if you compare it to others, and conclude you are, in fact, not normal. It is what it is. Nothing more. It is the “me” that compares everything because it is clinging to the desire for status, and for recognition, that is all. Otherwise why would it matter what size your house is, how much money your friend earns, or what size your bottom is.

We are all concerned that we don't measure up! To what? There is nothing to measure up to. You are a perfect wonderful human being, and once you become aware of that fact, the “me” will have nothing to cling to and will slowly disappear forever. Let go of embarrassment. You have nothing to be embarrassed about.

But just a little bit of advice. You will know when embarrassment is rearing its ugly head again because if you pay careful attention to the movement of your thoughts, you will observe that once again you have been engaged in the business of comparing. Stop it!

E v i l

Morally objectionable behaviour

•

That which causes harm or destruction or misfortune

•

The quality of being morally wrong in principle or practice

Man has always been superstitious about the presence of evil forces in the universe, but whether they exist in reality is another matter. What does exist everywhere is man's thinking, and that definitely causes harm! In the religious texts there is always a reference to good vs. evil, god vs. the devil. The devil is portrayed as an ugly monster with horns, but that's just an artists impression; just like the paintings of jesus and angels who are painted as beautiful. Black vs. white. We just can't help ourselves. We constantly compare good vs. bad, right vs. wrong.

But let's think about this for a moment carefully, shall we? Who is it who decides what is good and what is evil? Of course it's our old friend mr homo sapiens, and in particular, the powerful leader types who want to show us what is right and what is wrong.

So let's not get carried away with thinking that "evil" exists as a real entity as it is portrayed by hollywood and the religious organisations. If anything, "evil" (I don't like to use the word as it is fairly meaningless in itself) should be regarded as an individual state of mind or a way of thinking.

Unfortunately, presidents and church leaders go around calling whole countries "evil" which doesn't do a lot to further a peaceful world. "Who are you calling evil? We'll show you!" And recently one president who shall remain nameless called a group of countries the axis of evil (*a group of countries in special alliance*), and set out to destroy them. But we shouldn't let these stupid people interrupt our discussion. Just because they want to divide and conquer the world doesn't mean we have to follow them does it?

But follow them, some people do, firm in their brainwashed belief that the countries (and everyone in them) are evil people. They are no such thing. They are human beings just like ourselves. Sure there may be a few of them who's thinking is extreme, but then who could honestly say that there aren't thousands of people like that in their own country? No, as usual it's just another way to keep everyone in fear of everyone else, and a nice excuse to flex your military muscle and ask for more money for the armed forces. But we see through their little game don't we?

Apart from the obvious real devil idea, created by the powerful to keep the world on it's best behaviour, someone had the bright idea to invent morals.

Morals

Motivation based on ideas of right and wrong

This was going to be how people should lead their lives. And if they didn't, their morally objectionable behaviour could be classed as evil. But we must break through these childish man-made ideas – which have been round our necks like a noose for thousands of years – if we are to progress as a species.

"It's a sin," they cry, "they should be burnt at the stake," but as usual, sin is just another man-made idea, no matter what is written in the old books. Remember they are old books. They are past and we live now in the moment. All of these man-made ideas on what a sin (*an act that is regarded by theologians as a transgression of god's will*) is, and what is morally wrong, are beginning to become a little bit tedious, don't you

think? Or do you think there really is a god, who gave us a rule book, and told us that no matter what happened, we mustn't deviate from it? Do the animals have a rule book from god? After all, if god created the animals, fish and the birds (not forgetting the insects and the microbes), the rules must apply to them. But oh no, these rules only apply to the human species of animal, somewhat strangely.

"It is morally wrong to have sex before you're married" say your parents, but who are they? Just two people who followed the rules, they don't know the truth, and even if they did, they can't just tell it to you, you have to find out for yourself. So throw away your guide book and start exploring for yourselves, please!

I hate to keep going on about power and control because I am sure you are tired of hearing it, and I'm tired of writing about it. But who is it that tells you what is right and wrong? Sure, your religious text books for one, but forgive me for saying; they are just books. We are the most intelligent species on the planet, surely we don't need a book to tell us what is right and wrong?

If we live with compassion and love for all beings, then you don't need a book to tell you "thou shalt not steal," because you won't. You don't need a government or a church to tell you that this or that is a sin, and that god will punish you, you have no fear, because you are aware, and with that awareness you have insight, which will guide you in life.

Take a look at the people telling you about morals and sins – the religious leaders and the politicians! They lie and they cheat, they claim riches for themselves, they are involved in sexual scandals, but don't take my word for it, just pick up a newspaper in any country, any week and there they are in all their glory, for all to see. But somehow they always manage to weasel out of trouble due to friends in high places (no I'm not talking about god).

But there are people who believe that the devil has possessed them, and these are strange cases. I for one believe that there are different energies in the planet, some so negative, they affect the balance of nature; but we should not think it is an actual devil (*an evil supernatural being*) that has taken over the body of some unfortunate, as we must throw away superstition in order to find out the truth for ourselves.

There are people who rape and murder children and we call them evil, but although we should be sorry that anyone has died, we must remember it is the mind that controls actions, and these people need help. We must offer them our compassion, for if we call for them to be

executed or tortured for what they did, then we become the monsters. Do you understand?

I know that there are people in the world who carry out some horrible acts towards other humans or animals, but their minds are sick; in order to help the world heal, we must help them heal too, no matter how horrific the act is to us.

The end of evil

No good. No bad. No righteous. No evil. Just a state of mind. Can you see? All of these things exist in the mind of the perceiver. "He is a good man," or "he is an evil man," are just people's perceptions backed up by religious or political laws and accepted ways of behaving.

So what am I? Am I a good man or an evil man?

In many topics I have talked about the destructive force the church has had on the human race for thousands of years. I have talked about how these organisations are created by powerful men in order to control the population; I have taken drugs; I have been with a prostitute; I have been an adulterer; I have stolen; I have cheated; I have lied; I have been greedy; and I have desired women and money (not a bad cv). So what am I? Am I morally objectionable? Am I evil? Should I be cast out into hell. What do you think?

Actually, I think I am a compassionate person who loves all of humanity, and I have made choices. I won't say they were wrong choices, just choices with consequences. Did I regret taking drugs? Did I wish I had never taken them? Do I want to be redeemed (*saved from the bondage of sin*) by god? No thanks, in fact I enjoyed every minute of it (until the next day when I felt like I was going to die, but that is the consequence, the cost of the pleasure).

Did I regret having sex with a prostitute? With hindsight, I thought it was pretty stupid, and I was displeased with myself for paying for sex with a stranger, but at the time I enjoyed it. I regret (*feel remorse for; feel sorry for; be contrite about*) nothing, but I have learned from everything. They were not mistakes. I made choices, that's all.

But you, you who read this, may want to judge me for my choices, or tell me I'll be in trouble come judgement day. But that's the thing with religion, it doesn't even leave you alone even when you're six feet underground!

So back to my original question. Am I evil? Surely if you look up your little rule book of what to do and what not to, I must have done some serious sinning, or at least broken most of the moral laws?

But I don't care. Your book means nothing. Do you understand? There is no right and wrong, just opinion. "Ah, but it must be right if the whole country believes it," says one of you. But were the armies in Germany in the right when they gassed millions of people to death? They believed it! They believed they had a "moral" duty to rid the world of the Jewish people, and they wouldn't have done it if they didn't believe they were right.

So before you start judging me or anyone else it's time to have a look inside that big brain of yours and see who's really been brainwashed!

"This book is outrageous! It should be taken off the shelves immediately," I can hear some of you saying. "This is a moral outrage! He should be locked up for writing this."

But can you see what's happening in your mind? You are applying all of your conditioning by society; you are not thinking with true intelligence, which is insight. If you were, you would see that by calling something "a moral outrage" you are standing in judgement of someone based on your own opinion, because that's all it is.

And even if you think the whole country believes it, or it is against the law, remember what we were saying about a whole country believing something just because somebody told them it was right? You could see that gassing millions of people wasn't love or compassion, it was just murder. But if you tried telling that to the German population at the time, who would have listened? It is exactly the same with these discussions.

So let us stop calling people evil. Let's stop condemning people based on our ideas of right and wrong and calling them sinners; heck it's not even your own opinion, it comes second hand from a book. That's not very intelligent is it? Go into the world and throw down your rule books. Open your eyes to nature and experience what nature's love is all about. But please stop saying things are immoral or sinful, it's just childish, and it hurts people.

*Evil is all in the mind
Morals are all in the mind
Sin is all in the mind
But humans, we are real
Let's start living like it*

E v o l u t i o n

A process in which something passes by degrees to a different stage
(especially a more advanced or mature stage)

•

(biology) the sequence of events involved in the evolutionary
development of a species or taxonomic group of organisms

•

Group of organisms

There will always be an ongoing argument between religions and scientists as to whether humans evolved from simple organisms, over several billion years, or indeed whether they were created, just as they look now, by a supernatural all powerful god. I do not want to start this discussion by agreeing or disagreeing with the theory of evolution and natural selection; everyone has their own opinion, and you would find yourselves closed to this discussion if you were on the opposite side of my opinion! I do not want to talk about whether darwin, or the creationists were right. I wish to go much deeper into our conditioned minds, and explore with you how we came to arrive at our opinions, and then use our creative minds to move forward; to advance our minds. To shift our thinking.

I have not studied religion or the theories of evolution in any great detail, but I have not blindly accepted or rejected either; rather, I have investigated it with my own mind to find out the truth. I do not believe in absolutes, and so, if the mind is to remain open, there can be no absolute truth.

With both accounts of how we humans arrived here, the evolutionists and the creationists will show *overwhelming* evidence to support their findings. And although it is important to know where we came from, for us to understand the origins of life, (whether created by a god or whether simple organisms evolved into complex ones), the fact remains that even if one is proved “true,” there will always be someone who firmly believes the other.

It is this firm belief by people who have not investigated it themselves that concerns us here, not whether life was created in seven days or four billion years.

If I told you I had investigated it, and have concluded that evolution was how man was created, what would you say if you believed that god was the creator? Your conditioned mind would instantly jump in and shout, “Nonsense! He doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”

Do you find it strange that so many people just blindly believe what they’ve been told? And not only believe it, but actively share their opinion with others, as if it is their own discovery? Why do we do that? We are the most intelligent species on the planet. We have the capacity for learning and discovering, yet we consistently just accept the writings of one “learned” man, or accept the teachings of professors as absolute truths.

There may be more physical evidence that man evolved from simple organisms, but who is to say that there isn’t one super-intelligent supernatural being who whimsically created life on earth? The key here is belief. The blind belief that what someone says or writes must be true because it has been accepted.

Many brilliant scientists who were revered over the ages, have been proved wrong, again and again, because someone else investigated it themselves at a later date. Einstein proved some of isaac newton’s theories incorrect; and who knows, maybe in the next hundred years, or maybe even tomorrow, someone will come up with a new theory that supercedes einstein’s.

Investigation, not blind belief, will help us evolve psychologically. Blind belief in science, or in religion cannot advance us. Only by

allowing ourselves to be open to the possibilities of what *could be*, can we truly advance our minds.

In the years since man has populated this planet, we have constantly evolved, not so much physically in the last few thousand years, but psychologically. We have used our brains to develop into a more advanced civilisation – albeit rapidly – in the last two hundred years. Scientific discoveries have led to the invention of the motor car, the aeroplane, computers, telecommunication systems, space travel, skyscrapers, and electricity for all. You only have to look around you to see the marvellous discoveries we humans have made.

And whether through engineering, chemistry, mathematics, physics or biology, progress has only been possible through the ingenuity of man, and his willingness to experiment, to investigate, and to not believe everything he has been told before. This is what separates us from the animal kingdom – our ability to use our imaginations; to imagine, possibilities.

So please can you tell me why we constantly fight for the supreme position of knowledge of the creation of life on earth? Why do we try to control human minds, to make them accept that one story is true or not. Why would you try to tell someone that life was created in seven days, and not as a long difficult process, when you have not investigated the truth of it yourself? Is that helping us advance, by limiting the minds of our children, by making them blindly believe?

We must allow everyone to investigate for themselves, not to condition their minds with our opinions. Please think about this carefully, and watch your mind as you are reading this. If you instantly jump in with a “this is nonsense, everyone knows that evolution is how we got here,” it is as worthless as “only god could have created this earth.” We must find out for ourselves.

If we are deeply interested to know how we got here, we must not accept what we are told, or pass our opinions on to other people, as if they are absolute truths. We must use our minds to investigate, and in that deep investigation, we may find what we are looking for.

Life is small steps
Life is not absolute. Life is a process.

I wrote in the introduction to the book that nothing I write is absolute truth nor to be blindly followed; and that this book is not the final word

in being human. In the process that is my life, I have reached a stage where I want to make my small contribution to the future, and it may be that in several years, or even tomorrow, someone will write a book that is more advanced than I could ever hope or dream to be. That is evolution; that is the advancement of our human civilisation. Taking small steps, progressing in every way.

According to evolutionary theorists, the state of the world today may well be addressed sometime in the future, by natural selection, and that all the wrongs will be righted, by mother nature herself. And for the creation theorists, it may well be that god has a grand design for everything, happy to let the world carry on as it is, until he feels it is time to intervene. But if you believed either of them, you wouldn't be You. You wouldn't be the magnificent, amazing collection of atoms that you are. You wouldn't be human. Because man now has control of his own destiny, and that of the planet. We have the power in our minds, to create or to destroy.

