

VOLUME II
FASHION TO NEED

THE NATURAL MIND

WAKING UP

ALAN MACMILLAN ORR

The Natural Mind – Waking Up
Volume II

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F to N
Fashion to Need

Alan Macmillan Orr

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

Volume II

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 two, part of a three volume A to Z personal journey through 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 to 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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F

F a s h i o n

The latest and most admired style in clothes and cosmetics and
behaviour

•

Consumer goods (especially clothing) in the current mode

What's the fashion this year? Monk or punk?



Fashion. The most up to date, the most current, the most admired. If someone says it's fashionable, and you're wearing it, you're in the in-crowd. When we're young we plead with our parents to buy us the most fashionable trainers, jeans, t-shirts, and music. These are must haves if a teenager is to earn the respect of his peers. The majority are wearing it, listening to it, or doing it.

If skateboarding is "in," we have to have one, and the skateboarding clothes to go with the image, of course. If short blonde hair is in, we've got to have our hair cut that way. If red is this years colour; if jazz is this years music; thai is this years food; zen buddhism is this years religion; or organic is this years food choice, we've got to have it.

Whatever we do revolves around fashion, and if you're not following it, people deride you for your choices; they don't look up to you, and they certainly don't respect you. Not convinced? Let's explore this together.

Imagine the prime minister of your country coming out to address the nation in an old green sweater, cords, and a pair of comfy country shoes! What would you think of this man as he told you he was sending the troops into war? Would you respect this man's decision? Would he inspire you with confidence? Would you think the man was capable of doing a good job?

What about a monk or a priest? What if he walked around in a pair of surf style shorts, casual t-shirt, and sunglasses? Would you think he possessed wisdom? Would you listen to him? Would you think he had real knowledge? Would you think he could advise you in your time of need? Would you respect him?

Now imagine your teacher at school. What if he had come to work dressed in punk gear – all chains and rips, with a pierced nose and ears? Would you listen to him? Would you take in what he was saying? Would he have the voice of authority? Imagine your parents, what if they dressed in the latest teen fashion? What would you think of them? Would you listen to your parents? Would you respect your parents?

The answer to all the above questions surely must be a resounding no. Although if you can see past the clothes, and listen to the man himself, then you are on the right path.

But I think most of us would have to agree that clothes are highly important to us in society, not just because they cover our modesty, or because they are of the latest style, but because fashion is projecting who we want the world to believe we are.

That is why the prime minister wears a dark suit to project his seriousness. There is nothing flamboyant in his fashion; he wants you to listen to his voice. The priest or monk wears plain simple clothes, of specific colours depending on his religion, to convey the impression that he is above material things, and concerned only with spiritual matters. The same goes for teachers and parents. They must convey an image that is expected of them. Although each one of us believes he or she is making their own choice when it comes to fashion. That choice has already been made for us. Let me explain.

As I write this book today, I am wearing a pair of fashionable jeans (or so I have been told) a black t-shirt and a surf-style hooded sweatshirt. Is that what you imagined I'd be wearing? Should someone who is writing a book like this be wearing such clothes, or should I be wearing something all together more serious! What would I wear? A flowing robe, plain of colour, devoid of style and cut? Or does it really matter what I am

wearing? Some people say they have no interest in fashion, but the clothes they wear do conform to some idea.

In my mind, a university lecturer may wear a check shirt, a misjudged tie, a pair of ill-fitting cords, comfortable shoes, and a jacket with patches on the elbows. His hair would be marginally unkempt and he would probably have glasses (deep thinkers always wear glasses). That is my idea of how he would look. Am I close? I don't know, but if you think across different members of society, you will always see notice choice of clothing conforms to the position they have (or believe they have) in the community.

Imagine once again, the prime minister and the cabinet, sitting around the table in board shorts and hawaiian shirts, maybe with bleached blonde hair styled in the coolest fashion! It's unthinkable, isn't it? In fact, you would never have voted them into power if they had been dressed like that, because that style of dress does not convey seriousness. But all of it is still fashion.

Likewise, the type of music, the choice of food, the types of theatre, television programs, and books that the prime minister would read would also conform to this fashion. The government are in a "serious" (*concerned with work or important matters rather than play or trivialities*) business, so their choices regarding the above must reflect that. So out goes drum and bass on the mobile mp3, and in comes beethoven on the cd. Out goes hamburgers and chips, and in comes filet mignon with a brandy sauce.

Whatever the job we do, however much money we earn, whatever our status in the community; we conform to fashion. We do these things not for ourselves, or even consciously really, but to project what our status is to others. It lets people know who we are before they even talk to us. Even our manner and our demeanour is tailored. The clothes you wear, the furniture you buy, the music you listen to, all must fit with how you wish to project yourself in accordance with how you wish to be received by other people.

You may wholeheartedly disagree with me on this, but think about it for a moment. Why do you make the choices you make? Is it really just for yourself or could you have been influenced by society?

In victorian times in england, gents (*wealthy landowners*) would wear top hats, and workers would wear flat caps. Why? Because it neatly divided the classes (*people having the same social or economic status*). In courts of law barristers and judges wear robes and wigs because it

intimidates; it makes them seem of higher importance, and that they are “serious” people.

Projection. That is all this is. The clothes we wear, the music we listen to; it doesn't really make us more serious, or more cool, or more anti-establishment, or more spiritual. That is, and always will be, an illusion, although one accepted by most members of the human race around the world.

We need to break down these illusions; we need to understand that wearing purple robes does not mean we are more serious, more in touch with nature, or full of wisdom. The person underneath the clothes may be a serious person who thinks about serious matters concerning the world, and he may well be more in touch with nature, and he indeed may well have some wisdom to share with us all, but the robes mean nothing. The clothes he wears are only him trying to assert his position as a serious person, so we easily seek him out in a crowd.

Strip the politician, strip the soldier.

Strip the monk, strip the president.

Strip the skateboarder, strip the model.

Strip the anarchist, strip the skinhead.

Under these clothes, you and I are all the same – human

It is only our minds that are different.

The choice of clothes we wear are, in fact, meaningless; they merely allow other people in society to identify with us. A punk will seek out another punk; a monk will seek out another monk, because they can identify with each other. Through the clothes they wear, the places they go, the things they do, the things they talk about, they become almost homogeneous. But it is all fashion. If the monk decides one day to become a punk, he must take on not only the clothes but the attitudes, choice of music, and personality that is expected of a punk. He must conform to the idea.

So, if everything is fashion how do we transcend it? Do we have to, or are we all happy to be pigeon-holed into our little boxes? You may like what your clothes say about you. You may like what your choice of music or religion says about you. You may not want to change, and anyway, if you did change, what would you change into!

If you were a suit wearing politician and you chose to wear bright casual clothes, you would merely be projecting another image. If you've ever seen our leaders on tv when they want to be shown in a relaxed state you'll know what I mean. Their public relations people tell them to take

their jacket and tie off and roll up their sleeves! It really is all nonsense. It doesn't mean anything! It doesn't mean that now they are less serious, or more relaxed, just that they want to show you that they have "another side," a more relaxed side, that they are in fact human, but it is just an illusion.

It is amazing that clothes have this ability isn't it? To make statements about you, without you even having to speak.

You can see a man and a woman with dreadlocks coming down the road, dressed in hemp clothing and you instantly know they are "in touch with the earth, man," may smoke marijuana, will talk about saving the trees and how bad capitalism is. How do you know so much about these people? You have never met them before; you know nothing of their genetic history, their family history, or indeed anything of their minds, and what they do for a job. But I bet you could take a random guess and come up with something pretty close to the truth!

That's amazing, isn't it? You must be some kind of mind reader! But of course, you're not. You have a mental stereotype (*a conventional or formulaic conception or image*) which applies to them based on education, experience, media, and memory; and the dreadlocked pair have helped you come to that conclusion by projecting exactly that image to you. You see, people want to be stereotyped in this way and classified. It makes them feel good. But of course you don't need to have dreadlocks, be a hippie, smoke marijuana, or indeed remain unwashed for long periods to care about the environment.

An anarchist doesn't want to dress anonymously, neither does a monk; why would they bother being an anarchist or a monk if no one knew they were? We *want* people to know what kind of people we are, where we stand in the world, socially and politically; we don't want to just blend into the crowd. We want to stand out (even if we pretend we just want to fit in).

I want people to know who "I" am. It makes me feel powerful. I want you to know that by covering myself with tattoos, piercings, and scruffy clothes that I don't fit in with your society, but of course you do; you are part of society, which is just me and you. You are still conforming with the other people who have tattoos and piercings and scruffy clothes, so you can all go around together saying, "yeah, we don't wanna be a part of your society, man." But of course, the tattooed man could just as quickly swap his scruffy anti society image for that of a city business type. A quick haircut, an expensive tailored suit and shoes, and hey presto! Instant transformation. Now he can complain about the scruffy,

tattooed, pierced anti-social hooligans who roam the streets. It's as easy as that!

Clothes project who you want others to believe you are. It is not the real you, not the authentic self, but a self that wants to conform to someone else's idea and you want to fit in with that idea. The great thing about fashion is that you can swap fashions on a whim. Today I am wearing a pair of jeans and a hooded sweatshirt. Tomorrow I could be wearing monk's robes.

Would you take me more seriously if I were wearing the robes? Please think about this carefully.

We are conditioned to believe that people wearing certain clothes are of a certain type (they may well be, but only because they have packaged themselves in this way). What type do you want to be? How do you want to fit in? Are you a monk, or punk, or somewhere in between?

When we choose clothes, music, food, cinema, tv programs, we may be thinking we like it, but if we liked something that didn't conform with our fashion stereotype would we feel comfortable doing it, and telling our peer group about it?

Would the prime minister of the country let on that he liked watching daytime soaps on tv and eating pie and chips when he is expected to like hi-brow "serious" programs, and is expected to have acquired a taste for fine french food? What if the teen skateboarder let on to his friends that he didn't like grungy skateboarder music but actually liked bach and beethoven, going to the opera, and having discussions on philosophy after school! It just wouldn't happen would it? Because once you have accepted the stereotype you must conform to all aspects of it.

Fashion is not just about clothes, it's a whole package

I am not trying to tell you you shouldn't buy new clothes or music – it's nice to have these things; but merely to notice yourself in action; to notice your thinking regarding choices you make, and ask yourself, "am I making this choice because I as an individual want to make it, or am I conforming to the image I wish to project to others?"

Of course, our choices are influenced by our peer groups, that is inevitable, as man is a social animal. We want to be in the "in-group," not the "out-group;" so if our friends all like rap, why would we choose jazz? We want our friends to accept us so we want to make choices in line with the group.

But although man is a social animal, he is also able to exist alone, and that is the challenge that faces us now, whether we are prepared to stand up as individuals, whether we are prepared to forge a path on our own without the packaging. Whether we are prepared to give up conforming to an idea, and stop projecting false selves onto other people.

To care for the environment without having to make a fashion statement. To contemplate the self and humanity without wearing robes. To work and to play, without concerning ourselves about people judging us because of our choice of clothes or music. To *stop* concerning ourselves in projecting an image so people think we are intelligent, rich, or enlightened. To live an authentic life where the only thing you are projecting is the real you. The real human being, free of the shackles of fashion and conformity.

This may possibly be one of the hardest things to do in life, but the key to unlocking the real you is through understanding of yourself. To look deep inside and find someone who doesn't want to offer an image he thinks the world wants to see, who is happy in their own skin, whatever the clothes. It is only when the clothes become who you are that you lose sight of the real you.

Next time you get dressed, put on a piece of music, choose a tv program, or pick up a book, just ask yourself, "is this really me, or is it just someone I want the rest of the world to see?"

F a s t F o o d

Inexpensive food (hamburgers or chicken or milkshakes) prepared
and served quickly

Many of you will wonder what I will be dealing with in “fast food,” since I have already dealt with the subject of the one-minute meal in the “takeaways” topic, but fast food is more than just fatty hamburgers, chicken drumsticks, and sickly soft drinks; fast food is anything you don’t grow yourself.

It will shock most of you to think that the local seasonal organic beans you have to soak overnight, before you cook and season before eating, are fast food, but they are. Anything you buy off the shelf is fast food. It doesn’t matter whether it is organic or local. The time taken to grow it from seed, nurture it, and harvest it, versus the time it took you to take it off the shelf and pay for it at the counter, makes it most definitely, fast food! So with that out of the way let us begin our discussion.

It is only in the last hundred years or so that food has been readily available, even in industrialised nations. It has been in limited supply during that time too – due to two world wars – but already we are reliant on it being constantly available. We wouldn't know what to do if the food was not on the shelves of our local grocer or supermarket. We are dependent on someone else providing our food, and as if by magic, there is always a steady supply of seasonal and unseasonal vegetables, meat and fruit, appearing colourful and fresh at a reasonable price.

“That's what I call progress,” I hear you cry. “Food for all! No more hunger.” And for the more well off that seems to be true; nothing but the finest organic vegetables and beef for them, though I'm afraid it's chips and processed meat pies for the less well off, as fresh food is always more expensive than processed factory food.

Come on, you should know that. It's only the better off who can afford to eat well. If you're on a low income you'll be surviving on fried potatoes and other cheap food high in fat to sustain you. Your health will suffer, but hey, if only you were more intelligent and better qualified you could get a better job, and then you could eat organic. Oh, and don't even think of becoming a vegetarian on compassionate or health grounds; you just can't afford it. You *will* be able to afford all the chocolate, crisps, and soft drinks though. They're priced to sell at anyone's budget.

Where does all this food come from?

Why do you need to know where your food comes from? All you need to know is that it's here now, at price you can afford, so you should buy it, even if you don't need it. You are a consumer, so consume, don't ask silly questions that don't concern you. I'm sure most of you don't care anyway. As long as they have broccoli on the shelf, the mushrooms you like, or the piece of steak you want, you'll be happy.

You have been lucky to grow up in a country that is able to supply surplus agriculture (a lot of which goes to waste), and there will always be enough food for you to eat. Remember, the economy relies on you being well fed. No food equals no work. They'll make sure there's plenty to eat. Oh, for anyone reading this in a country where half your population is starving to death, this section doesn't apply to you; please see sections on government, oh and weapons, oh, and corruption, amongst others...

I was born in Scotland, in 1969, and grew up in southern England. I have never been short of anything in my life. The shelves in my local stores have always been full. My mother has never complained that the shelves were empty again. We have never wanted for any types of food.

Everything has always been available for as long as I can remember. All vegetables, all meats, all dairy, all packaged, all dried goods, and all sweets. Perfect. We haven't suffered a day's shortage of our most favourite items. But let's imagine we did. Let's all imagine that one day the food stopped coming. One day the shelves became empty permanently. What would you do? "Where did all the food go?"

Suddenly the question "where does all this food come from?" doesn't seem so stupid after all. Food, as those people who have lived through war or experienced any kind of dictatorship know, is also a weapon. Withholding food to gain the subservience of the population is an effective method of control. Think about it. I am not telling you this to scare you. On the contrary, I am trying to empower you as individuals. Whoever controls the food controls the people. Remember that.



Large scale farming operations are not a new concept. Man first domesticated animals several thousand years ago, and began to settle in one place and farm the land; agriculture was born. Over the centuries, the ability to feed more than just a single family proved a much more efficient method than everyone trying to grow their own food. It freed man to become a specialist. It allowed cities to be built, new trades to start; it allowed people time to think, to invent, and create without the threat of starvation over them at all times. Although it has not been an easy road.

There have been many years of failed crops and the resulting deaths from hunger, but we are now in an envious position in the west (and many other developed countries) of having a real surplus of food. We now grow too much for our needs.

Unfortunately, it has led us becoming complacent. Who now worries they won't get enough to eat tonight? Even the unemployed receive money from the government, which allows them to buy enough food; so I would like to talk about something which I believe to be vitally important and should be to you. I would like to talk about growing your own vegetables.

“What? Grow my own vegetables! I don’t have time for that, I’m much too busy, and I live in an apartment block.”

Hopefully, we all agree that eating vegetables is pretty good for us. They contain essential nutrients brain and body need for healthy operation; the problem is, they are also quite expensive – even in supermarkets – compared to filling, carbohydrate based food, or anything which comes pre-processed and pre-packaged. It always seems that the more nutritious something is for you, the more expensive it is.

That’s because when things are pure, you can’t add any cheap filler to them, which is precisely what large food manufacturers do. They use all sorts of weird and wonderful ingredients that (a) you’ve never heard of and (b) you don’t really want to have heard of! In the purest forms, unmodified, and untreated with chemicals, our fruit and vegetables are expensive to buy.

So what reason is there for you to buy them when you can get sweeter, more filling food for half the price? It may not be obvious to you if you have grown up on a diet of fish fingers, frozen burgers, potato croquettes, tinned veg, crisps, and cola drinks, but our system wasn’t designed for the stuff we throw down our throats! Does that surprise you?

Whether god created us, or we evolved from the apes, our highly advanced digestive systems weren’t expecting the sort of artificial junk we call food now. Nature provides well, and has done for every other species for the past four billion years. Each species lives happily on their species specific diet of either meat, fish, insects, plants, or grass, and doesn’t waver from it.

You wouldn’t see a cow thinking, “hmm, maybe I’ll have some meat tonight, or maybe some nice insects.” Why? Because the cow eats what is beneficial for the system. The human being on the other hand is a veritable jack of all trades when it comes to eating and drinking (all credit to our systems for coping with the regular abuse from all the unnatural substances we consume).

If evolution is to be believed, we came from the apes and ate a nut and fruit diet, which has evolved into a burger, chips, and cola diet over the past few million years. Progress? I don’t think so.

Without going too far off the track, what do you think large scale food manufacturing businesses are interested in? Are they interested in making sure no one goes hungry? No, that’ll be the government’s job. Are they interested in providing us with healthy food which has not been modified at the cellular level, or sprayed with harmful pesticides? No, of course not. Their job is to make money. Companies that produce food,

whether it be tomatoes, or chocolate biscuits are in business, and they have to make a profit to survive. Why else would they be in business? They are no different to a company that wants to sell us a new tv, dvd player, or mobile phone!

Don't tell me you're too busy to care where your food comes from...

Food is the biggest consumer business of them all! Everyone's a potential customer. You may already have a mobile phone or not want to buy a new tv, but you have to eat every day or you'll die. That may sound a bit extreme, but it's not. At best you'd last about two or three weeks with no food, and then your body would start to eat itself in order to survive. First the fat reserves, then the muscle. Then when there's nothing left to burn, ultimately, death. If that isn't a captive market, I don't know what is!

The people starving in africa (and other regions where food is scarce), where crops fail regularly, and the economy is mismanaged by corrupt officials, will know this feeling all too well. But anyway, let's not worry about them. We're all right. We've got plenty. All the big agribusinesses make sure there's always enough food to go around (at a price).

Food isn't free of course. It's part of the economy. The farms have large costs they need to recoup. Chemicals. Labour. Water. You know, the usual costs associated with running a business. Except this is not just any business, is it? This is our lives we're talking about here. Shut down the farms, and the country withers away – very quickly.

Are you still not interested?

Years ago, there used to be such things as communities, where people did things for each other and for the benefit of others. But this was before my time, and probably before yours. This was before the individual was advised by his government leadership to stick his finger up at every one else, and say "I'm in it for me." People were encouraged to only think about themselves, so what did they do? Like all sheep, exactly what they were told. Everything now had a price. No one did anything unless he could turn a quick profit on it.

People used to have vegetable and fruit gardens. My parents even had one for a short time in the seventies, but quickly grassed over it, because it became too much work to keep turning over the soil, and anyway, it was much easier to go down to the supermarket and buy beautiful looking produce, and anyway, my dad was too busy trying to make money to worry about a couple of carrots, and the birds usually got to the raspberries before we did...

In the past, everybody who had any space outdoors used to grow at least some vegetables. Whether for economic, social, or historic, reasons, or grown merely as a hobby, it makes no difference; the fact is, that man had control of his food. It may not have been everything he needed, but the fact he took the seed, planted it, watered it, watched it germinate, nurtured it as it grew, and finally harvested it, direct to his table, says more about the connection of man to the earth than any other human activity.

Sharing the garden food amongst the community (i.e. neighbours) may seem alien to us now, but back when people had garden plots, they were happy to exchange some of one for type for some of another. Listen:

“What are you growing there, fred?”

“Cabbages & cauliflowers.”

“Do you need any broccoli? I’ve got plenty this year...”

“Yeah that’d be great; I’ll give you some cauliflowers and some cabbage in exchange.”

“Great!”

I can’t see that same conversation striking up in my local english commuter town where the supermarket is king, can you? The idea of growing your own food and sharing it (or even selling it) seems a rather quaint idea in the era of agribusiness where a cabbage patch less than a mile long isn’t worth planting.

Food is vital to the survival of our species, and every other species on earth, and it is about time we started waking up to the fact that the very thing that keeps us alive is now “voluntarily” out of our control and in the hands of the same people who sell us mobile phones. Large businesses.

Do you think these large businesses put the same kind of love and energy into the growing of their fruit and vegetables that fred put into growing his cabbages? Large food business is a production line, and there is no love on a production line. The connection that man had to the earth, through the cultivation of crops has long since vanished, replaced by profit margins and balance sheets.

Fruit and vegetables – whatever varieties you have in your particular country or region – apart from carbohydrates, are the most essential part of our diet. We can all do without meat, eggs, and dairy products and live healthily. I do! But without fruit and vegetables, I wouldn't get the right amount of nutrients necessary each day to sustain a healthy system.

Are you a sheep?

Are you happy to allow someone else to have complete control over your food? Will you let business rule the food supply? Will you take back your role as a creator, and grow life sustaining food? Will you recreate the bond between man and earth by planting and storing seed (which is necessary for life), or will you just carry on the way you are?

You eat healthily. You eat what they tell you you're supposed to eat for a healthy lifestyle. You buy organic, you do your bit, and after all you're a bit busy, but well, it could be a good talking point that "guess what, I am growing my own organic fruit and vegetables...." "Wow!" They will all say!

Or you could just not care, which is what most people will do, because after all, why should you bother! You're too busy, and anyway it's a good thing having big business in control of the food, because it's a lot cheaper. And anyway you're too tired after work...Wasn't life supposed to be getting easier? Why make it harder? And now, the rest of you can join in!

"I live in an apartment, how can I grow my own fruit and vegetables?"

"I can't see any point in doing this."

"What's in it for me?"

"Why spend all season growing something to get one meal out of it?"

"I could think of better ways to spend my days than digging the garden!"

"I am a one parent family on income support, what do you expect me to do, I have a hard enough life as it is!"

I don't know, but I'm sure there are lots of you thinking, "what is he going on about? Why is this so important?" Because, food is the key to the universe. Food is the energy that flows through your veins that developed the brain that took man to the stars. With something that powerful, would you give control of it to a board of directors?

This topic is of the utmost importance to the world. Let's show some respect to the work our ancestors put in over the last ten thousand years

that has enabled us to have food on demand, and remember that whilst its production is in the hands of large businesses, and not individuals or communities supporting local communities, it can always be taken away again. Why would you let that happen?

Not only that, it's fun and rewarding to watch a seed grow, then savour its taste as you harvest it and eat it for dinner! Wow! You'll be involved in a process called life. What more could you ask for? Could you really say you have that involvement when you casually buy the strawberries packed in a punnet all neatly wrapped in plastic?

I am not so naive to think you will all stop purchasing all your products from anywhere else and attempt your own mini-farms in the suburbs. All I am doing is planting the seed...

F e a r

An emotion experienced in anticipation of some specific pain or danger (usually accompanied by a desire to flee or fight)

•

An anxious feeling

•

A profound emotion inspired by a deity

What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of something bad happening to you; are you afraid that someone might kill you or your family? It seems that this is the case now. We double bolt our doors, we lock our windows, we lock our cars, we are afraid walking down a dark street in case we are attacked, we have a police force and an army to make us feel less afraid. We even buy lethal weapons to protect us, but nothing seems to allay our fears.

We are all afraid sometimes, and sometimes the fear is real, related to a specific danger we can physically see (such as a man pointing a gun at my head); but generally, the fear is just an anxious feeling, with no place in reality.

We are afraid of something happening, that although we cannot yet see, triggers our ancient fear response system, fight or flight, which

prepares the body to defend itself, or run away. So fear is a natural response, generated by the brain to protect us, and it has served us well.

In the past, if we didn't have this fear, we would have been eaten by wild beasts looking for their next meal, so not having this auto-response would have signalled the end for homo sapiens. A being with no fear response cannot judge danger and becomes a victim, simple as that. So in the knowledge that this is normal we can progress with our enquiries further.

Throughout history, humans have fought one another for territory, females, and food, something we share with other species; so this response has kept our family groups safe from harm. This is the natural world at work. This is pure survival of the species. Unfortunately, the fear response was only supposed to be generated in the moment – the moment we were actually being attacked – not in response to some unknown attack that may, or may not occur in the future; that is a wholly modern problem.

We are afraid of everybody we don't know. If we pass someone on the street who looks a certain way, or who acts in a certain fashion, we are instantly afraid. We rush to our destination and lock the door behind us. Only then do we feel safe. So what is this feeling? If the person did not try to attack us or cause us harm why were we afraid of him? What is this feeling of relief we get when we get home and bolt ourselves in? What causes us to feel fear when we pass one man and not another? Well, I would like to talk to you about your brain!

Thanks to our unique human brain, we can construct our world view “on the fly,” and we use all tools at our disposal including experience, memory, and imagination. To give you a clearer example of what I mean, I recently asked my girlfriend from the czech republic about fear.

“If you were walking down a dimly lit street at night and you saw two black men approaching you, would you be afraid?”

“Why would I be afraid of a black man?” she answered.

“Would you not think they may try to attack you, rob you, or rape you?”

“No, of course not.”

“Well is there someone you would be afraid of?”

“Oh yes, if I saw two gipsy men walking towards me, I'd be petrified, I'd definitely turn and walk quickly the other way.”

“Why?”

“Because you can't trust them, they'll steal from you any chance they can.”

What do you think of this observation? For someone in london, it may be the opposite; but what I would like to explore with you, is that people are making automatic – though not necessarily instinctive – judgements about a human being from a distance. How do we do this?

Well, we hear on the television that a black man killed someone, or we hear reported that a black man was involved in some crime or other. We then hear our parents or friends opinions on black people, and we make an automatic association with that memory when we next encounter a black man, whether or not we have any experience of being attacked by someone who looks like that!

It makes no difference if it is a black man, indian, arab, white man, chinese man, or someone who just wears clothing that resembles a man you saw on tv being sought by the police for a violent rape. The mind takes the image, which it then stores, takes the description of the threat through language, and both are combined in the fear database which is then tested against everyone you encounter in your daily life to see if it fits, just like a police mug-shot.

“The perpetrator has black skin, shifty eyes, is heavily built, wearing a grey tracksuit, be on the look out for anyone who resembles this description, but do not approach him, he is highly dangerous,” reports the police spokesman on the radio.

Then the good old imagination kicks in when you see someone who has some slight resemblance to the man wanted: “Oh my god, that man looks like the man they’re looking for on the tv. What if he attacks me?” The stereotype is born. Even if the man you just passed was not a violent mugger, rapist, or a murderer, he suddenly becomes one – or at least has the potential to become one, when tested against the image in your fear database.

“Yes, but so many black men do attack women...”

“Muslims (because they may look the same as a terrorist you saw a photo of) are fanatics, look at the number of people they have blown up in the world...”

And yes, some black people can be violent, some muslims may blow themselves up, some men wearing tracksuits do steal from people, but some businessmen in suits kill people, some policemen are violent, some loving husbands and fathers are serial killers and rapists, but so many aren’t, and don’t!

How many black robbers are there in the world? How many white serial killers, chinese rapists, or arab suicide bombers? The fact remains that whoever you believe and whatever you see on television, not everyone who you think looks like they may kill you is actually going to do it! You may think you know, but you have no idea what is going on in someone else's mind. Until they do something in the moment.

*“but what if?”
“you never know”
“you have to be on your guard”*

We are so worried that something may happen to us that we prepare for the event in case it ever does, which, if you like statistics, will probably never happen. Living your life predicting that something bad is going to happen to you or your family is like living life trapped in an invisible prison, one of fear of the unknown.

“But a gypsy killed my family, isn't that proof enough to be scared of gypsies?”

When we all start thinking like this, we have condemned everyone on the planet.

Let's talk about the unknown for a moment shall we? What is the unknown? Well according to the dictionary, it is simply “*not known before,*” and although you may feel uncomfortable or apprehensive in a foreign country or area, or may stand out because of your dress, skin colour, or the language you speak, not everyone is going to kill you; the same goes for your own area or country. And even if they did, what are you actually afraid of? Death, which is final, or the moment when someone attacks you? Aren't you actually just imagining how afraid you *will* feel, even though the event has not yet happened and may never happen?

It is sad that we have developed such generalised anxiety in relation to the unknown. It is stopping us from transcending fear, and seeing it for what it is; an automatic emotional response designed to protect us from the jaws of wild beasts. It may be that the world has become more violent and we must protect ourselves, but humans have always been violent towards each other. There is nothing in our development that has suggested otherwise, but that is something that needs to be dealt with by the violent individuals, they have to know their minds, and learn compassion for other human beings. That is not our problem.

You and I have a short time available to live a fulfilling life on this planet, and fear holds us back. It limits our minds, it does not allow us to show compassion for everyone. It is the judge and the censor, protecting us from an imagined violent death.

Watch the zebras and antelopes grazing on the savannah on the great plains of africa. Do they show fear even though there is a lion sitting only a hundred metres from them? No. They carry on with life. They are aware of the lion, and do not willingly put their heads in its mouth, but they have work to do. They have to eat, and eat they do. It is only when the lion is hungry, and starts stalking them, that they take notice and make a run for it.

In the same manner, humans automatically defend themselves if their life is to continue. So if someone attacks you, that is the moment when showing fear will be the last thing on your mind. It is our nature to want to survive, and you will do anything you can to survive, just like the zebras do when the lion attacks. Whether by using language to calm the situation, using the flight mechanism or in the case where it is impossible to do either, fighting off your attacker hopefully with the help of compassionate strangers (although I am not so naive as to think that adopting a non-violent stance, whilst someone is holding a knife to your throat, intent on killing you, is the way forward either.)

Violence is deeply entrenched in our brains, as is fear, and it is our responsibility as humans to understand both of them, and in doing so, transcend them.

*I will embrace the unknown
I am not afraid of you
You may hurt me, you may kill me
but in my mind I am free
I will not let fear imprison my mind*

We are all afraid of different things. Some people are afraid of flying, some afraid of heights, some of being alone, some of the dark, but I think the one thing that unites us all in fear, is the fear of death. When someone talks about being afraid of flying it is not the flying that causes the increased heartbeat and sweaty palms, but a fear of crashing and ultimately dying.

These may be extreme examples, but fear is universal, it affects everything we do in life – the way we act, the way we plan. We are all so afraid! Of what? The unknown? The future?

You see, you cannot be afraid of the past, it is a technical impossibility. Why? Because you have already experienced it, so it is not unknown any more. All this silly fear thing is about is the fear of the future, of events that have not yet happened or may never happen, because... They are in the future! We must see through this together right now. If I am afraid of the future, how can I live life peacefully today?

“I am afraid that my marriage might fail. I imagine scenes of anguish, I imagine about where I would live, what would happen to the children, what would I do, who would want me if I am divorced with three children...”

Except it hasn't happened! Thanks to your imagination (which is a wonderful thing if used to imagine positive and happy things), you are now worked up about an event that not only hasn't happened, but may never happen. Bring your mind back to NOW. The present. This moment. You have it within your power to attempt to save your marriage, and if you can't, well you will have to deal with that when the moment arises.

“I am afraid I will not pass my exam, and then I will not get a good job, I imagine my parents being angry with me, my teachers being disappointed with me, and my friends laughing at me because they passed and I didn't. I see myself working as a labourer for the rest of my life, I imagine myself living in a tiny flat, not the nice house I thought I would live in...”

Except it hasn't happened. You still have a chance to study to get good marks to get the good job, and if you don't, it's not the end of the world, but you will deal with that when the moment arises.

Do you see? It is not the actual event we fear. It is not the lion charging at us less than fifty metres away we fear, it is the thought that one day a lion may come, and may attack us and may kill us, and oh, how terrible that would be. Can you see now? Fear of the unknown is just a misuse of the imagination. Do not fear the unknown, being afraid of it will not help you right now!

I am amazed by how many clairvoyants there are out there. You can all see such terrible things happening in your future! It's amazing that the world is still such a wonderful place with all of you imagining such terrible things. If you wish to look into the future and imagine, try imagining a peaceful life for yourself and all of your family and friends and a life filled with fun, laughter, and love. That is the best you could ever imagine.

I want to spend a little time going back to when we were young, before we became adults full of fear. Do you remember being scared as a child? I do, but not in the same way I am now. I was not afraid of people because of their skin colour, or worried about dying in a plane crash. Life was too much of an adventure to be scared, and anyway, I had my parents to reassure me that everything was going to be all right.

I remember being scared of the dark, as every child presumably is at some point, but looking back, I can see that the dark was just the unknown. You couldn't see anything that was familiar, so the imagination starts conjuring up crazy thoughts, which inevitably leaves you feeling so scared that you have to run into your mum and dad's room! I always remember being lost (for moments only) in a supermarket where I couldn't see my mum, and I instantly felt scared. Where was she, had she left me? But fear of abandonment is quite natural for a child; they need the protection of their parents until they are grown up enough to look after themselves.

What I want to understand with you here, is where the fear developed from. We are born with a hard wired fight or flight mechanism designed to stop us being killed, but is it possible we are also born with a fear of the unknown?

As humans, we develop later than most animals and we need protecting, but a baby cannot be scared of being attacked or killed, or have a fear of flying because it has no concept of it in his brain. As he grows up, he sees a boy punch another boy, he hears anger, he listens to his father talk about people, he sees news on the tv, he listens to his teachers; and when adults start talking children *should* start to be afraid, because they are bringing all their social conditioning, experience, education, prejudices, and general opinions to the children and presenting them as fact!

They may not even know they are doing it, but little by little the information trickles into the child's brain, and with no other information available to compare it with, it is quietly stored. Parents also like to scare children, even if it's only for fun. They tell them scary stories, and tell them something bad will happen to them if they don't say their prayers.

They insist it's good for children to be scared sometimes, because then they will realise that the world is a big scary dangerous place. Well, it is for the adults, because they've helped make it like that, and they think they are doing a worthwhile thing by preparing the children for adulthood. But all that is happening is a new generation growing up in

fear, thanks to adults driving home the “watch out! Be alert! Be on guard!” messages to their children.

There are many people in the world whose thinking causes them to act in ways that cause others to suffer; and people do commit murder, they do rape, and they do steal, but the real fear lies within the parent; and because they are afraid, they automatically pass this on to their children. I am afraid of X therefore you should be afraid of X.

A child doesn't know any different, it looks to the parent for love, protection, values, opinions; and as they respect their parents, will use their view above anyone else's – even their own – whilst they are developing. Adults make children fear the world, and in turn those children become adults who fear, thereby creating an everlasting cycle.

Do you think this is how the most advanced species on the planet should be behaving? Is this “just a phase” we are going through, that we will “grow out of,” or do you think we will continue to become more afraid? Do you think our cavemen ancestors were afraid? I would think most definitely! But of wild beasts, not of each other.

You see, in the past, we lived in small family, or kinship (*a close connection marked by community of interests or similarity in nature or character*) groups. We knew everyone. They were our friends and family and we looked after each other (even if we fought from time to time), in much the same way that small villages exist throughout the world today; but things started to change as we became more organised, and food was no longer hunted and gathered.

Agriculture was born; and with the surplus of food created, people were able to specialise. We came together in larger groups, and we found we knew fewer and fewer people. Cities were built, and people came to the city to work. Family and kinship group ties were severed, and increasingly, people found themselves working in geographical areas they were unfamiliar with, working with people they didn't know.

Then families started migrating to these cities from other countries. People who looked different, ate differently, spoke differently, even smelled differently. And over time the links back to these groups who looked after each other, who worked and lived together in familiar terrain became severed completely.

People were now on their own, and that caused them distress. Men were now separated from their families by large distances in order to earn money to provide food, and other essentials. The more money we earned, the more possessions we could then afford to buy – from the “essential,” to the luxurious. After some time when we had built up an array of

possessions, and we suddenly realised that someone, anyone could come and take them all away from us. The possessions we had worked hard for!

Our emotions responded, by letting us feel the same fear we would if someone was trying to steal our food – in essence, a survival instinct. Except we didn't need these possessions to survive. Our brains were not advanced enough to tell the difference between real life and death situations and imagined ones, but gave us the emotional response all the same, and prepared us for fight or flight. For such a seemingly advanced species, it is interesting to note that we still fear everything around us.

“Lock the door, you never know who may come in and try to rob us”

“Make sure you keep you watch your wallet someone might steal it”

“Don't talk to any strangers”

“Avoid dark alleyways at night”

Security vs. Fear

Whilst writing this topic, I am volunteering at a place called holy island, a small island off the isle of arran in scotland, accessible only by boat. It is a mainly buddhist community, dedicated to peace on earth, and environmental sustainability. There are about fifteen volunteers, and there are courses in meditation going on throughout the year.

Do I feel afraid here? Would you feel afraid here? No, I feel no fear, and I'm sure you wouldn't either. Why? Because I know the people here, although strangers to me, mean me no harm. I know they all want peace and harmony in the world; there are no drugs, no alcohol, and no sexual tension between the sexes. I don't worry about locking my room, and neither do the other volunteers. There is an underlying trust that bonds everyone.

Compare this to the town or city you live in. Are you sure the people living there mean you no harm? You can never be sure of anyone's intentions, so obviously you would lock your door at night. It would be foolhardy of me to suggest in a large community to leave your doors unlocked to show you are not afraid, but can you not see what has happened?

We have gone from small, sharing communities where everyone helps, not only themselves, but their neighbours too, to a selfish “I want” society where we have become addicted to possessions. Whether that possession be a portable tv or a car, like small children, we shout “it's

mine, don't touch it!" We greedily hang on to our "stuff," not even caring that we can't take it with us when we die; we just have to have things. It makes us feel comfortable and secure, like a safety blanket, and that is why we must protect our possessions from others who want them...

It seems to me that we are more afraid of losing our possessions than we are of someone coming to attack us. We jealously guard what is ours. We secure our homes with huge locks, gates, and alarms constantly on the alert in case someone breaks in! Do you not think all this is getting a little ridiculous that we want possessions so badly that we have to lock them up to protect them! Are they really worth all the extra stress of caring for them? On the one hand you do have to have some security to stop someone just walking in and taking everything you have worked for, but you will start to notice that the more you have, the more afraid you will become of losing it.

I am not advising you to give up all your possessions, that would probably make you too anxious; but a man living simply, even in a city where he does not know anyone will have no fear, and if you don't believe me, just try it!

When you have no gold, no fancy cars, no electric gates, no fancy wide screen tv, no cash spilling out of your wallet, what do you have to be afraid of. What will you lose? "What if someone attacks me," I hear you say, but really, what are the chances of it actually happening? The more you fear an event the more afraid you will become.

I think we have lost the trust in others, the natural benefit of the doubt we give to strangers, and we now believe that everyone we meet is a potential assassin or robber. Don't you think it's time we re-evaluated our opinions of others and go into life each day with love in our hearts?

Where there is love there is no fear

Not everyone will have the chance to live on a beautiful remote island dedicated to peace and harmony, in fact the majority of us will have to live in major towns or cities and live amongst strangers. Yes, some may be violent, some may be killers, drug addicts, hooligans, or robbers, but if you live your life focussed on the positive in people and dedicate yourself to a life of peace (no matter what job you do), you will find fear flows out your very being.

By choosing this path, you will find that your life will take a different course. You will no longer want and need the same things you did before, thereby freeing yourself from the prison of fear that accompanies possessions. Stop and think about this carefully for a moment and ask yourself the following question: “What would I gain from living a more simple life?” And follow it by the second question: “What would I lose by living a more simple life?” If you weigh up the two and find you would be losing more than you gained, well you will just have to keep living the way you are, but be prepared to keep fear in your life. Fear of losing all your lovely possessions. All your shiny jewellery, your money, your car...

Hang on to it all with a death grip, because someone out there who also loves possessions wants to take it all away from you, so you will have to secure it more and more, and shut yourself away from civilisation. Just in case! It’s incredible, isn’t it? You are probably more afraid of being robbed in the street than you are of actually dying!

In closing, remember we are all here for such a short time, that fear is irrational; we could die tomorrow. Let’s concentrate on living and enjoying the time we have here on this wonderful planet instead of worrying about bad things happening to us all the time.

**You are a part of the most violent and powerful species on the planet.
What are you afraid of?**

F l y i n g

An instance of travelling by air

I don't know if you have ever flown in an aeroplane, but for me, it is one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life. I don't know whether it is the excitement of going somewhere new with a different culture, or language, or the trepidation of climbing on board two hundred tons of metal to be hurtled six miles into the sky, or a combination of both.

I have been on many holidays and business trips by land and sea, and none match up to the experience of flight. Maybe it is because of all the things we have been able to achieve as humans, flying free like the birds has not been one of them! The invention of the aeroplane has allowed us in some small way to experience the magic of flight.

Airports are strange places, filled with people from diverse nations, all thrown together because of one desire – to go somewhere else. From the moment you arrive, something feels different. Despite the hustle and

bustle of people dashing to get boarding passes, arguing with the check-in clerk over the weight of their bags, there is a calmness which doesn't exist outside the airport. Whatever people's differences, whether it be colour, religion, ideas, or jobs, they calmly stand in line to have their bags checked by security, and their passports checked by passport control.

You could be standing next to a dictator, a bank robber, a thief, or a drug addict, but you wouldn't know it. Outside the airport they are someone else, but here they just stand, silently waiting to get on the plane; resigned to the fact that in order to get to their destination they must not draw attention to themselves.

As I stand in line, I often look around me at people, wondering who they are in real life, what they think about, and how they behave? Are they married, rich, poor, powerful, or weak? Do they dominate their family? Are they nice to their friends? Are they happy or sad? But they never give it away. They quietly watch the boards giving them instruction: "Wait in lounge," "go to gate," "boarding," or "FINAL CALL." Then they gather their bags and move on to the next designated area, until finally boarding the aircraft.

The hand luggage is stowed, seat belts are fastened, shoes are loosened, books are opened, and mobiles turned off. As the doors close, a faint realisation comes over me that I am now disconnected from the world. I have no way to communicate with loved ones, no friends to laugh with, no one to argue with, just 300 strangers with only one thing in common, the need to go somewhere else.

Family crises, deals to be clinched, plots to be made, governments to be brought down. But in that aircraft, there is nothing but an uneasy togetherness.

Who knows what thoughts are in these people's minds, who knows what trouble they may cause at their destination, but as the plane taxis down the runway, and the safety demonstration tells us what to do in the "unlikely event of a landing on water," there is only one thought going through everyone's minds: "I hope I get there safely."

The wheels are aligned with the middle line, the engines start to roar, and two hundred tons of metal and highly combustible fuel hurtle towards the end of the runway. The plane gets faster and faster until ever so gently the nose starts to lift, and the ground disappears quickly behind you.

You hear a slight whirring noise as the gear is retracted and the flaps are adjusted. Upwards you go, until you go through the clouds, and no

matter what the weather is doing below, thunder or snow, you are suddenly bathed in sunlight (sorry, not if you are flying at night!).

Soon, the seatbelt signs are turned off and the plane starts to level off. The roar of the engines has died down, and all you hear is a constant, almost calming drone. You are here now. You and three hundred strangers doing what man was never intended to do – fly!

Look down, and, if you're lucky, you'll catch sight of the cities passing slowly underneath, or see a small dot on the ocean. You are six miles above the earth, totally reliant on man's ingenuity. You could either scream in panic, or just relax and enjoy a wonderful experience.

What passes underneath

In my travels across the globe by plane, I have often thought about the people below – who they are, what they do, what thoughts they have, and how happy, sad, or violent they are.

Thanks to the marvellous modern invention of satellite mapping, we can now switch to a channel on our personal entertainment console, and see a little icon of the plane superimposed on a map of countries you are passing over. Whilst we are enjoying our lunch and watching yet another hollywood blockbuster, people below are fighting, killing, or raping each other.

They may be starving, scheming, desiring, or lying, but here in our plane six miles above the earth, we are above all human emotion and action, distanced from suffering. We may be suffering ourselves, but for now it is almost as if we are suspended in time, if only for a few hours. When we touch down, reality starts again, but whilst the engines drone on powering us towards our destination, we might as well just sit back and relax.

Directly underneath us, someone may have just been shot, lying in a pool of blood, gasping their last breath on this earth; someone may be arguing with his wife over money; and another may be in the depths of despair over money owed; we may be over water, where a violent storm on the ocean is about to capsize a boat tossing all on-board into the dark ocean, but up here none of that matters. This is a new reality, one where time almost stands still, even though we are travelling at five hundred and fifty miles per hour.

Touch down

As we start to descend, a new feeling seems to engulf the people on board. They start to get edgy; they start to fidget, gathering their belongings and their thoughts. The sounds on the plane change, the hydraulics start to whirl into life, the engine pitch changes, the seatbelt signs come on, the entertainment system is turned off.

The plane starts to become more affected by the weather; it judders and shakes, banking steeply as it prepares its descent back to earth; back to “reality.” The landing gear is extended noisily and locks into place. Suddenly we start to feel reality getting closer and closer as first we make out fields and cities, then buildings and cars. We turn onto our final approach in line with the runway.

Already people are busying themselves at the airport for our arrival. The fuel truck is put on standby, and the catering and baggage trucks wait patiently, as do the cleaners. Passengers are being readied to board our plane, a new crew is walking through the airport, and people are rushing through traffic to meet the passengers.

The land rushes up to meet us, and we touch down. The engines roar in reverse, and the brakes are applied swiftly.

As we are welcomed by the cabin crew to our destination, and we arrive gently at the stand, the feeling of calmness and peacefulness passes, and we are suddenly motivated to start thinking of what we have to do now. Quickly people turn on their mobile phones which bleep loudly with new text messages, and people carelessly grab their bags from above their seats. Politeness now turns into selfishness.

Only thirty minutes ago, people were apologising as they passed each other in the aisle; now they now have no time to let other people out of their seats. They rush off the plane walking quickly and purposefully towards the baggage carousel, passports at the ready, jostling for position, engaged on loud conversations on their mobile phones. They grab their bags and leave the airport, on their way home, to a funeral, to seal a business deal, to lie in the sun, or to go to war.

But for a short time up there, they weren't businessmen, criminals, tourists, or politicians; they were just human beings, travelling in two hundred tons of metal and fuel, six miles above the earth, where status and position counted for nothing; where rank, seniority, and wealth were of no importance.

I would like you all to just think about this for a moment and try to imagine carrying the feeling of flying with you as you travel through life. Where all you believe you are has no significance. You fight your way through life with your ambitions and your desire for power and position, but ask yourselves this: “Why am I fighting? What good does it do me and the planet I inhabit?”

When you leave the ground, you leave it all behind, and the same happens when you die. You leave it all behind.

In the unlikely event that your plane crashes, you face the ultimate reality that you are no one, that everything you have strived for has no point.

I often wonder what all the people on board a plane that comes plummeting to earth think about in their final moments of life. Do they worry about the size of their bank accounts or their position in society? I seriously doubt it.

Many will pray to god to spare their life, or ask to be forgiven for things they have done, or think about not seeing their loved ones again, but their sports car or holiday house will be the last thing they think about, I can guarantee it. So let's try to live each day well, being kind to each other, living in the moment, and enjoying every minute here. You never know which day will be your last. I am not trying to frighten any of you, just to get you to wake up to that which you really are.

It doesn't matter if you fly first class or economy; if the plane crashes, you die the same way. Try to remember that when you think about your status, or lack of it in the world. All humans are equal on this earth. Maybe not financially. But the rich man and the poor man breathe their final breath exactly the same way.

F o c u s

The concentration of attention or energy on something

•

Maximum clarity or distinctness of an idea

You know what focus is, you have it on your camera. It allows an image to become clear in the lens. Your mind is exactly the same; it can only focus on one thing at a time. You may have lots of things going on, but in the moment, it is just one thing that comes into clarity. One thing that shines in the mind above all others.

What I want to discuss with you here is not the event of focus, but what we focus on. For every action in the world there has to be some focus before the action. Whether it be hateful, loving, violent, destructive, or creative. Focus is like a laser beam, it brings one thing into the spotlight.

In other chapters we have discussed compassion, love, and empathy, three words which I think underpin what it is to be truly human. Three words that allow us to enter into the feelings of others (human or

animal), have a deep awareness of the suffering of others, and show a positive regard for others. When we focus on these things, we turn our mind into a force for positivity that affects the whole world. On the other hand, focus can be used to hurt, kill, control, and dominate animals, enslave humans, cheat, and develop greed.

In simple terms, focus can be used as a positive or negative force, and the results of this can be seen permeating throughout the globe. In some areas you can see terror and murder, and in others, people trying to help others live a better life through better water, more plentiful food, and education. So what makes us focus on the destructive things? Is it because we were brought up in a violent family and weren't shown any love? Or brought up in a family that concentrated on success and the acquisition of wealth?

There could be many reasons, some of which inevitably have been brought with you as baggage from your childhood, but to me, the lack of clarity which makes us focus on the negative things is merely a lack of awareness. Awareness of self in action, Awareness of others. Awareness of the effect we have on others. When we become more aware, our focus starts to shift automatically, leading to the deep understanding of the three words.

All too often our focus wanders back to the self. Self-interest, self-indulgence, self-pity. So how do we get this focus? Do we really want it anyway? Isn't our life good enough without it?

"Who are you to tell me what to focus on?"

And of course you don't have to focus on love, compassion, and empathy; who am I to tell you to do such a thing! You are an individual, free to make your own choices in life. It's entirely up to you what you do. If you want to focus on making as much money as you possibly can, or exploiting others, then that is what you should do. If you want to focus on terrorising and killing people, then that is what you should do. If you want to focus on stealing from people then that is what you should do. But remember it is now your personal choice to do so. You are not being forced to behave in this way.

You may have had a terrible upbringing which has contributed to who you are today. But now you must be prepared to take the responsibility for your actions. You are the one who is focussing on these things. No one is to blame. It is your responsibility to accept it.

Remember, you and I belong to the most intelligent species on the planet, and you are free in your mind to focus, and therefore act, on any activity you desire, whether it is of negative or positive consequence to

the rest of us. I just ask that you are aware you are making this choice of your own volition.

**If you can only focus on one thing at a time...
Why not make it a positive thing?**

With that out of the way, maybe we can move on to look at the positive aspects of focus (sorry to keep repeating the word). What benefits can come about by focussing on love, compassion, and empathy? Well there's no better place to start than the self!

Self-love may seem like vanity, and maybe just a little narcissistic for you, but if you can't love yourself, how can you start to love others? I am not talking about being conceited or admiring yourself in the mirror every day, this is about acceptance of self – acceptance that you are a wonderful human being, whatever you believe your faults are, and that you are capable of being loving towards every other human being on the planet. True acceptance of this is the start.

It doesn't matter if you have been a murderer, warmonger, drug dealer, criminal, liar, or con man. You are not everything you have done. You may have created negative effects for people in the past, but whilst air still flows into your lungs, and your heart still beats in your chest, you can refocus on the positive, and turn the spotlight on love – love of yourself.

From this love of self emanates a radiant glow around you; no longer are you trapped in a prison of negativity, you have refocused on love. You have let negativity slide away from you in one big shift.

The second step involves no effort either, but just allowing yourself to focus on someone else for a moment, for example your family around you (whether it be wife, husband, brother, sister, son, daughter, mother, or father), and let the radiant glow that is love reach out to them.

They are the closest ones to you. Whether you hate them, disagree with them, or argue with them you can still love them. You don't have to force it. Just embrace them and tell them "I love you," that is all. "I love you." If it seems difficult to you, just imagine you are saying it in your mind before you do it. I love you signifies a feeling so strong it contains no judgement nor criticism. "I love you."

Once you have said it, become aware of your feelings. Try to notice what you are thinking. Then try to think what the person you have said it to is feeling. What do you imagine they feel? Do you think it is positive

or negative? Try to understand how they may have been feeling if you hurt them in the past. Try to feel how they may have been feeling when someone they loved hurt them. What a dagger that strikes you when you are hurt by someone you love. Try to feel it now, without feeling pity for yourself for causing hurt, reach out with the radiant love to them and enclose them in it. The golden glow of love. You are focussing on empathy.

Step three. Refocus.

See this is easy isn't it? Think about the people you have hurt on your way in the world for a moment. Try to understand how they suffered when you hurt them. What was their suffering like? How did you feel when you were hurting them with your words and your actions? Can you see their faces? Can you see your face? How did you look? How did they look? When you are ready bring that suffering into focus and hold it there, shine a torch on it, pinpoint it with a laser beam. Don't let it out of your mind until you can feel it. Now let it go.

Let the negativity slide away once again and refocus on the golden image of love emanating from your body and embrace the suffering of the others you have hurt. Embrace their suffering and wrap it in your golden blanket of love.

Never again will you let your mind wander and focus on negativity, you are compassion, you do not want to hurt people you want to help them. It is in your true nature to help others not hurt them. You feel their suffering and you want to do something to alleviate it. You do not want to cause suffering any more. You are focussing on compassion.

Maybe you do want to cause suffering. Maybe you want to hurt people. Maybe you don't know you are hurting people, maybe you don't care, maybe you are just too busy to notice! Maybe hurting people is inevitable in your line of work. Maybe, maybe, maybe...

I would ask you one thing though, and that is to be upfront with people. You see, it is so hurtful when people are deceived into thinking you are loving, empathic, and compassionate, when you are not. It is so much better for you and for the rest of the world if you just come out and say it.

*"I don't care if I hurt people, I don't care about anybody.
I am focussing on myself"*

For me personally, if I am going to dedicate my energy to something, I want it to be positive. I want to help other people, so I focus on the three key words.

It doesn't mean I am not thinking about other things. It just means that when I have a thought or perform an action, I shine my torch on that thought with the test of is it loving, compassionate, or empathic? It doesn't take more than a micro-second to do. It isn't difficult, and doesn't require effort. Just awareness.

When I apply the test to myself, I don't have to stop and think, it is almost a transparent effect. The thought just passes through my mind without interaction and judgement, and is only halted when it comes into conflict with the three key words. It works for me.

Do something positive for yourself and the world right now. Shine a spotlight on your thoughts. Light them up and refocus. Why waste time on negative thoughts and actions. Where do they get you in the end?

You only have a short time on earth, why fill it with negative stress, when you could feel love, compassion, and empathy your whole life? My life is different since refocussing. You don't have anything to lose. If you don't feel better, then you can always go back to your old ways! It's that easy.

F o l l o w

To travel behind, go after, come after

•

Travel along a certain course

•

Act in accordance with someone's rules, commands, or wishes

Have you ever noticed that we are all followers? We are followers of fashion, religion, regimes, or ideologies, amongst others. What I want to discuss with you in this topic is the lack of independence we have, and why we are happy to just follow somebody, anybody. Where is our individuality, and in particular where is our individuality of mind?

What I would like you to do is to start to reflect on your possessions. Look around you now. Look at the clothes you are wearing. Sure, you may have bought them with your own money; you may even have carefully selected them from the hundreds of retail establishments and thousands of product lines available; but remember, someone else designed them, set the “trends” for the season, and spent a huge amount

of money marketing them, so you believe you freely chose to look a certain way.

You may also be wearing something because your company/religion/culture dictates you wear it, and you may also even believe it was your own free will that made you choose to wear it, but I would like you to think about this very, very, carefully. It is of the utmost importance that you become aware of what you are wearing, and why you are wearing it. Listen to your thoughts, to the justifications your mind is giving you for dressing the way you do. With that in mind, let's move into the home. Some of you reading this (in countries where mass consumerism hasn't taken hold due to financial limitations), may find yourselves aware, that although you don't have these things, you want them.

Look at your car, your television, your mobile phone, your satellite navigation system, your music system, your internet connection, your house, your garden (if you have one), your hobbies, your habits, your job, your aspirations, your desires, your likes, your dislikes, your political persuasion, your sexual habits, your religious views.

Please think carefully about why you buy, what you buy, why you say what you say, why you do what you do, and if you look closely enough, you may find you are not independent at all, but a mere follower. It may hurt to read me saying that you are in fact a follower of everything, but think about it carefully. Someone else is doing it and I like it, so I'm going to do it as well.

Someone has planted a seed, and given enough water, that seed has developed. The seed may have come from an advertising agency; from a politician; from a religious leader; from your parents; from your husband or wife, or your peer group. All of them know that in your deep desire to be accepted, you will follow; after all, it takes true courage (*a quality of spirit that enables you to face danger or pain without showing fear*) to stand alone, and most of us are too afraid to take that step. I can understand why.

Why should you choose to make your life difficult when the path of least resistance – the easiest way – beckons? I can hear most of you saying, “what's the problem of buying clothes! I'm not a fashion designer, nor am I an electronics engineer, so I need someone to design my clothes, and build my computer, there's nothing wrong with it.”

And on the surface, I would agree with you. But you see, the problem lies, not with the tv, or the clothes, but with the thinking; for it is the

same following that has enabled dictators to enlist the support of the people, and embark on killing millions of humans.

You can never blame the leaders. Sure, they might have the idea, but it takes more than just one man to start a war. It is you and I who actively or passively follow, who are accountable. So, although the purchase of a new mobile phone (because you've got to have one), or a new car (because the new one is more eco-friendly), or the wearing of a new type of hat (because everyone's doing it), or listening to the latest pop tune (because the band is so cool), may seem like it has nothing to do with genocide or religious fanaticism – but think again.

Leaders, whether they be commercial, religious, or political need followers. *Without you they are no one.* They are just a bag of bones, connective tissue, and muscles with an idea. Please try to see this.

*I will follow you whatever you say,
whatever you do...*

So when you next think about buying a new ipod or digital camera, or engaging in ethnic cleansing or “holy war,” become aware of your thoughts. Question why you think the way you do. Where did the thought originate? Did it just appear out of the blue, like magic, or did the thought come to you another way? Perhaps through the tv, advertising, friends, colleagues, politicians, or religious leaders for example.

Try to stop before you allow the seed to take hold; the non-independent mind is easily persuaded by talk that appeals to your ego, to your desires, to anything that will make you feel important or superior to others, to anything that will make you feel secure, safe in the knowledge that you do not have to think for yourself. All thought has been already taken care of.

To me, it seems natural that we blindly follow others, after all, we are brought into a world where fear is universal, and independent thought is actively discouraged. Sure, you have choices – what colour curtains to buy, what party to vote for, what tv to buy, what job to do – but they are choices within clear boundaries. As long as you pick one of the choices offered to you, you'll be ok.

But what if you don't want to choose any of them? What if you want to stand alone? I have found that the more you reject the choices available, the more you start to stand on the outside of “society,” where people begin to shun you for being an independent thinker.

When I have talked to my old friends about the path I have chosen they find it hard to understand. How could someone who liked fast food, fast cars, spending money, and buying all the latest gadgets have rejected it all, and is now embarking on a journey to discover himself, and try to help other people discover themselves!

It's all too much for them to comprehend, so they have gradually distanced themselves from me. My dad actually said I was becoming a social leper (*a pariah who is avoided by others*)! But for me, the further I get from the conditioned mind, the freer I feel.

For those of you who choose a similar path, I offer these words. It isn't easy, but nothing worthwhile ever is. You may lose your friends. Your family may reject you. Society may reject you, and you may feel as if it's a waste of time putting yourself through unnecessary suffering; but as the process begins, you will notice a change in yourself. You will notice that the less you follow other people's thought, the more free your mind becomes.

I cannot promise that this will make you happy, but then happiness is a choice you have to make, just like buying a new car. The one thing to remember is that not being a follower does not make you a leader, but then look where all the "leaders" in the world have got us.

The independent mind
Free and limitless

F r e e d o m

The condition of being free; the power to act or speak or think
without externally imposed restraints

Who gives us our freedom? The king, the president, the generals? What about democracy, god, or our parents? We often hear people talking about wanting their “freedom – not people incarcerated for crimes, but people psychologically imprisoned by their leaders. People who – for fear of imprisonment or death – cannot speak or act freely.

The freedom to think has never been able to be controlled, but I’m sure some governments would like to be able to do it; it would certainly make their job of controlling the citizens easier. So although people can think, and the government cannot hear them, how frustrating must it be to be able to think freely but unable to speak or act freely?

“The ideology of my government is wrong, they are killing their own people who speak out against them. They want us to worship them, but I hate everything they stand for.

They want me to inform on my family, if they speak out against them. I want to tell someone it is wrong, but I fear for my life, so I put up with it, and am tortured in my silence.”

Freedom – in the dictionary sense – is not your right, but something “given” to you, almost as a favour; a display that the government is generous towards the citizens of the country. It means you have the freedom to determine your own life, the power to act, speak and think without interference from the government. Oh, I forgot, that is, until you say, or do something that is against them.

I am not talking about committing a crime, such as stealing or murder, I’m talking about a crime with no victim. The crime, if that’s what you can call it, is speaking out against your own government. This is when you find that your “freedom” was actually only on loan to you, as long as you conformed to what was expected of you. It is almost like an unwritten agreement – your freedom, for your cooperation with the government. Break the agreement, and you may find your freedom being revoked, and a charge of treason laid at your door.

Treason

1. *A crime that undermines the offender’s government*
2. *Disloyalty by virtue of subversive behaviour*
3. *An act of deliberate betrayal*

Many people have tried to bring down corrupt governments, or cruel and inhumane regimes, only to find themselves summarily executed, or spending a life sentence in a hard labour camp. In a democracy this wouldn’t happen, they say, but try any of the above treasonable offences and see how caring and understanding your government is.

What I want to understand is, how can a group of individuals want to control what other people think, do, and say? Well, let’s try to understand a government’s job shall we (even in an undemocratic country). In short, it is to raise taxes from the people, and provide

essential services like health, education, infrastructure (roads/electricity), and to protect their citizens from harm. That is all. If you're lucky, they may use some of your tax to set up a social welfare system, which aims to help the needy.

Employers provide jobs that pay the workers, enabling them to pay for shelter, foodstuffs, and anything else they wish to buy with their hard earned money. The problem starts when – instead of being in government to help the citizens – the government starts to exist for its own sake. In a word, the leaders have tasted a very human emotion, and are not going to let go of it.

Power

Possession of controlling influence

And why would they? It's nice to be powerful! It feels good. It gives you a sense of being someone, not *just* an average man. You have armies at your disposal, you can order mass destruction at the touch of a button, you can have people killed that get in the way of your plans. Power. That's what destroys freedom.

People with power start to think they are more than human; they begin to see themselves apart from the rest of the people. They begin to rule from above; exercising their will, without any thought to anyone else. Their power must be absolute as they are now addicted to it, and they aren't going to give it up without a fight.

Ideology has nothing to do with it. Can you see? It doesn't matter if they are communist, conservative, socialist or liberal, they have one thing in common, they have power. You control what people say or do, but you also want them to love you – such is the destructiveness of power – so you grant them their freedom. The generous, benevolent leader, bestowing the ultimate gift on “his” people. Freedom...

Do you think you have freedom; are you free? Who *gave* you freedom? You see, for the word freedom to exist, there must be a controlling power who issues it. If everyone really could act, speak or think, without externally imposed restraints, there would be no need for the word, would there?

Freedom to act, speak or think, without externally imposed restraints, is only possible if you speak, act or think within the boundaries set by the controlling power. Even if it is a democratic power.

In case you were wondering, this does not only apply to governments. Parents do it by limiting what you do “for your own good.”

“You’re not going out tonight;” “you’re not seeing that boy again;” “you’re grounded for a week for not doing your homework;” “you’re not watching that tv show.”

They also try to limit what you say, because they find it offensive, or not in line with their values.

But it all changes when you get near the age of adulthood. They show you their magnanimous side, by saying, “your mother and I have discussed it, and we think we’re going to let you have a bit more freedom, now you’re getting older.” Thanks very much, that’s generous of you to allow me my freedom!

It seems to be, that once you are given a position of trust to care for someone (government caring for the people/parent caring for the child), you soon find out that actually what you have is power over another individual; and people with power soon find they are being corrupted by it. Why? Because they like the feeling. It raises their self-esteem, and any inadequacies they may have felt dissolve. They have the power of life and death over people; they feel like a god.

*I was free when I was born
I'll be free when I die
If only I could see through fear
I'd be free whilst I'm alive*

The only way to true freedom is through the understanding of fear. Why? Well, because it is natural to experience fear when someone is exerting great power over you. You know you must conform, or they have the power to take away your “freedom.”

We belong to the most intelligent species on the planet – one marked by superior intelligence and articulate speech – but what’s the point of all this intelligence and complex language if we can’t use it?

People in power will tell you that you are “free” to do, say, and think what you like, and that’s nice of them, but if someone tells me I am free, I know that in truth I am not. I am only free as long as I do not confront the person in power, so I am afraid to say, or do what I want, in case I offend them.

When I am no longer afraid, I am free. People in power can no longer control a man who is not afraid, their power starts to slip, and eventually they lose their power.

We will go into fear in a separate topic, but for now, think what you are most afraid of, and imagine if you said or did something against someone in power. What is the worst thing they can do to you? Even as a young person, your parents can't really do that much to you. Maybe ban you from going out for a month, or revoke some privileges, which is bad at the time, and enough to keep you afraid of losing them in the future. But what about as an adult? What is the worst thing you can imagine happening if you spoke out against the people in power?

For me, it would have to be the torture and murder of my family; because I love them, and I wouldn't want anything bad to happen to them. You would think that my death would be my greatest fear, that they would kill me, but death is final, there is no more pain. Death is not something to be afraid of, it is a natural process that will happen to all of us one day, but to do something to my family, that is a different matter!

That is why people in power – the world over – will always use something you love as an instrument of fear. They know you love your family, and to take them away would be the worst thing they could do to you, save kill you. This is control. This is when you know you are not free. You must conform.

Of course, in advanced democracies, this control is rather more loose than in certain dictatorships around the world, but it still exists, otherwise there would be no such word as “treason.”

Freedom from fear = True freedom

Power is, in truth, emotional emptiness, or a lack of love in your life; and it is an empty man who tries to control another through fear. Think about it. Whether you are a dictator, president, general, parent, director, manager, or supervisor – it goes right down the chain of command. You are trying to make yourself feel better by making someone else feel worse!

People are afraid of you, and you feel better, so you must keep controlling what they say or do in order to sustain the feeling. This control is called power, which is addiction, which is pleasure. And as we know from our other discussions, when the brain tastes pleasure, it isn't going to give it up without a fight. Likewise, the person in power isn't going to give up their position without a fight.

Help for the addicted:

The only way to free yourself from this addiction is to understand why you enjoy having control over other people. Even if you say it is your job, power is an addiction, which is pleasure. The world was not created so that one man has power over others.

We are all humans together; we all have a role to play here on earth, through cooperation. We are all born the same, we look the same without clothes, and we all die the same.

The dominance and control of others through fear is not the sign of a compassionate man, nor the sign of one who loves. It is the sign of power, addiction, and control, surely not things you wanted when you were born. When you let love back into your life, when you feel empathy and compassion for all other human beings, when you stop thinking about you, the need for dominance and control over others disappears. It's that simple.

You don't *need* to control other people to make yourself feel good; you *need* to build up your own self-esteem, so you feel good about *you* – not just when you have power over others. Maybe you should start a self-help support group for people addicted to “power and control over others,” and maybe then, we really will be able to remove the word freedom from the dictionary, for there would truly be no need for it anymore.

F r i e n d s h i p

A person you know well and regard with affection and trust

•

An associate who provides assistance

•

A person with whom you are acquainted

I offer all of you my hand in friendship



The dictionary definitions are all a little bit narrow for my liking. They seem to suggest that only people you know well should be called friends; or they suggest someone who helps you when you are in some difficulty is a friend. I also noticed that the antonym of friend is foe (*enemy*). So is the dictionary suggesting that someone I am not acquainted with, do not know well and regard with affection and trust, or someone who does not provide me with assistance, is my enemy! Surely this can't be right. Just because we don't know someone yet doesn't make them our enemy, it just makes them a friend we have yet to meet. There, that sounds better than enemy, doesn't it? So with that cleared up let us begin our discussion.

The friendship pyramid

Country leaders often turn to their friends during times of crisis, don't they? They've got themselves into a bit of bother so they call on some "friend" who happens to share the same religion or economic viewpoint, skin colour or language, and asks for some help (usually military or financial, and as we know, friends help each other out. When they ask for help, they receive it. "That's what friends are for."

Moving down the chain a little, some people have "friends in high places," a euphemism for saying a person in power who is able to be manipulated, and when they need a favour, they call up their friend and get whatever it is "fixed," (e.g. a parking ticket torn up, or plans for a new casino in a residential area passed). Isn't it nice to have friends?

Lower down the pecking order, there are people we know from the community, perhaps someone from the pub who can take a look at your leaky pipes, for "just a couple of drinks!" And finally we have the personal friends. But then these too go in order.

There are "friends you know to say hello to in the street;" "friends you know from work and may go out with socially a couple of times;" then the regular people you meet up with every week, followed by the second best friend and finally the first best friend – the person who you confide your darkest secrets to, and usually the ones that run off with your other half and don't pay back money they borrowed (sorry, that's a little harsh)! I haven't included parents in this list because you don't choose them, you're just kind of stuck with them, and anyway you love them, you're not just friends with them, right?

So as we reach the bottom of our pyramid, we can see that there are many types of friendships going on. From the "I have some problem I need fixed friend," to the "personal confidant friend" you need nothing from, but are just happy to share their company.

Friends are nice

It's nice to have friends isn't it? People you can phone up, share your daily worries with, pop round to their houses and they to yours, go on holiday together, and chat and chat and chat.

Everyone needs friends. But why? Well, for starters, we would be pretty lonely on our own, and second, it's nice to have someone else you can chat to apart from your other half (they don't understand you); and anyway, man is a social animal, he needs lots of different stimulation and conversation, and friends are the ideal people to do stuff with. They like

the same things you do, they like going to the same places and they like talking about the same things. All in all, it's a perfect set up.

Without people to stimulate us and share our daily troubles we'd be a pretty sorry lot, moping around all day with no one to talk to. Work colleagues won't crack it, we need someone we can trust, someone who knows what it's like to be *you*, and can empathise with how *you* are feeling and vice versa. Those of us who don't have this kind of friend tend to become insular and start to hide their feelings, which isn't good for anyone, no sir! So we all need to get ourselves some close friends and the world will be perfect. Ok? The end.

But hang on, how do we find these friends? The world is becoming a hard place to meet people. Everyone is so busy; they all seem to have enough friends already thank you very much and don't need any more, as I have found out over the last few years. And the older you get the harder it gets. People are married, they have their own lives now; they have families and they want to hang around with other families (you know the mothers who only hang around with other mothers).

So we join sports clubs, and other activity clubs, hoping to meet that special friend we have never had. But lots of people already have a best friend from their schooldays, so how are you going to find a best friend? Maybe you could set up a website for people who don't have best friends (hey, not a bad idea). Ultimately, it is down to luck and good chemistry whether or not you hit it off with someone and become everlasting friends.

But even when you do have those friends, you can still blow it, by sleeping with their partner, saying something that offends them, or borrowing money. I'm not sure which is worst, but I'm sure you'll all have your own idea. So, you should now have someone to confide in; someone to trust; and someone to be there for you. And that is a hard thing to find. I assure you.

The stranger

Maybe you hadn't noticed, but in the cities and towns these days, everyone is a stranger. Everyone is a potential enemy; you don't know who to trust, you don't know who you can confide in, and so you are always on your guard.

You move quickly from place to place to meet your "real" friends or colleagues, and purposefully avert your eyes in case anyone talks to you.

“Excuse me, can I just ask you a question?” pleads the underpaid, underloved charity campaigner desperately trying to get you to sign up to help the whales, the elderly, or the dying etc. and you move even quicker, side stepping them, and nearly knocking an old lady over in the process.

This as you may have guessed, is me I’m describing.

I have always hated talking to people I don’t know, although my mum is a practised genius at managing to talk to at least half a dozen people she doesn’t know in the street or in the shops.

“Mum!” I used to shout, all embarrassed. “Why do you keep talking to people you don’t know, it’s really, really embarrassing!”

“Why?” always asked my mum, “and anyway, they talk to me, not the other way round.”

“But you don’t even know them” I used to plead, as I was dragging her away by force. “You’re sooo embarrassing.”

But recently, I noticed that neither she nor the person she was speaking to seemed embarrassed, in fact they seemed to be enjoying the chat. My embarrassment, it seems, is utterly misplaced. I questioned who I was feeling uncomfortable for. Was it for me, my mum or the person who was accosted by her in the shop? I realised I was predicting what the other person must be thinking, “oh no, a mad woman has stopped to talk to me in the street! I must run away quickly!”

And that’s it isn’t it? We have lost the art of conversation. We think anyone who talks to us who is not our friend must either be mad. “Hello, I’m the king of egypt,” said one man who approached me recently; or after something:

“Scuse me mate, Scuse me... Err you ‘aven’t got a quid I could borrow ‘ave ya?”

To which I always wanted to reply:

“Sure, when were you planning on giving it back to me?”

Recently I saw a strangely dressed man walk up to a young couple and put out his hand. “Do you live here?” he said, and I didn’t hear the rest of the conversation, but as I turned back to look, I could feel the young man getting embarrassed by the poor man who was still busily shaking his hand. And I could feel myself thinking “I’m glad he didn’t stop me and shake my hand, that would have been awful.” But the only awful thing about it is that we (I) go out of our way to avoid people who are not on our list.

We have all become so insular that we cannot speak to anyone. How would we start a conversation? Would they think we were mad, or perhaps trying to chat them up? Perhaps they might think we plan to

steal their wallet, or follow them home and rape and murder them. Oh well, it's best not to think about it, so we go back to standing on our own.

Many years ago, I used to catch a commuter bus into London, and one thing I noticed was that the same people were standing at the bus stop every day, and never once, did anyone utter a word to anyone else; people who would spend two to three hours of their lives every day with these same people. I just couldn't understand it.

These weren't strangers, these were people they recognised, people who sat next to them on the bus; but each and every day they would walk in silence to the bus, sit down, read their papers, or fall asleep without so much as a hello to the other passengers. *That* might start a conversation, and we wouldn't want that, would we?

Six billion potential friends and counting

So, has man always been such a coward when it comes to chatting with people he doesn't know? Has he always had a deep seated fear of the unknown enemy; always on his guard in case of attack? Well, up until the last few hundred years, society was ordered very differently. There were no mega-cities and most people lived in smaller communities where most people knew each other. Sure they would gossip about each other, but they would also just stand and talk airing any problems they had, sharing in the village news.