Although it would be nice to think that god, or nature, will make it all better, and we will all start being gradually nice to each other over the next 250,000 years, I think we have to face facts, that although small steps are what has allowed us to progress to where we are today, we have come to a crucial stage in our development as a human race, where we can't wait for evolution or god to help.

We need to intervene. We need to take a big step. And that step, I would like to call a shift. A shift in thinking. And with that shift comes action: Immediate action. We don't have to wait to see the results in ten years or fifty years. We will start to see the changes filter through the world immediately. Can you imagine it? A more compassionate, loving, sustainable world for all who live here. For me and you and for all future generations...

I'm sure most of you reading this might say, "Well, it would be nice if something good happened, and there is suddenly no more hate, greed, poverty, hunger, or war, but it's not going to happen, these problems have been around long before me, and will probably be around for thousands of years after me. It's just human nature; you've just got to do the best you can." And there are millions who would agree with you. "We don't want the world to be a bad place to live in, but what can we do?"

Most people see the problems of the world as too huge to take on and deal with, but the problems are not with the world, they are rooted firmly in the minds of the individual. Each and everyone of us. Me, you, the

thief, the warlord, the soldier, the politician, the factory worker, the office manager, the florist, the green grocer, the supermarket shelf stacker, the serial killer, the arsonist, the teacher, the parent and the child. We are all individuals, with individual thinking, able to change.

We all talk of wanting to change something about ourselves, but we see it as a long process, not as something that is effective immediately. It's not the change itself which takes time, it is the time we take to get to the point of wanting to change! It is by starting to notice things about ourselves we do not particularly like or want to improve, that gives us the impetus to change.

A shift in thinking

Let's go into this a little more deeply together, shall we? We have said that change in the individual mind is an instantaneous process, after we have made the decision to change something about ourselves. Right now, many of you will be saying "I'd like to, but it's difficult" or "why should I change," but it is only the mind's resistance to the change that is making it difficult.

Take driving to work as an easy example. You inform yourself about the harm the motor car is doing to the planet, and you decide not to use the car every day to go to work. Instead, for one day a week, you use public transport, cycle or walk. It's a nice idea. It gets you out in the fresh air, you are responsible for less pollution, less petroleum consumption, less traffic, less stress. Hey! You're really doing a great thing! That is until the helpful brain steps in.

"What if it's raining? I'll get wet, and it's a real pain walking to the bus stop, and it's quite expensive, and the car is much more comfortable, and I feel safer in my car, and I don't have to share my car with hundreds of people, and anyway I like my car, I can listen to music..."

Blah, blah, blah... You see, the brain doesn't like change too much, it gets used to its comfort and doesn't like to be troubled too much by all this talk of change.

"It's much too difficult you see. I'd like to, but I knew it would be too difficult, and anyway, everyone else is using their cars, so why should I stop using mine? I paid quite a lot of money for my car, and anyway, I thought having a car was progress, I don't see it as great progress if I have to start walking again. My grandfather didn't have a car, and his life was difficult, I don't see why I should make my life more difficult. Anyway

what difference would it make if it's just me not using my car for one day be? It all seems kind of pointless to me.”

And there it is. The lazy brain wins, no question about it.

Now that example was just about not taking the car to work for one day. Imagine if the example had been switching to a meat free diet, turning your back on a consumer lifestyle, not watching tv each night, doing a job that helped others around the world progress, not just you, understanding and transcending anger, being compassionate to all, or not working for any company that had anything to do with making or selling guns or military weapons; and you start to see that it becomes almost an impossible task on the face of it.

If you can't get over using your car for just one day, how are you going to deal with the big stuff? Well, it's all big stuff, but all we can do is deal with it on an individual basis. The only way to deal with any problem is to break it down to manageable pieces. We all have different lives, although we are all connected. Some poor, some rich, some happy, some sad, some violent, some peaceful. But the one thing that makes us all the same, is we all have the capacity for change.

Big steps – Big shift

“Why should I do it? I'm quite happy the way I am!”

No one is forcing you to change; no change can come from outside of you. You can apply pressure all you want, but in the end, it is the individual mind that must change. If you apply pressure to your prime minister to stop sending troops to a foreign country, and he eventually decides to stop it, it is not that he has given in, it is that he has processed the information available, and made the change in his mind. Remember, that change can only be in the individual mind.

We may act as a group, but that group is just a collective of individual minds, all able to change the way they think, instantaneously. If you are part of a gang of thugs, and the group decides to beat up an old man, you as an individual have the power *not* to be a part of it. You are making a choice to join the group, to kick and punch the old man as he's lying on the ground. If you make a choice to stop in your mind, the change is instantaneous, is it not?

Many of you reading this will still be saying “Ok, but I can't see how changing will do any good, after all it's just me changing; if everyone else

is still doing the same thing, what good will it do?” and I can see your point. On the surface, it looks hopeless if it’s only you changing, but imagine if you were a street robber and through understanding yourself more and starting to feel compassion for other people, you decided again never to rob anyone in the street. That would have a big effect, wouldn’t it?

When I decided to take a big step and become vegetarian, many of my friends said, “Why are you bothering, they are just going to kill the animals anyway, so it doesn’t matter if I eat them, or someone else eats them.” Unfortunately, this is the kind of defeatist attitude that is so prevalent in the world today. They are going to do it anyway, so I may as well join them, there’s nothing I can do...

I will tell you why I became a vegetarian.

For nearly thirty years, I happily chewed my way through hundreds of sirloin, rump and fillet steaks. I ate pork chops, chicken breasts, bacon, and loved sausages. In fact, I ate every kind of meat there was. I never considered it wrong to be doing so.

My parents – whom I respected – provided me with food on the table, and as it tasted pretty good, I ate it. If anyone had ever told me not to eat it, I would probably have been annoyed and told them “man is a meat eater, and I can eat whatever I like!”

The first vegetarian I met was someone I later married, and although I couldn’t understand why she was a vegetarian, I respected her, so didn’t question her about it. She did take a lot of stick for being a non-meat eater (and a non-drinker/non-smoker), and because she was my girlfriend, stuck up for her (even though I thought it was pointless being a vegetarian).

For a couple of years, I kept eating meat and she never asked me to stop, until one day, whilst cutting up a huge piece of meat at a pub we were working, I suddenly realised that what I was cutting up used to be alive, and this was flesh, the same as mine. The blood that was all over the sink was just like mine, and I was treating this (now dead) animal as merely a tasty steak.

I started to imagine it alive, grazing in the fields, then I imagined it being killed. Just another cow, in a long line of cows to be killed, that day and every day. At that moment, I felt compassion.

Compassion

1. *A deep awareness of and sympathy for another's suffering*
2. *The humane quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to do something about it*

I knew that over thousands of years, man has been hunting animals for food. In the beginning they had no idea about agriculture, they merely hunted animals, and gathered whatever else they could. I also knew, that according to evolutionary theorists, the reason man's brain grew to its present size was possibly thanks to the proteins in meat. So if man hadn't eaten meat it, the theory states that I would probably not be here with a brain big enough to have self-awareness and discuss compassion with you!

But that was yesterday. We are now in the position where we don't need meat to survive, even if it is true that we did in the past. In fact we can get all the proteins we need from beans like soya amongst others, and we are able to produce vegetables in sufficient quantity that no one need go hungry. And in a moment, my mind changed from the hunter of 30,000 years ago to a man standing in a kitchen over a piece of a flesh that had been delivered in a van, wrapped in plastic and cut to size.

I realised I was no longer a hunter, merely a consumer of tasty meats. I knew in that instant that all the millions of animals being killed in the intense factory farming was not only wrong, it was inhuman. We had progressed throughout a bloodied history, fighting and killing for thousands of years to this point, and still we killed each other, and killed anything we could eat.

I decided to make a shift; a change that was immediate, required no thought, no mulling over, no long drawn out battles with my brain over the pros and cons of eating meat. I had no long discussions with my friends about whether killing animals was morally right or wrong, whether man was a carnivore, omnivore or herbivore – those things didn't matter.

What mattered, was at the time, I felt compassion, and I shifted my thinking into that of one who feels compassion for all living animals (and by the same token, without consciously thinking about it, shifted my thinking into showing compassion for all humans on the planet; thereby making it highly unlikely I would ever hold a gun, go to war, or be responsible for the death of another). I understood what it is to be human, our ability to show compassion for another living being. Lions

kill zebras because they do not have the capacity to choose whether to be carnivores or herbivores. We do.

Look at all those BIG things that came out of one SMALL shift!

I don't miss eating meat. I made the shift and moved on. It doesn't help to keep thinking "Maybe I should start eating meat again, maybe I'm missing out on something." I don't eat meat and that's the end of it. Move on.

I am not suggesting you must stop eating meat, that was a personal shift for me, and me alone. I do not try to convince others to stop eating meat. Remember when we discussed that only an individual shift in thinking, will make a lasting difference?

People will always try something for a while, but inevitably go back to what they were doing before, as it's more comfortable. Why? Because until you make a shift (which is comparable to moving up a gear in your car) your good old brain will try to offer you a way out of conflict (should I /shouldn't I) by suggesting you go back to your old way of thinking, which results in action.

So instead of asking yourself the same old question, "what is good for me?" Maybe we should be asking ourselves the question, "is what I am thinking or doing, helping to make the world a more compassionate, peaceful, sustainable place for me, and future generations of my family to live in? Or am I just living for today, getting what I can out of life for me; using people and the earth's resources to give me an easier, more comfortable life?"

It is fair to say that man would not have got where he is today, without doing things which were not compassionate, but that is yesterday. We may live longer, thanks to the availability of more healthy food and better medicine. We may be able to visit more places in the world, and travel often, thanks to the invention of technologies such as the car, train and plane. We may live in better housing thanks to better building techniques. We may be richer, thanks in part, to the industrial revolution. We may have better schools, and we may even be more humane than we were; but in our constant striving for progress, we have forgotten one thing – to show compassion and love for everything on our planet.

We live in a finely balanced world, which science is beginning to show has taken billions of years to evolve (whoever/whatever the original

creator was, it doesn't really matter), and still we fight with each other constantly. We destroy individuals, families and cities through war. We drink alcohol and take drugs to make us "relax." We seek power and control over others. We hate, we waste, we kill, we envy, we are greedy, we are afraid. We may have progressed externally, but when you examine it carefully, it begins to look as if we have the brain of our cavemen ancestors in a twenty first century body.

As we discussed earlier, we are at a crucial stage in our development, where fear and violence is rife. We cannot wait for a third party (god/evolution) to step in. We must shift our thinking, one by one, country by country, continent by continent, until we allow compassion and love into our hearts.

This is not something your government will help you with, nor your friends, nor your religion (many hundreds of wars have been started in the name of god). This is something you must do, for the benefit of yourself and your fellow earth dwellers.

The key to this shift in thinking is in stepping out of the "me" for a while; allowing yourself to watch how you think for a moment, and reaching deep inside, to feel just two things: Compassion and love. They are both qualities that are within all of us, which some of you may have already found but others need to find. We have discussed this in more detail in separate topics, but without them we are less than human.

- Shift 1** Learning to observe yourself in action in your environment.
- Shift 2** Learning to love yourself and show compassion to all around you.
- Shift 3** Identifying one thing you feel passionate about and make a shift. Don't wait.

Change is contagious. You will be amazed at how one small shift in thinking can cause a ripple effect that can be felt everywhere. It may not be apparent at first, but slowly, the compassion and love you feel for others, will filter through society (which is you and me), your family and your friends.

Imagine if you shifted your thinking on just one thing!

For example, stopping using supermarkets and only buying local organic produce. Think of the ripple effect worldwide. There will be some

upheaval, but anyone who tells you to think of the job losses around the world and the chaos, doesn't know much about the amazing adaptability of the human mind. What will concern you more, is that massive amounts of food will not be available to you 24 hours a day. "Where will I do my shopping? I'm too busy to go to different shops. It's so inconvenient!" But don't let that worry you for now, you have forgotten how amazing you are. You are a survivor. Your genes have successfully been passed from generation to generation through war, famine, disease, and hunger. I'm sure you will think of something!

Let's look together at how this small shift in thinking affects the world, because that's all it is, thinking; and look at the dramatic effects this has in action, in reality. Buying organic food means no harmful pesticides are used, and if you don't buy food that have been sprayed with chemicals, there will be no need to make pesticides anymore. It also means that no one has genetically modified your food, thereby eliminating the need to have companies doing weird things to your tomatoes; after all, the tomato has been around for a long time and got on pretty well without having its genes modified.

Sure, genetic modification supposedly makes plants resistant to some diseases, but are the – so far – unquantifiable benefits to the human race worth the unknown cost of fiddling with the genes in our food? Especially when we don't know how this affects the planet's global ecology. Farmers using only organic pest treatment will learn to work with nature to combat disease. We have the skills and technology to do this already. Buying locally means you are helping to keep agriculture local, buying products that are grown by local farmers, for the local community. If you live in a modern city, this may mean purchasing products that have been transported countrywide due to the space available.

Food grown for the domestic market will be fresher and have to travel less. At the moment, it is possible to go into your local supermarket and find very few items of fresh produce that have been grown in your local area, let alone the same country you live in. The current trend of importing fresh produce means you may be buying a lettuce which may have been grown five thousand kilometres from where you live, and transported via truck, aeroplane, and then another truck to get it to your supermarket.