But it's not like that now, is it? Nine million people in a city and you know, what, maybe one or two well, and have maybe thirty or so acquaintances and not so close friends. That's a heck of a lot of people we don't know isn't it? No wonder we are scared of strangers!

You see, the modern economic society is all about the individual, isn't it? My job. My money. My car. My house. My friends. My family. And we are taught that that is the way it should be. "You keep your head down in the city and nothing bad will happen to you," they say.

So every day, you jostle for a seat on the train, metro, or bus, with people you don't know, and you avert your eyes from theirs in case (a) they think you're looking at them "funny" and stab you, or (b) think you're a pervert for eyeing up the women.

And *never* look at children, because the parents might think you are a paedophile and report you to the police, and if you smile at a child, that is proof positive that you are a paedophile, and the father might get

aggressive, and you don't want that, so... It may be better just to drive in, just in case any of the above happens!

How do we engage again?

So, we can see from our dialogue that we are on pretty shaky ground if we ever thought about starting a conversation with anyone we don't know in a city or town. "Normal people don't talk to strangers, remember! Leave the talking to strangers bit to the mentally deranged and the homeless alcoholic beggars," your friend wisely councils. And maybe we should, after all, what would we talk about? The weather?

Maybe it's going to take a bit of intervention to get this whole thing going again, because I think, that left to your own devices, you will probably carry on with your "eyes averted, side stepping charity collectors walk," I regularly practised. But this is going to take careful management; we don't want to freak everyone out when we start talking to them. So what I propose is a conversation corner! What a scary thought.

"The conversation corner"

Now look, I'm not talking about anything fancy here, I'm talking about setting up several permanent tables and chairs with some kind of weather protection on the top. A sign that says "Conversation corner, get your conversation here," or something catchier than that perhaps! If you sat down and someone sat next to you, you would have to talk. A scary thought I grant you.

But what if we set up these conversation corners right in the centre of the city, and had as many of them as we have fast food outlets, and coffee shops? What do you think? Do you like the idea now we have kind of formalised the talking to strangers bit? It makes it a bit less confronting than just walking up to someone who is obviously in a hurry and obviously doesn't want to talk to anyone. Now if you want to talk to him or he wants to talk to you, you could meet up under the bright red "conversation corner" sign. So who wants to start it? You or me? Ok, I'll see what I can do...

Stop being so insular

We may have enough friends to confide in, we may not need any more, and our life may be complete; but for the sake of humanity, we have to stop enclosing ourselves in our little “friend” bubbles, whether that friend be at the national, or personal level.

We have to start breaking down the barriers, not putting up new ones that say, “these are my friends, these are the people I will talk to because they are like me.” We need to have conversations with everybody.

Imagine a muslim and a christian sitting down at one of our new conversation corners, just having a chat.

Break down the barriers and see that we are all people; that we can be friends with everyone. And when I say friends, I am not suggesting we regularly attempt to socialise with millions of people. We can have our close confidants, and our extended group of acquaintances, but there are millions of people in our cities whom we could call our friends, even if we only meet them once at conversation corner. They could be a drug dealer, a city dealer, or a car dealer, it doesn't matter; what matters is that there is one less stranger in our city; and that, my friends, can only be a good thing.

Connect.

F u n

Activities that are enjoyable or amusing

•

Verbal wit or mockery (often at another's expense but not to be taken seriously)

•

A disposition to find (or make) causes for amusement

When you think of fun, what comes to mind? Maybe a few drinks at the pub, going to a party, doing something exciting, or going on holiday? Of course you need to have fun; you have a stressful life, children, a mortgage, no money, relationship problems. You deserve a little fun in life.

When you are a child, what does fun mean? Happily running round in circles, playing with boxes, chasing the dog, painting our faces. This is fun! Everyone encourages you! Climbing trees, laughing with friends, riding our bikes, without a care in the world... Then we grow up, and become adults.

Now, no one encourages you to climb a tree, ride your bike, splash in the stream or swim in the lake. Unless of course, you are on a scheduled holiday from work that is. Then it's acceptable.

You're an adult now, face up to your responsibilities. Become more serious. After all, life is a serious business! Get a job, get married, get a mortgage, get children, get a better job, get a bigger mortgage, get more children.

Wait a minute, what's this about? We all know we have to eat, and have somewhere to live. We also know we are biologically programmed to seek out a mate and have children, to ensure the human race doesn't die out. That's pretty clear isn't it? We all know we have to work to earn some money, as that is how we pay for food, accommodation, clothing, holidays, children, etc... But who told you to be serious?

Serious

Concerned with work or important matters rather than play or trivialities

In your work, you sometimes have to be serious, but by that, I mean concentrate; pay attention to what you are doing. If you are a welder, an airline pilot, a scaffolder, a typist, or a deal maker, it makes perfect sense for you to be "serious" whilst you are involved in that activity, otherwise the job would not be done safely, correctly, or to anyone's satisfaction.

But this is a different type of seriousness, the type that comes from inside, the seriousness which is not concentration or attention to detail. This is sadness. Look around you in the office, or your place of work. Look at your colleagues faces. What do you see? Do you see happiness/joy in what they are doing? Do they look like they are *enjoying* themselves?

"Hold it," I hear some of you say, "work is not a place to enjoy yourself; you enjoy yourself in your own time, not in the company's time."

But this *is* your time, your very, very, short time on this planet – 80 or 90 years for the lucky ones. And out of that time, how much time do you spend working? Well, if you live in a country with an education system and retirement plan, you may leave school at 18 and work until 65 (otherwise you would find yourself working almost your whole life till you die, if you have no money) that's 47 years. 47 years! So let's look at your life span:

- 0 – 5: Just fun
- 6 – 12: Fun plus school
- 12 – 18: Fun decreasing, seriousness increasing (must study *hard*)

18 – 65: Work

65 – 80: Retired, coping with the onset of old age. Die. The end.

Now that might seem a bit morbid for a topic entitled “fun,” but I just want to show you that the majority of your life will be spent at work. At least 8 hours per day, plus travel time. Nearly half of the 24 hour day. Oh, I forgot to mention, you’ll need to take approximately 7 to 8 hours off for sleeping too, leaving you with a grand total of about 5 hours for *you!* Oh yes, you’ll need to eat as well, have a shower, look after the children, pay some bills...

It’s no wonder people are heading off for a drink to relax! They haven’t got time for anything else. Climbing trees, riding your bike? No chance! Maybe a quick drink, cinema, or something to eat and straight to bed, is all most people can manage at the end of the working day. You haven’t got time for anything else. Work is taking up all of your time.

“But everyone needs to work” you say. “How would we eat, pay the mortgage...”

But that’s not what we are talking about here. What we are discussing, is that when you are an adult, you are expected to be serious. The company expects you to be serious, your parents expect you to be serious: “When will you ever grow up?” The whole of society wants you to be serious. Everyone expects something from you. You must provide, you must have ambition, you must have a good car, you’re children must go to the best school. You must conform. You must be serious; you must take your responsibilities seriously.

Adults must be serious!

But this is *your* life, right? A short life you have here on earth. Who is to tell you to be serious? Go on, act like a child, laugh when it’s inappropriate, make silly faces, smile all the time! But you can’t, can you? Because life is serious; your boss would fire you, people would ridicule you as a “joker,” your parents would again tell you to grow up, your friends wouldn’t respect you.

I understand it’s hard being an adult, with such high expectations placed on such narrow shoulders, but do me one favour, can you? Tell me that even if you don’t do what you love, you love what you do.

So even if you love horse riding and are not a professional jockey, or you love singing but are not a professional singer, you at least love doing

your job every day, whether it's stamping invoices, working in the mail room, working on the checkouts, delivering pizza, working on the assembly line, reading marketing reports, selling office furniture, removing peoples rubbish, designing computer software, or are even chairman of the board.

If you love what you do, and you can have fun doing it, then the X hours a day, you spend doing it are well worth it indeed. But most people aren't like that are they? They are doing a job because it's good money, it's what they studied to become, or it or has good career prospects. They are doing it because the company has a good pension plan, they can't get anything else, or it's just a stop gap until they find what they really want to do.

That's why I ask you to look around you, and look at people's faces. Look around you in the streets at all the people shopping. Do they look like they're having fun? Do you look like your having fun? Or are you just existing in the world, doing your duty as an adult, paying your bills, going to work every day for a company whose idea of fun is "jeans and hawaiian shirt friday," or "team building days," "social evenings," and "office parties."

Companies know you spend most of your life giving your time and energy to help them make more money, and know that most of you probably only turn up every day because you need the money. So every once in a while, they make you feel better by providing "fun" days, where everyone can relax and let their hair down. Christmas parties, summer barbecues.

Just don't have too much fun, otherwise people will be talking about you on monday, and don't have fun at work unless the boss says it's ok. Work *is* a *serious* business, remember that. The company tells you when it's fun time, not you.

Fun laid on for adults usually means one thing – alcohol. Whether at a company party, social event, down the local pub, out at a nightclub, or dinner at home. It allows us to relax and allows us to have fun. It is adult fun; a prescribed dose of anti-seriousness. Everyone expects you to drink alcohol when you're an adult!

"I had such a fun evening last night! But I've got a real hangover today..."

How many times have you heard that? I've certainly said it on numerous occasions. So what we want to know is, can you have fun without alcohol, or is alcohol the fun?

Imagine for a moment you are at a friend's barbecue, at a company party, or down the pub. Now imagine having four glasses of water instead of wine or beer! How much fun would that be all evening? You may enjoy yourself, but would you be having as much fun drinking water as you would have drinking alcohol? This is a serious problem for all of us, when we only start to have fun when we are detached from reality.

Just look at a child, and tell me he needs to have a drink to have fun!

We are so busy working and earning money to pay bills, that we have forgotten how to have real fun; and I'm not talking about going on an adventure holiday, or any external entertainment, I am talking about internal fun. The feeling that life is fun, that it's great to be alive. The feeling that you want to smile in the morning, that you enjoy life and everything life throws at you.

The more fun you find in daily life, the more you stop being a slave to seriousness, a false idea, peddled by parents and teachers, that you must grow up, and face up to your responsibilities. Growing up is a process that happens all by itself, and as an adult, these are your primary responsibilities as I see them, whether male or female.

- (a) You need to provide food and water for yourself and your family.
- (b) You need a house for shelter and warmth.
- (c) You need to provide clothing for yourself.
- (d) If you have children you must care for them, and educate them (love is not a responsibility).
- (e) You need to find a way to pay for the above.

How you do it is up to you, but once you stop conforming to the idea that you must be serious in life, you will feel younger. Laugh out loud, smile, dress how you want, learn a musical instrument, change jobs, learn something new, choose work that allows you to enjoy the day, not a job where it's dark when you get up and dark when you come home. Laugh with friends, find something you love and find a way to get paid for it! Have a party with no alcohol! (that's probably a scary feeling), be happy when you meet people. The list could go on and on... It's up to you!

That feeling of fun inside you costs nothing. It's always been there, just waiting to get out. It's just been suppressed by years of conditioning, the fear of failing to conform. Just because you have a mortgage, a job, a car, and three kids doesn't mean you can't have fun. You just need to reach inside.

Let go of other peoples expectations. Just because you are married with three children doesn't mean you have to carry on hating your job! Once you let fun into your life, new ideas will come to you... Enjoy yourself, you're in the prime of your life, whatever age you are. You know why? Because you are alive. You are a human being.

That you even exist is an amazing feat! Through millions of years of evolution and the love of two people, here you are. A being marked with superior intelligence, and articulate speech. You really are amazing; in fact we all are, and we're only here for a short time. So doesn't it make sense to stop being serious, and celebrate being alive? It's time to have fun, to break down the conditioning, the expectations, the growing up. It's time to have the time of our lives.

When life is fun, anger is superfluous, negative emotions fade away. By letting fun into your life thought loses its grip on us, fear loses its grip, we stop controlling ourselves according to tradition, to culture, to the media, to politicians, to religion. And when we do that we let love into our lives, as the act of fun is love. Love of yourself, your family, your colleagues, your friends. Love of the world. Try it, you might just like it.

Help!

Miserable office worker, 38

Good salary

Hates job

Hates commuting

Hates boss

No social life

Three kids (private school)

One wife (spends too much)

Five credit cards (all up to the limit)

Bored with all of above

Becomes

Anything he wants to be!

G a m b l i n g

The act of playing for stakes in the hope of winning (including the payment of a price for a chance to win a prize)

•

Money that is risked for possible monetary gain

•

A risky act or venture

*I'll put a little bet on just in case
This one's to win in the second race
But then my horse falls and I start to crumble
Why oh why did I ever gamble?*

*Now I've lost the lot
It's hard to explain
I don't how it happened
But I'm broke again*

*But don't you worry
I'll bounce back
Next week casino
250 on black*



For most people, gambling is just a part of modern life; an innocuous hobby, that provides pleasure for millions round the world, provides jobs, and most lotteries give money to well deserving charities. It's only the weak who get addicted. For us, gambling addiction is the image of the poor dishevelled man, trying to win back his whole weeks wages, that he foolishly gambled on a horse.

He just can't seem to get back the winning streak he had last week. He just needs to borrow a little bit more, this one's a dead cert, a guaranteed win, so he borrows the money and of course, the horse is pipped at the post by a 200-1 outsider. If only he'd bet on that horse, all his troubles would be gone, just a few centimetres and he would be living the high life now... Better bet on one more, this losing streak can't stay with him forever, this one will win, it's a dead cert...

But of course, even if your horse does come in, you won't give up gambling. You see, winning and losing are all part of the game. It's a game of chance, and every gambler knows that sometimes you win, and sometimes you lose. Though for some strange reason, they think that if they lose five times in a row, they must be sure of a win coming up; because what are the odds of losing six times in a row?

You can gamble on anything. Horses, dogs, and boxing; or you can go to the casino and play blackjack, poker, spin the roulette wheels, or put your coins in the slot machines. All in the hope of turning that 10 into 20, the 20 into 50, and the 50 into 100. That's the point isn't it? To make more money? Otherwise why gamble? For fun? I don't think so... Gambling is yet another activity that acts on the brain's pleasure centres.



Have you ever been to a casino? I have. You walk in, and there are so many lights flashing, all green, red and white. There are lots of mirrors; the machines are so shiny, and you start to get excited. Your heart races a little faster, the music is loud, everybody looks glamorous (sound familiar?), you change some money, and you start to play.

Pound after pound, dollar after dollar, you feed the machine, while the wheels spin quickly, just waiting for the right pictures to come up... Then suddenly the machine starts the winning music, the lights flash faster, and out comes your winnings.

Time to leave?

"Oh no, not while I'm on a winning streak;" and off you head to the other machines, and finally to the tables, where you can lose your month's salary on one number, or one card hand. It's that quick, I promise you. Of course you could win, many people do, but casinos know that the odds are stacked firmly in their favour; otherwise they'd go out of business in a week.

So some people win, and some people lose, but ultimately, the only real winners are the casinos. They know what gets you excited, they know what makes you spend your money. Why do you think there are so many flashing lights everywhere, they know how to stimulate your pleasure centres and motivate you to action.

I hear some of you now: "It's just a bit of fun, it's a night out, I don't really gamble." And with that, most of you would agree: "Yes, why is he trying to spoil our fun? We work hard (sound familiar?), we deserve a little fun!"

And yes, it is fun, because your brain is just loving *all that pleasure*, even when you lose. Because the great thing about gambling, is that you don't just lose, and that's it finished; oh no, you can put some more money in, and next time, you could be a *winner!*

When questioned about problem gamblers, every casino owner will tell you that they don't force people to come into their establishments and spend money – it's all a matter of personal choice. They don't let anyone under the age of 18 in, so all of their customers are considered adults (in law) and able to make their own decisions.

But you and I know why we gamble, don't we? It's exciting! Will it be 24 red, will horse number 6 win, will I have a royal flush in this hand, will my numbers come up in the lottery? It must be exciting otherwise why would we keep coming back for more every time we lose?

Let's go into this together. If I bet 6 numbers every week on the national lottery, and have not won for 5 years why would I keep doing it? Seems a little strange, don't you think? Is it not the promise of untold riches, more money than you could ever dream of; a prize so big, that not only would you never have to work again, but neither would your family?

But the interesting thing is, even people who have plenty of money still gamble! So it isn't just the poor man trying to improve his lot in life! The same 6 numbers every week, (at least) and then they introduce a midweek lottery. What if your same 6 numbers come up on the midweek lottery, you could never forgive yourself for failing to buy a ticket, (neither would your family, who are banking on this chance to have a better life.)

Of course, the national lottery is one great way to get the whole country addicted, where the entry fee is low, and the prize is huge! And this kind of gambling is not the same as going to bet on horses, or play blackjack, because none of the money is going to those nasty bookmakers, or casino owners. This is all in a good cause. Most of the money goes to charity, so everybody wins. Or do they?

Have you ever noticed how you *feel* when the balls are spinning round waiting to drop? How do you actually *feel*? Pretty excited, I'd say. The anticipation, the waiting; could it be your ball first? Is it...Yes a 6! and it continues, the excitement grows... the second ball... Number... 24. Yes!! Oh, this could be your lucky week... 4 million pounds! How will you spend it? New cars, a yacht, a helicopter, and a new house in the sun... Number... 12. Ahhh, unlucky you think... Number 41...No! Number... 16. No! And finally... Nummmmberrrrr... 3.

“Oh well, never mind,” we say, “maybe next week.” And you’re right, maybe next week it could be you holding the cheque for £4 million, so dutifully you buy another ticket. Just in case.

The game of chance is not new; people have always gambled, which is to take risks. And why do we take a risk? One word: Excitement; which is pleasure!

The truth is, you will probably never win the lottery, but you may win a few pounds here and there Your horse may never come in, but you can be sure that someone else’s did, so that keeps you gambling – just in case.

Let me ask you a question: Have you ever seen serious gamblers? Have you ever looked at their faces? Do they look like they’re having fun? They are so caught up in the addiction, that they have no time to enjoy it. Like someone addicted to drugs, alcohol or cigarettes, they know they’re addicted, but they just can’t stop. The brain has tasted pleasure, and it won’t give it up without a fight.

Action now for the benefit of your system

Do you gamble? Do you like it? Do you enjoy it? Tell me why you really gamble. Is it to make more money? Is it to make a better life for your family? Is it to pay off debts? Or is it just for one simple reason: Pleasure? It makes you happy doesn’t it?

Don’t you think addiction of any kind is bad for the system? Doesn’t it distract and shelter us from real life, helping us escape, momentarily? But “real life” is always there, only addiction enables us to forget it for just a short while. It allows us to get through a day without worrying about our problems, although the problems are still there. It solves nothing but offers you plenty of solutions. Bet on a horse, go to the casino, have a drink, have a cigarette...

Do you not think it is time we learned to deal with problems on our own, and realise that addictions like gambling of any kind are keeping us from finding a solution? This is not about fun. You have been addicted by your brain; tricked into doing something that is not best for the system. If you really want more money, there is only one way to get it. Earn It. Go to work every day and earn more money. Get a better job, or if you want it quicker, rob a bank. Come on, this is not about the money, is it?

We are addicted to the excitement of placing the bet, the pure pleasure of it all, nothing more.

Receiving the winnings is secondary to the excitement of taking part.

Follow this logic if you will:

- | | | |
|----|--|----------|
| 1. | Go to work | Boring |
| 2. | Work hard all week | Boring |
| 3. | Earn £5.00 per hour | Boring |
| 4. | Take home £190.00 at the end of the week | Boring |
| 5. | Bet £20.00 on "old nag in the 3.00 pm" | Exciting |
| 6. | Watch race for 5 minutes | Exciting |
| 7. | Lose £20 | Boring |

This isn't good business sense, is it? Of course you will still argue, "but I could have won!" And there it is, right there, the addiction to the chance you could have won; the small excitement in your week. And maybe next time, number 7 will change to...

- | | | |
|----|----------|----------|
| 7. | Win £100 | Exciting |
|----|----------|----------|

Can you see how pointless this whole cycle of winning and losing is? The highs and lows? What a miserable addiction this is. We will wager everything, just for one moment of excitement, and still the bookmaker stands there ready to help us place our bet; ready to relieve us of our hard earned money. He knows why you're here, and so do you:

Pleasure

It doesn't seem like a problem while you're winning, although the consequences of losing can be serious. Getting into debt, ruining your relationships, or stealing to gamble more. But your addicted brain isn't going to let you give up quite so easily.

In order to be free, you need to be aware of yourself in the moment. The moment you buy a lottery ticket, place a bet on horse, or enter the casino. You need to see why you're there.

You don't have a problem, you are just a slave to the desire for pleasure, something which does not further the system in any positive

way. You are there because your brain likes it *so* much, that it is prepared to put your whole life in jeopardy. Your brain is bringing you along for the ride, so it can have a good time at your expense. When you can see this, you will be free.

Look at the problems gambling addiction causes in the world around us. How many addicted people are making their families suffer, their friends suffer and wider society around them suffer, without ever realising what they are doing? And the purveyors of pleasure, the casino owners, the bookmakers, the horse owners, and the lottery license holders, are all complicit in keeping us addicted. They know that once you are hooked you can't stop. Your gambling keeps them in a nice lifestyle, but what about your life?

This is your life, not theirs, and whether you agree or not, gambling one cent of money you have earned hard makes no sense. They know you *must* lose sometime, and when you do lose, that's the time you'll be back to win your money back.

Gambling is just another form of drug addiction.
You do it to get high!

G a r d e n s

A plot of ground where plants are cultivated

•

The flowers or vegetables or fruits or herbs that are cultivated in a
garden

•

A yard or lawn adjoining a house

Now, I don't know if you've noticed it, but the available "green" space we get with new house (which we call a "garden"), is diminishing by the day. Behind my mother's house, a large old house was recently knocked down to make way for three "executive" homes. Huge, I grant you; but when I looked over the wall, I failed to see any space we could call a real garden. So I asked the boss of the construction company why that was?

Me: Hi, I like the new houses you've built, but one thing troubles me, where have the gardens gone?

Him: Oh! (chuckling) Yes it's funny you should say that but someone else asked me the same question recently. The answer's really quite simple. If someone is going to pay a million pounds for a house, they like it to look like a million! What's the point in

having a huge garden and a tiny cottage? No-ones going to be impressed with that!

Me: So you're saying that the reason there are small gardens is because of status!?

Him: Something like that. Look, people are busy working these days, it's not like the old days when people had the time to potter around in the vegetable patch. These houses are expensive; people have to work as much as they can just to keep paying off the mortgage. And when they come home, what do you think they want to do? Dig potatoes in the garden or sit in a nice lounge watching satellite tv and drinking a relaxing glass of red wine? If people really wanted small houses and large gardens then we would build that, although thinking about it we wouldn't earn as much money building a small house, so that wouldn't be very profitable would it?

Me: No, thanks for your time.

In most developed nations, there isn't much space left near cities, so the developers try to put as many bricks as possible per square metre. It makes good financial sense for them, but as we can see in cities like london, they have become huge sprawling metropolises, with mile after mile of slate roof. Sure some people have gardens but it is the buildings themselves that take up most of the space. "What are you moaning about?" asks the town planner, "We have lots of lovely gardens and parks where people can walk!" Let me tell you a short story.

One of the reasons I liked the idea of going to live in australia was the space! I had heard a statistic somewhere, that the state of western australia – where only 2.2 million people lived – was the same size in land mass as india, and they had over a billion people there! Wow! I thought, this is going to be more like it, imagine the space we are all going to have.

So, imagine my surprise – when I started looking at houses to rent with my wife – that unless I had my own gold deposit, the most I would be able to afford would be a small house, tightly packed next to another one, with a postage size garden with sandy soil! I couldn't understand it, so I set out to find why we didn't all have massive spaces around us.

"Sure we have plenty of space around us, but most of it's uninhabitable unless you are a kangaroo!" a friend joked. He explained further. "Look, most australians live in, or close to cities, because that's where the work is. You could live further out, but then you'd have a hell of a commute on your hands, most people are happy to put up with

small gardens because (a) they're close to the city where they work and (b) the government have provided plenty of parks, and if you need more space, there's always the beach!"

How could this be? A new society created just 200 years ago falling into the same trap a city like London (that had been going a lot longer and so could be excused somewhat) had? And suddenly I realised. The Australians were following the same model as every other consumer society with the businesses in the centre and the accommodation/retail parks/transport infrastructure surrounding it. "Of course, this is what everybody's idea of a modern city is like," I thought. People go to work. People come home to relax. The garden is only there to look pretty. They don't need a garden for anything else but laying a lawn and planting nice flowers and bushes around the outside so it looks pretty!

This isn't like the old days when people needed to grow their own carrots and potatoes and fruit, now they had money from working and could just pop down to the supermarket 24 hours a day in the car if they needed to. Why would they want to spoil their lovely lawn by having ugly vegetables sticking out of the ground! People want to have beauty surrounding them and so they create their own little piece of paradise. Their garden.

We ended up with a house on the end of a terrace 100 metres from the main shopping strip of the area, and were told how lucky indeed we were to have a garden at all in the city, when in fact many thousands of people had only a balcony, at the very most, in their apartment buildings. But I didn't really count myself "lucky," in fact I was disappointed with the whole thing; but even so, I decided to start by growing some tomato plants, and some herbs, in the sandy soil. The herbs all got eaten by slugs and bugs and the tomato plants fared no better. I think we got two tomatoes from the plant but boy did we savour them!

Our own piece of paradise, ten feet from someone else's

I now came to realise that most of Australia also lived like this. Maybe if they were a bit further out they had a bit more land, but as I travelled out of the city and looked on in horror at some of the new developments built on little more than dust, surrounded by two metre fencing, it came to me. This is what people want. They want a low maintenance garden that doesn't take much looking after, and as long as the inside of the house is big and well equipped, it's enough.

The developers were only building what the people wanted (and want them they did, if all the sold signs were to be believed). They wanted their square patch of land fenced in by neighbours with just enough space so the kids could run around in and a patio large enough to entertain guests during the famous “aussie barbecues.” The plants and flowers were mere decoration.

So, the english developer I spoke to was right. People *are* too busy to worry about having large gardens with space enough to grow their vegetables, they had work to do during the day and gardens were for enjoying in the evening. They weren't from farming stock; these were city dwellers, brought up on fast food diets and consumer lifestyles.

What I was talking about was the past, a time when people couldn't afford to buy vegetables so they grew them themselves out of necessity, not out of some idealistic dream to be self-sufficient. And anyway, even if they wanted to be self-sufficient they sure would find it difficult to grow all they needed on a five metre square patch of land! It was me who was being idealistic, out of touch with the “real world,” a world where everything I wanted and more was available to buy just as long as I had earned enough money.

That was the dream that people were chasing now. The ability to have everything you want at your fingertips. Heck, with internet shopping, all our groceries could be delivered to us without us ever having to step foot out of the door! I was living in the past, and I needed to wake up (I was told). Old men had vegetable plots. Old men had vegetable plots because they had nothing else to do.

The demise and rise of the veggie plot

Although I was resigned to the fact that modern cities needed modern gardens, my hopes were lifted last year when I was in the czech republic; where although the gardeners were, what you could call “retired,” I saw many of these community plots dotted around the city. I found someone who spoke english and asked him why they were still doing it.

Me: Hi. Can I ask you why your still growing your own vegetables in a city. It seems most people gave it up a long time ago.

Gardener: Have you seen the state of the vegetables you get in the supermarkets? They're disgusting, they are full of chemicals, and they have no taste.

Me: Oh, I agree with you. It's just that it looks like a lot of hard work.

Gardener: It is, but I find it relaxing coming down here after work.

Me: Oh, you still work. I thought you must be retired!

Gardener: No, I can't afford to retire, I still work in a factory for eight hours a day; this is my bit of peace at the end of the day, and it feels good to get your hands dirty, knowing that at the end of it, you will have beautiful tasting fruit and vegetables. Come. You look at the soil here, there are no fertilizers and no chemicals, you won't find soil like that on the big farms.

Me: I can see that (I had to agree, it not only felt good, but smelt good too.). But don't you have too much produce here for your own needs, won't it go off?

Gardener: No, we have a community garden here, there are over 30 of us each tending individual plots, but we all grow things we can exchange with each other. For example, my friend over there grows potatoes. I grow apples and pears. He has no apples and pears and I have no potatoes, do you understand?

Me: Yes, I think so.

Gardener: Other friends grow different fruits and vegetables, and we exchange. If we have too many we take them down to the local market and sell them and we split the profit. It is not much but we manage to pay for a few drinks with it, if you know what I mean?

Me: So do you have your own gardens at your homes?

Gardener: No, most of us still live in communist-era apartment blocks, but some have gardens. They don't grow anything there, just flowers and plants. But here when we get together we grow! It is very friendly here; sometimes we bring food up to share and maybe some beer in the evening during the summer.

Me: So would you like to do this for a living?

Gardener: No way, much too hard work, this is for fun, but we never have to buy any vegetables and they taste so good.

Me: It sounds like you've got it made.

Gardener: Maybe, my friend.

Me: Goodbye and good luck with the growing.

This got me thinking. If we can't beat the developers who build the houses so close together with the tiny gardens, and we can't convince people that having them just to put some flowers in is a waste; then maybe there was another way. Perhaps if we used an example like the gardener I had met, people could have fun mixing with other people, whilst at the same time supplying each other with all of their fruit and vegetable needs. And when they have too much they just whip it down to the local market and sell it.

"Fresh, organic community vegetables, locally grown!" you can call out. Then split the profits and maybe treat yourselves to a nice meal or a few drinks every so often. Who knows, maybe you'll make more!

The rise of the community garden

So how do we start this community garden? Who would be in charge? Who would decide what vegetables to grow? How much is a five kilo bag of potatoes worth? One kilo of apples perhaps? What if people cheated, what if the people who worked there stole from each other? And other modern dilemmas created by the capitalist consumer society. But when we start thinking like this, the whole project is doomed from the start!

So, instead of worrying about who is going to cheat who, start chatting to your neighbours (you know, the people who live next door!) you may never have spoken to, or people at work or at social and sport clubs and see if they want to start a new club, but this time with no leader and no committee (otherwise you'll never get anything done), and see if anyone is interested in trying to start a community garden which grows fruit and vegetables etc. for the people involved with the project. So instead of having two sorry looking tomatoes to show for your growing effort, you will be rewarded by an endless supply of produce, as long as it is planned right!

There will, of course, have to be agreement on what to grow, and who will grow what, and how to manage pest control (no pesticides please), and then you are well on your way to the next stage; where to get the land from?

Now I am not suggesting that anybody should front up the money, or go to the bank and ask for a loan; we'd just be back at the beginning. No.

We have to go to the council and ask them for some space for a new community garden. And we won't pay a penny for it!

The council always has some spare land somewhere that a greedy developer hasn't snatched up already, and as you are members of the tax paying community, you would like some community space (please). They are sure to listen to your charming persuasion!

Who knows, there may already be a community scheme like this operating in your local area and that will save you all the hassle of starting a new one. What do you think? Do you like the idea of having your own vegetables and fruit for "free," sharing in some community spirit, and taking away some small part of the supermarkets profit?

It sounds like a good deal to me, and when I eventually find a place to settle my weary head, I too will try to start one of these. Come on, it looks like it could be fun, sitting around on a summers evening with some friends sharing a cool drink and having a laugh after tending your crops. The city gentleman farmer is born.

It just seems as though we are wasting so much space – which we could be using to grow good quality food – that has now been engulfed by bricks and mortar. But instead of just complaining and blaming the developers, I have to look closer to home; to our own consumer tendencies, and the lifestyle we helped create for everyone. Maybe this project is one simple way to start appreciating where the food comes from and having a good time into the bargain!

Campaign for space to be given for your own community garden
today!

Let's grow! (sorry for the pun)

G i v i n g

The act of giving

•

Transfer possession of something concrete or abstract to somebody

Let us start by talking about the antonym of giving, which isn't receiving, it is taking. Whether we were always like this, or it is a new thing, we have become a society of takers, and we'll take anything we can get. So why are we like this? Is it in our biological make up? Is our dna encoded with selfishness? Well according to some scientists concerned with evolution, maybe it is!

Selfishness

Concerned chiefly or only with yourself and your advantage to the exclusion of others

As a species, human beings have been very successful; we have survived the worst the elements could throw at us, and we have come out the

other side laughing. We have cities, cars, nice houses, plenty of food to eat (in some countries), and we have enough leisure time to enjoy doing things we like doing.

No more going out hunting and gathering every day for us. Those times have well passed, and we are now an advanced civilisation able to grow enough food around the world to feed everybody, and have the technology so that everyone can have clean water. This should be paradise for all of us, except it isn't, for so many. Millions of people are starving, dehydrated, sick from disease, on the run from war, homeless, helpless. Yet we carry on with our perfect lives, which you remember, are so easy now.

In the west, we aren't short of anything. We eat nice food, drink wine, go out to restaurants, go on holidays, go to the cinema and the theatre, gossip about our neighbours, mow the lawn, water the plants, and sit back and relax with a nice evening in front of the tv. Ahh, what could be better? Yet only a few hours away by plane there are people fighting for their lives.

Let me ask you a question: How many times have you flown long haul? The reason I am asking is that most of the big jets have a moving map on the back of the seat, which shows where you are, and which countries you are crossing over. I was fascinated by my reaction as we passed over countries where I knew fighting or killing was still going on, knowing that right at that moment, I was passing over people who were screaming in pain or starving, at the point of death. I was saddened that I flying above death, and destruction, enjoying myself; but then I switched over to the movie channel and all was well again. A meal was served or a cold drink from the bar and a bag of peanuts and those people's problems could be as far away as pluto as far as I was concerned.

Does that make me selfish? I didn't think so; this was an alien world to me. These people weren't my problem, what could I do? I had my own problems to think about. But it did make me start to think.

Maybe selfishness is the reason we were so successful as a species. Maybe thinking only about number one and our close family group is the reason we are still here. Maybe it *is* every man for himself. Maybe before going to help someone else we have to help ourselves. So many maybes, so few answers.

What do you think? Are you selfish? Do you put yourself before others, and if so, is it a bad thing? Do you feel guilty about doing it or does it not even enter your mind?

Unfortunately, the whole issue of whether we are born to be selfish has been clouded by the fact that selfishness has been positively encouraged by modern western capitalist governments. We have been encouraged to think only about what we can get for ourselves, and this principle has helped drive our economies to be highly successful. We are only interested in making money for *me*.

I want to get rich. I want to be successful. I want to have the most successful company in the world. I want a big house. I want a big car. I want I want I want, and I will get. And if you have enough skill and determination you may just get there. But then what?

You have enough money and security, for you, your partner, and your children. None of you want for anything. Everyone can have anything. You will never have to worry about money again. Does this make you less selfish now you have everything you have ever wanted? Will you suddenly start to give? Perhaps.

Maybe you will donate large sums of money to charity. Maybe you will dedicate some of your time to working for a charity, maybe helping to raise money for them. You may set up a foundation. But let me ask you one thing. Would you have done these things if you weren't successful, if you weren't rich?

What if you were the average man in the street, with a poorly paid job, a small house, little money, two children, and debts. Would you still help others? Based on the evidence we have seen, you wouldn't think so.

"I'm too busy; I've got enough problems without helping other people."

Yet strangely, people do!

I am not one of those people. In my life, I never thought about helping others. I worked hard (sometimes), enjoyed myself, bought myself nice things, ran up bills on my credit cards, went to the pub, and mostly thought about no one else – not even my parents really. I couldn't even be bothered sending them birthday cards or giving presents (unless I had plenty of extra money left over to spend on myself). So if you want to talk selfish, you don't need to look any further than me! I only worried about how much money I had for myself.

Did my parents encourage that attitude? Was I born like it; or was I merely conditioned into behaving a certain way by society? I do not know the answer, but I know that all the time I was growing up and beyond, my parents themselves did charitable work, and in fact have been charitable to me my whole life! Any time I got into trouble with money, there they were, ready to bail me out – always ready to give a helping

hand; selflessly, because I was their son. Maybe by helping me all the time, they unwittingly kept me selfish, but I will never know and neither will they. All I know is that I never helped one person in life. I only helped myself.

Writing this now seems strange, as I feel I am writing about someone else, someone I do not know. But this person is me, but just at a different time. Does this seem terrible to you reading how selfish I have been, when all I have been thinking about is me. My happiness. My sadness. My problems. Me, me, me?

What I want to explore with you is whether there is anything wrong with that attitude. Why does it have to be bad to be thinking about oneself all the time? Who does it hurt? If you were to have posed that question to me several years ago, I would have said nobody, and taken great affront at the fact you had asked me that question. You see, the problem is, a selfish person doesn't even know they are being selfish because they are too wrapped up in themselves!

Once again, we come back to our old friend, awareness. But if I am being selfish, and I am aware I am being selfish, will I still be selfish? That will be your choice, but the more you become aware of yourself in action, the more likely you are to shift your thinking.

As we recall, awareness is that fraction of a micro-second in between thought and action, where you stop, just for a moment before you actually do what you are thinking about doing. It is in that moment when selfishness leaves and unselfishness can enter.

Let the giving begin!

For those of you concerned that I am suggesting you hand over all your worldly possessions to a charity, let me assure you that that is not what giving is about! It is not about being altruistic and public spirited. It is a shift in thinking.

Giving is not concerned with not earning money, for that is necessary in this society to live, nor is it about letting others use you as a doormat and taking advantage of your giving nature. It is about going beyond selfishness.

Do for the benefit of all others

So how do you do something for the benefit of all others? Does this mean you cannot work to earn money for yourself, or cannot go on holiday, or buy a television, or a nice car? Of course not. I am realistic that we live in a modern world and we like to have modern things; we also have to earn money to buy food, pay our bills and taxes which help the wider community. This is about thinking not about yourself, or your family or kinship groups, but about everybody in the whole world – even the ones who haven't been born yet.

Think about it for a moment. Think about what an important gift that is. The work and the life you lead is for the benefit of all others!

I can hear most of you grumbling about how this doesn't make sense, and how you can't see it working, and it's not possible, and that actually, it's one of the stupidest ideas you've ever heard! But it's not an idea, it's a way of living that simply states: "Every action I do, I do for the benefit of the planet, the children in africa, the murderer in prison, the future generations, the oceans, the girl who was raped last night, the rivers, the people suffering from illness mental and physical, the drunk man in the street, the greedy man, the violent husband..."

If this is all a bit too philosophical and whimsical for you, let's start talking in plain language, shall we?

One big reason for a lot of problems here on this planet (which you remember you share with billions of others, plants, animals, insects, fish and humans), is *you*! In your selfishness, you have forgotten that we are all linked by a common bond – nature; something we seem determined to stamp out, if it's the last thing we do. We seem to have forgotten that every action we take affects someone, somewhere else. That's not philosophy, that's a fact.

If we all decide to eat beef, forests must be cleared for grazing; cattle must be watered, grain must be grown in a field, which must be watered and harvested, and processed to feed the cattle. Someone must then butcher the cattle, process the cattle, pack them in plastic which must be moulded after the oil is drilled from the ground; then shipped in cartons, that use cardboard that comes from trees which must be cut down; then loaded onto a truck which must be made from metal which must be mined then manufactured in a factory that must be built and run on electricity which must be mined, then burned, then distributed, to generate electricity; and then the truck will carry the meat, using fuel,

which is petroleum, which comes from oil, which is dug out of the ground, to the shop where it stored which uses electricity. Finally you buy it, take it home, cook it using electricity and eat in five minutes flat.

So, hopefully, you can see from this simplistic model, how our actions affect others. All others, not just some others. Remember that.

The whole world is about links. This book is about subjects that are linked. You are linked to so many events and people in the world you don't even know about! That is why we must do everything for the benefit of all others, because if we remain selfish and do everything for the benefit of ourselves, we are still affecting others on the planet, only more likely than not, it will be adversely. I think the main problem is that in the western world, most people are not aware they are adversely affecting others. Let me give you a quick example.

If an upstanding member of the community who does charity for work for the homeless and orphaned children in the united states decides he will buy an orphaned child a soft fluffy toy, most of you would think it is a nice gesture, and the child who has seen so much sadness in its life, will be happy to receive such a gift. But the toy was made in china by a child labourer, the same age as the recipient. He is forced to work 12 hours a day for next to nothing. The money that is raised by the sale of the toy, goes back to fund the military and a government that is a brutally oppressive regime.

This is not about making ethical choices. It is about awareness of how everything you do is linked to something else. So before you take action, reflect for a moment on the effect it is having on all others, and ask yourself if the action is to the detriment of anyone or anything else on the planet. That is the principle of giving as I see it.

Most of you will say, "this is too hard, how are we to research all the links in the world to see if buying a fluffy toy has a detriment on any others? That's a crazy and unworkable idea!"

It may seem hard to do, but the most important things in life are never easy. A lot of you might argue and say, "what about giving time, isn't that important?" or "If no one gave money to charity lots more people would suffer or die in the world," or "how dare you criticise the work that charities do, they are helping people and the planet the world over, without them the world would be a worse place to live in..."

The way I see it, charity is the end result of selfishness. Giving is the beginning of compassion.

G l o b a l i s a t i o n

Growth to a global or worldwide scale

Big is better!



We've heard a lot about globalisation in the news recently, haven't we? It's usually a raggy band of protesters at some economic summit "protesting" about corporations, shouting "down with capitalism," and eventually fighting with the police or smashing things up! Great. But I don't think that gets you and I any closer to understanding what globalisation is, and whether it is good for us as a species and the planet in general, does it? It merely alienates these protesters more, and has them condemned as anarchists, without getting the root of the problem.

So what is globalisation? It's exactly as it says in the dictionary – growth to a global or worldwide scale. So what does this mean to you? Well, If you live in the developed world it probably means wide product choice, availability, and cheap prices. Can you think of anything else?

The one thing that has been global for many centuries, is religion, something you don't hear many people complaining about! So before you read any further, understand this. Globalisation is not destroying the planet. Globalisation in itself is not a bad thing. If we look at globalisation in a different way, we could say that the earth is our local community and all globalisation is, is a method to connect us all; to bring communities with different skin colours, different languages and different traditions together. What do you think?

The problem is that when we hear about globalisation in the media, and from scruffy protesters, what they are talking about is the high flying world of cola and auto marketing, sprinkled with some shady global finance and oil companies. What we have to remember is that these people are just trying to make a living selling us stuff in the spirit of free enterprise, something that has been encouraged since entrepreneurial men began trading with other countries.

The west has long since traded with asia, especially in textiles and spices – the volume of trade has just got bigger! So we shouldn't be surprised when people want to sell their products to everybody else in the world. They think it's a good product and they think people will buy it, and sometimes they're right, they do. Whether it is ethically right or not, that is not for us to determine.

Remember, we are dealing with individuals with big brains here, you know! These are people who can think for themselves and make their own choices, they are part of the most intelligent species on the planet, who are we to impose our will on them?

If a woman in some back water in china sees an advert for a cola drink, she has the choice to say no! People who are anti-globalisation, think it's wrong that these big companies exist, and are using up all the planet's resources, but there is no such thing as right and wrong, only choice, and if someone chooses to buy a cola drink and pays money for it, who are you and I to say it is wrong?

Personally, I wouldn't drink the stuff, because I don't think it is good for the system, it creates a lot of rubbish, and uses up water supplies that could be used for better things, like erm, drinking water! Do you follow what I am trying to say here? I have made the choice not to drink the cola drink, due to self-education and awareness.

I have the opinion that what the product contains, is not going to have a positive effect on my body, coupled to the fact that I know plastics are bad for the environment, the volume of water used up for a product with no nutritional benefits is high, and that the massive production and

distribution networks built up around this product of no nutritional value, place a heavy burden on non-renewable resources. That is my choice.

What the protesters fail to realise, is that if everyone had the awareness and education regarding cola, the cola company would – if you pardon the pun – go quickly into liquidation. It would be gone; finito! There would be no more cola. Never forget that. We, the people of the world, keep the large multinationals in business, without us, they crumble – instantly.

So, instead of blaming the cola firm, blame the woman in the rural chinese village, who had no awareness, nor education of the impact of the product on herself, or the environment; and allowed her mind to tempt her into trying one! I am serious. All of us are responsible for the growth of global companies because we buy what they sell. That's just business.

So, if you want to smash the windows at a fast food restaurant in your town, go ahead, but it won't stop people eating there. The same goes for smashing the windows at an oil company, it wont stop people driving their cars. Only they can decide to stop doing that. Informed, individual choice is the key to halting the massive drain on our natural resources by certain global firms. That's all it will take to halt the expansionist policies they have.

Although you try telling someone in a village they don't want a car because it's "bad," when actually, they do! They're sick of toiling all day long on foot, and now they want something to make their life easier. The other problem one has, is that people in developing countries (apprentice consumers) see what we have, and want it! Just like the western traders saw the beautiful silks in asia, and wanted them. It is no different.

Sometimes I feel sorry for these large companies, who are caught up in these globalisation struggles. You see, they started out small, and like most small businesses, when they see an opportunity to expand, take it. They didn't set out to ruin the world, they probably set out to make it better; after all, which bank is going to support a brand new business whose mission it is to use up all the worlds resources, and addict people to their product?

Lots of people refuse to wear certain brands because they use sweatshop (*factory where workers do piecework for poor pay and are prevented from forming unions; common in the clothing industry*) labour, but most textiles are made by people working in harsh conditions. It has never been a pleasant industry to work in, even in this country. But the interesting thing is, I never hear people complaining about not accepting

coal for their fire or refusing to accept electricity that was generated by coal. That truly is a “sweatshop” job, working in the dark, half a mile below the surface of the earth in cramped, and dangerous conditions.

We have to look at this objectively, if we are to understand the truth of it. There is no good just picking on companies because they operate in multiple countries. They may pay poor wages, and may have poor conditions for the workers, and what they make may damage the environment irreparably, but then we’d have to look at 50 other local companies doing the same thing, and maybe even worse. Our challenge here is to investigate globalisation, not to condone it or criticise it.

So let’s look at one global phenomenon shall we? The first is the mobile phone, used by hundreds of millions of people worldwide, owned by a handful of companies. The second is the internet, used by tens of millions of people connected by a backbone owned by a handful of companies. Oh, and before I forget, I am writing this book on a laptop made by a multi-national company. So let’s forget all this talk about companies, we will deal with that topic separately, let’s just finish by saying that individuals have the last say in whether companies stay, not only global, but in business at all, and that we *all* have a responsibility to investigate each product we buy to ensure it is not adversely affecting the well-being of the planet, animals, or humans.

We also have to recognise that some advances have only been made possible thanks in part to globalisation – for example, medicines, which have saved the lives of millions of people worldwide. Before we criticise something we must investigate it fully.

Going global

I would like to talk to you about a different kind of globalisation now, one that has nothing to do with industry.

One benefit I noticed, when I worked for a large company in information technology, many years ago, was I got to travel to other offices. For me, it was great to get to meet so many people from so many different countries, all with different traditions and cultures. All too often we get stuck working in our local community, with the same people doing the same thing, and we become insular in our views. We see everyone from abroad as an unwelcome outsider. In short, our world view can be very limited. For some people, the most they see of people

from other countries, is when they take their two week package holidays (the british especially).

Some people rarely travel outside of their own countries on holiday, preferring the company of their own country folk. But it is good for the species as a whole to mix with, and try to understand other people from faraway countries, whose languages we don't speak.

How often do we ever get involved with helping other people in other countries less fortunate than ourselves? Ok, maybe we give a donation or two, but one of the problems of not seeing the world as a whole is division. The separation of people into countries, languages, religions. We need to globalise more, not less, and I am not talking about for profit either.

We need to break down the barriers that exist between us, and learn to understand each other. I don't mean understanding culture, that is a mere external expression of the person, I mean really getting to know another human being from a different part of the world, sharing experiences, and healing the divisions that have isolated so many of us from each other, thanks to skin colour, language, nationalism and religion amongst others.

So what do you think? Are you able to go global? It's all very well to stay put, where it's safe and warm, and you know everyone, and you have a nice job, and a nice quiet life; but if we are to move forward as a planet, we've got to start getting to know each other a bit better – this separateness has kept us fighting for too long. We have got so used to only hearing our own language, and being around our own culture, that we have forgotten that this planet is ours, all of ours.

We are not defined by skin colour, language and culture; underneath we are all the same, human. The rulers of the countries may have laid down borders to keep us separate to define their lands (not ours), but the world is ours, not for the taking, but for the exploring. The time has come when identity cards and passports that define us as having one nationality go. For too long, the powerful have wanted to control us. We are the powerful, and we should let it be known that we will travel the globe, and we will not be restricted to having nationality, which is a man-made concept.

Unfortunately, most people only want to travel to another country for a better lifestyle than they had in their previous country. All they want is what they had in their own country, plus a bigger house, a bigger car, and better education for their children. That is economic migration, not globalisation.

Globalisation is the right to roam free in our world without men in suits restricting us. Not so we can go to countries to earn more money, but to connect up with our fellow man across the globe! Idealistic? Mad? Crazy? Maybe! But I just want you to understand how I see the concept of globalisation, and it doesn't come packaged in a cola can or a burger box. The more we are kept separate from each other, the more the fear of each other will increase.

Come on everyone, we've got nothing to fear from each other. We're not aliens! We're human. We're all exactly the same. It's time to get out there and start meeting each other. We are so insular, how do we ever expect to get on with someone from another planet when we don't even know our neighbours?

Branch out. Expand. Globalise.
Not your company. You!

G o d

Any supernatural being worshipped as controlling some part of the world or some aspect of life or who is the personification of a force

•

A man of such superior qualities that he seems like a deity to other people

•

A material effigy that is worshipped

•

The supernatural being conceived as the perfect and omnipotent and omniscient originator and ruler of the universe; the object of worship in monotheistic religions

Who do you think you are writing about god?
What do you know about god?
How dare you!
Blasphemer!



I indeed, I have asked myself the same question, many a time. Who am I to write about god? What do I know about him? I have pondered over writing this topic for a long time now, but I feel I am now ready to open a dialogue with you. It may not be an easy dialogue, as we are dealing with conditioned minds: Minds that have been conditioned by parents, history, religious gurus and teachers.

It will not be an easy path, but if we both open our minds, we may find out something incredible. What do you say? Are you ready to explore this most difficult of topics with me? Or do you want to skip reading this in case anything that is said here conflicts with the ideas that your mind has been imprinted with? Good, now we can begin.

For many thousands of years there has been talk of god, an all powerful being who created man in his own image. Prophets (*someone who speaks by divine inspiration; someone who is an interpreter of the will of*

god) have spoken to us, books have been written by disciples; in fact for the last several thousand years, god has been the one word on everybody's lips.

God is like all supernatural beings, invisible to the naked eye. But that's not to say he doesn't exist, after all, the wind is invisible to the naked eye, yet we can still feel its presence. Some have written that god is in fact in you, or that we are all god. One man recently published a book called "Conversations with god," where he had an apparent dialogue with the man himself. We are obsessed with the divine.

The idea that god could have created this world in seven days goes against all that the scientists have discovered about man evolving from the apes. So who is right? Did god create the world, or did the world randomly evolve over a great length of time. I think to truly understand all this we will have to throw away such questions which after all have only lead to a lot of argument in the past (and the present), and start to ask different questions of ourselves.

If no one had told you about god existing would you still believe in him? If you had not been given religious instruction in your various religions would you be so wholeheartedly defending god? But maybe you "found" god after a difficult period in your life and god helped you through it?



Scientists are in a difficult position are they not? They try to find out the truth of things by doing experiments and measuring the results, but science has not found a way to prove or disprove that god exists. And even if they did come up with evidence, what do you think you would say, if you believed in god? "What utter nonsense! These scientists should be sacked at the very least for suggesting such a thing."

Science is interested in facts. But the only "facts" they have to hand about god's existence, are the words which were written down many thousands of years ago. Occasionally, there will be "miracles," or some effigy will weep in a remote mountain village, but there are no "hard" facts.

"We don't need hard facts," say the believers, "we *know* god exists."

The scientists would say that yes, you can believe there is a god, but there is growing physical evidence that man has evolved from the apes in africa several million years ago, and through the process of natural selection, and several million years, out pops homo sapiens, ready to tell

anyone who will listen, that he in fact did not evolve from the apes; he was always a man, just as he is now, thanks to god creating the world in seven days...

We seem to be constantly at war with each others minds, fighting each other psychologically and physically, to prove god is better than your god.

Poor old god, if he did exist, would be sitting high in the heavens shaking his head, saying, “no, no, no, this won’t do, they haven’t understood a thing. Why did I even bother!” And we have to ask ourselves that question as well. If god really exists, why did he create the world – what was he trying to achieve? Please forgive me if you think I am taking this a bit too far, but I feel we must “ask” god himself these questions, and have our own “conversation with god.” Let us begin.

Me: So god, I just wanted to know one thing, if you do exist, then why did you create this world?

God: Because I could.

Me: Is there any purpose behind it?

God: No it just is.

Me: Is god your real name, or do you have another name I should call you?

God: You can call me god or whatever else you want, it doesn’t really matter.

Me: Are you angry with man for the trouble he has caused here, for all the misery and suffering he has caused himself and others?

God: Man has caused the pain for himself and others because he does not understand.

Me: Understand what?

God: What life is.

Me: And what is life exactly?

God: You will find out, but you must open your mind.

Me: So how will I find out?

God: You already know the answer.

Me: But I don’t, please tell me.

God: All will be revealed.

Me: But when?

God: When you find out.

Me: But I have so little time on earth, I need to know now.

God: Why do you care about time, it is unimportant.
Me: Because one day I shall die, and I want to know before then.
God: All of you want to know the answer, but that answer lies within yourselves.
Me: But god...
God: Sorry, I've got to go.

So. I just had a conversation with god, right? Did I? Was I talking to the great man himself, or was it all in my mind? I am serious. I asked some serious questions, I wanted to know the answer to, and "god" replied. Was I communing with a higher power, or were those answers just coming out of my own mind? How can I know? How can I "prove" it? Can you prove I wasn't in a dialogue with the entity that created the whole world? Can I prove I was?

Actually it doesn't matter. I wrote god's answers without thought or preparation, they just flowed "through" me, and they ended up on this page. Have I just proved god's existence, or have I deluded myself into thinking that there is more than there already is? I will never know.

But the answers "god" gave me, enlightened me a little. The answers were not what I was expecting, although they are in line with my own thinking. Do you see? Perhaps the answers are all in me, and all I have to do is ask the right question until I reach the truth of it all. Go on, have a go yourselves; ask "god" a question and write down the first answer that comes into your mind. This does not require analysis, just an open mind. When you have finished, come back and we will restart our discussion.

You see, I do not want to prove or disprove the existence of god to you, or to anybody; it serves you and I no purpose. I do not want to convert you to my way of thinking, whatever it may be, I just want to explore this deeply with you, so we both may be awoken.

God or god?

Actually, it doesn't matter if we give him a capital letter or a small letter, the only difference is how you think about it. If you think god is more important than any of us, then you should give him (it's funny that god is always a man don't you think?) a Capital letter, but if you are ready to explore something that is more than mere words can explain, then it makes no difference if it is a capital G or small g; after all, the alphabet was made by men, not god.

I am now hooked into asking god questions, so forgive me while I ask a few more.

- Me:** God, if you are a supreme being, do you look like a human?
God: Why should I look like you? Do you look like a lion or a mouse?
Me: Then why do people say you made man in your own image?
God: Men say lots of things.
Me: Are you solid or are you a part of the universe?
God: I am the universe.
Me: Ah, so your saying that you are everything, that you are everything that exists and has ever existed?
God: That's right.
Me: I see. So if you are everything, I am everything.
God: Right again.
Me: Does that mean I am god also?
God: Why would it? You decided to call me god. I didn't tell you my name.
Me: So what is your name?
God: It is unimportant.
Me: Ok, I understand. Last question. Should I be afraid of you?
God: Are you afraid of yourself?
Me: But I thought you said I am not god.
God: I keep telling you. You came up with the name, it means nothing.
Me: Ok, sorry. One final question, Why is everyone afraid of you?
God: Because they cannot see me. And what they cannot see they do not understand.
Me: Then why do you punish people.
God: I do not punish people, people punish people. I just am.
Me: Am I?
God: Of course you are. I have to go.

I'm pretty impressed. Not only has god spoken to me, he has confirmed what I already thought. This is strange. I wonder if I ask the questions and try to answer them myself, if I will still get the same answers? Let us ask our questions.

Me: Why am I miserable all the time, why is life not perfect.
Answer: Life is perfect, you just think it isn't.
Me: Then why do so many people suffer.
Answer: (silence)

At this point I found it hard to answer. I couldn't get the thought from my mind to the paper.
Let's ask god. It's easier!

Me: Then why do people suffer?
God: Because they are lost, they do not know the path.
Me: What is the path?
God: Do you not know?
Me: No. How can I find out?
God: You already did.
Me: Did I?
God: Yes, the path is the one you have chosen.
Me: But is it the right path to end suffering?
God: Why do you keep going on about suffering? I have already told you that man causes his own suffering; there is no purpose to it. The universe is the path.
Me: Is it? How do I know? How can I tell it is the path, I need some guidance here!
God: From who?
Me: From you.
God: Who am I?
Me: Me?
God: Wrong. I am me.
Me: But you said...
God: We are separate, but undivided. Does that make sense?
Me: Not at all. Why can't you give me a straight answer?
God: Why don't you ask a straight question?
Me: I thought I did. Ok, I see that suffering is man-made, not by divine intervention, that I call you god, but that it not your name. I am the universe and so are you, but I am not god. I am separate but undivided, which means that there is individual consciousness as part of the whole which is everything.
God: Goodbye.

That was seriously amazing. You probably won't believe me that I couldn't ask myself the question and answer it straight away, but when I asked god (whom I shall now call everything) what the answer was, I could keep going until I think I answered it *from* myself. I am now convinced, not that god is an entity, capable of great power and destruction if we displease him, but that what we call god is consciousness in the universe. The consciousness is everywhere and is everything. We cannot answer the question ourselves, because we do not know the answer, because we are limited by thought. But by putting the question out into the universal consciousness, I come back with an answer. I'm impressed!

But hold on, couldn't this just be insight?

G o s s i p

Light informal conversation for social occasions

•

A report (often malicious) about the behaviour of other people

•

A person given to gossiping and divulging personal information about others

•

Wag one's tongue; speak about others and reveal secrets or intimacies

“Shhh, Don’t tell anyone, but did you know john from accounts is sleeping with sally from marketing?”

“No! Really?”

“Yes it’s true, betty from telesales, was told by simon from the factory, because he was in a pub the other night and saw them together.”

“No!”

“Yes, It’s true! Did you know he’s married?”

“Really?”

“Yes, and he’s got children, I mean, you never know what’s going on, do you? Just think how his poor wife must feel?”

“Yes, she’d be heartbroken.”



It doesn't matter that actually john and sally arranged to meet after work because they both play badminton! As far as the office gossips are concerned, if someone says it's true, it must be.

Wherever you go in life, there is someone gossiping about someone else. From the offices of the large corporations I used to work in, to the small spiritual community where I am volunteering at the moment – gossip is rife.

Not content with talking about our friends, family and colleagues, we now have magazines and television programmes dedicated solely to gossiping about celebrities lives. People we have never met, nor will probably ever meet. This is how far we have come in our lives, the end result of millions of years of evolution.

Four billion years after the earth was created, and here we are, sitting in front of the tv, eating junk food, and looking at pictures of people who

have become well known for one reason or another (rich, model, TV star, actor), and who has been photographed or filmed, (a) coming out of a nightclub drunk, (b) with someone other than their partner, (c) with a prostitute (d) snorting cocaine or some other drug or (e) involved in some other scandal (*disgraceful gossip about the private lives of other people*).

One question I want to ask you all, is whether gossip can ever be helpful? Can gossip ever be construed as well meaning, or positive? Before you answer, I would like you to think about it for a moment. Does talking about people's lives make your life any better and does it make their lives better? Of course not!

But don't we feel really sneaky talking about people behind their backs? They can't hear us whispering our poisonous words about them, and when we see them or talk to them, we never mention we were gossiping about them, do we? Then it wouldn't be gossip. Instead we are all smiles. We pretend they are our best friend and yet we stab them in the back with malicious rumours or discussion of their private lives.

How many of us have been told something in confidence by someone and promised never to divulge it, yet as soon as we get the opportunity say, "I shouldn't tell you this, I promised not to tell anyone, but did you know that..." I can't believe I have been guilty of that on so many occasions. I listen to someone's innermost secrets, and then casually share them with friends down the pub.

In response to the question, of whether gossip can ever be positive, I would have to say that gossip is always malicious. It always relates to someone else's bad points (in our opinion), or things they have done they don't want other people to know about.

I often wonder how these celebrities feel when they see themselves in the paper or the trashy magazines, doing something they aren't proud of or want to keep secret. They must be distraught. Even though they court public attention, to see a picture of yourself stumbling out of a nightclub at 6.00 am must be quite unpleasant. Remember, for all their faults, celebrities are human too, even if we don't treat them as such. For us, they are people who have made a lot of money by being in the public eye so we have an inherent right to spy on them!

At heart, we are just voyeurs. Not in a sexual way (although that occurs too), but in a "your life is more interesting than mine way." Why do you think we have become so addicted to reality tv programmes where we "spy" on peoples lives for extended periods of time?

We love them, we can't get enough of them, so the tv companies make more and more. They have finally found what the public likes best –

voyeuristic programmes with real people, not actors, so that every day at work, or at home, or in the pub, we can say:

“Did you see what happened last night! I can’t believe she did that!”

“Yes I know, you’d think she’d have more sense.”

Day in, day out, we watch people, listen to them and discuss them; good points and bad points.

Let me ask you something. Don’t you think gossip is a real waste of energy, do you not think we could spend our time discussing more important issues in the world? “Why?” says you. “That’s no fun, gossip is much more fun.” But fun is not what gossip is at all, fun is sharing and laughing together, not secreting yourself in a corner with a confidant, and sharing half truths and rumours (which are always negative or used in a negative way).

For those of you who say that gossip can be used positively, please try to think of any time when you have gossiped about someone in a positive way.

“You know john?”

“Yes...”

“Did you know he’s going to be promoted to office manager?”

“John? You can’t be serious, he’s useless”

“I know, I don’t know what they were thinking...”

“Oh, hi john, just heard about your promotion, congratulations, you deserve it!”

I cannot understand it why are we so two-faced (*marked by deliberate deceptiveness especially by pretending one set of feelings and acting under the influence of another*) Why can’t we say what we are thinking? Because as humans we want people to think we like them – to avoid conflict. But underneath the jokes and the smiles is the jealous and malicious person, full of hate, rage and envy. That is the person who gossips.

We just can’t stop talking about each other

It starts off all innocently doesn’t it? A few back-handed words about a friend or a colleague who has done something to offend you, or maybe someone you don’t particularly like, (if you liked them, why would you talk about them behind their back?) but slowly it grows inside, like a disease, and you find that your whole conversation becomes about other people; what you heard and what you saw. It doesn’t even have to be out loud.

We talk to ourselves all the time about others. “Look at her, who does she think she is? She’s nobody special.” “I can’t believe he got promoted, above me, he’s useless, I’m so much better than him.” The incessant chattering in the brain, always judging ourselves, and always judging others. So where does it all end, this malicious gossip?

If you aren’t aware of it, military regimes, and dictatorships around the world use gossip to keep tabs on dissenters and people plotting against them. Throughout countries with totalitarian (*characterized by a government in which the political authority exercises absolute and centralized control*) governments, people were encouraged to spy on their neighbours, to tell the secret police about their activities. Of course they found no shortage of volunteers did they?

Thanks to the information provided, thousands of people were imprisoned and/or executed as a result of the information passed to the authorities. It still goes on now. Right now there are people all over the world knocking on the doors of the authorities to give information about other peoples activities. In the light of recent events in the world some of you may believe that to be a good thing.

Western governments are putting up posters everywhere, taking out adverts, in papers and on tv. “If you see anything suspicious, contact us now.” The governments are so concerned with terrorism that they now want us to spy on our neighbours as well. Do you not think this is reminiscent of the old cold war era? “No” says you, “that era was about control and oppression, our government is fighting for freedom. We need to stop the terrorists so if we have to spy on our neighbours to stop them blowing us up, so be it. I’m glad to give any assistance to the government.” But please, you must remember this, it is still gossip. It is still talking about someone else.

“Yes, but I saw him building a bomb.”

This is easy. If you have facts that will help less people being killed, then you should try to do something about it. Most police operations have information given by grasses (*someone acting as an informer or decoy for the police*), and a grass is just a different name for a gossip. The police and the security services rely on peoples inherent nature to gossip and talk about others in order to get information to stop dangerous events (such as explosions) from actually taking place or to bring about the end of paedophile rings etc.

Information is different from gossip only in one way. It is provided with the express intention of helping others on the planet, otherwise it is just gossip and is malicious.

So do you think we will ever be able to transcend this poisonous trait so inherent in human life? It has been around for a long time and shows no signs of abating. Always negative, never positive. Were we born like it? Doubtful. It is almost certainly a learned behaviour from society, from listening to our parents, our teachers and our peers, and starts early on in life, probably in the playground.

So how do we go beyond this; will we evolve enough so we no longer gossip? Who knows, but all I know is that it is a poisonous arrow in the side of the human race, and causes nothing but suffering. It is malicious and vindictive and bears no relation to our compassionate nature. This is a bolt-on attribute, and not a very nice one at that.

The only way forward is to make a big shift, right now; where we make a promise to each other to stop gossiping about other people, and try to develop love for each other. So what if people do things you don't like. Who cares if John is sleeping with someone and he's married. So what if someone has nineteen illegitimate children. None of this matters. It is unimportant, has no effect on our lives, and helps no one by gossiping about it. So why do it?

Go beyond it now. Vow with me to stop gossiping and help the world be a more understanding and peaceful place. Do it now. I have. You will probably find like most people, that this big shift doesn't work quite as quickly as you would like. That's where awareness comes in.

With awareness, you are not forcing yourself to stop doing something, you are just noticing, quietly, the internal voice, noticing quietly what you say, and noticing quietly what you do. You are not trying to stop anything, merely paying attention to yourself. It is through this noticing, and your commitment to yourself, that you will go beyond gossip. Be aware in the moment. Right now.

G o v e r n m e n t

The organization that is the governing authority of a political unit

•

(government) the system or form by which a community or other political unit is governed

•

The act of governing; exercising authority

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I don't know how long governments have been around, but there have always been people in power for as long as man has tried to organise himself into social hierarchies. Modern governments now look after social welfare, health, education, employment, public services like roads, oh and war if necessary, and they do it all for YOU. Well they say they do, because you pay for it (you know, through those little things called taxes, which are compulsory I might add).

But why do governments really exist? Can man not look after himself? Is he not the most intelligent species on the planet, capable of great discoveries? Let's face it, man used to get on all right before there were governments. He made shelter, found food and water, made clothes, and managed to keep the species going quite nicely, thank you very much!

But something changed, and that change came when the groups began to get larger, and man was able to specialise, thanks to the

development of early agriculture which freed his mind to really start making mischief.

**Of course the people need us!
What would they do without us?
They would be lost!
We provide security, peace...
blah blah blah**

But anyway, we're stuck with governments now, aren't we? We might be lucky enough to live in a democracy where the people "vote" for the party who they want to be in "power" (usually the people who promise the individual the most, like lower taxes, etc.), but do we really know what we are voting for?

The parties all have manifestos (*a public declaration of intentions, as issued by a political party or government*), but most of us have never seen one, let alone read one, probably because they are not delivered to our door. So we vote for the party who stands for the things we think are important to us, like "law and order," "immigration," "lower taxes," "bigger pensions," or we just vote for the party our parents voted for. "My father always voted conservative," or "I am a third generation republican" and all that nonsense.

The politicians campaign to get our votes, and on polling day we mark a cross on the ballot sheet, and our vote is sealed away in a box. On election night the media follow the counting, and we are told about swings to the left and swings to the right, and finally a winner is announced!

"Hooray! Our party has got in," we shout, and the politicians have a wild party to celebrate. But tomorrow, it's back to the same old business of counting the taxes, diverting the taxes and wasting the taxes.

Whoever got in, the roads will still be there, the hospitals will still save us, and electricity will still flow to our homes. Our cars will still start, and our favourite shopping malls will still have their doors open ready to welcome us.

If you are unlucky enough to be living in a country run by a dictator, or by a corrupt government diverting your money to their own personal swiss bank accounts, then my sympathies go out to you. The election was probably rigged, or you may not even have had an election – but life carries on.

You will still have to pay taxes for the government to control you and imprison you for speaking out, which is one thing we don't have in a democracy! "No, sir, we have freedom of speech! We allow you to say what you want, isn't that nice of us?" And nice it is. How thoughtful of the powerful to allow us, the meek and mild, to say what we want; to use our own vocal chords. They really are most gracious. We bow down to you, oh great ones, for being so generous.

But enough of the sarcasm, we are on a serious investigation here to find out what it is we can't live without if we had no government.

Let's go nuclear!

I don't know what all those environmentalist hippies are going on about, nuclear power is amazing. Thanks to some great physics by some of the world's top scientists, we can generate power by some process called a nuclear reaction. Clean energy for all. No more digging for coal, or trying to tap gas or oil resources. We just dig up some uranium, do some clever stuff with it and out comes the energy. Fantastic!

Sorry, someone is talking to me:

"What's that?... Toxic?...What's toxic?... No, they said it's clean... Oh!... Really?... Oh dear..."

Sorry about that, someone just pointed something out, that actually, although the nuclear energy is "clean" in that it doesn't spew out pollution into the atmosphere, they have a teeny weeny problem, and that's how to get rid of the waste.

I have been informed that the preferred method of getting rid of this radioactive (*the spontaneous emission of a stream of particles or electromagnetic rays in nuclear decay*) material, is "deep and secure burial," whereby I guess they mean they bury it in our earth, cover it up, and wait a few thousand years until the ground is safe again. I have even heard people talk about sending it into space or burying it in the ocean floor.

In fact, I imagine governments would do anything to get rid of it. You see, radioactive material is just a little bit dangerous to the human (oh and the planet). In fact, in many countries there are millions of gallons of radioactive waste and thousands of tons of spent nuclear fuel. But it's ok, the environmental protection agencies are on to the case! I'm sure they will be thinking of how to pollute some other planet in the solar system with our waste.

"Yeah! Send it to the moon, that should do it!"

But if that wasn't bad enough, some bright spark had the idea to turn the massive power that was able to be produced by a nuclear reaction into a bomb! "Hooray," cried the governments, "no-ones going to mess with us now. We are invincible." And indeed they were.

In 1945, the united states of america dropped two bombs on japan: one on hiroshima, and the other on nagasaki, killing many thousands of people on the ground through the first fireball; and then subsequently, many tens of thousands from the slow and agonisingly painful death of radiation poisoning (*low doses cause diarrhoea and nausea and vomiting and sometimes loss of hair; greater exposure can cause sterility and cataracts and some forms of cancer and other diseases; severe exposure can cause death within hours*). But it stopped the war!

"Hooray!" Shouted the people. "Hooray for us!" Shouted the government. Victory parades were ordered around the globe. "We are the winners!" Shouted the allies. "We have defeated them!"

What the governments were failing to tell people, was that during the second world war, sixty million people died. That's nearly the entire population of britain now, and guess what folks? Over two-thirds of the people killed, were civilians; that is people who were not actually engaged in the fighting directly.

After the victory parades died down, the big winners, russia and america, split the world into east and west, and bored with the quiet that peacetime was causing, started the cold war (*a state of political hostility that existed from 1945 until 1990 between countries led by the soviet union and countries led by the united states*) which existed for 45 years! This was a war of ideology, of technical development and espionage, and provided the backdrop for many famous "spy" films and books.

They also spent a great deal of time and money, your money not theirs (it is estimated the united states spent several trillion dollars), developing nuclear weapons – you know, like the ones they dropped on japan, only bigger and nastier – and stuck them in strategic sites all over the world, "just in case."

They were known as deterrents. "Look, if you fire one at us, we'll fire ten at you," and kept the world on the edge of their seats waiting for one of these idiots to press the fire button and unilaterally destroy the world and all that exists in it.

Fortunately, an american ex-movie star, and a russian president were able to sort out their "imagined" differences, and the threat of war went away, much to the army generals displeasure on both sides of the atlantic, I'm sure!

But still the nuclear weapons remained in place; and by now, more countries had developed the capacity to blow us all to bits (if you've got one, why can't I have one?), including the united kingdom, israel, india, pakistan, china, and of course, those masters of diplomacy, the french; with each country "testing" (a euphemism for blowing up part of the ocean or earth) their weapons just to flex their muscles a little bit. You know, kind of like a children's game!

So here we are in 2008. The cold war has ended, but there are still about 20,000 of these missiles still active, according to some sources, but who knows the real figure? All ready to blow up the world at the touch of a button. And now the countries with the weapons are trying to stop new countries from developing their own, because they're not responsible enough to have them – like our governments are!

But the one thing you *must* remember about nuclear weapons, is that not only did we pay for them, but they were built to "protect us," do you understand? These missiles were pointed at millions of civilians in other parts of the world; people we had never met, who didn't care about us; people who were just going about their daily business. People who weren't our "enemies," they just spoke a different language.

So who do you think the government were really protecting?

You may remember that they built themselves nuclear bunkers which would save them from the bombs, whereas you and I could fry in the blast, or die a slow death from radiation poisoning.

So who were they protecting? Us? From who? People we had never met, whom we had never quarrelled with?

What were they really protecting? The security of the country, that's what. The system. The hierarchy of power – nothing else. They were not protecting our "way of life," they were not protecting "freedom of speech," they were protecting themselves from other powerful leaders. To them it was just a game of power wielding.

"I'm more powerful than you."

"No, you're not."

"Yes I am."

"No you're not."

Unfortunately, this game could potentially cause us to cease to exist! Some game. But well done for paying for it, because you, and everyone around you, are keeping the world in suspense over whether one day someone is going to come and blow us up. And your money is keeping everyone in fear. Thanks.

**Can we trust you?
Of course you can trust us!
We're the government!**

So let me ask you the question again? Who is the government here for? Why do we need them? Why do we waste our hard earned money so that men can play power games?

“But they give us roads, and healthcare, and schools...”

But let me ask you this. If we wanted to, don't you think we could organise all of it ourselves? Could we not maintain the roads? Could we not school our children? Could we not train doctors? In fact with the money we were saving (trillions) on not developing weapons, or spying on people, or maintaining massive armies, we could build something pretty nice!

So how do we get rid of the government? Do we have to have a conspiracy (which is illegal, of course) or do we commit treason? No of course not. We either stop voting, or stop paying taxes! What are they going to do, throw us in jail? All of us?

But enough of that subversive talk! I'm not going to overthrow the government, and neither are you. We are much too happy in our little lives to do something which is, after all, “illegal.” Of course it's illegal, they want to stay in power, and if you live in a democracy you put them there.

Let's all spy on each other!

Governments are pretty jumpy at the moment, or at least, they tell you they are. They have “elevated” threat levels because of the new threat to the world – “the terrorist” (basically a soldier without an army or a country to back him). He is portrayed as an evil muslim generally intent on destroying “your way of life;” but like all government nonsense, we have found out that a lot of these guys were trained and paid by the central intelligence agency, and other lovely organizations whose (self-appointed) job it is to look after the interests of the country and the world.

But let's get back to our evil terrorist, who, funnily enough, started appearing more and more after the cold war ended (funny that). Now I'm not saying that governments like to be engaged in some kind of

conflict at all times because it is good for business; nor am I saying that having potential “threats” to our “national security” is a good way to exert more control on the people by introducing identity cards, biometric (*using human physical characteristics (face shape, finger prints, etc.) for identification*) authentication, and more random checks on “civilians.” No, no, I wouldn’t ever want to suggest such a thing.

So in this state of heightened security, after 9/11, or 7/7 (an attack in london), the governments have put up more surveillance cameras (to protect us), and they have sent even more spy satellites into space to observe what we are all up to (of course to add to all the other thousands of bits of metal up there doing such dubious tasks as checking how much we are destroying the planet and relaying the data back to us).

You see, we must keep a watch on what everyone is doing; the terrorist is a slippery customer. We must have the world under surveillance at all times. We must protect national security, we must protect the system. We must protect the powerful (oh, sorry, I mean, we must protect the people). So we spy and we spy on each other, and the poor old terrorist is getting the blame for everything!

I’m sure more civilian people have died during the “liberation of iraq” than ever died in the world trade centre or in the london explosions.

Now, I never condone loss of life, but people die, all over the world, every minute of the day, for all sorts of reasons; but unfortunately, the united states and the british/australian governments (among others) think their citizens are more important than others. Or is it really the citizens they are concerned about? What do you think?

We must protect the security of the country

We must protect the system

We must protect the power structure

I don’t know about you, but I’m not paying for this anymore

I’m pretty sick of this whole fear campaign spread around the world by powerful men in their powerful positions. But I must remember I put them there. I just won’t pay them to control me and the rest of the world anymore. They can throw me in jail if they like, and I won’t vote for them anymore.

Ok, maybe if a party of people were trying to be elected on a ticket of love and compassion for all beings, and gave a guarantee they would disband all power structures, weapons and demobilise (get rid of) all

military personnel, then maybe I'd think about it. In fact maybe I'll start my own party. But then again, I'm easily bribed, so maybe it's not such a good idea! But do you understand what I am trying to convey to you?

People have managed without government before, it's not such a big step.

"But there will be chaos in the streets! Who will run the country?" I hear you cry. But we are not talking about reform (*a change for the better as a result of correcting abuses*) here, nor am I talking about replacing the government in some coup! You only have to look at what has happened every time some "freedom fighter" takes over. He becomes just like the man he replaced – maybe worse!

I am talking about a non-existent government, where man takes responsibility for his own planet, where he works together, not like a world government, but with no government.

"But who will control the violent, who will stop lawlessness?"

But that is just fear talking.

The man who is free from fear, needs no government, and you know, we *are* supposed to be the most intelligent species on the planet! Out of chaos there is a natural order that exists. But I am not talking about new ideas for a new world, as ideas come from thought; and as we have discussed many times, thought is limited.

We need to get rid of the spy satellites and the nuclear weapons. We need to dismantle the power structure, not by force, but through insight.

Hey mr national security! Come get me!

If I were a leader or a government official or secret service agent reading this, what would I think? Would I think, we should bring this potentially dangerous individual in for questioning? Would I have me "bumped off" for daring to question the power structure of the land? Would I charge him with conspiracy? What would I do? I want to desperately keep power because I like it. I like the excitement of having control over others. I like my status in the society. I will not give it up for anyone.

Or would I think: "This is no one's planet. We are all human and we have to co-exist with everything from the trees to the birds and the animals not forgetting six billion other people. What right do I have to impose my will (whether it was voted for or not) on someone else? What right do I have to decide the future of the planet? Who am I? Am I not just human like everyone else?"

Or would I think: “This writer has to be stopped before he starts a revolution and we can’t have that because it will destabilise the country, and we can’t have that. The people must be controlled at all costs.”

Or would I think: “It is I who is destabilising the country and the world by my desire for power, domination, and control over the people.”

Or would I think: “They need us, how would they organise themselves, how would they manage their healthcare and their pensions and how would they protect themselves from foreign invaders?”

Or would I think: “Man has always looked after himself. He needs no control. If he has managed to survive for millions of years without identity cards, biometric scanning, and nuclear weapons, I’m sure he can survive without me.

So, mr president. mr prime minister, mr dictator, mr official, or mr national security, what do you say? Will you choose a different path to the one you have chosen? Instead of controlling the world to feed your desire, will you work with all of us to bring compassion, understanding and love to everyone, without your symbols of power? You will? Fantastic!

We, the people of the world, thank you with all our hearts. Oh, and you won’t be needing your limousine anymore.

I know we shouldn’t look to the past, but I can’t help wondering where we went wrong, where desire took hold in men’s minds, and gave them a lust for power? But if I could, I would travel through time and have a serious talk with man. You see, we are all responsible for the world today. We help create it every day.

NOW is the time we must create a new path. One that leads away from power and fear, but along the path of the universal towards love. Can we do it? As long as we stop thinking – certainly!

I welcome you on a new journey, all of you. And be kind to each other. There is nothing better you can give.

G r a f f i t i

A rude decoration inscribed on rocks or walls

*You tagged your name a thousand times,
Your mates think you're so cool.
You sprayed buildings and trains,
Carved your name in glass.
You rule this area.
You are the king of graffiti.*



Graffiti is everywhere, isn't it? In our cities and our towns, walls and subways are decorated with “tags” (or names) of the people responsible, usually done with a spray can, something that could not be described as “art,” although many attempt to. It's not freedom of expression either, nor is it generally the making of a political statement – that would be legible! It's just a mess.

Other forms of graffiti include tagging glass with sharp objects so that that a permanent inscription is made. Graffiti is quick and easy to do, just point the can and spray, although it's not everywhere, is it? You would think if you could do this in a matter of seconds, that it would be on all buildings, given its prevalence in urban environments, but it isn't.

Have a think about the most likely places you would see graffiti. Trains, public toilets, car parks, public elevators, disused buildings, or

run down housing estates perhaps, but you almost never see it on buildings of beauty, or new buildings. Why do you think that is?

Perhaps they don't get an opportunity to graffiti them, perhaps the security is too high around them, perhaps people who tag don't go into areas of beauty; perhaps they have a respect for the builders who spent so long putting up the new building; perhaps they appreciate fine architecture; perhaps they are afraid of being fined, or maybe they just tag where other people have done it before.

There could be many reasons why people who spray graffiti choose certain buildings and not others, but one thing is for sure, if you walk around areas that are disused or run-down in any way you are sure to see it everywhere.

If you walk into areas where there is a lot of graffiti, have you ever noticed how you feel? Maybe a little uneasy, a little afraid? Or if you travel on a bus with the windows all scratched and tags everywhere, how do you feel? I feel angry and a little fearful. Angry at the destruction of things which obviously took time and effort to create, and fearful that if the people who did this cared so little for the property of others, what might they do to me?

What would happen if I asked them to stop? Why do I get the feeling that whoever was responsible not only doesn't care what other people think of them, or show the slightest respect for others, or property, but also may use violence if challenged?

*"I don't care about anyone, I don't care about anything.
I'll do what I want, if I want when I want,
If I want to spray that wall,
or tag the glass, what's it gotta do with you?"*

Since ancient times, man has felt the need to make a statement to let everyone know he was here. From ancient stone age carvings to school children carving their names into their desks, young lovers carving their names into trees, and people carving their names into buses and trains and spraying their names in huge letters for everyone to see. So, is this part of man's desire to leave a mark, or is it just vandalism (*wilful wanton and malicious destruction of the property of others*).

Just last week, my Swedish girlfriend and I went to visit some stone age carvings. Although we were impressed by the primitive stick man, bird, and an elk, we couldn't help wondering what we have felt if these

had been sprayed on the rocks by some spotty teenager. I am sure that I would have just thought it was a mess, and complained bitterly about the state of society, instead of admiring it as a “work of art.” But let’s get back to our main discussion!

Let me ask you a question. If you are a vandal (which anyone spraying graffiti really should be called), what do you think about when you are vandalising buildings and public areas? Do you think what you’re doing is wrong? Do you think: “If I spray this paint everywhere, this place won’t look nice anymore,” or do you not think anything? Do you just do it because you want to, to impress your friends, or to leave a mark, or to perhaps make some kind of statement? Maybe you’re just a frustrated artist who can’t afford canvas and brushes. Maybe you are anti-establishment or anti-authority? Maybe you like the mess you make, and find it aesthetically pleasing, or maybe you’re just plain...

Antisocial

Hostile to or disruptive of normal standards of social behaviour

I think if we were sensible, we would define the “normal” standard of social behaviour as just being kind to one another, and not engaging in acts that make the world a worse place to live in. On first examination, graffiti may not seem to fit this definition, as it evidently has nothing to do with kindness, and isn’t killing people, and “normal” behaviour may be seen as conforming to society, which I for one would not suggest as being good for the system! So is graffiti non-conformist? Yes, but not in a way that furthers the progress of mankind.

I would like you to think about the type of person who vandalises property (and if you are in fact a vandal, maybe you would like to think of the type of person you are too). What image comes to mind? Does the image of a well educated person come to mind, or the image of someone who shows respect for his fellow inhabitants on the earth, or someone who has a good job, or does community work?

On the contrary, your first image is more likely to be a person with a low standard of education. Someone who has had a troubled social background, who may or may not have come into contact with authorities at some point in their life, is probably young, male, and has no respect for others. Someone who may also relish in the fact that people are afraid of him when they see him vandalising property. Stereotype?

All around the world, whether educated or non educated, young males are full of testosterone, full of bravado (*a swaggering show of courage*), with a need to impress their peers. So they show off, to gain status and respect from within their group, and rival groups. They are not so concerned with the wider population. They live in their own worlds, dissociated psychologically from an adult world of responsibility, and ultimately what they see as boredom. They live for excitement, for thrills. They rarely think about the consequences. How often do we see groups of young men tragically killed in a car accident where they have been involved in a race?

I remember all the stupid things I did in my youth, but the one thing I never did was spray permanent mess onto buildings. Not because I was such a well behaved child, or because I cared for the rest of my fellow human beings, or the buildings, but because my peers were never involved in it. I didn't know one person who was a vandal. Maybe if someone I knew and respected did it, I might have too.

So if you think about it, although I was brought up well, came from an educated family was taught to respect people and property, it was not the reason I didn't spray graffiti. In my youth I got into trouble with the police whilst drunk and disorderly, drove cars at high speeds with friends in them whilst over the alcohol limit, and went around in big groups shouting in the street making older people afraid.

I cared little for things to do with the adult world. This was my world, and as far as I was concerned, the only world that mattered. I am not saying I was involved in crime, but if I was to see myself now I would say I was highly antisocial, but then again it was kind of cool to be antisocial when I was young.

Children are easily influenced, especially by older children who rebel against their parents and society. They are someone to look up to, someone to emulate, someone to respect, who is not a parent; but it is a shame that instead of directing that rebellion at something worthwhile, they just vandalise property. Maybe because the young mind isn't fully formed and able to deal with things at a rational level, they use vandalism as a way of venting their frustrations.

Perhaps those involved are just "bad" and should be locked up for the good of society? I'm sure that may be the opinion of anyone who has had their walls tagged a thousand times, or the people who have to clean it off public buildings and public transport every day. One thing I am sure of is that people who graffiti in this way wouldn't like it if you did it to their property.

If you are a vandal, imagine the fun and satisfaction of vandalising a public bus, or carving your name into the glass of a public telephone box, or spraying your tag on someone's door. You are cool, you gain respect from your peers; but then you come home and find that someone has sprayed their tags all over your house, and they have scratched their names into the glass of your car, how do you feel? Not so cool now I expect? Probably angry. You promise to get the people responsible for this!

Isn't it a little paradoxical don't you think? Like the mafia hit man who swears revenge for his brother being killed in a mafia hit! No one likes to be the victim. So why continually do it?

It takes a lot of work and effort to create brickwork, and it takes time to paint it, but it only it takes a second to ruin it.

In the same way as glass takes a long time to make. First someone specifies the size and thickness, then it is manufactured, then fitted to the train, then finally the train is ready for service, and the first day it is in service, someone ruins the glass forever, by carving their name into it to be cool!

Destruction isn't cool, it just shows that the person involved was using their mind incorrectly. If you know that this process takes this amount of time, but are still insistent on ruining it for others, you are anti-social.

The strange thing is, you want the bus and the train so you can get around, and would complain if the service was removed, but you just can't sit and relax and appreciate the work that went into creating it for *you*, can you? That's right. It was created for *you*, to make your life easier, paid for by all the other people in your city and *you* just can't wait to destroy it.

This is a plea to all people insistent on graffiti. If you want to make a mess of something please buy your own train or bus and destroy it to your hearts delight. Oh, and be sure to etch all the windows in your house and spray graffiti in your bathroom while you're at it! But of course, being antisocial isn't like that. You have to affect other people around you. You can't be antisocial on your own.



Unfavourable social background, lack of good parenting, boredom, lack of education. They could all be factors in allowing a young person to be more easily influenced than someone with a more favourable background, but no one is born antisocial. All babies are cute and cuddly. They don't have an antisocial bone in their body.

It is only through a lack of love that the seed takes root. The feeling that you aren't loved, makes you unable to show love; you start to hate other people more, and if you can't take it out on them, you take it out on property. When you start to feel love, the need to be antisocial decreases, no matter what your background or education. *True love can never be destructive.*

Love the environment you live in, even if it is made of concrete. Plant trees and flowers; enjoy natural beauty in your grey urban environment. The worse you feel about the place you live, the more likely you are to hate it, and want to destroy it, thereby making it worse for everyone. You are not the only person who has to live there. Life is hard enough in an urban environment without making it more unliveable by creating such a visual mess.

Let me ask you a question. If you lived by a beautiful ocean, would you want to spray green and red paint over the trees and the beach huts, or would you just want to appreciate the natural beauty? Even if our lives are hard and we have no money, we still need to see beauty every day to appreciate the life we have on this planet. I know that most of you will say it's hard to find beauty in a city, or in a grey housing estate, or on overcrowded public transport. Graffiti just makes this task harder. That's all.

G r i e f

Intense sorrow caused by loss of a loved one (especially by death)

I have never lost anyone close to me. Both my parents are still alive, and the only people I have known who have died were never close to me. Some of you may be wondering how I can write about a topic of which I have no experience, but this is not just about people dying, it's about living.

Around the world, every day, people die, and they are someone's loved one. Even though I do not know them, I know they must be suffering a great loss. When people we love die, we feel as though something has been taken away from us. Not just the person, but a feeling like part of us has died. And indeed it has, for they were as much a part of you as you of them.

Grieving (*sorrowful through loss or deprivation*) is a natural process, which they say, must be gone through in order for us to achieve resolution and move on in our lives. Failure to allow the grieving process

to take place will result in us staying attached psychologically to the person even though they are dead.

How many of you have lost people you have loved? Were you really close to them? Was it your husband or wife, parents, child, or a best friend? If the person was old then we feel like nature has run its course, and death was inevitable, but if a young person, or a child, dies, especially in traumatic circumstances, such as murder, or a terrible accident, it makes it hard to bear – especially for a parent. They know they are not supposed to outlive their children.

In this modern age of medicine, we all assume that we are likely to live at least five or ten years past retirement age, but it didn't use to be like that. Not so long ago the life expectancy of an adult may not be much more than thirty or forty depending on varying environmental factors such as disease or war. Many children died in the delivery room, or in early infancy; some didn't make it past early adolescence.

We should count ourselves lucky that we live to such an old age. A combination of better diet, less war, better clothing and housing, and the availability of medicines has meant we can regularly live past eighty or more – unthinkable up until recent times. And it is with this age in mind that we plan our lives, and the lives of our children. We all assume we will live a long life. That is our first mistake.



On the island where I am living right now, the animals have spent the last month giving birth. Foals and lambs have been born, and many sea birds hatched (although many eggs were attacked by predators before they hatched), and I have watched their first few weeks of life with great interest.

Several of the lambs have died, but many more have survived. The chicks seem to be doing well, but again many have died. The strongest and some may say the luckiest have got through the hardest part and now have to concentrate on living.

Every day is a challenge for them, as indeed it is for us. We have no idea what will happen from one day to the next, so to presuppose nature, and arrogantly give ourselves a determined life span, seems remarkably short sighted! So we must remain open to the reality that the outcome of a chain of events can most certainly affect us.

“Goodbye love, I’ll see you this evening.”

“Ok, have a nice day, don’t work too hard.”

"I won't! I know, let's take the kids out for an early dinner this evening, then maybe a movie."

"That sounds good. Don't be late home jim."

"I won't. Bye."

You get into the car, and start the engine. It's a bit chilly so you put the heater on and tune into your favourite radio station. The traffic is quite light as you join the motorway, and you relax. You'll be in work in about forty minutes. You sit thinking about what you've got to do in the office, but suddenly in less time than it takes to blink:

"Oh God, what's happening?"

There is the crushing sound of metal. It all happens so fast. You see bright flashes of light, your world starts spinning upside down. You can't breathe. YOU SCREAM. The pain. You exhale. It is over. Your life ends.

Yesterday... 08.25 am.

"Shit!"

"What's wrong steve?" His wife asked, waking up with a start.

"Oh, that stupid alarm didn't go off again; I'll have to get a new one."

"Take it easy, you'll give yourself a heart attack!" his wife called after him as he quickly dressed and ran out to the car.

"Oh no," he thought, "I'm going to be late again for the second time this week; my boss is going to kill me."

He put his foot down and got onto the motorway. Suddenly a careless driver cut him up, and he blasted on his horn in annoyance, and the other driver gave him "the finger." This infuriated steve even more and he chased after the car, driving erratically until he had pulled alongside, gesticulating wildly at the other driver and swearing until finally he pulled back. This event left him in a real rage, which set him up for the tragic events which subsequently followed.

He got into work late, and his boss was there, as always, to chastise him;

"I've got no place in my organisation for someone who can't even be bothered to get up in the morning!" his boss chided him.

"Yeah, sorry about that, the traffic was bad."

"Well don't let it happen again, I'm sick of it."

Steve trundled over to his desk, grabbing a strong coffee on the way.

"Steve!" his boss called over to him. "I need you to go to one of dave's customers for a couple of days, he's called in sick." Although

inconvenient, it would allow steve to get away from his boss for a couple of days.

That evening in the hotel he decided to have a few drinks to relax. Why was he still working at this company? He hated his boss. He could get a new job any time he wanted, he didn't need the stress. He would find something closer to home, that way he could spend more time with the family. It might mean less money, but they could cope with that. As he pondered his life, one drink turned into two and three turned into four.

Next morning, he felt suitably hung-over as he got into the car, but also felt remarkably positive after his evening of thinking. As soon as he got back home he would start looking for a new job, then he could tell his boss where he could stick his job. With a wry smile, he indicated to get onto the motorway, and pulled out. For what seemed to be no more than a second there was an incredible noise of crushing metal, then total silence. He closed his eyes for the last time.

Just another pair of regular guys on their way to work. They never knew each other, and probably had nothing more in common than that shared moment in time. Like all events we see as “tragic” (*sad; especially involving grief or death or destruction*), we try to work out where we could have done things differently. What if? What if? If only dave hadn't been ill, then steve's boss wouldn't have sent him to see the customer, and the two men might be alive today.

But there is no use trying to re-imagine a scenario again and again to see how you would have done things differently. I will not be so callous to say that if it's their time to go, it's their time (after all, these are people who love and are loved), only that in life, nothing is certain.

It is true that even up to the last second before the accident; if either of them had noticed one another, or steve had been caught at the traffic lights, he was so pleased to have got through just before they turned red, the accident wouldn't have happened – but it did. No what if's, no if only's, just finality. Death. And so starts the grieving process; the remembering, the crying, the missing, the why me, and finally acceptance and resolution, and the moving on with life.

Grief is a very personal emotion, no two people feel the same way. Some people just spend all day crying, whilst others just become introverted. There is no right way to grieve. We grieve because we are attached to someone through love. We do not grieve for people we do

not love, although we can empathise with them, and we do still show compassion.

Would jim's wife grieve for steve? Of course not, neither would steve's wife grieve for jim. In fact, they may hate each other's husbands for "causing" the death of their loved one, especially if an enquiry finds one at fault. This will give the griever more opportunity to feel angry and hurt at being left and having their husband "taken from them."

Who do you cry for – yourself or your loved one?

This is a hard question to answer. What do you think? Of course you cry for your loved one, because they are dead, but you are the one who has been left alive. As an old man said to me once, "I want to die before my wife. I do not want to be the one left alive. I do not want to be sad all the time." At the time, I thought it was rather a strange thing to say, but now I see it differently. It is easy to die, but to be left with grief is the hardest thing in the world, especially if, like him, you had spent sixty years together with your wife. But death catches us unawares, and there is no sense in wishing yourself dead, just to save you having to go through, what is, after all, a natural process.

So here you are alive, left, abandoned in this strange, dangerous world. Your protector and lover vanished into thin air. Why did they leave you? How could they do this to you? Suddenly we become selfish, even though death happened to them, not you! We feel aggrieved, let down, disappointed.

"We were supposed to live until we both grew old" you cry.

But we all die. Some sooner, like the lambs just born, and some when they are old and wizened. There is no trick. It is just life. Acceptance of this is the first stage on the journey to resolution, at which time you will be able to look at a photograph of your loved one, still cry, but recognise that *you* are the one alive, and have a responsibility to yourself to keep living, not in pain, but in joy. You are alive!

Everyone who has lost someone experiences great sadness. You will no longer see them laugh, you will no longer feel the warmth of their body next to yours, you can no longer hug them, you can't even argue with them. It is as if your heart has been ripped out. The emptiness, the loneliness, the misery. But this is normal. If you are attached to something the mind will not let go of it easily. Although we have

photographs and memories, we want the physical body back. But learning to stand alone is one of the greatest challenges.

For most of us, our whole life is spent with someone else. We have a boyfriend or girlfriend from our teens, then we get married, and even if we divorce, we usually end up with another partner. As a social animal we find it hard to be on our own. But in grief, you learn that, although you miss the person, you also have a life, an independent life, able to be lived in a state of joy. Even if it does feel as if you won't ever be able to face the world again alone.

We don't just grieve when someone dies. We may also grieve for a partner who leaves us, and we may also grieve for children when they leave home. It is not death that makes us grieve; it is loss, and our attachment to the loss. Grief does not exist independently. To understand this better, I want to tell you two short stories.

When people talk about having split up they always talk about the anger and pain during the divorce, but they never talk about it as grief. I have only recently understood that what my mother was going through when my father left us was grief. It went on for several years, and she could not come to terms with her loss. She had been brought up to believe that when you got married, it would be forever, and had never considered in a million years that it wouldn't be permanent. It wasn't my father she felt sorry for, it was herself. She felt sorry wouldn't have him around anymore – how would she cope? Why did he do this to *her*?

She cried and cried for years. She was so ill at times, she would be bent over the toilet being sick, with me supporting her; and that is for someone who not only wasn't dead, but had run off with another woman! What a waste of positive energy. But she didn't see it like that. She was the victim. She had lost something important to her, and that was her "other half."

It is interesting to note that the expression "other half" is used to describe one's partner, as if being without them does not make you whole. It is only when we learn to stand alone, that we will be truly free from our attachment to loss, to learn to be whole on our own, without the dependence on someone else to make us whole.

My mother eventually resolved her grief in exactly that way. She found her independence, filed for divorce, and made a conscious decision to move on and enjoy her own life. After all, my dad was happily enjoying his.

Man's greatest challenge is to stand alone

The second story is regarding a great friend of mine, my uncle – my mum's brother. Every year he and his wife came down to stay with my mum for their two week summer holiday, and I always made sure I'd get to see them while they were there. Last summer was no exception.

I was over on the west coast of Ireland working as a chef, and I invited them all over for a week's holiday. As usual, we had a great time, my uncle quizzing me about guitar chords, us playing golf together, sharing a few drinks. They left with me saying cheerio at the airport, but little did I know I would never be able to speak to my uncle again.

Two months ago he suffered a stroke, and fell down the stairs badly damaging his brain. This brought on a rare form of dementia, that left him, in a moment, in a different world. I went up to see him in hospital a few months ago, and although the face was the same, it was like staring into nothingness. He didn't recognise me, and indeed didn't recognise anyone, including his wife and children. He was locked in a world they couldn't access, and he couldn't access their world.

This was one of the saddest moments I have experienced. Knowing someone so well, who not only didn't know who I was, had no idea of who he was, or even where he was. My aunt said to me that she couldn't stop crying and asked how you grieve for someone who isn't dead? I told her that the grieving process is the same whether the person is alive or dead. It is our loss we are suffering from.

But it *is* strange to see someone you have known your whole life, sitting there in hospital, completely vacant. For me, knowing he will never know me or speak to me again, and will silently slip into death in years to come, without any last goodbyes, will be a sad moment.



As humans, we do not seem to be very well equipped for dealing with sadness. That is why it is so important to speak to someone during this process. Although you can talk to friends and family, there are many trained people who will be able to give you the support you need. I urge you to seek this assistance and resolve the grief that is inside you. You owe it to yourself to rebuild an independent life, a life you can live with total joy, because you never know when it will be time.

Let us not look back on the loss of loved ones with sadness, and statements like, “I wish I had been nicer to them, or loved them more.” Don’t wait until people die. You are alive now. They are alive now. Together in the moment. Now is the time to show them you love them; to hug them, to show them compassion. Do not wait until it is too late.

If we all spent a little more time being nice to people we would not spend so much time in regret. Celebrate life now. Do not wait until people have passed away. Resolve your differences, share friendship and experiences. Above all, live life to the full as an individual. You are whole, not an “other half.” Live as one, and the grieving process may just become a little bit easier.

G r o o m i n g

Care for one's external appearance

Some of us like to make sure we are dressed nicely, and look well cared for, whereas others don't care at all. They dress slovenly, have dirty or torn shoes, do not shower often, let their hair get matted, let their fingernails stay dirty and ragged, and wear creased clothes. They may have no money, or they may just not bother with external appearances, thinking that there is more to man than just nice clothes! Unfortunately, people judge us on how we look, how we smell, and how we carry ourselves.

What I want to discuss with you today is how we got to this point; how early man, who allegedly came down from the trees, has turned into city man, and what, if anything, have been the benefits? If you think man has existed as he is since the beginning of time, you better start thinking again.

You don't really have to imagine your ancestors very hard, you could just stop grooming for a couple of weeks and you would find out, because you would quickly become them. You may not believe me, but when you throw away your shower gel, razors, aftershave, and stop cutting your hair and your nails and stop washing your clothes, it's will be like stepping back hundreds of thousands of years.

First, your hair would start to grow longer and get more tangled. Your beard (if you are a man) would start to grow, and within a week you would have quite an impressive facial covering. Women would find they actually *do* have hair under their armpits and on their legs when they stop waxing! Dirt would start to accumulate under the finger and toe nails, and they would start to grow; and without doing physical exercise to file them down, they will get longer and longer. It's just like your pet dog, if he walks on abrasive surfaces enough his nails will stay neat, but if he doesn't, they just keep growing.

So here I am, city man, starting to look more like ape man.

I've got long hair, a long beard and dirty long nails. I still wear my pinstriped suit to work, but people are beginning to talk. It doesn't matter that my mind is the same; they are only looking at my external appearance. Now I have stopped using shower gel, deodorant, and aftershave, my smell has become different. I don't smell "expensive." I now have what we call body odour (*malodorousness resulting from a failure to bathe*). It's not that I don't wash. I do shower in water, but the bacteria in my sweat is attached to my clothes now; and whereas in ancient times the sweat would evaporate into the air, it is now trapped.

Because I don't wash and iron my clothes, they are beginning to look more and more creased. There are marks on my underwear from failing to pay enough attention whilst urinating; stains on my shirt from food I dropped, and dirt on my shoes. Pretty soon, people are staring at me at work. Maybe they think I have suffered a nervous breakdown, and maybe they feel sorry for me, but my bosses aren't pleased, and they call me in for a meeting.

"Now listen here, alan" they start, "you know we all think you're doing a wonderful job here, but we just can't have you going around looking and smelling like that, it's disturbing everyone, and we can't have you going out to see clients like that – you'll scare them off! So go home, have a shave, have a nice soak in a fragrant bath, trim those nails, have a hair cut and we'll see you in the morning. Oh, by the way, buy some new clothes. If you decide not to, don't bother coming back to work."

This scenario could happen to any of you. In less than two to three weeks you could find yourself out of a job, because you have allowed yourself to show the world who you really are underneath all that grooming. It really amazes me that the human race is so shallow.

When I go back into work the next day, everything is back to normal. People shout across the office “nice to have you back alan!” or “you smell nice,” or “you look nice, that’s a nice suit.” That is a fictitious example, but if you try it out in real life you will see that this situation will play out almost exactly as I have written it here!

It’s a long, long way back to the trees, you think...

If you ask anyone why we place such a high importance on grooming, they will tell you it is because man is different to the animals, that we live in an advanced civilisation; but you only have to look at the previous example to know we are much closer to our ancestors than we thought. The problem is that human physiology has not kept up with the development of the human mind.

We want to distance ourselves from the idea that we could ever have been like the apes we see in the zoo, and so we put on false scents, and paint our nails. Women wax their legs, dress in fine silks and walk tall in high heeled shoes.

The signal we are giving out is that we ain’t no ape, baby! We are a human being, who has nothing in common with the natural world.

And of course we don’t, as we sit dressed in our finest in restaurants and café’s sipping cappuccinos, with our humour and charm, scented with the exotic, hair coiffed just so, nails clipped, do we? But this isn’t who we really are, this is who we have been able to pretend to be thanks to advances in technology and the harnessing of electricity.

Think about it. If there wasn’t a company to make shampoo what would you clean your hair with? If there weren’t companies making combs, brushes, gels, mousses, and hair-dryers how would you style it? If there weren’t companies making shower gel, and perfume/aftershave how would you smell nice? If there weren’t factories making clothes, or companies making washing machines, washing powder, fabric softener and oh, how about an iron, how would you be able to dress nicely? If there weren’t any companies making underwear or socks or companies making shoes what would you do? Who would you be? If we hadn’t invented razors you would all look the same, hairy!

Don't worry it's nothing to be afraid of! It's who we really are – fairly hairy big brained apes! Does that shock you? It shouldn't, because despite our desperate desire to leave the past behind, it keeps catching us up doesn't it?

The mirror does lie

Unfortunately, we all live in a bit of a fantasy world. We actually believe we are not descended from hairy apes, and we have had to invent all sorts of things to keep the pretence alive. It has been said that the mirror doesn't lie, but when we look into it, we are seeing the result of thousands of years of desire. Desire to separate ourselves from nature.

It makes me laugh to see all the people walking around in their fashionable clothes (especially women) wearing some oil paint on their face with their hair immaculately coiffed, and perhaps dyed, having spent ages in front of the mirror to achieve this look.

If we were all just to “let ourselves go” for four weeks, maybe we would start to realise something about ourselves – something quite profound in fact. What that something is, I cannot tell you, but you could find out for yourselves in a short space of time. All I can tell you is that what you are seeing in the mirror right now is not real, it is not your authentic self, it is a projection of your mind. You are seeing thousands of years of cultural conditioning reflected back at you.

If you do not wash, or trim, or comb your hair, or cut your nails, is it really *you* thinking you look bad, or is it the psychological bolt-on of comparison? If I leave my nails to go dirty, am I truly worried about the nails, or am I wondering what other people will think of me? If I fail to shave and let my beard grow, or fail to shave my legs, am I truly concerned with the beard or the hairy legs, or am I concerned with how others will see me? This is important, so please go into it with me carefully.

The key word here is conformity. If everyone had long hair and hairy legs, would you be concerned with removing the hair? Of course not! In fact people would look strangely at you if you did remove the hair. You wouldn't fit in, and actually that's all this topic is really about, fitting in. It doesn't matter how you look, if you are healthy, until you start to compare yourself with others.

Man has decided, using his big brain, to wear make-up and to shave the hair off his body. It is for no practical purpose, except cultural. The

rich and powerful wanted to look different to the poor workers, so they used their minds to separate themselves. They created clothing, grooming techniques, and accessories, they knew the poor could never afford. They wanted to be looked up to, respected, and if they looked the same as everyone else, that could never happen. After all, who's going to respect you if you look the same as them?

It is still the same today. Everywhere we look we see celebrities looking amazing don't we? They're wearing the most expensive jewellery and clothes, things we could never afford thereby psychologically asserting their status in society.

The suit vs. The overalls

Thinking back to when I worked in business, I remember noticing how the office staff divided themselves from the factory workers. We would come to work in nice suits, ironed shirts, and nice ties with polished shoes, whereas the "workers" would be wearing overalls or something similar.

They looked different to the office staff. They weren't immaculately dressed, they didn't smell of expensive scent, and they didn't need to worry about shaving. Why would they? The work they did was dirty and there was no one to impress. They worked on machines that didn't care what they looked like; but in the office something different was going on. The office was the place where status was vitally important, where ambition reigned, and outward appearance was part of the game.

Every time I had to go to the factory for something I felt more important, safe in the knowledge I wasn't one of them. I was someone who was going places! I can remember standing next to a machine worker in my elegant suit and polished shoes, smelling of cologne and comparing myself to him. Here was a man twice my age, who smelt of oil, unshaven, with unkempt hair, who did a "menial" job, and here was I, young and important (or so I thought), and I was sure I was definitely more intelligent than him. My personal appearance was speaking volumes about who I *was*.

Looking back, it all seems so stupid now, but at the time it was of the utmost importance to me. My appearance meant I was above him, and that's all that mattered. Think about how you look now, how you feel when you are nicely dressed. Try to observe what is going on in that mind of yours. What processes are taking place under all the grooming?

It is sad to think we gauge human beings based solely on how they look, but I don't think anyone wants a return to nature where we all look the same, and have long hair, scruffy nails, and beards! Grooming has become a part of asserting ones individuality in the world, even though it is just conforming; but in order to truly know ourselves we need to develop an awareness that accepts we are not the grooming. It is just another bolt-on accessory to make us even more psychologically removed from the natural world we inhabit.

I like to look "nice," and smell "nice," but it does not make me more human, just more or less like everyone I compare myself to. Think about it, and maybe for just one day in your life, don't look in the mirror, it's not who you really are.

G r o u p s

Any number of entities (members) considered as a unit

•

(chemistry) two or more atoms bound together as a single unit and forming part of a molecule

•

A set that is closed, associative, has an identity element and every element has an inverse

It's only natural that we band together in groups, after all, man is a social creature, and it's pretty hard to socialise on one's own! So as we begin this discussion together, I would like you to think about any groups you belong to. Perhaps you could consider the following groups as a starting point:

- (a) Work/school group
- (b) Family group
- (c) Friend group
- (d) Extended family group
- (e) Sports club group
- (f) Same interest group

As you go through the list, you will notice that you probably belong to a lot of groups, all with their own hierarchies and rules. You may be at the top of one group (say the family group) and the bottom of the other (work group), so you may experience different conflict going on within you. Why am I the boss of this group and the bottom of that group, but don't be too hard on yourself, you can't win 'em all!

Apart from the family group, which includes your parents, you may find it hard to break into other groups, after all, groups are pretty exclusive things, no matter how many people are in them. But eventually, after working your social magic and becoming acceptable to the other members, you are in! You will be treated as one of them.

People who would normally ignore you, as just another human, will come up and expressly talk to *you*. They will listen to *you*, and hear *your* ideas, and generally give *you* a forum to air *your* opinions. You couldn't do that if you hadn't joined, could you? You have become a member of the "in-group" (*an exclusive circle of people with a common purpose*), and as long as you share that common purpose, you will continue to be welcomed as a friend.

Let's think about this for a moment. We may see a violent gang of criminals as threatening, and they may instil fear in us, but how do they see each other? Well I would guess, totally different. They are a group with a common purpose (crime), and they will be comfortable in each others company. They will laugh, joke, go out to dinner together, have a couple of drinks, go round to friends houses etc. and their life will seem completely normal.

When they come to rob our banks it's a different story though. "Get your hands up or I'll blow your fucking head off." "Don't fucking move!" they will scream. Everyone will be terrified and thinking, "please don't kill me, please don't kill me." But after it's over, they will get back to their houses and laugh about the whole thing saying: "Jeez, did you see the look on that guys face when I threatened to blow his fucking head off? Ha ha, nice work today lads, shall we go and have a beer?"

Whatever we think of them, they probably don't think about themselves. You see, we are the out-group and they are the in-group. We are not in their exclusive circle, so we feel afraid of them, of what they could do to us. Do you understand?

Hey, you're all right, you're in my group!

Religion is another powerful in-group, out-group scenario. To be honest with you, it doesn't matter about which religion we are talking about; it is the bond between the members we are interested in here.

Imagine you are on holiday in a foreign country, on your own, and you do not know the groups. One day, you are caught in a violent rampage with people shouting death to all muslims. Next to you a (muslim) member of your tour group is violently hacked to death by the mob, and just as you are about to be summarily dished out the same fate, you shout: "Wait! Wait! I am a christian, please don't kill me, I am a christian." Suddenly the group realises you are a member (even though you are not part of the mob threatening to kill all muslims), and someone says, "leave him alone, he's one of us!"

Leave him alone, he's one of us?! It's unbelievable isn't it? The other man who was just hacked to death with an axe was "one of us" too, remember? He is a human! But to the group, the only thing that mattered was whether he was "in-group" or "out-group." It didn't matter what colour you were or how intelligent you were, or whether you were loving or violent. As long as you belonged to the group "christian" then you were like a brother, and it is exactly the same in crime gangs.

If you belong to the smith syndicate, then all other members of the exceptionally violent smith group will treat you like a brother, but if you belong to any other criminal group then you had better watch out, because your body could end up dumped in the river. Do you see? It's nothing personal. It is only the nature of groups.

So how many in-groups do you belong to? You see it is not for us to decide whether you belong to an "in-group" or an "out-group," that is your perception, and any group you "belong" to will be an "in-group" and every other group will be an "out-group." But it must be in the same field.

For example, the smith crime syndicate generally only has problems with other crime groups, they wouldn't see the catholic church group as an out-group, it wouldn't make sense. But the catholic church group may see the muslims as an out-group because it is someone who stands in the way of their goals.

In-group, out-group is like two sides of the same coin. Good one side, bad the other. Heads or tails! Is it becoming clearer to you?

Picture any scenarios where you could imagine this taking place in your life? What about when you go to a football, rugby, basketball, cricket match? Who is on the inside? Of course, anyone wearing the same shirt as you, and anyone wearing a different shirt is on the outside. So if

it comes time to have a little fight, you know exactly whose on your side, even if you have never met him or her before!

The same goes for war. You are wearing a green uniform. If you see anyone with a green uniform on you will protect them, but anyone wearing a grey or brown uniform you will kill them. It's all pretty dumb, isn't it? But that's the way groups work! As any professional criminal will tell you, "Hey, it's nothing personal."

Do you see the stupidity of the group mentality? One day you are wearing a grey uniform and everyone with a green uniform tries to kill you. To them you are evil, and must be destroyed, but don't worry, everyone else with a grey uniform will protect you.

The next day you decide to defect to the other side. You hand yourself in and ask to join them. After some lengthy interrogation to make sure you are not a double agent, they give you a green uniform. You catch sight of a guy that only yesterday, just narrowly missed killing you. He shakes your hand and says, "hey, buddy, welcome to the team." But now of course, all the people who yesterday wanted to protect you, now see you as evil and want to kill you. It's nothing personal though!

One minute you're in, next you're out

Work is a great example of being in the in-group. You are thrown together with a load of people you have never met before and you are instantly accepted as one of them.

"Hey, alan, welcome to the team" they said "want to go for a beer after work on friday?"

"Sure" I said.

And it felt good to be standing laughing and joking with all these people I had only known for less than five days. If I had been in the pub on my own they would have ignored me. I could have stood on the outside laughing along with them but soon, someone would say, "hey, who's that guy, does anyone know him? Excuse me, this is private, ok?" And I would have to walk off to the corner alone again.

But no, I was in, people were listening to my stories, sharing their own, gossiping about other members of staff, and although I didn't even know them, I laughed along, because I could. I belonged. And it was nice to belong.

People said "good morning," and "how are you, alan?" and although I didn't have an important job, boy did I feel important as I walked

through those doors every morning. I joined in weekday social activities, went out at the weekend with some of the guys occasionally, I even joined a five a side football team, and also had a “little” on-off affair with one of the secretaries there! Life was good. Until one day, I was called into the human resources office and my boss and a couple of other bosses were there.

“I am sorry but we are going to have to let you go alan”, they said.

“Uh, oh, when?” I said.

“Effective immediately”

“Why?”

“You have not being fulfilling your contract properly and we gave you plenty of chances”

“What? I said. “How can you, that’s really unfair!”

And there I was, a fully fledged member of the in-group, football player, ten pin bowler, friday night drinks man, wooer of the ladies in the sales department, being marched out of the building by my boss! No one said a word.

Over the next few weeks I called some of the guys, and although they commiserated, they didn’t seem to be that interested in me anymore.

“Shall I see you guys for drinks next friday” I asked one of them.

“Err... I don’t know erm... if we are going out on friday, we’ll call you if we are.”

I even tried calling the little on-off secretary I had been seeing, but she wouldn’t return my calls. I couldn’t understand it. Why were they avoiding me? “I thought they were my friends” I thought to myself, and I was more than a little hurt.

When I did eventually see them on one friday night after work (they just happened to be in the same pub as me), everyone said “oh, hi alan, all right?” But I quickly realised I was never going to be invited in to the circle to join in with the laughter again. So I just finished my drink and left. After all, it was nothing personal. I just wasn’t in the in-group anymore.

So how many of you have stories like that? What, am I the only one? Anyway, it is clear to see that what we call “friendships” are mostly little more than in-group affiliations. But don’t take my word for it, test it out for yourselves.

Is anyone a true friend?

So how do we know if someone is really our friend? Given that group relationships come and go, are there any people we can really call friends, people who are there for us through thick and thin, who don't stop being our "friend" when we stop being a christian, or going to the tennis club, or stop working for a certain company? Well, there's usually your parents, who although say they're your friend, are really there for you because they love you, they brought you up, and they don't want to see anything bad happen to you, or see you unhappy.

But sometimes, we find a special someone who is there for us, and we are there for them with no strings attached. Not because we are married to them, or share a common purpose, but because we are connected in a bond that is greater than all groups. That relationship is something to be cherished, because believe me, they don't often come along, if at all.



Man may be a group animal, but at heart he is still an individual; and learning to stand alone, when all others are joining groups just so they can "belong," is one of the hardest things you will ever have to do.

It is so important that man thinks for himself, and does not just conform to belong. That is how we have seen some of the worst atrocities in the world carried out. Not because people necessarily believed in everything they were doing, but because they were just following the group. Do you understand? We must learn to leave the groups we belong to and stand alone.

It doesn't mean socially isolating ourselves, just not throwing ourselves head first into belonging, without first investigating what it means to you (and the rest of us) to belong, and what it will mean for you and for others, if you are forced out. You must investigate this.

As humans, we just can't seem to be honest with people or be loyal to them, can we? Just when we think we can trust people they let us down. And let's face it; most of us are pretty good at letting people down.

But as individuals who belong to the group called homo sapiens, we must try to find a way to be loyal to people, whoever they are, to support them, give love, guidance and compassion, and not falter in our friendship. That is what it is to be a true member of the group – not some temporary relationship with some people from work. It's time to

start thinking outside our little groups and thinking of the impact we are having on the big group. Us.

G u i l t

Remorse caused by feeling responsible for some offence

I'm sorry, I'm so very sorry. I feel really bad. I didn't
mean...



Like many things in life, I often ask myself, is guilt real? If so, where is it and what is it? To understand guilt, we have to go into the mind of someone who has done something “wrong” (*contrary to conscience or morality or law*), or who has voluntarily carried out an action he later regretted.

Before we start this discussion, we have to realise straight away that guilt can be avoided. Not by obeying the law, but by carrying out right action. Action that is line with the three key principles of compassion, love and empathy. Go with those, and you can’t go wrong. The end.

But life isn’t like that, is it? We’re not all “perfect,” and in fact, none of us are, or ever will be. Perfection does not exist, except as opinion.

Take the woman who has been married for 25 years to the same man. She has brought up a beautiful family of three children, worked hard,

and looked after her husband. Through sheer chance, she meets a man at a class she is attending, and they go out for a couple of drinks together.

Before long, a full blown affair is in swing, and they are seeing each other a couple of times a week. The affair isn't serious, but for the woman, this is the most alive she has felt in years. She enjoys the passion and the clandestine meetings. She enjoys this double life she is leading, and although she doesn't want to hurt her husband, he had an affair several years ago, "so this makes us even." The affair carries on for several months, until she decides to end it.

She hadn't seen the man for over six months, and didn't think about him, but what she did think about all the time, is how she cheated on her husband. The lies she told to cover up her actions. Having sex with a man she barely knew! How terrible the pain. She was truly suffering now. Why had she done such a terrible thing, how could she? After all her husband had done for her.

She was beside herself with guilt. She couldn't go on sleeping in the same bed with him now, not after all she had done. She wasn't worthy of his love. How could he bear to look at her? She was a despicable woman and she deserved all she got now. She didn't deserve any more happiness in life after her betrayal of the man she married. How she cried every night. How she chastised herself for being so stupid. How could she, an intelligent woman, who had brought up three children so well, have turned into a common whore. That's all she thought of herself. What was she thinking? What had happened to the mild mannered community minded woman had been? How had she turned into this other woman?

Every day she tortured herself about the affair. One minute deciding to tell her husband, the next thinking about running away. She even contemplated suicide...

In the end, after much deliberation, she told her husband. How did she feel when she told him? Was she scared? How did she feel afterwards? Relieved?

It is incredible the pressure we put ourselves under isn't it?

Guilt is not real. We can't see it, we can't touch it, and no one can show it to us. It is something which sits inside the mind, but eats away at us every day. Why?

Most people in the world have a conscience (*conformity to one's own sense of right conduct*), and we know when we breach it. That's where guilt comes in. It's amazing isn't it, that our own mind would make us

feel so bad about something it had thought was perfectly acceptable to do at an earlier period.

If the woman had considered the affair using right action before embarking on it, there would be no guilt. She obviously believed in the past that having affairs was wrong, and when she herself embarked upon one, her conscience let her know it was wrong again, and again, and again, until finally, she had to own up to it.

Some people feel so guilty about wrong action, that they do indeed kill themselves. How sad that someone actually terminates their own precious life, because they are worried about what people will say or do.

The way forward is right action. Where your conduct follows what you believe is right or wrong. If you believe it is right to have an affair, you will have one with no guilt, but this topic isn't about right and wrong, that is up to you the individual to decide. If you decide it is wrong to have an affair and have one anyway, your ever present censor (*someone who censures or condemns*) will be ready to beat you (or your mind anyway) up for as long as it takes. That is why murderers and others who have committed serious offences against people sometimes have a need to own up. They just can't bear the pain in their minds anymore.

So guilt is real. Very real. Even though it is invisible to others, it is as real to the sufferer as a burn on the body. It is inescapable. You cannot run away from it, it is always with you. Even if you travel a million miles through space. You take it with you.

“So what you're saying is confess and everything will be all right, is that correct?”

Well, actually you may feel better for confessing your “guilt,” but the action has already taken place. Someone is dead. Someone is hurt. Someone is crying. It is too late to go back. You can only go forward.

Most people don't confess, because they don't want to lose face (*status in the eyes of others*). They don't want people to know they have done something which wouldn't be approved of by their peer group (if your peer group is into mugging and robbing people, you may not feel any guilt, and may even feel proud of what you have done), family or wider society.

We all want to put on a public face. We want people to think we are one type of person, usually an upstanding (*morally admirable*) member of the community. That's why we feel so guilty when we have done something not so admirable. We don't want to get found out and so lose our status.

If you want a good example, think politicians or priests. In our newspapers in the uk, there are constant scandals involving people who put on a morally admirable front, only to do the complete opposite when no one's looking. Why do they do such things? Because it is the real them - behind the mask of morality - who is sleeping with prostitutes, taking drugs, going on alcohol binges, taking bribes, being corrupt or engaged in some other unpleasant business.

Doing these things does not make them bad people, but when the difference between the authentic self and the projected self gets too big you get guilt. If your authentic self is corrupt and the outward projection is corrupt, no problem, well at least for you regarding guilt. If your authentic self is a murderer and your outward projection is a murderer, no problem again regarding guilt.

Now I happen to believe that the true, or authentic self, of every individual, is a loving, kind, compassionate one, and that everything else is a projection. That is why instead of worrying about how to fix guilt. i.e. so we can do things that are against our better judgement and not feel guilty, we should be concentrating on developing our authentic self.

Guilt is a pointless exercise, don't you agree? Let me ask you a question: If you could get away with things without feeling guilty, would you do them? If you could get rid of a love rival without anyone ever finding out and without ever feeling guilty would you do it? How about robbing a bank? No one will ever find out and you won't feel guilty...Well? Would you?

Right Conduct

It's not an ethics quiz we are playing here, we are trying to discover whether it is the guilt that is the problem, or the action. Most people are more worried about the guilt. They are happy to take a risk with the action and hope they won't get found out. Is that a fair assessment?

I have lied (on several occasions) to previous girlfriends about where I have been, when in fact I was with someone else. I saw the opportunity, took it, enjoyed it, and worried about the consequences later. It was only when it was brought up in conversation with my girlfriend that I started to feel guilty. Not because I was really truly sorry, although maybe I thought I was; but knowing it was only a matter of time before I was caught.

“Why did I do that?” I thought, “you’re so stupid alan, if only you hadn’t slept with that girl.” The closer I was to being caught the more guilt was piled upon my mind.

Have a think about any actions you have felt guilty about for a moment. Can you remember why you felt guilty?

Remember the woman at the beginning of this topic? She wasn’t feeling guilty while she was having passionate sex with her lover, was she? On the contrary, she was enjoying herself! It was only when the thought of what the consequences *could be*, that she started to feel guilty.

Guilt is nothing more than the cost you must pay for having done something against your better judgement (and you have a chance of being found out), in the same way that a hangover is the cost you must pay for drinking too much, and having a great time at the party the night before. Actually you may feel guilty about having drunk so much as well!

So what is right conduct? Is it something you learn from your parents, your teachers, or your peers? Inevitably, you do learn from these people, but who’s to say what right conduct is? The only way to learn this is from yourself. Through observing yourself in action.

Guilt is an unnecessary encumbrance (*Any obstruction that impedes or is burdensome*). We need to throw off the shackles of guilt, and live in minds free of pain, for that’s what guilt is – pain. A constant reminder that there is something you have done which is unresolved.

So from today onwards I will not let guilt into my life, how about you? But to do that, I must change the way I think, and the way I act. In order to bring about this guilt free life, we must make a *big shift* in thinking, and in action. There is no time to consider it, you have to make this decision right now. Do I want to live my life without guilt? I certainly do.

Make the decision and commit here and now, to live according to compassion, love and empathy. That is all you have to do. The rest will take care of itself. There is no time to think about this, it is done. The shift has been made. You are now guilt free, ok?

Once again, I hear you sitting reading this, thinking, “what was he talking about? I don’t feel any different, I’m sure I’ll do something that will make me feel guilty again.” But what kind of authentic life is that you will be leading? You are already predicting that (and listen to the words) you will *go against yourself*. How is that actually possible? Can someone please explain it to me? You are one person are you not? You

have one brain. One body. One Mind. Where is the separation? Who is going against who?

If you commit a “wrong action,” why is it wrong? If you do it, it must be a right action! Maybe not for the others you are affecting, but for you it is right. It must be or you wouldn’t do it. There is no point in us discussing what is right and wrong again and again. Right conduct is easy. Wrong action is easy. It is your choice. But only one of those comes with a “lifetime guilt-free guarantee.” Which one will you choose?

Just one last hint...

- (a) If you think it is wrong it probably is.
- (b) If you worry it might be wrong, it probably is.
- (c) If someone else says it’s wrong, go back to A.
- (d) Right action is always right.
- (e) Guilt is a waste of a precious life.

G u n s

A weapon that discharges a missile at high velocity (especially from a metal tube or barrel)

**You're the man
You stand above me
Trigger at the ready
Such power in small hands
You are god and I am no one**



Things have changed quite a lot since man invented the gun. Gone are the days of hand to hand combat where you weren't sure if the person you were attacking or defending yourself from was stronger than you. No longer do you have to worry that they may be a black belt in some dangerous martial art; the gun levels the playing field, and gives you, the holder of the gun, immense power.

You feel powerful, psychologically, as well as physically, safe in the knowledge that you can defend yourself from attack; and if you are that way inclined, attack someone yourself. In the past, there was always a chance you would lose a fist fight or a knife fight, but now you don't even have to get close to someone to kill them.

You stand, you pull out the loaded gun, and gently squeeze the trigger. Blam! The explosive charge sets the bullet off leaving the gun at high speed; the pointed metal projectile spinning through space with no

thought, no intention, no desire. The thought rested with the one who pulled the trigger. It might have been self-defence, wilful attack, an accident, a desire to kill, a need to rid the world of someone who you believed to be evil, a criminal trying to leave the scene of the crime, or the police shouting, “stop or we’ll shoot.”

But the bullet has no such thought; it is but shaped metal, no bigger than a finger, yet capable of destroying life wherever it is sent. Suddenly it finds its target, a human being; and in a micro-second, the metal pierces first the clothing, then it starts to tear inside the flesh, shattering bone where it finds it, pulverising organs indiscriminately. The victim falls. Their breathing becomes shallow, blood pours from the hole in their skin, their body desperately trying to keep them alive. They are but a short time from death. You stand over them, and fire again.

The human is no more; the bloodied flesh is all that remains. You did that. You killed him. For whatever reason he is now dead. He may have stolen from you; you may have stolen from him; he might have been a danger to society. I’m sure you will be able to justify it.

How many people die this way? And it’s all thanks to one man’s invention. One human thought which came up with a hand held killing machine that is now in use in every country in the world. Criminals use them against innocent people, innocent people use them against criminals, and the police and army use them against everyone. In the united states especially, gun ownership is seen as a fundamental human right!

Guns have one purpose. To kill. Do you understand that? To deprive another of his or her life. That is their *only* purpose.

I’ve seen the police carrying guns in most countries, and how powerful they look. The holster on the belt says, “don’t mess with us, otherwise you die.”

Guns generate fear in others; they make the holder almost invincible, no matter how small they are. It may make the general public fear to do anything wrong in case they are shot, but it doesn’t really stop those who are determined does it? It just means they get a gun to shoot back at the police.

Where will it end? Will we all be forced to carry a gun “just in case?” Are we so afraid of each other? Do we really want to cause each other so much harm? I am filled with sadness as I write this topic, that our species, homo sapiens, has ended up just using our brains for destruction.

Before anyone tries to justify gun use, let me remind you, that the ends can never justify the means. We want rid of all gun crime in our city. So what do we do? We shoot the criminals! And the cycle continues...

I understand that people are afraid. They are so afraid of something “bad” happening to them, that they decide to arm themselves. And what happens when someone tries to attack them? It’s kind of obvious. They shoot them dead! Of course they were doing it in self-defence, so that’s all right, isn’t it? In any case the law would probably agree with you, and the police would be happy that there’s one less criminal out on the street.

But what is this really about? Perhaps this is good vs. evil.

The man who goes to church every week, and is a “model” citizen (mr good), is attacked in his home by a burglar (mr evil), and shoots him in the head, killing him instantly. This is clearly a case of good overcoming evil wouldn’t you say? Except mr good killed a man. He fired the projectile that span into space before ripping through the flesh of mr evil.

I can hear many of you thinking you would do the same, given the same circumstances. But the more we think like this, the more guns we will carry, and the more people will die unnecessarily. Actually I feel sorry for the burglar; he is not evil (for me there is no such thing as good and evil), he is just misguided in his own thinking. The same goes for anyone who thinks that the only way to live is to steal ultimately worthless possessions from others.

Scenario 1

I have used the scenario of the bank robber in another topic, but this time imagine he has decided to steal from an armoured car. He knows the guards are armed, so he arms himself. The van stops, he pulls down his mask, jumps out of the car and runs towards the guard. He shouts, “get your fucking hands up where I can see them;” but unbeknown to him, there is another guard to his left. The guard removes his revolver silently, aims, and fires. The robber goes down. Hooray! What a hero the guard is. He has saved the precious money! The wonderful, amazing bits of paper he is prepared to kill for. The would be thief lies dead in the road, blood oozing from his wounds. The guards congratulate each other for saving the money.

Scenario 2

The robber pulls down his mask, jumps out of the car and runs towards the guard. He shouts, “get your fucking hands up where I can see them,” but this time he sees the guard to his left removing his revolver; he aims and fires. The guard goes down. He grabs the money from the guard and runs back to the car. What a result! He got the money! The wonderful amazing bits of paper he is prepared to kill for. The guard lies dead in the road, blood oozing from his wounds. The thief drives off quickly, happy to have completed his task.

Guns are so quick. No time to think. Use it if you have to. Just like a computer game.

Except this time it's real blood, real screaming, and real agony.

So now we all know that the almost self-explanatory purpose of guns is to kill. They do not discriminate between right and wrong. They just do exactly what they are designed for. K-I-L-L. So just before we finish this topic, is it possible that someone can answer a question that has been troubling me for some time? Why do they keep making them?

The leaders of most “civilised” countries want peace and harmony in society, so why do they permit companies to keep making guns? It seems like a no-brainer to me.

You want to cut gun crime, but you arm the police, allow companies to manufacture guns, and in some countries allow people to buy them legally. Surely you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that if people have them, they're going to use them. It's like trying to get rid of cocaine on the streets and then allowing people to make it legally and then allowing people to buy it. Somewhat contradictory, wouldn't you say? But maybe it's just me!

People go to work every day in gun factories throughout the world, making the bullets and the guns that fire them. How do they feel about what they are doing? Do they think they are doing work to further peace and harmony in the world? Who do they think they are helping? Perhaps to them it's just a job, a way to pay the bills and nothing more. But I can't see that. Surely they must recognise that the output of their work may be ending life somewhere, whether used by the police for “good,” or criminals for “evil.”

How proud they must be, as another “piece” rolls off the production line, ready to be bought for a few measly pounds. How proud the owners

of the gun factories must be to see such booming sales. I can see the boardroom presentations now.

“Due to the unprecedented levels of fear our products have created, sales are steadily increasing. As we have seen in the last quarter, a high level of gun attacks has meant that more people are arming themselves against gun attacks resulting in increased sales.”

The other directors applaud the sales director and give him a big fat bonus. After all, this is strictly business.

Man has always been violent, but before guns, people had a chance to survive, now it's over without any contact. After all, what use is thirty years of martial arts training against a skinny youth armed with a 9 mm automatic pistol?

Guns redefine power. You no longer need muscles; with just one tiny movement of the index finger you can release a bullet. For me, that's a pretty scary thought, but for some people, it makes them feel powerful, it gives them a super strength they never knew before. It makes people fear them, respect them and obey them. The gun compensates for feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness. It redefines who they are, or at least who they want the world to think they are.

Don't worry it's just a game...

Have you ever owned a gun? Have you ever fired a gun? I have. I don't know when the first time was, but it was probably when I was a small child! Not a real gun of course, but a “toy” gun, bought for me by my parents. I used to love playing “cops and robbers” and other children's games. “BANG BANG! YOU'RE DEAD,” we would cry or “STOP OR I'LL SHOOT.”

Looking back it all seems so innocent, just children playing with toys and their imaginations. It's just a bit of harmless fun, isn't it? “Why should we stop children having fun?” I hear you say. “It's just make believe. It's not real.” But it is real.

The children may know they haven't really killed someone, but how are we supposed to teach our children to live a peaceful life when we actively encourage them to simulate violence? Is there not enough violence in the world already without using violence as a play activity?

I used to play “cowboys and indians,” which in the real life past, was american cowboys brutally killing native american people, and the native people retaliating by brutally killing the cowboys. Nice game! How about

cops and robbers, where I pretend to be a policeman and I chase you and kill or capture you?

What sorts of games are we teaching our children? How can we expect their minds to be repulsed by violence when it is actively promoted everywhere! Please think on this for a moment.

I cannot understand why we are encouraged to play these games for although we adults see them as pure fantasy, the only difference between them and reality is that the guns can't kill or harm anyone, the thought behind the game is the same: "BANG BANG. YOU'RE DEAD."

Parents may argue that it's a violent world out there anyway and this is just a harmless bit of fun, but since when has violence – real or pretend – ever been truly fun? Maybe you think you're preparing them for adult life, but let me ask you another question. How can we expect to break the cycle of violence if we are indoctrinating children from a young age that violence is acceptable?

Children's minds are like sponges, and they soak up everything from their parents and other teachers. If a child is told that it is ok to pretend to kill someone, why wouldn't they think it's ok? Admittedly most people who play cowboys and indians do not grow up to be mass murderers, but the seed is planted.

It's time to unplant the seed

Maybe there is someone to blame for all this. Maybe it's mr colt who invented the revolver in the 1800's; maybe it's the parents who let their children pretend to kill people; maybe it's the computer games companies who make violent computer games; or maybe it's the governments who say it's ok to defend yourself with a gun. It could be the man who works in the factory making bullets who is to blame. It could be that educators are to blame, or the american media companies who insist on making the most violent tv and films possible, or perhaps our ancestors are to blame, or maybe it's just that having learned about violence and guns we want to continue to be violent because actually we get a buzz out of it! Let me tell you about my limited experiences with real guns.

I first bought an air gun which fired real pellets when I was about fifteen or sixteen. The first thing I remember was how it felt. Somehow the handle just fitted my hand like a perfect glove. It seemed to be a natural extension of me, and I felt powerful. I sat in my back garden

shooting at anything. Tin cans, the fence, the trees, when suddenly I saw a pigeon sitting on a branch. I fired at it and hit it, I think, but in any case, it carried on flying so I don't know if it died or not.

Over the next five years or so, I had other air guns and (very) occasionally would fire at friends feet if they were visiting, resulting in lots of laughter.

The first time I fired a real gun was very different. My friend had been in the army and was obsessed with guns. He took me into the woods and showed me how to load up a 12 bore shotgun with two cartridges. He then hung a piece of tissue paper on a branch and asked me to fire at it from many metres away. I was shocked that it was completely destroyed afterwards. "That's what it will do to your insides if it hits you," he joked.

We then proceeded to go rabbit hunting with two other friends. "If anything moves" he said, "pull the trigger, and make sure it's dead, after all we don't want to have to go after it to kill it. We can't just leave a wounded animal to die." I thought it strange that on the one hand he was happy to violently take the life of another animal, but was concerned it shouldn't suffer (I think having its life violently ended is suffering enough, don't you agree?).

We walked for ten or fifteen minutes when suddenly something shot out in front of me.

Without a thought, my "hunter's instinct" took over, and I pulled the trigger. Bang Bang, went the shotgun as it recoiled against my shoulder.

Someone shouted over: "Did you hit it alan? Where is it? Did you kill it?"

I walked over to a rabbit lying on its side, still except for very fast breathing. Its eyes were still. Its legs were still. I stood there transfixed, unsure what to do. "If it's still moving, kill it" shouted my friend. So I reloaded my gun pointed it at the rabbit, kind of looked away and fired. The rabbit stopped breathing.

My friend came over and picked the rabbit up by its back legs and said "This things pumped so full of lead it's got more holes in it than a colander. No ones going to want to eat that." Everybody, including me, laughed, and he tossed the dead rabbit into a bush.

*Such big men, you stand
guns raised skyward
waiting for the moment,
then watch birds, graceful
fall silently to earth*

That's all I remember about that trip 11 years ago, but I never picked a gun up again. The power of the shotgun really scared me. I, a weak human being killed another creature, for what? Sport? Having a laugh? Having a Sunday morning out with the lads before the pub opened for lunch?

I was utterly disgusted with myself, and still am, for taking the life of that rabbit. Up until then, playing around with guns was never going to really hurt anyone, but here was I, holding the power of life or death in such small hands. How was it that our worlds collided?

We both got up on Sunday morning and had breakfast. The rabbit had no plans for the day really, I would guess, but I did. Shooting in the morning, followed by drinks in the pub, followed by a meal at my friend's house, followed by an evening at the pub. All in all, a fun day out. The rabbit didn't know my plans. He just carried on with his daily routine until he walked across my path at the exact time I was walking past with murder on my mind. An unfortunate meeting for both of us. He, because he lost his life, and I, because I had to carry the guilt around with me for many years.

Do I blame the gun manufacturer or my friend for giving me the gun, and urging me to go shooting with him? I could, but ultimately the responsibility lies with me. I chose to go that day. I chose to load the shotgun. I chose to pull the trigger. Everyone has a choice. I chose never to pick up a gun again.

Guns: Tools of the mind

What is a gun? It could be a pistol or a rifle, automatic or manual. It could fire pellets like my air gun, bullets like a rifle, or cartridges that spray small round balls everywhere when fired, like a shotgun. They are made of metal, have a firing pin, and sometimes come with a silencer. That is about the sum of my knowledge of guns.

I know they are used by different people worldwide. Terrorists, armies, criminals, policemen, householders, jealous lovers, mass murderers, hunters, and sportsmen. I know you don't have to get close to the person in order to hit them; in fact some rifles are able to fire bullets in excess of a mile. That means I can sit and pick out my target without ever having to see their face except through a telescopic sight. The result will be the same (shattered bone and ripped open flesh), but the effect on the shooter will not. Detachment is the key word here.

In fact, the gun removes any kind of physical connection, unlike stabbing someone, which means feeling the blade going in, or strangling or punching someone to death, which requires a physical connection with the hands. That's why shooting someone is easier, because you don't get the intense emotions associated with hand to hand combat where you and your opponent (or victim) are exchanging energy constantly.

With a gun, there is a coldness like the metal it is made from, a non-emotional tool for getting what you want. Whether it is to kill an enemy of the country, or kill a man for his wallet, it makes no difference to the gun. It is always ready to do your bidding. The bidding of your mind.

So what I want to talk to you about now is what thoughts appear in your mind that allow for the possibility of using a gun. Let's start off with a few examples to get you going shall we? How about food, revenge, government sponsored war, anger, paranoia, disease of the mind or robbery?

BETRAYAL: You see the man with your wife. You feel the anger rise up inside you. You feel the betrayal, the lies, the dishonesty, and your ego cannot take it any longer. You feel hurt, confused, and angry. You confront them in bed, raise the gun, and fire.

WAR: You have the enemy in your sights. You know he is your enemy, because your government told you so; and because he's wearing a different uniform, you do not question, you aim the gun and fire.

FOOD: You see the animal, standing in the forest. You want to eat meat so you raise your gun and fire.

ANGER: He's said some horrible things about you, you can't listen to them anymore, he's hurting your self-esteem, you're not going to take that. You raise your gun and fire.

DISEASE: You hear voices in your head; they are telling you to kill her. The only way to silence the voices is to do it. "Go on, do it," the voices urge, and you aim your gun and fire.

GREED: I want your wallet, and your car keys. Give them to me right now or I'll kill you. The man refuses so you raise your gun and fire.

CONTROL: The man will not conform to society, he is a trouble maker. He is stirring up other people who may start to question the regime as well. He needs to go. You set out to find him. You find him, aim your gun, and fire.

REVENGE: He killed your brother. Now he is out of prison, he must pay for causing you to suffer. You follow him home one night, stand silently behind him, raise your gun and fire.

FEAR: You hear a noise downstairs. You reach for the drawer by your bed and remove the pistol. It's dark as you creep down the stairs. "Who's there" you call. Suddenly you see a man hiding in the dark, you raise your gun, and fire.

Shall I continue? There are a hundred other examples of times when the mind will reach for the gun, which is the ultimate silencer of life. Can you think of a scenario, where if you had a gun, you would use it? You may think not, but given the right situation you just might.

I say you might, because without the right thinking processes in place, there is always a chance, a slim chance, that you feel justified in terminating a life.

The key words we need here are compassion (*a deep awareness of and sympathy for another's suffering*) and love. If we cultivate compassion for others and develop love for everyone on the planet, no matter what their background or thinking we can start to put the guns down and the manufacturers out of business.

I have often contemplated writing the following letter.

To: A. Global Gun Manufacturer

21/11/07

Dear sir

My name is alan, and I am a human being like yourself. Whilst I appreciate that you and your family need to eat, I have become increasingly concerned that you are not in a business that actually helps – let alone furthers – the human race. I would like to ask you why that is.

Maybe you don't care that tens of thousands of people are killed by small arms fire every year. Maybe you know people want to kill each other, and you realised they needed someone to help them "facilitate" it, thereby providing a very valuable public service? Maybe you have a great awareness of the need for population control, and given that most people in undeveloped countries do not use contraception, have come up with an ingenious way to keep the numbers down?

Given you probably know that I was not being serious in my last two statements, and you know I am aware that you are just in it for the money, answer me one question. Do the words love and compassion mean anything to you?

Do you realise you are helping people to become killers? You may say you do not fire the weapons, but deep in your heart you sincerely hope people become violent, because, if they all become peaceful, then you may have to sell your mansion and your ferrari, and you wouldn't want that would you?

So given that I know you want violence to continue, in order for business to boom, why don't you do the world and everyone in it a favour, and turn your attention to making products that benefit the world, not destroy it?

Yours sincerely

alan macmillan orr

A plea

Many people have said to me that guns are essential to ensuring the peace and stability of the world, but I have to disagree. Guns make the world violent, by giving people, who need help to work through their problems and their thinking, a one-handed outlet for their emotions.

People are affected by the desperate psychological need for status, power, and greed amongst other things, and guns help them to fulfil these desires. You may also say you have a weapon for self-defence, and if you don't have one, a robber may kill you; but that is your need for power over the robber, in the same way he has a gun to have power over you. He might try to kill you, that's true, but keeping a weapon "just in case" just perpetuates the violence. After all, if you have a gun, you are already planning for violence to take place; maybe not today or tomorrow, but some time in the future.

So give up your guns. Break them right now. Take a stand for humanity. Show you care what happens to the world by sending a letter to an arms company. Ask your friends to show some compassion please, and most of all, please don't condition your child into believing that guns and gun play is an integral part of the human race, it isn't. The place for guns to stop is with every new born child.

We need to start to put guns behind us. That means no toy guns, no cops and robbers games in the school yard or computer games in which the only objective is to "kill" things.

I can hear some of you laughing saying things like, "you'll never get people to do that," or "they're just harmless kids games, I think you're wrong." And that's ok, but please, I beg all of you to start to show love to each other, as humans belonging to the same species, and stop using guns.

This appeal also goes out to anyone who works in a gun factory anywhere in the world. You are helping man destroy man. Please find other work. You may be poor and need work to feed your family but believe me, thanks to the work you do millions of people will suffer. Think about it. We use guns because they are there, not because we need them.

Let us start to use our amazing minds to get what we want not by ripping flesh apart with metal, I can only think we will surely destroy each other, if we do not – which may be good for the arms businesses, but bad for the human race.

Whose side are you on, a greedy faceless corporation, or all of humanity's? If guns were necessary, we would have evolved with them already built in.

The choice is yours.

H

Happiness

State of well-being characterized by emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy

•

Emotions experienced when in a state of well-being

I just want to be happy!
Is that too much to ask?



I want you to think back to a time when you were happy. I mean really happy. When was it? Was it when you were a child? Was it when you first fell in love? Or was it sometime more recently, like when someone bought you a really expensive present, or you went on a “dream” holiday? Maybe you got a promotion which came with more money, or maybe when you had a child? That is what we are here to find out!

According to my mother, I was never a miserable child, and in fact, throughout my life people have always said that I had a “sunny disposition,” but I don’t think I was ever truly “happy.”

As I passed through my turbulent teens, and into my twenties, I became more and more “unhappy,” and more dissatisfied with everything

that was going on in my life. I could never hold down a job, although I was bright. I drank too much, and I flitted from girl to girl.

Although I had fleeting moments of happiness, such as getting a new job, finding a new girlfriend, getting my paycheck, buying new gadgets, cars, or going on holiday; these intense moments of happiness were followed by a steady decline into boredom and dissatisfaction. Nothing could make me happy I concluded, except perhaps an abundance of money.

Yes. That was what was required, and I set off in search of it. I found I could do contracting in the information technology field, and I “blagged” my way into a project management job which was paying about six times the hourly rate I was on previously. When my first week’s paycheck came in I couldn’t believe it! Wow! All this money for me! I was so happy. And at the weekend, I treated my girlfriend to a nice meal, bought her some nice presents, bought myself some nice presents, bought a bottle of champagne and celebrated.

This was more like it, and I was starting to feel much happier. My parents were happier with me as I wasn’t borrowing money from them anymore, my girlfriend was happy because now we could afford nice things, and I could buy her presents and take her out, and internally it felt like a great stone had been removed from my neck. I was free! I could now do anything I wanted. I had plenty of money.

This went on for about a year, but I was noticing that although I was earning five to six times as much as I had been previously, I was also spending five to six times as much and sometimes more! We moved into a big house by the sea, I bought my girlfriend a horse and a dog, we had a nice new 4x4 jeep, and we went skiing for christmas. This was the life.

I was now much happier than I had been for years, and as I approached my thirtieth birthday, I felt pretty good about everything.

But one day, as I was walking down by the sea with the dog, I got a tiny piece of insight which told me, that as much I was earning, I was spending, and even if I earned more than I was earning now, I could see that I would probably spend it. I then worked out what I believed the maximum amount of money I could earn as an consultant would be, and concluded that I was probably nearly at that amount already. Then what? If I couldn’t earn anymore then what would happen to my happiness?

I decided that something had to be done! One afternoon, as we were grooming our horse in a little field close to the sea, I turned to my girlfriend casually and said, “do you want to go travelling to australia?”

“Yeah, ok!” She replied excitedly.

In search of happiness?

And that was it. We sold all our possessions for a tenth of what they were worth, stored a few personal things at my parents house, and gave the rest away. I handed in my notice, emptied my bank accounts, begrudgingly gave some to my girlfriend, and five months later we were standing at the airport with our rucksacks on. As the plane climbed into the night sky, I thought to myself “ha! We’re free! I’m so happy!”