Imagine the amount of fuel (an unsustainable resource) being used in the transportation of your lettuce. The pollution caused by emissions. The water used in growing and washing your lettuce in a country where

land has been converted to grow food for export and may face its own water shortages. You may even buy too much and end up throwing some of it away. The benefits to all local communities would be huge by just choosing local produce. Maybe not financially in the short term, but as responsible citizens, shouldn't we be looking at the long term?

You may also choose to grow some of your own fruit and vegetables, if you have a spare piece of land. Just imagine the satisfaction of having your own potatoes, strawberries, or carrots, fresh from your garden. It may seem time consuming, but if you dedicate time and energy to this, you will think less about wasting any, something that happens on a massive scale every day in western industrialised countries. Food is cheap and always available, and we have become blasé, happy to buy two boxes of strawberries from across the globe and throw one away because it went off as you bought too much. Easy come easy go...

When you buy local organic produce, you know you are buying seasonal produce as well and you will look forward to this year's new apples or strawberries when it is their season, and not just expect that everything be available all year round just because you want it. You learn to wait and then appreciate the seasonal produce.

You will be cutting down on massive amounts of packaging that is necessary to carry your products thousands of miles, thereby saving our valuable resources – oil for plastics, metal for cans, and trees for paper and cardboard. You may realise that you don't need to buy products just because they are for sale, and you will begin to eat more healthily, cutting down on processed foods that have been made in huge factories, and begin to learn the art of cooking again.

More local people will be encouraged to reopen local stores, who have been driven out of business by the huge supermarket chains. You will be free from the companies that control the world food supplies, by putting food production back into local community hands. I am not talking about businesses giving their food away cheaply to local people, indeed it may be more expensive than the supermarkets, but I can assure you that local food will taste better, and you will feel good about once again supporting local business in your community.

These are just some of the things that could happen if you just stopped going to your local supermarket and tried going back to local market shopping. If there isn't a local market or food shops selling local produce, you could try talking to someone about starting it or opening your own!

But then again, that sounds a bit difficult, as you've had a hard day, you're tired, and you just want something quick to eat. You can't be bothered with all this nonsense, and it's best to leave it to someone else to fix it, and anyway what good is it for you to sacrifice yourself, when everyone else is going to the supermarket, and come to think of it, you like the supermarket, it's easy, convenient they always have what you want. It's cheap, and you get points on your loyalty card. "No!" say you, "I'm not going to change for anyone. It's a free country and if I want to shop at the supermarket. I *will!*" Well maybe you're not ready to shift your thinking, but if you don't who will?

You may wonder what stopping shopping at a supermarket has to do with love, compassion and evolution. On the surface – nothing! Compassion and love are human. Supermarkets sell cucumbers. Until you look at the list again above.

If you love the world you live in, and want to show compassion, you have to think about the people who have to work for next to nothing in non-industrialised countries to provide you with your cheap produce. And because you demand lower prices every day, the supermarket drives down the price they are prepared to pay for the goods. When you win on price, somebody else loses.

For you, it's just a bunch of cheap bananas, but for the person who works on the farm it's his livelihood. You may argue that if we didn't buy it he'd have even less, but as I have consistently discussed with you, the human being is the most intelligent being on the planet, he is resourceful and adaptable.

They say that nature is the survival of the fittest, and that may well be true, but it doesn't mean we can exploit other human beings just so we can have cheap food we may or may not eat. If you show compassion and love, you also have to think about the planet we live on that we exploit every day. We use huge amounts of energy to power the machines that give you the consumer mass produced products; from sugary soft drinks, to biscuits; from cooking sauces to desserts; everything has been pre-made. We use plastics, water, oil, petroleum, wood, and metal, just so you can get a nice product, in a nice jar, with a nice label 24 hours a day, cheaper than you can make yourself, made a thousand kilometres away, that you use in five minutes, and then throw away the container.

Think about it with me for a moment.

In the time that man has been on earth – whether he evolved from a tadpole, or came fully formed as a human being – all the evidence points

to the fact that we have had a pretty hard struggle to make it this far. Without counting violent acts we have committed against each other, we have had to fight ice ages, floods, famine, disease, earthquakes, and volcanoes, amongst other obstacles that nature herself has thrown up; and against all the odds, we have made it! You and me.

We're alive, and we belong to the most intelligent species on earth; homo sapiens, the human being. Whether we live in asia, africa, europe or the americas, don't you think now is the time we give thanks to our ancestors who managed to stay alive, despite the odds against it, and give birth to us? We must use this opportunity of a lifetime to begin to advance in our thinking and start to give birth not only to new children, but to a new level of compassion for our fellow inhabitants of this planet, quietly spinning in space; and a new level of awareness both of ourselves, and of the impact we are having on the planet for future generations.

Our ancestors left it in pretty good shape for us. Let's do the same for the next generation who come along.

*Without love and compassion I am empty.
I feel nothing, I am merely a machine.*

E x e c u t i o n s

Putting a condemned person to death

•

Unlawful premeditated killing of a human being by a human being

He committed an offence punishable by death
It's the law



Even the bible says it, so I guess it's ok! An eye for an eye. And I'm sure other religions may have something similar? In our drive to become "civilised," the rulers of the separate nations of the world decided they needed some method of control over the population to make sure they conformed. And if you fell foul of the law, you could potentially pay the highest price – you could pay with your life.

The general public actually used to go – in several countries they still do – to hangings, and it was seen as a day out. "Watch the condemned man swing from the gallows!" said the advertisements. Quite a jolly affair really, leaving all citizens glad it wasn't them.

The most obvious offence to be executed for, was, and still is, murder, but it wasn't the only offence you could be executed for. Others included, treason, spying, or stealing (anything from a bird on someone's private land to someone's wallet). Suddenly people could be killed for

any offence that the government decided should be punished by death. They had to keep control of the population, and made public examples of people, that would stop others from committing offences.

Various methods of execution have been used over the years, including the good old guillotine that just chops your head off and it rolls into a basket; to the more macabre, where you are hung by the neck until not quite dead, then taken down from the gallows, a knife cuts you, first down the middle, to open up your chest, and then, as I understand it, the knife is run the opposite way across your chest and your organs removed whilst you are still alive. Anyway, the purpose seems to make you suffer as long as possible before you die.

More boring methods of execution include hanging, where you just fall through a trapdoor and your neck snaps, or something like that; firing squad, where some expert marksmen shoot you through the heart; being wired up to an electric current with some kind of hat on that kind of cooks you from the inside (much like a turkey in the oven I guess), to the most mundane of all, “the lethal injection.”

Come on! All that happens is that you lie down, some nice doctor gets two injections ready, he smiles at you like any normal doctor would, tells you to relax; and injects you with a really nice muscle relaxant. Once you're nice and asleep, he calmly puts another injection into your arm that just stops your heart, pretty similar to putting your dog to “sleep,” I guess. Listen to these statements and see if you agree.

Death by hanging is murder
Death by lethal injection is murder
Death by firing squad is murder
Death by the electric chair is murder

Lots of “civilised” people still believe that death is perfectly acceptable for someone who kills someone else; after all, they made people suffer, so it's only right they should suffer. In principle, this seems straightforward until you understand that killing a murderer is still murder, made acceptable by the fact that you are tried by a court of your peers, and the whole process is done in a very civilised way! After all, this isn't the dark ages, they don't just hang a rope over a tree and hang you. You are innocent until proven guilty.

You had every chance before you committed the crime to think about the consequences of your actions, and you have every chance under the

law to show you didn't do it. It's up to the prosecution to prove you did it. Then it's up to a jury (in countries where this exists) to consider the defence and prosecution cases, listen to the summing up of the lawyers, then debate it for as long as it takes to reach a majority decision. If you are found guilty by these men and women, you still have right of appeal, and it is finally up to a judge to determine what sentence should be passed. So it is fair to say that if the sentence is ultimately death, then that must be the final decision.

It has to be remembered though that most countries are beginning to see the death penalty for what it is. Murder (*unlawful premeditated killing of a human being by a human being*). Killing another human being is the most sickening of all events that happen in the human world. The deliberate act of taking life away from someone else. We will deal with the act of murder itself in another topic, but for now let us think about the act of execution.

When someone brutally strangles, shoots, stabs, or drowns another human being, we have to think that the person who did it was not thinking, indeed, I would say, was suffering from mental illness. In law, they have to prove you knew exactly what you were doing; that you were not insane. Otherwise, you would be found not guilty, by reason of insanity.

We are the most intelligent species on the planet. We have the ability to show love, feel compassion and empathy for all other creatures, so when someone deliberately, or even in the heat of the moment, kills another human, it means something has gone wrong in the brain, don't you think? Something in the wiring is faulty. Whether you meant to do it or not means that your thinking has got so twisted, that you see killing as an option – not for food, but because of jealousy, desire, greed, anger, or hate. It doesn't matter if we classify it as a crime of passion or a crime committed by one with a sociopathic personality (*a personality disorder characterized by amorality and lack of affect; capable of violent acts without guilt feelings*).

I believe that the human brain is hard wired to feel compassion and love, so if you cold bloodedly gun down a shopkeeper because you want their money, kill a love rival, kill someone because they are from a different country, or have a different skin colour, your brain and your thinking must be faulty – given we are wired not to kill someone from our own species. If we were, humans would have been wiped out thousands of years ago.

Indeed, most other species do not kill their own. Why? Because in nature, we become hard wired to act in the best interests of our species. If lions all killed other lions, there would soon be no lions left. Does this make sense to you? It is not in the interest of any species to exterminate their own members.

It is interesting to note that the death penalty only applies to killing members of the human race; you can kill as many other life forms as you like, whether they suffer or not. You can torture animals, then cut them to pieces whilst they are still alive screaming in pain, and you may at worst receive a prison sentence. You can shoot animals for sport, like pheasants and deer (as long as it is in the right season), and no one will say a word to you. In fact it is practised regularly in some countries by the upper classes and members of the most *civilised* societies.

So if it's acceptable to kill animals, why can't we kill humans? They're exactly the same; they have muscles, and a heart; they feel pain, and they are alive, just like the animals. Where is the difference?

We love animals, and show them compassion just as humans do to each other, but it's perfectly acceptable to kill them (as long as you obey the law). And that is where the difference lies. Law. We have made up some rules that everyone should follow. Except these aren't global rules on conduct, they vary from country to country, and from state to state. In the united states, if you kill someone on one side of the state border, you may find yourself lying down getting a lethal injection, and ten metres away on the other side, you will find yourself spending life in prison.

This is not about an eye for an eye, this is about where you live and who happens to be running the country at the time. This is not about morals, this is about power. This is not about justice, this is about control. Do you see? If killing another human being is the worst thing that another human can do, why is it acceptable to execute (kill) a human being because a man-made law says it is? One day the death penalty is used, the next year it's not, the next year it's reinstated.

If the death penalty is meant to be a deterrent, it certainly doesn't work. Every day, humans kill other humans in the name of love, war, god, peace, justice, or revenge; and in war, killing is a free for all, unless you happen to kill with a little too much cruelty, or use nasty weapons that make people suffer too much before they die. No. Killing in war is all right as long as you obey the rules.

“...and remember lads, I want a clean fair fight. If the enemy (another human) wants to kill you, make sure you get him first, but a straight head shot is preferable, instant death and all; we are not barbarians you know...”

Don't you think it's time to upgrade our brains? In specific circumstances, killing is all right, as long as it's within the law, but if someone kills a child, or murders several people in a killing spree, we demand they be punished to fullest extent. We want blood. But if it's a “just” war and the enemy gets killed, *that* is seen as a great triumph! We want to congratulate the soldiers, not punish them. The only difference is in the use of the word “law” and “justified” when we decide whether you should be punished with death for killing another human.

If we are to succeed as a planet, we must upgrade our thinking. We must learn to feel compassion for all forms of life on this planet. If we kill someone who kills, are we any better than them? Have we not advanced enough as a civilisation that we can help people who commit terrible acts against our own species to think more clearly? Instead of murdering them to satisfy the baying mob, shall we not help the person to feel compassion and love for all others; and return them to society to show others the way forward?

Law makers would argue that they are not in the business of salvation, and that they are there only to make laws to protect others; but is it not our duty as fellow humans to end the cycle of violence that has existed for thousands of years?

When a man kills because of anger, greed, hate, or revenge, at least he is showing some form of emotion, and we can help him understand, and correct his thinking. When a judge sentences someone to death, are he and the executioner not acting more in line with the sociopathic personality? When the judge sentences the man to death, he shows no emotion, nor does the executioner; after all, it's only a job for them. They can go home with a clear conscience at night knowing they have seen justice done, and firmly believing they have done the right thing to help society.

I have only one question to ask the judges and executioners who may be reading this:

“If you sentence someone to death, or you pull the trapdoor lever, or administer the lethal injection, or pull the trigger, or switch on the electric chair, how do you feel as a human? Do you feel compassionate? Do you feel love when you see the man die, or does it not enter your

head? Are you just doing your job, much like hitler's executioners in the second world war?"

The time is now to end this violence, to start to understand ourselves and the way we think; to progress as a planet and to protect our species. That means people changing the way they think so they never again feel the desire to harm another human being. Possible?

"Of course not," say some of you, "man is violent and has always been violent, and there's only one way to deal with violent murderers – execute them."

But then you would be as violent as they are, even if you don't pull the trigger. We are all involved in this, and stopping executing people would be a first step to showing compassion on a global scale. Don't let your governments continue this violence. Just imagine if you were the one who made a terrible mistake in your thinking and were on death row right now, about to be violently murdered. How would you *feel*?