The first month or two were fantastic. We were so happy in australia; It was new and exciting, money wasn’t a problem, and we bought surfboards, new clothes, new watches, a car, new jewellery and partied like it was going out of fashion! The beer flowed, and the money flowed, day in, day out.

But that wasn’t what I wanted to be doing, I thought to myself as I woke up in the hostel with yet another raging hangover. I wanted to drive around australia, and I would. “We have to leave straight after christmas,” I told my girlfriend; and on boxing day, we got into the car, and started driving.

This was it. Freedom. Travelling the open road; stopping to look at the natural wonders, sleeping in a makeshift bed in the back of the car. This was what happiness was about I concluded, and I relished every moment of it. But not for long.

Why does the money always dry up?

In my state of happiness at being on the open road, I had forgotten to check how much money we were spending (as neither of us had jobs), and within six months, it was gone. My relationship with my girlfriend became more and more strained as I realised that without the money to keep us happy, there was no love between us, and we split up. How was I going to get money to live?

I was now desperately unhappy; alone in a country with no friends, save for party backpackers with whom I would share an occasional drunken night with.

But then something magical happened. I met a girl whose was working at the backpackers I was staying in. At first we felt nothing towards each other, but that soon changed as we decided to head off to sydney together. We stopped in a little village called byron bay, and it

was there that we fell in love. And what a love it was. I say “was,” because we too have split up, after six and a half years travelling the world together, working together, learning together, sharing successes and disappointments.

During the first few years everything was great. I had forgotten how desperately unhappy I had been with my previous girlfriends and previous jobs. I met really interesting people, and I learned a lot about myself.

Money wasn't important to me anymore, I decided (although we were still having to work just to scrape by). I felt like there was a huge change in me, and I liked it. Except it was only temporary.

We returned to australia with the idea of starting a massage business, but with only a few pounds left over from our travelling days, it was impossible to get going properly. My wife (for we had got married the previous year) got a job straight away, but I was obsessed with the idea of getting this business off the ground. So once again, I was unhappy. Unhappy at the life I found myself in. I didn't want to be poor!

“I am not good at being poor,” I thought, so I too got a job, and although I was earning a decent salary, it wasn't enough to allow me to keep buying new things (which I loved to do). I couldn't buy presents for my wife, and I couldn't do the things I liked doing. This was no good.

Why wasn't I happy? I had a beautiful wife, a nice (rented) house in melbourne, australia, and I had a job of sorts, and a couple of friends; in fact, everything that anyone could wish for, but still it wasn't enough.

I had to go travelling again I decided. So off on the plane I jumped once more, for thailand and the uk, but it was different this time, without the person I loved by my side. I felt empty and even more unhappy.

I spent more and more time at the pub drinking, pretending to be the happy traveller that everyone envied. I had to get back to australia, to my wife, I thought, so on the plane I jumped, back to melbourne. I got another job, and I tried my hardest to be happy but inside there was just darkness. The months dragged on and I said:

“I'm off travelling again.”

“What? Why?” my wife asked.

“I just need to get away,” I replied.

And that night in bed she said to me:

“If you stay, we can work this out, I promise. But if you go this time, don't come back.”

Oh my god, she was giving me an ultimatum, that wasn't good. But my mind was already made up. I had to go. And I did.

A new beginning?

Since that time I've been involved with a couple of other people, started writing this book in earnest, travelled to several different places, and worked in several different jobs – all in search of true happiness. But it is only in the last six months I have come to realise what happiness is (and what it isn't).

I thought happiness meant having a stable family life, with a career, and two holidays a year. I thought the reason I was miserable was because I didn't have any money. It was so obvious to me! When I had plenty of money, I was happy. When I had none, I was miserable. So the only way to ensure I had this constant state of happiness was to ensure a constant flow of money. Hey, this is easy!

I knew what I needed to do. I needed to get a good job. Get a nice house. Get someone attractive and intelligent to live with, get a dog maybe... But a little voice in the back of my mind was saying, "but you've had all this before, alan."

"Oh, no!" I thought.

The voice (which was my own) was right. Years before, I had all this. The well paid job, the attractive girlfriend, the dog, the house by the sea, and now several years later, I wanted it all back. How stupid had I been? Why did I hand in my notice, why did I go travelling, what was the point of all this. Oh, how stupid I was! I had been out of computers for over nine years so there was no chance of getting my old contracting jobs back, and that was all I knew. My life was finished, I would end up working cleaning toilets or something like that! I cursed myself for being so idiotic. "How could I think there would be more than I already had? Stupid. Stupid."

I couldn't believe what I had done. I had given up everything I held dear to me on a whim, and traded it for this. For nothing. Why hadn't I seen this coming? Why couldn't I go back to the way it was before? I didn't even bloody like this new me.

People I knew were starting to question me about what I would be doing with my life now I had come back from australia. "Oh, I'm writing a book" I would reply, hoping that got me off the hook, but my parents were even more insistent that I give them an answer.

“Now come on alan, you’re 37 years old, don’t you think it’s time you gave up all this travelling nonsense and settle down?”

“No! I don’t want to settle down,” I shouted. “I don’t.”

“Then what do you want to do, son?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know.”

And it was true, I didn’t. Sure, I was writing this book, but that would be over in a couple of years, and then what would I do? Would I end up on the streets, addicted to drugs or alcohol? Would people look back on me and say, “it’s a shame what happened, he was a really bright boy with a bright future ahead of him, but he threw it all away, shame.”

I thought and I thought, but I couldn’t see a way out of the misery I had created for myself. I had really screwed up, and I knew it. I was going to be a forty something backpacker, going from place to place, trying to meet new people who were just embarking on their travels, and boring them with my stories. Where would I work? What if I got sick? Where would I live when my parents died? What would I *do*?

I got more and more depressed and spent more and more time trying to find a solution in a beer glass, but it wasn’t helping, nothing was helping.

I was utterly dissatisfied with my life. And then it hit me. I was discontent with everything. I was discontent with people, with politicians, with careers, authority, litter, prejudice, poverty, greed, murder. I was discontent with being told to conform to someone else’s idea of what happiness was. The reason I wasn’t happy was because I wasn’t conforming.

If only I had settled down to a job as soon as I left school, If only I had done better at school, and just been satisfied with my lot in life, this discontent would never have arisen. By now I could have had a nice career, company car, a wife and family. My parents would have been pleased for me. And they would love having grandchildren! On sundays, after lunch, we could all go for a walk with the kids and the dogs. And we would be having a very nice time thank you.

“If only you had conformed” say the powers that be, “you wouldn’t be in this silly situation. You weren’t supposed to tamper with the program. If only you’d gone along with it, you’d be perfectly happy right now. You’ve only got yourself to blame.”

“But I am not unhappy!” I thought “I love life. I have always loved life. But boy am I angry. Boy am I discontent, and I’m going to do something about it.”

Discontent

A longing for something better than the present situation

The more I thought about it, the more angry I became. How could I have been so stupid? How could I have thought that happiness was something I could get with money or by constantly travelling around the world?

As a child I was happy. As a child I loved everything. It was only when I became an adult that things started going wrong, when I was expected to behave in a certain way I became discontent with life. The more I started to see the truth of it, the less angry I became. There was no point in being angry all the time. All I would do as alienate more people from my life.

I could start a revolution and try to overthrow the government but what purpose would that serve except either ending in my death, or that of many others, and anyway, who was I? Certainly no revolutionary! No. I had to find a better way. I had to transcend the anger I was feeling and try to understand what it was that was making me angry.

The dictionary definition of discontent is “*a longing for something better than the present situation,*” but I couldn’t accept that I was longing for something better. I actually wanted to create something better. I wanted to create a better world, one where money was not god, where people did not conform, where happiness was not just an external illusion. A world where compassion and love replaced fear and violence. But how would I do it? This was surely going to be a mammoth task.

How could I get everyone in the entire world to change? I realised that once again I was being stupid! You can never force people to change. They have to want to change, and the only person you could change was you. So I did.

I let go of the anger I was feeling, as I realised it could do no other purpose but stop me from seeing the truth of the whole situation, and started to become aware of what it really meant to be discontent. Why was I discontented with the life I had, when on the surface it appeared that I had everything I needed to make me happy? The first thing I did was to accept that I was happy. I was happy to be alive. And that was a good starting point if I wanted to dig any deeper.

My mother was right; I was a happy child. And I was a happy adult. I was just so caught up in my own external needs of wanting to be happy, that I was blind to the truth.

Being alive on this wonderful abundant planet, so full of beauty, was enough. Sure, we needed to eat and to have shelter, clothing and procreate to keep the species alive but they had nothing to do with happiness. Those were the basics we needed as a species to survive, bolt-on happiness providers like having a girlfriend, children, nice house, holidays, money, were all illusion – illusions created by conforming.

Happiness is contentment with who you are. Happiness is an absence of conflict in the mind and knowing no fear. Happiness is accepting that you are part of the universe, and it is part of you; and that you are not alone, although it sometimes feels like that. You are happy. You have always been happy, and that the desire for happiness is just desire. Nothing more. But don't take my word for it.

Watch yourself next time you feel happy, watch the movement of your mind, notice how your body feels and your heart is beating.

Are you sure you are not confusing happiness with excitement (*the feeling of lively and cheerful joy, The state of being emotionally aroused and worked up*)? You can call it happiness, or anything else you want, but you will notice that these are only temporary feelings and then the discontentment returns.

I get a pay rise. Wow! I am excited. I am happy, but then it passes.

Wow! I have found the love of my life, I'm going to marry her, and I am excited and I am happy, but then it passes.

Wow! We have just bought a new house, and I am so happy, but then it passes.

Wow! We have just had a baby boy. We are so excited. It is the happiest day of our life. But then it passes.

With all things of the material – even having children – the state of happiness is only ever temporary. You may love your child, but are you as happy as the day you noticed you were pregnant or the day you had the baby (maybe not happy, given the amount of pain you probably suffered). But can you see what I am getting at?

Happiness, as we know it, is only a temporary emotional state, and when the feeling of elation or joy passes, discontentment fills the space; until the next happy moment, and then back to discontentment. You cannot force yourself to be happy every day, and trying to, as I did, by filling my days with so many “temporary excitement moments” only made the discontentment worse when it came. From a great high, always comes a great low, as anyone who has ever taken drugs will tell you.

So learning to live in a state of happiness or joy is not about filling your life with things to take away the discontentment. It is allowing the

discontent to rise in you until such time as you wake up! And wake up with a bang you will. Only then can you start to understand what true happiness is about. Let the discontentment begin!

H a t e

The emotion of hate; a feeling of dislike so strong that it demands
action

•

Dislike intensely; feel antipathy or aversion towards

*I hate him with his rich lifestyle
I hate her shoes
I hate you because you are fat
I hate you because you are french
I hate you because you are black or white
I hate you because you are a beggar
I hate you because you are playing music I don't like
I hate your hair
I hate her laugh
I hate the clothes he wears
I hate this tv program
I hate when you smile at me
I hate you because you are catholic
I just hate you*



Why do we hate? What is hate? Well, hate is just another word with four letters, made up of two consonants and two vowels, but think about this: When you were born, who did you hate? Stop. Think carefully. I didn't hate anybody, did you? So let's ask an easy question of each other. What has changed since we were born?

Well, from my point of view, the only thing that has changed is that my mind has been filled up with knowledge, conditioning, experience and memory.

Everything you were when you were born you still are. The only thing that has changed is the content of your mind. So, perhaps we can agree that hate is all in the mind? It's not something real (although you may hate someone so much, you may kill him, that's pretty real!). But hate itself is nothing but an image, a story, a conversation. Hate is just a mass

of connections in the brain, that's all it is. Unfortunately for us, once all the wiring is complete it is hard to track back and rewire it, but we can but try. So let us now begin our discussion in earnest.

What is it about the british or the americans that so many people "hate" at the moment? They may have never met anyone from either country but no, they "hate americans."

I have heard it so many times over the last few years that it is starting to annoy me, especially as I have a good friend who is american, and I certainly can't see why anyone would hate him. He is friendly, thoughtful, kind, does lots of voluntary work and plenty else. Why would you hate him?

"Because," begins the brain, "he is part of the imperialist capitalist consumer society that is taking over the world, they make me sick, damned americans with their big cars, loud talk, oh they're so arrogant, it's like they think they know everything, and they're always right..."

Ok that's a lot of hate! So I think it's time we pick up the phone and talk to someone who hates america and americans.

Me: Hello, my name's alan, I'm phoning to talk to you about america, and why you hate it so much.

Mr hate: Oh yes, I've been expecting your call. You english?

Me: Scottish actually, but I grew up in england.

Mr hate: You are just as bad as the americans.

Me: Oh, why?

Mr hate: You and your imperialist ways you took over the world and made people suffer for your greed.

Me: Actually, that's not entirely true. I had nothing to do with british imperialism, I am only 38, have no money to speak of, and care neither one way or the other for the country.

Mr hate: Yes, but you're still a british citizen. By being british you are responsible for all the deeds that your country has done in the world. That is why you must pay.

Me: That's a bit strong. I think what britain did in the past was terrible, but that is past. Now is now and I have nothing to do with the past.

Mr hate: But don't you see, no one has paid the price for all the killing, torture and rape that your people did to my country.

Me: But it is past. Sorry can I ask you how old you are?

Mr hate: I'm twenty four.

Me: Twenty four! But you're even younger than me. The british were long gone by the time you were born. You live now, not in the past.

Mr hate: But the suffering continues, because of british imperialism.

Me: So you keep saying. But listen. How do you know that your country is suffering because of the british?

Mr hate: It is obvious.

Me: Well not to me. Who told you about british imperialism and all the atrocities that were carried out by them?

Mr hate: It is written in many books, we have learned in school and our parents still remember what the british did.

Me: So what you're saying is, you have had memories planted in your mind by people who did suffer and want revenge?

Mr hate: No, that's not what I'm saying. I am saying that the british must pay for what they did to us.

Me: So what you're saying is, the collective memory of the people, written into books and told in class has been imprinted on your memory by people who want you to take revenge on the british?

Mr hate: My father was murdered by the british, isn't that enough?

Me: For you to hate? Yes, probably. But do you hate all british, or just the soldier who killed your father?

Mr hate: All british. They represent everything that is bad in the world.

Me: But do you hate me?

Mr hate: Why do you ask?

Me: Well, it seems as if we're having a nice conversation here, and you sound like a nice man, I was just wondering if you hated me?

Mr hate: I am sure you are a nice man too, and no, I don't personally hate you, I just hate the british.

Me: So this british thing is a concept? You don't hate me personally just the idea of britain?

Mr hate: Yes. That's true. I have nothing against you. But my father was killed by the british and they must pay for that.

Me: But if you kill someone, their family will suffer.

Mr hate: Why not? My family has suffered.

Me: But that's just revenge, not hate. Look let's get back to what you were saying about the idea of the british. What is it precisely that you hate?

Mr hate: Everything. Their arrogant attitudes, their rich lifestyles, their army, their politicians.

Me: Have you ever been to Britain.

Mr hate: No. I would never go.

Me: Ok, what about if I swapped lives with you, and I came to live in your country for a while. Do you think I would hate Britain then?

Mr hate: No. Because you are British.

Me: So actually it is not the people at all. It is the nation, the country, the flag, and what it represents that you hate.

Mr hate: Exactly.

Me: But the flag is nothing more than a piece of cloth. The country name is just a label. Underneath we are all just people together. The concept that the flag represents has nothing to do with real people; it exists whether we are here or not, because the powerful keep it going. So is it not power that you hate?

Mr hate: Yes I hate everything about power, the powerful, they killed my father.

Me: But aren't there powerful people in your country as well, keeping the flag flying and brainwashing everyone to believing in the "nation."

Mr hate: I guess there are, it's true, I hadn't thought about it like that before.

Me: So do you now still hate all British.

Mr hate: I just miss my father.

Me: I know you do. Take care.

Mr hate: You too, goodbye.

So, before you go around hating people just because their passport says they come from a specific country try to have a conversation like that with yourself. Write it down and see why you hate. Remember we are here to unravel hate in your mind.

I did not choose to be British. I was born and assigned a label, thanks to my parents being labelled some years before. If I had my way, there would be no separate nations, as it only causes fear and division, and if I could give up my passport today I would. But until all countries start accepting we are all citizens of the world and we don't need "official papers" to travel on our own planet, I will have to hang onto mine for now. But I will be trying to find a way to give up citizenship of any

country and still be able to travel. I will let you know how I get on. But let us get back to our discussion.

We can now see that hate does not exist in one form. It is the accumulation of different processes, stories, teaching, propaganda, experience, and memory (whether yours or not), and it is only when all of these different items come together, in just the right amounts, that hate is formed. But we must become aware of it straight away before it takes root.

Some people hate others because they are rich, but let's examine for a moment why you would hate someone just because they had more money than you. First, jealousy has come into play. You are jealous because you are poor. Then greed comes into play, because you want more than you already have, and finally comparing, where you compare your lifestyles, and see that his is better than yours. So rather than (a) just letting it go and being happy with your life or (b) going out to work to earn more money than him, you "hate him" because it's easy, and it makes you feel good.

Think about it, it's really quite simple. We don't hate anyone, as hate in itself does not exist. It is a cauldron mixed with many ingredients heated to just the right temperature; but if you look closely, you will find some key ingredients every time.

Imagine you split up from your husband or wife, why do so many people hate their "ex's"? What is it about finishing a relationship with somebody you loved, that you went on so many holidays, and shared so many good times with, that can end up with you saying, "I hate him." Well let's explore it.

If he finished with you, there is the obvious sadness that it is finished, but the fact you were left leads to resentment and hurt, and if he has someone else, then obviously jealousy comes into it. How could somebody you loved do this to you? You loved them and this is how they repaid you! I hate him, for leaving me, I hate him for running off with another woman. But can you see that hate is just a word? It is not real, it is the feelings behind the word that are real, and like my friend who hated Britain, once we had explored it enough we found out the root cause of it (the loss of his father) – that actually, he hated no one.

We have to do the same in every situation that we find ourselves saying, "I hate," because once it takes hold, it's hard to uproot; remember that. So before it does, look deeply into the situation causing the word "hate" to be emitted, and write a conversation with the hated object. You might find out more about yourself than you know.

You don't hate anyone, I am sure of it. Just as I don't hate anyone. But I did. At least I thought I did until I found out I was hurt, or jealous, and then I dealt with those feelings by going through the process of becoming aware of my emotions and thoughts. I urge you to do the same before anyone else gets hurt.

We are all human, we are all members of the same species. A monkey doesn't hate a monkey. A lion doesn't hate a lion. It is thought that creates hate, and when we stop thinking so much, and take the time to do some exploring, then perhaps we will stop hating. Try it.

Remember, hate is just a word made up from two vowels and two consonants, and although the feelings behind are more complex, even a simple word can cause a lot of pain to others – physical and emotional. Empty your mind of the word. Allow yourself to be the love that you are.

H e a l t h

The general condition of body and mind

I think it's fair to say, that as a species, we generally tend to be living a lot longer than we used to. Gone are the days when many women died in childbirth, or infants died in the first year of life. All over the world men and women are living into their eightieth year and beyond. We can attribute this to many causes including improved sanitation and living conditions, availability of fresh fruit and vegetables but most of all, we have the development of modern medicine to thank.

Sure we still get sick, but these days (especially in the developed world), we just go down to the doctor or go into hospital, and we are either given wonder drugs, or operated on. We are saving more people than ever before. People with weak immune systems, bad genes, unhealthy lifestyles or just those who engage in dangerous activities, are taken into hospital and saved! It's a miracle!

People can go on eating what they want, driving too fast, smoking, taking drugs, and drinking too much and there is always somebody there to drive you in an ambulance to the hospital. No longer do we just leave people to die, we can do something to help them, and for that we must thank the doctors and nurses all over the world. We even have veterinary hospitals to save our beloved pets from death and suffering. Everyone can be saved!

Well, not everyone, but we have a damn good go at it, and although the doctors tell us about curbing our unhealthy activities, we can just smile and carry on what we're doing knowing full well that if we get sick again, they will have to treat us. Hey, you may drink two litres of whisky every day, but if it gets really bad, they will always transplant a new liver into you courtesy of some dead guy. We also engage in potentially lethal sports knowing that help is just a mobile call away.

Life sure is different to even a hundred years ago. We don't have to worry about the risks of what we are doing at all. We can be absolved of all personal responsibility, and place it firmly in the hands of people who studied for years, just so they could help us.

We get involved in street fights and brawls, we even get shot sometimes; and although the doctors can't guarantee they can save us, the chances of living are much higher than if we were just left on the side of the road. The healthcare system is truly the compassionate side of the human race! Armies go to war knowing full well that there will be a team of doctors ready to help the soldiers fight another day, so let's face it, what would we do without them? Well for one thing, the population would probably get smaller, and perhaps, even perhaps, people might take a little more personal responsibility for themselves and their actions.

Population

1. *A group of organisms of the same species inhabiting a given area*
2. *The people who inhabit a territory or state*

I was astounded to read recently that the population of the world only forty years ago, was about half what it is now. Only three billion versus today's estimate of approximately six billion. That's right, six billion of us and growing! It's a frightening number of people. And still, people exercise their biological right to have more and more children, driven in the knowledge that with modern medicine, they all have a good chance of surviving.

Some scientists have put the number of people that the earth can sustain at a good standard of living at about five hundred million, that's one-twelfth of the population we have now. Now, I don't know whether to believe these figures, but that's not what concerns us here, what I want to know is how the population keeps getting bigger beyond that which nature itself can sustain.

There is one reason. We keep saving people! I know that sounds harsh but it's true.

Gone are the days when nature would send along a good plague and wipe out a number of people; or a harvest would fail and a whole country would go hungry (as happened in Ireland). Now we have inoculations against all the nasty viruses that used to wipe out humans, and no longer will people starve to death, as we have modern agriculture and distribution methods.

No one must suffer, we must save everyone!

You may think I have lost my compassion for all beings, but isn't that precisely what is happening in countries like Africa? For many reasons, including over-population, modern economics, corrupt inefficient governments, war, and the weather; the Africans in some countries are finding fast that they do not have enough to eat. But instead of letting nature take its course, we intervene and we ship millions of tons of food to them every year.

Now, it is not that I don't have compassion for the Africans, they have endured much suffering over the last several hundred years, especially at the hands of the rich, powerful Westerners who came to enslave them and rob their country of all its natural resources. But as a people, they have managed to live happily with nature for many thousands of years without international aid. So we know something happened to change the delicate balance between man and nature.

Greed, the building of Western style cities, and the adoption of a consumer lifestyle (added together with many years of civil wars) have all contributed to the suffering they are enduring now. But what I want to understand is what would happen if the international aid and the medicine was not forthcoming?

Thanks to the wonders of modern media, we would see people starving and thirsty and ultimately dying. The big charities around the world like to make a play of this and regularly advertise for more and

more donations to “help the children” etc. But perhaps once again we are doing what we do best, interfering in nature.

I can hear most of you shouting at me now, up in arms that I would suggest such a thing; but if we are to understand the true nature of what is happening in the world, we must put our conditioned thinking aside, at least for the moment.

Over the past few years in the uk, we have seen diseases like foot and mouth (*acute contagious disease of cloven-footed animals marked by ulcers in the mouth and around the hoofs*), which isn't in itself fatal to the animals, resulting in thousands of cows being killed and their carcasses thrown on large fires and burned. A simple inoculation would have cured them, but for economic reasons, unsurprisingly wasn't offered! The emergence of bird flu (*a highly contagious type of influenza found in birds*) has also meant that millions of chickens have been killed to stop it from spreading but you wouldn't see that happening in the human world. No sir. We must save everyone from disease and death, whatever the cost (to the planet).

You see, there is a grave problem in africa (the continent) and other parts of the world with starvation and disease, but because we are talking about humans, as opposed to our less intelligent brothers, the animals, we can't just round them all up and say: “sorry about this, but you are all diseased, and for the benefit of everyone else, we are going to have to kill you and stack your bodies high on funeral pyres.” That would be madness! We would be murderers, and would be considered inhuman by all, but it's ok to kill animals and birds that are diseased, because, they're animals!

The human is the most important species on the planet. The most intelligent being. And so we do everything in our power to save them. I fail to see the difference between murdering animals and murdering humans, but maybe I'm just stupid.

What I want to convey to you is, that although I do not believe that nature (*a causal agent creating and controlling things in the universe*) has a grand plan for us all, it seems to have kept the world in balance for many billions of years. There has of course been much disease and death, but if you believe we are all a part of the universe, then the idea of death will not trouble you so much. Birth, death, rebirth is just a part of the movement of nature. There is no beginning and no end.

But humans don't see it like that, do we? We see our birth as the time we leave our mothers womb and death as when we are laid into the ground, and in between, we do everything to “survive,” but what are we

trying to survive? If we are part of the eternal (*continuing forever or indefinitely*), which is the universe, then what do we have to worry about! But we digress.

I want you to try to look at this differently then; I want you to see the problems of disease, hunger and suffering from a different perspective. When we consider the situation in africa from a human point of view, we see it as something terrible, something that must be altered or fixed (presumably as we know it was our doing in the first place), but I don't see it as terrible, I just see it as it is.

They fight with each other for control and domination. The weather has not been kind. The mass agricultural system built around the movement of people to cities has contributed to the crops failure, and lack of water. They continue to have children. They continue to aspire to a western lifestyle. The politicians are incompetent. Shall I continue?

Nature has provided everything. All that is required is already here. Do you understand? There was enough water, and there was enough food. But something happened. Man has tried to control nature, and as with everything man tries to do, has caused an imbalance. Suffering, disease, and starvation are the result of that imbalance (this doesn't just apply to africa).

I keep thinking back to when the lands of africa were able to sustain the people, and why they are not able to now. The imbalance is not their fault, nor anyone persons fault, but imbalance it is, make no mistake about it. The lack of food, or rain, could be the result of another country's greed and desire in another part of the world. It could be the agricultural and social policies of a country ten thousand miles away which has caused the imbalance. But the common denominator is our good friend man, mr homo sapiens – which shouldn't surprise you really!

We blame global warming, or some other idea for the disasters we see around the world, but global warming, or even over-population isn't the problem; it's man's thinking that has caused the misery we can see now. His desire to be rich and powerful, and have more food than he needs; to expand his empires, to acquire more land and more possessions.

The world is truly imbalanced. But unfortunately, the do-gooders of the world think the solution to the perceived inequality between the "have's" and the "have not's" is that everyone should have more! Hopefully they will start to see that ensuring everyone has more is usually going to mean that someone else will have less, and that won't be the humans if they can help it. It will be the animals, and the birds, and the grass, and the trees. In fact, the whole planet is going to suffer, just so

“one child never has to know the terrible pain of suffering.” But it’s not going to work. Man is no match for nature.

Let nature be

So, cruel as it may sound, what would happen if we didn’t provide emergency food aid and medicines to africa? What if we just let nature take its course? What would happen? Would we, as we predict, have the deaths of millions of peoples on our hands? That, I’m afraid, is a distinct possibility.

Would it bring nature back into balance as we hoped it would when we killed millions of chickens to prevent the spread of avian flu? Would the cities crumble, and the desire for a powerful life full of riches dissolve? What do you think? You see, man is good at controlling other men and helpless animals, but he has no control over the big stuff. The sun, the rain, the wind. All that is nature’s domain.

We build our beautiful cities with intelligent cultured people. We work hard and we build our beautiful homes and give birth to wonderful children. We go to concerts and we create great learning institutions for the next generation. We create works of art and we go into politics. We print money and we keep it in the bank. Then one day a great earthquake comes and flattens the city, the buildings, the houses, the parks, the culture, the learning, all gone, under the tons of rubble that are left. People are left for dead wherever we look. Nature has spoken.

All over the world, nature is communicating with us, telling us of the imbalance we are creating. From the sea great tidal waves come and great storms rage the ocean, and from the sky rains create great floods or lack of rain cause great drought. There is no thought behind this though. Nature is.

But the thing nature doesn’t count on, is man’s ability to think creatively! Nature doesn’t know that man has developed modern medicine, nor does it know that man won’t just leave the sick and wounded to die, or that man will rebuild his city exactly where the last earthquake hit! Nature doesn’t know that man cannot just leave another man to starve. And that’s where the problem lies. We are just too damn nice to each other!

We have compassion for others that goes way beyond the call of duty. That’s why, when we see our brother suffering in africa, or wherever it may be, we send aid. We try to help him so he will not suffer. We do not

want to see the faces of dying children, as they could be our children, so we send money, we do anything to help.

We go to africa, we develop new water systems to irrigate the land, we bring medicine, engineers, farmers, machinery. We will help them, we say. We will save our brothers in africa. But still war ravages on, Men still desire power and riches, politicians are still incompetent, and the cities are expanded even more. Do you follow all this?

The land of africa was in balance. Man was in balance with the land.

Then thought arose. And then man was out of balance.

So what did man do? He thought, and he thought, and he thought how to bring balance back to the land.

But it was too late. He didn't know what balance was.

Try as we might to overcome nature with our medicine, and our operating theatres, and our worldwide food aid programs, we can no more stop the movement of nature, as we may try to stop the snows melting in the spring. And talking of spring, I sit here writing in the cellar of a house in northern scandinavia in the middle of january watching the temperature rise and the snows melt when once at this time of year it was freezing with several metres of snow. I can see the grass starting to appear where last week it was covered. Some people call this global warming. I just call it imbalance.

Balance

A state of equilibrium

So what is this state of equilibrium we are talking about here? Equilibrium (*a stable situation in which forces cancel one another, or a chemical reaction and its reverse proceed at equal rates or Equality of distribution*) is seen as something that man has control over, or at least has the ability to control, but to me it is something unseen, unobservable to the naked eye; something that goes on in the background, and foreground, forever monitoring and remedying where necessary.

It could be said that the universe, although constantly changing, is the ultimate balance machine. It is the scales of justice that order our world. And it is from this perspective that I would like to continue our discussion.

When the universe was born (or reborn), it has been said that out of chaos, came order, and with each passing year, so the earth became more ordered and more balanced. Just the right amount of worms for the birds to eat, just the right amount of mice for the owls to eat, just the right amount of trees for the birds to nest in, just the right amount of nuts and berries for the monkeys, and whenever one species became too populous or too dominant, there were natural controls in place to redress the balance.

Although we think we understand how the balancing machine works, we have never been able to say why there would be such a thing in the first place. Why did the universe bother? What was the point of all this? Was there a grand plan? Why is ours the only planet capable of sustaining life? Is there a creator? Who is he? Questions have been posed for many thousands of years (probably since we first started to think) but ultimately it doesn't matter why. It just is.

So let's try to accept that for a moment while we consider the building blocks of the universe. Whether we call them quarks (*(physics) hypothetical truly fundamental particle in mesons and baryons; there are supposed to be six flavours of quarks (and their antiquarks), which come in pairs; each has an electric charge of $+2/3$ or $-1/3$*) or atoms or some other name, it must all have come from somewhere, so there must have been a thought of how to order it, and how to maintain balance. But you see, where we all get caught up, is in thinking; and because thought is so limited, we imagine that there must have been thought behind its design! That's just the way our minds think. Sorry if I'm confusing you, sometimes I confuse myself.

Underneath our nice houses, cars, ambitions, clothes and desires we are primarily all made up of carbon (*atomic number 6*) atoms (or perhaps something smaller and more fundamental) all charging around at huge speeds. Even women's most cherished accessory, the diamond, comes from carbon. It is a non metallic element which occurs in all organic compounds. The coal we burn to create electricity and heat comes from carbonised vegetable matter. Even the earth's crust is primarily made up of carbon.

We think everything in the world is different, but underneath the physical disguise, the building blocks are the same.

Over the centuries, man has discovered many of the elements that make up the universe, and as such a periodic table was created which details whether they are metallic, gases, or non metallic, and gives all known elements an atomic weight and number.

These are the building blocks of life.

Water, our most precious resource is just two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. There is no such thing as “water,” it is merely the bonding of two elements. And while we are on the subject of water, it is interesting to note that whilst approx seventy percent of the earth’s crust is covered in water, man is also made of approx seventy percent water. Coincidence? Let’s not speculate.

So back to our building blocks. If our universe was created in a big bang, supposedly all the elements we find in life now would also be present, as they have not been created by man, but merely discovered through scientific enquiry. So how many of these building blocks were there? Were there a specific number for organic life forms, a specific number for water, gas or ice, a certain number for metallic compounds etc. or was it all just complete random?

Let us have an imaginary discussion for a moment. If only 100 of these building blocks were available at the start of our planet in order to retain balance throughout the rest of our universe, how do you think they were allocated? Would 70 be allocated for water, 20 for the earth’s crust and ten for organic life forms, or was it all so random that it was just luck that the earth was round (almost), that there was land to live on, and salt water to evaporate, fall as rain, form rivers and allow land based life to exist? The unlikeliness of the whole thing, is what leads us to believe that there must have been intelligent life that created it. And there was.

Order in the universe is held together by gravity (*(physics) the force of attraction between all masses in the universe; especially the attraction of the earth’s mass for bodies near its surface*). In all its seemingly random glory when we look at the stars at night from the earth, there is order. Universal order. Not created by thought.

It makes no sense to me that all this could exist if there was not also balance within the order. How could the universe exist at all if there were too many stars (*(astronomy) a celestial body of hot gases that radiates energy derived from thermonuclear reactions in the interior*), or too many planets within a given region? So all of this balance must be in some way fundamental, not only to the existence of the universe, but the existence of all living creatures on this earth, and finally to the star of the whole show. Me! The human being. King of the universe!

King of the universe?

Somehow all this postulating about us being so great and knowledgeable doesn't quite ring true when we look at the mass of forces governing the universe. What do you think?

When we start to break down our massive egos to an element called carbon, we suddenly start to look a little foolish. And foolish we have been.

Through the development of the human brain, the development of "I" (I need, I want, I deserve, I think, I hate, I love), we have missed out on learning something interesting about ourselves as a species. One which all those who think we are (a) not part of the animal world, (b) come from an alien race of super beings, or (c) were created by the hand of god, seem to constantly deny.

Carbon is everywhere. It is in the earth, in the animals and in us. If we are based on the element carbon, we are as much a part of everything as it is of us. It is this constant denial that is causing us so many problems. Like the android (*an automaton that resembles a human being*) who so desperately wants to become a man, so we desperately want to be something more than human. We want to be special. But we already are, we have just forgotten.

Atomic number six come in. Your time is up.

Just as the sun will eventually use up all of its energy and start to expand, rapidly engulfing our planet, before finally exploding and creating the beginnings of a new star, so our time on earth will come to an end also. But this is not about death or rebirth, just a change in state. You see, we are not really human; we are carbon atoms lent by the universe for a temporary period of time.

Before you think my mind has gone, this is not philosophy my friends, this is chemistry! Universal chemistry.

You see, in universal time, the human being is not important; in fact, all he seems to be is a nuisance! Nature is always having to clean up after him, always trying to bring everything back into balance wherever man treads, or tries to help out. But we don't know anything about ourselves, let alone balancing universes, so why do we keep interfering? I'll just tell you one more time so I don't bore you. Because we think too much!

We desperately cling to life, hoping we never die, hoping pets don't die, or the people in africa or asia don't die. We develop medicines, and send food parcels; pick up the pieces of road crash victims and put them back together again. We want to save the beautiful children who look at us in the tv ads with longing eyes. "Please help them" the ads say. But nature is at work. Sure, man may have caused the suffering in the first place, because that is his life's work, but nature will do its best to restore balance.

What is man thinking? You may well ask. But we need to let go. We need to accept that people die, and let that be the end of it. It is not about a lack of compassion, it is about letting nature do its work. We cannot restore balance, no matter how hard we try. It isn't the work of a simple carbon life form. All we are doing is creating a population so large that in the end, nature will have to resort to some extreme measures to bring the planet, and therefore the universe back into balance.

We also spend our time diverting rivers and creating dams, saving species from extinction (probably because man drove them to extinction), moving species across continents so the new inhabitants would feel at home (as the british did when they colonised australia), killing natural predators of animals to preserve our livestock and income, cutting down forests, creating wastelands, and constantly urbanising the natural environment.

But just as some humans attempt to destroy everything, their opposites try to save everything. But in the end nature will have the last laugh, and it will be at our expense. You see, it's really very simple. In order to understand nature, we don't have to go to university to study it, and observe it. We are it. It's time we started to observe ourselves and let nature just do its thing. But that doesn't mean we don't have to stop taking responsibility for our actions that throw it out of balance.

The universe is balance
Fear and violence is imbalance
Nature is balance
Thought and desire is imbalance
Birth and death is balance
Greed and hunger is imbalance
Get the picture?

H i s t o r y

The aggregate of past events

•

The continuum of events occurring in succession leading from the past to the present and even into the future

•

A record or narrative description of past events

•

All that is remembered of the past as preserved in writing; a body of knowledge

I spent most of yesterday afternoon reading through a detailed history of the world, whilst at the library. The thing that most surprised me was how current it all was! Here I was reading about events from 55 bc, 400 ad, 1100 ad, 1556, 1722, 1852, 1952, 1987, and 2000, and it could have been the news I read yesterday! Murder, greed, power, deception, sexual scandal, control. They were all there, just as they are today, which got me thinking! “What’s the point in recording all these events? Is it so we can progress as a species, or is just voyeurism into the past?”

I want to discuss this with you today, because I believe we spend way too much time looking backwards (and forwards), when we should be concentrating on the present moment. Sure, it’s nice to look back at pictures, and see who invented stuff, and who won this battle, and who was burned at the stake for being a witch, but that’s just entertainment.

Some of you reading this right now may be vocally disagreeing, but that's ok with me. That's what makes these dialogues more interesting!

When you look at the past, what do you see? Joy or despair? If you read history books, the past always seems like a brutal place to be when we compare it to our lives today. People were being murdered all the time, disease was rife, life expectancy was short, food was scarce, the rulers were corrupt, powerful individuals were getting richer whilst the poor were getting poorer. Actually what I could be talking about, is any number of countries RIGHT NOW.

On the african continent, there are many countries with murderous regimes actively killing people right at this very moment; actively diverting funds to their own personal swiss bank accounts. It's incredible to believe, isn't it? What we thought was all in the past, confined to history books, is alive and well, operating right under our noses.

When we (westerners) look at history books, we may see that people are no longer being hung, drawn, and quartered in our country, and that we have a great health service, and that there are equal opportunities for most of us; where the weak are looked after, and the strong are regulated, so they do not overcome the weak. For us, history shows improvement.

As a british citizen, when I look back at history, I see people a lot worse off than me, struggling every day. Ok, so we might have had a lot of victories in battle, but no one seemed to be very joyful! So if I compare my life now, with its comfortable house, car, laptop, plentiful food etc. I'm rather glad I don't live in the 1500's or before.

Our fellow humans in parts of africa, asia, and the middle east don't have the pleasure of looking back into history and being glad they live now. For some of them they may prefer to have lived in a different time. For most of them, living now is a living nightmare.

Fuelled by greed, power, the need for absolute and total control sprinkled with a dash of idealism, the rulers of these countries are making life hell for everyone who is not part of their select group. I will not go into details of each country individually here but they know who they are.

So as we can see, when we look back at history, we expect to see change for the better. It would be a fairly depressing school lesson if we all had to open our books at page 223 covering the oppression of the people in 1100 ad, where dissent was met with torture and death; only to point out that it was still going on in 2007! Well that's what's happening right now in some parts of the world.

We all complain about our lot in the west; that we don't have enough money for a new car, that we have to work too hard, that we can only afford a two week holiday abroad with the family next year etc. But we do not realise how lucky we are.

I say lucky, because it is just luck that we in the west happen to be alive during a period which seems peaceful and calm in our countries, where capitalism and consumerism seem to be vying for the attention of the people.

Absolute state control of the people has reduced to a low level and the real people in power are the corporations, who (fortunately) don't want to convert you to their religion, they just want to sell you stuff. So power has moved away from the gun to the dollar, which is equally as powerful, but comes with less obvious bloodshed.

In the west, we all seem to have quite a lot now; and thanks to mass production in asia, we can all afford electronic goods and fashion clothing. We all have housing, we all can afford some kind of car, we can all go on a holiday. These days there is something for everyone. If you have a lot of money you can have an expensive car or go on an expensive holiday, and if you have a little money you can have a cheap car and go on a cheap holiday.

Gone are the days in the industrial western countries where only the rich could have a car or go on holiday. Capitalism has made the battlefield, and companies fight it out to the death using advertising, marketing and product innovation instead of weapons!

We have a democratic government, and no matter what you think of them, they make sure that people have jobs; and if they don't have jobs, support them financially until they do get one; and if you don't like this government you can just vote them out next time round.

You try doing that if you are a citizen in a country ruled by a dictator or junta (*a group of military officers who rule a country after seizing power*). They generally stay in power for as long as they can get away with it as they tend to be the sorts of people who like the power and the money.

In the west, we now have freedom of speech, whereby you can say anything you like against the government; try that in a dictator run country. Well, you can say what you like, but you are liable to be brutally tortured and then murdered!

So if the history books were to reflect back on this period in the west, they would have to say that it is a period of stability, prosperity and general happiness! There would be no pictures of slaves being dragged, shackled to their next "employer," no pictures of dissenters being hung,

drawn, and quartered, and no pictures of starving children. There are of course people with individual problems in every country, but nothing worth reporting in the history books as a general state of affairs.

But like all that is past, history sits just behind us ready to become part of the present. Why? Because history is a record of actions: human actions and actions created by natural events.

As I look back through a chronicle of our history in Britain, I can see that although things have changed, like free schooling for all, a more comfortable lifestyle, and we live longer, the fundamental core of ourselves has not. What do I mean by that? Think about it for a moment.

If we trace our ancestors through history we can see certain traits which have been carried on through us. Certainly there are positive traits like inventiveness and resourcefulness, but others such as greed, violence, state sponsored murder, ego, vanity, ambition, power seeking, warmongering, sexual depravity, idealism, extremism, religious fanaticism, amongst many others have shown through in page after page of the history books, and appear right up until the present day.

So although we may have satellite television, jet aeroplanes, and fast food, are we really any different from the characters from the history books?

What have we learnt from history?

The one thing we must understand when people say, “learn from history,” is that they are talking about avoiding repeating the same mistakes over and over. That is only possible if (a) they want to learn from their mistakes and (b) view them as mistakes in the first place! Slavery is a good indicator of this.

In Britain, there were slaves before the Roman times, and slaves were considered essential to the economy of the country. It wasn't until 1807 that slavery was eventually abolished thanks to the tireless work of several men, otherwise it would probably still be in existence today. Oh sorry, I forgot. It still does. Britain may not use slaves anymore but other countries still do, and you can see why they still think it's still a good idea – they get free labour! Unfortunately, people have to suffer, but there's always more of them aren't there?

There are a thousand stories from the history books we could use as examples here, but I think it would be more valuable if you found yourself a decent book on world history and the history of your own

country and looked through it. I am sure you will find the same types of events coming up again and again.

So is that it? Are we destined to never truly move forward as a planet together? Will the same history continue to be written? Remember, we are a human race, we all live on this planet, there is no point writing history books to say, look what we've achieved, look what we've changed, look how we have changed, if it does not apply to the whole world.

You may argue that that is impossible to achieve and countries and people progress at their own rate. Where some countries in africa are now, we in britain may have been 300 years ago.

But I do not believe we can just stand back and let the history books continue to be written. We cannot allow events of great sadness to transpire on our planet, and say, "oh, well, in a couple of hundred years we will learn from our mistakes!" All this looking back into history to predict the future does not change the fact that people and animals are suffering RIGHT NOW because of terrible actions carried out by humans. Humans who do not care for each other, and who do not care for the planet they are living on.

Whether they are warmongers, politicians, churchmen or businessmen it doesn't matter. These are the same people who have been causing us to suffer since the history books began. The names and the faces may have changed, but the core of these humans remains the same. Until they become aware of themselves in action, we are destined for a miserable future on this planet. Until they transform greed, anger, hate, ego, power, and extremism into love, we will continue to have wars and suffering. Until we all transform consumerism into abstinence we will continue to destroy the planet and use up all of our resources.

Ultimately, all the historians have done is to illuminate the fact that in all the years we have been developing on this planet, the same basic drives have existed throughout.

Does this mean that man is terminally flawed? Not at all. But until the human race become aware of themselves in the present and transform themselves, not over time, but instantaneously, history will continue to repeat itself. Because all history is us. Yesterday.

H o m e

Where you live at a particular time

•

Housing that someone is living in

•

An environment offering affection and security

•

A social unit living together

So, you've finally done it. You either got a mortgage from the bank, or you are renting, but nonetheless, this building with four walls you are about to move into, is yours! No more parents telling you what to do, nobody to share with, you (and your partner perhaps) are finally free. You can choose your own furniture and décor, you can play music at a level you want to listen to, eat what you want. This is your home, and as long as you keep paying your bills, no one is going to take it away from you. It's what you have always dreamed of. Now you have it. Congratulations!

Moving in day comes, and you have finally got your hands on the keys. You walk through the door and look around you. Home. This is where you will spend all your free time.

You spend the next few months buying new things, equipping the kitchen, getting the bedroom "just right," pictures are hung, photographs

are displayed, and the wide screen tv is placed in the corner of the room, ready to receive the latest news, movies, cartoons, and soaps from the satellite dish on your roof.

Soon, everything is finished, and you have got the house just as you want it. Now you can get on with the business of enjoying it (just remember to keep up the repayments or you're out on your ear). But now it's ready, what do you do in it? Well, you cook, clean, watch tv, water the plants, sleep – you may even make love to your partner! But what else is there? To understand this we have to investigate more deeply.

We have said that the four walls, in which you are now “contained,” is your home; that this is your secure place, where you come back to every night after a hard day at work. When you get home you do some chores and you probably “chill out” for a couple of hours before going back to work the next day. On your day off, you may, or may not, spend time at the home. You may invite friends over, or do some home improvements to keep yourself busy, then open a beer and turn on the tv. But what else is there?

You work hard to pay the bills, and over time you accumulate more and more possessions. Thanks to a surprise promotion, you find yourself with more cash and decide it's time for an upgrade.

You look around and find a bigger apartment or house within your budget and soon you are moving again. You get the keys, you walk through the door and look around your new home. This is where you will spend all your free time. You spend the next few months buying new things, equipping the kitchen, getting the bedroom “just right;” pictures are hung, photographs are displayed, and the wide screen television is placed in the corner of the room, ready to receive the latest news, movies, cartoons, and soaps from the satellite dish on your roof. Soon, everything is finished, and you have got the house just as you want it. Now you can get on with the business of enjoying it (just remember to keep up the repayments or you're out on your ear). Sorry, does anyone notice I am repeating myself?

Several years later you find you are expecting a child. What a wonderful moment. What great excitement. You can't wait to decorate and furnish the child's room and buy toys for them, but in the back of your mind you are thinking: “I wonder if this house is big enough.” And you set about looking for a bigger house, in a better area, where your child can grow up safely. You look around, find something you like and eventually get the keys...You get the idea.

When is enough, enough?

Many years later you now have the exact house you want in the perfect area. You have accumulated a mountain of stuff, and have had to invest in some serious security to protect it. New locks are fitted and an alarm is installed. You must protect the stuff at all costs. You have worked so hard for it, you must protect it, these are dangerous times, you know!

As time goes on, you notice that not only have the children grown up, but the four walls you call home, have turned into a storage depot! So you set about getting rid of things you no longer need, then decide it's time for a redecoration, and actually the sofa's getting old, and so are the carpets, so maybe you should change them too; or maybe it would be better to find a new house.

But this time, you downsize. You don't need the extra rooms, so you find a nice house in need of a bit of renovation and you (or the bank) buy it. You spend a small fortune ripping out the walls, tearing the kitchen down and set about replacing everything in the house with more modern appliances etc. "This will do us," you say to your partner. "We don't have to move again now." Or do you?

The thing with the human consumer is that he is *never* satisfied. He is continually moving. Moving in a direction he calls "up," whatever that means. He has his status to think about, and the house is the ultimate status symbol.

Over the years, the human consumer attempts to fill his house with the best things he can afford (or can get credit for), and he hoards, and he hoards, afraid to lose his prized possessions lest he cannot get them again. But as people get older and pass into retirement these status symbols lose their charm and the human starts to become more concerned with the more down to earth business of just trying to survive! The four walls that meant everything to him are now not so important.

Sadly several years later, one partner dies, followed the next year by the other partner, and all that remains is a dead house; filled with dead things. But wasn't the house already dead the day they moved in?

What else is there?

We all need somewhere to live, that is a given. Shelter is one of the primary drives for the human being, and a house is a good way of

providing that, so I am not about to tell you to go and live in a tree in the forest. But let us think back to the beginning of this discussion where we finally left the nest and branched out on our own, where we got the keys to our own place.

Our place. No one else's. This would be a place for me. No one else. Later, it became, our house, for our family, and we installed locks, and alarms to keep everyone else out. "The home must be protected at all times" you thought. "These four walls are mine. No one else's. This is where I feel safe. This is where I feel secure. I must protect myself and my family, but most of all I must protect my stuff; the walls and the possessions."

But after we died, it wasn't our home anymore. Sure it may still be in our name but if you remember, we are now dead!

All those years of striving for the perfect house, the perfect neighbourhood, the perfect sofa and the perfect curtains, now ended with nothing, except death.

Pretty quickly, if the house isn't looked after, it will start to return to nature. The walls will start to break down, the carpets and the curtains will start to attract dampness, and the grass will grow tall. The bushes in the garden will start to grow wild, and nature will start to reclaim the four walls we spent our entire life striving to pay for. All those stressful late nights at work, all that moving, all that furnishing the interior, now means nothing. Do you understand? Everything you worked for is now dead, including you!

As dampness creeps into the floorboards, they start to rot, and the metal appliances start to rust. The house begins to take on an eerie smell, and all who go into it will feel uncomfortable. It will feel like "someone died here." But we're not talking about the "spiritual," we are talking about nature reclaiming that which belongs to it. Think about it. We never feel uncomfortable when we are out in any kind of natural environment, are we? Whether it be walking along a stream, out in the forest, walking in the hills, or just sitting under a tree. It feels good. It feels like you are alive. The same can't be said for the house you built.

The house that died before you moved in

When we move into a new house it feels "nice," doesn't it? Everything smells clean and fresh, and if we don't move into a new house, we quickly rip out the old interior, and replace it with new materials. But

let's not run away with ourselves thinking that what we are putting into the house is any way "new."

The metals we create were extracted from ore which has been going through a process in the earth's crust for millions of years. The timber we saw was a tree growing for anything up to a hundred years or more. And the moment the ore is mined, the tree felled, or the cotton harvested, it is dead (starting to change state), and through building new houses or renovating old ones we constantly try to keep the materials "alive."

So we buy new sofas, new curtains, new lamps, new windows, in a desperate attempt to stop the house from dying. We clean it obsessively, refusing to allow dust to build up, or have anything "dirty," but it is a feeble attempt by humans to stop the inevitable happening. And through our labours we maintain an illusion that the house is "alive."

Why else do you think we like having an open fire or candles burning? It is so we can experience life again, even for a short time. We buy fresh cut flowers to "brighten" up the place, and have to change them when they "die," but can't you see, everything we surround ourselves with is already dead. We buy plants and herbs and water them constantly to have some life around us, but one day they too die. Hard as we try, we can't escape death.

The natural energies we surround ourselves within our four walls have no more life to give. The tree no longer has any roots, and the minerals are no longer connected to the earth's core.

So... Maybe that's why we like so much tv! Television is constantly moving, constantly changing, bringing energy into a home to revitalise it.

How many times have you gone into someone's home and said "it just feels dead, like there's no life in there?"

When we have children, they bring a massive amount of positive energy into a home, but in the end, they leave, and we are left with our dead possessions, our dead appliances, our dead walls and dead roof. It just feels like there is nothing alive except for perhaps the music system or the tv in the background. So what use is there to have a home surrounded by locks and security systems if all we are doing is imprisoning ourselves in a dead space?

Maybe that's why we buy so many new things all the time? Maybe the consumer lifestyle is an attempt to bring life back to our homes, at least temporarily. "Wow, look at this new thing, it's great!" we say, but soon it gets relegated to the attic or basement and is replaced by something "new." Do you understand? So right now have a look around your home,

and tell me what is alive? I mean really living, with its connection to the earth intact? Anything? Nothing?

People try everything to keep their homes alive. They learn feng shui (*rules in chinese philosophy that govern spatial arrangement and orientation in relation to patterns of yin and yang and the flow of energy (qi); the favourable or unfavourable effects are taken into consideration in designing and siting buildings and graves and furniture*) to create more positive energy flows around the home, but it is all too late, as the buildings themselves are dead. We even put in “water features” in our gardens to emulate the flow of a natural stream, and we hang up bird feeders to attract wildlife. But nothing works.

Soon we get tired of the house we live in, and we move to somewhere new hoping to re-stimulate the energies, and we get caught in a cycle that never escapes the dead materials. Some people talk of eco-buildings where they have a living roof of grass, and they may be onto something, but it doesn't solve the problem of living with dead materials. They are everywhere.

As long as we continue to accumulate possessions, we cannot hope to escape this.

Breathing life into the dead

I do not have a “solution” that will solve all these problems. The city planners and the construction companies are deciding how we should live. The desire to create wealth and status determines where and how we live. Unfortunately, we have come so far from nature that we cannot hope to ever return to it. So I guess that means we are stuck with synthetic materials and dead wood, brightened up by the occasional plant, open fire, and water feature.

But is that really it? Is that the end? Can we not see a way out of this for ourselves? You may say: “But in order to create the four walls that protect me against the burglar and the elements, we must at least cut down trees, if nothing else.” But what are we talking about here? Are you saying you must have these four walls because you are scared someone will attack you and steal all your dead possessions?

If the possessions are already dead, why do you care? What does it matter if you lose all your possessions, things you desperately hang on to, and will fight anyone that tries to take them if you are going to die anyway. As far as I know, even religions that promise the afterlife, make no

promises about inter-dimensional shipping of personal items. So I say unlock your doors. I vow to you I will do the same!

In order to remove fear of losing your possessions it's not about saying: "I don't care if I lose them," we have to stop accumulating them. I have seen many monks with no possessions and they look perfectly happy! Not because they have found enlightenment but because they are free from the burden of fear that possessions come with. Do you understand?

The second is to find a way of living that brings nature back in through your front door! "What you must be mad, after what I paid for this house!" I hear you cry. But this isn't possible whilst you still live at number 42 b consumer street. This will require a great shift on your part, and the possibility that you will have to let go of the individual to see yourself as part of the whole.

"I can't believe it, he wants us to live in a commune in the forest like a load of hippies," I hear everyone shout. But given the seriousness of the situation here on earth – especially in the westernised countries – we have to give our fullest attention to this problem.

We have to start asking ourselves what it really is we are doing here, and whether there is "something more" than just surrounding ourselves with four walls and shutting the door as quickly as possible, just in case someone comes in and attacks us.

We might like to think we are all "individuals," that our home, and our stuff, is all that is important, but we are so much more than that; we are a community of the most intelligent species on earth, and the only thing individual about us is our thinking.

We have been told, by our parents, and our leaders, that building your own home is what you should strive for, that owning property is the single most important thing you will do apart from having a family; but that is just good business for the banks and the insurance companies.

So why do we close ourselves off from the world? Why do we lock ourselves in, watching life pass us by out the window? What is it "out there," that we are so scared of?

We have to let nature back in, not shut it out

Maybe it all stems from our childhood, but I can assure you that it is not a natural phenomena. You don't imagine for one moment that all the

creatures that inhabit the earth are scared being out in nature in the dark, do you? That would be absurd.

Unfortunately, throughout our childhood, we are always told to be wary of strangers, and to lock the door when you come in. Given the amount of fear-mongering that goes on when we are young it's lucky we even go out at all as adults! But we don't like to be outside where there could be strangers for too long, do we? We unlock the door, get into the car, lock the doors, go to our work then back home again and lock the doors. This might be an extreme example, but can you see the point I am trying to make?

We have separated ourselves from nature and each other by all this individual living. Ok, so it *is* nice to have your own space, but not at the expense of not even knowing the people who live down the road, or even next door. What has happened to our communities?

We came from small tribes, where we worked and cooperated together, for the good of the community, and we had shared interests, shared meals and shared accommodation. Do you think the old community members were more unhappy than we are now? Or more scared of nature?

I am not suggesting a hippie style commune where we all live under the stars, singing songs round the camp-fire, where everyone does everything together, as individual expression always ends up being repressed in all idealistic communities. Why? Because they are created by man's thought, which as we have seen, has always caused mischief in the world.

But I would like you to think about this now. How can we get back to our natural state, where we exist in harmony with nature; where we live and cooperate together and still have our own individual expression? Think about how we can bring living materials back to our homes (if we really all need our own homes).

The problem with any of these questions we pose ourselves, is we are coming at them from where we are now. From our three bedroom semi-detached houses in the suburbs, and our cars, and our well paid jobs, and we can't see a way out of it. But remember what we said earlier on in the discussion – there is no inter-dimensional shipping company. When you die, you leave it.

Wouldn't it be nice to find out if there was another way, a way to live with nature, to explore the universe with your mind, to learn, without having all of these burdens, which died many years before. Wouldn't it be nice to breathe life into our own living spaces. Real living energy?

I don't want to live in a forest. I like my house!

The answer is quite simple, although I cannot tell it to you here. You must find out for yourselves. But I will give you a hint. It starts with letting go of everything you think you are, and everything you have acquired. It sounds difficult, but freedom doesn't cost a penny. Just a shift in your thinking. Right now.

You may either be thinking: "He's completely mad," or "how will I cope without the security of my nice house, I don't want to end up homeless." But homelessness in its purest form is merely a state of mind.

I feel sorry for the people who lie in the gutter in the cities begging for some money to fuel their addictions, or feed a hungry stomach; but what would happen if the homeless man was transported to a natural place where there was no one to beg from? What would he do? Would he die, or would he change? Would he realise he needed nothing more than already surrounded him, and create something new for himself?

So let's not all worry about being homeless. When we think like that we are thinking as the individual, not as the whole. But when we start to realise we are all connected, the thought of just letting go becomes a whole lot simpler. And the great thing is, you don't have to join a hippie commune to let go!

The earth is my home. Where's yours?

H o n e s t y

Not disposed to cheat or defraud; not deceptive or fraudulent

•

Without dissimulation; frank

•

Worthy of being depended on

•

Without pretensions

•

Habitually speaking the truth

Before we get started on this discussion, let's talk about what honesty is not, and that is truth. Sometimes we misuse language and don't even realise it. For example, an honest man does not always tell the truth, and as we will discover later on, truth is something which must be discovered individually, it is not a character asset as in "he always tells the truth." So with that out of the way, let us begin, with a question. How many of you tell lies?

Lie

1. *A statement that deviates from or perverts the truth*
2. *Tell an untruth; pretend with intent to deceive*

On a regular basis? Once every so often? When the situation demands it? Never? If you have selected never please go back to the top and reread the question!

We all tell lies from time to time, whether we set out to deliberately deceive others, or by just telling a “white lie” so we don’t hurt someone’s feelings.

“How did you like the dinner?”

“Mmmm,” you say, “it was really lovely,” as you crunch and chew your way through what could be described as concrete.

A white lie, as it is known, is thought to be an unimportant lie, normally used to be tactful or polite, and is thought as harmless. In fact if we didn’t have these so called “white lies,” we would all find it hard to get through our days without offending people. We use them to avoid potential conflict.

“Don’t you like me?”

“Of course I do.”

White lies make our life easier, and in a strange way, make the life of the person being lied to easier. They allow us to seamlessly move through each day without noticeably offending people, and allow the recipient to carry on believing that everything they do and say is perfect.

Just imagine if everyone went round actually saying what they meant – the world would turn into a bloodbath! There’d be fighting in the offices, the restaurants, the homes and the shops. It would be a complete disaster. People would be getting upset all the time. There would be a lot more anger and violence.

“Hi! Do you want to come out for a drink with me tonight?”

“No, I think you’re the most stupid and arrogant man I have ever met, I wouldn’t go out with you if you were the last man on earth.”

How would you feel?

So this is about not hurting people’s feelings (*emotional or moral sensitivity (especially in relation to personal principles or dignity)*), isn’t it? In fact, we don’t care so much about their “feelings,” as much as we care about what they will think of us. We don’t want other people to think we think they are less than they think of themselves! Does that make sense to you? We are protecting our position in the relationship. But this forms the basis for a very shaky relationship, don’t you think?

Sometimes, we figure that it isn’t worth the hassle saying what we really think. We will only meet this person once, and we want to avoid any conflict with them, so we say what we don’t mean. We lie.

Let's now look at the person on the receiving end of the lie. Do you think they want to be lied to? Do you think they want their "feelings" left intact? Do you think they want to believe that everyone liked the food, which was obviously burnt? In my experience, I would say a resounding yes! Why? Because I would like it.

Even if I knew the food I cooked for my guests was terrible, and it was burnt, and I know they didn't like it, I don't want to hear it from them. You see, I already feel bad about the meal, and I don't want to feel any worse. The little lie that says, "no alan, it *was* nice," makes me feel a whole lot better. What do you think? Would you prefer that someone was honest with you and said, "sorry I didn't like the food, it was burnt;" or would you like a little white lie that doesn't trample over your delicate "feelings."

The thing is, I knew the food was burnt, I knew it wouldn't taste good, but I served it anyway! Do I deserve to have my feelings hurt? Of course I don't. You see, my guests don't know if I'm (a) consciously aware that my food is burnt, or (b) just a terrible cook who has done their best, and thinks "burnt" is the way it should be served! That is why the little white lie is more of a "feelings protection device." Do we need one of those? We shall see...

Do you think I'm pretty? Of course I do!

The gap between what we think, and what we say, varies tremendously on a minute-by-minute basis during the day. All credit is due to our wonderful human brain that manages to take in input, process it, think one thing, and at the same time say something else. We have learnt complex behaviours to cope with any situations, and generally err on the side of caution when answering questions that may be sensitive. You might argue that lying is a natural human process that oils the wheels of society, and allows us all to interact without conflict, but. And there's a big but.

Perhaps we are just deluding ourselves about true selves. Maybe it would be kinder in the long run to actually tell me "alan, thanks for cooking tonight, but I'm not sure if you are aware that the food was burnt; in fact every time you cook, the food is burnt. I would be happy to give you some cooking lessons if you would like." How would I "feel," when I heard that statement? Would I be upset? Probably. Would my feelings be hurt? Definitely. But if I accepted my friend's offer of cooking

lessons, wouldn't it be better in the long run? Now my friends would really be able to complement me on my unburnt cooking, and I would have the confidence to cook food, knowing it would taste delicious! Problem solved. No protecting my feelings. No lies. It's a win-win situation, or is it?

So why doesn't everyone remove the white lie from their vocabulary and replace it with constructive honesty, after all, criticism is worthless. It helps no one and it is better to say nothing at all, if you have nothing nice to say.

I know one reason I would keep lying, and that is because I don't want to be seen as the bad guy. I want to be liked. Being honest with someone will probably put me in a state of conflict (however temporary) with them, and my human drive is to avoid conflict, which is why most British people – when presented with a tasteless meal in a restaurant – will answer, “oh, yes very nice, thank you,” when asked how the food is by the waiter, and then quietly complain about it in private! As long as I am not in conflict, everything will be fine.

So a white lie can also be seen as a “conflict avoidance device.” In the situation I described earlier, where my friend tells me my cooking was bad and offers me lessons, the result was a resounding success for honesty; but maybe it didn't go that way. Maybe my friend *was* tactful, but I took it the wrong way. I took it as a criticism and an insult. I screamed at my friend he was an ungrateful bastard, threw him out of my house and never spoke to him again! What would be point of letting that happen when a little lie would save all that hassle? My feelings would be left intact, and so would my friendship. The food would still be burnt, but what's a bit of burnt food compared with keeping my feelings and my friendship intact? This white lie is looking better all the time, and compared to a “real” lie, it's almost the truth anyway.

A “real” lie is not like saying you like burnt food when you don't, is it? A “real” lie might involve you telling a future girlfriend you are single when in fact you are married, still live with your wife and have three lovely children. Now that's a real lie! Or, “sure this car's reliable, I'm only selling it because I'm going abroad/getting a company car/going green and using my bike,” when you know it will probably break down half an hour after the unsuspecting person buys it. That's a real lie. How about, “If you invest all your life savings with us, we will give you a guaranteed return rate of thirty percent per year, ” when in fact, you are just a

conman, and will use these people's hard earned cash to fund a life of luxury. That's a real lie too, isn't it?

Except they're all lies, aren't they? From not telling me about the burnt food, to ripping off some unsuspecting pensioner. It is how we judge the lie that is important. Its severity is only where we judge it to be on the "lie scale." So losing all your life savings would generally be judged more severe than not telling me about burnt offerings! Would you agree?

With a lie, the intention is always to deceive. That is the definition.

I don't know how many of you have travelled to different countries, but if you have, you may have noticed that some cultures are more "honest" than others. For example, the restaurant scenario described earlier would be dealt with differently by different cultures. The British try to avoid conflict at all times in public, but the Americans would have instantly called the waiter over and told him that the food was terrible, and either he replaced it with something decent, or they wouldn't be paying their bill! Any British national would have cringed to see that, and we would mutter something about them not having any sense of decorum.

In Britain, we are horrified when people blatantly refuse to use the "conflict avoidance device" (c.a.v.). We cannot understand it, because it is hard wired into our brain. So, is this c.a.v. something we are born with, or is it something we learn from our parents, our teachers, our peers, and our culture? As with most things, I would say it is a mixture of all of them.

As humans we are hard wired to defend ourselves against aggressors, to survive at all costs, and the inclusion of specific skills to avoid conflict where physical injury or death may happen would seem logical. Culturally, there is a huge gulf between different nations, with some choosing to speak their minds, whether it offends or not, and others choosing to use their language skills so as not to offend at any cost. Whatever the case, we all feel hurt when anyone lies to us and we find out. It's almost as if not knowing is better.

What wife wants to know that her husband has been having an affair with another woman for the past three years? You feel stupid when you have been lied to. Stupid for believing someone you thought would always be honest with you, or stupid for being cheated by a conman whom we believed. It is almost as if we blame ourselves for having been

lied to. Whatever the excuse for lying to someone, there is no excuse, unless your life depends on it. That is when the “life preservation device” or l.p.d. kicks in!

People always make excuses about lying. “I lied to protect you.” “I lied to you because I was ashamed.” “I lied because I was afraid of what you’d say.” But in the end, people only lie to protect or help themselves. There is no real intention to protect other’s feelings. We lie to people because we can.

Just imagine for a moment that you couldn’t lie for the day. There have been several comedy films which use this theme to great effect, but just imagine! How would you feel? It would be awful. You would have to be honest with everyone you met. The person in the office you disliked, the customer you wanted to sell an overpriced product to, the waiter in the restaurant when the food isn’t up to scratch, your wife when she wears a dress you don’t like, your best friend who has a bad body odour problem...the list could be endless.

How would you deal with these situations? Some may require honesty with tact, some may require a complete change in what you believe is acceptable behaviour to others (as in cheating others out of money), and if you are a politician, you may have to just not say anything for the day for fear of incriminating yourself. Here’s a bold idea, why don’t we all try to be honest with each other, even for a day. We have all sorts of national days. National cancer awareness day, national mental health day, how about national honesty day? Can you imagine it? The sad thing is, neither can I.

There is no point in ending this topic by saying, “don’t lie, unless your safety or life depends on it,” you will. All I ask, and I will follow this too, is to be aware any time you are lying, and for the split moment between the thought and the lie, ask yourself why you are lying, and how you would feel if you got caught out? Who does this lie benefit? Only you will know the answer.

One last thing. It’s a lot less stressful leading a life filled with honesty. Lies equal pain. Think about it. Give honesty a go today, try just one hour and see how long it takes you to build up to a whole day.

Lies hurt, but being honest may hurt even more!

H u m a n

Any living or extinct member of the family hominidae characterized by superior intelligence, articulate speech, and erect carriage

Before we begin this topic, let's just say I am not about to go into a detailed discussion of history, evolution, or biology, I will leave that to the experts in those fields. I am not here to talk anatomy, feeding habits, or sexual behaviours, but I do want an in-depth discussion. About us. The human race.

Do you know what the difference between a polish man and a russian man is? Or a chinese man and a frenchman? Or an englishman and a pakistani? There's probably a hundred differences you could write about including culture, looks, or habits; some cruel and disparaging, others mere hearsay or observation. If someone asked you to describe the english, you may say:

- (a) Drink too much
- (b) Like fighting at football matches

- (c) Curry is their favourite food
- (d) Always miserable because of the weather

We like generalisations about other people, especially nations. We manage to stereotype millions of people into a popular view, whether true or not. Good or bad. It doesn't matter. We just like to have a rough idea of the type of people we're dealing with. So even if you are english, don't like football, curry, or alcohol, and actually love the weather, it doesn't matter. You are english, and that's what matters, so the stereotype is applied to you.

How many stereotypes do you have in your country about other nations? Think about it for a moment. How many people do you actually know from that nation? Have you ever been there? I can hear some of you saying: "I heard about the stereotypical greek men, and when I went, they were exactly like everyone said!" But the interesting thing is, that some people actually start to conform to the stereotype.

For example, the english have a reputation for drinking too much on holiday, so what do they do? Not try to show their hosts that they are not like this, but actually behave the way think they are expected to, and are proud of it! The same with english football fans. Everyone expects they'll cause trouble, so they do.

We all like to make judgements about people, even people we have never met. We have a pre-formed opinion of what they will be like, and we decide in advance whether to like them or not.

An italian man recently told me – on first introduction – that he in fact, didn't like "the english," but as soon as I told him I was "scottish," he said "oh, that's great, I love scottish people." He hadn't met many english, and he certainly didn't know any scottish people. He didn't know if I was a wife beater, bank robber, or axe murderer. He didn't care. As soon as he heard I was scottish, he applied all his preconceived ideas about the nation to me, and fortunately he liked the people from the country of my birth (even though I spent less than six years there).

So this application of a stereotype can't come from personal experience. You wouldn't say, "all americans are thieves," because you once went to america on holiday, and someone stole your wallet, or "all indians eat curry," because you went to a restaurant and saw an indian man having a curry, or "all english are drunks," because you see one man drunk in a bar in england. That would be absurd, and no one would believe you if you said it. No, this has to come from somewhere a lot deeper, doesn't it? It needs a nation of people to feel that way about the

other nation. This is not about one individual, this is about a whole country.

But where does the stereotype come from? Is it all myth, or is there some truth in it? Well, we would probably need to go back into history, where countries were at war with each other. This is where a lot of stereotypes were created, where opinions of “foreigners” were formed.

“I don’t like foreigners, you can’t trust them”

The world is full of foreigners isn’t it? Over six billion of us! All foreign to someone. If we went to another planet that was inhabited, we would all be foreigners, think about that. Whether you came from south africa, indonesia, saudi arabia, india, iran, tahiti, or uzbekistan, they wouldn’t care, because the place of birth on your intergalactic passport would be “earth.”

Foreign

Relating to or originating in or characteristic of another place or part of the world

We all come from somewhere else; we all originated in different parts of the world, migrating through need for food, or through expansion of a nation. We all originated somewhere else. In the present day however, mass migrations have generally stopped, and people are happily settled into their various countries and ethnic groups, proud to be eighth or tenth generation, happy amongst their own people (humans who look identical and we assume are from the same country as us).

We like being amongst our own, like a lion with other lions, an ant with other ants, a wolf with other wolves. Except, there’s a big difference here, did you notice it? You see, the lion doesn’t want to be with the wolf, because he’s a different species! But when we talk about being with our own, we don’t mean the human species, we mean people from the same country, who look the same as us. That is a huge difference!

Same country of birth, and same language don’t come into it. So if I say I am japanese, it is not enough to speak the language, live in tokyo and be born in osaka, because if I don’t look japanese, I am not accepted as japanese! If you don’t look identical in facial characteristics or skin colour, you are a foreigner, and that will never change. This means we are not only divided by land and language, but are divided by things such as, skin colour, eye shape, height, body shape, food choices and clothes.

There are biological reasons why we all look a little bit different. Perhaps it is to do with how we evolved in different climates, over thousands of years. But now we stand fully evolved as homo sapiens (*the only surviving hominid; the species to which modern man belongs; a bipedal primate having language and ability to make and use complex tools; brain volume at least 1400 cc*).

We are the most intelligent species on the planet, yet we are afraid of each other! And when I say each other, I mean humans who look different to us. We're more afraid of a muscular african than being attacked by a lion. We're more afraid of arabs than being killed by a scorpion. We're more afraid of the white man than we are of a great white shark. Why? Because we've got nature pretty much under control, we live in urban areas where there aren't too many scary things left.

Gone are the days when hunters would be watching their backs at all times, to make sure they weren't attacked by wild animals. We don't need to hunt anymore – we farm. We keep our animals under control, we don't let them trouble us too much. So we've got to be afraid of something, right? You've got it, each other!

If we are white, we treat the man from africa as if he is from a different species, the same goes for the chinese, arabs, indians, thai, vietnamese, and in fact anyone who doesn't perfectly fit the "white" brand. Of course you then subdivide the white man into nations, which although may be the same skin colour, may have different shades; and then into language (first by country, then by region). Then we attach a mainly derogatory label to each of them, based on some sweeping generalisation in order to further divide us – such as "fat americans" or "greasy italians." We have now created new sub-species of humans without even realising it!

Fear is perpetuated by rumour and insinuation, by media, by politicians, by teachers, by parents. They keep the fear alive by passing on their prejudices of people who are *exactly* the same as us! They may live in different types of houses; eat different bread; have dessert for main course; wear different clothes; eat rice instead of potatoes; eat animals we keep as pets; smell a little different because of the food they eat; believe in different gods, or have different customs, but these are the result of tradition, culture, and conditioning. Once we are naked, we are all exactly the same.

Imagine you are taking part in an experiment called "find your friend," where you had to find the person in the group who was identical to you.

You are blindfolded and your nose is covered, to eliminate any chance of guessing through any distinguishing smell you may pick up. All the subjects are naked (male and female) and you have to find one male and one female, in a group of ten people, using only touch, could you do it? Perhaps you might get lucky. Perhaps there is something in your race of people that is prominent, like height or weight, but if the subjects were all the same weight and all the same height, how about now?

What does your race of people have, that others haven't? I am sure you will be coming up with all sorts of slight differences, but what about major differences like a different number of legs, more eyes, less arms, no nose, or a mouth where the forehead should be? Eight toes on each foot? What about higher intelligence? Can you feel for that? No, I think we all agree that humans are identical, otherwise we would all belong to different species.