Wouldn't you want someone to give you a chance to understand why you were violent, and transcend it to become a more compassionate human being? Would you seize the chance, or would you prefer to die?

I will leave you with that thought.

E x e r c i s e

The activity of exerting your muscles in various ways to keep fit

Exercise is an interesting concept isn't it? I'm sure our ancestors, who toiled the lands every day for hours on end in order to grow food, would laugh when they saw all of us at our pilates, step aerobics, and spinning classes. Or what if they saw us spending hours in the gym, just to get exercise and get fit? It is laughable really, don't you think? Us standing in front of the tv going along with the latest craze in keep fit. "Yeah, I used to do tae-bo, but that's so last year..."

Fitness has become a fashion, and millions of dollars is spent on it every year by overweight, under-worked people, desperately trying to look "perfect;" which of course never happens, because they were "too busy" to go last week, and "they've got a lot on, next week," and anyway, "it's not really working, I think I might try something else!"

What's going on? We are turning into a world of fat people, and before all you politically correct types start to get upset, let's go into this together, shall we? We are, at our core, an animal just like the other animals who live on the planet. Physiologically we're no different. We have bones, fat, and muscle just like a lion, or a tiger. Now, how many of you have seen fat lions?

Over the millions of years we have been evolving, our bodies have turned into lean, delicately balanced machines, with just the right quantities of everything. We can increase muscle to make ourselves stronger, but can someone tell me what putting on fat does for us, unless it's to keep us warm at night perhaps?

**Be proud to be fat!
Big and lovin' it!**

Unfortunately, some overweight celebrities in western countries seem to be promoting that it's ok to be fat. Now we have fat people just accepting they are fat, and that's it. I am not anti fat people, I just want you to be aware that it is not our natural state. Being fat means just one thing – you eat too much of the wrong thing (unless you have a “disorder,” in which case, accept my apologies).

You crave animal fats, sugars, simple carbohydrates, anything processed, sugary drinks, and beer – the list goes on and on. “Oh I've always had a problem with my weight, I just can't seem to shift it,” or “it's probably genetic, my father was a big man too,” and many other excuses. You may not even want to lose weight. It may not be important to you. But recognise one thing. Not eating fatty foods doesn't make you fat. Doing physical work does not make you fat.

Let's go back to talking about your natural state. The one where the whole body is in balance.

Being overweight puts more strain on the system physically, makes you slothful (*disinclined to work or exertion*), and dulls the mind, but today's sedentary lazy lifestyles in the western developed countries are seen as a privilege, something we have worked towards, something we could say we have earned.

No longer do we have to toil in the fields, now we can sit back and enjoy ourselves and eat. And watch tv. And sit. And eat. And drive in the car. And sit. And eat. So something must have changed to allow us to do

this. After all, if you are out working in the fields all day, the likelihood of becoming overweight, is, if you'll pardon the pun, "slim."

Work has moved from the hand to the mind

That is precisely what has changed in western civilisation. No longer is everyone out toiling all day. Now, lots of us have jobs which don't require any physical work at all – even those who do manual jobs now use machines to assist with any heavy work – and coupled with the rise in working hours demanded by employers, and the easy accessibility of processed fast food (*anything not home made*), is it any wonder we have become obese?

"Hold on a minute," says you, "what about all the office workers in asia, you do not notice they are fat, and yet they work long hours, have easy access to fast food, and don't do much physical work, why aren't they fat?"

That is a good question, but for that, we will have to look, not at a genetic predisposition to be slim (because as you will remember, being slim is our natural state), but at their choice of foods.

Their diet is made up almost entirely of low fat products, including lots of vegetables, and their diet is free (in the main) from dairy products which are made from animal fats, whereas our diet is high in dairy products; from cheese to yoghurt; from milk to creamy sauces and ice cream. The thing is, we just don't seem to be able to cook without dairy products. I include eggs in this, even though they are not strictly dairy, as they go hand in hand with things like butter and milk when cooking.

Give up dairy products? Never!

We are addicted to dairy products and we don't even seem to realise it. I gave up dairy for good this year, and although I consider myself a versatile cook, I really struggled with some recipes I used to like making. Nearly all had dairy products in them. Even a basic lasagne needs milk and butter to make the white sauce, and grated cheese for the topping.

So, with my old recipes out the window, I embarked on finding new ways of cooking and I started to realise that what I was eating (even as a vegetarian) was so heavily influenced by dairy, which is unfortunately full of fat. I discovered that getting used to not eating animal fats was pretty

easy, although my mind did start craving things like milk chocolate, yoghurt, and cheese. It amazed me that I was actually craving specific types of food, and I could only put it down to the animal fats I was eating.

In the days when people were labouring all day, they probably didn't notice they were eating so much fat, as they were burning the same or more energy than they were taking in; but with the almost slothful work that is undertaken by most people in western developed countries (I am not saying that people don't work hard, just that they don't use their physical labour as much as they used to) and the odd hours we keep, eating is done whenever we get a chance. Sometimes eaten on the go, and sometimes eaten late at night before bed (alcohol, which is fattening is also mostly drunk late evening), and surprise surprise, we start putting on weight.

We then notice one day that our clothes feel a little tighter, we start to see a few bulges, where there didn't use to be any, but we're much too busy to worry about it. What's a little more fat? We can always lose it next week. But of course we're always much too busy. We have stressful lives. We don't have time to think about losing weight, until one day we decide to do something about it, by which time we have put on so much that we can't just lose it in a week. So we panic.

"How can I lose weight? How do I look? I look terrible. My clothes don't fit me any more. I need to get slim!" So we join a gym, go to an aerobics class, go on a crash diet, get a personal trainer, buy a book, or a dvd by a famous celebrity who has never been fat, and buy slim shakes to drink. We are desperate and now we'll try anything.

The diet companies start rubbing their hands in glee! Woo hoo! Another customer who has eaten too much fat, too much sugar, and never does any exercise. So they milk us for everything we have (pardon the pun). They sell us a diet dream to look wonderful again in just thirty days! No catch! They are making a fortune out of us selling us fat food, and the same companies are making a fortune selling us the healthy alternatives after we've become too fat!

I wonder how many of you have tried to lose weight in the past. Recently I have noticed that I have been putting on weight, although only in the tummy area, fortunately, and I am now making sure I return to my system's optimum weight in the soonest possible time. Excess weight brought on by sitting writing this book for over two years, doing little exercise, and eating too many dairy products! I am well on the way, now I am eating no dairy, and only wholegrain cereals and breads, beans

and pulses, steamed vegetables and rice, local pearled spelt, or barley, but more on that in another topic.

It just seems to me that we are behaving in the complete reverse of what is good or indeed essential for the system, by eating way too much for the amount of exercise we do. We subsequently put on weight, become lethargic and unhappy with ourselves, and our mind loses its sharpness, as our system spends its whole day in a state of digestion. Breakfast. Mid morning snack. Lunch. Mid afternoon snack. Dinner. Late evening snack (and perhaps alcohol).

Cutting down on eating, not only helps you to look good and feel good, it helps your mind stay more focussed and become clearer. You are a perfect finely tuned human being, and clogging up your body with fat makes it harder for your perfect system to operate.

Would you deliberately add butter to your car engine if all it needed to run was petrol? Think about it. Given that we are here now, and there is no going back to start again, we must start to look at what kind of fuel our body needs, how often, and how much, and we must balance the amount we eat with exercise – walking or running, for example. Not only does exercise burn calories, but it releases the all important endorphins to make you feel good too! It can also help clear your mind of any stresses and strains, turning cotton wool thinking into razor sharp clarity.

I mentioned running as a good choice of exercise (although the “experts” may not agree with me), because I have been doing it for the last 27 years, and have found it to be of great benefit for body and mind. And as it is done outdoors (preferably in a green space), it helps us to reconnect with our natural state, away from the madness of western style city living.

Clear your mind. Clear your arteries. Get rid of the fat in your diet. Get rid of the fat on your body. Become the truly amazing human being you already are, you just need a little push in the right direction! Don't waste your time going to quack fitness gurus and diet goddesses, spending your hard earned money trying to lose the weight you spent your hard earned money putting on! Give up fat! Give up dairy. Give up eggs, cheese, milk... Go on, you can do it! Make a positive shift for yourself. Don't listen to your addicted brain telling you you can never do it.

You don't need all that fat, especially the fat from the milk of another animal. Just think, the milk you drink is meant for the calf of the cow! You wouldn't give human breast milk to a calf would you? Why? Because mother's milk contains just the right amount of protein and vitamins to

help the offspring grow and mature into a healthy animal. As every species is different, the quantities vary greatly, and if you hadn't noticed, you gave up drinking your mother's milk a long time ago.

Human breast milk – like animal milk – is there to provide the newborn with the right amount of nutrients when it is newly born! You would think it strange if they were selling bottles of human breast milk on the supermarket shelves, wouldn't you? Or what if everything you ate, or drank contained human breast milk? *You would find that strange wouldn't you?* And that is milk designed for our species! You are drinking the breast milk of another species, designed for newborns! And throughout our lives, we continue to drink it. Why? Because we are told it is good for us. "It contains calcium," they say, but there are many products that are higher in calcium and more easily absorbed by the body.

It is just traditional in western countries to use dairy (cow breast milk) in everything we eat. We are used to having milk in our tea and coffee. We are used to having cream on our apple pie, because our mother put milk in our tea and cream on our pie. We don't need these products at all, but we have become addicted to them. If you want evidence we don't need them, just look to the asian diet which contains almost no dairy products, no cheese, no milk, and no butter.

So where do they get their calcium from? They seem healthy. You don't see fat people on the streets, surely they can't survive without their daily glass of milk as recommended by the government health agencies? In my opinion the promotion of dairy products has more to do with keeping the farmers in business than anything to do with our well being.

Our body systems are amazingly complex, honed over millions of years, with only the most successful traits carried on into future generations. How do you think it was possible that the human being has developed a need for the breast milk of another species? I don't know about you, but that seems laughable. Oh, if you want any other reasons to stop dairy products, then just imagine being hooked up to an automatic suction pump for three-quarters of the year and forced to lactate. That's a nice thought isn't it?

So what's the answer to this obvious problem of obesity that is scourging western nations? Give up dairy? Give up alcohol? Join a gym? Do more physical work? Maybe all the above, but one thing we haven't covered is why people *allow* themselves – which they do – to get fat. Well, no one

forces us to eat; we physically lift the pizza, the soft drinks, the beer, and the cheese to our lips and swallow, so we do it to ourselves!

We eat and we eat until our waist lines start to bulge, our trousers become a little tighter, and our rear end starts protruding more. Soon, our face starts to look bloated, our arms and legs become fatter, and we start to sweat more. We find ourselves short of breath walking up a few stairs, all but the gentlest of exercise leaves us puffing and panting, and suddenly it's too late. We're so overweight that to think about cutting down on fats wouldn't make any significant difference, and dieting would require going through physical and psychological pain, so we just accept it. We are fat.

Your self-esteem (*a feeling of pride in yourself*) diminishes and you just give up. You now have to buy fat people's clothes, join weight loss clubs, and watch tv programs where you'll learn that it's ok to be fat. It's not. It's not good for your system. Your heart and all your organs are designed to work with a lean body.

Imagine for a moment that you had a two litre family saloon. It has a chassis that is designed to work with that engine. If you started loading too much extra weight onto your car and then tried to tow more than the engine could manage, you would notice that your car really started to struggle. It wasn't built to carry that amount of extra weight, and neither is your body. Think about it. Feeling heavy and sluggish is not just a physical ailment either; the more weight you put on the more sluggish your mind becomes. It starts to become dull, it loses its vibrancy, sharpness, and inquisitiveness. It can only think about food now.

You may think these examples are extreme, but as western nations, we are becoming obese. We have to stop this trend in its tracks. Not through government initiatives and healthy eating adverts, but through ourselves. By using our minds.

But first, we have to accept we are addicted to eating. We don't just eat to survive, we live to eat; and big business has caught onto that fact. Before you start blaming them, they are just fulfilling a demand for fast, sweet, salty, fatty processed food.

We love all that stuff. Mmmmm, it just tastes sooo good. But this isn't your stomach telling you it tastes good, this is the pleasure centre of your brain telling you it wants more, more, more. Just like cocaine, heroin, cigarettes, and alcohol, this fatty, rich, processed food is satisfying a craving; and once the brain tastes these addictive substances, it remembers it likes them and motivates you to get more!

Ignore it. It isn't real. You don't really want these foods. They are not good for the system. The cravings are an illusion created by your brain. The more you abstain from these substances the less your brain will crave them. You are a wonderful, amazing animal, a human being – the most intelligent species on the planet; it's time to start living up to that label and start looking after ourselves before we become obese. A good start is to avoid any pre-packaged, processed food.

If it comes in a packet, you can be sure it has been processed to some extent. I know you're busy, but it's time to start buying the raw ingredients and remembering how to cook – and while you're at it, get rid of your microwave. Yes, I know it's convenient, and it allows you to reheat everybody's meals at different times, because you all come in at different times, and anyway you're too tired to cook, and it's quick, and you're hungry now; but if you are too tired to cook food, you should look at why you are too tired to cook!

You have to work longer and harder than ever before for your employer (who would get you to work 24 hours a day if they could) amongst other things. So, fast meals are actually a real plus for employers! It means they don't have to worry about you complaining that you have had to work overtime, because they know you can buy a ready meal and cook it in 0.087 seconds in a strange box that does weird things to your food!