The differences are only man-made, created by people who want to be different, who want to be superior, who want to dominate and oppress, who want to wage war, who hate you because of your accent, who despise your colour, who, over centuries, have been conditioned by society that to be "foreign," is to be mistrusted. We have our parents to thank, and their parents before them, and our teachers and our parents teachers, and our government and our parents government and back we go, century after century...

The conditioning is deep rooted, and so is our prejudice. We don't even know why we hate the english, although maybe 300 years ago their armies came and robbed our country and murdered our soldiers, but every country has been at war at some point in history. War is not exclusive to one nation. War and violence have surrounded us since the beginning of civilisation, and has clouded our judgement of people.

Do not tell me you hate the french, the swiss, the germans, or the russians. Hate is a strong word that cannot be used in terms of entire nations of people. You don't even know these people. You are remembering a story from history, where your nation may have fought theirs on the orders of your leaders, not because individuals hated you, or you hated them. I challenge every one of you to go and meet someone from a country you "hate." You will find the only way to deal with people in the world, is on an individual basis, one person at a time.

Remember what the place of birth would be on your passport if you went to another planet.

"Earth"

If there is to be a future for the human race, whether in twenty thousand, or twenty years, we all have to identify with the world as our country, because it is.

On a clear night, have a look up at the stars, and count how many you can see. Twenty? Fifty? One thousand? One million? One billion? We are quietly spinning in what appears to be the middle of nowhere, with no one else around. A strange place to be indeed. It makes the fact you abused a man because of his skin colour, killed a man for his wallet, bombed a country because you didn't like them, or tortured a man for information, utterly worthless. So unimportant – apart from showing how cruel the human being can be.

Can you tell me what we have done to deserve the crown of “most intelligent species on the planet?” Can you tell me the mind that creates weapons and bombs is not sick? Can you tell me why we kill and torture our own species? It is indeed a sad day for me, because I believe the world would have been a better place, if we had not evolved into homo sapiens “*the most intelligent species on the planet.*”

When it comes to how we treat each other, we are no further forward than we were (even before) primitive times. We use our minds for greed, desire, destruction, and control. We kill and we maim, we steal and we acquire. We invent substances to shield us from reality. We are not ready for this power. The power that the mind has given us. We are not ready. We need more time. Our brains may be working, but our thought is corrupted.

We may have progressed materially and technologically, but in our haste we have missed one vital component, to know what it is to be human; to love one another, and to love the planet that gives us life. If I were from another planet, observing from space, I would cry for humanity. Such beauty on the earth, such abundance of life, such hope; all being destroyed by the human being, self-appointed custodian of the planet.

H u m o u r

A message whose ingenuity or verbal skill or incongruity has the
power to evoke laughter

•

The quality of being funny

•

Put into a good mood

I've always thought of myself as a pretty funny guy – often the life and soul of the party, never dull, always entertaining, that's me! I just love humour. It has almost got me into trouble so many times I have lost count, but still I keep on.

I'm not a joke teller, I can never remember them; I am more of a situational comedy sort of person, in that I listen to, or observe someone and make a funny quip about them, or the situation. I just see a lot of humour in what people do and say, but I wouldn't do it if I thought it would upset them. In fact that would upset me more. How about you? Do you have a good sense of humour, or are you more of a serious type? Maybe you don't know any good jokes, maybe you don't think you have a sense of humour? Let's explore this together.

I don't know how I became funny, but people laugh when I am humorous and I like it, because it means I can laugh as well. I don't know if people take me less seriously than I would like because I never really thought about it until now. I like to mix deep humour with deep thinking! It keeps me grounded, and a little laughter goes a long way to making the world a happier place, don't you think?

As someone who has spent most of their life in offices, I have to say that I think there isn't enough humour in the world. People see their job as something they should be serious at, and only humorous outside work; or even worse, not humorous at all.

My father is one such good example. He spent his whole life being serious, even though, cloaked under all that seriousness was a keen glasgow sense of humour. He regularly chided me for being the office joker. "How do you expect to get on in life, if you can never be serious?" he used to demand; but there was one thing he missed, and it was that I was serious about my work. I always liked it, and always concentrated hard on it, but I could never understand what everyone else was doing! They spent their days moping around (sorry, being serious) never laughing, never sharing a joke, or if they did, it would always be restrained.

You see, we have this crazy system which seems to dictate that the higher up an organisation you go, the less humorous you become. My dad tells me that the reason is because people expect you to be serious; they don't expect the leader of an organisation to be telling jokes.

"If I was always joking," he told me, "they would never respect me."

That struck a chord with me.

It's all about appearances

"So if I want to get on in the world, I should start to look more serious and be less funny," I asked him.

"Precisely."

"How am I going to do this," I thought? "I want to be taken more seriously at work, but because I am good at what I do, not because of the way I hold my lips together, never smiling, save for a slight nod to acknowledge anyone in an inferior position." I wasn't prepared to play this game.

I thought by just being my cheerful happy humorous self I could get on in the world, but it didn't work like that. People saw it as a sign of

weakness, a lack of sincerity, a lack of commitment, and exploited it at every opportunity. But I was committed to my job; I always put one hundred percent into everything I did. But whether they found my humour and joviality unsettling, and wished they could be more laid back and still good at their job; or whether they just found it annoying, I will never know. But I started to notice more and more that I didn't fit in.

I was doing fairly senior jobs and my colleagues were all "serious." I think they wondered how I got the job if I was such a joker (on reflection, maybe I should have just kept my mouth shut, but I didn't). Everyone else just got on with their job without a word. I couldn't bear it. It was all so clinical. If we were going to spend nine or ten hours a day together, I sure as hell wasn't going to sit around with my face tripping me all day.

"If you want to joke around go and be a comedian, but don't do it here," my boss said to me once. I looked around at all the office personnel and realised that not one of them looked like they were having a good time. Some of you may be thinking, "you're not at work to have a good time, you are there for work." But the way I see it, if you are going to be spending on average 45 years, 5 to 6 days a week, 10 to 12 hours a day (including travelling time) for 48 weeks of the year, you really should be having some fun. There should be laughter, there should be humour. After all, what is it we do as humans that is *so* serious we can't take time for a bit of humour?

Bosses seem to forget we are spending nearly all our adult life working. The way I see it, if they want robots, they should employ them. Do not make a human behave like a machine just because you pay them a few pounds for their labour. Let them express themselves.

I do understand the need to maintain some level of composure when at work, just in case you think I was running around all the firms I worked for telling everyone jokes all the time, and making silly quips – I may like a laugh, but I'm not stupid.

I think my dad thought that being humorous meant being seen to be less intellectual, something that would never do if you wanted to climb the high echelons of business, something I never wanted to do. I was happy earning good money, enjoying myself at work and then moving onto my next contract. Very content, I would say. Although the people I worked for probably weren't quite as content with my happy disposition.

So let's talk about you now shall we? I think I've talked enough about myself, as usual! Let's talk about the sort of person you are, the job you do, and the image you want to project to the world. Do you want to be taken seriously? Do you want people to listen to you? Do you want to get on in the world? Do you want to have a nice life? Then please stop pretending to be so serious.

Teachers, judges, lawyers, politicians, policemen, all have this seriousness about them that you know is a put on. You know that in reality they *cannot* be that serious. It is part of the costume. The same way people at work in an office are forced by their bosses to wear the "serious" costume. Please, if that's you, take it off! What's the worst thing that can happen to you? As they say: "lighten up," you cannot be that serious all the time (although as we know, there are times when it is appropriate).

Life is all about enjoying living, and humour helps us to release tension by laughter. It also helps shine a light on the falsity of serious people through the clever use of wit and satire. It is good for people to laugh at themselves, and it helps with awareness. No, honestly! It does. If someone makes a witty remark about your "bossy" personality, you are more likely to pay attention to the message than if they shout it across the room and insult you. One thing I have learnt is that if a serious message needs saying, it can sometimes help to dress it up in humour, it lessens the blow and can convey the message a lot more clearly and easily.

Stop pretending to be serious

I have met so many different people from all walks of life over the years, and I have to say that there is humour in everyone I have met. No matter what type of personality they had, each of them had the capacity for humour inside them – even my dad, who has been pretending to be serious his whole life.

We are born, we go to school, we work, we contribute to the world, we have children, we retire, we die. The end. We can make the decision to walk through life with a solemn face, or we could light it up with a smile and some humour, it really is a great characteristic we have developed over the years.

Remember, I am talking about inclusive humour here, where everybody laughs, even the person who may be on the receiving end; and above all, we need to learn to laugh at ourselves. We need to see how

ridiculous we look sometimes. The things we say and even the clothes we wear.

If the animal kingdom has developed humour I'm sure they find us funny as well, especially when we pretend we aren't anything like them.

Let go of seriousness. Bring more humour to your life. If your place of work wants you to be a machine, tell them to find a machine who is as attractive as you, and walk out. Do your own thing. Do not let yourself be led by others, especially those that want you to conform to their idea of what work should be. Let's bring comedy back to mainstream life instead of saving it for the professional comedians and the comedy festivals; and although some of you may not be as funny as others, it is better than spending your time pretending to be serious; trying to impress people with your "serious" facial expressions.

Just because you are a scientist, a chief executive, a politician or other "serious" person, doesn't mean you have to behave like a robot who has a line of code that states:

1. Keep face straight no moving of mouth or eyes.
2. Goto 1

You never know, people may even start respecting you for actually being human. It's really easy. Give it a go. You've got nothing to lose except that frown line across your forehead.

I

I l l u s i o n

An erroneous mental representation

•

Something many people believe that is false

•

The act of deluding; deception by creating illusory ideas

•

An illusory feat; considered magical by naive observers

Some people have said that the world we live in is just an illusion – that it is not real; and that somehow, we are being tricked into thinking it's real! But it looks real enough, it feels real enough, babies really do come from the womb, the trees really grow tall, and it does snow. So what on earth could they be talking about?

Talking of the earth – the photographs and video that the astronauts have taken of our planet prove it's real enough. A great big blob in the middle of nowhere!

If you look at the sun on a clear day it blinds you, and you do feel its heat, especially when sunbathing! So what do you think? Is it real? If all my five senses tell me this is something physical, something tangible, then it must be. But what does your so called sixth sense (*grasping the inner nature of things intuitively*) tell you? Think about that for a moment and then we shall begin our discussion.

I have often heard people saying, “yeah, but we *could* all just be an experiment by intelligent alien life forms,” said mostly by people smoking marijuana, or drinking beer, both of which seem to loosen our grasp on what's real and what's not! But of course it's possible. We may think we understand the proportions of the universe, but we might be just a tiny experiment, or a game in somebody's shed. We might actually be much smaller than we think!

During the alien summer barbecue, alien al says to his pals over a bottle of alien beer, “hey, do you want to come over and see how my human experiment is going? They're so dumb, you should see what they get up to!”

“Wow! That's great, and it all comes in a box?” says one of his friends.

“Sure does, you can get them up at the store. They're not cheap - 699 alien dollars, but definitely worth it! I have hours of fun changing their weather patterns, watching their crops fail, and planting lunatic dictators in countries to see how quick it takes them to kill everybody.” (everyone laughs) “The software it comes with is top notch. You can control everything. You can make people only like the same sex, or you can make people believe in 'god' and get them to pray every day.” (everyone laughs) “It really is funny!” “You can even get them to gain awareness and question the nature of everything. If only they knew.”

“Of course we are not part of any alien experiment! What a stupid idea” says you. “This book gets more idiotic by the page, I wonder if I could get a refund?”

The magicians slight of hand

So I ask you again. Is this world real, or have we been tricked by a clever magician into thinking that the universe started with a big bang, or that there was a god who created us all? Have we been tricked into thinking that we came from the apes millions of years ago, when really, the world has only been in existence for a short time? Do you see the importance of these questions?

We believe that everything is solid here, and it might be. Our houses do protect us from the rain, and our clothes and heating protect us from the cold. What I am talking about is the bigger picture. The one where we attach meaning to this life.

It is perfectly possible that we are no more than a backyard experiment being controlled by “alien al” on his computer. You may laugh, but it’s no laughing matter. Why else do you think science hasn’t been able to find the answer to any big questions, like how the universe started? This box we all live in, in the backyard, only started when “alien al” turned it on at the mains, and as it is only a one player game al has purchased, not the multi-player network game, he only gets one “active” world to play with, that’s why the rest are “greyed” out and have no life on them! This life we live here could just be like computer simulation games, where we give our characters personalities, likes and dislikes, wants and desires. It may seem far fetched, but if we are to explore our minds, and the universe, we must look at every possibility.

Sci-fi film makers have pushed this point on many occasions, where in some films they saw a world controlled by a computer to make life seem real, but when the computer was smashed the people could see that the world had been destroyed many years previously and they were left in a barren land. Tough break!

There have been many great books and films in which the writer has imagined that this world is but an illusion, and maybe they are right. But for now, we must leave the realm of fantasy, and leave “alien al” in his backyard shed, and come back closer to home, to look at someone we have an intimate relationship with. Ourselves.

Does the eye really “see?”

“Of course my eyes really ‘see’ what a stupid question.” I hear some of you cry. “I’m not blind, therefore I can see! Jeez this book. Really!”

A friend asked me once: “What do you see with, your eyes or your brain?”

“Your eyes!” I cried out immediately.

“I’ll leave it with you,” he joked.

But later I got to thinking about it. *Do* I see with my eyes?

I was very confused, but the more I thought about it, the more I could see the point to his question. Yes, the eye is the vehicle by which the light from all the objects is filtered through, but that’s all it does. It doesn’t have its own central processing unit. All “information,” (light) must go to the central processing unit (cpu) for processing.

The brain is where we see “table,” “happy man,” “angry man,” “pizza,” “wife,” “friend,” “house,” “cigarette,” “attractive girl,” “ugly woman.” Do you see? (excuse the pun)

The eye merely passes the information through to the brain, like a security guard that just lets everybody in. Nothing gets missed.

The brain then instantaneously pulls up record sheets and compares the object with its database record. Object round, has bits on top. Check memory. Had before. Check knowledge. This is called a pizza. Then perhaps the brain’s pleasure centres remember they had one pizza before, says to the consciousness: “I really fancy one of those,” but because you heard it in your own voice you think it was your idea!

Let us explore a little more deeply.

Is a chair really a chair? If you walk into your lounge, close your eyes and touch different objects, what happens? Go on try it sometime! As you feel for shape, texture etc. what is going on in your brain? It cannot “see” the object directly because the eyes are closed, but it is running some pretty impressive calculations. And from the size and “feel” of the object, your brain brings up a card that matches and says that is a chair! How does it do it?

Well, without getting into technicalities here, you were told to look at it when you were young, and your mother pointed at it and said “look! A chair” and that was all you needed to know. Your brain put the shape and the dimensions into memory and labelled it. Thus chair becomes object number 208,394, and everything that is associated with 208,394 will have links to that object. Do you understand?

I do not know the exact way that the information is stored because I have not studied science, but hopefully you can see what is happening here.

Your eyes are there as an evolutionary adaptation (the earliest organisms did not have eyes). They help us to hunt for food, and water, and they help us to navigate. Everything else is done exclusively in the brain. So even if you have been blind from birth, if someone lets you touch an object and get a “feel” for it, and then says “table,” it is no different. The only difference is that you have a precise visual representation of what a table looks like when you look at it. If you have no eyes your mind will put together a best guess of what a table is based on what it knows or what someone tells it. So now you know what table is.

“Will you 'sit' at the table?,” your mother asks.

You have been told and shown what “sitting” is and you now know what “table” is, so you can sit down. But imagine no one had ever used words to describe anything, and now imagine that you cannot see with your eyes. How would you feel, how would you interact with the world around you? Now when someone says “sit at the table” you ask them what it means. To you and I who have gone through the process already this seems almost too simple but it’s not, I assure you.

Imagine you have someone round for dinner who cannot see, and has never been given detailed descriptions of objects before.

“Sit at the table, please,” you ask.

“What is table?” He asks.

“Well a table is something that has four legs.”

“What is four? What are legs?”

“Well, legs support the table and are made out of wood and four is a number,” you reply.

“What is wood. What is number?”

“Wood comes from trees. Number is something you count with.”

“What is trees. What is number?”

“Trees grow in the ground and have leaves and branches. Number is a shape that you can add, subtract, multiply...”

“What is ground? What is leaves? What is branches? What is divide..?”

“The ground is where the tree comes from. It is made of soil. The leaves and the branches come out of the tree as it grows. I’m not sure what divide really is but I think it is where you take a number and try to... no, that’s not right...erm...”

“What is soil?”

“Soil is the earth.”

“What is the earth?”

“It is where you live! Now hurry up and eat your dinner before it gets cold...”

“What is cold?”

You can see how infuriating it would be!

Now imagine you have another guest round for dinner who is not visually impaired but has never been told what anything is either.

“Sit at the table, please” you ask.

What is “table” he asks.

“The table is what I want you to sit at, look, it’s over there.”

And he sees it, and registers it as table. But he still needs to know more information. "I see that it is table," he adds, "and you have said I should 'sit' there, but I do not know what 'sit' is."

"Look, watch me. You take a chair."

"What is chair?"

...And you sit down like this" ignoring him and demonstrating it instead of explaining it.

So as you can see from our wordy example above, although the child who has vision understands the connection between what he is seeing and what he is being told, and stores the appropriate pattern maybe a little faster than the boy who can't see; the process is exactly the same. The brain is the one who "sees" things, the eyes merely filter in the light. Not that we should take our eyes for granted, they have helped us enormously.

But what harm have they done?

It is the eyes that see the black man in the "white area," it is the eyes that see the jewish man amongst many non-jews, it is the eyes that see the "muslim" man in a "christian" country. We could go on for a whole book with examples, but I think we both understand?

We have said that in "reality," it is the brain which is seeing, although the light is captured first by the eyes. A man who has in his mind that he wants to rape a woman, would still want to rape a woman if he was blind, being able to see just makes his identification of his target quicker. Do you follow?

If I do not know what a table is and then you show it to me, it is much quicker than having to explain everything. It is kind of like having a photograph to show someone of the time you went on a camel ride. You could explain it without the photograph, but the visual example has a faster impact on the brain. That's all.

So what is the point of all this talking about the eye not really being the thing that sees, "what difference does it make?" I hear you asking.

Well, if it's true, it means that the one thing we trust the most, our eyes, are not as reliable as we once thought they were.

Perception

1. *The representation of what is perceived; basic component in the formation of a concept*
2. *Becoming aware of something via the senses*

If I see an immigrant walking down the street at night with his hood up, what am I seeing? Am I seeing the shape of a body and nothing more? No. I may see his outline with my eyes, but already my brain has processed him based on the way he walks, his colour, my education, my parent's prejudices, my fear, my beliefs, my memory, his clothing, media reports or government reports.

In a flash, the message appears in my consciousness: "He is probably dangerous and could attack me, so I'll walk the other way."

So did I really "see" the man as he was? No I didn't. The information carried in the light through my eye was nothing compared with the amount of information I had to weigh him up with. In a millisecond, I had not seen a man walking, I had perceived him to be a dangerous person, even though he showed no outward signs of it!

One of my favourite examples of perception at work is that of the car crash, and I am sorry if I have used it in another topic.

On a dangerous bend in the road, a car accidentally crosses the centre line and hits another car almost head on. Fortunately, neither drivers were injured seriously, but the police were called anyway as a precaution. As the police were trying to determine what happened, two potential witnesses came up and offered their version of events. The first one to speak was a young man.

"Yeah, I saw, it, some old bloke was coming round the corner not looking where he was going, and must have let his car drift over the road and hit the other car."

"That's not what happened at all!" said the old lady. "The young driver was coming round the corner way too fast, lost control of his vehicle and crashed into that other man, who was doing nothing wrong!"

"Are you sure you two both saw this accident?" asked the police constable.

"Absolutely!" said both of them, "we were standing right on the same spot."

So, as you can see, two people can be looking at exactly the same thing from the same angle and both "see" it differently. They would both swear in court that that was exactly what they saw and no amount of questioning would convince them otherwise.

How many times do we hear barristers ask "are you sure that's what you saw madam?"

"I am absolutely positive!"

Then some new information appears that meant the woman could not have seen the defendant on that day, and she says: "... But... I could

have sworn it was him... I know what I saw..." and she would be lead down from the witness box utterly perplexed as to what had happened.

Have my eyes deceived me?

It's terrible when you can't trust your own eyes, isn't it? "Maybe you need glasses madam?" the barrister might joke; but it is nothing to do with having blurred vision. It is seeing something that isn't there in 20/20 vision, courtesy of our old friend, the mind – master of illusions.

So if it is possible that we perceive things that didn't happen or weren't there, couldn't it be entirely possible that there were things in the world we weren't perceiving? Could it be possible that there is something that is invisible to us?

You see, we mustn't put so much emphasis on old phrases like "seeing is believing," because it just doesn't ring true. Remember, even the physical lenses by which we "see" the world aren't that good compared with say an eagle who can spot his prey on the ground from high in the sky; or the owl that sees the mouse scurrying about in the forest floor in the dark. So perhaps we should retire our eyes for a moment, and in the darkness, imagine a world we cannot see with our eyes. A world that is very different to the one you and I live in right now. What would it look like? How would you look? Would you be the same as you are now?

If we are to understand anything about ourselves, we have to open our minds to new possibilities. When we talk about "real," we are always testing something with our eyes and our touch. "Yes, it is real," you say, "because I saw it with my own eyes, and I touched it." But what is really real? Is the thought in your head real? Do you understand?

So perhaps we should drop the word "real" and "reality" from our vocabulary. Everything is real and unreal. It just depends on how you look at it! Ok, so you may be able to touch a "solid" object like your wife, but how long does she stay solid for? Until you look away?

I know this is rather confusing but bear with me. What we are saying is that although I can "see" her with my eyes and brain, and touch her with my hands making her "real," does that mean she is always existing in that state, or does she dissolve into a different form when you take your focus off her?

"Don't be ridiculous!" I hear you cry. "What sort of a stupid discussion is this? If I can see and touch her one minute she's not going to disappear the next!"

But what we are saying is that when you look away, she has disappeared. Because you can no longer see her! We must not let our eyes trick us.

As we have shown on several occasions during this discussion, our eyes cannot be trusted. And if our eyes cannot be trusted, then we also have to question how much we can trust our own brain, which has been conditioned by parents, teachers, tradition, media etc. into judging what is real.

I think we have to admit to ourselves that we have no idea what “real” is, what absolute reality is, so we should stop professing to know! One thing's for sure. It's not what we think it is.

Illusion 1 – Human race 0

How many times have we been fooled by a master illusionist, or even an amateur one?

“Yes, I am positive. The ball is in the right hand,” you say. “Yes, I know which card is mine, I saw him put it back into the pack,” and then find that the ball is in the left hand and it wasn't the card you thought it was! How do they do it? They trick you. They divert your attention away for a second and they switch balls or cards.

Some illusionists are ingenious indeed, and to this day, no one knows how they did their tricks; because they were tricks, right? They couldn't actually be “real” could they? That would mean that the man had to be a sorcerer or a wizard (*possessing or using or characteristic of or appropriate to supernatural powers*) of some kind, and they “definitely” don't exist, do they?

I don't know, you tell me!

We have all read about wizards and witches (*a being (usually female) imagined to have special powers derived from the devil*), and seen films with them in; and we are always fascinated by the special effects, that have them controlling matter with just their fingertips, or their minds. But then it's just a film, no one has these powers in real life, do they?

For many thousands of years, ancient civilisations have believed in magic, with one or more members of the society believed to be able to heal through the power of touch. Some tribes still have witch doctors who have “supernatural” healing powers.

Books of spells (*a psychological state induced by (or as if induced by) a magical incantation*) abound. Come on, you may not believe in all of it, but you are definitely fascinated, like most people. It would be really

“cool” to have these kind of powers, wouldn't it? To be able to get someone to fall in love with you, by just putting a spell on them, or conjuring up a spirit, or being able to have all the riches in the world, or to fly without a plane to support you, or turn water into wine, or be able to walk on water...

Some would say that by merely discussing this we should change illusion into delusion! But explore we must.

The problem lies in our thinking, and what we believe.

For example, we “know” that some people create illusions to make us believe they have done something with magical powers, but in the back of our minds, we “know” it wasn't “real,” it was just a stage trick, like special effects are in films. So it makes it hard (or easy) to believe in real “magic.”

Some of us say, “he couldn't have done that, it's not possible, it must be a trick,” but imagine going back in time a thousand years with a 747 and showing it off proudly flying around the sky! Can you imagine what the people would think of you? They would say you were a great wizard able to command metal to rise into the sky. They may be impressed, and hail you as a god, or they may burn you at the stake. Who knows what people believe.

So let me ask you this question: If I see that someone can move matter, with what only looks to be the power of their mind, what do I do? Do I instantly disbelieve it, or, on seeing that there are “independent” witnesses who have sworn that no trickery is being used, believe it and think to yourself, “that's amazing, I wonder how he does it?”

The problem lies with our eyes and our brain again. The eyes see something which looks “real” but the brain says: “No, this must be a trick,” or depending on your viewpoint, says: “Ok, this guy must have supernatural powers.” But what is supernatural (*not existing in nature or subject to explanation according to natural laws; not physical or material*)? Supernatural is just something we can't explain. Yet.

Imagine again that you travelled in time and showed the ancient civilisations the power you held in your hands as you detonated bombs, or managed to kill a man without touching him (with a bullet), or you showed them a nuclear bomb being detonated in this distance. What supernatural power would they think you had? It's like everything we don't understand. We either worship it or kill it!

So should we believe that people have healing powers, that they can cure the blind, make cripples walk again and turn water into wine? Sure,

why not? Whether they really do have “healing powers,” what do we know anyway? We can't even trust our own eyes to tell us the “truth!”

Maybe some people do have access to knowledge we don't. Maybe they have a complete understanding of the universe and how to control it. Maybe they are from a future time (having discovered that time travel was possible) and maybe there is such a thing as a god, but then surely that would be the same thing as having a complete understanding of the universe and how to control it, no? And maybe they are just deceiving us like a master illusionist does; but how will we ever know the truth of it if we can't trust our eyes, and we definitely can't trust our brains?

Truth is something you experience, so you had better go out and experience it, although even a trick can seem real; so maybe we will never know whether it is possible to gain these magical powers. Maybe we will delude ourselves into believing that there are such things as supernatural beings who have ultimate control over the universe, or maybe we will start to explore all possibilities with our access key to the universe, our open minds, and truly find out for ourselves.

So what if there is no “alien al” sitting in his backyard, playing the latest version of “human universe 2,” and there are no such things as supernatural beings, wizards, sorcerers, magical healers, and matter movers; what are we to do? What if we are all alone in this dark universe? What if this tiny planet, a speck of dust in the universe is all that contains life as we know it? What if there is no afterlife, no heaven and hell, what if this world is solid and there are no illusions, except the ones we go to see performed on stage? What would we do? How would we feel knowing that this was it?

Well I tell you one thing, I'd make every moment count! And I would make sure I enjoyed my time here and made sure that everyone around me enjoyed it too. But until I know the truth of it all, I will never stop exploring. Neither should you.

I m p o r t a n t 1

Of great significance or value

•

Important in effect or meaning

What is important to you?



I'll rephrase the question What is the most important thing in your life right now? I am going to take a guess that you are *not* going to say your sports car, going out for a meal at the weekend, going down to the pub to relax after work, your career, your lovely house, or going on holiday this year. I am going to take a huge gamble and come out and say it. I think the most important thing to you in life is (a) your family (parents/children/partner), their health and their happiness and (b) your own health and happiness. Am I right, or even close to being right?

You see, I think that whether you're a gangster, a corrupt politician, a plumber, a nuclear scientist, a cleaner, a hit man, a clerk, a stripper, a director or a soldier, those are just jobs. Some are more questionable than others, but nonetheless, they are just your chosen professions. Even if you extort money for a living with menace, you still have a mother, or a wife

and children to think about. You make money to provide the best you can for your family.

Even gangsters are in love. Think about it. Even people who kill other human beings are capable of love for their family. It's inbuilt. Hard wired. As far as I know, even presidents who start wars that kill millions of innocent people, love their wives and their parents. So for me it really comforting to know, that no matter what people do in life, whether violent, or peaceful, there will always be an emotional connection to our parents, and we will seek someone to love, and share that love by having children with them. Perfect!

What we are in fact showing here, is that even if people are beset by anger and hate, they still have the ability to show love for another human being. This is the single greatest step towards a more peaceful world. Just loving one person may not solve all the world's problems, but it's a good start.

My parents are the most important thing to me, not because my partner or anyone else isn't important, but because my parents have always been there for me when I needed them; and as they will (probably) die before me, I want to get to know them better. I want to understand more about their lives. I only seem to know them as "my parents:" two people who brought me into the world and looked after me – not as individuals with hopes and dreams; successes and failures; sadness and joy. So can someone please try to help me understand the following. If love is the most important thing to all of us, why do we act in ways that are the complete opposite of love?

Love

A strong positive emotion of regard and affection

We say we love, but how quickly we forget what that means when we hurt another. So how can we know love when we only apply it to one specific group of people (e.g. our family).

How the soldier cries when his brother is cut down by a bullet. He loved his brother so much. He will avenge his death. He will find the person who did this and make him suffer for what he did.

Love and hate may be the opposite of one another, but they are closely linked. You have hurt the one I love so I will hurt you. The example of the gangster, who loves his family but is prepared to kill

anyone and everyone who gets in his way is a great way to show the hypocrisy (*insincerity by virtue of pretending to have qualities or beliefs that you do not really have*) of the human race. I do not believe we really know what it is to love. We may like people, or feel bound to them because of a genetic or matrimonial link, but to love is so, so different. If you love you *cannot* hate, and if you hate, you cannot love. Please try to understand what we are discussing here, it is of the utmost importance.

The mind, like a camera lens, cannot focus on more than one thing at a time. When you bring one thing into focus, the other goes out of focus. You cannot love and hate at the same time. Even as a soldier, if you say, "I don't hate the enemy I am killing, I'm just doing my job, I'm just following orders," please see that in the very act of killing, there is an absence of love and compassion for another human being. In the same manner, you cannot say you love animals, whilst enjoying a nice juicy steak.

So let's not pretend we are full of love as the priest who blesses the troops going into battle does. Anyone who takes another life or sanctions the taking of life does not know love.

It's time to stop pretending and find out what it really means to love, that is the important thing in life.

I m p o r t a n t 2

Of great significance or value

•

Important in effect or meaning

When questioned about what is important, it is fair to say that most people do not want to appear selfish. That's why we say: "The most important thing to me, is family;" but in reality, that isn't the case. I think we should stand up and be honest with each other, and say, "Do you want to know what's important to me? It's *me*. I am what's important to me." Is it true?

All my life, I have only been concerned about me. My job, my car, my problems, my desires, my money, my holidays, my stress, my relationships, my struggles. The world revolved around me. But a few years ago whilst travelling through a poor country in asia, I suddenly thought, "Stop! What am I doing? Am I so concerned for the "me" in life that I am forgetting everyone else in the world?"

Of course, some will say, "you have to look after number one. If you don't, who will?" And I'm all for people looking after themselves, and

working to provide for their family. But what I'm talking about is the realisation that whatever I do in life, affects others. This isn't about suddenly becoming philanthropic (*generous in assistance to the poor*) or running off to india or africa to help people who cannot fend for themselves. It is the clear realisation that we are all connected.

Connected

1. *Being joined in close association*
2. *Joined or linked together*

How is it that we are all connected when we are geographically and culturally so diverse? Well, the first thing that connects us is that we are all human! Oh, sorry, and let's not forget the animals who provide us with milk, or the animals who unwillingly give up their lives so we can taste their flesh, or the streams that flow into rivers to give us water, or the trees that provide oxygen for breathing that we cut down for paper. I think you get the idea!

Not only are we connected to each other by way of being of the same species, but we are all connected to the planet and all forms of life are connected to us. We are all interdependent. Whatever we do can affect the planet and whatever the planet does can affect us (for example: tsunamis, volcanoes exploding, earthquakes, floods, crop disease, animal disease).

If I were a human, I'd be treading very carefully on this planet; it seems as if we could unbalance it very easily. Oh, I forgot, I am a human; and am I treading carefully? No I'm not.

Some of us on earth feel strongly about certain issues such as hunger, war, poverty, health, the environment, or global warming (which are all worthwhile causes I grant you), and we campaign tirelessly to "Stop The War!" "No More Hunger!" "Stamp Out Poverty!" But are we missing a vital clue in how to solve them?

There are a million campaign groups out there, each with their own agenda, each lobbying parliament. Although some are successful, the fact remains that individuals have the most important part to play in the world. An individual thinking and acting independently, whilst acknowledging that they are connected to everything in the world, can solve any problem.

Think about it. Most people believe that the only way to effect change is through outside pressure, through convincing someone else to act, but

the importance lies with us. Our individual thought, followed by our resulting actions, all affect someone or something in the world. Everything we do; from the time we get up, until the time we go to bed, is having an effect – positive or negative. And because we think mainly about ourselves and our families in isolation, we don't even realise we have had an effect! We are so unaware of ourselves in our surroundings that we can't comprehend the idea.

So just for a moment let's step outside the *me* to look at real life. One day in the life of alan, an average employed working human being in the west. You may not see anything in this day as significant, but try to look deeper and see the connections.

"I get up in the morning and I take a nice long hot shower to wake up. I have a quick coffee, it's from the finest beans in costa rica, but it's quite cheap at the supermarket. I like to have a dash of warm milk, and I'm sorry to say, a couple of sugars. I always get up a bit too late in the morning to have anything to eat for breakfast, so I usually grab something on the way from the takeaway cafe to eat in the car. The journey takes me over an hour in the morning thanks to all the traffic, but my car's much more comfortable than public transport.

I usually arrive at my office a bit stressed, but after another couple of coffees and a cigarette, I feel better! I work for a multinational organisation with offices in twenty countries. We make everything from security products to aviation products, and even have a food division. Sometimes sitting at a desk all day can be really boring and the hours are long, but the pay is pretty good, and the life I have been able to make for my wife and my four children has been great. We have a nice house in the city with all modern appliances, although there isn't really much of a garden to speak of.

My wife has to work as well, as the mortgage is so expensive on the house, so we have to scrape enough pennies together to pay for child care so that there is someone to look after the kids when they get home from school. Hopefully they will all go to university and get good jobs with better pay than I get, then they can look after us in our old age! At the weekends we go out on family trips in the car, and we always go to church on a sunday..."

So what was significant in that little story? Anything? Nothing? Did you see anything of yourself in this example, or did it all go over your head? That's ok, it is hard to see that anything you do is having an effect, whether negative, or positive in the world; but it is precisely that lack of awareness that is causing us so much trouble.

I am sure none of us really set out to make trouble for ourselves and other people, and most of you would be really offended if I told you that most of what our example character above was doing was having a negative effect on himself, his family, the community and the wider world in some way or other; but you have to start to look beneath the words. I don't want to spell it out to you here, but please look back over the short story as many times as you have to.

It was in understanding something similar that set me off on my own journey, which has enabled me to write this book. Something along the lines of, "hey, if people eat fast food, they drop lots of litter, where does that litter go? And anyway, why do they need fast food...?" Ahh, because they work in jobs that take them miles from home, and who are the companies they work for miles from home? Certainly not companies that are serving the local community, and why do the job anyway? Ah ha! To get money to pay for a house and pay off the credit cards you have been running up buying stuff. And so why do you buy stuff? Well, to keep up your status in the community, to keep yourself happy, and why do you need to keep yourself happy? Because you are afraid, so what do you do? You go to church and pray that everything will be ok, and a man reads from a book that tells you everything you need to know etc. etc. and this book was born. So you see how important it is to see the connections.

You don't have to force yourself to look. Just start to be aware of one thing, and see how it spreads to other things. For example, whilst watching the news, there may be a short piece on a war that soldiers from your country are taking part in, just ask yourself a question like, "why are they there?" And wait for a response! Your mind will start opening up, I assure you, but as soon as you start agreeing with the tv, your mind will be closed once again.

To make the connections, you have to ask questions; and you must watch your mind carefully so it doesn't reply with a conditioned response (because it will, as you are already conditioned by the society you live in). When it does, ask another question. Challenge the conditioning. Ask another question and another. Pretty soon your mind will have to open its doors to one who knocks so loudly.

Question, question, question.

Why? Because all is not as it seems in the world. It is of the utmost importance you make these connections. Do not wait or hesitate. Find out for yourselves. Right now.

I m p o r t a n t 3

Having authority or ascendancy or influence

Just what is it to be important? I am the managing director of a company or the president of the country. I may have a job which affects a good many people, but that's just a job; what I want to discuss is the psychological feeling that goes along with that job. We have worked our way through the ranks (or not) and we are at the top. The apex of our lives, and we like to let everyone know we are there, that we have made it! But is it real?

I would suggest that this importance is only in our minds. We have the respect (*an attitude of admiration or esteem*) of others, not just for what we have done, but because we are in a position of authority (*the power or right to give orders or make decisions*), and we know that this gives us superiority over others. Although this superiority is superficial, in the sense that we are only comparing our relative position in society, this still appeals to our egos. Why do we feel differently about ourselves when we

are in this position? We walk taller, we feel stronger, we acknowledge subordinates in a kind of knowing manner; we feel more godlike, in the sense that like the image of god who is above us all, the man in the position of power feels he is above others.

If we think about this rationally, when we all strip off our clothes, the judges, politicians, directors, and army generals are all the same as everyone else – just a collection of bones, muscle, and tendons; although that is not how we like to see ourselves! Why? Let's approach it from a different angle shall we?

In most species, there is the leader of the group, the dominant male; and this can be seen in every documentary about the natural world. In the animal kingdom, a male will challenge another male for superiority, territory, and the right to breed with all the females. In the human species, there is always a male challenging another male for superiority. It can be seen throughout history where one man has proclaimed himself “king” and beaten all of his opponents into submission (usually through extreme violence).

In countries where there is a king, he is still the most important person in the land, even when he is just a figurehead and the real power lies with the government. In some countries, he is even revered, but he got to that position by taking out all of his enemies, one by one.

In this modern age, the king is no longer fighting for his position physically, and the title of “king” is handed down through members of his immediate family. He parades around in the finest clothes and lives in the largest houses in the land. His position is on top. He is above everyone else. There is no one but “god” above him (or so he thinks). As can be clearly seen during revolutions, when the people have had enough, the king is the first one to go!

So why do human beings want to be the king? Well, first and foremost, we are still apes, and groups of animals need a leader – especially in the ape world. The only difference is the size of the group. So instead of ruling ten or twenty subordinates, we rule fifty million. The process is the same, it is just that through the creation of a super group (the country), the leader has ended up leading millions of people.

All hail, the supreme ape leader!

So maybe all this need for authority and supremacy is just natural, and it is as much a part of us as the need to procreate; so perhaps we shouldn't worry. All we are doing is expressing a natural urge, and as our minds have not developed much in the last several thousand years, perhaps it will take another million years of evolution for us to no longer need to have authority and control over others. But why should we wait?

We may want to feel important, but it's not really helping us build a peaceful, intelligent, sustainable world, is it? In fact this need for importance is damaging us and the rest of the natural world every day.

We don't have to be a king, we don't have to have authority over others. We do not need this. The world is abundant, there is plenty to go around. We do not need to fight for the right to mate with females, all we have to do is buy them a drink and talk to them! We do not need to build castles and have servants – a simple house is all we require. We do not need to dominate and exercise authority over people who work for us. We just need to reorganise the way we work. Do you see?

Once we transcend the need for status, and we recognise we are all one on the planet, why would you want to be more important than your brother? It's as if there is a tiny switch in your brain that says “On. Must have more importance than others;” but turning off that switch is as easy as asking yourself the question, “why?” And allow your thinking to come up with a million reasons why it is not only good, but indeed essential for you to have more importance than others. As with the previous important topic, the only thing you have to do is keep asking yourself why? Why? Why? And eventually your mind will open, and you will realise in a flash that actually all this feeling important stuff is all nonsense.



When you die, how important are you? “Ah,” says you, “but it is better to be remembered by others who will say, 'yes he was an important man,' than not remembered at all.” But that is a mere projection of the brain wanting to keep itself alive at whatever cost. Soon you will be forgotten, and even if you aren't what does it matter! You are dead. You cannot hear the people talking about you, but you would like to, wouldn't you?

“Hello, look at me, I've made it. Look at my riches, look at my wife, I am a leader, I am powerful, I am someone, I am powerful.”

But underneath all of those riches and bolt-on accessories you call having made it, what is left? You, my friend, just you; naked, with skin covering muscle and bone.

Who are you now? Are you still important? Are you still great? Are you the king now? No, you are the same as every other human on the planet – except now you are free. Do you understand?

Maybe one day, when you get a minute in your busy schedule, just undress in front of the mirror and stand and observe yourself for a moment. Who are you now? Are you still the man with the sports car, the fine clothes, the credit cards, the business empire, the adulation of others, the authority or the power? No, my friend, you are just like me, and I am just like you.

Our minds want us to think we are something different to give them something to cling on to, but we are all the same. It is time to realise that, and give up our designs on being important, after all, it means nothing.

I n f o r m a t i o n

A collection of facts from which conclusions may be drawn

•

Knowledge acquired through study or experience or instruction

Where do you get your information from? What type of information is it? Who tells you what's going on in the world? How do you know what they are telling you is “the truth?” Like most people, including me, you get information from newspapers, radio, magazines, television, and the internet.

Apart from the internet, the other forms of media have been around for years and have been known to use propaganda (*information that is spread for the purpose of promoting some cause*) many times; in fact I would say you never know when the information you are reading or watching is factual or propaganda! That's a scary thought, isn't it?

It might sound like I am scaremongering but that is not my intention. You see, every media outlet is owned by a government, a company or an individual; and at the heart of everything, there is the individual, with his own bias, his own political leanings, his own agenda, ready to push that

out into the world. That's not new, as everyone has their own views. Unfortunately, media owners and governments have a powerful platform with which to air theirs.

Newspapers, magazines, radio, and television are push media. They push the information to us and we have no control over its content, as opposed to the internet, where we pull the content we are interested in. Do you follow?

Whether we like it or not, and even if the media content providers are not attempting to brainwash (*persuade completely, often through coercion*) us, we are subjected to what *they* think we *should* read or *should* watch. Of course you are at liberty to turn it off or not buy the paper, but that's not going to happen, is it? We love reading all the news stories; we love watching terror on television, it's exciting, isn't it? You get to be part of the action without having to take part in the war.

I don't know if you remember the first gulf war in the early nineties? It was the first real war to be broadcast live across the world. A real media event! We were taken inside the action: Booom, Bang went the bombs. We saw an iraqi target in the cross-hairs of the gun sight then, boom it went up in smoke. "Yeah!" Went the crowd, "another damned iraqi blown to bits, we'll show them." Analysis followed analysis. Reporters giving different angles and views on the stories, 24/7.

But of course, these were *our* news stories, put together to show the glory of the western troops against the oppressor and dictator of Iraq, and you didn't see reverse angle camera work of the iraqis in their homes just before their bodies were blown to pieces by the bombs, egged on by the viewing public at home, and in the bars shouting: "Yeah! We got ya!"

The next live main event came at the beginning of the twenty first century. Commonly known as 9/11, it was the footage that "shocked the world," and started a whole new war (with live viewing available).

You all remember the images of two planes supposedly hijacked by terrorists and flown into the twin towers of the world trade centre. About 3,000 people died, but as far as the media were concerned, it was a godsend. Live disaster! Millions of viewers! Massive advertising revenue potentiality in the breaks! What a story that was. Even years on, people are still talking about it. Certain governments are still using it to support their "war on terror," which is just another excuse to kill people, if you don't mind me saying.

Who knows what the truth really was on that fine september morning in 2001, but there has been growing evidence in the alternative media that all was not as it seemed that day; that perhaps the government had a

hand in it themselves in order for them to pursue a cause in the middle east. They do say that truth is stranger than fiction. But then again what agenda is the independent media provider trying to push? He is clearly anti-government, so what's to make us believe that what he is telling us is the truth?

Can we ever be sure that what is being told to us on tv, radio, magazines or newspapers is the truth? The clear answer is of course, no, but this doesn't mean we should all become paranoid we are being lied to, manipulated and controlled, after all, you can turn off the tv and not read the newspapers.

To understand this more clearly, we must look behind the motivation of those who disseminate information, and remember who these people are. First, they are people with their own opinions, second, they are in business to make money, and third, they are easily manipulated by government.

Remember bad news sells more newspapers

Have you ever thought about the content that is pushed to us? There's not much good news is there? Maybe a little light hearted story about a fluffy kitten that was rescued from a tree after thirteen days, read by a smiling newscaster, just to make us feel or nice and warm and fuzzy inside. But you can't imagine them putting on an hour's program about good news, can you? People would turn off in a second; and they certainly wouldn't buy the newspaper. Would *you*?

We want doom and destruction, violence and murder, but we also want to see that someone is doing something about it; and of course there is. The government.

If there is a story about a "possible terrorists attacks" in london, there will also be police and government spokesmen telling how the government is introducing a new bill to detain "potential terrorists" for extended periods of time. If there's a story about someone dying in a drink driving accident, there will be a policeman to tell how they are "clamping down" on drink drivers to "stop the carnage on the roads." If there is a story about a young boy being stabbed to death by a gang, there will be government officials and police detailing on how they are "clamping down" on knives and gangs. If there is a story about heroin dealers selling to children, there will be a spokesman saying they are

introducing a new bill to lock up heroin dealers for longer periods if they are convicted.

Fear followed by reassurance

That is what news media do. They make us afraid by showing us some terrible event, then make us feel better by showing what someone is doing about it. I am surprised that no one has picked up on this. This is formulaic news-casting. If you think about it closely enough you will see for yourself..

Images and news stories are used to get us to feel a specific way and that is where the control element comes in. Can you imagine how you would feel if after every story there was no one to tell you it was going to be all right? They know what they are doing in the media. These stories are designed to keep you hooked; to make you scared when the bad guys are around, but eventually the good guys win (ring any bells?). Sounds just like a hollywood movie! And that's exactly how push media should be treated – as entertainment; nothing more.

Please think about this for a moment will you? How deeply interested are you in the topics you read about; I mean *really* interested in? Enough to investigate more, or just enough to discuss it with your friends, family, colleagues, or your mates down the pub? Everyone likes to talk about the stories they read or see on the news, it makes the day to day conversation more interesting, where suddenly, we can talk about terrorism in a real way, discussing the ins and outs of the potential threats to our lives: But only until the next big news story arrives.

I have even found myself becoming an armchair commentator on such subjects; subjects I have no real knowledge of. And come to think of it, no deep interest in. After all, if we actually thought we could be under attack at any time, we wouldn't just be sitting around talking about it would we? Or would we?

You see, news is something that happens to someone else; we never really imagine that we will be involved in a terrorist attack or abducted by a serial killer, do we? How many of you have been involved in something which was on the news, or even known anyone who was on a news story? Not many probably. News for us is like a fantasy land where the players are actors, and we are just the audience; and that's the way we would like it to stay, thank you very much.

Entertainment provided for us in our living room, on the metro, on the plane, on the train. Press the red button, get the news in ten different

windows, different stories, different angles, satellite, cable, terrestrial. Get your news here while you still can! "... And did we tell you the world's about to end, but here's some pictures of a nice fluffy cat rescued in a tree to make you feel all warm and fuzzy inside. Back in a moment, after a word from our sponsor..."

All push media should come with a warning sticker: "*For entertainment purposes only.*"

Real propaganda

If we believe that western papers are prejudiced, filled with propaganda, then maybe we should take a look at some other countries. At least we live in a democracy. Their media looks the same as ours, feels the same as ours, sounds the same as ours, but the content is deeply disturbing.

Governments tightly control what is published and broadcast. This is not the prejudice and bias of one man, but of a system, a system to control the minds of the people: To make them believe what is being said is "*THE TRUTH;*" and unfortunately, due to lack of any other outside information, they believe *the truth*, instead of dismissing it at best as entertainment, and at worst, brainwashing.

They believe that other countries are evil, that their country is the best in the world, that their leaders are the most righteous, that their people are the most pure, the most intelligent – the list could go on and on. This is where media gets into dangerous territory, where they are actually feeding false information to the people as truth. If you live in a country controlled by either a dictator or military junta or live in any country with a regime as opposed to a democratically elected government you can be sure your media is tainted by propaganda.

Please, what ever you do, turn it off. Don't read the newspapers. Don't listen to the news. Don't watch the tv.

That sounds extreme doesn't it? But how can you be sure that what you are being "pushed" is the truth? If we (in the west) cannot be sure we are not being fed propaganda – and we have a freely elected government, and free media – then how can you be even one percent sure your media is not only filled with lies, but information to make you feel a specific way about your own government and the other people in the world?

This is vitally important. Please listen for a moment.

You may not be interested in thinking for yourself, you may not care what is happening inside your country at the moment; you may only be

interested in your wage, and your family. But if everyone just rolls over and lets someone else tell them what to believe, what sort of civilisation have we built as humans? One of our greatest faculties is the power to question, isn't it time to use it?

Unfortunately, getting real information is hard – even if you do want it – especially in tightly controlled regimes. The one tool that is available is often controlled and monitored by the security services, which seems to be happening in more and more countries.

The power to question

Of course, it's the internet. Established many years ago as a tool to share information between universities, it evolved over the mid-nineties as the full blown internet, which enabled people to send electronic mail to each other, create websites to share information, and sell products, amongst other things.

In the beginning it was dead slow and stop, but now with more advanced communication technology, it can be lightning quick to display content, including streaming video and audio; and the one incredible thing about it is it isn't censored! “How can this be?” I hear you ask. Well, content is uploaded and stored and viewed in so many different countries that have so many different laws, it is impossible to control legally; but that doesn't mean that the security services are not monitoring all traffic and websites even here in the “free” west.

Governments don't like to lack control. They have passed laws over centuries, and have established police forces, and armies and courts and prisons to control subservient populations. They do not want to lose control, but at the moment they have. You can say anything you like in cyberspace.

For the first time in human history, the people have the power, and they know it. Never before could you criticise your king or queen and get away with it.

There are websites on every topic; free information about everything you could imagine; a million different views about the same subject; independent media, contributed to by people from all over the world; and most of the content is free. What could be better than that? Now you don't have to listen to what they want you to hear.

No longer is the media being pushed at you, now you can “pull” exactly what you want; and if you're not happy with the first one, you

can look at another one, and another one, and you can comment on what other people have written, and you can even create the content yourselves! You can be in charge of your own newspaper. You can write your opinion and people can view it or choose not to. It's their choice. Worldwide campaigns can be organised in a matter of hours, and groups with common interests can share information...

Except, according to recent studies, we're still doing it. We are addicted to it, and we can't help ourselves. That's right. Pornography.

I won't lie to you, I've spent many hours in the past looking at it, but the more I thought about it, the more I became worried that we were using the only free medium to express opinions around the world for nothing more than cheap thrills.

Stop wasting your time looking at porn and use the internet for something that benefits others!

We've had our fun. There's only so much porn we can look at in life isn't there? Surely ten or twelve years of using the internet to jerk off (*Get sexual gratification through self-stimulation*) to is enough? Isn't it time to wake up to the fact that the internet will be locked down one of these days and we won't have done a thing to stop it happening?

"If only I hadn't been masturbating to porn, I could have done something to save it" I hear you cry. And it will come. Do you really believe that world governments will leave something this powerful out of their control? Control is essential.

Talking of control, do you know who's really in control of the internet? Have you any idea how the internet even works? How you get a web page that is stored 10,000 miles away on your screen in less than a few seconds? Well maybe it's time to wake up!

Large businesses are in control. Telecommunication companies, hardware manufacturers, software developers, that's who's in charge. They like the idea that the customer has control because it's good for business, no other reason. But it won't be long before the governments of the world start forcing these companies to spy on their customers as a condition of doing business there. It has been said that one of the largest search companies in the world has agreed to bar the search of certain words like "democracy" and "freedom" from its search engine in order to do business in one undemocratic country.

You must remember that companies are not the keepers of world ethics, they are in business to make money and while a free internet serves them now, a controlled internet may suit them in the future. They will do whatever it takes to stay in business, please remember that, while you sit ogling women in various sexual positions.

Democracy without an agenda

The internet is the voice we have as a world population; where people from anywhere, of any religion, country or language can come together. Without it we are divided, living our own lives and own cultures, oblivious to what is going on anywhere else except for the information that the traditional push media and the government wish to disseminate to us. We must use the internet to include everyone in the world; to make sure everyone has a voice. The internet is the only democracy without an agenda. It is not trying to become more powerful, and it has no ideologies. Everyone is free to say what he or she thinks; and the more views there are, the more of a balanced informed decision we can make about things.

We cannot listen to our governments or our traditional media as a source of information anymore, the information has become so contaminated, as to render it worthless. We must create our own information, about any and every topic. We must sow the seeds of doubt in the minds of those who are tightly controlled in their own countries, so they question the information they are currently receiving. We must offer the hand of friendship to all.

Whether the information is about news, politics, religion, culture, compassion, car mending, gardening or mental health, the internet is an amazing resource. It is such a pleasure to see people sharing their knowledge and wisdom without charge. Most websites are free and we should all contribute where we can, with whatever we know, and put it on the web.

It is the greatest repository of instantly accessible knowledge we have today. Let's use it for the benefit of everyone on the planet, and keep it out of the hands of meddling governments and people whose only motivation is money. How? By coming together as a world community, united in the love of freedom to think, say and do what you wish without interference.

The governments would say they are controlling what they need to, to help us. To keep us safe from terror, death and destruction – but they would say that, wouldn't they? It's their job to make us afraid, and then offer us solutions, isn't it?

Start a website, contribute to one that already exists, comment on a news item; whatever your view, whether it's extremist, or moderate, or even small, you all have a voice. Use it.

I n s i g h t

Clear or deep perception of a situation

•

A feeling of understanding

•

The clear (and often sudden) understanding of a complex situation

•

Grasping the inner nature of things intuitively

Insight is often talked about as being a sixth sense that some people possess, and it is true that most people do not possess much insight into their everyday lives, let alone the “inner nature of things.” Until recently, I would have said that I possessed between zero, and half a percent insight.

I carried on my daily struggle in life, never paying my bills on time, drinking too much, getting involved in unhealthy relationships, borrowing money left, right, and centre, and generally making a nuisance of myself to my parents, who thought I had definitely lost the plot! I was a walking disaster, although I had a nice personality, and could make people laugh.

I couldn't see anything wrong with my life. I was intelligent, had the ability to get good jobs (although usually ended up being fired for quarrelling with the bosses), and always had attractive girlfriends. My life

rolled along fairly hectically, but I liked the “buzz” I got from constantly changing situations and moving house and job. Insight was not a word I knew. I couldn't see what was going to happen in the next 24 hours, let alone understanding what life was about.

It all changed when I upped and left my highly paid contracting job in information technology, to go and travel in australia – although several years passed before I got my first insight. It was not a religious experience; simply that my australian girlfriend told me that flicking your cigarette butts on the street, “not only caused litter, but was harmful to the environment, as they took so long to break down.” I remember the moment so clearly.

I was standing at a crossroads in sydney. Suddenly I got a flash of insight; the first ever!

“Yes,” I thought, “it does cause litter, and someone has to pick it up. That's not good. I don't want to do something that harms the environment, after all, my girlfriend seems pretty smart, and she wouldn't tell me to stop doing something if it wasn't important.” So I never flicked my cigarette butts on the floor again (not that it stopped me smoking you understand), and I was quick to point out the same thing to anyone else I saw doing it!

So what was different here? Maybe I was just repeating what I had heard, and wanted to impress my girlfriend, but insight is not like that. Many people who have experienced it will tell you the same – it comes to you in a flash, and stays with you always.

As I stood on the pavement, it was as if my mind had been asleep for a long time, and suddenly starting working again of its own accord. It felt like the wheels had started moving, and now there was no turning back.

Waking up

My girlfriend had been a vegetarian for ten years when I met her, and I was a confirmed meat eater. I didn't know any different, and I kept eating meat for nearly a year after I met her. She never tried to convert me; and in fact, when I told her about stopping eating meat, she said “oh no, you're not becoming a vegetarian are you?”

I remember the day I decided to stop. It was whilst we were working in a little pub in the english countryside, busily preparing the roasts for the sunday lunch. As I was cutting through the beef, the blood was pouring out all over the work surface, and suddenly I couldn't help

thinking, “this used to be an animal, this lump of flesh. An animal who walked the earth just as I do now;” and here was I cutting up the remains of its body, with my hands soaked in its blood. I couldn't believe I was standing there with a knife in my hand sprinkling herbs onto its remains!

In that instant, I decided to stop eating meat.

I have never touched it since, and it amazes me to still see people eating it greedily at the table, tearing it apart and dipping it in a nice sauce. That is the power of insight.

I then tried to convince people it was wrong – that man shouldn't eat meat, and I got angry about the whole thing every time friends who weren't vegetarian came round. After a while, I think they stopped looking forward to coming round for dinner! The more I looked around me, the more insight I got into the nature of the world, and how they were connected. Always in a flash. Never thought about, mulled over, or explained.

But soon, I realised something important. Here was I, someone who had gained some insight into the world as it is, trying to convince people of things about which they had no insight into. To them, I just seemed like a bit of a nut; an extremist, or just an annoyance. Why couldn't I just get on with life instead of trying to convince them of things? And then I saw it. These people were me, several years ago. If someone had tried to tell me that eating meat was not compassionate and loving, I would have laughed, or said something like, “piss off and leave me alone,” thinking “what a nut!”

Do you understand? Insight cannot be taught or passed on. It only exists in the person who has it. To everyone who is asleep, it just seems like crazy talk. It has taken me until right now to realise this; now I can understand why everyone thought I was annoying, or mad, or maybe both. We humans do not like to be told what to do, or why things are right or wrong, we want to make our own minds up about things.

Unfortunately, without real insight, all our opinions are just based on our conditioning, and our learning – what our parents, our tradition, our religious leaders have told us. We don't want to hear about people who have “found another way,” or even “found god,” if we don't believe in it ourselves or haven't experienced it.

A religious experience?

There is one thing true of all drug and alcohol addicts, and that is, they like their “stuff.” They go out of their way to make sure they get a regular supply of it at all times, whatever the cost to their relationships and health. Some people carry on like this their whole lives, whereas some go into therapy, and detox and struggle to stay clean. But the people I want to discuss with you here are those who magically found god, and stopped taking drugs or drowning themselves in liquor every night. We have to go into this carefully together, so we will take our time.

In the stories that have been related to me, or from personal accounts, people either saw a beam of light, or a flash of light, which they immediately attribute to god; so why don't we ask him about it, maybe he can help us solve it!

Me: Hi god. Sorry, I don't know what else to call you. What's with these religious experiences where people suddenly see the error of their ways. Have they found you?

God: Who am I?

Me: You are god, the all powerful, the creator of all things.

God: You say.

Me: Well... Anyway, are you the flash of light that people see when they get this insight into themselves?

God: Why do you think they see me?

Me: Because they say that they see you.

God: Who am I?

Me: Sorry, I don't quite get it. You are you.

God: Exactly.

Me: But that doesn't answer my question. I want to know if people are having a religious experience when they see the light.

God: They can call it whatever they want to.

Me: But is there a light?

God: I don't know, I can't see into their minds.

Me: But you are god.

God: So you keep saying.

Me: Ok, I give up. People say they have an experience, which they attribute to you, but you are saying that it has nothing to do with you. That it is in their mind.

God: I didn't say that. What I said was, people will see whatever they want to see, and they may attribute it to god, but if that is what it takes for them to see the path, then so be it.

Me: So it is a religious experience?

God: Your words, not mine.

Me: Ok, so they get a flash of insight into themselves, they wake up and start to lead a good life, they cannot believe it came from themselves, so they attribute it to god, who after all cannot be questioned on this, because god is a supernatural being, or at the very least, invisible, and because it is attributed to god, no one questions it.

God: I couldn't have put it better myself.

Me: So there is no such thing as a religious experience?

God: There is the experience, which may feel like something they have never felt before, and because they have no words to describe it, they call it god, but they could call it anything they like, and they will still have the experience.

Me: Ok. One more question. What is it that gives them the insight. Is it you, or is it themselves?

God: Who am I?

Me: Well you are the whole, the universe. I remember from the last chat we had. So although the universe had a hand in it, it was them who did it themselves, because they are part of the whole.

God: Almost.

Me: Then what is left to say?

God: Be careful about saying the universe had a hand in it, because that implies some grand design, where there is nothing but the whole. People wake up because they wish to be woken. Their minds have now opened to the universe. They can see clearly.

Me: Yes, I have experienced that, but I wouldn't have attributed it to you.

God: Why would you, I don't exist.

Me: Don't you? Then how am I talking to you?

God: Exactly!

Was god helpful? I'm not sure. Was I really talking to god, or was I answering the questions? All I know is that we must find the flash of light we call insight, and pin it down once and for all.

I think we can safely say that insight has nothing to do with thought as we know it. If it did, we would all be able to see clearly, and the world would be in harmony, which is clearly not the case!

Thought is the result of memory, but insight is something new, do you see? Insight is something that can't be pinned down because it is not a process of the mind, but something else – not something religious; but if you want to call the whole, the everything, the universal, religious, then go ahead.

The experience that makes people change their lives, and embark on journeys that are so far removed from anything they have done before, requires so much energy to enable such a change in direction (that has nothing to do with thought), that maybe that burst of energy is the flash of light some people see.

Sometimes people change. They change towns, careers, and partners, but those are all in the realm of thought and memory, there is nothing new. So what makes a man want to give up the life he knows and dedicate it to explore the universe and himself to find out the nature of all things?

What made a selfish man, who spent his time wasting money and getting drunk, embark on a journey that has culminated in writing this book? A thought? A religious experience? Faith in god? I'll tell you. A flash so bright it shook my very being. A flash that caused such disruption in my brain cells that they were physically altered for ever. Who did this? God (as god would say, if you want to attribute it to me, go ahead!), or was it me, or the universal consciousness (if there is such a thing); or was it the whole, the indivisible?

Unfortunately, for the first time since I started this book, I cannot answer my own question. I cannot find out what this flash is in this short discussion; so maybe insight is the eternal, maybe it is the one thing that cannot be described, which cannot be labelled. Maybe god is the label we give to insight. All I know is that insight is a wonderful gift, wherever it comes from. And it can be awoken in everyone.

I n s u r a n c e

The act or an instance of insuring

•

A sum paid out as compensation for some theft, damage, loss etc.

•

A sum paid out

I don't know if you have ever crashed your car, or lost something valuable to you, or had a house fire, a flood, or had something stolen? If you have, you will know it costs a lot of money to replace the items, and as most of us don't have bucket loads of spare cash, we would find ourselves in a bit of a predicament. That's where insurance comes in.

I don't know when it started, but we can assume it had something to do with wealthy people wanting to protect their property, or goods, but you can see the sense in taking it out, after all, insurance takes the “what if?” and “if only,” out of life, even if we are only talking about possessions.

I did not have insurance on my list of topics to write until several weeks ago, a time when I was in the final stages of editing the book.

I had gone on a two week holiday to greece (my first proper holiday for many years), and it was during this time, I realised I had missed an important topic. Let me explain why.

I woke up in the morning with a slight pain in my abdominal area; nothing severe, but nonetheless, uncomfortable. Having had food poisoning abroad on many occasions, I put it down to a dodgy meal the night before, or ice cubes in the water. I got some herbal tablets from the pharmacist, and he told me to take these three times a day, and if it didn't clear up, I should go to the doctor.

Four days later, and it was still there, so I headed down to the local doctor's surgery.

"If you can just fill in this form please, and write down the details of your travel insurance."

"Ah, but I don't have any travel insurance," I replied, now starting to worry I wouldn't have enough money for treatment.

"No travel insurance...?"

"Err, no, how much will it be?"

"Eighty euros."

"Oh, I see."

I couldn't believe I hadn't taken out travel insurance. I guess that because I have been travelling regularly for the past nine years, I had become a little, should we say, blasé about the whole thing. You see, I only considered travel insurance as important if you were carrying a lot of money, or possessions with you, and thought they might get stolen, I never for one moment thought about a medical emergency!

I dutifully handed over the cash, and was informed that I probably had a urinary infection, and was sent off with the usual prescription for antibiotics.

At the pharmacy, the pharmacist told me:

"Remember to keep your receipts, you will be able to claim this back on your travel insurance."

"I don't have travel insurance," I replied, chastising myself for not having ticked the box which said, "Would you like travel insurance?"

I handed over the cash, and started taking my tablets, twice a day, after meals.

One week passed and I still had pain, so I went back to the doctor.

"Yes, I see," said the doctor, "the tablets prescribed are probably not strong enough for you. I will write you another prescription."

I handed over more cash, went back to the pharmacy, handed over more cash, and started taking my tablets, twice a day, after meals.

The next morning, about 5.00 am, I was awoken with a strange pain in my left side. I thought it must be trapped wind, so I sat on the toilet for about fifteen minutes, trying to let it pass, but the pain just intensified. I went out to the balcony, and started to pace up and down, just to relieve the pain, but it didn't help. Within 30 minutes, I was in agony; I couldn't work out what was causing this pain. I went into the shower and just stood with hot water running over my lower back. It gave me slight relief, but as soon as I came out, I felt sick, and disorientated. At this point I started to worry, thinking, "I'm going to have to phone a doctor if this gets any worse."

And it did get worse.

I phoned for an emergency doctor, and although I was in a great deal of pain, couldn't help thinking how much his bill might be for coming out to a hotel room at 6.00 am.

He eventually arrived, prodded me for about a minute, and finally said:

"Kidney stone."

"Kidney stone? How?"

"Oh, there are many causes. I will give you this pain relieving injection, then you should take a taxi up to the private hospital, and see a specialist. Make sure you keep your receipts and then you can reclaim it from your insurance company."

"I, erm, don't have travel insurance, what should I do?"

"Go to the public hospital and wait."

Fortunately, he didn't want any money upfront.

I couldn't stand going on the bus, so I booked a taxi, which cost another 45 euros.

I waited and waited at the public hospital, at which (being a European citizen), I could get free treatment. I may have still been in some pain, but I was glad I was in a European country, and not somewhere where treatment would have cost me my life savings – if I had any!

After what seemed like days, I was finally seen by a nice doctor who did an ultrasound, and confirmed, that yes, I did have a small kidney stone. I should take these pain killers, and go and see my doctor when I got back home.

I took the prescription to the pharmacy, handed over some more cash, and started taking the tablets, three times a day, after meals, and took a taxi back to the hotel.

I returned to the uk the next day, about 350 euros lighter than I expected to be, but glad not to be in pain.

So what's the lesson here? Is there one? Do I only have myself to blame for not taking out travel insurance, or is there something more fundamental going on we should be looking at?

Compatibility test: Insurance vs. Compassion

If only I had taken out insurance, I would have saved myself all of that stress, wouldn't I? If I had just paid the very reasonable sum they were asking when I booked my holiday, I wouldn't have had to worry about going to a private hospital. In fact, I may have gone to the doctor earlier instead of trying to save money by buying the cheap tablets from the pharmacy.

But let's look at this from a different angle, shall we? It seems that these days, we need two things in life – the first being money, and the second, being insurance. But the people who are worst off have neither, so if anything goes wrong for them, they just have to deal with it! There is no one there on the end of the freephone number to say:

“Certainly, mr orr, we'll get your house all fixed up after that flood, and in the meantime, please book yourself into a nice hotel, and we'll pick up the tab.”

No, unfortunately, you're on your own. If you have lost everything, that's your tough luck. You should have studied harder at school, so you could get a better job, so you could pay the very reasonable sum for insuring your house. But no, you chose to miss classes at school, and tried to be cool, by not doing your homework, and the consequences of that, are that you now have a flooded house, ruined possessions, and nowhere to live. Deal with it.

That's not very compassionate, is it? But then, that's how life is these days. You see, every man is an individual, and individuals have to make sure they look out for number one, after all, no one else is going to, are they?

It seems to me we have lost an important part of being human, and that is to help people who are in need, and not ask for anything in return. Sure, we may see appeals on television for some major disaster and get our credit card out, but that's about it. We don't actually want to physically help people, especially in our own country. We seem to think we can only help people who are in an undeveloped country, where we

say, "poor wretches., look at them," and magnanimously pick up the phone and say: "yeah... card number 4453 3221 1321 1321. Yeah... 50 dollars to the people who just had that earthquake.... Sure.... Ok... Thank you... Bye.."

And that's it done. You have shown your compassion, and you return to watching tv, and sipping your tea.

But what if, the next day, your neighbour had a fire? Would you get your credit card out to help him? I seriously doubt it.

You would say, "I hope he's got plenty of insurance," and return to watching tv, and sipping your tea. If you heard, that in fact, he had no insurance, would you be compassionate? Or would you say, "he's only got himself to blame. Everyone knows you need to take out insurance."

That's incredible, isn't it? One day helping out people in some faraway country whom you will never meet, and the next day, ignoring your neighbour, who really needs some help.

Why do you think that is? What is it about the modern society we have created, in which we will help people 3,000 miles away, but not someone who lives in the same street? Maybe, it is because we think the people in the faraway country can't help themselves, but know that our neighbour only had to pick up the phone to arrange insurance.

"You've only got yourself to blame," you tell him.

"Yeah, thanks for your compassion," he replies.

You see, I think insurance takes the compassion out of being human, the feeling that one wants to help their fellow man, in his time of suffering, and replaces it with a policy number. To me, this is just another good example of how far we have come down the road of individualism, compartmentalism, and meism! No longer do we have a community, where we know everyone, and will help people if they need it, now, neighbourly compassion has been replaced with a corporate customer services centre.

We are so wrapped up in "me," that we fail to notice that anyone else exists, unless we happen to catch some emergency relief appeal on the television, which sparks a tiny part of humanity in us (or gives us an opportunity for some guilt relief).

Compassion is about recognising suffering, and wanting to do something about it. Insurance is also about recognising suffering, and wanting to do something about it. But only one is money free, and comes to the aid of his fellow man, just because he can, not because he is a customer.

Prepare for death! Insure yourself!

Insuring your property, your possessions, and your health, are not the only policies available. Oh, no! There are so many more to choose from. But the one I want to talk to you about first is life insurance, where you pay money into a policy for many years, and when you die, it pays out! Surely, this is a joke, right?

“No, it's no joke,” says one of you. “My husband died last year, leaving us with no income, and no way to pay the mortgage. If only he had taken out life insurance, we would have been able to have a happy life. As it is, we will have to sell our house, and move to a tiny apartment.”

So I would say that the man who dies, leaving his wife and family to pay bills, without having taken out life insurance is a *very* selfish man! How dare he die, and leave the family with nothing?

But seriously, I can see the point of life insurance if you are able to cash your cheque at the “bank of the afterlife,” but if that's not possible, I don't think I'll bother. You see, when I die, I die. That is the end for me.

“But what about your family? That's a very selfish attitude to have!” I hear some of you say

Unfortunately, it does sound like a good idea. And that's the problem with insurance. On the face of it, it does seem sensible to prepare for the unexpected, to take the “what if” out of living. So we sign up in our droves, knowing that once we have our policy in place, life can throw its worst at us, and we will be prepared! Because, you see, you must *always* plan for the unexpected. You never know when something bad will happen to you!

Talking of dying...

When I used to live in australia, there were always adverts on television for funeral insurance. Funeral insurance?! I couldn't believe it. And they also made you feel as though you were being selfish, if you didn't have a funeral plan.

(Sad music playing, images of people crying)

“What would your family do if you died unexpectedly? Did you know it can cost up to five thousand dollars for a simple funeral? Five hundred for a priest. One thousand for a casket. Three hundred for flowers.... For only two dollars ninety a week, you can insure...”

I was seriously sickened by this. I couldn't believe that the insurance companies were praying on people's worst fears – not just the fear of death, but the fear of being a financial burden on your family!

In life, we now always assume the worst, and so we insure against it. We now *expect* that things will go wrong (sorry, but where did all this negativity come from?).

Are we so scared of living that we have to prepare for something “bad” happening to us? Yes, it may be unpleasant if there is a fire in your house. Yes, it may be unpleasant if you have your possessions stolen. Yes, it may be unpleasant if you crash your car. But surely, the very act of insuring these items makes the fear of loss greater. You may think it's the opposite, but you see, if you have insurance, it must mean that you are afraid to lose these things, that you are psychologically attached to them.

You may think this is a stupid topic, and that “everybody knows it's sensible to have insurance,” and that actually, I don't know what I'm talking about, but let me ask you one question. Do the animals and the birds need insurance?

Does a bird take out insurance just in case his nest gets destroyed in a storm?

Does a squirrel take out insurance just in case someone steals his nuts!?

Can you see the point I am trying to make? If no other species on earth has insurance, then why does man need it? I will let your over-active mind give you the answer.

“Because, what if a storm comes, and my house is destroyed, it would be terrible, I would lose everything, then what would I do? It would be terrible, I would lose...”

As usual, the whole thing comes down to man's best friend, money.

You see, the bird doesn't need any money to build a new nest, as the materials are free; and the squirrel doesn't need any money to get more nuts, as nuts are free, the only person who needs money is man, as he is the only species that has to pay for food and shelter. Maybe we will all start having to look at our lives more closely to find the real reason we need insurance.

J

J e a l o u s y

Showing extreme cupidity; painfully desirous of another's advantages

•

Suspicious or unduly suspicious or fearful of being displaced by a rival

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A feeling of jealous envy (especially of a rival)

We've all felt jealous at some point, haven't we? It's a natural human emotion they say.

“Why has she got him? She doesn't deserve him, she's nothing. Look at her, she looks cheap. He'd be so much better off with me.”

“Why did he get promoted, he's useless, he doesn't know his job. I taught him everything he knows, none of the staff will respect him.”

“Why were you talking to that woman again, is there something going on between you? She's a bitch, that woman! I hate her.”



Wow! Can you feel that? Have you ever felt like that, maybe without even knowing you are doing it? Do you know what it feels like to me? Pure poison (anything that harms or destroys). Wanting something so much you feel hatred towards the other person for possessing it.

People who are jealous would rarely admit it, even to their closest friends. They would much rather seethe with anger inside. Why? Because to tell someone “they are ugly, don't deserve a man like that, and have terrible taste in clothes” wouldn't look good, would it? We may want what they have, but we would never let others know it. We all want to keep up the appearance we are happy for them, although we may make snide comments under our breath.

Deep down, we know that jealousy is a poisonous feeling. We don't want it, but we just can't help it. We also feel jealous when our partner

talks to someone who we believe is more successful than us, has more money, or who looks more beautiful than us, and we believe our partner may be enticed away and we will be on our own. The more we feel jealous, the more angry we get, and given enough time this may actually lead to physical violence.