Getting rid of the microwave will help you to think more about the food you buy and cook, as you won't just be able to slop it on a plate and heat it. You will have to take more time, and make more time, for cooking. You will start to look at the ingredients you are putting into the food. You will notice how much animal breast milk you are using in your human cooking. You will become more aware of the food you are putting into your mouth and swallowing.

You will become more aware of yourself. You will realise that what you consume reflects how you look externally, and it feels nice to look good. You can see the health in your skin and your eyes. Your self-image will be stronger. You will look good, feel good, and your mind will be clearer. It's amazing that you can get all these positive benefits by just choosing to eat non-processed, non-packaged food. You will want to live a more healthy lifestyle. You won't want to fill your body up with toxins any more. It feels good to be alive!

You will take more pleasure in nature, you will walk more because you feel good and strong. Your brain will start to lose its addictions. All because you started to think what you were putting into your mouth.

It all starts with food. Every other change you make is purely external. There's no good exercising four times a week if you stuff your face with processed food. Exercise is important, but only if you eat well first. It's not the only answer. You may do a physical job for a living, but eating processed food is just filling your body up with toxins.

Some of you might not care that you eat processed foods. You might not care that you are overweight. You might not care that you drink animal baby milk, but then that is symptomatic of the whole of western society, so you are not alone! It's ok not to care. No one is forcing you to, but all I hope is that you will start to think a little bit about what you are doing to your magnificent body system – a system so advanced, that man, with all his intelligence could never hope to replicate it. A system you stuff with burgers, pies, beer, wine, drugs, and animal fats.

In fact, the only reason we aren't completely toxic is because our system is so advanced. Think about it. You don't care what you put in to your body – because it manages to expel most of the toxins you ingest – until you get sick. It seems the only time we gain real awareness of what we are doing to ourselves is when we end up in hospital.

Someone I know recently had a quadruple heart bypass, which was preceded by a heart attack, preceded by ten years of angina. He ate too much fatty food, drank too much alcohol, and finally his body gave up. Fortunately the wonders of modern medicine managed to save him. Now he is a changed man. He doesn't drink. He has become vegetarian, and is determined to lead a healthy lifestyle from now on! All it took for him to get this awareness was that he nearly died! Isn't it a pity that it takes such drastic events to convince us, the most intelligent species on the planet, to do something good for our system?

So you may not care now, but this unhealthy living is destroying our systems. For what? The psychological pleasure of eating a cheeseburger, a cake, a toasted cheese sandwich, or drinking a pint of beer? So for all of you who don't care out there, just notice how you feel when you eat processed foods and creamy sauces, and compare it to how you feel when you eat a piece of steamed broccoli! "Ugh, plain broccoli, that's so boring," I hear you say. And that is precisely the difference between the two foods. One is "boring" the other is "really tasty." Why do you think that is?

Do you think the stomach thinks that the broccoli, which is full of vitamins the system needs, is boring, or do you think the real reason you find plain steamed broccoli "boring," is because it doesn't contain the addictive chemicals which work on the pleasure centres of your brain?

Cheeseburger or steamed vegetables? Sweet fatty sauce, versus healthy vegetables?

On the surface it's no competition, is it? Anyone who was intelligent would pick the healthy option. But we don't, do we? We buy the one brain is most addicted to. Start to notice it...What have you got to lose? The only losers will be the companies that make billions of dollars keeping us addicted to their processed junk, and that can't be a bad thing, can it?

E x p e c t a t i o n s

Belief about (or mental picture of) the future

•

Wishing with confidence of fulfillment

•

The feeling that something is about to happen

I don't know about you, but I often think I must have been a great disappointment to my parents – my father in particular. I think he had great hopes for me, and expected me to follow in his footsteps into business. But I didn't. Instead, I left school early without a proper qualification to my name, proceeded to undertake a series of dead end jobs, and inevitably kept borrowing money from him just so I could “stay afloat.”

I think he thought that because he came from a disadvantaged background, grew up during the second world war, and “made it” on his own, that I couldn't fail to have a promising career ahead of me, given the chances I was getting (private school, plenty of money, extra coaching when I needed it), I would be great.

He probably thought I would be a businessman like him, only I would be greater. I would be a captain of industry; I would have

thousands of people working for me; I would live in a big house with my pretty wife, and he could pop round and visit the grandchildren any time he wanted. What a disappointment I must have been to him! In and out of work all the time, never holding down a steady job, always off travelling somewhere with no money. In his eyes I must have failed. Well, failed him and his expectations at least. He now has high expectations for my book; he hopes I get it published, and that I become a successful author, but of course that's not what this book is about.

So why do parents have such high expectations of us? Why do they put so much pressure on us to do well at school? Are they just looking out for us? Do they just want us to be successful so we don't have to struggle through life, like they had to? That is what we are here to find out.

I have often wished that I had asked my father why he had such high expectations of me, and I wonder whether fathers who have not become successful, also have high expectations for their children, or are they happy to just let them be? I often wonder whether it is their own status they are worrying about (sorry for the cynicism), that deep in their mind they feel as if they would lose status in the eyes of their peers, if they are successful and their children are not. How do you think my father would react when he was asked:

“So what's young alan up to now?”

What would he say?

“Erm, erm, well he's kind of, erm, in between jobs now,” when actually what he really wanted to say was, “well, actually, he's lazy and ungrateful; he does nothing, and after all we did for him. He's such a disappointment to me.”

But it's not just successful parents who place these expectations on their children. Poor and uneducated families believe that the children will pull them out of the misery and poverty they find themselves in. “Oh, yes, our george, he's a lawyer now you know; very successful...”

But what happens to the young mind when faced with the knowledge that he is not going to live up to these expectations? I knew I was never going to be a rocket scientist or win the nobel prize for physics, and I didn't like school much.

I couldn't really see the point of all the tests they kept making us do; probably because I wasn't any good at them. I couldn't tell my parents that; they were investing in my future (and spending lots of their hard earned cash on me) so I had to keep going. The problem was, everyone

now had high expectations of me. Even my friends thought I was going to be successful – imagine their surprise when I dropped out of school!

I then did what any soon to be unsuccessful person does, I started hanging around with people who were not only less intelligent than I was, but who had no expectations of me – the hard drinking pub crowd. It was great. Suddenly I was free. No one had any expectations, except I would be able to drink at least eight pints each night with them. To them, I sounded intelligent and well spoken, and they kept asking me “What are you going to do alan? I’m sure you’re going to make a lot of money, not like us, we’re stuck in our jobs.”

And there it was. It had happened again; suddenly, even the “drop out” crowd I was hanging around with wanted me to make something of my life. So I did what any self-respecting drop out would do, I started hanging round with a new drop out crowd.

Years went by, and I still wasn’t living up to anyone’s expectations, least of all my own. You see, the more people told me I was going to be a success, the more I started believing it myself, and the more bitterly disappointed I became when I failed, yet again.

Disappointment

1. *A feeling of dissatisfaction that results when your expectations are not realised*
2. *An act (or failure to act) that disappoints someone*

I couldn’t believe it! Everything I tried, I failed at. When I first started a new job, I went into it like a rocket and was soon the golden boy. Everyone had high expectations! But time after time, I blew it; by arguing with the bosses, or turning up late. The truth is, I didn’t care.

I was a disappointment to my parents, my friends and everyone I met. I became depressed, wondering how I was going to find a way out of this cycle of expectation and disappointment?

Suddenly I knew; I needed to be my own boss. So I left my job – which was only temporary – and set out to start a computer company. I was pretty good at computers and I thought, “I’m going to make a success of this!”

It started well enough, and everyone had high expectations that this was the chance I needed to really prove myself. This was where I would become the success that everyone expected me to become; alas it was not to be. Within two months, I had run out of money. I couldn’t borrow

anything from the banks, as by now I had a bad credit rating, and the only way I could get the money I needed, was to go crawling back to my father once again and borrow the money from him, but each time I did, I had to endure a lecture about what a disappointment I was...

“You’re useless, alan,” he would say (as he had said for most of my life by the way), “you can never get anything right, you really are a good for nothing.”

“Yes dad.”

“Do you know how much money you’ve cost me over the years with your silly schemes? Thousands. I don’t know why you don’t just buckle down and get on!”

“Neither do I dad.”

And he went on:

“Do you know what people would give to have had your chances in life? Hmm? Well, Do you?”

“No dad.”

“Let’s just say that there is a queue of people out there who would give anything to have a tenth of what you were given.”

“Yes dad.”

“I’m sick of supporting you, I’m sick of you coming with your hand out all the time, it’s time to grow up, for christ’s sake!”

“Yes dad.”

“Now, how much do you need?”

And that was the story of my own business, which as you will imagine, failed several months later. Needless to say, I ended up down the pub with a new group of friends, who had no expectations of me, except being able to drink eight pints. It was definitely a darn sight easier than trying to live up to my dads expectations.

Failure

1. *An act that fails*
2. *An event that does not accomplish its intended purpose*
3. *Lack of success*
4. *A person with a record of failing; someone who loses consistently*

So there I was, branded a failure; and that lived with me for most of my adult life, until recently, when I started to consider it more deeply. I realised that I wasn’t a failure myself, I was failing to live up to expectations. These weren’t my expectations of myself, these were somebody else’s: My parents! That’s it, I thought, “All these years you

thought you were a failure, and there was no one to blame but the expectations!”

Think about it. If you are a low grade student in biology, and I expect you to become a surgeon, what do you think the chances are of it happening? Zero to ten percent? Now it would be different if you set yourself a goal that said I am going to become a surgeon, but then you would study harder at biology at school. You’d have to be slightly silly to fail all your exams and still want to be a surgeon, that wouldn’t make any sense.

It was the same with me. My dad wanted me to become a captain of industry or at least an entrepreneur, but he was so blinded by his expectations, he failed to notice reality. Instead of encouraging me to do something a little closer to the standard of work I was putting out, he said “reach for the stars!” And as I didn’t want to become a captain of industry, I didn’t put any effort in, so had no chance of even leaving the earth’s atmosphere, let alone reaching the stars.

After I left school, I kept trying to please him by taking jobs I thought would impress him, but I wasn’t doing them for me, I was doing them for him; so when my enthusiasm waned several months into the job, I ended up doing something to get myself fired or just walking out.

But my dad wasn’t to blame, all he did was encourage me; it was the expectations and the gap between them and reality. I have never been a failure. If I really want to do something, I do it, and if I don’t, or don’t succeed at it, it doesn’t make me a failure (although people would see it like that). But who cares about other people? Unfortunately, we do, and we end up trying to please everybody, even if it makes us unhappy ourselves. So we try and try until we give up, or can’t go on, and we are branded failures. Thanks very much!

So, instead of creating expectations, maybe parents should just let their children be. Let them be children, let them grow up, and when they want to do something they will do it. After all, it’s their life, not yours. What’s it got to do with you if they don’t want to be a scientist or a businessman? Those are the things you wanted to be, not what your children want to be; so leave them alone! Let them work out their way in the world. All you are doing is setting yourself and your children up for potential disappointment later on in life, and then have them branded as failures.

Success is overrated anyway. As long as people are happy and content in their life, free from conflict and fear they will have a good life. It is not up to you to choose their path for them. “But I am only trying to guide

them as any good parent would do” I hear one parent shout. But putting pressure on children to decide what they want to be when they finish school is about as far away from being a good parent as anyone could hope to be. Let them BE.

Who cares if they end up working in a dead end job? That is only your view. If the child chooses it, then let him be. There is work to be done and people have to do it. We must not judge our children for the jobs or the path they have chosen. There is no right and wrong path, only a path; we must see that even if we don't agree with their choices. We must end the cycle of expectations, disappointment and failure we are creating for our children and ourselves.

Who needs expectations? They are merely an expression of psychological becoming, which is a process of thought: Of wanting more than you already are, which in the end, causes conflict and unhappiness for all involved. Let's all give up expecting, and we may find ourselves pleasantly surprised by the results. And even if we aren't, well, it's not the most important thing in the world, is it? Let it go. Please. We are doing so much damage to our children's young minds.

And to young people, I say: If anyone asks you what you want to be when you grow up, you can reply cleverly, “but, I already am!” And then watch their response. Have fun in life, and never let anyone tell you you are a disappointment or a failure, you were already so much more than that the day you were born.

E x p e r i e n c e

The accumulation of knowledge or skill that results from direct participation in events or activities

•

The content of direct observation or participation in an event

•

An event as apprehended

•

Go or live through

•

Undergo an emotional sensation

•

Have first-hand knowledge of states, situations, emotions, or sensations

No matter what your education, one always finds it remarkably difficult to get a job without having the necessary experience. In other words, you may know how to do the job in theory, but we want to see evidence you can do it in the real world. We want to know you have lived the job, gone through the good days and the bad, and still managed to get the work done. Of course, experience is not just about work. I see life as a collection of experiences, neither good nor bad – not judged, just lived.

I have tried to experience as much as I could in life. You may consider some things I have experienced good, others bad, but they have been experienced, and now they are in the past. The only thing I can say is that I have learned from this experience. I don't say I've learned from my mistakes, I prefer to call them my choices.

Long ago I decided to stop beating myself up about choices that didn't work out the way I planned. They were my choices. They were right at the time, otherwise I would not have made them. Whether I judge them to be errors in the future is just hindsight. It doesn't change the event.