Do you not think this is a terrible emotion to have? To feel such anger towards someone; not because of something they have done, but because of something they have that you want (beauty/possessions). Unfortunately, it seems to exist in every one of us. It is not a disease, so why do so many of us have it?

Self-esteem

A feeling of pride in yourself

It starts with a feeling we are inadequate, and we begin to resent other peoples success. We want the powerful job, the fast car, the gorgeous husband and the worse we feel about ourselves the more insatiable the desire becomes. Only through seeing ourselves as worthy can we cure ourselves. The problem starts with one word: Comparing (*examining resemblances or differences*). We compare ourselves to everyone. We compare our waist sizes, our clothes, our cars, our girlfriends, and our wallets.

Situation: Walking around a supermarket.

Thought: “Why is he looking at her, does he think she's more attractive than me?”

Action: “I *saw* you! You're always looking at other women! She's nothing but a cheap tart, I can't believe you prefer her over me.”

Result: Argument with boyfriend/husband. Resentment building on both sides. The man can't believe that the girlfriend/wife is jealous over something he wasn't even really aware of, and the woman begins to wonder if he can be trusted, especially if he's out on his own.

If she were uglier, fatter or wore more unattractive clothes than you, you wouldn't care, would you? No one has ever been jealous of someone with an older car or a worse job. The only time the jealousy monster rears its head is if someone is wealthier than you, or more attractive than you.

Jealousy doesn't care if the person with the large diamond necklace is a horrible person, and you are caring and nice. It only cares about the possessions.

But this only happens when you feel low; when you feel bad about yourself, or you are unhappy with your lot in life, and you feel as though you deserve better. It takes advantage of the fact that you are not feeling positive about your own qualities and offers a solution. "Why has she got it and you haven't, you deserve it more than she does." So you agree with the thought, "Yes I do, I am better than her, I should be wearing the diamond necklace."

If you were happy with yourself, satisfied with, what are in fact, only temporary possessions. If you weren't constantly wanting to be someone else, but content to just be you, comparison would not begin. Why would you compare yourself to someone who had a diamond necklace and expensive clothes if you never had a desire to possess them?

Greed

Excessive desire to acquire or possess more (especially more material wealth) than one needs or deserves

For many thousands of years now, humans have been attempting to acquire more and more wealth; and for some people, it is never enough. Look at the possessions of kings and queens. They had huge wealth, but wanted more; and even now, in the twenty first century, the acquisition of material wealth is number one on our priority list – but as usual, we would never admit it.

Imagine this scenario. You and your neighbour both have a similar size house, earn equivalent salaries, and drive similar cars, but one day your neighbour comes home with a brand new ferrari. How do you feel? For some time now you have been on an equal par, but now he has upped the stakes by buying a sports car. Can you say that you're not just a little bit envious?

Now imagine this scenario. You meet a friend in the street, you talk for a moment and she tells you she has to go because her husband is taking her to the new five star hotel for the weekend. Why doesn't your husband take you there? He never takes you to nice places like that. How do you feel? Even the slightest bit jealous? Of course you do. Where comparison meets greed, jealousy and envy arise.

To find out why we are greedy, we have to go into this a bit more deeply. When we have food, clothing and shelter we have enough to survive.

When we have someone to share our life with and bring children up with, we have all that is necessary for the survival of the species. But being human is not just about surviving, is it? If we all just “survived” and were happy with that, there would be no trouble in the world, but somehow our minds have become sick and we make ourselves better by gaining more than the next man, our nearest rival.

Make no mistakes about it, greed is not a “sin,” it is a sickness of the mind. Somewhere along the line we have realised we can have more than we possibly could ever need. We have become hoarders, and we want more and more items. Seeing as we can't take them with us when we die why do you think this is important to us?

It seems pervasive throughout societies worldwide rich and poor. The poor man wants to become rich and the rich man wants to become richer.

Biologically, greed is a meaningless pursuit. There is only so much we can eat and drink, but psychologically is where greed is limitless. Somehow wires have become crossed, and the brain thinks it should have more and more, and let's face it, the more we have, the more secure we feel. The more we have, the less fear we feel.

Rich people always look so much more relaxed, wouldn't you say? They don't have to worry about a thing. They can always buy more of what they desire, whereas the poor man is always struggling and striving to make enough money to buy what he needs, let alone desires; but the feeling is still there. In the back of his mind, the poor man wants more. He desires to become rich and sometimes will stop at nothing to get what he wants. Robbing banks is just one example of this.

The poor man desires what the rich man has, and because he does not know how to get it by working, plans to steal it instead. He envies the rich man's lifestyle, his car, his house, his glamorous wife, and thinks that if only he could get enough money he would be happy.

I have never robbed a bank, but I have borrowed and run up credit card bills – all because I was greedy, and wanted more than I had. It was only in the last couple of years that instead of acquiring items, I have been getting rid of them. I suddenly realised that by having enough to eat, warm clothing and a simple place to sleep, I had enough personal items. The rest are just a burden.

The more we acquire, the more we need to protect it, in case someone else tries to steal it. So we buy locks for our houses, alarms for our cars

and use banks to keep our money in. We fail to see the connection between our greed for more and the man who wants more but has no means to earn it.

We pour scorn on those who steal from us – we label them, and we lock them up. “Criminals!” we say, “why don't they get jobs and earn it for themselves, instead of stealing from us? We who have worked so hard to get all this stuff!”

But don't you see? The thief and the rich man both the same; they are both engaged in greed, but they think they are different. The only difference is that the rich man has gone to work for it (maybe exploiting people, harming the environment and stepping on anyone who gets in his way), whereas the thief decides to take the, shall we say, more direct route! But as he routinely engages in violence to get what he wants, he is singled out, and put behind bars. It doesn't matter what harm the businessman has done to others or the planet, because he followed the law – and that is all that is important.

In our western societies, we have been taught that greed is good. Greed is to be encouraged, and the developing countries are catching up fast. Yet they fail to see that the benefits of greed – although material – rest firmly in the mind. “I am happy for now” your mind says, “we've got lots of nice things, but how about us going out and getting some more?” It's no wonder people start to feel jealous. If the educators and the government tell you greed is good, then why shouldn't you have it! It's your right.

So how do we transcend this sickness if there is no magic pill for it?

How much is really enough?

We are all engaged in status battles with our peers, that is clear. Individuals, husbands and wives try harder and harder to impress their friends and family with how well they are doing. It is a measure of themselves you see, it is who they are. It is their self-esteem. It is everything. The sports car, the gold and diamond jewellery, the attractive partner, the large house, the privately educated children, the holiday home abroad, all represent the sum total of these people. All made possible through greed, supported by the powerful (greed keeps the economy ticking over nicely you see, and a strong economy means re-election).

But suppose I wake up one morning and decide that enough is enough. I begin to understand that greed is keeping me trapped in an endless battle to earn more money with no end in sight, so I give everything of value away. I buy a small house, give up my car, start to grow my own vegetables, try to live as simply as possible and take a job working for the benefit of all, in a way that does not harm humans, animals, or the planet etc. What happens to my status in the community?

Well it's quite clear. They probably think I've had a nervous breakdown! My partner will probably not want to be with me anymore because they were used to showing off their riches, to show how much wealthier they were than their friends. My children will hate me because they can no longer have the latest game consoles or mp3 players, so they also can no longer show off to their friends either. Your friends and family will not understand why, after working so long and so hard for something, that you could give it up, but what has this shown you? What have you learnt from this experience?

What you have learned, I believe, is a great deal about other people. You can see why they like you, and why they respect you. It is not as you believed, "because you are a really nice guy," it's because of what you have in material possessions, that's all. Soon, your fancy friends will stop phoning you because you have become an embarrassment to them at parties, your wife will file for divorce, and your kids will probably prefer to live with mum's new boyfriend who drives a sports car like you had and has even more money than you used to have!

What does this really teach us about others? What can we see straight away, now we have nothing but the basics necessary for living? Think about this carefully for a moment, for it is of the utmost importance.

You have stripped your life down to the absolute minimum of bolt-ons, but you are still you. You are no different. You are still attractive, you still have your humour, your personality, but others don't care about that. They are only interested in the bolt-ons, the status and the possessions; what you can physically give them. It is sad to note that this is pervasive throughout our modern society. "How can I be with him now he has nothing, what will people think of me?"

We just can't stop comparing. We never once stop to think that it is us who are empty, our minds sick with greed and envy, desiring more and more, whilst the man who has transcended greed through choice and personal action has no need to feel jealous of anyone anymore. Do you see? He had everything, and now he has given it up to live as himself. The only reason we become jealous is because we want what someone

else has. If you no longer want it, because you see the damage that jealousy is doing to your mind, then you are free.

Watch yourself closely

As I have said in other topics, I have spent the last few years unburdening my life. That does not mean I do not appreciate nice furniture, or the skill and design that has gone into a sports car, or the beauty of a diamond necklace; I just do not see the need to possess them. For me, the most important thing in life is to live well, to be kind to my friends, family, and strangers, and to learn about myself and others. I like to laugh; I like to play; I like to discuss, and I like to read. Above all, I never take life too seriously.

The more we start to possess, the more we have to be serious, the more work we have to do, the more people we hurt along the way. I cannot urge you to stop being greedy, for it is inherent in society. I cannot urge you to stop being jealous. But recognise that jealousy is not in your nature, and neither is greed. These are all learned behaviours which can be unlearned. Do not ask yourself “why am I jealous?” or “why am I greedy?” You just are.

Acceptance is the first step to unlearning. The next step is awareness of yourself in action.

Just watch yourself closely until you catch yourself saying, “why does he earn more money than me...” or “I wish my partner would buy me a necklace like that...” or “why isn't my husband as good looking as that man, I wish I could swap.” The moment you catch yourself in action is the moment you will wake up.

When you see the beauty of life in all its simplicity, you will be free, and you will know that time. One morning when you wake up, life will just seem different. The material things you used to place importance on will no longer be important. Having more money, being jealous of your wealthy friend with his beautiful wife, or envious of your neighbour's sports car, will all seem like a dream.

J o b s 1

The principal activity in your life that you do to earn money

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The responsibility to do something

This is the big one, the one you spend most of your life doing. Something you do at least five days a week and spend eight hours a day at; so you better enjoy it, right? You've finished school, you took your exams, passed or failed. Now what? Depending on your results and what you're interested in, you may find yourself as a trainee barrister, trainee engineer, trainee accountant, trainee doctor, or you may find yourself with the rest of us, not knowing what to do. The only thing you're sure about is you know you are supposed to get a job to earn money, to pay your bills, to contribute to society. Welcome to adult life.

You may be 16, 18 or 21, depending on when you left school, but this is all new, this responsibility. It only seems like yesterday when you were playing in the school yard, laughing with friends, learning about life, growing up, experimenting. Suddenly, it's all gone, that life, and you are now on your own.

What does that mean to you as a young person? What are you expected to do? What is your role in life supposed to be? Who are you? Well, the one thing you are, is a fully fledged adult (according to law) and as such, you will be welcomed with new temptations, such as alcohol to make the pain of adult life more bearable, and cigarettes to help relieve the daily stress. As long as it's legal, nobody cares – your parents won't, and the government certainly won't. You are now old enough to make your own choices.

In some countries, alcohol and cigarettes are not legal until you are 18 or 21, but you are usually still old enough to work and pay taxes as an adult at 16. It's all a bit strange all this. One day you were a schoolboy, and the next, you are an adult. It's not like driving, you don't get L plates to wear round your neck for the first two years. You're straight in, no allowances. Oh, and by the way, you are also now old enough to get shot for your country.

There are so many choices, so many types of jobs. Factory jobs, catering jobs, management jobs, administration jobs, carpentry jobs, retail jobs, sales jobs, even self-employed jobs. There is a huge choice – for some. For others, it's more difficult. They didn't pass their exams, or they live in a town where employment is scarce, and they have to take the first thing that comes up. One thing's for sure though, the only reason you're taking a job is because you need the money. Just imagine for a moment that you win the lottery. You have just won millions of dollars!

“Congratulations! What will you do now?” the interviewer asks.

“Well, I'm going to take my whole family on holiday, buy a new car, and move house. I will give some away to charity, and I'm going to pay off the mortgage on my brother's house.”

“That's very nice of you,” says the interviewer. “Do you think you'll go back to work on monday?”

“Sure, just to pick up my things and tell them I'm not coming back.”

Is earning money my main purpose in life?

Everything costs money – even the basics like food, water, shelter, heat and clothing. There is nothing for free. Even if you want to grow your own vegetables, you have to have rent or buy land to grow them on. Everything costs something.

Although you may be able to barter for some goods, large electricity, telephone and mortgage companies aren't interested in what services you

can offer them in exchange, they want paid in hard currency, (the paper medium of exchange that is currently used.) and there's only one way to get it – hard work.

When you're still at school, you don't have to think about this. Your parents provide all the basic necessities for you and more. Children aren't really aware of how things appear at the table, or how a new toy came to be in their possession, they just arrive, and that's a child's prerogative. It's when you stop being a child that the realisation comes as to how you get all the things you want. Work. W-O-R-K.

How many people can honestly say they like going to work? I know some, but most people would prefer to do be doing something else, doing something more constructive with their time. As one person I know put it: “Work gets in the way of things you love doing like your hobbies, or spending time with your family.”

We don't want to spend time with people we don't know and may not like, doing a job we don't really like, eight hours a day, five days a week. We certainly wouldn't spend that time on a hobby we didn't like or spend eight hours a day with friends we didn't like! So either some of us actually do like our jobs, or we're doing it just for the money.

Some people have fulfilling jobs don't they? They find them fulfilling because they are actually getting paid for something they enjoy doing, and there is no specific job that fits this description, everybody's idea of fulfilling work is different.

I worked in information technology for several years. I started at the bottom, and through a good bit of luck rather than design, managed to work my way up to several managerial positions. I jumped around from contract to contract, always earning a good bit more than before, and the work was interesting – all big projects to put in new systems, never a dull moment.

I really enjoyed my time doing it, but looking back, I asked myself would I have chosen information technology as my career if the money hadn't been so good, as I certainly could never see myself going back to that life now; I would find it immensely boring and unstimulating. So I asked myself: “what would you have done instead?” But I couldn't answer. I just fell into information technology; it wasn't the thing I really liked, it just paid the bills, and as a side effect, was actually quite interesting.

When you start a job, you may hate it straight away, but as time goes on, you start to enjoy going. You meet different people, complain about

the bosses, have lunch together, go for a smoke together, maybe a drink after work. It's almost like an extended family.

Work also gives you a reason for getting up in the morning, seeing as the days of hunting and gathering have long since passed. You may complain about hating your job, but the regularity of the income, and the things money provides, gives you a gentle reminder that although you don't like the work, it sure is better than sitting around the house with no money; because although everyone says they'd rather be at home doing their hobbies, or playing with their children, what they omit to tell you is, "as long as I had enough money."

As I well know, sitting at home when you're poor is a miserable experience, especially when you start seeing the bills coming in every day and you have no way of paying them. Believe me, spending time with your family or enjoying your hobbies isn't so much fun anymore when you know you may be evicted from your home. They take a back seat until you find regular work again, and once your back on your feet financially, you can start complaining about work, and wishing you were at home with your family, enjoying your hobbies.

Although everyone would like to be doing what they love, one thing stops them – money; or rather, the lack of it. If you think life's difficult with money, try life without it. Although some people manage ok.

Monks spend their time in quiet contemplation in their monasteries, and generally never carry money, proving you don't need worldly possessions – but remember, someone's paying for their food, the upkeep of the monastery, the purchase of the land, and their shoes. They may have no need for money, but that's because all of their expenses are picked up by their relevant religious institutions who get their money in turn from you, who has to go to work to earn it!

Money is critical to our existence now. We can't operate without it. We have discussed barter in another topic, but as you may remember an airline won't accept three sacks of potatoes from a farmer to pay for his holiday flights! And for good reason. What would they do if everyone was paying them in produce, plumbing services, massages and upholstery? Barter works at its best between two individuals who both require each other's services and can be effective, but let's get back to the topic at hand.

Whatever we do, we expect to be paid for it, whether in cash or as a barter agreement – that is called a job. We all need one. It is our responsibility as adults to have one, and without one we'd all be in a pretty sorry state. The question is, what job?

We have already discussed that even if we enjoy our work, the purpose of going every day is to earn money. Without earning this money, life on earth would be difficult for all of us, even to have the most basic existence. Throughout the world you have seen people without money, and they have to rely on other people to earn it for them, to be distributed through the government social welfare system or in extreme cases through international aid.

We need work to keep our self-esteem high, to feel worthwhile as a human being, so it is no wonder that people feel depressed when unemployed. Everyone needs to feel purpose in life, and there is no nobler purpose than going to work to earn money to feed and clothe your family, provide a roof over their heads and enjoy yourself once in a while. So whilst earning money may not be the meaning of life, it certainly is the purpose for which all adults go to work every day. No man can search for meaning when he's hungry.

J o b s 2

The principal activity in your life that you do to earn money

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The responsibility to do something

As I travel around during the day, I take pleasure watching people engaged in their work, not because I like to see other people working instead of me, but to see the complex human, and what he is capable of physically, and mentally.

**Counting, adding, typing.
Designing, cutting, building.
Thinking, talking, deciding.
Lifting, packing, driving.**

We're amazing aren't we? Who could have thought we could have evolved into a being capable of such complex tasks? I don't think most of us realise how brilliant we are!

As I sit here typing, a thought comes almost instantaneously; my brain sends messages down the arms, to the fingers which have learned where each key is, and words automatically appear on a screen. The sheer complexity of making a wrist and finger move to a thought. That the word appears in my head and all my fingers move to type it is the most amazing thing. Think about it for a moment. Now think that a human has also designed the computer I am typing this into.

Most of us have no idea how the words get onto the screen, what a screen is made of, and how our work is saved to something called a hard disk. We just accept that it happens, the same as being able to type. But you try asking another species to type, or design a computer!

We are the most intelligent beings on the planet with superior intelligence, articulate speech, and erect carriage. We have created musical symphonies, built bridges, sent men into outer space, and built buildings in the sky where people can live. We have designed machines that can fly. We have designed systems where we can talk to people who live thousands of miles away. We can send moving images through the airwaves. We can see at night, thanks to electric light. We can keep food fresh for months by freezing it. We can keep warm at night without lighting fires thanks to central heating. Those are just a few examples of a list that could last pages and pages.

We have indeed achieved a lot, through our capacity for complex thought, thanks to our amazing bodies. That's why it makes me sad to see some humans engaged as machines. Human beings working in jobs that require them to use nothing more than their labour; jobs that require little, or no thought. Why? Because they need money, and they failed their exams at school. No human is born not to use their brain for eight to nine hours of the day; our brains have the capacity to do great things, even if we did fail our exams. Some people just aren't good at tests, or they've had a difficult upbringing, but the fact remains that as a human, you have a huge brain just waiting to be used.

Modern business is organised around larger-scale companies, with a hierarchy that has few bosses, and is bottom heavy with workers employed for their labour only – much like an army. With the advent of the modern production line (*mechanical system in a factory whereby an article is conveyed through sites at which successive operations are performed on it*) which facilitates fast construction of items, each employee is only required to do a small part (no craftsman is responsible for making the whole product). This requires skills which can be easily be learned with on the job training.

In the beginning, the work may seem difficult, but like driving a car, the more you do it, the easier it gets, It becomes a subconscious process, where you can think about other things when doing it. The modern office is organised in the same way, only pieces of paper are processed instead of products.

Business leaders, economists, and governments will always argue that a certain percentage of workers will always have manual machine-like jobs, and they are correct. You see, without humans engaged in this type of work, products wouldn't get made, companies wouldn't make money, employees wouldn't get paid, taxes wouldn't get paid, social services would collapse, (roads, education, health) and society as we know it, would collapse, leading to an eventual breakdown in law and order and eventually anarchy – and nobody wants that, do they?

So, although education is high on the governments list “*everyone has the right to an education,*” they don't want everyone “too” educated, as that would upset the fine balance that needs to be achieved. They still need to provide employment to people with low academic achievement so they can afford food, clothing, and rent, and leave them with some money to spend on entertainment, otherwise they may find themselves with some very unhappy voters, who fail to return them to power at the next election! So the employers don't want everybody to be a deep thinker do they?

Imagine if you had gone to university for four years, were well educated, used creative thought and were put on a production line that required no thought? Actually, imagine a whole factory staffed by university professors! They wouldn't stay longer than a week, unless they were desperate, but even then, they would find it intolerable. They would argue with their supervisors that this “wasn't the best way to do it, and had they considered doing it another way?” Why? Because they were using their brains, something that is definitely not encouraged on a production line (or indeed the army). People must obey orders, they must conform, otherwise there would be chaos.

Companies may have “employee consultations” where they discuss proposals for changes, or ask for employee input; but in reality, the managers are the ones doing the thinking – that's what they get paid for. They get paid to think, and workers get paid to do. If you have too many ideas or disagree too much with the way that things are being done, you may find yourself labelled a “troublemaker,” and be on the next list for redundancy. So in order to keep your job, it's better to just keep your mouth shut and not think too much.

I am not saying that everyone's jobs are on a production line, or in an office moving paper, that is merely a couple of examples. What I want to discuss, is jobs where you don't have to use that big brain of yours; where the tasks are so (relatively) easy for someone with this kind of brain capacity, that the job becomes monotonous, yet you can't leave, because you need the money.

How many of us are stuck in jobs where we can't use our brain, but have had to stay because we have taken a mortgage, bought a car, are raising a family, and have credit card debts? The sad thing is we just give up sometimes. Society tells us that this is our place. We failed our exams at school so we are destined for a lifetime of misery, doing a job that makes us no better than a machine. All for what? A bit of money?

We are here for such a short time on the planet that it seems such a shame to waste the brain we have. You and I are the same; you and the boss are the same; and if you're the boss reading this, you and the employees are all the same.

We all have brains of approximately the same capacity, it just depends on how much you use them. If you are told that because you failed your exams, you are written off as a human being. They couldn't be more wrong. Exams are just indicators of how much you remember of a subject, and if you weren't interested, didn't study, or were distracted by social or family problems, it's no wonder you didn't pass! It doesn't mean you're stupid, or don't have a brain. You just aren't using it.

So now, imagine you could do any job you wanted, what would it be?

Any job you wanted

Would it be the same job as you're doing now? I would guess that unless you were doing a job that used your brain and one that interested you, the answer would be no.

Job now: Cleaner

Job wanted: Cleaner

We all have what we call dreams. We have jobs we would like to do, no matter what field they are in, whether in science, arts, aerospace, or industry. These are the jobs, that given the chance, we would love to do.

Let me ask you a question. If there was a twenty year old factory worker whose job it was to sweep the floors, could he become an

engineer? Could an office clerk become an airline pilot, or a cleaner a doctor? The answer depends on two things: First, on the length of time they have left their brain unused (a fifty year old man who has never used his brain may find it more difficult to learn something new), and second, how much the person really wants to do the job. If you really wanted to be a doctor, I mean really wanted to, you could. You only have to be deeply interested in it, and when you're that interested in something, you are prepared to do whatever it takes to learn it, no matter how long.

The trick is to not leave your brain ticking over in idle too long. Your brain is like a ferrari just waiting for you to put your foot on the accelerator to show you what it can do. Your brain is the most powerful thing on the planet and maybe even the universe. Don't let society condition you into believing that you are not capable of magnificent things. You are not just a worker, you are amazing. You are a human being; you must not let anyone set your limits.

If companies want machines they should build them, not use you. You are not a machine. The possibilities for work (which we have shown is necessary to earn money) are endless, although money should not be the only reason you go to work. Think now about the type of work you would like to do. It may seem outrageous to you that it could be possible, and your friends, colleagues, and family may also tell you that it's impossible.

“What? You, a doctor? Ha! Don't make me laugh”

People are always jealous of someone who wants to use their mind and isn't prepared to be labelled *worker*. They may want to do something different too, but were too embarrassed to mention it in case anyone laughed at them. Take the courage to learn more, to do the job you have always wanted to do; after all, the world will be a better place when more people start using their brains. Think about this for a moment. Can you see the possibilities?

The path you want is not always the easiest to navigate, but if you really want it, you will find a way, whether you have a mortgage, credit card debt or two children.

This is your one chance at life to do the thing you have always wanted to do. Take it. Don't spend nine hours a day wishing you were somewhere else. If you really want to, you can be somewhere else doing what you want to do and getting paid for it. You have nothing to lose.

J o b s 3

The principal activity in your life that you do to earn money

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The responsibility to do something

I recently asked myself the question: “What work have you done to help the world be a better place today?” To be honest with you, I had to say, nothing. Sure, I have contributed to the world by being a cog in the wheel that lets people be fed, bridges be built, televisions be bought, houses be built and armies conquer nations. I have gone to work, earned enough money to pay my bills. I have paid taxes to the government for the benefit of society and had enough money left over to buy a few consumer goods, go on a couple of holidays and generally have a nice time.

Then I asked myself a second question. “Has any work you have ever done furthered the cause of humanity.” “What a deep question to ask yourself,” I thought! I racked my brain and could honestly say that nothing I had done in my life had furthered the cause of humanity. If you asked yourself the same two questions, what would your answer be?

It's a tough question, because although many people do good work every day, helping people and healing them, they would have great difficulty quantifying whether they were furthering the cause of humanity. So I think we need to re-phrase the questions don't you. How about:

“What work have I done to make the world a worse place today?”
“Has any work I have ever done worsened the cause of humanity?”

To most of us who work in regular jobs, we wouldn't think anything we were doing made the world a worse place, especially if the work we were doing was legal.

Legal

Established by or founded upon law or official or accepted rules

I'm sure the man who works packing cigarettes in the factory or the person delivering them to the stores, or the shop assistant selling them doesn't think they are making the world a worse place. It's not their fault if someone over the legal age for smoking dies of lung cancer, that's a personal choice. All they are doing is their job. What about the man who works in the gun factory. All he does is assemble one part of the item, he doesn't care if it's a real gun or a toy, he's just doing his job. He has to pay his bills too. The same goes for the man delivering them or the store that sells them. They don't kill people. They're just doing their job. He's not doing anything *illegal*.

If you were to ask the man in the gun factory why he does what he does, what do you think he'd say? I'd think he'd be annoyed he was being asked such a question!

“I've worked here twenty years. I've never had a sick day in my life. I pay my taxes and my bills on time, and I have brought up two children who are both law abiding and at university. I volunteer at my local hospital. I do not do anything wrong. I'm just a hard working citizen of this country who only has ten years left until retirement. Even if I wanted to, there's no point in me giving up my job, there's plenty of people willing to take it over. There isn't too much employment around here, so what would I do? I'd be unemployed, I wouldn't get my pension, and I'd have a tough life. No thanks. Until someone tells me the work I'm doing is *illegal*, I'll keep coming to work every day so I can keep paying my bills.”

Most of you would find it hard to find fault with what he's saying. After all, he does have a point. His aim is to find work to earn money which he does. Employment in his area is hard to come by, and anyway, he quite enjoys his job. He knows it's mundane, but he likes the people there, and he's doing a great service to the nation assembling guns for the army. He has achieved everything he set out to do. He would vehemently deny he is contributing to the death of thousands of people around the world, killed by the very weapon he helped assemble.

"I have never fired a gun in my life, I don't fight with anybody, and I am a peaceful man who is just going about his own business, and by the way, I don't make the bullets! That's what kills people, not guns."

Like everybody in the world he has a family to feed and look after, but then again, so does the man who has just been killed by the gun he helped manufacture.

Would you do anything for money?

I'm not talking about selling drugs, or robbing banks. I'm talking about a job in a real company that makes or sells items that are legal. I do not wish to get into a discussion with you about morals and ethics. There is no such thing as right and wrong here, that is all a matter of personal opinion. I may think that the man selling cigarettes is helping people kill themselves, but he thinks he's providing a public service.

Cigarettes, weapons, and alcohol, are not the only businesses in the world *not* furthering the cause of humanity, but they certainly are responsible for more deaths than the agricultural trade spraying our crops with poisons, or the soft drink companies and fast food companies addicting our children; although they are catching up. At least you can see the result of an automatic machine gun having been fired, it's a lot harder to measure the health costs of the use pesticides and insecticides.

So would I do anything for money? No I wouldn't, but only because I am aware of the knock on effects of seemingly innocuous actions.

Think about this scenario for a moment. Who is to blame for the death of the man in who was robbed in the street; is it the man who fired the trigger? Or is it the government for legalising guns; or the woman who packed the bullets into the box; or the man who sold the gun; or the woman who works in the accounts department of the gun company who paid the supplier for the raw materials to make the gun; or the shareholder; or the computer company that provides their pc's; or the

electricity company who keeps the production line running? Who is ultimately responsible? Legally only one. The man who fired the bullet.

“Quite right” says you, “he is the only man who broke the law. He is a murderer. He should face the death penalty. He is evil.”

Wait a minute though. If no one had made the gun or sold the gun, he would have found it a lot more difficult to kill the man he was robbing. “But,” says you, “he would have probably have used a knife if he hadn't had a gun...”

Nobody wants to take responsibility for the effects their jobs have on the world. The man who screws the wing onto the fighter aircraft, thinks he is no more responsible for the deaths of a thousand people who die in a bombing raid, than the man who types up advertising brochures for the cigarette company he works for. In their opinion, the only person responsible is the one who carries out the action; the person who smokes the cigarette, or who fires the gun. But we are all part of the chain when we work. We are all ultimately responsible.

Think about what you do, what company you work for, and what they do. If you don't know, find out. Is anything you or they do contributing to making the world a worse place?

Of course, if you work sweeping the floor at a fast food chain you wouldn't really care, it's just a job to pay the bills, but if we all think like that we will never be able to make the world a better place for ourselves. If we stop thinking about our own personal needs for a moment, and start to see the bigger picture, we will begin to understand that choosing work that is good for the world can only benefit us all in the long term. I am not talking about doing voluntary work.

As we discussed in part one, we need to earn money to survive in the modern society, it is the type of organisation we own or work for that is important. The way we can evaluate the impact our job is having on the world is by making a simple positive and negative comparison list:

Fast food company

Positive:

1. The fast food chain creates jobs for the local economy.
2. They provide cheap food quickly.

Negative:

1. Litter in the streets.
2. Huge volume of packaging used.

3. Addicting children and adults to unhealthy foods.
4. Helps make every high street look the same, forces out local restaurants who can't compete with such cheap food.
5. Helping create a society that rushes eating, and doesn't respect the effort that goes in to cooking a meal.
6. Clearing of forests to graze cattle.
7. Waste of resources on something not beneficial to the system.

By doing this we can start to get a clear view in our mind of the negative sides to the company we run, or are employed by, thus enabling us to start a conversation with our employer about concerns we have, or more likely (due to not wishing to be sacked), leave the job and find one that fits in better with our personal ethics. The most important time to make this list though is before starting work for an employer. Most of us know the right questions to ask at an interview. "What is the salary? What are the career prospects, the health plan benefits, holidays..? But how many people have ever asked a prospective employer:

“What is the negative impact of your business on the world as a whole?”

It certainly isn't a question I have ever asked, have you? Why? Because we want the job. We want what it offers us. We want the package that enables us to have a comfortable lifestyle. We don't really want to jeopardise that by asking questions that might embarrass our future employer do we?

Interviewer: So do you have any other questions about our gun making business?

You: Well you've pretty much covered everything except... could you tell me what the negative impact of your business on the world is please?

Interviewer: Sorry, I don't follow.

You: Well, does the business impact anyone negatively?

Interviewer: No, we have a great employee loyalty scheme, we donate one percent of our profits to charities and help people in third world. We also give money to the local schools.

You: That's not quite what I meant. Does your business harm anyone else's lives in the world?

Interviewer: Well, our guns kill people if that's what you mean, but our business has a social responsibility program. We recycle eighty percent our waste, we have solar power in the factory, we collect rainwater for use in production, and we have summer barbecues every year for disadvantaged children. Any other questions?

Please think about this carefully for a moment. This may sound like an extreme example, but it isn't. Either the people who work for, and run companies are aware of the harm their primary products do (and try to cover it by doing "good work" in the local community, as a smokescreen to their real activities), or nobody actually cares what they do to earn money.

What does your company do?

It may be that you sell clothes, not guns, but where are the fabrics made? Are they produced in some sweat shop where the people work twelve hour days, and earn less than you spend on a soft drink? Or do you sell cars or computers which use massive resources from the earth to manufacture? It's no good saying, "well, if I don't do it someone else will" or "if people didn't want to buy the products they don't have to;" it really is *your* personal responsibility to do work, that not only gives you money to live and enjoy your life, but also does nothing to negatively impact someone else's life. Their life is as important as yours.

It may be that you ignore this section because it is a difficult one to come to terms with. What we are saying here is that by not engaging in employment that has a negative impact on the world (people or environment), the negative effect of that work will disappear. By doing work which positively impacts the world, we are contributing to making life better for everyone.

We are the most intelligent species on the planet, but sometimes it seems as though we are also the most stupid, selfish, arrogant, uncaring, cruel species on the planet. I'm sure there are no other species here that could be labelled as all those things.

Life isn't just about one person earning money, owning a house a car, and having a family and taking two holidays a year. Life is about people. Six *billion* people and their right to enjoy a short life here whilst not being negatively impacted by other people on the planet.

It seems to me that most of us are only concerned with what we can get now – money, status, power, control. We don't care about anything else. We want to earn a lot of money to have a rich, easy life, and we don't care how we get it; and we sure don't care about what will happen to the planet in 200 years, we'll be long gone; it will be someone else's problem. Meanwhile, we're going to have a good time.

I hope I am not right? Am I?

K

K i l l i n g

An event that causes someone to die

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The act of terminating a life

We all hear that “killing is wrong,” yet we all do it every day. “Not me,” says you, “I have never killed anything or anyone in my life, I am a lifelong vegan and do not eat or wear any animal products or by-products.”

I too do not knowingly eat any animal products, nor knowingly wear animal products, but that's not to say that I'm not a cold blooded killer!

The vegetarian cold blooded killer

I believe that all life is precious, and should be preserved, but a lion would disagree with me. For me it's a philosophical and ethical choice, for the lion, it's the choice between life and death (his). He has to eat meat; he has no method of processing, letting alone finding, potatoes and

carrots! So my view on killing is instantly different from an animal who requires meat to stay alive.

One day we may all be vegetarians, and no one will have to put up with the gory sight of a predator tearing apart its prey; instead it will be the carrots being brutally torn from the soil using machines!

As a recent (seven years) vegetarian, I have often heard people using the argument:

“You say you don't eat meat, but how do you know that the vegetables aren't suffering, hmm, what about that, vegetarian?”

To which I have to reply, “you're right, I have no idea if the vegetables suffer, but until I hear evidence that they do, I think I'll keep eating them!”

But it did start me thinking.

When I chose not to eat meat, I, like most people who have become vegetarian, was probably thinking about large animals, or at least animals, birds and fish I used to eat like beef from cows, chicken, haddock, pork from pigs, etc. I wasn't really considering the entire population of tiny animals, insects or microbes.

For me, choosing not to eat meat was a statement. A statement that it's wrong to kill animals, and that man does not have to be a meat eater to live a healthy life. Looking back, I seem to have missed out several thousand species that it seems I was prepared to kill without a second thought! Those include ants in my kitchen, all the bugs on my windscreen and headlights I have summarily executed at 130 kilometres per hour; all the creatures that have habitats in the grass where I have run them over and chopped them up with the lawn mower; entire colonies of germs in my toilet, assassinated with bleach; and millions of micro-organisms in the cows milk before it was pasteurised (when I used to drink milk); not forgetting the mosquitoes I squashed on holiday last year.

So you see, I am a hypocrite. Every day I walk around in my big shoes stamping everywhere without a second thought for the tiny creatures that may be on the pavement – I'm too busy to be worrying about that!

When I was volunteering on the scottish island last year, we used seaweed from the beach to mix with our compost, thereby destroying the habitat of millions of tiny creatures. Without the habitat I had destroyed, they would then die. I can hear you now shouting, “killer!” So just because I eat no animal products do not be fooled by the peaceful exterior. Inside, I'm as cold blooded as the lion who tears his victim

apart. Except I don't eat the creatures I kill, I just casually leave them on the path to die in agony.

Last night as I was walking up the path to my house, I heard this crunch underfoot, and as I looked down I could see I had crushed a snail. "Oh I'm so sorry" I said, but it didn't hear me. It didn't nod and say, "oh, that's ok, it happens all the time, don't worry, there's a million more like me, we're used to being stepped on." I just had to pick it up and put it in the bushes where it probably died or maybe is still suffering.

Oh well, as long as I can't see it suffering, that's ok. The same goes for any animal that gets in the way of the car as I am driving along country roads. Bam! And that's the end of it for them (or maybe they suffer for some time before dying).

The thing is, we are tuned into the suffering of larger animals more because their cries seem to have an emotive effect on us. If you have ever heard a pig or cow suffering when they are being killed you will know what I mean. The difference with the tiny creatures, insects especially, is that they don't make any noise at all, they just squirm about until after a short time they stop moving, and we can pronounce them dead.

My mother taught me a great trick with ants in the back garden. First, boil a kettle of water. Second, take said water and pour all over ants. Ants then seem to disappear and don't come back for a while. Wonderful. All without the use of harmful chemicals. An organic solution! The environmentalists would like that.

I never stopped to consider what was actually happening when the water hits the ants bodies at 100°C. I am not sure of the technical details, but I can imagine what would happen if someone poured the equivalent temperature for our size, on us. Excruciating pain followed by death, I would guess. The difference between the ants and us is (a) we scream and they don't, and (b) we think ants are pests. We do not know what part they have to play in the ecosystem, they aren't cute and cuddly like a labrador, there's billions of them, and actually, we're scared of them! In the great battle for survival, the resourceful human invents as many nasty ways to dispose of things he (a) doesn't understand and (b) doesn't like.

I guess that by eating non-organic carrots I am a vegetarian cold-blooded killer because they spray the carrots (and all veg) with pesticides (*a chemical used to kill pests*). Oh, and don't forget herbicides (*a chemical agent that destroys plants or inhibits their growth*) that are designed to kill anything man considers a weed. I wonder how many micro-organisms and small creatures I have been responsible for the death of? Probably more than a couple, I'd say.

Every time man (oh, that's you and me by the way) gets an idea into his head about how to better his lot, someone else's ecosystem suffers. When a forest is logged for example, how many different species die or lose their habitat? But who really cares? We get nice desks, chairs, paper, etc. and our needs are greater than anyone else's, right?

Imagine if all these creatures had the use of language and organised themselves as humans do, how different would it be?

Us: Right then squirrel, badger, fox, and owl, we're logging this forest and there's nothing you can do about it!

Them: That's what you think. We're taking this case to the court of human rights!

Us: Eh?

We don't like a fair fight, we like an easy fight; and animals, birds, fish, small creatures (not to mention the ones we can only see under a microscope) are just that. Easy. They can't talk back. They can't fight back. They suffer silently. They die quietly. They are no match for our technology and our weaponry. We are the supreme hunter. We won. We're the top dog!

But like everything we do, it comes with a cost attached. The more we destroy habitats and change them, the more we interfere with the ecosystem as a whole. We have no idea why most of these creatures are on the earth, especially the ones who seem to be doing everything to make our lives difficult. But they don't know us; they just do what they can to survive.

Some of you may argue that that's all we're doing, but we've gone way beyond just surviving. We want it all, and we will let nothing stand in our way.

What to do?

I think we're all going to have to agree that if we can't see it, we can't really stop ourselves from killing it accidentally, right? And if a rabbit runs out in front of the car and we can't stop, it's just an accident, right? And if we happen to tread on a snail accidentally, it's just too bad. The same goes for micro-organism habitats etc.

But seriously, it is hard to avoid killing something at some point during the day, especially if you can't see what you are killing; and we

will have to accept that sometimes it happens. There is no point in we vegetarians getting on our high horses and assuming a holier than thou position, preaching about not killing, when in fact we are all killers at sometime or other, even if we don't realise it.

The most important thing is that we acknowledge that there are tiny creatures who exist on this planet, whose job may be unclear to us. And it is our job to try not to wipe the planet clean of any creature however large or small for interfering with our plans for planetary domination.

We kill foxes because they try to get to the sheep, but all they want is to eat, and in the pens there are plentiful sheep – the foxes only want a few! We see it as a battle of good vs. evil, us vs. the animals who want what we have, but you only have to take a cursory glance at the “natural world,” as opposed to our unnatural world, to see that they operate in harmony with each other, something we have long since given up doing.

We need to develop our awareness of the world around us, and be aware that if we are going to keep concreting and urbanising green land, and cutting down forests, we are affecting the ecosystem, possibly irreversibly. We cannot continue to trample all over this planet as if it were our playground. This planet provides the means by which we can all play.

Let us tread carefully

K n o w l e d g e

The psychological result of perception and learning and reasoning

We all like to think we know a lot about something. Some of us know a lot about aeroplanes, some of us know a lot about football, and some of us know what the strongest beer is to get us drunk. But what's the point of all this knowledge, and actually while we're here, what exactly is it? Is it physical, and if so, where does it exist? That's where I'd like to start this discussion.

We all know we have a brain, encased in a skull. Inside this brain there is some strange looking matter, which, whilst invisible to the naked eye, and having no visible moving parts, is doing some pretty amazing stuff. This amazing stuff also has the ability to store what we perceive, through seeing, hearing, feeling, touching, or smelling. This goes into the mysterious box in your head and is stored somehow (sorry I'm not a scientist!) into short and long term memory available for recall at some future time.

You could say it is physical because it is stored by physically connected cells in the brains; but it doesn't feel physical like your arm or leg, does it? It feels somewhat ethereal (*characterized by lightness and insubstantiality; as impalpable or intangible as air*). We know it exists within us, but it is nonetheless hard to try to pin down exactly where it is.

As we begin our investigation together, I would like you to try to put down your preconceptions of knowledge, and attempt to approach this topic with an open mind. Let us begin.

Is my knowledge the sum of me?

I questioned myself about this recently, because I wanted to know the answer. I was concerned that who I was, was only about what I had in my head, and how I communicated what I had in my head to everyone else. On the surface it makes sense, don't you think? People know me because of how I interact with them. They know me because of what I talk about. They know me because of the job I do. They know me because they have spent a lot of time with me, so know what I have been doing over the years. But do they really know me? I would have to say no.

People sometimes say I'm funny, because I can make people laugh quite easily, but how do I do that? I have frankly no idea; somewhere along the line, I must have learned to use language that triggers laughter. My mother thinks I'm clever because I can always fix her computer, but that is because I learned how to fix a computer. Everything that people praise me for, I have learned. People say I am a good massage therapist, but that is because I was taught by a professional how to massage. People say I am a good cook, but that is because I learned how to do it.

These are all just skills. These are the bolt-ons we talked about in the education topic. These are not the core of me, are they?

Without my knowledge of things would people not like me anymore? Without knowledge, would there be anything to like or dislike? The answer has to be a resounding no. If I had not learned language, or how to interact socially with other human beings, or had read books, or watched films, or travelled; I would just be a bag of bones connected up with tendons, and muscles, covered with a piece of skin, running on nature's blueprint to stay alive. I would not have the power of perception, reason or enquiry.

You may argue here that these are abilities that humans naturally possess; but these are skills, learnt from parents, teachers and peers. A

baby may have the potential to possess reason for example, but cannot actually reason with an adult because he or she does not have the language capabilities to do so.

As the brain develops, so do the skills. Some of us become skilful, whereas others flounder, but all the “knowledge” is an add-on to the core of the human being, *not* an integral part. So when we say that someone is clever, or intelligent, what we actually mean is that they have put things into their mind which we haven't, and as we don't understand it, we are impressed by it.

My mother says, “oh, alan, I wish I was as clever with computers as you, I'd never be able to do what you do.” But that is because she has never ever picked up a book about computers in the ten years since she's had one, and has never taken a course! So how does she expect to have the knowledge?

It is not willed by god that humans have knowledge; it is a human process of being taught something, remembering it, and then using other skills, like investigation, to modify and improve the information.

I certainly don't think I'm clever (*skilful (or showing skill) in adapting means to ends*) in the way my mother thinks. If I hadn't read about computers, taken courses, made many mistakes, and observed and listened to many others, I would also have the same skill level as her. So what of this idea of natural cleverness? Maybe some people's brain's have slightly different wiring that predisposes them to learn quicker, maybe genes has some part to play in it, but the learning you do after you are born is where the real knowledge comes from.

If, for example, all I know about is drinking in the pub, football, and picking up girls in nightclubs, is that all I am? On the surface other humans in society would say yes. They just judge from appearances. They may say, “he is very shallow,” but is that my fault, given that I was conditioned from the moment I was born?

My father worked in a manual job, went to the pub, went to the football, read the tabloid newspapers, and didn't do anything else. What will he teach me? To appreciate mozart, or to understand the universe as we know it? Somehow I don't think so! Only because my father didn't learn about those things, and didn't know anyone else who knew about those things. It is not because he was stupid and incapable of acquiring knowledge.

Knowledge can be acquired at any age, although physically the brain may be more receptive when we are younger, and we may learn quicker. But my question to you still is: “Is that all that I am?”

START OF ME

Job: Factory worker

Hobbies: Like football, pub and nightclubs

Reads: Tabloid newspapers and celebrity magazines

Not married: Likes lots of girlfriends

END OF ME

What if I come from a wealthy family where art, science and politics are discussed openly and regularly? As I grow up what will happen to my knowledge? Will I only know about beer and girls, or do you think there is a good chance I might gain some knowledge of the things they talk about; that I may develop skills to competently discuss art or politics?

It is not given, as everyone's brains work differently, but it is more possible than if my family did not discuss them! I get sent to the best school, and when I grow up get a job in finance in the city, play the piano, and enjoy arts and politics. But is that the sum of me?

START OF ME

Job: City finance

Hobbies: Play classical piano, arts, and politics

Reads: Financial papers and literature

Married: Two children

END OF ME

On the surface these are two very different people, wouldn't you say? So which one do you prefer? If like me, you come from a family that discusses politics, arts etc. then you will probably prefer number two; but only because he has more in common with you. I may find him to be a complete bore, but at least I can discuss things I am interested in with him. On the other hand, if you like beer, football, tabloids and girls you would find him very, very boring, and so would gravitate towards number one.

So we have two men, from very different backgrounds, who both like very different things. Number one has not been taught to use his brain creatively – he sticks to very similar patterns that are easy to process; whereas number two has been taught to use his brain more and to develop other skills. They may both be nice family men, who love their parents and children, who have never engaged in violence; but we are impressed by the man who talks politics (but only because we have not learned the skill of it).

With knowledge, comes an unfortunate, often unconscious superiority over others which harks back to the taunting in the playground. “I know more than you, I am better than you, you are stupid...”

Superiority/Inferiority

So why do we feel inferior when in the presence of someone who has a lot more knowledge than us?

As I have told you before, my father worked in industry, as a managing director, and had many hundreds of employees worldwide. I remember the way he used to talk to me about the important things he knew about. He talked about the stock market and buying and selling companies, and I remember being impressed, but somehow feeling like I was beneath him, because I couldn't hold a conversation with him about takeovers, and he wasn't interested in the things I was.

So, in search of superiority, I would take a walk down to the local pub, where I knew that all the people I drank with did manual jobs, and they would be impressed with my knowledge and the fact that I travelled to Europe for my job, thereby making me feel superior.

But that's not what the acquisition of knowledge is for, is it? To make us feel good about ourselves? Is it not to further the understanding of ourselves, and the universe we inhabit? Oh, sorry, my mistake!

As individuals, we swallow up knowledge from the start. We learn about people and places, food and drink, and walking and reading and history and football and cricket and beaches and seas and mountains and fashion and shopping and how to do this job and how to do that job. The list goes on and on.

Some of us keep learning, whilst others are content to only learn so much. All around the world there are billions of bits of information walking around on two legs, on topics as diverse as sport, science, warfare, deception, mass murder, idealism, fanaticism, spaceships, computers, brick laying, floor mopping, salad dressings, pick pocketing, wood carving, stamp collecting, saving money, ironing, car design and rally driving (to name but a few!)

Just stop and think about it for a moment, would you? Look around you when you are in the street, and look at all the people. Not only do they all look different, act different and dress different, they also all have a unique collection of knowledge. No one person's knowledge is superior or inferior. And they pass you by. So not only do you not know what

they're thinking, you also have no idea what they know – until you speak to them. How strange. All that knowledge wrapped up in bone and tissue. Inaccessible by any machine except conversation with another human!

How often do we hear about someone who has just died, and discover they were knowledgeable about things you wouldn't dream they would know or be interested in; and they died without sharing that knowledge with anyone else. So much knowledge gained, yet so much taken to the grave without ever having seen the light of day. So what use is all this knowledge then if it is not to be shared?

Apart from learning obvious things to help us find work to get money to pay the bills, are we just learning things to keep ourselves amused, or maybe to stop boredom from setting in? We seem to accumulate knowledge at a rate almost as fast as we accumulate possessions and we store it. We can't help it. Our eyes take it in and the brain stores it.

So why are we acquiring it?

Perhaps you believe that knowledge is what sets man apart from the animals. The ability to not only learn, but to better ourselves through the acquisition of it, and maybe you might be correct. After all, it is only through the passing of knowledge from one person to another that we have become so inventive. One man invents the wheel, another builds a cart, another domesticates the horse to pull it, another invents an engine to do away with the need for a horse! A perfect example of human discovery, saved as knowledge, and passed down to the next generation as education.

So we have all this knowledge, stored up, ready to be passed down, but hold on a minute, how much human knowledge do we want to pass on to our children, and in any case how much of what's in our head is just junk?

Imagine for a moment your house. It may be a big house or a small apartment, but just think how much junk (sorry, possessions) you have. How many of them are worth keeping? How many of them would you want to pass on to your children and grandchildren? If you're like most people, it wouldn't be many. Maybe something really special perhaps.

It's the same with knowledge. We obviously want to pass on important stuff to the next generation, but do we want to burden them with our baggage (excuse the pun); do we want them to be discoverers; to have free minds; or do we want them to be conditioned clones of ourselves, because I'm sorry to say, that's what's happening. We pass on our prejudices; our likes and dislikes; our culture; our hatred; our

religion; and our opinions. I can hear some of you saying, “but it's impossible to not pass it on, it's part of who I am,” and there is the key.

You believe that this knowledge, in the form of religion, opinions, politics, etc. is part of you, and you cannot separate yourself from it. You may have been indoctrinated and conditioned by your society but that does not mean you *are* the knowledge. It just means you have to unlearn (*discard something previously learnt, like an old habit*).

Unlearning – The path to freedom

So here we both are, with our big brains bursting at the seams with this human knowledge. I can't see your knowledge, and you can't see mine, but all this knowledge has only lead to fear, hatred and division. We may have planes in the sky and cars on the roads thanks to knowledge, but we have deception, killing, greed, poverty, corruption, and desire – all things that still exist in spite of all this learning.

I am not saying we have to forget how to build a motor car or a jet plane (although it may help the environment somewhat), what we need to unlearn, are the unhelpful things that lead us away from love and compassion. We are caught in the prison of memory, even if the memories are not our own. These memories are dutifully passed down from father to son and son to grandson without them even being consciously aware of it.

In this country some groups of people hate “pakis” (*a derogatory word for people from pakistan*) because of no other reason than they have learned to hate them. How can we call ourselves the most intelligent species on the planet when we pass knowledge on which furthers division between us?

For centuries, the british ruled ireland, and now even after many years of independence, people still hate the british, even if the actual people that oppressed them are long dead. Everyone hates everyone for some historical reason, but that's all it is, history. Yes, some people may have been cruel to other humans but that is past. If it is finished with we must let go and move on, otherwise we are carrying the past into the future, which is surely a dangerous thing to do.

History, which is the sum of the past, is full of horrendous stories of slavery and rape and murder, and I know that these acts are still being carried out in some parts of the world, but what we are talking about here is moving towards unconditional love; and love is something that takes

place in the present. It can never take place in the past or the future. Our memories or knowledge however pleasant, or important they may seem, are always unwittingly keeping us in the past.

To see clearly you have to forget what you saw

Some of us don't want to see clearly. We would rather stay locked into what we know – afraid to give it away in case there's nothing better to replace it, in the same way that we cannot give up our possessions; because who would we be without them? Who would people think we were if we had no possessions? So we jealously guard our knowledge, afraid to ever give it up, always waiting to impress someone somewhere with something we know.

But we have to let go of psychological attachment to the knowledge, because it is only stopping us from seeing who we truly are. We are barricaded behind school certificates, degrees and mba's; we surround ourselves with news of political affairs, the arts, or religious scriptures; and we hide physically behind our material possessions; Our cars, our jobs, our status, our mobile phones, our range of credit cards.

We are all afraid in life, and that is why we surround ourselves with items to make ourselves happy, ever mindful that if we stop filling our head with knowledge, then one day we may come face to face with our real thoughts. To find freedom from fear, we must face ourselves without external knowledge, it is the only way to understand that you are not just your degree in engineering, your bmw, and a great personality. You are one part of a whole universe. A contributor to universal love and compassion. You are energy and light. You are pure and whole.

Inside each one of us is a core. I cannot explain to you what that core is, but you can see it for yourself. With no definable structure, you cannot see or draw it, yet, if you look, you will find it. You will sense that connection to the universe, something that lets you know that there is no need to be afraid as you are interconnected with everything else. That thing I do not call god, that is man's label, and it is not the same as belief, as there is nothing to believe in, nor is there any need to gain knowledge of it. Just to notice and be aware of it is enough.

Brick by brick, you and I must start to disassemble the protective structure we have built around ourselves. Only then can we transcend fear and human knowledge and embrace our universal wisdom. That wisdom, as I have found out, resides in every one of us. You don't need

to remember it, study it or look it up in an encyclopedia, but definitely don't take my word for it. Doubt it, question it, and reject it, but don't ignore it. The time has come when all of us need to start to look inward.

L

L a n g u a g e

A systematic means of communicating by the use of sounds or
conventional symbols

•

(language) communication by word of mouth

•

The cognitive processes involved in producing and understanding
linguistic communication

Every creature on this planet has some kind of language, although we have no means of understanding what they are saying. Zoologists have interpreted some of the sounds in primates, and translated them to mean things like “I am hungry;” “there's a predator over there;” “where are you?” etc. But from what we know, most of the communication is very basic; whereas man has a rich vocabulary, and is able to communicate complex themes via his voice (*the sound made by the vibration of vocal folds modified by the resonance of the vocal tract*) made possible by millions of years of evolution.

Language started as mere grunts – so I am lead to believe – and over time, we learned to control the vocal cords and develop more complex sounds. An alphabet was formed, and words were created. I do not know if this happened all over the world at the same time, and why we

developed this ability. But as I am not a scientist, I am unable to answer these questions!

So the starting point for our discussion today is not related to biology. What I want to ask you today is: “Who would we be without the use of language?” Could we think? Would we be able to deliver complex ideas to others without speech? Stop for a moment and consider these questions, as they are complex indeed. Now let me tell you a short story.

Let's talk

I like to talk a lot. In fact, many people have said that not only do I like to talk a lot, I love to talk, and unfortunately, I have to agree with them. There are always so many things on my mind I want to say to people, and there just never seems to be enough time in the day to say them. I often find myself getting so caught up in what I am saying that I forget the point I am trying to make. My mother talks a lot too so maybe I have “caught” the talking bug from her!

I used to talk all the time on my mobile phone, until recently, when I decided to stop using it unless it was absolutely essential. I realised I was just talking for talking's sake. Nothing I was saying was really important, it was just idle chatter – a chance to keep my over-active brain more active. Talking lead to more talking and more talking led to more discussion, and more discussion lead to arguments.

I argued my case for vegetarianism so many times which just ended up with me getting angry and talking more. It resolved nothing of course, except perhaps, raising everyone's blood pressure!

It was only when I went to a monastery – which was a place of great silence – that I started to think about this. Here was I, supposedly intelligent, constantly arguing with everyone, chatting with people, gossiping; suddenly plunged into an environment where talking was forbidden! I showered in silence, got dressed in silence, ate breakfast in silence, walked in silence, ate lunch in silence, meditated in silence, ate dinner in silence, and then slept. No books, no writing, no music – just a lot of silence.

The first day was intolerable; actually, I should say, the first thirty minutes were excruciating. I wanted to scream out loud, I wanted to hear my voice. My brain was aching to talk. “This isn't normal,” my brain kept telling me, “man isn't supposed to be silent! Man is a talking animal, just talk! This place isn't for us, we like fun and we like jokes, how is

anyone to know we have an extrovert personality and we can be great fun to be around? We should leave now, before it's too late." Hours went by and I was feeling more and more tense. I felt like I was about to explode. I needed to talk to someone. Desperately.

I may not have been talking out loud, but inside my mind my brain was talking to me at a million miles an hour. It seemed as if I would go mad if I didn't talk out loud, even if no one was there to listen to me, so I did something silly. I went for a walk and started talking out loud! At first it seemed really strange to hear the words coming out of my own mouth, then I thought to myself, "this is stupid, if I am really here to understand what it is like to be in silence then in silence I shall be! I will suffer my brain constantly taunting me and eventually it will quieten."

Several days later, and I was *still* suffering. It was only when I stopped fighting with myself that I eventually started to enjoy being in silence, not only on my own, but mixing and still communicating with other people in the group in silence. I was starting to understand how much language got in the way of real communication, implausible as it sounded.

Blah blah blah

We use language to communicate who we "are" to other people, don't we? "Hi, this is alan, he's a marketing executive for a large firm in the city," "Oh yes, I have a house here in the city but I always go to the country at the weekends. We have a house there you know..." "Well I was driving a mercedes, but now I drive a bmw, I find it to be a much smoother ride." Blah, blah, blah.

We go on talking incessantly, boasting, name dropping, ego tripping. "Yeah I've got the new game station;" "well I've got a new laptop, it's top of the range you know;" "I've got all this money;" "I've got no money;" "I'm really miserable;" "Oh, are you? I'm really happy at the moment;" "Have you got a new boyfriend?" "Yes, I have, and he's really great and he's so funny, you'd love him..." "I just split up from my wife, she's not getting a penny from me...!" "I hate him, he's such an idiot."

Does language get in the way? What do you think? "Get in the way of what?" you are probably thinking to yourself.

Let's start slowly shall we?

We have been born with the gift of language, which we would lose, according to research, if it is not used in the first couple of years of life.

We would not be able to talk and shout and gossip and hurt and scream and punish and hate amongst other things...

Hmm, seems like not a bad thing! You see, you need language in order to communicate these concepts. A lion may bare its teeth at an opponent and growl, the way a dog does when it approaches a strange dog, but that's it. It does not constantly chastise its offspring, and tell them they are failing at school, and they are no good at anything, and why don't they pull their socks up, and how will they ever get a job, and if they don't get a good job then they will have a terrible life, and what about when they retire, they'll have no money and they'll be relying on state benefit and on, and on, and on...

The funny thing is, you do not need language to communicate love, empathy and compassion – these are above the realms of human language.

Couples fight over money, jealousy, this years holiday, the size of their house, the need for a new tv, why the other doesn't earn enough, the need for a new car, why so and so's husband is doing better than you. They may even say they are not talking to the other, as a means of punishment and to the person left in silence it feels like torture. “Why are they not talking to me? I need to talk,” but that is just the brain desperately wanting to talk, the other knows this and uses it as leverage to get you to apologise . Which again is talking.

But they never fight over love. Words are immaterial. They may say things like “I love you,” but the feeling is communicated without the language. They can look into each others eyes and know they love each other. They do not need to talk. There is a point which when crossed moves from the realm of the mind, the thought, into that which cannot be explained verbally. Try this with your loved one tonight, or with your children. Just sit for a minute with them and stare into each others eyes! Let's call it an experiment! What information is being communicated to you, how do you feel in the silence, how do they feel? Uncomfortable?

Silence is a strange thing isn't it? We often feel this at parties where we don't know anyone or the music stops for a moment. I think people call it “an uncomfortable silence,” don't they? We find it hard to be in a room full of strangers without background music or talking. The music somehow fills a gap in the talking, and that's what the brain wants, no gaps. Lots of talking. Must keep talking, whether it's inside the brain, or outside in speech. It can't be alone without noise, it must have noise otherwise it will go crazy.

Suddenly this whole language thing seems like a bit of a burden. But I'm sure most of you still can't see who you would be without it.

Let's imagine that you, like my uncle's parents, were born deaf-mute (*unable to hear language or speak language*). What do you think is going on in their brains? Are they constantly chattering to themselves, thinking and planning? Well it seems unlikely if they have never heard language being spoken. So perhaps there must be a lot of silence in their minds.

To us, we see that being born deaf-mute is a terrible affliction, and we pity them. But why? My uncle's parents could not hear nor speak, yet they fell in love and gave birth to a child through love. It seems like there was an awful lot of communicating going on! It's just that we can't understand because we are too busy talking. Sure they can communicate with sign language and the written word but the power of speech has been removed. Do you see? Verbal language contains a certain energy that silent communication can never have. We can almost feel the power of a dominant speaker like a general rallying his troops to war but in silence we communicate differently.

We can of course, communicate negative feelings like hate, anger and displeasure without talking by displaying facial or body signals, and we can display status signals like having a large house or a sports car but it is the spoken word that is generating much of the mischief we see in modern life.



Stop for a moment and reflect on love. What is it about love that sets it apart from modern language? What is it in love that bypasses the need for idle chatter? Imagine for a moment communicating with everyone in that language; how different would the world be? How much hate and sorrow would we cause? How many people would we hurt with our words?

So often we hurt people with the things we say. Remember in the beginning of the book when I asked you to consider the impact of two statements: "I love you" and "I hate you"? Hopefully, you can now see the power of words, and how frivolously we use them.

"I give love unconditionally to all" is not a statement you often hear, but I offer it to you now in the language we both understand. What a different world we create with that statement compared with "I hate him, I hate his religion, I hate you, I hate her."

We must start to realise the impact that this wonderful and sometimes terrible addition to our species has brought. If we are to use language at

all, then the language we use must come from love, from empathy, and compassion. How else are we going to communicate with our children and our colleagues, let alone people who are from different cultures, speak a different language and have a different religion?

Anything that does not come from love breeds hate and violence. Look into this for yourself. I am not speaking the truth here. This is only my opinion, but it is of the utmost importance for us all that you look into it – every day.

Every time you speak to your children, your friends, your parents, even people you dislike, ask yourself this question: “Where is this language coming from. Is it born of compassion for all or is it something else?” It is a difficult question and one I too have found myself in much conflict over. My mother used to have a saying: “If you have nothing good to say, it is better to say nothing at all.” I don't know where it came from, but it has stayed with me always.

We should all practice a little more silence in our lives and start to realise that until we know our own minds thoroughly, we can never be sure what the tricky little brain is going to get us to utter! The violence of language breeds only more violent language. You only have to watch an argument start then heat up, then explode into rage, before possibly ending in a fist fight or worse. There can never be a winner in a verbal argument, both are losers.

So why do we want to hurt another with our words? What benefit is it to humanity? Maybe all we are, is stuck in a million year old pattern of status displays, one-upmanship, dominance and instilling fear in others; except we have replaced the lions roar with complex cruel, hurtful sounds.

We have not yet learned to use this powerful language kindly; we have not learned that love has no language, no status, no power to exert, no violence.

It is time to stop talking.

Silence, once understood, is truly a beautiful thing, and you will quickly discover more language than you ever thought possible. Let the powerful and the dominant hear our silence.

L a w

Legal document setting forth rules governing a particular kind of activity

•

The collection of rules imposed by authority

•

A generalization that describes recurring facts or events in nature

•

A rule or body of rules of conduct inherent in human nature and essential to or binding upon human society

Imagine a world without law. A world where there are no man-made rules and restrictions on anything you do. No one tells you what to do. You are free! Free of all restrictions, and free of all control from the authorities. What would you do? Who would you be? What would you become? That is what we are here to find out.

So what is law?

Law is merely a set of rules, created over several thousand years by powerful men to create order in their lands, and make sure people behave in a manner they require. The law sets out penalties for non-compliance of these laws, and courts have been set up to deal with such events. If you are found not guilty you may go free, but if found guilty, you will be punished for breaking the rules – anything from a fine to a prison sentence, but perhaps even sentenced to death.

Most people are happy that there are rules to control the more wayward members of society, and it is only the minority, not the majority who break them. As my mum once said to me: "If you've done nothing wrong, you've got nothing to fear from the law." Law is simple. These are the rules. Don't break them equals no problem. Break them equals problem. Any civilised person would agree that we need these rules to stop the more "dangerous" people from behaving in ways that harm others.

Although law exists in all parts of the world, laws vary widely from country to country, and even village to village. There is no universal law created by man, because each man who creates laws in his country thinks differently.

In Britain, if you steal apples from a shop, you may receive a fine, but in Saudi Arabia, they may cut your hands off. If you kill someone in Britain, you will go to jail for a long time; but in some parts of the world they will hang you, electrocute you or shoot you. In some countries, speaking out against the government is punishable by torture or death, and in some countries it is positively encouraged. In some countries killing a cow is a crime, and in others it's a business.

These are laws created by whoever is in power at the time. It is an individual opinion of right and wrong, and punishments vary widely from place to place. Law can also be modified instantly with a change of government, even in a fully functioning democracy. One day something is illegal, the next it's not.

Courts and judges do not decide law, they merely apply the law of the day; there is no moral or ethical judgement. If the law says it is not illegal to kill another human being, you will never be convicted of killing a human being (until they change the law that is). Do you see? Law is transient, not fixed.

If I am in government and make not carrying identification illegal, punishable by twenty years in prison, and you break this law, you will go to jail. But if I am defeated at the next election, and I am replaced by a new government, they may reverse this immediately and you will go free!

Law is ultimately changeable on a whim, depending on the mood of the government, and the one thing we should not accept, is that law is truth. Right and wrong is a man-made concept, designed to control the population; to keep them in line; to show them who is really in charge of their lives; and to let them know that if they fall foul of these laws, they will be punished to let the rest of the population know that disobedience

will not be tolerated! After all, making murder illegal does not stop it happening, it just states that if you commit murder you will be punished.

Democracy

A political system in which the supreme power lies in a body of citizens who can elect people to represent them

If you are one of the people lucky enough to live in a democracy, and not a country ruled by a military junta or a homicidal dictator, then you will have the right to vote for whichever party you believe will serve your interests best. Each country has its own special rules, but generally you will vote for a local member of parliament, who will represent you at a national level. He or she will probably belong to a major political party that will have their own agenda to push through.

They (the party) set out specific things they wish to achieve during their term in government in what's known as a manifesto, although most people never read it. Once in power, the government will try to get some of their bills (*a statute in draft before it becomes law*) passed. Some you will like, others, you may not. You may like that they're tough on immigration, and have passed new laws to repatriate illegal immigrants, but you may hate that they have passed a new law to make you carry identification at all times to prove who you are. They may not have had this bill in their manifesto, but have rushed it through in light of "recent developments" which have forced them to act in such a way to "protect national security."

So what are you to do? You voted for the party you liked, but you don't like some of the new laws they have passed. In a democracy, you get the chance every four or five years to change the government, so you decide to vote for another party, but are dismayed that all the parties think that carrying identification is a good idea, so you don't vote in protest at the identification system. But as most other people agree with the party's stance on carrying identification, someone gets elected.

But what if the majority of the population disagree with carrying identification? Well, normally if a party wants to get elected, they'll drop it as a campaign issue, or may promise to revoke it if it has already become law; that is the only chance you get to directly influence the law, before a new party is elected. Once you have elected them, you cannot just change your mind, you will have to wait another four years.

You cannot just decide to change the law, that is for the politicians you elected to decide. You can protest all you like and try to influence them, but they still may not waver from their policies and will continue to try to get bills passed, after all, that's what they have been elected to do.

If you don't like it, wait until the next elections come around and have your say along with the rest of the population. That's democracy. If you do not live in a democracy, then I am so sorry but you are under complete control of those who have seized power, and challenging the law, will normally mean a lengthy prison sentence or death for you.

A little experiment

So hopefully, we now understand that law is a man-made, country specific tool, to control the population. You may not agree with me here, and may still believe that, "law is what makes us civilised! Where would we be without law? We would be no better than the savages." And that is *exactly* what I want to discuss here with you now.

How many laws do you have in your country? Have you any idea? I certainly haven't got a clue, but I am sure there must be literally tens of thousands in my country, covering everything from what side of the road I must drive on, to rules about going to the toilet outside! So let's begin.

From today onwards, all laws have been revoked. You may now urinate where you please, drive on whatever side of the road you like, you may steal at will, murder and rape, build houses and offices wherever you like, fail to pay taxes, it doesn't matter, because no one will tell you it's wrong. After all, how could it be? There is no punishment, therefore there can be no crime.

What I want to understand is whether law has evolved as a natural control mechanism because humans cannot live together peacefully, and have no self-control, or as the result of men having power over others, and wanting to hang on to that power, whether religious, military or political?

Now there are no laws, would you revert to barbarous (*primitive in customs and culture*) behaviour where anything goes, or would you start to feel more empathy, compassion and love for all around now you were free of control? Would you still continue to believe that things were wrong, if no one told you otherwise?

Let's talk about drinking and driving, something which is obviously a dangerous combination, for you and all other people on the road. In the past it was illegal, and you faced stiff penalties, although it didn't stop people from engaging in it, but now you can do it whenever you want. Drink ten pints of beer, get in your car, run down a family of four, and feel none the worse for it. After all, it's not illegal.

What if someone refuses to pay your invoice for work you have done? There are no courts you can take them to, so what do you do? Do you just talk nicely to them until they pay up, or do you resort to verbal and then physical abuse, and beat the money out of them? It's ok to do it, because it's not illegal to beat someone up anymore.

What if you really want to have sex with someone. Do you still buy them drinks, sweet talk them, then ask them if they want to come back to your place, or do you just grab them, drag them back to your house and force them to have sex with you? After all, it's not illegal anymore, nothing can happen to you. You won't go to court, because there are no courts, because nothing is illegal. Do you understand?

What if you want to build new houses in a street and the people living there refuse to accept your offer of monetary compensation if they move? No problem! Turn up at 6.00 am on a Monday, and start bulldozing their houses – even if they're still in bed. You offered, and they refused. It's their own fault. Even if you kill or injure a few of them, and the rest go homeless, who's going to stop you? It's not illegal, *nothing* will happen to you so you can do whatever you like.

But the one thing we're forgetting here, is that although we can do what we like, because there is no more law, that means the other people (the people you affect) can do whatever they like as well... And here's the flip side.

As you attempt to drive away from the scene where you ran down a family of four, an angry mob gathers, witness to what you have just done, and drags you out of the car, and beats you to death, after all, it's not illegal.

The man who refuses to pay your invoice threatens you and promises that if you ever come near him again and demand money, he will find your family and hurt them.

The woman you want to have sex with has her boyfriend in the bar, and on seeing you attempting to drag her out, stabs you in the heart, after all, it's not illegal.

The people whose houses you have destroyed find out where you live and not only destroy your house, but steal all your possessions, shoot you

and leave you for dead. It's not illegal; and although destroying peoples homes is not against the law, the people feel ever so slightly aggrieved at your actions, and in return, punish you for your actions.

So as you can see from these simple examples, punishment is not absent in a lawless society, it is directly meted out by the people. The only difference, is the severity of the punishment may not match the crime.

People will not stand by and watch terrible things happen to themselves or their family; in the end they fight back. All law is doing is controlling that natural urge to administer personal justice and making sure the person is actually guilty before they punish him, something mobs and vigilantes do not explore in any great depth!

So who are you without law? Are you a caring, empathic individual, who wants only the best for his fellow human beings and has a deep understanding of what it is to be human, or are you without feeling for the rest of mankind. Someone only interested in what you can get for yourself, without any thought that your actions may cause suffering?

We have labelled ourselves "the most intelligent being on the planet," but is that who we really are? If we see the suffering and exploitation that mankind exerts, not only on other humans, but on animals, and the natural world we live in under the rule of law, it is hard to see that we would suddenly change if the rule of law were to be removed.

I believe that mankind is not ready for law to be summarily removed. We lack the qualities that even most animals possess in being able to live together in balance. We are unbalanced as a species; our brains have not evolved past that of our ancestors in anything but our development of technology.

None of us like to feel controlled, especially by some faceless concept called "law," but we have to suppose, that in order to achieve some kind of "civilisation," we have had to invent rules to control conduct.

Man is essentially no more than a violent ape, with the added bonus of being able to use the power of language to manipulate and dominate others. We are not ready to be left on our own, to work out what is in the best interests, not only of ourselves, but of the species as a whole.

We kill, deceive and steal at a will, wholly aware that rules have been created to stop that, and we are also aware of the consequences, but we do it anyway. We ruthlessly charge through our short lives, standing on anyone who gets in our way.

We hate the rules, even if we can see that they are in the best interest of everybody. I am not talking about rules set up by despots to control

the population for their own interests, (financial or ideological), the rules I am talking about are ones which we should know already without the need for governments to enforce them, but don't.

One more big shift

In order to remove the rule of law, we have to take a giant step. We have to make a shift in our minds that means that the rule of law would naturally fall away. That there would be no more need for judges, prisons, and courts, or written rules. Would it be possible? Certainly not today. Law underpins civilisation, and without it, we would crumble into barbarism.

Doesn't it make you sad that we have to be controlled with the threat of punishment in order to live (semi) harmoniously? It makes me very sad. Does the thought that the world would plunge into the darkness of chaos without law make you not want to look at yourself, at your actions, and make a positive shift in thinking? Probably not. You see, we only think of ourselves and our needs, without any recourse to the feelings of others.

If I gave you a list of things you should or shouldn't do, it would be no different from the rules associated with religious, military or political law. Who am I to tell you you shouldn't kill, or you shouldn't steal; or you shouldn't be violent, or you shouldn't say horrible things about people.

It is for you to understand your own mind, and in that understanding you will have evolved. You will no longer need a government to tell you what is right and wrong, you will never need a court to stand in judgement of you. You will be free and the man-made laws will naturally evolve into natural law. The law of compassion, the law of love, and the law of empathy. When you understand these three things, you will see they aren't laws at all.

Just feeling these emotions removes the need for any external control. Think about it. How can three small words remove the need for law?

L a z i n e s s

Inactivity resulting from a dislike of work

•

Relaxed and easy activity

•

Apathy and inactivity in the practice of virtue (personified as one of the deadly sins)

Laziness is a term you have often heard in your life isn't it? My mother always used to say to me "Pick your toys up, put your clothes away, tidy your room, don't be so lazy." I used to say a similar thing to my ex-wife when she would leave everything at her back. Cups and spoons hidden by the side of the sofa, plates, pots and pans stacked ten deep at the sink, clothes strewn everywhere. She, like many people, didn't think she was being lazy, she just thought she had more important things to do than keep things tidy (like watching tv).