Job application for life: My experience

Let me take you back to my youth. Here I am about fourteen years old: I am on the bus on the way to school. I have just been notified by letter that my dad has decided he can't live with my mum anymore (and that means me also). I know plenty of people's parents have split up, but just reflect, if you can, on a young boy in puberty whose father, that he loves and respects, has just abandoned him. Why has he left? What did I do wrong? Why would he leave me if he loved me?

It is an experience I would not wish anyone to go through. The constant sobbing from my mother, sitting in darkness, drinking sherry and listening to mournful music. "Surely no man is worth that?" I thought. "Why would you put yourself through so much torture for so many years after he left?" Obviously because she was in love.

I don't know how the whole trauma ended up hurting me emotionally and psychologically. I still had a comfortable life, and we weren't short of money, although something was always missing. I even missed being shouted at, and although my father was never around to play with during my childhood (working to further his career), he was still there. Now he had written to say he was off. He couldn't live here any more. He wouldn't be back.

I'm sure many people will have had similar experiences.

I can't really remember that time too well. Maybe I have blanked it out, maybe it was just a long time ago (24 years ago), so I won't say it turned me into an emotional wreck; I am not sure how it affected me. I lived through it, and although it probably ended up affecting my school work, I could never be sure if the reason I failed to live up to expectations was due to emotional trauma, or just because I was a daydreamer and lazy!

I left school at the age of eighteen without completing my "A" levels. I was sent out to work, but I didn't really want to work. I couldn't be bothered! I had discovered alcohol, cigarettes, and girls. The problem was that I didn't have any money, so I went through my mum's drawers looking for loose change. I got an overdraft on my bank account and

took out a loan (none of which I had the means to pay back). I don't know how it happened or what I was thinking. I even altered cheques that my dad gave me to make it more. I was just crashing through life without any thought or awareness.

I took a job that my mum had arranged for me, but it didn't pay much. My new friends were older than me and had more money to go out with. I had to beg, borrow, and steal to keep up with them. I didn't realise it at the time, but all this was, was peer pressure. If I could have learned to say, "no I'm not going out tonight," or "I have no money," I wouldn't have got myself into these situations. The benefit of hindsight rather than foresight!

These older boys appealed to my ego. They were cool. They had cars, their own flats, fashionable clothes, plenty of girlfriends, and they wanted me to be their friend. Wow. To be accepted into a cool group! It was more than any young man could ask for. The only thing I needed was a car, and money – my parents provided both.

I left my job after about six months in search of new riches. I took a job as a self-employed telesales representative selling advertising space. By this time, I was in debt, and my parents had sold my car (while I was away on a holiday I couldn't afford).

I convinced my dad to rent me a car for the job. I picked up parking tickets galore, I made no money, and I got more and more into debt as I tried to earn enough to go out and be cool with the lads.

I left job after job, after arguing with the bosses, always thinking I was right and they were wrong. Getting fired again and again.

I was basically an angry young man between eighteen and twenty one. I got drunk all the time, had casual sex with as many girls as was physically possible, and worked very little. I got involved in several public fracas with the police, and ended in jail for the night; appearing several times at the local magistrate's court.

But I was brought up well. I went to private school, spoke with a nice accent, and was genuinely kind to people, so no one could really understand what was going on. Maybe it was trauma and rage, maybe just my age.

I wanted to become a musician, although the only instruments I played with any competency were the recorder and the flute, which are not well known in pop music! I made a friend at a sales job, who was a budding musician – although he was 44 – and I decided that if he could do it, so could I. I purchased electronic equipment, and off I went.

I had no idea of how to construct a song, although I did record several dire dance tracks. I blamed the sound engineer for their quality, although in reality, they were dire because I couldn't play any of the instruments I owned, and although I had a "good ear" for music, had actually omitted to write the songs before going into record them!

The climax of this sorry state of affairs happened on christmas day in 1989 where, fuelled with alcohol, and without a penny to go out in the evening, I snapped.

I smashed my guitar up and set fire to my parents' bed, my bed, and my dad's chair. Looking back, I cannot see what the significance of the three items were, but I immediately went next door to our neighbour's house to get them to call the fire brigade. Unfortunately, I hadn't counted on the police being called, and was duly arrested for arson, which I strenuously denied (even though the evidence was overwhelming).

I wasn't charged as no one was in the house, and they left it up to the parents to decide whether to prosecute or not. Fortunately, they didn't.

I was sent to see a psychiatrist, who promptly told my parents I was an alcoholic, and as far as I can remember, that was the end of the therapy.

My parents didn't know what to do with me, but eventually I was sent to newcastle (five hours away from my parents) to retake my exams. I was in a shared house, my parents had bought me a new car, and I got an allowance every week. I found a girlfriend. I went out partying. It was great fun! I can't remember the college much, only that I failed my exams because I wasn't concentrating or interested in the work.

My father despaired and tried to help me get a job, but I wasn't interested. Eventually I was sent to help on a project that was based in paris with one of the companies he ran. That was a real turning point for me. In many ways.

I started to enjoy work. I got to travel. People were interested in me. I had a nice apartment that I paid for myself. I was eventually starting to learn to be more responsible. I was getting on fine; I had the chance to stay and work permanently and make a life for myself there, and had even made plans to move to a bigger apartment. I took out a loan to pay for new furniture; but shortly before moving, I went on a business trip to stockholm, in sweden. That business trip signalled the end of my life in paris, and the start of a very different life.

I had noticed over the previous months that I was beginning to become nervous about flying. I started feeling panicky as soon as the engines started, I worried that the flaps were in the wrong place to take off, that the engine was making the wrong kind of sound, or that the airline I was flying didn't have a good safety record; that, actually, I was about two minutes away from death. The year was 1993.

Although I was fairly lonely living in a country with no close friends, and living amongst a culture that didn't pop down to the pub on a friday night, I was quite content. I went out shopping every saturday and treated myself to something new. I was still trying to make it in the music business, even though all of my tracks were unfinished, or unstarted, due to not being able to play the guitar or piano, so I just messed around with the drum machine. Nevertheless, it made me superficially happy at least.

I was given a return ticket back to the uk once a month where I still had a girlfriend, and used it as a good opportunity to get drunk with the lads. I had told my girlfriend it wasn't going to work, and we should split up, but she was insistent on staying together whilst I was abroad. I remained faithful the entire time I was away, although this was to change later.

My life changed the day I caught the plane to stockholm.

As usual, I had felt a bit uneasy on the flight, but by the time I arrived at the hotel in sweden I was feeling very strange. I went to bed early, but as soon as I got into bed, my head felt like it was going to explode, spinning out of control, I felt sick, I went to the bathroom to throw up, I felt like the world was closing in on me. I went to the window to get some air, but it wouldn't open. What was happening to me? I had never felt like this in my life. I was definitely going crazy. I can't remember how long it lasted, but it felt like an eternity.

I woke the next morning feeling like I was on a different planet. I couldn't eat at breakfast. I was picked up and taken to the office where I sat staring at the wall for several hours. I then told them I was feeling ill and needed to go home – not to paris, to london, where my family home was. I desperately wanted to go home, to run away from whatever was happening to me, and although I was scared about going on a plane, the risk was worth it. I had to get away.

And so started a cycle of events that would lead to me running away whenever I started to feel anxious or panicked.

I didn't know why I was running; I just knew that if I got home to my family house everything would be ok.

Several days after the panic attack, I returned to paris. It was tuesday. I told them, that unfortunately, I had to leave, and I would be leaving the next day.

No one could understand it. Here was this amiable, confident young man who was good at his job, liked living in one of the world's best cities, about to accept a permanent job, and move to a bigger apartment, telling them he would be leaving the next day. To them, and to me, it seemed crazy, but it was something I had to do.

I packed my car and drove back to england, taking what I could with me. The next day I got an appointment to see the doctor, who promptly told me to "pull yourself together." Great advice! But unfortunately, this left me struggling to stop having panic attacks all the time, and too afraid to ask anyone for any help due to embarrassment, including my parents, and my girlfriend.

I plummeted into despair, although I covered it well.

I went out drinking more and more to stop the anxiety and the thoughts, under the pretext of having fun. I couldn't sleep without the tv on, I became involved with lots of people on one night stands, and I tried drugs (speed) for the first time. I was a mess, but I was keeping it all together under my "happy go lucky" positive persona. I was so upbeat and happy all the time; how could anyone understand that underneath I was desperately afraid (but not unhappy).

This cycle of panic (overcome with alcohol) lasted until 1997, when I finally split up with my long suffering girlfriend.

I was still in and out of jobs, although, through a good deal of bullshitting, had managed to work my way up fairly quickly. I was arrogant, and was convinced I could do a job better than anyone else. Still the panic attacks came.

In 1998 the panic attacks seemed to subside. I had a new girlfriend who brought a lot of stability into my life. She wanted to be a home maker and have children, and although I wasn't interested in that kind of life, she was nice to be around. Bubbly and cheerful.

We got a dog together, a house by the sea and a horse. I was by now earning huge money as a contractor in information technology, and life seemed rosy. For the first time in my life things started to come together – until she got pregnant. I thought she had done it deliberately and was very angry. I told her it was me or the baby, and being the type of girl to put me first over a living being inside her, she decided to have an abortion. I didn't really think how this was affecting her, I was only thinking about my own selfish needs.

Soon after the abortion, I decided to give it all up. I was wasting every penny I earned on holidays and fun.

I had a speedboat and I bought a Jeep 4x4; I went out partying to posh london clubs with my – also extremely well paid – colleagues. I was living the real high life now!

Except, it suddenly dawned on me one day that this was about the most amount of money I was going to get paid. I certainly wasn't worth what they were paying me. I hadn't saved a penny. I didn't own any property, so where else could I go? I gave up work and went travelling to australia.

Again, no one could understand why I was leaving when surely I was at the highest point in my career. But they didn't get it. I was 29, at the highest point in my career, and the only way for me as I saw it, was down.

I had never stuck at anything my whole life. My life was a series of starts and stops. Comings and goings. I didn't want a boring permanent job, I liked the excitement of travelling and change. It fitted in with my personality. Always flitting between jobs, relationships, towns, countries. Always on the move.

My girlfriend and I didn't stay together long once we went travelling. I couldn't stand her, and dumped her at the soonest possible moment; in a campsite miles from anywhere! I just packed up my rucksack, told her I was leaving, and that was the last I ever saw of her. Within an hour of leaving her, the people I was travelling with picked up another hitch-hiker whom I ended up having a month long relationship with. We travelled back to the hostel my previous girlfriend and I had been working, where I had spent the time getting drunk, having sex with other guests, partying, and going for swims in the pool at 5.00 am (before driving their courtesy bus at 6.00 am), and everyone was indeed surprised as it was only a month since I had left with someone else!

Not surprised at all, was a girl who worked in reception. She had become friendly with my ex during our stay there, taking an instant dislike to me, having advised my ex to leave me as soon as possible. We were married three years later.

I don't know how it happened, but we found a lot in common with each other, and just decided to go travelling on a bus into the sunset. It was two days before our first kiss. From that day onward things started to go right, although I was still drinking a lot, and socialising with the wrong

types of people. But I guess you hang around with people who like doing similar things.

This girl was different to all the others I had known. She started opening my eyes to several things I was unaware of. She taught me you don't need to get drunk to have a good time, and cigarette butts take several years to break down (as I casually flicked the butt onto a sydney street).

I started to become more aware of myself and my environment. I opened up to her, told her about my problems and she listened patiently. It was true love. I loved her with every part of my being. I couldn't bear to be without her. I missed her when she wasn't there.

We spent the next five years travelling, living, eating, studying, sleeping, working, and making love, learned to be chefs, and studied to become traditional thai massage therapists. We were together almost 24/7, 365. No one could work out how we managed to do it, but we did.

I had some therapy to deal with the anxiety, and for a while it got better.

But as time went on, I began to get the feelings of needing to run away again. I didn't want to, but I just couldn't stop myself. Just like years earlier, I got on a plane several times from australia back to my family home in england.

I started going out to the pub nearly every day again. People offered me party drugs which I, being drunk, casually accepted. It made me feel a lot worse the next morning, and I always regretted it, but suddenly I was back fifteen years ago, except now I had developed a heightened awareness of my actions; and although didn't stop myself from doing it, always regretted it.

I wanted to be a better person, but kept being dragged (willingly) into something I didn't want. It all came to an end last year when I left australia, and my wife. She just couldn't live with me any more (unsurprisingly).

For the last year and a half I have been finishing this book, developing more awareness, and being more thoughtful. Since returning to europe, I have worked as a chef in ireland and had a short relationship in the czech republic whilst writing my book there. I have decided to develop my own personal skills before entering into any more relationships! I write this book on an island in scotland – at a tibetan buddhist retreat in fact. This is my experience so far...

I could go on and on, or into much more detail than I have here, but you get the picture. Some of you may have been shocked by what you read here. Some of you may be thinking, “how can such a deeply flawed individual give me advice on living my life? He should sort out his own life first!”

But all I have done is bared my experience to you. If it was good or bad is merely subjective. Just because I have done things that may be illegal, doesn't mean they were bad. It is only experience. It was my life as I lived it.

I have told you as much as I can, without deceit, in order to let you the reader become involved in my life, which is my experience. Without judgement. It just is. That is how I have interacted with the world for the last 37 years.

There has been fear, hate, selfishness, anxiety, greed, lies, cheating, intoxication, anger, and waste; but also a lot of love, fun and joy, in case you think my life has been one of misery! These have just been the most significant events of the last twenty one years. I have not been miserable in my life. I have embraced each day with enthusiasm and a smile.