I have known many people like that. You wouldn't say they are generally lazy or slothful (*disinclined to work or exertion*). My ex worked as hard as anyone I'd ever met, whilst at work, and enjoyed going out and doing exercise; so what was it that made her almost apathetic at times?

What is it that makes so many of us so lazy? Let's explore this together and try to understand it more.

We all enjoy lazy days, don't we? Especially when the weather is fine, and we can sit in the park or on the beach or in our garden. Just sitting, doing nothing, maybe reading a book, sipping a long cool drink. Ahhh! What better way to spend an afternoon? I certainly wouldn't call it laziness. I would call it an important relaxation exercise.

But we haven't always been able to sit around relaxing, have we? Before the dawn of industrialisation, the world was a very different place, primarily because there wasn't much time for sitting around. As with today, money didn't grow on trees, and people had to work long hours to get enough money to pay for even the most basic of goods. Remember there were *no* supermarkets, *no* local hardware stores, *no* cars to make getting between places easier, *no* direct electricity and gas to the home, and basic plumbing and a toilet if you were lucky!

Life was a lot harder then, and I can hear you all shouting "we don't want to go back to that time, we much prefer it now." And so do I! I enjoy the comforts we have now.

I am sitting writing this in a beautiful library, on a laptop computer, with a table lamp on a comfortable chair, looking out of a double glazed window onto the wild elements of a scottish island. I am surrounded by hundreds of books, and the night storage heater at my back is keeping me warm. Even the kings and queens of yesteryear didn't have it this good. Remember that.

How is it possible that most of us actually live better than kings and queens? The answer is progress. Man developing new skills and new technologies, and for the first time, using his mind more in the process.

Back when we were simple peasants (*1. One of a (chiefly European) class of agricultural labourers 2. A crude uncouth ill-bred person lacking culture or refinement*), we used our muscles, not our minds. But thanks to intensive modern farming techniques, which use machinery instead of muscle, many more of us have been able to move away from agriculture to develop our minds, and learn new trades. Hence the modern reality in most developed countries, that the work is moving almost steadily from the hand to the mind. This can only be a good thing, don't you think?

We can now specialise in such diverse areas as engineering, quantum physics, manufacturing, marketing, law, hospitality, cleaning and waste disposal.

There are a myriad of new job opportunities, each one better than the jobs we had to do a hundred years ago or so. Opportunities abound to learn new things, to develop your mind, to improve. There is no way that

this would have been possible for everyone even as recently ago as the second world war.

Now that we don't have to worry about where the next meal is coming from, and are not all out tending our crops, the possibilities are endless. Except we don't seem to grasp this idea so well do we? Thanks to many people dedicating themselves to developing new technologies to make our lives simpler (actually, just less physical work), we have been getting lazier and lazier (even if you think you are working harder and harder). Before you all start shouting that I don't know what I'm talking about, let me explain.

Do you remember the days before we had cash machines? I wonder how people got their money out of the bank? What about before you could pay for things over the internet with a little plastic card with a number, or even over the phone? Actually how about before there were phones, let alone little personal phones you could use all over the world, where people dial your number and the system finds you on a beach five thousand miles away! What about before you could heat a meal that had been prepared in a factory many miles away on a rotating turntable in an oven that never gets hot, yet your food does? Actually, how about before there were electric and gas cookers, because there was no gas or electricity?

The quicker and easier it is, the lazier we become

With each new invention, our minds become a little more attached to the comfort it brings. If you think about it, most of them are pretty good inventions: it is our complete reliance on them now that will cause us problems in the future.

Take for example, the television, which has only been in existence for little over 60 years (that means we have been several million years without it). Now we have digital satellite and cable, hundreds of channels. Whether you are poor, or rich, it is the modern accessory we cannot seem to do without. Not having a television is comparable to not having electricity in some people's opinion! "What, No tv, how do you cope?" And my answer would be, "just fine thank you."

A friend recently reminded me of the example of the tv remote control. You know how it is, when someone wants to change the channel and the following request is issued:

"Has anyone seen the remote?"

“No. Sorry.”

“Argh, that's really annoying.”

The idea of getting up to change the channel is as alien as not having the tv in the first place! We are so lazy we can't get up less than five feet away. We sit surrounded by controllers for the satellite, dvd and video. I can hear some of you shouting, “that's progress, not laziness!”

But I need it, I am so busy, I couldn't do without it.

Stop for a moment now and think of all the things you couldn't be without. What makes your life “simpler?” These days there are so many new ideas to stop us having to physically do anything, it's starting to get ridiculous. The last straw for me was when I saw an exercise table that moved your legs and arms for you! “Get really fit. No effort required whatsoever!”

So now we have gadgets galore to help us, what do we do with all this extra time? What do we dedicate ourselves to now we no longer have to worry (in the west at least) about the basic stuff? As I have stated in other topics, work has moved from the hand to the mind, and that is what I want to talk to you about here.

We have freed ourselves physically, and are now in a great position to develop our minds. What a great opportunity for self-development this is. We can learn more about ourselves, we can study life more, we can study anything, but what do we do? Well, to be fair, some people do use this time constructively, but most of us are so tired from the long hours we are expected to put in at work, that the only thing we can be bothered doing is to “veg out” in front of the tv, with a ready meal and a glass of wine.

It seems to me – maybe cynically – that the companies who are manufacturing items to make our lives easier, are doing it to earn money from the companies we work for, so we can stay at work longer, without having to worry about what we are going to have for dinner, and what we will do in the evening. Everything is laid on for us. In fact, everything is sooo convenient now we don't have to go home from work at all.

But seriously, we do spend most of our lives at work. I have been over this several times before, but if we get up a 6.30 am and get back around 6.30 pm (some people work much longer), that is half of our day dedicated to work. That doesn't leave much time for anything else. It's just rush, rush, rush.

A well deserved rest

So if our lives *are* very busy, and we *are* over-stretched, maybe this so called laziness I am talking about here is no more than a well deserved rest period. Maybe my wife was right; maybe it is more important to do things you want to do instead of doing things you have to do, or that other people say you “should” do. What do you think? Explore your own day.

How long do you spend not just at work, but getting ready for work and getting home in the evening. Think what you like doing in the evening to relax. Would you consider yourself a *lazy* person?

The body has natural rhythms known as circadian rhythms (*A daily cycle of activity observed in many living organisms*) which operate in a 24 hour cycle. During that time we have periods where we are energetic, periods where we are sleepy, periods when we are hungry. As you probably are aware, modern life has altered these rhythms beyond recognition. We get up at strange times, go to bed at strange times, take artificial stimulants to stay awake, eat at strange times – everything we do is strange!

If you have ever been awake just before dawn you will notice the silence followed by the sound of birds chirping and singing, which they continue to do just up until sunset, at which time they promptly retire for the evening and stop singing. They have had a full day of work and now they will follow it by a full nights sleep to recuperate for the next days activities. But you see, they have to get up and go to sleep in tune with the sun, because (a) they haven't invented electric light and (b) they haven't got eye shades (or curtains) so they can have a lie in.

Natures rhythm

The first thing I have noticed since coming up to this little scottish island retreat, is the silence. There are only about fifteen volunteers here, plus the people who come up in the summer for courses. There are no lights on the island, and the quiet time is 10.00 pm. As it is a place dedicated to meditation, there is no tv, radio or music blaring out (a welcome change from the city).

When I first arrived, I was sleeping until my alarm went off around 8.30 am, and I was going to sleep about midnight – that was my rhythm.

But the more my body detoxed from city life, and the more my brain became calmer (due to not being over stimulated by shopping, tv and music), and was allowed to just be, I noticed my natural rhythm starting to change.

They start meditation here at 6.00 am, which in the beginning would have been an arduous task, but now, two and a half months on, I am waking up with the birds at 4.30 or 5.00 am and getting on with my work straight away without feeling exhausted all day (and without the need for strong stimulants to start the day off).

It seems like a lifetime ago when I used to have to get up at 4.30 or 5.00 am to drive like mad to get to the airport to catch a flight – three strong coffees would have been the minimum requirement! Now, I have no need for stimulants because I have detoxed from them. I still enjoy coffee as a rare treat, but not as a necessity for living; so at least I don't get those awful caffeine withdrawal headaches that so many of my colleagues used to suffer from in the business world.

It now seems as though I finally know, and feel, what it is to live in nature's rhythm, although you may argue that this kind of existence is not possible in ninety five percent of towns and cities.

The 24 hour lifestyle has replaced nature's rhythm. We get up because the alarm goes off. We go to bed late because we were watching tv, because we got in late from work and we hadn't eaten and we wanted to spend time with our partner and we wanted to relax (oh, and there is 24 hour electricity). After work we go out for a drink to relax, which upsets our natural sleeping patterns, and we eat heavy food late at night. We have jobs that start after we should go to bed. We take drugs that keep our body awake all night so we can have "fun."

We are turning into 24 hour machines, and we are not designed for that. Somewhere, sometime the system will break down, and it is. It really is no wonder we are so stressed. We are so out of tune with our natural rhythm, that our body and mind doesn't know if it's coming or going!

Here's an idea. Buy a tent!

If you're like me, and are now shouting, "help! I want to get off," one place you can really experience this rhythm right now, is to go camping. You may think I'm joking, but I'm not. Everyone has been camping in the wilderness at sometime in their life, even you probably. Can you

remember it? Do you remember when it gets dark, and there is no artificial light (save for a small torch). What time do you go to bed? (I am assuming you aren't like some campers who have a generator and sit up drinking beer and wine till late) Normally when it gets dark, right? And what time do you get up? Normally when it gets light, right?

I have been camping with people who have been so bored because there was no alcohol, no tv, and they had to go to bed early. They even got bored with waking up early because there was no tv, no radio, and no newspaper, and they couldn't think what to do with themselves. They couldn't just *sit* and enjoy nature. They had to be doing something to keep their hands and minds occupied.

But we are all like that, aren't we? We can't just sit. We don't want to be alone with our own thoughts too long, so we invent things to occupy them. If humans had their way they would stay up 24 hours a day, every day. We force ourselves to stay up late at night, when our body clock is saying,

“Hey, time for sleep!”

“Time for sleep?” says you, “I'm just going out nightclubbing, you try to stop me! And if you pull any of that I'm tired stuff, I only have to pop a chemical, and I'll be wide awake again.”

Our whole life has become so unnatural. We are so desperate to be something other than what we are, a member of the animal kingdom.

So do yourself a favour, if you're not ready to see what nature's rhythm is really like, and go camping. I promise you'll enjoy it, as long as you just let it happen and experience it without judgement. Try to notice your thoughts while you lie in the tent or look up at the stars, and think about what you are missing. Think about sitting on the couch and eating a takeaway and leaving the washing up, and watching program after program on the tv. Then come back to the present moment and be aware of what you have.

Listen to the wildlife and feel yourself naturally reconnecting with nature and its rhythm. It may seem boring to you, and it may seem like an impossible way to live in a city, but then maybe we all have to look at our lives, the way we live, the choices we make, and see how out of balance we have all become. The more I follow nature, the more energy I have, the earlier I wake, and the more I get done during the day. Believe me, by the time I get to bed at 10.00 pm, I am ready for sleep. I figure if the rest of nature's doing it, why aren't we? We are not a nocturnal animal.

All the great philosophers and religions throughout the world have advocated getting up at dawn (approx 5.00 am) and sleeping at nightfall (approx 10.00 pm in the summer); that gives us 17 whole hours of day! That's a whole lot of time in which to live. Surely we can squeeze everything we need to do into that?

If we can't, maybe we should look at the activities we are trying to squeeze in, and if they aren't helpful or beneficial to the system, then maybe we should just let them go. Try it. Oh, and enjoy your camping.

L e a d e r

A person who rules or guides or inspires others

We are surrounded by leaders, aren't we? Business, political, religious and military leaders abound. And it has always been like this. In nature, pack animals always have a leader and humans are no different. It could be said that out of all groups a natural leader always emerges. They are the ones who show the way (whether the way is right or wrong) and people follow them.

All over the world, there are statues erected of leaders of days gone by, cast in bronze or carved in stone. Great military leaders who fought bravely for their king and country, or political leaders who have changed the shape of history. Sometimes in dictatorships, the current leaders just erect statues of themselves to feed their own ego, and let people know of their status.

Some people have gone against the idea of one leader, and even try to organise their groups where everyone is the leader, where everyone has an

equal voice, but that doesn't work either – all that happens is nothing ever gets done! So, whichever way we look at it, a “natural” structure always arises, with a leader at the top, and a pyramid spanning out underneath him.

But what I want to know is, do we really need someone to lead us? Do we not know the way? I do not want to talk about business, or politics, or the military, for the people that lead do so solely on their own agenda. They are not trying to inspire people, just convince them to follow them, do you understand? When the king, or ruler makes a speech “to inspire” the people, he is doing so to convince you to carry out his wishes, such as go to war and kill or be killed for him.

The leader I want to talk about does not seek to control nor receive adulation from his followers, but is someone who shows the way, by being the way. Do you understand? It's like walking the walk and talking the talk! The leader I talk about does the things he wants to inspire in others and does not require them to agree with him or even know who he is.

A great leader is someone who inspires but has no followers

So many people try to lead others, but ultimately all they are trying to do is gather followers. Some people only like the idea of being a leader if there are people to follow them. What would be the point of making a rousing military speech or engaging religious sermon if there were no one to listen? What would be the point in leading a political party if there were no members of the party? Do you see? A leader needs followers, or he is not a leader, he is just another man like you or I.

So what makes this man different, this leader without followers (which is surely a paradox (*logic*) a statement that contradicts itself)? That we will find out!

Have you ever met someone who *hasn't* tried to convert you to something or other, or got you to join some organisation or campaign?

We turn up and here is the leader speaking trying to convince us of the evils of immigration, the power of the lord, the need to save the rainforest, and a multitude of other (sometimes worthwhile) ideas. Have you noticed how convincing some of them are? ”Yes. I will join the national party. The black man is taking our jobs!” “Yes, I agree. The only way we can free the animals from the animal testing laboratories is to start killing those who work there.” “Yes I see, the capitalist is evil, and

needs to be stopped by any means necessary.” “Would I wear a bomb? Sure! Why not?”

Oh, we are so easily convinced!

Why are we so easily convinced? Because that is the leader's job. Nothing more. He is not there to have an open discussion on the subject, he is trying to get you to follow him, and if you do, he has done his job. It doesn't matter if he was convincing you to make jam for the summer fair to help the needy in the community, or convince you to attack parliament with a suicide bomb.

First, he gives you some background information, then uses some clever words so that his suggestion appeals to your mind, then he gets you to sign up. Easy! Like I said, we are so easily convinced, because we do not take the time to explore with our own minds. If we did, we may not follow quite so quickly.

But who is this leader I speak of? He does not try to indoctrinate you. He asks nothing from you. He does not want nor need followers, and he has no aims nor manifestos, nor ideas. He just is.

“So what makes him a leader?” I can hear you ask, “he clearly does not fit the definition of what we know a leader to be.”

To which my reply is “exactly!”

We have all been told to live this way or that way, think this, think that, become this, become that, don't drink, don't cheat on your wife, do not lie, do not steal, but how often is it that the leaders, the powerful, become corrupted, and do the very things they are preaching to us not to do! You see, these people are not leaders, they are people who want followers. Today they might be preaching about the environment, tomorrow they might be preaching about how great the logging industry is.

These are not authentic people. They do not believe this stuff in their hearts. They just want to lead somebody, anywhere! I remember my dad once saying to me, “once you are a leader, you can lead anything,” and that rings so true with me now; most people just lead for leading's sake. They may even sound passionate about the issue they are trying to talk to us about, because that's what leaders do, they *sound* convincing. Do they believe it themselves? Possibly. But what really matters here is that they just want to lead.

“Ever since I was a young boy I’ve known I would be a leader of men.” How nice! But empty, and worthless – the same as all the military, political, religious and business leaders. They would say anything just to get people to follow them.

“I think fox hunting is an integral part of English traditional rural culture.”

“Hear, hear,” said the followers.

Until the anti-fox hunting lobby got going, and the politician then contradicted himself:

“I think fox hunting is an unacceptably cruel activity which has no place in this country.”

“Hear, hear,” said the followers. Except this time the followers were different, but the speaker was the same. Is this making any sense to you at all? I hope so.

The leader with no followers is different. Why? Because he stands alone. He is a person who, through great insight into the nature of all things, lives a life in balance with himself, in harmonious relationship with the universe and all other beings on the planet. I’m sorry, does this sound a little crazy to you? Perhaps it does, but to understand it, you have to let go of all you think you know about what it is to be a leader.

I used to try to “lead” people, but all I really was trying to do was to convince them through (mainly unconvincing) argument that I was right, and they were wrong.

Several years ago I realised (and it came as a great disappointment to me) that all I was doing was arguing. Sure, I might get a couple of people who thought I was right to follow my ideas, but why? Are my ideas perfect? Are they the greatest ideas ever to exist on this planet? Hardly! All I was doing was pandering to my own ego. The thought that I was better than anyone else – that I had the answers, and they didn’t. But that is what a leader tries to do, to convince others he is right, and so I felt positive again. “Maybe it is me who will be the leader,” I thought.

But the day I discovered that there is no right and no wrong way, just a way, I gave up all my ideas of being a leader of men! Oh well, no followers. But who needs followers, apart from the politicians, the gurus, the colonels, the managing directors...

So who is this leader, if it isn’t me and it isn’t the politicians, the spiritual or the military leaders? Who is this leader? Is it you? Is it all of us, or is it none of us? What do you think? Please let this question go deep into your mind for a moment.

When I see the way, and that way is compassion and love, and I live that way every moment I breathe, who is the leader? When I tend my crops with love, who is the leader? When I love my brother although I do not know him, who is the leader? When I show empathy for another who is suffering, who is the leader? When my mind is free from violence and conflict, who is the leader? All has been said. The leader who does not lead.

L i s t e n i n g

The act of hearing attentively

•

Hear with intention

•

Listen and pay attention

•

Pay close attention to; give heed to

Listening is different from hearing (*perceive (sound) via the auditory sense*). Hearing is just as passive bodily function whereas listening is active, or should be. When we listen to a lecture, on a subject we are actually interested in we give our full attention to the topic. We are actively involved in the subject. We take in everything that has been said and process it carefully.

That's all very well when we're talking about a subject that is of interest to us, like learning a language so we can travel, or gaining a new skill for our job, but what if we are talking about a subject that is important, but one which you have no real interest in?

You see, we listen when it affects us personally, when the topic being discussed is related to "me." My education. My job. My family, My security. My home. My pension. My holiday. My future. My children's future. If it's *me* your talking about, then I'm interested. How can this

benefit me? I'm listening! But the world isn't just about you it's about me and you. It's about six billion people living on a small planet, somewhere in a place called space (*the unlimited expanse in which everything is located*)

But everything has to start with me, doesn't it? Even changing the world! It's no one else's responsibility, is it? Oh yes, I forgot, actually it is someone else's responsibility – anyone who likes, because I'm too busy doing the “me” stuff.

Ok, I'm sorry, I'm not being fair to you, but what I'm trying to understand is whether we only listen to things we're interested in, which to be fair, probably doesn't include saving the planet, and everyone who lives here.

Everyone, including me, has to survive. We have to go to work to pay our bills, our credit cards, our car loans, our mortgage or rent and we have to eat. We work hard and long, and we are stressed by the end of the day. We are tired, and the last thing we want to be thinking about is someone else suffering in a faraway country, someone we will never meet.

“Benevolence is a hobby for the rich” you shout! “I don't have time to concern myself with saving the planet, it's hard enough getting by on my own without worrying about someone starving in africa, why doesn't their government look after them?”

And I would agree with you to some extent. Your responsibilities are primarily to your family and to your kinship group, and you must look after yourself before you can help other people.

Who will listen to me? Who will read this book? Will they listen to what I have to say? Do they care? Is it important enough to those who read this book to actively listen, or will they put it down because the subject matter doesn't interest them?

And this is the great problem. If you have paid money for this book, it means you actively sought it out because you were interested in the subject matter. If you weren't interested, you wouldn't spend your hard earned money on it. It's as simple as that.

Can I ask you a question? How do you get people to listen to you, if they don't think what you are talking about is interesting? When I started writing this book, I realised that, potentially, the only people who may listen, were those who were already interested in people, the mind and the planet. If you just go to work every day, don't give a damn about anyone else but yourself, and go through life using everything and

everyone just for your own benefit, why would you buy a book like this? It doesn't make sense, does it?

Do you think politicians will actively want to read this? How about murderers, rapists, warlords, army generals, hooligans, drunks, drug addicts, fast food corporation directors, people who drop litter, shopaholics, criminals, supermarket shoppers and bosses, car drivers, or even fried chicken lovers. This book is not for these people! They wouldn't buy it, or read it, and even if they did, they may put it down rather quickly, because this is not a book about something they're interested in; it's a book which asks them to look at themselves. It's a book which questions the "me" and asks, "how do I affect the other people in the world by my actions?" and they may start to feel that they need to change something about themselves.

I am convinced that if you buy this book, you are already open to change, and that is such a pity, because the people who should read this, aren't interested. But I cannot force them to read this book, anymore than I can force anyone to do anything.

If I force you to listen to me. Are you really listening, or are you merely hearing?

The only time people listen to things they aren't interested in, is when it affects them personally. You can talk all you like about war, climate change, compassion, and love, but it's only when a bomb explodes, or a tidal wave destroys a city, or a member of their family is murdered, that people take notice. It takes something cataclysmic to invoke the desire to listen, the desire to change. This doesn't mean that the people will suddenly try to understand everyone else, and get to the heart of the problem, it may only strengthen their resolve; as In the following example.

A bomb was detonated in the london underground a couple years ago, by supposedly muslim suicide bombers. Scores of people died and were injured in the blasts.

Do the government and the people decide that they must try to find out what would cause a human being to blow themselves up, and kill other innocent human beings? No. They invoke even greater security measures, everyone is afraid of anyone from a muslim country, and the police are given greater powers of arrest; thereby creating more tension,

more fear, and more hatred of people who look and dress differently to themselves.

So yes, people did listen, but they listened to the government spokesmen, the media, and anyone else who had a negative opinion of “muslims.” They didn't want you to explore it for yourselves, they presented the “facts” in the knowledge that everyone is afraid of life, and offered a solution to protect you.

What I am trying to uncover here, is that actively listening does not mean believing. I want you to listen to what I am saying, but I don't want you to blindly believe it. I want you to explore it for yourself, not in the way a government presents evidence, and then says “make up your own mind,” but to explore every topic with an underlying feeling of love and compassion for everyone, and everything on the planet. Only then can you find out the truth of it all.

Listen passionately by all means, but then test it against the principle of compassion, and you will soon see if what is being said (by anybody) meets this requirement. You will not just be able to make up your mind, but you will see the real truth behind what is being said, whether it is you, your president, your media, your friend, or your teacher speaking. If there is no compassion in what is being said, then you will know it can never be the truth.

Listen with compassion
Explore with compassion
Understand with compassion
Act with compassion

L i t e r a t u r e

Creative writing of recognized artistic value

We all read books from time to time. Some of us read constantly, others maybe just pick up a book at the airport. We read trashy sex novels, crime novels, scientific books, religious books, self-help books. In fact there are so many authors and different styles available that it is hard to know where to start!

I would like to begin this conversation with you by saying that it doesn't matter what types of books you read or whether some stuffy intellectual or critic thinks that what you are reading is of no artistic value, or isn't "serious" reading. What matters is that books are one of the best ways to see into someone else's imagination, and to have that imagination in some small way inspire us.

Of course, some books inspire us more than others.

When people read the koran (*the sacred writings of islam revealed by god to the prophet muhammad during his life at mecca and medina*) or the

upanishads (*a later sacred text of hinduism of a mystical nature dealing with metaphysical questions*) or the bible (*the sacred writings of the christian religions*), those who read them are sometimes inspired to change their lives, and follow a religion. Others such as self-help books tackle specific topics that people want answers to in their personal lives. Scientific books inspire children to want to learn more about biology or chemistry, and others just entertain.

They all have their own place, and I think that books are tremendously important. More so than even the most educational television will ever be.

I remember reading a children's fantasy novel recently, and then going to see the film. I was so disappointed! I had imagined the main character as someone who looked and spoke so differently. I had imagined the land where it took place as something not at all like that presented on the screen. And the reason was that it was the director's imagination I was seeing. The book had allowed me to construct my own view of how everything would look. It allowed me to use *my own* imagination.

Questioning the unquestionable

What we must remember, is that books present a view, not the absolute; and I am sure I will get into serious trouble with all the major religions of the world for saying this, but books can never present absolute truth, for they are the word of another.

"How dare you deny the word of god! You will burn in hell!" I hear people screaming.

And maybe I will, but is that your view, or the view of the book you read that said I would? You see, with all books, whether they be "sacred" and unquestionable, or just an opinion, they all demand to be questioned. That is why I ask each and everyone of you to question everything I write here.

If sacred books are the word of the one true god, then surely he would expect that you ask questions? No compassionate god would be so presumptuous that everyone just followed everything he said, would he? That is why I offer my apologies to all who have chosen to be offended by what I have just said, but also ask you to place the question: "How can someone else tell you truth?" in the back of your mind.

Surely truth is something you discover for yourself, even if it eventually coincides with the writings. At least you will have verified

what has been said to your own satisfaction, and gained true insight into the nature of all things, rather than repeating words written many years ago.

Now I find myself having to write about this topic very carefully. Why? Because talking about “sacred” books where the word of god is unquestionable makes me feel a little uneasy. You see, it is not that I deny god in whatever shape or form you choose to envisage him, nor do I deny the value of the teachings. In fact, in every book from the koran to the bible, the word of god seems to coincide with most of what I hold to be my most precious values. Truth, honesty, compassion, love, understanding; and whilst I am not here to question any of these “sacred” writings, all I ask people to do with any book is to question it.

Now there is no denying that it is wrong to steal or that it is wrong to kill, I just want to find out why, in my own mind. Do you understand where I am coming from?

I know that greed is a terrible disease that afflicts so many of us. The sacred writings talk of it, but I just want to explore it to my own satisfaction so I actually understand what it means to be greedy with my whole being. If I just repeated it from a book, I would see that yes, greed was bad and god said it was bad, and then just carry on with my life.

How many people attend mosques, churches and temples, and pray to god every day, reciting extracts from the books, and listening to teachings about how greed is bad, and then close up their books and return to a capitalist consumer lifestyle?

How many people in the world read from the “sacred” books about how killing another is wrong, and then return to their daily business of war and violence? How many times have I heard western politicians talk about god, and the bible, before sending in their troops to other countries to kill and maim their people, and then talk about having god on their side?

Unfortunately, this has been seen before, during the crusades (*any of the more or less continuous military expeditions in the 11th to 13th centuries when christian powers of europe tried to recapture the holy land from the muslims*), and so it is little wonder that the muslim people are more than a little upset about the most recent incursion.

How can they use these great books to justify killing people? I cannot understand it, anymore than I can understand certain parts of the muslim faith, where they advocate killing all infidels and using the great words of the koran to back them up. No. These are not religious people. They use

the most powerful book ever written to back up political, and extremist ideology, in order to control the people.

The fact they use the “unquestionable” word of god as their backup, just makes it all the harder for people to say that what they were doing was wrong. But the killing of any man, woman or child falls way short of what it is to live with compassion, and love for your brother, whether it is a muslim brother, a christian brother, a hindu brother, or even an atheist brother.

We are all creatures of the world, whatever religion we believe in, and using these texts to justify murder, rape, greed, power and torture is the greatest sacrilege (*blasphemous behaviour; the act of depriving something of its sacred character*).

We must not allow people who are determined to use these texts for their own advantage and personal gain to continue to do so. We must help them understand that what they are doing is not the will of god. If you believe that god created the earth in all its abundance and beauty, why would he give licence to a few powerful people to go around causing mayhem, and destroying everything he had created?

It is with great sadness that I watch television reports of people being killed by soldiers anywhere, and how they casually drop bombs on people, their homes, and their villages, and destroy the trees, and the grass, and the animals who inhabit it. For what, to prove they are right? To carry out god's will? Surely god would not allow man to create such suffering for, who are, in effect, all gods children.

It is with greater sadness that I see people with bombs strapped to their bodies, ready to die for a greater cause, reciting words from their sacred texts, before blowing their perfect human bodies into pieces along with anyone that is close. No, this is man's work, god did not sanction this.

So I do not ask you to question the word of god. I ask you to question yourselves. I ask you to question your religious leaders. I ask you to question your political leaders. I ask you to question everyone you meet – for it is only through these questions you will find truth. I decided to ask the president (you know which one) about his beliefs.

Me: Excuse me mister president, is there a reason you are callously killing lots of civilians in iraq?

Him: Well, we are trying to bring them freedom.

Me: So, it wouldn't have anything to do with your christian beliefs?

Him: No, but the lord guides me in my work.

Me: So god told you to kill the muslims, is that what you are saying?
Him: Now you're putting words in my mouth.
Me: Isn't freedom something you discover for yourself?
Him: No, we are freeing these people from tyranny and oppression!
Me: So, what you are saying is, that you are these peoples saviour?
Him: If you want to put it like that, yes we are, we are saving them.
Me: Who told you to save them? And what are you saving them from?
Him: I told you, tyranny and oppression! (angrily)
Me: So you don't want to convert them to christianity? You did say that the lord guides your actions.
Him: No I do not want to convert anyone, just save them.
Me: So is there a passage in your sacred book that justifies your actions?
Him: Actually no, it was the united nations who sanctioned this, although there is one passage...
Me: Thanks, I think I've heard enough.

Whenever people need to refer to a “sacred text” to give them more moral authority than others, you can be sure they are going to want us to go along with something that the texts probably forbids anyway! They just twist it to their own advantage.

So can you see why questioning these people is important? Hopefully the people who carry out this behaviour in the name of “god,” will finally get the insight into themselves, and what they are doing, and start acting with compassion and loving kindness, to all on this planet and beyond.

So read all you can, but question what you read, and try see it from another viewpoint.

If you are a christian, read the koran, if you are a hindu, read the bible, do you see what I am saying? In order to reach our own truth, which is the indivisible, we must gain insight. And to gain insight, we must question even the unquestionable.

In doing so we are not denying it, nor are we saying it isn't the way, we are merely opening our minds to possibilities. And if you are trying to find the divine, your mind is a great place to start. Open it, and allow compassion to be your guide in your exploration.

Inspiration

1. *Arousal of the mind to special unusual activity or creativity*
2. *A product of your creative thinking and work*
3. *A sudden intuition as part of solving a problem*
4. *(theology) a special influence of a divinity on the minds of human beings*

So, literature of all kinds can inspire the most heated of debates, as we have seen in the previous paragraphs, and can inspire us to do the most wonderful, or terrible things to each other. But inspiration is not all about what you have read.

I have read widely, on every kind of topic imaginable, but the inspiration to write this book was sparked by a person (my ex-wife to be exact), although she didn't know it at the time, and neither did I. Whether it was something she said, or something she did, I don't know, but from that moment my mind started to work more creatively. Then I read more on topics I suddenly developed an interest in, which sparked more interest, and inspired me to change my life. I then started to observe people, and nature, and finally myself, which gave me more inspiration. Soon it was becoming all too much for my little brain to take, so I started to write it all down. And gradually, the more I was inspired to look at something, or talk to someone about something, the more insight I got, and the more inspired I became. It was like a self-reinforcing loop that became stronger every day.

Suddenly I had written 500 pages, and I couldn't even remember exactly how I had started it, or even why! Let's just leave it at "I was inspired to write it" without trying to sound too mystical!

Some people are inspired by great poets, athletes, politicians, religious leaders or scientists to start something wonderful in their lives, but however the inspiration starts, it's like feeding an eternal flame that just won't extinguish. I only hope you all get to experience what I have felt from writing this book, and find your own inspiration in life. Whether this inspiration is from the divine, from your own mind, from nature or from another human being, it doesn't really matter.

We are a truly unique species, living in a wonderful universe, so full of mystery and beauty, and it keeps begging to be asked questions. "Who am I? Where am I?"

I hope you all find the inspiration to ask, and find out answers. But don't keep them to yourselves, share them with others, share them with your friends, your families, believers and non-believers. All should get a

chance to explore what you have discovered. You never know, it may inspire others. I hope that one small section of what I have written in this book helps you to find some inspiration. But if it doesn't, don't worry. After all, this is just one book in a sea of millions!

But I have to put all this inspiration into perspective in the universe. The contents of all of my inspiration fit on a single, tiny, microchip! This huge book, with all of my fears, my addictions, my successes, my discoveries, my joy, and my sadness, my insight and my lack of it; I have emptied my mind into this book; there is no stone unturned, nothing you do not know about me. I have opened up my entire life to you – all 38 years of it. You know all my stories, my opinions, all my jokes, all my ex-girlfriends, and my family. There is nothing left to tell. But all of it can fit on something so small, I can put it inside my wallet. That should give you something to think about!

Never stop being inspired. I won't.

L i t t e r

Rubbish carelessly dropped or left about (especially in public places)

“If I don't drop litter someone won't have a job”



I used to, do you? I used to empty my ashtray under my car when I stopped at a service station on the motorway, or I'd leave fast food wrappers under the car, because I couldn't be bothered going to the bin; and of course, I *always* threw my cigarette butts out of the window.

I have no idea why I did these things. I wasn't deliberately setting out to make a mess or to cause someone more work. I just couldn't be bothered. I didn't consciously think, "I will drop this cigarette butt here and I don't care if I make a mess," it just didn't even cross my mind, it was a purely automatic response.

What a change! Why? Well, let's start from a different angle shall we? How many pavements, beaches, parks, rivers or streets are full of litter? What are the most offending articles? I don't have any statistics, but I can take a pretty good guess, what about you? Cigarette ends? Chewing gum? Plastic soft drink bottles and cans? Fast food containers? Plastic bags?

So who can we blame for this litter?

The cigarette companies, for making filters which are not biodegradable in the street? The chewing gum companies, for selling a product based on petroleum that sticks to the roads and any other surface it comes into contact with? The fizzy drink manufacturer for making bottles that don't self-compost? The fast food salesman for using so much packaging? The retailer who supplied the plastic bag?

As much as the general public, and the environmentalists would like to blame the companies responsible for producing the goods, for the litter; we have to look in a different place.

Let me ask you a question. How many banana skins, or apple cores, do you find littered all over the street? How many times have you been for a walk in the park, and said "Look at all the orange peelings that people have dropped everywhere."

Have you ever seen this in the city? Ok, maybe once or twice, but this is not something you see everywhere. Why? Maybe it's because people don't eat fruit outside, or maybe it's because the people who eat oranges, and bananas, are more responsible people! Maybe they are from a different era, where dropping banana skins in the street, is not acceptable.

All of these arguments could be plausible, although I don't think we're really getting to the bottom of the problem; and indeed it is a problem now. Everywhere we look, in every country in the world, there is litter.

Some countries have less litter, because they impose an on the spot fine, something governments have resorted to, because it's easier than finding the real reason behind it.

Litter is a sign that humans have been there. How many times do you walk through some area of natural beauty, and you see cigarette butts littered everywhere? The people who walked through smoking, were probably appreciating the scenery, as they dropped their cigarettes, or left their rubbish from their picnic by the side of the track. This was me, many years ago; appreciating nature, and ruining it at the same time, without so much as a thought that what I was doing was wrong.

How many people do you see flicking their cigarettes out of their car window as they drive along? Most of them. How many have ashtrays provided? All of them. I don't think I have ever seen someone smoking inside their house, then opening the window, and throwing the butt outside in the street. No, even the most unthinking people, with no care

for the world we live in, usually use ashtrays and empty them into the bin, to be disposed of correctly (if only to be buried in the ground at a landfill site). Although some people throw apple cores, and the suchlike out of the car window, I have never seen someone throw an empty coffee cup out of the window. It's not acceptable.

This leads us somewhere interesting, don't you think? The definition of acceptable is "*judged to be in conformity with approved usage.*" Well, that doesn't mean that littering is approved of, but we learn what acceptable behaviour is, by watching, and imitating others, and if we see enough people doing it in our social peer group, it becomes acceptable.

If your peer group contains car thieves, then stealing cars becomes acceptable to you, although it's not accepted in wider society. If your peer group contains church going people you will most likely think that it is acceptable to go to church. For smokers, theirs is a large peer group; one that contains, smokers! And, if they see many smokers throwing cigarettes out the window it becomes acceptable behaviour for them as well.

If you see chewing gum on the pavement, you know that a large number of people already do it; it's everywhere, same as takeaway containers and plastic bags. There is already a large amount of it littered around, so one more takeaway box isn't going to hurt, is it? And anyway, you were drunk, and you don't remember leaving it there, and someone will clean it up in the morning, and it wasn't hurting anyone! We never see our individual actions as harmful.

You say: "It wasn't affecting anyone." You say: "I am a decent citizen, and anyway, I pay my taxes, and that includes paying for someone to clean the litter in the streets. The end."



The other living creatures on the planet don't really drop too much litter do they? Maybe a small amount of excretory waste from their meal the night before, but on the whole, I couldn't really say I've noticed much litter left around the place from the birds, animals and fish in the sea, even when they die. Excretions return to the soil, and in death the body breaks down. They are part of nature and they return to nature. From them they supply other animals and insects with nutrients. Quite a nice little cycle, don't you think?

In fact, you don't really notice that animals and birds are there, do you? They just kind of fit in, quietly performing their daily tasks, without leaving a legacy of litter behind for a hundred years or more. Everything

an animal uses is natural; everything comes from the natural world. There is nothing artificial used by animals. Why? Because they don't have the skills, brainpower, or need, to make it. As the most intelligent living being on the planet, we do have the skills and brainpower to make artificial products; but do we “need” to make them?

We already know that an animal doesn't need any more than he already has, but we are different. We have needs, desires, addictions, and wants. We have “needs” that cannot be satisfied by the natural world, so we have to fulfil them artificially. We have developed skills and machines that enable us to live more easily.

Let's face it, life isn't so difficult anymore; we no longer have to go out and hunt our food, we buy it in the supermarket, and we store it in the freezer for use sometime later.

Our ancestors never used to go shopping to the supermarket, had a takeaway, or chewed artificial gum! Why? Easy. They didn't exist. But with the advent of the industrial revolution, came the invention of new types of synthetic material, large scale production techniques, and the ability to make new products that companies could sell to the general public on a massive scale.

Gone were the days of people using nature for the products they needed. Now they could get products they didn't need and thereby activated a whole new pleasure area of the brain. The pleasure to get what ever you want whenever you wanted it even if you didn't need it. As long as you had one thing – money.

And so it began. Companies started making products people wanted; not because the people needed them, but because someone from the company invented them, and they thought they would make money by selling them to everyone. “Hang on!” I hear you say, “there have been some marvellous inventions over the years; so many things to make our lives easier.”

Unfortunately, alongside this ability to mass produce things we wanted, liked, needed, desired, or craved, came a problem. They had to find a way to get it to us without the products becoming damaged. So they needed to invent packaging (*any material used especially to protect something*). This enabled goods to be manufactured in other countries and transported by rail or sea (or by plane or road now) and delivered to the retailer, in perfect condition for sale.

So let's recap. We are interested only in litter, and we have looked at the most prevalent types of litter in our streets, rivers, and parks. They are cigarette butts, chewing gum, plastic bags, and takeaway containers.

Whether you think chewing gum is pleasurable, or you enjoy eating kebabs or burgers, the fact exists that many people do. Why? Instant gratification.

“I am hungry.” I can eat a takeaway immediately and feel pleasure. “I need nicotine.” There are twenty shops that sell cigarettes. I can buy a pack and feel pleasure. “I want to buy products from the supermarket on my way home from work, but how will I carry them home?” They have bags available to make it easy. The fact is, whatever the product, and whatever the reason for buying it, if I can think of it, I can normally buy it within one kilometre of where I am standing. That is the modern world. That is mass manufacturing and global distribution. I want it now and I can get it now.

Every pleasure has a cost. The pleasure of instant gratification, is the packaging required, to get it to us in perfect condition.

But we still can't blame the packaging, or the companies that make the products; even if we want to. They don't force us to consume them, or drop the litter on the ground, do they? Of course, we're very busy in our lives, aren't we? So anything that makes our lives simpler, helps.. We *are* busy, we are always working, always doing something. We're always on the go, always rushing somewhere. No time to stop, must dash, in a rush, can't wait. It's enough to drive you mad! So it's no wonder we stop at the takeaway because we are hungry, chew gum or smoke cigarettes because we're stressed.

Society made me drop it!

Could it be that because we are always preoccupied with something else that we don't even consider that dropping litter is important? Could it be that our busy lives take on more importance than disposing litter properly. What do you think?

“I'm walking along the street, and I'm hungry. I've had a busy day, and I got up at 5.30 am for a train to a customer. It's 2.30 pm and I need something quickly. I buy a burger, unwrap it, and the mobile phone goes. “Hello? Yeah, I'll be there in four minutes.” Hands full, I quickly dispose of the most unimportant thing, the wrapper; it's an important call.

I finish the burger, take out my cigarettes, and think what I'll say at the meeting. The phone goes again. I finish my cigarette, and stamp it out on the pavement, whilst reaching for my gum (I don't want the director to know that I smoke). As I approach the entrance to the office building, quickly think of my speech, and spit out the gum. It doesn't look very professional to be seen chewing gum in a meeting..."

We're not lazy, we've just got more important things to think about. Ourselves.

Now remember the animal, and the bird, and think of the fish. Do they need a cigarette to de-stress or chewing gum to freshen their breath? We need things we didn't need before, things that are not for the benefit of the system.. We are now programmed for success, for stress, for making more money. And litter is our by-product.

"But hang on, I earn lots of money and I care about the environment and I always put my litter in the bin. I never throw it away in the street!"

Maybe you do, and your fellow city dwellers will thank you for it, as it makes the city look cleaner; and no one wants to live in a place full of litter. But even if we throw it in the bin, even when the street sweeper takes it away, and our streets look nice, it's not the end.

Our cigarette butts. Our gum. Our plastic bags from our shopping. Our burger wrappers. They all go somewhere! They aren't like the animals droppings. They don't just wash away and return to nature, they stay, and stay, and stay, all around the world, just filling up giant holes in the ground.

*Litter is not about putting your rubbish in the bin,
although it helps the place look nice.
It's about what products are important,
what products you really need,
although you may not need them at all.*

*It's about choosing products that have no packaging.
It's about reviewing your lifestyle.
It's stopping rushing, it's about caring.
It's about thinking about something other than yourself.
It's about change.
Ultimately, it's not about litter at all.*

L o a n s

The temporary provision of money (usually at interest)

Why do you need a loan?

I need a loan because I need new car. I need a loan because I need a new extension. I need a loan because I need a new fridge. I need a loan because I want to buy a house. I need a loan because I need a holiday. I need a loan to pay off my credit cards. I need a loan to buy the boat I want. I need a loan to have a new carpet installed. I need a loan to pay for the last loan!

Borrowing money isn't a new thing. It has been around for many years. There's always someone desperate, and there's always someone willing to help (for a price). Of course, in the old days, the poor man trying to borrow money would be desperate – otherwise why would he need a loan? Desperation is why we borrow; or is it?

Am I desperate when I say I need a new car? Am I desperate, when I say I need a holiday? Am I even desperate when I need to buy a house or new furniture? This doesn't sound very desperate! Although I might agree that the man who has gambled, or bought drugs, and needs to borrow money to pay back his creditors, who have threatened him, is.

We borrow money because we are addicted to pleasure. New televisions, new sofas, new bathroom suites, new cars, new computers – all things that give pleasure; except we are not prepared to wait for them. We are not prepared to earn and save money, to wait until we can afford

them. We want them now, something which would previously not have been possible for the average man, but companies are now making it easy to have what we cannot afford. Right now!

*Buy Now Pay Later!
Nothing to pay for the first 2 YEARS!
No deposit necessary!
Take it away today. No money required!*

So it's no wonder you can't help yourselves. Who wouldn't? It means you can have the pleasure right now, and it won't cost you a cent! Until the pleasure wears off and the reality hits that you now have to pay back every penny plus interest for the next three years – long after the initial pleasure has worn off.

How long does it take for the pleasure to wear off the purchase of a new sofa? I'd guess less than three years – maybe soon after the purchase. Then you begin to think: “What else can I buy?” “Oh, look, that new fridge is on sale, with nothing to pay for two years!” And so it starts again, the cycle of borrowing; for no other reason, than we want it. In effect we put off reality, to have pleasure today.

Buying a house is the one thing that most people are taught to aspire to. The ultimate dream; owning your own home, not paying a landlord any more rent, something that is truly yours for life. Something you can sell, something you can make money on. A wise investment – until you can't keep up the mortgage, because you lose your job, and get evicted.

As you all know already, you don't own the house, until you have paid back every penny of the loan plus all the interest. Something which normally takes at least twenty years.

You have to be pretty sure about it before signing the contract. No more freedom to do what you like, no more leaving when you want, no more making decisions on a whim. You are an adult now, and with that, comes responsibilities. BIG responsibilities. Not to the world, but to a bank. Of course, you can sell at any time, as long as you can pay back the loan; so you better hope your house is worth more than you paid for it.

On the face of it, buying property seems like a sensible way to borrow money. After all, you need somewhere to live, and you have enough income to meet your repayments. It's no one's business but yours. Right?

Let's move away from housing and go back to need, shall we? I think if we were all to be honest with ourselves, we would say we don't actually

“need” to borrow money to buy consumer items. Hey, even if you don't have a sofa you don't actually “need” one, do you? What you mean is, “it would be nice,” after all, in some countries, it is actually cultural to sit on the floor, and by all accounts, better for your spine!

So why borrow? Why do we get sucked in by these companies? Well, it's because they know how to appeal to your inner desires; after all, that's what they are. They know you want something new, it's nice to have something new, and they want you to have it; after all it keeps them in business, and it's good for the economy.

The definition of a loan is “*the temporary provision of money,*” and if you have the income that allows you to borrow money at interest, and pay it back over two or five years then there is no problem. It's no ones business but yours. Right?

Imagine for a moment that you have never borrowed any money. How do you feel? Relieved? Happy? Maybe, but I doubt it. In fact, most of us feel happy when we borrow money. Not at the prospect of having to pay it back, but that it enables us to buy the things we want, but cannot afford.

Not that people rush into borrowing money. Quite the opposite. Most people carefully consider their financial position, do endless calculations, but will ultimately conclude, that although things may be tight, it is actually financially viable to take out the loan.

Five days later the high definition plasma television with dvd recorder and surround sound is delivered

Wow! Look at it taking centre stage in your lounge, all shiny and bright, sound coming from every corner of the room. You can't wait to invite your friends round to watch a dvd.

“Wow!” says your friend. “Is that the new high definition plasma television with dvd recorder and surround sound that's just come out?”

“Sure is,” you reply with a wide smile.

Any thoughts of repayments here? Not on your life! “I've evaluated the financial situation and now I'm just going to enjoy it!” That is, until your friend gets the new sports car you've always wanted... “I wonder if I could afford that, maybe I could take out a loan...” and you start to forget about that glorious surround sound.

So if we don't actually need it, we don't really want it, and we are the most intelligent being on the planet; what could possibly make us sign up

for a loan for three years with interest (*a fixed charge for borrowing money; usually a percentage of the amount borrowed*)? One word:

Status

The relative position or standing of things or especially persons in a society

A bigger house, a better car, a more expensive suit, a better holiday, a better computer, a better sofa. Let's face it, we never trade down do we?

In days gone by, we used to be able to distinguish someone's relative status in society by the type of clothes they wore. If you wore a top hat, or a cloth cap, if you had a horse and carriage or walked, or if you had a castle or a cottage.

It was evident to people on first meeting if you were of low status, and you stayed there, unless you made a lot of money. These days, it is harder to determine status, especially in the so called middle classes. We all dress similarly (driven by fashion), we generally all have cars and houses, and most of us have jobs. So how does the man, who earns thirty thousand per year, show he has a higher status than the man who earns twenty thousand per year? Certainly not in the street.

If I asked you to evaluate the status of two men in the street, who were both wearing the same jeans, t-shirt and shoes, could you do it? Maybe you could try to distinguish them, if one spoke with a more "educated" accent, but then again some people have made a lot of money without the need to have one. In today's society it would be difficult, so we have to use possessions as the indicator.

If I follow the two men, I would be looking to see what car they drove, or where they lived. Like it or not, the ownership of an expensive sports car would satisfy me that this man was of a higher status than the man getting into a fifteen year old car. But how does the man with the sports car distinguish his status from another man with the same make and model of car? He has a bigger house. And how does the man distinguish his status from another man with the same size house? He has more expensive furniture, and so on. Are you following this? We all have a need to show we are of a higher status than our peers.

You certainly wouldn't respect the position of the king or queen if they lived in a tiny council house would you? No, they live in a house bigger than anyone else's in the country, and that defines their relative status in society. This is not about what you know, or who you know,

this is about showing what you've got. And if you want to be at the top, you have to have more possessions than anyone else in your status group.

I do not wish to start a discussion on why status is important here after all we are talking about loans! Let's just say we like to impress people, and have a need to keep up with our peers. So it doesn't matter what level of wage earner you are, if your friends have the new wide screen satellite system you've got to have it too; better still, make it the high definition wide screen satellite system with dvd recorder and surround sound while you're at it.

But high definition wide screen satellite systems with dvd recorders and surround sound are expensive, aren't they? And after you pay your bills, and buy your food, you have little left with which to buy new items. So you borrow. Just to keep up with the neighbours next door. To impress your friends. You sign up for a two year loan which will make your life, just a little more difficult; but you don't care, this isn't about the money, remember! This is about status. After all, would you really need a new sports car, if no one looked at it?

"I buy these things just for me, no one else. I'm not a show off! I just like sports cars, so I bought one! Do you have a problem with that?"

Although we may desire these new possessions (because we like them, they make us happy, and we are addicted to pleasure), we still have to keep asking ourselves; "would I really, really want it, if no one commented on it?" After all, a sports car just gets you from a to b, the same as an older car; and a wide screen tv still shows the same tv programmes as the non-wide screen version.

But this is not about the possessions themselves; a tv is nothing, neither is a sports car, they are just pieces of carefully engineered plastic and metal. It is only when we allow them to become symbols of wealth that they take on significance. Let's face it, most of us are not or never will become extremely wealthy, but loans have enabled us to give the appearance of wealth.

I've had loans before, and I've bought cars, a small boat, tv's, and washing machines, all of them on credit, and I *definitely* didn't need them. I already had a car, and I certainly didn't need a boat! I had a tv, and I could have used the local laundrette for washing; but I didn't. I chose to get into debt; to make my life a little more difficult, so I could have the appearance of wealth, and gain a higher status position relative to my friends.

But it's not just people with no cash who borrow. The wealthy borrow too. Remember it doesn't just stop when you have all the possessions you want. Now that you're wealthy, you're going to want a better car, and a bigger house; your possessions are all relative to the status you want in society. The high definition wide screen satellite system with dvd recorder and surround sound might have worked when you were impressing your friends in the small, rented flat, but now all your friends have their own home cinemas! So what do you do? You carefully consider your financial position, do endless calculations, but ultimately conclude, that although things may be tight, it is actually financially viable to take out the loan!

Loan companies are not stupid, they know why you borrow, and they are making billions out of each and every one of us who are desperate to improve our status within society. Why can't we be happy with what we have? Well, that is a question that should be addressed in another topic, as should housing. Let's just say that the loan itself is not the problem, it's why we want it that should concern us all.

This is a never ending cycle – once you're on it, you can't stop: until you finally realise that the ultimate reason for having something you have no money to pay for is *status*, and the cost is debt, and perpetual discontent.

Love

A strong positive emotion of regard and affection

•

Any object of warm affection or devotion

•

A beloved person; used as terms of endearment

•

A deep feeling of sexual desire and attraction

•

Sexual activities (often including sexual intercourse) between two people

We all know what it is to love, right? Even the most violent amongst us has loved someone in his life. Perhaps his mother, or father, or a partner. When we fall in love something magical happens doesn't it? We can't think straight (a good thing), and our whole being feels giddy. We just can't focus on our work and any tasks we have to do seem like frivolous distractions compared with being in love. It uses up all of our energy, but it requires no effort. We don't suddenly decide to be in love, when it happens it happens. No one can explain it. Sometimes the feeling lasts a lifetime sometimes just a couple of months but it is an experience we can never forget.

I have always told my girlfriends at some point that I love them, but without fail, the love seems to wane, and the gritty business of just being

in a relationship takes over. We all have bills to worry about, our careers, our own problems, and pretty much everything else.

Life gets in the way doesn't it? All you want to be is in love, but circumstances won't let you just "be," and soon the intense emotions (*any strong feeling*) start to fade, and all you are left with is the mundane stuff. "I think we should split up" one of you says, and that's the end of love!

Funnily enough, when partners stop being together, other emotions kick in like hate, or at the very least, dislike. I have never understood how I can go from feeling all the love chemicals rushing around my body to having no feelings for them at all. Love seems to be such a temporary thing.

"You have to take care of love" one of my girlfriends once said to me. I never really knew what she meant, but I think what she was getting at was that I should spend more time with her, just her, and pay her some attention, but what do I know? We split up soon after that.

So what thought waves or chemicals are passed invisibly between two people to create this intense emotion we call love, which is, after all, only a man-made word? Perhaps it is just a biological process that takes place to ensure the pair bond is complete and that procreation will take place. But it "feels" like something a lot more than that doesn't it?

When you look into somebody's eyes (the window to the soul, someone once said to me) you can feel this intense connection, a connection that has nothing to do with words.

What is it that attracts us to each other in the first place, they say that opposites attract, but what is doing the attracting? Is it a silent chemical connection, or are waves being transmitted across the air? What do you feel like when you catch someone's eye across a room, and they catch yours? What is connecting you? Would you feel the same way if you hadn't held each others stare?

The eyes are indeed a window, not to the soul, but to the mind. For in effect it is the mind doing the seeing, the eyes just channel the light. And when you look into someone's eyes for long enough, it's like you are reading their mind. Actually, you are; and they are reading yours. Not consciously of course, but more telepathically (*communicating without apparent physical signals*). How else can you explain this thing called love?

My love for her

It's strange the people you end up with. I didn't even like her in the beginning, but the more we talked, the more our minds came closer together and we started communicating without words. I remember the first night I kissed her, we spent what seemed like an eternity looking into each others eyes. She on the top bunk of the hostel, and me standing looking at her. Suddenly it was as though there was a rush of chemicals running around my body, not in the way you have before sex, it only happened when I looked in her eyes.

And that's the thing isn't it? The difference between love and lust. With lust you look at the body and with love you look deep, deep into the eyes. Then I kissed her.

From that moment, I was in love. I mean really in love, I couldn't stand to be away from her, but as time went on, and bills, and day to day stuff got in the way, it just turned into, can't stand her. I couldn't understand how I was losing all the feelings of love for her, to be replaced with just a mild annoyance at her presence. In the end we split up. We said we still "loved" each other, but living together was just too hard. And so I left.

I thought long and hard about where it had gone wrong but I realised that the original love had never really died. It had been awakened, and couldn't die. This love was not a process of the mind, it couldn't be, the mind is governed by thought. This love had been crushed by the society we chose to live in and through our actions, we had driven each other apart.

Have you ever noticed that if you are having relationship problems, having a holiday together seems to rekindle the love, only to have it dashed onto the rocks when you return home? Why do you think that is? People say that the holiday was not real life, that real life was back in the house with all the bills, but think about this with me for a moment; what is more real, two people who can be just with each other with no pressure or a society which forces people to constantly compete? Unfortunately, so many relationships are ruined by the creation of this fast moving individualistic society.

I don't know if man and woman are supposed to stay together forever, from a biological point of view. I know that the church led creation of marriage is purely artificial. But if you find someone you love why can't

you be with them? “Outside pressures” is often cited as a reason for relationships breaking down, but surely we can create a life without these pressures?

I realised some time ago I still loved the girl whose eyes I had looked into, but I knew because of “outside pressures” we would never be together again. But the bond is still there. You can never break something that deep. Whatever we would like to think.

I want to move away from relationships for now, as I think that there is possibly something more to this love than “meets the eye” (excuse the pun). What I really want to discuss with you is love at a different level. What I mean is love that cannot be divided even by “outside pressures.” A love that bonds us all. A love that is created along with every particle in the universe. But I don't know what it is or if it exists. I think it does. I feel that love for another individual is just one level – that there is something deeper. Maybe I am wrong, but I would like to explore it with you nonetheless in the form of a dialogue with self. Let us start.

A dialogue with love

Me: Now, I know I have called you “love,” but it is just a dialogue with myself. Is that right?

Love: You would be correct!

Me: So I'm just going to throw this question out there; is there something deeper than love for another person?

Love: Do you want there to be?

Me: Well, it would be nice, but I have just been thinking that this love shouldn't be divided into just one man one woman that somewhere there is a love for all.

Love: Do you love all?

Me: Well, not in that way.

Love: What way?

Me: Well you know looking into someone's eyes and kissing them and making love to them.

Love: Do you think you need to look into someone's eyes and kiss them to love them?

Me: Well, no, well, yes, I guess so, how else do you love?

Love: (SILENCE)

Me: Ok I get it. I don't need to look into someone's eyes, but how will I know if I love them if I don't get the butterflies in my stomach!

Love: That is just a physical sensation, it has nothing to do with love.

Me: Oh, Ok. Erm, so how can I love everyone else then, it's probably a good thing to do.

Love: Do you have to know? There isn't a method.

Me: Well I don't know how to do it. I want to love every being on this planet but I don't want to have to kiss them all.

Love: This is no time for jokes. You say you want to love every being, does that include all the animals and plants and trees?

Me: Yes I guess it does.

Love: You do already.

Me: Do I? Great. But it doesn't feel like it.

Love: Like what?

Me: You know, what love is supposed to feel like.

Love: We are mixing up two things here, physical attraction to enable procreation, and love which has nothing to do with physical attraction.

Me: I see. So what does it have to do with?

Love: (silence)

Me: Look, how can I already love everyone and everything? I haven't had time to think about it yet!

Love: Exactly. You do not need thought it just gets in the way.

Me: Ah, so love is always present but thought stops it somehow?

Love: (silence)

Me: So if I stop thinking I can love?

Love: You are love.

Me: How?

Love: Because you exist.

Me: What? I don't understand. How can it be that simple, don't we have to make a decision to love?

Love: Decision is thought.

Me: Ok, So say I accept your (my) advice and I agree I am love how does that help me, how does that help the world?

Love: You are not trying to force everyone to be love, you are saying that you are love. That is all, when people see that they too are love the world will help itself.

Me: Ah, so everyone needs to see this individually there's no point in me telling everyone.

Love: Why would you, it is not the truth.

Me: Wait but you said everything was love, if that's the case why can't I tell people and maybe they would wake up?

Love: It is not truth.

Me: Ok, but how long do we have to wait until everyone discovers that they are love?

Love: As long as it takes.

Me: But should we just stand around and watch while people kill each other?

Love: If that is how they will learn, yes.

Me: It sounds all a bit uncompassionate to me.

Love: But can you see, love is universal, that is, it is part of everything that exists.

Me: So why can't the scientists see it?

Love: Because scientists see with their eyes.

Me: Ok I am love, it is universal, now what?

Love: Now nothing.

Me: Is that it?

Love: I guess so, is there anything else?

Me: But I don't understand, it can't be that simple.

Love: But it is.

How can love for all mankind be that simple? I just can't understand it. Maybe I didn't ask the right questions, maybe I misunderstood, maybe I wasn't listening, but who was talking? Me!

Me: Look, I'm not happy with the answer. I want to know more.

Love: Stop resisting.

Me: Resisting what?

Love: Stop resisting what is.

Me: What? How can I if I don't know what you're talking about.

Love: You are resisting truth, you are resisting what *you* know to be true.

Me: Am I, am I the resistance that is stopping love?

Love: You are.

Me: So how do I stop resisting?

Love: By stopping resisting!

Me: How?
Love: Let go. And be love, it is everywhere in you.
Me: Ok.

So perhaps I am right, maybe resistance is what's stopping us all from loving, not in the sexual way, that is biological, but universally.

And you don't need to say I am love. Because If I am already then why mention it? That is merely division.

But if love is universal, and we are all part of the whole, then surely compassion is the same. But wait a minute I have spent this whole book splitting love and compassion into two separate words. And I know why. Because humans have divided them, they have created separation in everything. Why am I surprised that they have divided compassion and love?

But I thought love was “*a strong positive emotion of regard and affection,*” and compassion was “*the humane quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to do something about it,*” but I must forget the dictionary definitions and focus on the whole. That is me. I am the whole. I better have a quick dialogue and check!

The end of division

Me: Hi there, me again. Look, I've just had this bit of insight and I wanted to run it past you.
Love: Go on.
Me: I think that love and compassion are the same, I think we have divided them just as we do with everything.
Love: Go on.
Me: Well, love is a man-made word which describes feelings for another, and I know I am love, part of the whole. And if I love someone, then I must be compassionate at the same time.
Love: I see.
Me: So if I am, love I am compassion, there is no division. There cannot be one without the other. So why have I spent a thousand pages dividing them?
Love: Because insight is a process.
Me: But should I go back and change them?

Love: Why would you? You can't tell anyone truth. You have to find it out for yourself and even if people understand what you are saying it doesn't mean that they are going to get the same flash of insight you did.

Me: Well I am happy.

Love: Why?

Me: Because I can now see how I am still dividing everything, even towards the end of this book!

Love: You are human, and humans love to divide.

Me: No more: I divide nothing. I am indivisible.

Love: Are you sure?

Me: Absolutely. Although there can be no absolutes can there?

Love: Why?

Me: Because it implies an end, a conclusion when there can be none, just movement.

Love: So who are you, love, or compassion? Or both?

Me: Neither. I am, that is all.

Love: You're learning.

There is nothing left to say, I cannot tell you you are love, or that love and compassion have been divided by man, that there is no one without the other, I can only leave you these words and wish you luck on your own journey.

M

M a n u f a c t u r i n g

Put together out of components or parts

Some people are always complaining about the terrible things companies (large and small) are doing to the planet, and at one time I used to join in with them – until I started to consider my modern life. I would like to believe that I have given up the trappings of the western lifestyle, but that is blatantly untrue.

So, ok, I don't have a car anymore, but I live in modern dwellings wherever I am in the world. I occasionally buy cd's of artists I like. I use the internet. I have a laptop and use wireless communications. I wear modern clothes. I like fashionable shoes. I enjoy doing winter sports from time to time. I have a snowboard. I have special winter clothes. I like to buy dried soya products. I still buy various things I “need” from retail shops. I take the plane. I take the train. I walk on the roads. I cycle. I go to a cafe from time to time. I use the telephone. I go to the cinema. Need I go on? I am still a modern western consumer whether I like it or not!

I wrote in other topics that I was living on an island at a buddhist retreat, for a short time, which sounds as far away from modern life as one could be, but that wasn't the case at all! They shipped in their food via a boat driven by petrol from a local retailer who in turn bought their products from wholesalers, who bought from distributors or growers worldwide, and the food was shipped via plane or ship from all four corners of the world!

The food was then transported up to the purpose built centre made of concrete, bricks, with wooden doors and double glazed windows in plastic wheelbarrows, where it was stored in nice shiny fridges and freezers, and then prepared on plastic chopping boards on aluminium benches and then cooked in aluminium pots on a nice stove (gas powered), and served on china plates and eaten with stainless steel knives and forks, before being washed in a sink with water heated by immersion heaters and sometimes solar panels, scrubbed clean using cloths and washing up liquid before being dried by cotton dishcloths! And that's just the start of it!

Modern porcelain toilets and basins, cotton towels, bed sheets and pillows. Modern beds, desks, lighting, power showers, meditation cushions, candles, incense, and even statues of the buddha! All made by manufacturing companies somewhere in the world.

I think it is of the utmost importance we do not fool ourselves, or attempt to fool others into thinking we are free of the trappings of modern life. We are not. Everything we have and use (with some small exceptions) is manufactured on a production line.

Before you offer various handmade items for exhibit, please think about this. The man who makes the handmade table you have in your kitchen probably didn't whittle it from a tree in a forest! More likely he bought the wood pre-cut from a wood supplier, and then started to make the table (oh, using tools made by tool making companies) which was glued or nailed using the modern items (glue or nails), manufactured by a company somewhere!

And if you look around your house – go on, have a look now – you will notice that everything you have has been made by someone else. The taps you turn on, the shower you step into, the shower gel, the soap, the toothpaste, the toothbrush, the fire to keep you warm at night, the central heating, the light bulbs, the telephone, the tv, the dvd player... As you can see, we could probably fill up this whole book with items we buy, but that would be a waste of paper!

I used to feel terrible that I was buying so many items, but we mustn't feel too bad about all this. There is nothing wrong with buying or using products made by manufacturers. Far from it. I'd like to see us all trying to start from scratch to make tools and products. None of us have the skills to make everything we need, let alone things we desire. That is the modern life we live in.

Specialisation has enabled us to become really good at one thing, and if everyone were generalists we would not have seen the technological improvements we have today. So we really owe a debt of thanks to all those brains who have started companies to design and build products that have made our life easier and more comfortable. You don't have to go back very far in time to imagine what life would have been like without the things that make it possible to spend our days working as marketing executives and stockbrokers!

So what's the problem?

On the surface, nothing. We could very well end this topic now by congratulating ourselves on a job well done. Companies make the stuff we want. We buy it. People are kept in work. Money is generated, money is spent. Perfect. Well almost, if it weren't for the fact that the whole process is building up momentum; until now, the happiness and success of everyone depends on us making and buying more and more stuff, whatever the cost.

You see, the raw ingredients have to come from somewhere, and so does the energy required to turn them into something saleable. We are using up more and more of the planets resources, and we are literally digging the planet up to have things which make us comfortable. Think about it carefully for a moment will you.

Have you ever considered where the table you sit at, the computers you use or the tv you watch comes from? You cannot make something out of nothing you know! The more money we earn, the more stuff we want. Our appetites are insatiable. It has become a dangerous sickness of modern times.

Not only do we buy a computer, but next year a new product comes out to replace the one we have. "It's so old," we say, "we need to get a new one." The same goes for cars and sofas, and tv's. We must have the most up to date stuff. We must!

In fact, if we didn't keep buying the most up to date products, and replacing our "old" stuff, manufacturers would quickly go out of business, jobs would be lost, the economy would come to a standstill, and from the government's point of view that would be a disastrous state of affairs. Unemployed people tend to be unhappy people, and unhappy people don't vote for a government they believe has "failed" them!

So it looks as though we are stuck in this never ending cycle of manufacture and purchasing. If it stops, who knows what would happen to the world we live in. Unfortunately, the situation is so grave that we should be asking ourselves what will happen to the world we live in if we continue the way we are going? Or, how long have we got before the resources eventually run out? And what will happen to my happiness once no one is making new stuff I can buy? We need to consider this carefully.

Goods are churned out by the millions every year, most of them not designed to last, but priced to sell, and the manufacturers know very well we will have to replace them, not only if they break down, but when they "go out of fashion." After all, who wants old stuff?

The problem lies in that very fact that most things are designed to be in fashion for only a short period of time. The textile industry is testament to that. And what do we do when things no longer suit us? We toss them away, sometimes in a skip at the local refuse collection point, and sometimes in the recycle bin, thinking we are doing a good thing by recycling, then the next day buying new stuff. It seems to me we are stuck in a loop with no way out! What do you think?

Manufacturers, driven by profit, powered by advertising, supported by us, and the government, are literally eating our home away by using up all the resources – which believe it or not – are in short supply. We have one home, earth, and the only way we can slow this process of "erosion" down is to stop buying new stuff all the time. Can't you see?

Our psychological desire for more and more shiny new things is costing us the earth! We are so trapped into making ourselves superficially happy, that all we will end up with is a rock floating in space that resembles a waste disposal site.

So what can be done?

Businesses don't want to stop. The people who work there don't want to stop. The governments don't want them to stop, and you and I definitely

don't want them to stop. We're all too comfortable on this merry-go-round. And anyway, why would you listen to me? I have already told you that I too am bound to this modern way of living. It *is* hard to give up, "and why should we?" you ask. Well, first of all, if you can't see why, then you'll never give it up!

Over the last couple of years I have gradually begun a process of what I like to call "unburdening" my life. I still live in a modern western society, I have not closed my life off to it, after all, we are all in this together, east and west, rich and poor, but I have begun to realise that all the goods in the world cannot make me anymore than just superficially happy. So I have just got rid of them. Not to go and live in a cave somewhere, but to live as me, not me plus everything I desire. Do you follow what I am trying to say here?

I was born into the world as a naked member of homo sapiens (you know, the species you and I belong to?), and I will die as I came into this world. I want to experience life as it is, not through game machines, tv's, new sofas, and the constant remodelling of my house.

I appreciate that there are items that one needs in life to make us comfortable, but these manufactured goods are not who we are. Of course, we can impress our friends and family with these items, but that is pure ego and status, both of which are irrelevant bolt-ons. I understand the attachment you have to these items, that's why it need only start slowly; but in order to see the world more clearly we must start to unburden ourselves of these worthless goods.

I am not for one minute suggesting that you become an ascetic (*someone who practices self-denial as a spiritual discipline*), and wander the globe with only the shirt on your back, but isn't it time we used this big brain of ours for something more than desire of material possessions? Even if you don't care about digging up our one home and polluting our fragile atmosphere with toxic gases, then do something selfish for yourselves.

See what you could be missing behind the veil of constant consumer purchases and try to imagine what your life, and what your families life could be like, if only you were to change your thinking just one degree. Over time, one degree of change can put a ship many miles from it's destination. Imagine if you were that ship. Where would you end up? Isn't it time to let go of the attachment to mass marketed, mass produced goods and take a good look inside the box? Your box. Your brain!

Go on, I dare you!

M a r k e t s

The world of commercial activity where goods and services are
bought and sold

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A marketplace where groceries are sold

In this time of globalisation, where the word “market” means the entire world, wouldn't it be nice to take a trip down memory lane to a time when life was simpler, to a time when you could stroll between different stalls selling all sorts of produce, crafts, and hand-made products at your leisure without shop assistants shouting: “Are you all right there? Do you *need* any help? Ok, if there's something you *need*, just let me know.”

I don't know about you but there's something about the shops these days that make me not want to go in! They all seem to be the same. On each high street there's five mobile phone shops, twenty fashion stores (all part of a chain), four mini-supermarkets, a spattering of estate agents, and maybe the odd computer store. Each shop is ambiently heated to either way too cold or way too hot, and upon entering you will be greeted by either excessively loud music or “shop fm” where the stores have a

pretend radio station welcoming you to a world of bargains. At least in the uk we are saved from “spruikers” (common in australia), who stand outside the shop with a microphone and an amplifier, trying to tempt you in to the store.

Each store has a million different products, it doesn't matter if they are selling shampoo or tv's. The choice is endless. Rows upon rows of heavily packaged – usually imported - products, and advertising banners hung everywhere to point us to this weeks bargains.

I have to admit, I did use to like it. It was all quite exciting going out on a saturday with all my hard earned money ready for a spending spree, heading out in the car to the big shopping centre where I could comfortably park my car inside and shop in style without getting a single drop of rain on me!

As I walked into the centre I would be enchanted by the shiny floors (apparently created like that so you don't have to look down to watch where you put your feet, and can concentrate on looking at the shops), and the bright twinkling lights. So many shops to look at, so much stuff to buy.

I used to travel back to my car with my arms laden with goodies, filled to the brim with tasty burgers, chips and cola, impatient to get home so I could unwrap everything and get out in the evening to show off all the new clothes I had bought.

But this topic isn't about consumerism, or buying things you don't need just because they are there and you've got your credit card. What I want to talk to you about today is the lost connection between the community and local producers.

With the demise of local markets and locally owned shops, and the rise of mega shopping stores, where each product is individually packaged and “sealed for quality and security” the local businesses have found themselves on the outside of a new globally controlled market, and subsequently, out of business.

Many of you may argue that if the public don't want the markets and the local shops, then they should be left to disappear and replaced with something they do want. But do the public – that's you and me – really want these shopping centres? Isn't it because we have become lazy, because we don't want to have to walk more than ten feet in order to buy the goods we want, and only if we can drive there? Think about it. We say we are so busy that we need these types of stores, but we didn't have them before, and was life so terrible?

“What?” says you. “The service was appalling, the shops were never open when you wanted them, and even when they were, they had a terrible range of products to choose from, and they weren't cheap. Now we have shops open almost 24 hours a day, they look nice, they smell nice, they are cheap, the staff are friendly, there is a huge range of products and they are pretty cheap. There's no competition.”

Do you agree? Has the era of the local trader died? Are locally produced products no longer wanted? Let me ask you another question. Would you prefer to buy lettuce which has been grown organically in a field two miles away from the stall, or would you prefer to buy it in a massive supermarket where it has made a journey of several thousand miles, and may have been washed in a country where water resources are already scarce?

When you look at products on the shelf, like salad, have a look at the country of origin, you may find it originated in africa. Don't you think it is sad that we are buying products we can grow in our back gardens, or greenhouses, and people in adjacent countries to the lettuce's country of origin are starving? Then they ship the food to a country that doesn't *need* their produce? In fact, the only reason we buy it is because it's cheaper than local produce, or available out of season.

In many towns and cities around the world, the market is still the main place for trade. You can buy anything there, not just fruit and veg. Locally made furniture, rugs, clothing, and items for the home (although you do have to check that the products are local, not just imported from china, and resold on a market stall). There are so many different products sold, and if you have ever been to any of the big market cities in the world you can feel the vibrancy of it.

It is alive with people bargaining. 180, no 150, no! Ok, 120. Sold! It is fast moving, the goods don't stay on the shelves for months at a time. There is the added bonus of being able to deal with real people, not staff who are trained to behave and talk exactly as the corporation wishes them too. These are people who say what they want, and do what they want. You may not like them, because they do not show you the same “respect” that you get in your fancy shops, but that “respect” is false. It's an illusion, created by the companies to make you believe the shop assistant is really interested in you. In reality what they are interested in is finishing for the night!

Shopping at markets and small local stores may take longer than your average mega-super-mart but it is supposed to, it is a different kind of experience, and the people are different. Try a local store again and give

them support, or better still, start your own; but if your main motivation is to be in the top 500 rich list in the uk, please think again. Local business, and especially market business, is community based. It is a place where real people use real skills to make the products. You may not value this skill, but in an era where everything is made by machine, isn't it nice to have something hand-made? Let me tell you a story.