So what can we learn from experience? What is it that makes experience so important? For me, it is, learning from each action we perform, and using that knowledge to improve our awareness of ourselves in action. I spent many years in the dark, unaware of the effect my actions were having: first on my family, and loved ones, and second, on the wider community who have had to work with me, and deal with me. I just carried on regardless, even when people were shocked by my actions or tried to help me.

It is only now I have almost complete awareness of myself in action that I can start to comprehend the pain I put everyone through, and although self-criticism is not helpful in the long run, the awareness that you have had a negative effect on yourself and others is.

So let's not worry about going into the past and seeing where we could have improved, that is a waste of time, time which is ticking away, even as we speak. You and I have just lived. The way *we* chose to.

I could have got help years earlier, but I didn't. I was too busy to worry about that. If I was to look back on the times I felt at my lowest, I would say, “I wish I had got help way back,” but what good would it do me?

I don't know what kind of experience you have had. You may have led a blameless life, sacrificing yourself before others, or you may have

been a paedophile, a murderer, a tyrant, or a bully. You may have been jealous, greedy, or selfish, but all that is in the past. As you read this, the last word you read is in the past.

We may think we have learned from our actions in the past, and we know that if you get drunk, you will feel terrible the next day, or if I rob a bank, I am likely to get caught; but how many people repeat these actions?

Maybe, like most people, you never learn, because experience doesn't teach you awareness. Awareness teaches you awareness, and awareness is the one thing that will help us progress in our lives. Most people who have experienced drugs do not become aware that destroying your mind with chemicals is a bad thing; in fact they will probably keep doing it because it feels good. Most people who lose money on a horse will not realise the futility of gambling, and will put money on another horse to win their money back. Please go into this with me here. This is most important.

Just because you have experienced something doesn't mean you will become aware of what you are doing, unless it has a negative effect. And even then, most people repeat the same mistakes over and over, chiding themselves "Why do I keep making the same mistakes over and over!"

Surely they have the experience. Surely they would learn?

We would all agree that experience is essential to performing repetitive tasks like driving, operating machinery, or working in the same job. You have a limited set of instructions, and by repeating them, you hone your skills. That is why experience is necessary for jobs. They want you to have honed your skills before they start paying you a wage! Otherwise experience is worthless.

It can only be of value if you gain instant awareness from your action.

"I have hit my child for crying. I am now aware that hitting my child causes suffering and lacks compassion. I will never be violent again."

Unfortunately the chances of that happening are slim, although you never know.

So, before we leave this topic, let us make an agreement, you and I, to draw a line under experience, to note what we have done in up to this moment, and to never judge ourselves for what we have done in the past, nor let others judge us. Let us agree to develop awareness of ourselves, to notice how we interact with society, and start afresh this second with compassion for all other beings on this planet. Forget what experience has taught you. Experience is memory, and memory is conditioning.

Whether you have had bad experiences of people from different nationalities, religions, or certain personalities, approach all with a new found openness. It isn't hard. Just let go of experience. Let go of what you think you know. Don't judge based on past experience. You are just remembering a pattern.

Real life isn't a stored pattern. It's new and vibrant every time you look at it. Give it a chance before you destroy all your new experiences with "experience."

E x p l o r e

Inquire into

•

Travel to or penetrate into

•

Examine minutely

All hail man, the great explorer



Come on, we have to give ourselves a round of applause to start this topic off. We have explored more than any other species on the planet. We have explored the depths of the oceans and discovered wonderful new creatures. We have explored into the earth's crust and found wonderful minerals, we have explored the skies and created amazing aircraft to carry us many meters above the land, and finally we have started to explore space and have created satellites and spaces stations. Oh yeah, and some bloke went to the north pole and another to the south, and one guy went up a tall mountain. The end.

Maybe it's just me, but it seems that all the exploration that man has done, save for a few expeditions over the arctic tundra and up some exceptionally high mountains, has been to benefit himself; for his own

wealth. He didn't just mine the rock to see what it was made from; he mined it because it made him wealthy.

I can hear some of you thinking out loud already:

"What nonsense is this?" If it hadn't been for all man's exploring we wouldn't be where we are today," to which I reply:

"Exactly!"

Others will be saying:

"But look at our achievements! We have done so much. No other species has come close to what we have done," to which I reply:

"Exactly!"

Thanks to our wonderfully big brains and our insatiable desire to explore everything, we have, whether we like it or not, made a bit of a mess of this planet of ours, and the governments with space programs will probably do the same with outer space given half a chance. We just can't stop exploring can we? But soon, there will be nowhere left to go. All will have been discovered, all will have been mined, trawled, and polluted, then we will only be able to sit back and explore with our big brains where it all went wrong.

Perhaps then we should start with the mind before we destroy everything, because that is where it all begins. When we have been exploring it has always been external. Of course, we have thought about the exploration in our minds first, but we have always looked outward. We have always explored with our eyes and our hands. We have built sailing ships and traversed the globe, but we have never once thought to mount an expedition to the interior, which would surely be a more fascinating journey than ever before. That all been said. Let us begin.

A journey to the centre

"But where do we begin? Is there a starting point? And anyway what is the point of all this?" I hear some of you asking. Perhaps there is a starting point. Perhaps there is a point to it all, but we will never know until we look. So where is the centre of your mind? Is it the bit between the left and right hemispheres of the brain? If you think, then what side does it come from? Is the thought above you, to the left a bit, or maybe panned to the extreme right? Any ideas? Perhaps you can hear your voice as you read this. Where is this thought coming from?" Did you hear it?

“Why am I talking in my own head?” “Why can I hear my voice, but my lips aren’t moving?” Ok, you get the idea!

If you ever get to see a brain, it looks kind of greyish with lots of bumps all over it. It certainly doesn’t look like the kind of thing that allows a man to explore space or his sexuality, does it? In fact it looks just like any other organ in the body (pretty disgusting), and although there are massive electrical pulses along the neural network that is your mind, you can’t see them to the naked eye. I won’t start using technical terms here, as I’m afraid I don’t know any; so if you want more detail, you’ll have to head down to your local library!

So our brain is a bit of an enigma. You can’t really see it in action unless you look at another human or study yourself, but if you watch a man chatting up a girl in a bar you can see that his brain is definitely hard at work. But these thoughts trouble me. I can hear them in my own voice but they do not appear to be coming from anywhere. A true mystery! Are thoughts real then? Do they really exist? Can anyone else hear them, or are they locked inside my cranium (*the part of the skull that encloses the brain*)?

Perhaps this is the reason that man explores outwardly. Perhaps it is a little too complex to understand something if you can’t actually see it working. If I look in the mirror, I can see my face moving, I can see that I can move my mouth, and if I look down I can see that I can move my hands and that I am still alive, but there is no way to really see inside our own brains.

Sure, the scientists have concocted clever little machines that measure electrical impulses – amongst other things – but they can’t visually map the territory. Unlike the science fiction films where observers are able to see into people’s minds by way of a television screen and some special cables, our observations at a scientific level are should we say, slightly lacking! So how do we map the brain? How do we see what is going on in there? Unfortunately we only have one way available at the moment and that is to turn inward on ourselves, like pointing a video camera at a television screen.

As we try to watch for our thoughts, they become elusive, jumping around, so we can never really catch them, or hold them for long enough to see what they contain. Some people recommend meditation for this process where (through chanting or some other method) they are able to empty their mind long enough so they can see what’s going on. By all accounts, it’s a difficult and long process, and doesn’t ever really answer all our questions. So where are we?

We have said we aren't sure where our thoughts are coming from, we couldn't draw them if we wanted to, we don't know what colour they are, we can only say we know they exist. Try as we may to get an image in our mind it's never quite as clear as watching it on a tv screen, unless, that is, we are asleep.

Dreaming

A series of mental images and emotions occurring during sleep

Let's face it, dreaming has been explored more than most other functions of the brain and psychologists can tell us one thing, and neurologists can tell us another, but when most of us want to know something, we go straight to a dream dictionary where we find out that dying in a dream doesn't mean you're going to die in real life; and if you see a rat in your dream then that means someone is going to die in real life or something like that!

Unfortunately, as no one really knows what's going on in the brain, we have to assume that these dream dictionaries are of no more use to us than the daily horoscopes in the tabloid newspapers; all they are based on, is human superstition and not much insight. Nonetheless, they sell in their millions, to people desperate to know what their dreams mean; because of course, as an explorer, man can never live with the unknown – he must find out the truth, even if the real truth is far removed from what the writers have decided it means.

But we shouldn't knock dreams. If nothing else, they are great television you don't have to stay awake for to watch, and man, are some of them weird!

I'm sure you have all had similar experiences with your dreams, as characters and shapes interchange, and speak in different voices. One minute we are in a bar talking, the next we are rolling down a hill as a rock. One second we are in a hotel lobby the next we are in a field! Argh! What does it all mean?

The scientists have said that we dream to make sense of the day and file everything away in order, but unless we dream in metaphors I can't remember having been a rock on hill!

"Ahh so the rock signifies me, because I feel heavy and because I have a great "weight" on my mind, and I am laden down with debt and I feel like my life is running out of control!"

Thanks psychologists and dream dictionaries, but I think I'll take my chances elsewhere!

One vivid recurring dream I have is that I am flying. Yeah I know you've all had dreams about flying, but what does it all mean? Sure, I am a little bit scared of flying, which, given that I am sitting in a metal tube filled with 200 tons of highly explosive jet fuel gives me some cause to be. But these dreams are not about being in an aircraft. I am actually flying. In some of the dreams I am standing on a chair and I raise my hands and let myself fall. Suddenly I am free. I am floating about the earth! It is a wonderful experience.

Some people may counsel me that actually in the past man has always flown but his nature has held him to the ground (sorry, isn't that gravity?) and only when he lets go of all earthly desire will he be true to fly again. Hmm, perhaps I have just watched done too many superman films.

But although I can't see we were ever flyers on this planet, we could have been in a different life, or maybe we are experiencing what our other self is experiencing in a different dimension! But would that mean he had the same friends as me and went to the same bars, except he didn't have to take a taxi! Whoa! This is all getting a bit too weird man, so I think we better anchor ourselves firmly back to this planet and back to "reality" and ask one of the characters in our dreams what it's all about.

Yesterday I had a vivid dream of my wife, whom I separated from two years ago, and haven't seen since; so maybe I should ask her what the heck I'm doing dreaming about her after all this time, seeing as the brain is supposed to be making sense of the day's events. I will ask. But first I have to go to sleep. See you in my dreams!

Asking the dream

Me: Ah ha! Caught you!

Her: What are you doing in your own dream?

Me: I've come to ask you a question or two.

Her: What about?

Me: Well, I think it's kind of weird that I am dreaming about you a lot at the moment, seeing as we split up ages ago.

Her: What do you dream of me?

Me: I don't know, sometimes we are kissing, sometimes we are holding hands. Once we cried together.

Her: Perhaps you dream of me because you still want to ask me something?

Me: Do I? Perhaps I do. I was pretty sad at leaving and all.

Her: I know you were.

Me: Do you miss me?

Her: What sort of a question is that? I loved you once. But now it is gone.

Me: But I still love you, I think. I think that's why I dream about you all the time.

Her: But you left ME. Remember?

Me: That's true, but if only we could get back together again. I could make it right.

Her: It is right. What's done is done.

Me: But why do I kiss you in my dreams, when I have a real girlfriend lying in bed next to me. Is that cheating?

Her: It cannot be cheating because I do not exist. You kiss me, because you have kissed me before. You remember kissing me.

Me: But doesn't this mean we will get back together again?

Her: Why would we? We have been apart for such a long time. It is over.

Me: So why do I dream of you?

Her: Because you remember me, and in your memory you have good memories and bad. You dream of me as you once knew me.

Me: But aren't you still the same?

Her: In the dream I am, because your memory last saw me in the flesh like that. But now I am just a figment of your imagination.

Me: My imagination?

Her: Your dream of me is a connection of memories all jumbled around, and left to fight it out in your imagination.

Me: But is my imagination real? Does it exist? Where is it?

Her: It is in your mind and without. It is part of the whole.

Me: You mean, my dreams are just imagination?

Her: What else? Do you think you really kissed me last night? Do you think I dreamed of kissing you?

Me: Did you?

Her: You will never know, because that is only in my imagination.

Me: So it's over between us?

Her: I guess so. But if you want to, you can dream of me, if it makes you feel happy.

Me: It makes me feel sad when I wake up and you're not there.

Her: That is the trick of the dream. That is the trick that makes you feel me, and touch me as if I am real but I am just a memory.

Me: Aren't memories real?

Suddenly the connection is lost and I'm flying over a field again.

What about you? Did you try a conversation with someone from your dream? I don't know what is real and what is not. My dreams seem so real, and it is as if I am in my own television show, except for the fact that I have little dialogue, or directorial control.

But it's no surprise our dreams are so weird, or sometimes so intense that we wake up believing that what happened in the dream was real. Every single second, our minds are recording every smell, every taste, every action, every word, every feeling, and sleep time is the only time it gets to process all the information.

So maybe we read into dreams too much. Maybe we are looking for something, and hope to find it in our dreams, just as we hope to find it in the astrological chart. We all want to know "Is it real, Is it real? We cannot just accept that it is. We all want to know the meaning behind everything, and if you pay someone enough they will always try to find a meaning for you.

Why do we need to have meaning? Because we are never satisfied with the way *it is*. The earth. The stars. The oceans. The forest. The animals. The fish. The human. That is how *it is*. Do you understand? But your mind says "No, I must explore more, I must explore and find out whether there is meaning behind any of it." So we analyse and we analyse with our big brains using thought, which is limited by memory, and imagination, which is limited by thought.

If there is a meaning out there, we won't find it looking into our own brain using thought as a probe, because it can only see what it wants to see, it has no access to anything more than your memories, your experience and your knowledge. To explore further we need a different tool. That which is indescribable, that which is insight (*grasping the inner nature of things intuitively*). Until then, we can discuss dreams and the workings of the grey blob that is our brain until pigs fly...

But let me let you in on a little secret. It's all in your mind.

E x t r e m i s t s

A person who holds extreme views

We can all be a little bit extreme from time to time. We all have opinions which can be unwavering, but in reality, there are a million different opinions, none of which can be the only correct answer. If we deal in absolutes we can never progress. Just imagine if we all still accepted that the world was flat and had never questioned it! Everybody likes to think they're right – even me! And we will argue our case until the other party backs down. Just to say, “ha! I told you I was right.”

Just because we accept it's true doesn't mean it is

In recent times, the label “extremism” has been laid at the door of islam, but that is just the media and politicians talking, using headline grabbing

catchphrases. Christianity, judaism, and all the other major religions could be considered extreme, and without wanting to discuss religion here, are extreme if (a) they believe their truth is the only truth and (b) if they force other people to accept what they say is true; but extremism comes in many forms, religion being just a small part.

We may hold extreme views on politics, immigration, homosexuality, sport, education, crime or race, but that is only ignorance. Ignorance of diversity. Ignorance that there are other people in the world who do not share your views. Ignorance of the fact you may not be right. Ignorance of the fact that real truth stems from openness.

If we are to learn the truth about anything, we must be open to new ideas, new suggestions and we must attempt to discover the truth for ourselves.

Let me ask you a question. Where do you get your opinions from? Who told you about this truth you believe in? Listen to this statement.

“All rapists are evil and should be locked up forever.”

Now most people have a firm opinion on rape, due to its brutality against women, so everyone would agree with the statement above, wouldn't they? What about paedophiles who prey on children, who lure children, and sexually abuse them? What should be done with them? Kill them? Lock them up and throw away the key?

But it is not the seriousness of the crimes we are interested in here, it is the attitude to the statements. How fast did you reach your opinion? Half a second? One second? How about “We should have the death penalty for child murderers,” or “it is sinful for a woman to have an abortion.” One second? Two seconds?

What we are trying to examine here is that when we make up our mind on a subject in a matter of seconds, it means we have an extreme view. This is an opinion that has been imprinted on the memory ready to be used in an instant when challenged. This is extremism, not suicide bombers, or terrorists – as the media and politicians like to call them. “Terrorism” is just action. The end result of extreme thinking. What we are discussing here, takes place in the mind long before action. I would like to use the example of the animal rights extremists.

As you have read in other topics, I am a vegetarian, and believe that as humans we should show compassion for all living things on the planet, not just our fellow humans. So, although it saddens me to see animals being experimented on by scientists, it saddens me even more to see people who supposedly love animals, terrorising the scientists who work there; or setting fire to the labs and generally causing fear to everyone

associated with animal testing. Why do they do it? Because, in their distorted thinking, anyone who causes harm to these animals is a justified target, and in doing so, they lose their compassion.

In my mind, it doesn't matter the cause you are fighting for; if you are prepared to use violence to achieve your goals, (however peaceful the end result may be) you have extreme thinking. In your desire, and subsequent failure to convince everyone you are right, you have resorted to convincing people that your views are the only truth, by forcing them to accept your opinion through terror.

Let's go back to when we were children. I wonder how many of us had extreme views then. Any of us? I doubt it. So let's try to examine where this thinking originated from. As we weren't born with these views, the first people we have to look at are our parents. Think back to any views your parent's had, that you may have picked up – whether religious, political, or racial.

Most of us don't realise what an effect our parents views have as we are beginning to form our world view from an early age. If you constantly hear your father talking about “the immigrants that came here to take our jobs,” or the “failure of the government to lock up dangerous criminals,” or “christianity is the only true religion,” do you think it's possible that – as you respect your father – you believe what he says is the truth?

Most of our parents never encourage us to think for ourselves; in fact it is more likely they will try to stifle debate, by exercising their authority. “Don't argue,” they will say. “What do you know about it anyway? You're only a child.”

Instead, it is the children who should be asking “Actually father, what do you know about it? Where did you get your opinion from?”

As we get older, we form our own opinions from experience and our environment; from government, our, religion, our peers and the media; and everyone holds some opinion, left, right or centre. The problem of extremism arises when we fail to notice we are holding an opinion that does not allow any other views. When we are so convinced that our way is the only way, we become single-minded and our mind loses its flexibility to be open to different trains of thought.

The key to understanding extremism is to understand ourselves. To watch ourselves in action, and pose the question “Why do I think like this? Is this the only way?” Before you have a debate with another, debate with yourself. Go on, try it! Pick a topic you hold a very strong or single-minded view on, and ask yourself: “Why do I hold this belief to

be true?” Ask yourself if holding that view, in your opinion, makes your thinking extreme. Remember, there is always another way than the one we know.

There will always be truths we have yet to discover, and that is the greatest thing about being human. The ability to use our minds to find out the truth of something. We should never hold an opinion that is absolute. Throughout our long history, people have held views that have been accepted as “definitely and most certainly, the truth,” whether scientific or religious, only to be challenged later, and replaced with another that is “definitely and most certainly, the truth.”

Opinion

1. *A personal belief or judgement that is not founded on proof or certainty*
2. *A vague idea in which some confidence is placed*

I have come to realise that pushing our opinions onto other people turns them against us. Opinions are merely that. An opinion. People do not like to be forced to agree with us, they want to make their own minds up. So if we want to share an opinion with another, do not offer it as the only truth, or the only way, because there are a billion opinions out there in the world. Just ask anybody! We cannot hope that everyone will agree with us.

Whilst reading this book, I am sure there are lots of things you don't agree with, because you have another opinion, but all I ask is that people approach life with an open mind. There is no right way to truth, only a long journey of discovery. Extremism stops people from embarking on that voyage of discovery because it limits the mind.

Closing Dialogue ~ Volume I

And so it is done. I had planned to have some clever discussion with you about what you had discovered, but then it came to me that this book was my journey of discovery. Sure we had some discussions, I made plenty of sarcastic comments, and challenged, or should I say confronted you on many issues; but in the end, even if you don't end up reading this book because (a) no one will publish it or (b) you're not interested in what I am discussing it won't matter. The insight I have gained from writing this book has opened my mind to a world I didn't know existed.

As the reader, you may feel that in some instances I went too far, or maybe not even far enough. The words may have cut deep into your thinking or they may have washed over you as if I had never even written them. But none of that matters.

I can only thank with all my heart, the people who have shared their time, part of their life with me, and people I have met in the streets, or even just observed in passing, for they are the ones who have taught me; not clever books on psychology, philosophy and religion. In other people I have seen myself, and on many occasions I didn't like what I saw. But through silent watchfulness I started to understand. So this book is for all the people who loved me, married me, left me, hated me, worked with me, shouted at me, gave me a job, sacked me, drank with me, had sex with me, oh, and the people who bought me dinner and let me stay in their house whilst I was writing this.

I warmly invite anyone and everyone to write their own books that explore the nature of all things; you can even use my topic headings. And even if no one else reads them you will teach yourself more than you will ever learn from experience, classrooms and books.

I wish you all a peaceful and joyful life.

Thank you for sharing my journey with me

p.s. If this is the first volume you have read then be sure to read Volume II and III

The beginning...

The natural mind project
The evolving book project

www.thenaturalmindproject.org
www.evolvingbook.org

Welcome

A very warm welcome to all of you who have come this far with me on this wonderful journey into what it truly means to be human.

I have now created the natural mind project to help all of us create a more compassionate, peaceful, creative, sustainable world for all who inhabit this planet. It has been difficult to see how this should work as I believe there should be no centre, no organization, no ideas, and definitely no leader. “But who will lead us” says you....

With that out of the way, let us begin.

The evolving book – A collaboration

When I was in australia recently, I was sitting in a bookstore, looking at the thousands of books surrounding me. I suddenly realised that, however good the content, the books were now dead! At that moment I knew what I had to do.

So this book has no copyright. After all, I will be dead in a few years! What's the point of protecting words? I believe the only way we can move forward as a species, and a planet, is to share information and to develop new thinking.

Although this book costs real money to buy, all of the money raised will go into the natural mind project, although it is just me at the moment! And I have set up a wiki style section on the evolvingbook website with each topic laid out as it is in this book. Here, anyone in the world will be able to add, change, or delete pages, with the resulting book being compiled and printed once every year. Like life, this book will have evolved.

So what do you say? Would you like to be a part of a wonderful collaborative project? I will leave it to you to decide!

Setting words free – Public literature

After discussions with one of my good friends in australia, I decided that we should liberate the printed words from the constraints of a bound

book (books are so old school!) and display the work in public. This would involve projecting topics (or sections of topics) on sidewalks or buildings for all to see. We may even set up areas in the city where individuals can read or contribute to it. Perhaps this will be in our new international centres for dialogue, which as you remember are nothing more than a place where strangers can meet and talk! If you wish to contribute to this part of the project please contact me:
alan@thenaturalmindproject.org

Stop Press: The book is now live online at www.evolvingbook.org able to be freely edited, or completely rewritten, and is free of any copyright. There are discussion areas, forums, community chat. Join in and start creating!

Food!

As I am sure you are well aware, food is essential to our continued existence on this planet, and no amount of money or spiritual awareness will help you survive if there is no food left!

From our discussions you will also be aware that I believe leaving the food in the hands of corporations whose **only** reason for being is to make a profit is a very short-sighted. This means that our primary need can now only be fulfilled by having money which puts us in a very weak and subservient position to those who have power over us.

It is my intention to take the power of money away from our basic needs.

One way to do this is and show that there could be another way requires collaboration in the community. I plan to open city centre cafe's where great vegetarian food will be available! "But there's millions of them already" I can hear you saying. But. At our cafe's there will be no charge for the food. "But who is going to pay for it?" You ask.

Nobody! You see, the idea is that people in the community grow vegetables (or in the beginning donate) and in exchange for contributing some potatoes, flour, carrots etc you will receive a meal. This is not meant to be idealistic, merely an exploration into the possibilities of regaining control over our food from the hands of giant faceless agribusinesses and supermarkets.

But it will take collaboration. I cannot do this alone. Just imagine reconnecting our communities through one of our basic needs – food, all

without money. We will need premises to operate from, so if anyone wishes to donate a space, lease it to the project or can help in any way please contact me.

Places of contemplation

If you remember from the book, I believe silence is a great way to gain insight of yourself and the world around you. I have always been impressed by the way monasteries run, and although this would not be in any way religious, or idealistic, would be a great way to get away from the hustle and bustle of modern life. I would like to build many of these (hey! Slow down alan!) and want to use the most sustainable building methods (straw bale perhaps). The only problem is land.

You see, land costs a fortune, and as I am dedicating my life to the service of others, don't have a spare million in the bank. So, if you have a small piece of land you would like to share (don't worry, we don't want to own it), where we could build this centre; where people from all walks of life could come to spend quiet time together, then please get in touch. If we could make it self-sustaining, so much the better.

Returning land to nature

As humans, we are so attached to owning things that there is hardly a spot left on the plan that isn't owned by an individual, an organisation, or a government. I would like to see (even small) spaces that aren't owned by anyone; spaces that could be left in their natural (not concrete) state, that are free from individual, corporate, or state interference. As far as I am aware, it does not seem currently possible that nobody owns land. So, if you would like to contribute a piece of space, no matter how small or big, you will be doing more for the planet than you know. Please get in touch with me. I would love to work with you on a thoroughly unique project.

Centre for dialogue

I know we said no centres but what I am talking about is building a self-sustaining centre, where people from all walks of life can come to share dialogue with each other, whether they are religious, atheists, criminals,

or warmongers. You see, it is only through engaging everyone that we will be able to progress as a species. If you wish to contribute the sharing of a piece of land, time, building materials, or wish to offer any other kind of help, then please get in touch with me.

Money!

Although I would like to see an end to accumulation of money as our primary goal in life, I am painfully aware that currently, things cost money. I am dedicating my life to this project, to help humans gain insight into themselves and their actions, so if you would like to contribute any money, then please go to the website, or better still give me a call, and we can have a chat! Unfortunately, the natural mind project is not a “registered charity” so you won't be able to claim tax relief on it.

The reason it is not registered with the governments of the land is because of one reason. When I was going through the forms necessary to start a charity. I noticed something interesting. It seems (in the uk at least) that amongst reasons for becoming a charity, such as “humanitarian organisation,” anyone who is actively promoting the armed forces, a religion, or belief in a supreme being, can start one! As I don't want to be associated with religions or the armed forces, I decided to give it a miss. If there are “tax” issues, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Maybe you could give me some advice?

And that's it folks! The beginning of something new, with compassion for all at its heart (oh, sorry I forgot, no centre). I welcome you all to join me on my journey. Remember, even if you choose not to get involved, we are all still involved in relationship – every one of us. From the mouse in the field, to the owl in the tree, to the logging company that cuts down the trees, and pays taxes to a government which spends them on war.

I look forward to meeting you soon.

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Ps. If you would like to help with the translation of this book into your own language please contact me.