I was shopping with some friends at a local market once when I noticed a perfume stall; the lady introduced herself, and asked us if we would like to try some perfumes and aftershaves she had made herself. One smelled beautiful, and I asked my friend if she was going to buy it. "No." she said, "I'm not paying that much for a 'non-label' perfume," and anyway, it doesn't even come in a box!" Right there. Right then, I noticed it. Not only did she not trust the product because it didn't come in an attractive gift box, but because it wasn't some big name brand, she wasn't prepared to pay for the woman's time and effort to produce it.

I then realised that shopping at these big stores had little to do with convenience and price, it was a status thing. People actually liked to be seen carrying the bags from the designer stores, so that others could see that they had not only been in there, but had purchased something! That's why they wouldn't buy a hand made product from a market – it didn't come with a label. Who would be impressed by the product they had bought? No one. And shopping these days is more about the bag than the actual item it contains.

We like to buy into the illusion of the stores with the shiny floors, ambient music, respectful staff, and glossy bags. We actually like it. That's why we don't buy at the local stores anymore. They have not invested in special flooring, lighting, and advanced sales techniques for their staff. The shops aren't painted in the latest fashionable colours to tempt us. They just do what they say they do. They sell things.

Last year, I went into a local hardware supplier on the west coast of Ireland. I could not believe my eyes. There was stuff everywhere. I couldn't walk through the aisles without tripping over something. They had a lot of products, but it wasn't the same as walking in to one of the chain stores. There, the products would be organised according to type, big signs overhead pointing you to the correct area, no mess, only shiny floors! I realised that it was *that* I liked. I had become so accustomed to shopping in the large corporate stores that I now disliked the local stores because they failed to conform to the idea of what a store should look like.

I was almost about to walk out, when an older man, presumably the owner stopped me, and said, “can I help you with anything?” I told him I was looking for a bicycle lock and with that he said “Give me a second, I'll just get you one.”

In my haste to find the product I was looking for, pay and leave without speaking to anyone, I forgot that there is still something that exists which is called “customer service.” Not the “trained” staff in the big stores, but people who were genuinely interested in you and what your requirements were.

“This is real shopping,” I thought to myself. We have become so used to not talking to strangers (just in case) that any interaction on a level deeper than “that's £34.50, cash or credit card?” seems intrusive! That's why these big stores work. You don't have to talk to anyone. No one engages you in any conversation, but *that* is what we are missing in this clinical modern life.

You may remember tv programs, where you'd see old ladies go down to the local shop for a “chin wag” with the owner – the purchase of the goods being almost secondary... No? Well apparently it used to happen in real life too; and it wasn't just old people, young people did too! They actually knew the people in the local store, or the market stall, because guess what? The people working there were part of the community. They lived in the town, unlike today where everyone commutes and is from somewhere else.

No wonder we don't like talking to people. They are strangers. They are not from the surrounding area, and we have nothing in common with them, that's why we like to shop as quickly as possible and get out without having to talk. Do you see? Is that clear to you?

So what can we do about it? Do we want to do anything about it? I do. I would like to see local products that have been made with local skills back in our homes. No more flat pack wardrobes from half way around the world. A real wardrobe – you may have to save up for – made from sustainable forest wood, which won't start falling to bits in a couple of years. I would like to see local produce being sold at markets again, and people prepared to pay the correct price for these items, even though they don't come in a shiny bag. I would like to see, real local stores, selling goods that local people want. That *doesn't* mean the stores don't have to look nice or smell nice either; just because it is a local store won't make it attract people, it has to compete with the chain stores.

And finally, we have to shift our minds about what shopping really is. Is it a necessary activity to buy things we need or want, or is it a leisure

activity all on its own? This addiction to shopping is not one of the greatest achievements of the human race, and all it does is use resources we can barely afford to waste.

Local shopping and markets cut down on the amount of road and air miles product has had to travel, which reduces the amount of carbon that is emitted into the atmosphere. Because it is made locally, it does not require the volume of packaging necessary to keep it intact, thereby reducing packaging, which reduces the amount of trees that need to be cut down, and the amount of plastic (which comes from petrochemicals, which come from oil) that needs to be used. Buying locally made products support the local community, because you are supporting local employment which local people spend in their local community! Is this making any sense to you at all?

Buying local is good for the environment, good for local business, good for the community, and ultimately good for you and me. Let's give it a go. We've got nothing to lose and everything to gain.

M a r r i a g e

The state of being a married couple voluntarily joined for life (or until divorce)

Of all the things we conform to in society, marriage is perhaps the most serious, in that it is actually a legal contract we enter into. A contract that is recognised by all the courts in the land. Given that the statistics show nearly two out three marriages fail these days, I thought we should explore this deeply. Why do people get married? Why do they divorce? Do we actually know what marriage is?

Story one

I got married in 2003, to a woman I loved very much. We were married in England in a registry office, not the church. Both of us were not really interested in getting married although we were in love and wanted to be together. The thing was, our visas for our respective countries (Australia and Britain) were running out, and soon we wouldn't be able to be

together in the same country – so we came up with the only solution we could.

My wife was anti the whole idea, and I was unsure as to what the significance of it was, although I was sure it was something my parents wanted me to do. It was seen by both our parents as achieving respectability (*honourableness by virtue of being respectable and having a good reputation*) as we would then fit nicely into society, as a another married couple, ready to embark on a life which would produce grandchildren and continue the family names (and genes).

The ceremony was carried out at a council office, presided over by a council employee who had the authority to conduct marriage ceremonies. The one thing I noticed as we went in was a distinct lack of ceremony, although it was formal – in the sense of signing the papers for a new house. We were asked to state our wish to be joined together in marriage, but vows resembling any kind of emotion were deemed optional. We chose the standard vow, number one, and five or ten minutes later, we were pronounced man and wife. I can't remember if I was asked to “kiss the bride,” but very quickly we had to sign the formal papers. The contract was complete.

We left feeling very unmarried, save the reasonably cheap rings we had bought for each other. There were no guests except my parents as the two witnesses, (because we were travelling all over the world and my wife's family were in australia), and there was no drunken party. In fact, apart from a nice lunch and an evening in a farmhouse bed and breakfast, it could have been any other day. We split up one year ago.

Story two

One of my best friends got married the year before we did. She and her boyfriend were very much in love and they got married for a very different reason. Neither of them had to worry about visas even though he was from new zealand and she was from australia. They were very much *for* the idea of marriage. They saw it as something exciting where they would be embarking on a new life together. They were happy to conform. In fact they didn't see it as conforming, more a natural step in their relationship. Something they saw as evolutionary in their partnership.

Their parents were overjoyed, and a lavish wedding ceremony was arranged costing several thousand australian dollars. Guests were invited

from new zealand. The reception was organised. The church was booked. The band was hired. The menu was discussed. The caterers arranged. The dress was made. Suits were hired. The photographer was booked. Hairstyles were discussed. Everything was organised. Bridesmaids were selected. The best man was nominated. The wedding cake was made. Flowers were arranged.

The big day came, and although I wasn't able to be present as we were travelling at the time, we sent flowers for the bride. By all accounts it was a wonderful day. The bride was beautiful, the groom handsome. Everyone looked just perfect in the photos. The couple's parents looked so proud. It was the happiest day of their life. They split up one year before we did.

Two very different stories. Two very different reasons for marriage. Two identical endings.

Let's go back in time shall we? Back to the time when marriage actually meant something. A time when "death do us part" actually meant what it said (I am using a christian marriage as an example but this topic applies to marriages within any religion). Back to a time when couples stayed together "for better or for worse."

The idea of divorce may have crossed a woman's mind, but she would rarely carry it through for fear of the humiliation it would bring on her and her family. Women put up with years of physical and emotional abuse from their husbands because, back then, most women had no other place to go. A woman's place was in the home. She was subservient (*abjectly submissive; characteristic of a slave or servant*) to the needs of her husband. She quietly brought up the children and looked after the house. The man's role (as it was seen then), was to go to work to provide for his family.

Women typically didn't work outside the home, so they had no independent income of their own; hence leaving could not be described as a realistic option. It didn't matter if the husband was unfaithful, a drunkard, a liar, violent or cruel, women saw it as their duty to remain in the home. And outwardly at least, they were fiercely loyal to their husbands.

To understand this mindset we have to think of the role the church has played. Until recently, marriage was conducted exclusively by priests in the church, and girls were "given" away by their fathers (can you

understand the word “given?” How can you give another human being to someone?) And women promised to “love, honour and obey.”

This is a clear example of the patriarchal (*characteristic of a form of social organization in which the male is the family head and title is traced through the male line*) society. Where the male is the dominant sex, and the female is subservient. It disgusts me that men have conspired over thousands of years to dominate and rule women for so long. All blessed by the church.

We shouldn't be surprised at this, after all the church is still an all male affair, no matter what they say in public relations statements about embracing the role of women in the church. Men are the most powerful of the human species, physically at least, and have always thought of themselves as above women, spiritually and socially. As far as men were concerned, women were here to look after the house, bear children and be happy with their lot, which for most women was being polite and respectful to their husbands (who were obviously superior). So women had it pretty tough back then, and in a lot of countries they still do.

Men seem to be delusional at times in their opinions of themselves. They actually believe they are superior to women; just because they have more muscle power, and many countries, women are treated with no respect from their husbands, are physically beaten and psychologically tormented. In fact it almost seems to be an accepted part of the culture.

Some women are forced to hide their faces (and sometimes their whole bodies), not speak to other men, and be available at all times for their husbands. This seems to be done under the guise of religious practice, but in reality, it is just another way for men to exert their absolute and total control over women, who in case anyone forgets, are equal members of the human race, and individuals who must be treated with love and compassion.

It amazes me that some men actually still believe in their superiority. It makes me almost angry with sadness to see such a lack of awareness on their part that they cannot see they are (a) deluding themselves as to some imagined status and (b) hurting another human being they supposedly love.

How can you think you are above someone who you love? Love is openness, understanding, sharing. Compare that to dominance, control and violence, and you will see that a man who believes that just because the law gave him the right to “marry,” he can do what ever he wants with his wife, just like a child tosses around a rag doll. He is “married” so he

can turn his inner weakness on someone who is legally “his,” or so he believes.

Thanks to women entering the workforce in larger numbers (amongst other things), the tables have at last been turned on these patriarchal bullies. Women have finally gained their financial independence which allows them the ability to leave relationships, without fear of having to rely on others, who may judge them as being an unfit wife. It is amazing that people can have such idiotic prejudices. What is an unfit wife? People are people, and if they are not getting on, it is best to part – even if they have children.

Marriage is not for life. That is dogma, that is religion. Male control and dominance. Marriage is just another illusion created by powerful men to enslave women. Maybe this seems strange coming from a man, but when you become aware of what it is to be married you will start to see what I mean.

Some people think that divorce is too easy. “Life means life;” but that is a naive and unrealistic view of the world. Divorce is not “further evidence of a break down in morals and family values.” If you believe that, you must question where your ideas come from. More often than not you will be a churchgoer, and a strong believer in the word of god. You will not have come to this conclusion by any rational thought.

If you are not able to reconcile your differences, please move on. Leave. Be on your own, find a new partner, because two people who were in love and are no longer in love can create some very negative energy – energy that is not only unhealthy for their own minds, but can also affect others around them, including family, friends, work colleagues and of course, children.

But before you do that, try to find out what is going wrong. Maybe it is just part of a natural cycle that will even out in due course. Maybe you need to get some outside assistance to help you work out your problems, or maybe you could even try to talk to each other *before* the tension starts building between you. Both of you need to become more aware of yourselves in action. Try to see the other person’s point of view, before you start the inevitable meltdown into constant bickering and arguing. The world has too much sorrow and pain in it already, don’t add even more hurt to the world by hurting someone you love.

In sorting it out, talk a little, but hug a lot! When you hug someone you pass warmth and energy to them and vice versa. Instead of beginning the argument, try to hug each other first. Hold each other tight, and don’t speak. Let the moment be silence. Experience the moment without

interacting with it, and when you have finished your hug just stand back for a moment and try to start an argument. You'll find it much, much more difficult, I guarantee you that. Try to remember what it was you wanted to say, then, approaching the situation with tenderness, speak softly and kindly, even if it is something that has made you mad. Remember to treat this person the way you want to be treated.

If this doesn't work by all means go back to screaming and shouting and throwing things. Why not go the whole way and become violent as well? Because I can guarantee that whatever it is you are arguing about is not that important, although at the time you may think it is. Talk, then let it go. Don't keep it in your mind. You need to let your husband or wife know how you feel, agree upon a way forward, and let it go. Don't let things build up though that just makes them worse.

Sorry I got carried away! Who am I to give you advice about your marriage? At the end of the day, if you know what it is to love, and you feel connected to the other person in love, you will stay together, whether you have a little piece of paper or not. If you don't feel the connection, do yourselves a favour and split up. All marriage is, is a piece of paper that joins you in a contract. It's not meaningless, because contracts are enforceable by law, but it is not a love contract.

"You're just saying that because your marriage failed. Don't try to spoil it for the rest of us." say some of you.

Am I? Think about what being with someone actually means to you. What does being married actually mean to you? For a man, one would hope that the reason he got married is not to make sure his girlfriend was off limits to other males hot in pursuit, although as a male I know it can cross your mind from time to time. Perhaps you are worried your girlfriend will run off with another guy, so you propose to her. Make her legally yours. No one can take her away. She is your possession. Until she decides to leave you.

You can't stop her. She is an independent human being whatever your legal piece of paper says. Marriage is two people in love, living together, having children (perhaps) and enjoying and sharing life's great adventure with each other. Can someone tell me why two human beings who are in love with each other need a contract? Because that's all marriage is. Love is love. You don't need a contract for love, it just happens.

Break with tradition. See love in reality. See the church for what it is doing. Marriage is a man-made illusion – it did not evolve out of nature. Nature does not need contracts. You are in love, so be in love. Don't ask your government to make your love "official," it means nothing, all that

matters is that you are in love. Enjoy it. It is the most wonderful feeling in the world.

M a s s a g e

Manually manipulate (someone's body), usually for medicinal or relaxation purposes

*I don't have time for a massage I'm much too busy!
And anyway, massage is for women, I'm a real man.
Real men don't get massages.*



People are so stressed these days! It's just go, go, go, all the time. In modern city life you seem to get carried along with the flow. Everybody else seems to be moving fast so we should too. We don't have time for anything. We work harder than ever, we have children to look after, we have to take the children here there and everywhere, we have bills to pay, we have a mortgage that we can ill afford. "I'm sooo stressed!"

But hang on, we've always been busy, I mean as a human race; we haven't been sitting idly on our backsides for the last million years. In our developmental years we hunted and gathered, there was no agriculture, no supermarkets, no fruit and vegetable stalls. We caught beasts with our bare hands (ok, maybe a spear), there were no butchers to give us nice cuts of meat presented on a plastic tray and tidily cling wrapped. We had

to do everything by hand; there was no machinery to assist us, and amazingly, we walked everywhere (sorry no cars).

So life in those days was pretty hard, especially if you had to fight off a marauding wild beast or two during the course of the afternoon, and the worst thing was there were no pubs to relax in at the end of the day, and nowhere to put your feet up and watch tv.

Let's fast forward to modern times.

I would have thought that with all the wonderful modern inventions that are supposed to make life easier, we would be less stressed. We don't have to worry about catching the food, that's all taken care of for us. We don't have to worry about chopping wood or felling trees to get warm; we have central heating. We have cars or public transport to move around in, so no more walking. We have children to look after, but then we always did, and children are nice to be around aren't they? So what's making us so busy that we don't have time for anything else, and why are our stress levels so high that we reach for the drinks cabinet as soon as we get home! One word. Us.

I bet you thought I was going to say the dreaded W word, Work, but no, we have always had to work. Man has always been productive, and must find a way to pay for the goods and services he uses. So unless your chosen career is as a bank robber where you will probably spend most of your time relaxing in prison, or as a layabout, in which case someone else has to go out to work to pay for you, you will have to do some kind of work which gains you the method of exchange of the day – money.

Let's get back to "us" though; we who are stressed in life. We who find it difficult relaxing, because of the turbulence in our minds.

Although we have been constantly evolving since man first stood on two legs all those millions of years ago in africa, it has really only been in the last fifty years or so that the pace of life has gone supersonic, and I just don't think our physical brains are ready for that.

Can you imagine our cavemen ancestors getting up at 5.30 am, gulping down a coffee, sitting in the car for an hour and a half in a traffic jam, followed by eight or nine hours of deadlines, under tremendous pressure to work faster and harder, followed by an hour and a half drive back home, followed by an argument with his wife, two screaming kids, and a reheated microwave meal? It would be enough to turn them to drink!

But the strange thing is, for some reason, we love it. We love the pressure, whether real or imagined, because we like talking to other

people about how much pressure we are under and all the things we have to do. We talk in some pseudo-complaining manner which says, “look how stressed I am, but also look how busy and important I am.” We love telling people how difficult life is, especially the mothers who don't have to work, because their husband is wealthy.

“You know janice, I've had the most dread-ful day, you wouldn't start to imagine! First, little freddy was up in the night crying, and he just wouldn't settle back to sleep, then emily got up early and wasn't feeling too well, bit of a headache; so we rushed her down to the doctors, because you can't be too sure about these things, then I had to take her to school, and freddy to playgroup, then I had to pick emily up and drop her at her ballet classes. Oh, and did I tell you how long it took me to drive down the high street, the traffic was ridiculous, they really need to do something about that high street, and now I'm doing the shopping before richard gets home, and I need to prepare the kids supper. I really should go janice, so much to do, so little time! Thanks for the coffee...”

We have allowed ourselves to become busier and busier, because it makes us feel good about ourselves. We have a sense of our own importance in the world when we are busy, and we feel as if we are making a contribution to the world, or at least to the size of our bank balance and ego. But can you see what we have left behind, whilst we battle on at the speed of light; whilst we concentrate only on the “me” in the world?

But we have left precisely that behind. Me! I am not talking about the me you project into this fast moving life, it is the authentic me; the one who is at peace with him or herself, without the need to prove anything to anyone; the one who is naturally balanced and in tune with nature. You may find yourself smiling or laughing at loud, and saying:

“Don't be ridiculous... Naturally balanced? In tune with nature? Who are you kidding? This is reality; we don't live in some zen fantasy world where every man is at peace with himself, we live in the real world, and it isn't like that!”

I would like someone to tell me what the “real” world is like, please? Violent, discontent, angry, afraid, stressed, full of hate, full of desire and power? Is that what the real world is like? Well if it is, I think maybe it's time to talk a little bit about massage, and how it can help us all become less stressed, less angry, and maybe even less violent!

“How is it possible that someone who is not much more than a beauty therapist can help the world?” you ask. Let me tell you a story.

I was like everyone else trying to succeed in the city, always rushing somewhere to a customer, to a meeting, to another meeting, and I was pretty highly strung, always ready to snap at someone who I thought was stupid, or who had made a simple mistake. I worked in information technology, drove fast, ate fast food, got home late, had something to eat, and went to the pub for several beers to “chill out.”

I was really busy, but I wouldn't say I was stressed! I talked fast and loud (some people say I still do). I earned quite a lot of money, but spent it on useless gadgets and entertainment whilst struggling to pay my credit card bills... I was still, I believed, a pretty nice guy, although from reading this you wouldn't think so. I just got carried along with the rest of the world, moving fast.

One day I decided to give it all up, and travel to australia, so I sold all my possessions and went backpacking, although I didn't suddenly become a zen master overnight! On the contrary, I pursued backpacking with the same vigour and pace as I had in my previous incarnation as a project manager, casually driving at breakneck speed around the whole continent in a matter of weeks, not months. It took several more years of travelling to start to slow down, due mainly to a lack of funds, not enthusiasm.

On one of the trips my girlfriend and I were planning, we decided to visit thailand, which I had heard was a beautiful country. Whilst there, I had my first massage; fully clothed on a mat on the floor. I had assumed massage would be done semi-naked on a table with oil rubbed into my skin, so was indeed surprised when the lady – who was over fifty but under five foot tall – started moving my body in ways I am sure nature had not intended it to move! All the while she was stretching, pulling, twisting and pressing for two hours. Except I needn't have worried, because in less than fifteen minutes I was almost asleep, or should I say almost in a trance, as I was aware of what was going on but had no urge to move any part of my body.

When I came to at the end of the session, I noticed something strange. I felt light headed, but my body felt heavy and I was breathing slowly and gently. I suddenly felt like all the tensions and problems I had ever experienced, had been gently lifted into the hands of the masseur. I actually felt quite sorry for her, as only then did I realise how much tension I had been storing up!. Less than a year later we both went back to thailand intent on learning this magic, and starting a business in australia to help other people with stress.

Stress

A state of mental or emotional strain or suspense

The art we studied was called traditional thai massage, invented over 2,500 years ago and brought to thailand with buddhist monks from india, a time when they probably weren't as stressed as we are now; but with all these men of wisdom, they had great foresight when it came to knowing that the technique they had invented would be needed in the future!

The first thing I noticed whilst learning was that when I placed my hands on another's body to commence the massage, I got a genuine feeling of calmness and connectedness. It may sound strange to you, but I really noticed it. The next thing I remarked upon was that although the person receiving the massage looked as if they were enjoying it, I was enjoying giving it. It was an activity which was performed in silence, with all movement slow and purposeful. No rushing around, no shouting, no deadlines, no talking on the phone. This was something which I the practitioner experienced, not the client.

For me, it was a revelation, to be able to do a job, which not only healed people of daily stress and strain, but made me calm as well. For the first time, I realised that there may be as much therapeutic benefit in giving a massage as actually receiving one. How could I, mr stress, become calm whilst working? It didn't seem possible, but it was actually happening.

After qualifying in our chosen subject, we returned to civilisation to heal the nation of its ills. We came up with a name, designed a brochure, printed some leaflets and business cards, purchased our mats, and found a sports club to practice from. We waited for the door to be beaten down by weary city dwellers, eager to feel less stressed, eager to be more calm in life, but the knock never came. Not one.

So four weeks later, we put up a poster that said: "Introductory offer: First thirty people to write their names down will get a free massage." Within less than a day, the diary was full. Success! we thought, people want our massage! In fact the promotion was so successful we extended the offer for an extra week and that too was fully subscribed. Success again!

Two weeks on, we looked forlornly at the empty diary, wondering where we had gone so wrong. Everyone had said they thoroughly enjoyed it and that they would definitely return soon. Sixty people had all

received a free massage, and not one rebooked! Maybe we were just bad at business, we thought. But as time went on, and I talked to masseurs in different countries, a pattern started to emerge which showed large variations in uptake of massage in asia compared to western countries.

In thailand, massage has entrenched itself in the culture, and you can see businessmen with their socks off having their feet massaged everywhere, something you wouldn't see in the united kingdom or the west in general, for several reasons.

First, massage is a rather inconvenient stress reliever. You have to make an appointment, then you have to go there, get changed, lie down for an hour, then you have to get dressed again... It's so much more convenient getting a bottle of wine, or stopping off in the pub on your way home from work. Alcohol relaxes you much quicker, you feel good about yourself you laugh and share a good time with other people, whereas massage is silent, and not as much fun as a bottle of wine.

Second, massage is relatively expensive in the west, and one hour of massage is roughly equal to five times the average hourly wage, so unless clients have a large disposable income, they do not value massage over say going out for a meal, or going to the cinema, viewed in the west as more traditional stress relievers, and that perhaps massage is a bit of a waste of money.

Third, most of the customers were female. Those who were male, came in because of a physical ailment only, like a sore back, stiff neck, tight shoulders, or something they couldn't just shake off. The men weren't interested in understanding that the cause of their back pain may be stress related and they may need to address their lifestyle, in order to combat these physical manifestations of psychological stress.

It got me thinking: "Why do men not like massage, when women clearly like it, if they can afford it?"

Well, Men are MEN! They are strong. They do not show their emotions. They must keep themselves together at all times, and stress is a man's right. He has the right to get stressed, and make everybody else stressed, then deny that he is the cause of the stress. Am I right, ladies? Touch is intimate, and is something men associate with physical contact with a woman. They become uncomfortable being touched by someone, not because they don't like the touch, but entirely the opposite; because they do like it, and they are afraid they may become stimulated physically, and embarrass themselves.

Men do not like to be perceived as weak, and they do not ever want to show their "feminine" side, which although present, is repressed in the

dark recesses of the unconscious. But true weakness is the non-acceptance by men that we are stressed and uptight, and that we do need someone to make our shoulders feel better, and our neck more relaxed. The power of touch has magical qualities, which de-stress the nervous system and leave man ready to fight another mighty battle (probably in the office, not the battlefield).

Of course, some people like myself have already been converted to massage, but others have yet to experience how wonderful you can feel in just five or ten minutes. But I don't believe that this is something that should be left in the realm of "professional therapists." As you have seen by my personal story, people just aren't that interested in feeling good, unless it's free, and I can see why. It's just too much hassle.

So what if the men are a little agitated, or shout at the children and their wife when they come home because *they* had a bad day? So what if the anger overflows into domestic violence, it's just a little pushing.

I can hear many of you saying, hHow do seriously expect massage to change that?"

Because massage makes people relax. It forces them to relax, and relaxed people, are not angry people. This is not about sending your partner off to some clinic once a week to have "anti-anger" and "anti-stress" massages. This is about two partners who are sharing their life together giving each other a ten minute massage when they come in from work. You just have to get into a routine of doing it. Even five minutes is better than nothing. You can buy your own book, or get one from the library, or even go on a short course, (I am planning on setting up courses to help people learn the basic art). But I guarantee the small amount of time invested in learning how to massage the shoulders, neck, back and head will pay you dividends for years to come. Giving the massage is almost as calming as receiving it (although everyone prefers receiving).

So even if you don't want to change your lifestyle for something a bit calmer, the more people massage each other, the less stressed everyone will be when they are going to work, at work, on their way home from work, and back at home. Try it, you've got nothing to lose but five to ten minutes of your life every day and you may gain a lot more in return.

My teacher in thailand said she gave her farmer husband a ten minute head massage when he finished work, every day, because he was tired and stressed when he came in, and it made her life calmer and easier by doing so, "and anyway," she said, "what's ten minutes in a whole twenty four hour day?" and I have to agree. Don't you?

M e a n i n g

Rich in significance or implication

What is the meaning of life? The ultimate question



O r is it? We are born, we learn about the world, we go to work, we have a family, we teach them what we can, we see them grow up, and start a family. We retire, we enjoy our retirement, we help look after our grandchildren then we die. Whether or not there is such a thing as an afterlife or god, is not the wonder of humanity, that we even exist, that we have made it through millions of years of evolution, and can even consider whether there is a meaning of life not enough? Probably not.

We all want to think we were put on this earth for a higher purpose, that our lives must have meaning, but is that not because of a general dissatisfaction with our lives? Has the man who loves what he does, loves his family, and loves the planet and his fellow inhabitants, not already have found the meaning of life, which is to experience love and share

love? If everyone found this meaning, surely the world would be free of war and destruction, don't you think?

Many of us confuse meaning and purpose, but I think purpose can be seen quite clearly as man's need to spread his genes to ensure the continuity of the species. If our purpose was only to earn money, invent new technologies, and achieve self-realisation, there wouldn't be anyone left on the planet! So having a child is the greatest purpose we can achieve, and all the animals, birds, insects, micro-organisms, and fish also share this purpose. A built in biological program to continue their individual species.

But that's where the similarities stop. In the long development of our brains, we have created something called imagination.

Imagination

The formation of a mental image of something that is not perceived as real and is not present to the senses

Imagination allows us to think outside of our current situation, to consider new possibilities, to dream of fantastic ideas, to think about things that don't affect our immediate survival. This is one thing that makes us human. This is what enabled us to become craftsmen, artists, engineers, and scientists. We developed the ability to imagine scenarios, and use our skills to make them real.

The imagination is a powerful thing, and we can use it positively or negatively. We can imagine great successes or great failures, but what really matters is that it is not real, until we make it real. It is through this imagination then, that the idea came, that perhaps there was some special meaning to life, that getting up and working as a machine every day for ones whole life wasn't quite what it was cracked up to be.

You see, man has always known he was special, and indeed he is, given that he can walk on two feet, is conscious of himself in his environment, has complex language, opposable thumbs, and great tool making abilities. No other creature on earth has all these skills; but this has left him with one problem. If all of these skills set him apart from the animal world, why does he have to work like them every day? For all that man has, he still has to feed himself and his family, and provide clothing, heat and shelter every day; and there is only one way to do it. Go to work, just like the animals and birds. Every day.

“Surely there must be more to life than this!”

How many of us have said that? I know I have, as I've been sitting in a two hour traffic queue getting to work, whilst sitting at a desk pushing paper all day, whilst sitting on the underground, whilst sitting in a two hour queue on the way home. All for what? Some money that pays for our accommodation and food.

It doesn't seem fair does it? We are the most intelligent species on the planet and through all our technological advances, we still have to work as hard as the rest of the creatures on the planet. But that's not totally true, is it?

Over the last hundred years, our agriculture methods and food storage abilities have made life distinctly easy. In the developed world, more and more people are doing sedentary jobs, and we are earning enough money to buy our own homes and take time off to go on holiday. Compare that to the lives of our ancient ancestors who had to hunt and gather food. We have it distinctly easy these days. Easy enough to use our powerful imagination to ponder questions, such as the meaning of life.



Are you dissatisfied with your life, do you think that there must be something else, that there must be a more deep, and profound reason why you are on the earth? That there must be a creator who has a special plan in mind for you? Or are you happy to accept you are part of a fantastic cycle of life and death, that keeps this planet alive and healthy nothing more? That you are different to the animals only because of a process of natural selection and evolution?

Do you think that there is a special “meaning” for the other creatures on earth or is that feature only reserved for us humans?

Our amazing brains and imaginations can ponder the question of meaning forever, because there is no scientific test for it! We cannot effectively prove or disprove that there is something more than just existence, but if you think about it, existence isn't such a bad thing. On the one hand you exist, you are alive; thanks to your father finding a mate, and successfully transferring his genes to you. On the other, you get to experience the beauty of the earth, and all of its inhabitants. You can raise a family of your own, and you can learn about wonderful and amazing things.

And finally, you get to experience love, something no machine we produce can feel. If there ever was a meaning of life it is love. When your parents hold you as a baby you feel it. Without it, you feel empty, as if a part of you was missing. You love your parents, you love many partners through your life (or just one), you love your children, and if you love everyone and everything, you will never again have to ask if there is a meaning, because you will already have found it.

Meaning is love, but meaning is also how we approach life. When we love what we do, when we feel joy in getting up in the morning, when we look forward to each and every day and the challenges it brings, we have all the meaning in the world.

The problem for most of us in modern society, is that we do things every day because we have to, not because we love doing them. I know for sure that if I asked myself the meaning of life a few years ago, it certainly wouldn't be getting up at 5.45 am every morning for a two hour drive, followed by office stress for nine hours – no matter how much money I was being paid! It makes sense we all do what we love, but unfortunately that's not always possible.

When we're young many of us dream of being actors, pilots or great doctors, but the world needs more real workers than it needs thespians on the stage. Somebody still has to work to harvest the crops, to make the clothes and build the houses and the roads, that make modern life so comfortable.

M e a t

The flesh of animals (including fishes and birds and snails) used as
food

I am a strict vegetarian, so you may think I am biased in writing this section. When I started writing this book I promised myself I would not enforce my opinions on other people, and that part of being human is the ability to make up ones own mind about things based on the information we have available. So in that spirit, I will let you make up your own mind about whether to become a vegetarian! It is not for me to decide. I made a personal choice for me, that is all.

Speak to anyone about eating meat, and they will tell you, “man is supposed to eat meat. Man is a hunter. We are meat eaters, no question about it.” Not because they investigated whether man is indeed a meat eater, omnivore or vegetarian, but because, as children, their parents fed them meat and told them it was good for them. The children naturally

trust their parents, and happily eat meat for the rest of their lives without giving it a second thought.

On the surface it does no harm does it? In fact the scientists have said that without eating meat, man would never have evolved such a large and complex brain, which means that if my ancestors didn't eat meat, I wouldn't have had the brain capacity to be able to write this book! So perhaps in our evolution from tree dwelling apes living on vegetarian diets to an upright being with intelligence and tool making abilities, the consumption of meat, and the proteins derived from it, have been critical to our development.

But let's forget evolution for a moment, as here we are in the present day, able to not only use complex tools, but able to design spacecraft to go to the moon. That certainly is a giant leap.

So maybe steak and chips is the only way to go if we want to progress even further. Perhaps eating more meat will help us become more compassionate human beings, perhaps we will become less violent, perhaps we will have empathy with others, perhaps we will even know what it is to truly love.

Eat more meat equals become better humans.

Because let's face it, we've come a long way in the last two hundred years. Industrialisation, better medicine, better living standards, better science, more equality, less slavery, more money, and more comfort; but is that really because we ate meat?

We started on the long path to becoming homo sapiens several million years ago, but "civilisation" as we know it only started taking place about ten thousand years ago, with the domestication of animals for food, followed by the start of agriculture, and the building of the first cities.

Ancient civilisations developed medicine, culture, tools, roads, water supply systems, political and legal structures, philosophy, literature and mathematics over thousands of years and we have eventually arrived. Here. 2007.

Maybe we got here because we ate meat, maybe we got here on our own without eating meat; all I know is that we are now the most intelligent species on the planet, and with that, comes a lot of responsibility. Responsibility to ourselves, the species we share the planet with and the planet itself. We are now in the enviable position of having complete control over everything that exists here (including other humans). Life or death. That is a lot of power to hold in such delicate

hands, don't you think? In fact, the power lies not within our hands, but within our minds.

We have the ability to destroy or create in seconds. A thought is generated, and that thought becomes action.

I see the rabbit, and in a millisecond my gun is raised, and I have the choice to pull the trigger and end its life or not.

But life wasn't always as easy for the hunter. In the old days, it was an arduous task hunting down dangerous wild beasts. For a start, we had to chase them on foot, and we didn't have guns, so we had to get close. Of course, all that's changed now. Food is ready prepared for us, and sitting on the shelf, looking very un-animal like, ready to put into the frying pan to tenderise the meat and make it easily digestible for us. No more spearing the animal to death, then cutting off its skin and gutting it; someone else does that for us, and it's that which I want to talk to you about today.



As we have discussed in other topics, the control we exert over all other living species is lacking in all things human. Love, compassion and empathy. We call ourselves animal lovers, but happily chomp away on their flesh; but for once, I want to give humans the benefit of the doubt here. We are all products of the past, of our parents and society, so maybe we have failed to make the connection between the “cute” animals we adore so much, and the fried chicken on our plate.

As children, and as adults, we enjoy watching animals in their natural habitat. Cows, deer, birds, dolphins, whales (if you're lucky enough to see one), pigs, and chickens, amongst others, and we feel automatic empathy with an animal if we see it suffering (after being hit by a car for example). In fact, we can't bear to see animals in pain, even if we are meat eaters.

Vegetarians haven't got a monopoly on empathy you know! It's a natural emotion that is within all of us, it just needs the right trigger to activate it. You may or may not think that animals have a consciousness, but they are definitely aware of themselves in their surroundings, even if they cannot question the nature of their own existence. One thing is also sure, they *do* feel pain, no doubt about that, and it is exactly that cry of pain that triggers our own emotional system to feel compassion and empathy for them.

Even humans who have detached themselves from feeling empathy for their victims (such as murderers) still feel it, it's just suppressed. But there

is always the possibility of an event or someone triggering it off again. It is the one thing that makes us truly human.

A gangster who cold bloodedly executes his enemies, is in a state of inconsolable grief when he hears his brother has been shot dead, even though he showed his victims no mercy. He can feel the pain his brother suffered at the time the bullet went in. He can share with him in his last breath, and in that moment, he feels empathy, and compassion, even though he has never experienced it before. Empathy and compassion are always there ready to be used, we just need to make the right connections in our brains to trigger them.

A violent warlord, who brutally tortured and killed his own people, could never do the same to someone he loved, like his mother or his wife. Why? Because he feels compassion for them, and compassion is the one emotion that stops humans killing. So, we have seen that humans *can* experience compassion, albeit selectively, but it's a start!

Let me ask you a question. When you go to the butcher or the supermarket to buy your meat, what do you feel when you pick up a chicken breast, sirloin steak or a fillet of fish? Do you feel empathy with that cling wrapped package? Of course you don't, that would be as foolish as feeling empathy with a loaf of bread, because there is no connection between what the eye sees and the origin of the product.

Mince is just mince, and a chicken leg is just a chicken leg. We do not think of these as animals. These packages are not pigs, nor cattle, nor chickens. The animals have been reduced to pieces, or ground up so we may enjoy chicken curry, spaghetti bolognese, chicken drumsticks or hamburgers amongst others.

To give you a better example; I recently showed a documentary to some close friends which showed graphic images of animals being tortured, tormented, and brutally killed, and each one of my friends (non-vegetarians) said: "I can't watch this any more, it's horrific." Some refused to watch saying: "I'm very sensitive, I love animals, I can't watch it, it would make me cry," but all of them said they would continue to eat meat, because "humans are meat eaters," or "I love meat too much to give it up, but I do eat a lot of vegetables."

Evidence once again of the lack of connection between the living animal and the end product on the plate.

If you have a pet dog or cat, would you like to see it caged with thousands of other dogs and cats, with no space to move, let alone run and play in the wild where they belong? Imagine watching its fur being brutally skinned off while it was still alive, or seeing its throat slit, and

having its trachea pulled out, hung upside down, and left to bleed to death, still screaming in agony?

Let's put it another way.

Would you like to see your son, daughter, wife or your parents, being forced to live in disgusting conditions where disease is rife, in huge factories, and caged? Where they are branded with red hot steel or have a plastic tag put through their ear, or a chain through their nose; where the workers not only kill, but torture your family to death, and leave them sliced open and bleeding, writhing on the floor trying to gasp fresh air while they slowly choke on their own blood?

Do you agree with the death penalty for murder of other human beings? Well the way animals are treated is much, much, much, more brutal than any execution, and at least these condemned murderers had a chance to live out their life before they made the mistake of killing someone. These animals have no such choice; they are created to be killed.

This is different. This is no accident. This is deliberate. This is cruelty and murder above anything humans are capable of doing to each other.

Think about this. If one man sends six million people to their death in the gas chamber, he is considered inhuman, a monster; but if a man kills sixty million chickens a year, he is considered a successful businessman! Tell me, where is the difference?

You will probably say that we are the supreme predator, we are meat eaters! But what a weak supreme predator we are; not like the lion, who chases after his prey when he is hungry. We have no need to chase prey now. We can grow them in factories and fields, keep them controlled until they are fat enough to kill, then lead them to their death.

We are not like the lion any more. We kill animals; not because we are hungry, but because we are powerful; because we have electric cattle prods, guns, chains and machines, and we want to eat meat, so we do. Not because we have to, but because we are superior. And superior beings get to do what they like, isn't that right?

Superior

One of greater rank or station or quality

Why do you think we are superior to every other species on the planet? Is it that we are the most intelligent? Or is it because we have invented guns and other devices to kill at will, from a safe distance? We are certainly not

superior because we are the strongest physically. Imagine a hungry lion coming into the city, and fighting it hand to hand. Would we win? No, of course not. A lion is designed to eat meat; he has evolved that way, and uses his physical strength and teeth to overcome his prey. We had to invent weapons to overcome the lion and other large species.

Would you be able to wrestle a cow to death? Or a deer? Or would you be able to catch sheep whilst running after them? No, our human bodies are not fast enough, agile enough, nor strong enough for that. We would find it difficult to kill a beast with our bare hands, so we have used our newly developed intelligence to control them. Have you ever wondered why most animals are not actually scared of us in the wild? It is because we are not their natural predator. Animals are not scared of us because we are not on their blueprint of predators. Their brains are hard wired to experience fear when specific species are near, but we are not one of those specific species and we use this to our advantage.

You see, animals have no concept of what an abattoir, electric spike, bolt gun, or what a de-beaking machine is. They have no concept of tail and ear clippers, cages, chains, or knives. These are not in the natural world. These are man-made objects which are at odds with the natural cycle of life and death in the wild. These are tools we use to be superior.

Nature is finally balanced between the carnivores and vegetarians. Too many vegetarians and the natural resources become depleted. Too many meat eaters and the diversity of species becomes reduced. Nature has been balancing the books on the planet for over four billion years, and then we come along, newly evolved with our big brains, ready to raise the planet to the ground. Surely some mistake in evolution?

We charge through life without a care in the world. Killing, clearing, chopping, and digging up the planet, like some naughty child in a playground. Happy to label ourselves “the supreme predator.” Predator, yes. Intelligent, no.

We have no idea about nature. We study it, dissect it, control it, and exploit it, but we are thousands, if not millions of years away from ever understanding how to live in harmony with it, or realising that we are just a small part of nature not above it.

I wonder if you have ever watched an animal being lead to its death? You can see the terror in their eyes, but you can also see that they just can't understand what's going on. Look into their eyes. See the fear. See the trust they had in humans, betrayed. See a living creature being sliced open while it is still alive. For what? A chicken curry, a big mac, or a

kebab? So we can say “mmmmm, that's so tasty,” eat half of it and casually toss the animal into a bin?

Imagine if that was a human, what would you feel then?

To have so little disregard for any life makes me so sad. We all say we love our pets and animals, but please try to make the connection between them and eating meat. Just imagine now, your pet whom you love, being stamped on, beaten with a hammer, or sliced open whilst alive, just so people can enjoy a dog burger, a dog curry, or a dog kebab. If we do not have empathy for the other species who live along side us on this planet, how are we to ever expect to have empathy for our own species?

If you continue to eat meat, you may as well have put the knife in the animal and watched it bleed to death yourself. You are responsible for its death.

Although the abattoirs may be out of sight in your comfortable home, the abattoir is with you every stage of the cooking process to cook your beautiful “meat.” When you make the connection between the fillet steak on your plate and the animal that unwittingly gave up its short life, sliced open at the throat and left to bleed to death whilst still conscious, you may just realise that we have no more right to determine the fate of an animal, than we have the right to determine the fate of other human beings. We all live side by side here, and if we want to retain the title of “most intelligent species on the planet” we had better start behaving like it.

I gave up eating all living things about eight years ago, and since that time, without exception, in every country I have visited in the world, people have looked at me strangely when I tell them I don't eat meat. “Why don't you eat meat?” “It's natural;” “We are the supreme predator;” “I can't believe you are a vegetarian.”

“Men shouldn't be vegetarians,” they say. It's almost as if they feel threatened by me choosing not to eat animal flesh, as if somehow it compromises my masculinity and theirs. “Man is a hunter, he is a meat eater, we have always been meat eaters,” they say. But if you knew anything about the history of man, you would know that man was first a vegetarian and we do not have the necessary biology to eat raw meat like a lion does.

We have to process it artificially to make it edible, then we have to cook it to make sure there is no bacteria still alive. If we were a natural meat eater we wouldn't have to do all that. You don't see a lion carving

up his steak first then casually grilling it over a fire. The lion eats everything, one bite at a time. That's a natural meat eater.

So why do we continue to angrily defend our “right” to eat meat? Maybe because it isn't natural, but like so many things we humans do, is something we “want” to do, because we can. People who have criticized me for not eating meat always want to know the real reason I gave it up, and they feel quietly satisfied if I tell them it was for health reasons only. If I say that I disagree with our dominance and lack of empathy of other species that creates a huge argument and discussion which starts with “man is a meat eater...”

Let's move away from empathy, compassion, and argument for a moment, and let's talk about our parents. If our parents hadn't given us meat when we were young, and if we didn't see other children eating it, do you think you would still be “natural” meat eaters? If your parents were vegetarian and your friends were vegetarian, do you think it would ever cross your mind that you fancied some deep fried chicken nuggets or fish fingers? Is it not wholly possible that the reason we are meat eaters is in fact a result of conditioning?

“Eat your meat! You'll grow up to be a strong boy!”

If I have managed to survive very nicely whilst being a vegetarian (who eats no dairy or eggs also), and continue to enjoy eating thai, italian, indian, mexican, and french cuisine without one animal nor my taste buds suffering, is it not reasonable to suppose that I actually didn't need it in the first place? I am healthy, I am not malnourished, and in fact I feel pretty good!

The problem lies in our arguments for eating meat, in that they are not made with an inquiring mind to find out the truth. The arguments we make are pure conditioning, pure past; a memory of what was told to us by our parents, teachers, and society. If we are to progress as a species we need to inquire into the nature of all things, not blindly accept what others have told us and fight anyone who challenges that thought with automatic responses.

It is not enough just to say something is so to make it so. Do not use other people's arguments. If you want to make a case for eating meat, then inquire into with your own mind, but until someone can convince me that being vegetarian is not only bad for my health, and has not enabled me to be a more compassionate human being, not only to the animals, but also to my fellow humans, then I will get back to enjoying my vegetarian thai curry thanks.

M e d i t a t i o n

Continuous and profound contemplation or musing on a subject
or series of subjects of a deep or abstruse nature

•

(religion) contemplation of spiritual matters (usually on religious or
philosophical subjects)

I never knew anyone who “did” meditation until a few years ago when I started travelling. I met a man who was later to become a close friend of mine who was a buddhist. He meditated every day, and told me this was the one way to find yourself, and reach enlightenment. He had tibetan singing bowls, a small altar, images of the buddha and various incense sticks burning. Here he would sit every day trying to quieten his mind; and although I wasn't really interested in it, the ritual seemed like fun; and although I didn't believe in religion, I began to try it.

Several years past, and I was no further forward. I always found myself thinking about other things, and the more I tried to focus on a sound, or just watch the movement of my mind, the more I thought about what I would be having for dinner that evening, or what bills needed to be paid. It was a most frustrating process.

So last year I moved into a buddhist community on a small island in scotland so I could concentrate on finishing my writing, and at the same time try to “improve” my meditation practice.

Every morning, and every evening, we would go to the meditation hall, someone would light the candles and the buddhists would do their prostrations (*abject submission; the emotional equivalent of prostrating your body*) in front of an image of the buddha. We would take our places solemnly on our meditation cushions in either a lotus position (*legs crossed; used in yoga*) or some other position, and someone would chime the bell to signal the beginning of formal meditation.

It began. I would sit and try to focus on the sound of the birds singing or follow the rise and fall of my breath or simply watch my mind, but my mind was always too busy thinking about what I would be cooking in the kitchen for everyone at lunchtime, or what topic I would be trying to discuss in my book in the evening.

Once again I felt frustrated by this lack of “progress” and sat down to discuss it with one of the monks. He listened to my frustrations and assured me that there was no right or wrong meditation practice, which cheered me up a little. Day after day, I just sat in the meditation hall, not caring whether I was doing it right or wrong and just tried to enjoy it.

Several months later, I left the retreat, happier that I had been doing a lot of writing, but unsure as to whether the meditation practice had left me enlightened. I was forced to admit it probably hadn't!

Over the next few weeks, I contemplated meditation and its purpose, and how sitting in a weird cross legged position watching your thoughts could help you reach “enlightenment” whatever that was, and the more I thought about it, the more I could see that any regimented practice – however helpful – was not the answer.

The answer came to me when I was sitting on a train, dreaming out the window, looking at the trees and the fields and the cows. This was it, this was the state of meditation I couldn't understand! Not just watching your thoughts, but watching nature and being with nature. Later that day, I went for a walk in the woods alone. I found a suitable tree and just sat underneath it. No images of the buddha, no incense, no singing bowls, no special cushions or candles. Just sitting.

Sitting, just sitting

I cannot express in words what I felt there. The emptiness surrounded me yet at the same time I felt held, supported, together. It was a strange feeling. I realised that this was what formal meditation was missing. In their desire to quieten the mind through special tricks, they failed to allow nature – which is everything – to communicate with them.

All the time we had been sitting in the meditation hall it felt like a one way communication, with “me” in control. Me controlling my thoughts, me trying to quieten my mind, whereas here was I alone in a wood with nothing, yet everything was with me. Everything was me. I was everything. I can tell you it was one of the eeriest moments of my life. Knowing, yet not knowing, and it scared me a little.

Here was I, a human being, a member of homo sapiens, someone who had never cared about anything in his life apart from going out to pubs and clubs, sleeping around with women and earning and spending as much as I could, suddenly understanding what it meant to be human. I realised I understood everything, but at the same time understood nothing, which is a strange predicament to find yourself in! The trees, the leaves, the soil, the sky, the stars, the ants, the foxes, the beetles, me, the moon, the water, the sun, me, the water.

Over the next few months, I spent more and more time just being with nature, but that doesn't mean I just sat under a tree, after all, I had still had a job to do during the day. But whilst in the car driving, walking down the high street, going to the cinema, going out for a meal, talking with friends on the phone, I suddenly realised that everything was meditation. I was the meditation and so was nature.

Through the quiet observation of everything in the world, everything became clear. I didn't have to sit on a meditation cushion anymore, burning incense and trying every technique to try to quieten my mind. Sure those things were nice, but it wasn't meditation. This disturbed me somewhat.

I had planned to go to several other monasteries including a zen temple in japan to try to learn proper meditation, but now I realised I didn't have to go anymore. There were no more techniques to learn, no more steps to follow, it was just me, on my own. Even a few months earlier that feeling would have scared me, but now I knew that there was nothing to be scared of.

I was part of nature, part of the universe and it was part of me, we are one. All this fancy meditation was doing was keeping us separate from what really is, keeping the mind happy we were going towards something, attaining something, which is still attachment.

No longer could I be scared of dying. Dying means nothing except the significance that our minds, trapped in fear, are giving it. True meditation, the communing with nature, releases that fear.

Let me ask you a question, if we agree that water is a living thing, does it ever die?

Yesterday I sat on the balcony of the house I am staying at in the north of Sweden, and looked at several icicles hanging from the roof. The temperature was increasing slowly, and some of them were melting, and as they did, they fell gently into the snow below. When spring comes, the snow will melt, and the water will run into the river below, or evaporate in the atmosphere through the heat of the sun's rays. It may not be an icicle anymore but it has not died. It is a part of the universe, as we are. No birth no death, just changing state. Do you see? The only reason we believe we are separate from the universe is that our minds have told us we are, it does not mean it is the truth.

So get up off your cushions, throw away your images, candles, and meditation music, and walk or sit in nature. Do not try to force your mind to focus on the sounds of the birds singing, remember your mind is part of that singing. There is no goal to this; no purpose; we are just sitting quietly. Do not close your eyes for then you are back in the realm of your mind, which is darkness. Keep your eyes open, let your mind see!

Unfortunately, I cannot help you to become better at doing this by offering you special techniques, for there are none. No yoga positions will help you commune with the universe better! It is funny we think we are being more in touch with the universe by sitting in a special position. Don't get me wrong, yoga and formal meditation are all better than sitting in a pub drinking and fighting or causing trouble for your family and everyone else.

I am not offering you a "better" way, I am just telling you a story of my own experience. You must find out for yourselves, and maybe you would like to join in with a group doing "meditation" practice, after all, how often do we find the time to sit down quietly without fidgeting and talking. Anything which makes you slow down can never be a bad thing. Just be aware of the reason you are doing it.

If you are stressed and overworked then listening to some calming meditation music whilst smelling some beautiful incense will help you feel better, I guarantee it.

I have tried all these techniques, and they have helped me feel better at times when I was feeling low. It feels nice to sit in the lotus position, to

hear the chimes of the bells and take part in what is really an ancient ritual, but it has nothing to do with being in meditation. Meditation is the awareness of yourself and others whilst on the train, whilst going about your daily business. It can never be separate, otherwise it just becomes a bolt-on, albeit a nice smelling, calming one! You must be the meditation. You are the meditation. You just are, as a friend of mine once said to me. I never understood what he meant when he said that. In fact, when I used to ask him how he was, he used to reply: "I am," or "I just am," which used to infuriate me!

"How can you just be, when I have asked you how you are?" I used to shout. "You are either good, happy, a bit under the weather, unhappy, etc. you can't just be!!"

"But I am," he would say.

It has taken me a long time to understand that indeed he had had the realisation that he just was. And that is the key. Everything is in balance. Everything is working just as it should work. There is nothing wrong. Everything is perfect, except us, because we cannot except that we are as one with the trees, and the birds, and the snow and the mountains.

Imagine when you see that you are; that there is no difference between you and a rock! You just think you are different. But there again, so did I.

There is no time-scale for this. You will get it one day. You just have to let go and you will find that which is already there. I am not suggesting it is easy, but then again it is not difficult because there's nothing to do!

I cannot tell you how I came to this, for it would not be the truth, just a story. It is something you, and only you will be able to discover for yourself. I urge you not to wait though. Start your journey of discovery right now, for now is the only time to do anything.

M e m o r y

Something that is remembered

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The cognitive processes whereby past experience is remembered

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The power of retaining and recalling past experience

Like a fantastic video recorder, our brain stores every piece of information that the eyes see, that the body feels, and the hands touch. Every comment, sensation, and experience is diligently recorded; and the amazing thing is, we never seem to run out of tape! Everything is stored, ready to be accessed at some future time. Some things we find harder to remember than others (in that they are stored somewhere on the tape that is harder to retrieve), but everything is there. Good experiences, bad experiences, pain, and joy, all there ready to help you form opinions about future events, people you meet, or situations you find yourself in.

So we know that memory is important. We need to remember basic things, such as how to brush our teeth, how to drive a car, how to do our jobs, or even how to make lasagne! But what I want to discuss with you

here is something different, it is the use of memory to enable us to live in the past, not in the present moment. Let me explain...

Photographs

Just yesterday, I destroyed all the photographs I had taken (digitally stored and printed), which to most people would seem like an extreme measure, something destructive. I assure you it was not, although it took a lot of courage to hit the delete key and to throw the other pictures on the fire. I felt a well of emotions rise in me, as I first looked at each picture individually and then watched as part of my life disappeared for ever.

To watch photos of my parents and I on happy outings, or my wife and I during our happier times travelling round the world, started stirring lots of feelings. Suddenly, I felt sad that my parents had split up, and I longed for them to have stayed together so we could have gone on family holidays, and I could have enjoyed their company together and watched them growing old, and how I longed for my wife and I to be back together so we could enjoy ourselves as much as we were enjoying ourselves in the pictures.

As I carried on going through my pictures it was like watching a movie of my life. Although the pictures were still, as soon as I viewed them I got the full movie running in my mind, courtesy of our old friend, memory. I looked at pictures of myself, and realised that the camera does lie. I saw myself with a group of friends in a bar, smiling as if I didn't have a care in the world, but then my memory reminded me that at that time I was feeling terrible unhappy with my life.

My wife and I were separating, I was going to have to leave australia, and I didn't know what I was going to do. I tossed the picture on the fire. Friends I would never see again, old girlfriends, people I met on my travels, people I worked with, people I got drunk with all either erased from my hard disk, or burnt on the fire.

My life was slipping away, my past disappearing, all that I was and am was burning. I would never see these people again, I would never see the way the light danced on a tree I had photographed, I would never again see how I looked last year on that specific day with that specific smile.

Then it came to me, that this whole memory thing was complete nonsense! I thought to myself: "Why do I need physical images, when I've got it all up in my brain?" Do you understand? But we like to have

images of events that have happened to us or of people we know don't we? We like to "look back" and reminisce about the good times, to say: "If only life was like that now." But can you see what a dangerous trap we are setting for ourselves? Instead of living right now, in this moment, with pain or joy, we are returning to a safe place where everything is ok. We are living in our memories – which are past.

Can you see now why I, as someone who wants to live each moment as it comes, needs to let go of the past; why I must get rid of photographs? I can hear some of you saying now, "what's the problem with a few photographs, they aren't doing anyone any harm," but hopefully, as we progress through our discussion it will become clearer.

Letting go of memories

It's a strange thing memory, and as I got rid of the last photographs, I noticed something interesting had happened. I suddenly felt free. Free of the burden of my past! It was an enlightening moment, and one I could not have predicted would happen. As the final photograph disappeared, I realised that now I could live in the present. Hanging on to photographs just so I could "remember" people and places I have been was exactly the same as keeping old things because they bring back happy memories.

Are our lives so miserable that we need keepsakes (*something of sentimental value*) to be happy?

Last week, during the christmas holidays, I watched my girlfriend's brother put some photographs into an album, which he carefully labelled and finally put away on a bookshelf. I asked him why he was bothering to take and keep photos especially as he couldn't see them often, and he said: "so I remember where I've been." For me this was rather a poignant statement. Rather than knowing where he is, he is content to know where he was.

And we all do this to some extent, don't we? We carefully catalogue the past and plan for the future, but never do we once think about just accepting that we are alive now. Right at this moment. Think about it carefully for a moment. The past doesn't exist and the future doesn't exist, except in your mind. Memories are just an unfortunate side effect of living.

Imagine if you lost your memory. Who would you be without it? This does happen to people, and they spend a huge amount of time trying to find out who they were! Do you see? It makes no difference to me if you

remember the good times of our relationship. Now that relationship is over, it is past. I live now. What I am trying to understand with you here is what benefit memories (apart from the ones that enable us to carry out daily tasks in life) have for us, as humans?

Do animals have memories? They say that some do, including elephants; but do they reminisce about the good old times when so and so was around before he got eaten? Or the time when they all climbed a tree or flew around? Of course not. They live right now.

It seems it is only the human being who desperately clings to the happy past in order to protect himself from what seems to him a very scary present and future, although perhaps there are animals who have the unfortunate burden of the reminiscing device, for it is a burden.

Maybe it is part of our make up as humans that we attach memories to our emotions. Maybe in the past it had some biological benefit, such as remembering that a lion was a dangerous animal and thus triggering the body to act, or remembering that a certain fruit with a delicate scent was very tasty. From a survival point of view it makes sense. From a "living in the present moment" point of view, they are a hindrance, a burden that man can do without.

I remember that song...

Have you ever noticed how you can hear a piece of music and are instantly back to where you first heard it? A certain love song you listened to with a partner, or a song you used to dance to when out with your friends? Of course you have. There are literally hundreds of songs, that as soon as I hear them, I can see myself laughing with an old girlfriend, or at school, or out with friends at a pub, or crying, miserable because my girlfriend has just left me, or angry with someone for betraying me, or not paying money back they owed. It's incredible isn't it? The worlds best video recorder!

I may not have thought about an ex-girlfriend for fifteen years, when suddenly a song comes on that was playing a lot whilst we were going out together, and I'm back. Cue video and... Action! My masterful memory machine kicks in. The video is running in my mind. I can see my girlfriend and I out in the car, laughing and joking, having so much fun, listening to this song on the radio.

And then suddenly I feel sad. It's such a shame I split up from her, she was really nice. Then cue profile video. I can see her beautiful hair, smell

her sexy perfume, see her smile, her figure... Roll back to the present. The song ends. You forget about her!

Our memory works by association. We associate things in the present with things in the past and compare them. As we said earlier, that worked perfectly for our ancestors. It works the same with smells.

Three months ago I smelled a perfume on a woman, as she passed me in the street, and it was the same perfume a girl I had a six month relationship with wore ten years ago! I hadn't seen, nor heard from this girl in all that time, but when I smelt the perfume, I quietly said her name aloud and then quickly turned around to see if it was her. It wasn't, of course, but nonetheless my heart was beating with a little more excitement than usual. Why was this? After all, I remember when we split up. It wasn't pleasant, lots of shouting, and swearing and "I hate you."

But memory is something else. It only remembers the good times. The same way as someone who is addicted to alcohol is shown lots of lovely pictures of himself and others having a rip roaring time whilst out drinking, subtly forgetting to mention the bad times where he fell down, got in a fight, lost his job etc...

Freedom from the past

I am sure, that like me, you like to cling on to your memories – whether they be physical objects or a process in the brain – but how can we hope to let go of fear and the past, if we hold on to it so tightly? That is why I have stopped taking photographs. I want to experience the moment. I do not want to look back to the moment, months, or even years later. The moment passed and I experienced it. The end. I do not need a physical reminder.

When people go on holiday and take photographs, they inevitably take most of them of their friends or family. "That's me on the beach, oh, and that's me on the jet ski, and that's me and John drunk in the bar, oh, and that's me..."

So why do we take them? Because we want to matter. We want to prove we existed. We don't want all traces of ourselves and our lives disappearing when we die. We want someone else to be able to see that at one point in the history of the universe, we were here. Physically. And here is the evidence to prove it. What do you think?

Do you care if people knew you existed? Do you want memories left of you when you die, so that people can look back and say: "Oh, and that

was my great grandfather joe...” What does it matter? The universe has been in existence for billions of years. The universe will always be in existence in some shape or form. The earth will not.

Eventually the earth, as we know it, won't exist anymore, but we keep gathering more and more to prove we were here. In our desperate desire to never die, we even have grave stones erected with our names on them, and sometimes people come and light candles and say a few prayers (*the act of communicating with a deity*) for us, or if we are cremated, we have our ashes placed in a little urn above someone's fireplace! We want to remember, and we want to be remembered – even if that memory is just a process in the brain.

But what will happen to those memories in a billion years? How many things and how many people do we want to remember? How many photographs will we keep? As with all things on the earth even photographs change state. The ink breaks down as does the paper and hard disks stop working. Eventually we are going to have to let go, don't you think?

Sometimes the memories are not even personal ones. We are passed down memories from our parents and our teachers about entire nations! For example, some jewish people still hate the german people for what was done to their ancestors during the second world war, even if they weren't even born then! We have to pay the utmost attention to what our memory is doing, to how it is moving, and why if we are to be truly free of the prison of the past.

On the surface, you can probably see why jewish people may hate the germans, but the german people are not those who actively murdered their ancestors. That moment has passed and now is now. The people are different because they live NOW. Even if we, or our ancestors have been wronged in the past, we must let the past stay where it is, and not attempt, through memories, to bring it alive again – that is truly destructive, and can only fuel further animosity between people.

The british did some terrible things to many millions of people during their violent reign over different countries, so some people say we must remember it to avoid it happening again, but that can never be the way forward. Why must we force ourselves and our children to remember events from the past? Even if you were part of the events, they are gone, never to be repeated in the way you remember them, for now is now. Remember that. You may have suffered, your friends and family may have suffered, but they are past, and no amount of remembering them, or the suffering you endured, will change those events. Do you follow?

The children must remember

In school, we are forced to remember dates and places of great battles country has fought in, amongst many other topics. This teaching forms part of what they call history (*a record or narrative description of past events*) and all over the world, historians are writing books about the past, and all over the world, children are reading and remembering about the past. It seems natural, doesn't it? Most people would agree that no education would be complete without learning about the past.

But I am not talking about biology, or geology here, this is about our human past. The history where we conquered, where we controlled, where we killed and were killed, where we grew powerful, where we became rich, where we built great cities. The history we want to remember. The history that forms part of our national identity. Through the countless books and talks, children are imprinted once and for all with this sense of nationality. So as you see, teaching about the past is not simply part of education, but of conditioning.

Children don't know why they have to learn about the past, they are just told that they *must*, in order to pass their exams. "It is important," say the teachers, "that children know the history of their country."

I have but one simple question. Why? What sort of damage do you think telling children they must remember the past is having? Do you think that teaching about the past is psychologically beneficial? Sure they may be able to pass their exams but that isn't what life is about. Life is about living right now, experiencing every moment. Living each day with joy. Learning about battles and famous emperors doesn't help us do that.

So imagine for a moment, if you will, that we didn't teach about the past! Imagine if we taught that living now is the only important thing, and the past does not matter because it does not exist. It did exist, not as past, but as the present which is now. I hope you are following all this!

As humans we are psychologically attached to memory. Memory is not just something you access when you are looking for information, it works autonomously, giving us helpful (it thinks) little snippets of past video or information that it thinks is important to the current situation, but it isn't. When we approach a new situation with memory we are not meeting it without judgement, which is crucial if we are to live in the present moment without fear, with intelligence and clarity.

If a jewish man or woman meets a citizen of germany, they are bringing all their ancestors memories and their history education to the

meeting, do you understand? There is great fear and mistrust based on what they “know” happened in the past. But that past is not now.

We must let go of all psychological memory. You may find this intolerably hard, but do not fight with it, just watch your mind carefully. Do not imprison yourself in the misery of the past, let go and be ready to approach each new day with fresh eyes and a clear mind.

Start today. Take a photograph that “means” a lot to you and get rid of it. Watch how your mind desperately clings to the memory not wanting to let it go, how you desperately want to have that image of someone close to you. But they are. They are all still filed away meticulously by your brain. The most wonderful video recorder in the universe.

M e n

The generic use of the word to refer to any human being

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An adult person who is male (as opposed to a woman)

*Men may hate, and start wars
Women may love, and cry for them
But there is still no division*



When I first started to lay out this book three years ago, I had men and women as a separate topic. I planned to explore the differences between the sexes; but recently I decided that if I was going to explore this topic correctly, men and women should come under the same heading. You see most people like to “celebrate the differences” between the sexes, or at the very least, compare them. But I don't want to do that, I want to understand the similarities with you and find out how we could have become so divided.

“But men and women *are* different,” I hear you cry. “They are *so* different.” “Men will never understand women and vice versa, that's just the way it is,” and other statements of the conditioned mind. So let's begin shall we? Let's find out what it really means to be human underneath all the labels we give to each other.

Which do you have – a penis or a vagina?

Biologically, this is where the main differences lie. One sex provides the means by which the egg is fertilised, and the other bears the children. This process, (if you don't know already) is made possible by the male achieving an erection and inserting it into the women's vagina. Some minutes later, the male ejaculates, and millions of sperm swim for their lives to achieve their only purpose – find an egg and fertilise it. If the woman is in the correct phase of ovulation this egg will become a fully fledged member of the human species in about nine months. Ok? Everybody understand?

When the child is born the woman will feed the baby from special milk through the mammary glands (*milk-secreting organ of female mammals*). End of biology lesson one.

But let's look a bit closer at the sexes shall we? Let's try to see what is underneath the sexual functions.

Well to start with, both sexes have a skeleton (*the hard structure (bones and cartilages) that provides a frame for the body of an animal*), both have muscles and sinew (*a cord or band of inelastic tissue connecting a muscle with its bony attachment*), both have a central nervous system (*the portion of the vertebrate nervous system consisting of the brain and spinal cord*). With me so far? Both species have a digestive system (*the system that makes food absorbable into the body*) and both have the same system to excrete urine (*liquid excretory product*) and faeces (*solid excretory product evacuated from the bowels*). They both have a heart (*the hollow muscular organ located behind the sternum and between the lungs; its rhythmic contractions move the blood through the body*) and they both have lungs (*the hollow muscular organ located behind the sternum and between the lungs; its rhythmic contractions move the blood through the body*), and last but not least, they both have a brain (*that part of the central nervous system that includes all the higher nervous centres; enclosed within the skull; continuous with the spinal cord*). End of biology lesson two.

So we can see that apart from the obvious sexual reproductive systems, the sexes are identical (I can hear some anatomists standing up wanting to correct me). Sure, there may be some cosmetic hormonal differences I grant you, maybe the hips are a bit wider in a woman so she can give birth more easily, but basically we are both the same structurally. So why are we so different?

Well, let's look at the basic biological roles of each of the sexes. If we look at other mammals we can see that it is the male who goes out to hunt and bring back the food, and the female generally stays and nurtures the young. The male is generally larger and stronger than the female as he is the one responsible for protecting the family from predators, and the human species is no different.

For a period of time, the male needs to provide support for the family, and protect it from harm, and the female performs her biological duties of breast feeding (or somewhat strangely, buying milk from corporations), and creating the mother-child bond to give the infant security, the ability to recognise his mother, and his own species, and generally nurture the child until it is old enough to look after itself.

Humans have an incredibly long childhood with them, not leaving the nest until at least eighteen, and normally early to mid twenties, when they move out to a place of their own, or get married. This is not biological, but social, as they reach "maturity" much earlier (physically, not psychologically).

The mind, as we know, takes much longer to develop than the body. So the women (and the men) are stuck with a child (or children) who is physically mature enough to have children of its own, but psychologically not yet ready for the society we have created. In fact, as my own parents have found out, nurturing a human child can take a lifetime! End of biology lesson three.

Man the hunter – deceased

If we believe that men are the ones who have the biological hunting role, life must seem strange for them these days. They are no longer hunters and they no longer even have to bring in the food, as women have been handed the role of doing the shopping. They no longer have to protect their family in the same way, as we have no other predators to speak of, and we have a fully equipped police force and army to deal with any danger. So what does man do?

It seems that for many thousands of years now, his strict biological role has been in decline so, you can see how confusing it must be for the biological systems. Suddenly, man has no firm role. Agriculture and large scale industrial farming has taken the place of hunting, and although men have to go out to work, it's to earn money to buy the food, not to grow

it, catch it., or gather it. We have found ourselves in a very tricky predicament haven't we?

So what to do with all that excess energy? What to do with those fast twitching muscles, adrenaline and fight or flight mechanisms? You can't just turn them off, these are evolutionary adaptations developed over several million years. There is so much pent up energy in the male body that something has to be done to release it.

So one thing man does, is to go out and hunt other humans instead! We may think that war is a terrible blight on the face of humanity, but let's face it, man is just doing what he does best, hunting prey and killing it. The only thing he falls short of is eating it. After all, it's inhuman to eat another member of your own species, but killing them *is* acceptable.

So here he is, the great hunter with too much time on his hands coupled with a large brain, surely a recipe for disaster.

Man has constantly craved power and wealth, and seeks to dominate all around him especially women. But I don't blame men for it, they just haven't got a clue what they're doing! Their systems are in so much conflict, that maybe we should just feel sorry for them.

Let's play some sport

So if we haven't got anything to hunt, because we now get our food from agriculture, and we can't just go around killing anyone we feel like, how do we get rid of this energy? Well, as we see all over the world, man hunts animals for sport, but now it's a little one sided! Gone are the days when men were outmatched by the strength speed and agility of animals, now all it takes is a rifle or shotgun aimed from a great distance and BLAM! The shot is fired, and the animal goes down. The hunters congratulate each other on a great days sport, but even if they eat the animals, there is something a little unsettling about using a long range weapon to kill an unsuspecting animal – surely that's not sport.

The romans had it right. They built great arenas where condemned men would be “thrown to the lions,” and people would cheer as the poor men unsuccessfully fought off the great beasts! Then there was chariot racing (*a two-wheeled horse-drawn battle vehicle; used in war and races in ancient egypt and greece and rome*), and last but not least, the star of the show, the gladiator (*(ancient rome) a professional combatant or a captive who entertained the public by engaging in mortal combat*). This was great entertainment right enough. People forced to fight in an arena to the

death. There was no referee to stop the fight if things got nasty, just one rule, fight to the death!

And as the victor drove his sword into the losers chest, and he gasped his final breath on this earth, the crowd cheered, and cheered. This, my friends, is men's idea of fun!

Of course, we don't have anything like that now, no sir, we aren't savages you know! Now, two men go into a ring with the sole intention of knocking the other one down, except this time they wear gloves so they don't smash each others skulls in, and there is a referee on hand to stop the fight if there is too much blood.

The crowd (mostly male) shout and cheer as the defeated boxer is left unconscious on the mat. We may even have won a bit of money by putting a little bet on.

We return home feeling satisfied. We may not have been in the ring, but the adrenaline we used shouting and cheering was enough to leave us tired and ready for bed.

“Did you have a fun evening” your wife asks you.

“Yeah it was great!” you reply. It may not have been ancient rome, but it was close enough.

It is funny to note that boxing is an accepted sport in the world where men agree that it is better that someone beats someone up in a ring than on the streets! The difference, please? Oh yes, sorry! One is sport where you can win money or a medal, the other is assault, and you can win yourself a jail sentence!

Of course not all sport is as bloodthirsty as boxing; we also engage in rugby and football, where the aim of the game is to get a small ball into the other team's goal, and if we manage it, the crowds go wild! There is shouting and singing, and baiting of the other teams supporters, and we may even engage in physical violence against them, it all depends on how we are feeling!

We love to cheer our team on don't we. We want to see them win! We want to see the other team “defeated.” We may not be on the pitch but we can feel the adrenaline coursing through our veins as if we were playing. If we are successful we go back home with our male urges satisfied.

Some sports don't require us to compete in a team, but individually such as running, hammer throwing, javelin etc. but the object is still to win – to be the fastest, or the one with the longest throw, or jump, and once again the crowds cheer us on. Winning, that is all that's important.

So perhaps modern day sports aren't so far removed from the games of ancient rome, they are just, should we say, "different" in that the aim is just the beating your opponent not actually killing him.

My team vs. your team, my gun against the deer, my boxer vs. your boxer, my country vs. your country. We love sport don't we! It keeps us alive. It makes us feel as if we are back a million years, out hunting animals for something to eat. Except we aren't. We are a modern animal with no need to hunt anymore, so we find our "pleasure" or at least find a way to release built up energy in other ways, but the motivation is the same. To hunt. To subdue the prey. We have just invented a modern way to do it.

The fairer species

"Oh, she looks just lovely" you say, as you see your daughter all dressed up in her wedding dress ready to be "given away" (as if she were an offering) to the man she loves. She has beautiful hair, beautiful make-up and she looks so elegant. You feel so proud. You have brought up this young girl to be a woman, and now she will start a family of her own.

Back in the old days when the role of a woman was clearly defined as the bearer and nurturer of the children things were a lot easier. Neither the male brain nor the female brain had developed its higher abilities, and we were just like the animals. We had sex, the woman got pregnant, the man brought in the food and the women prepared it and looked after the children. Easy! But as our minds developed, and we created modern societies, something changed.

The woman's mind is inquisitive as the man's, she yearns to find out more, to understand, like men do, but her role has been cast in stone, by men, at the time of the cavemen. It's no wonder that women want to go out to work and to be "equal" to men because funnily enough, they are.

Men have always called women the weaker, or fairer sex, but just because they don't have the same size frame or muscle density that men have, doesn't mean they are not as capable of doing exactly what men do (and better). Whilst in thailand recently I noticed that most of the workers on one building site were women, something that would never be allowed in western society.

"Women are here to look after the house and the children. It is their role," say the men. But in asia, I noticed women out working in the fields

with their infants on their backs (and probably going home to cook the dinner and look after the house after work).

Roles? What roles?

So why is it that we have such a division of the sexes? Why are women deemed to be weak and helpless? It is obvious to me, from observing women in many countries, that they have the same abilities as men. Ok, so they may not be able to lift quite as much as men, but what does that matter?

Unfortunately women have been stereotyped by men in an attempt to subdue them and control them just as they used to subdue their prey.

Women have been brought up playing with dolls and “girly” things to make them think they are different to men. “Girls wear pink and are princesses,” says your mother as she starts her motherly duty of conditioning you to your fate. “One day you will meet a nice man, and he will sweep you off your feet and marry you.” That is what you've got to look forward to.

Even in an age where parents say that education is important, they still hope their daughters will be married off to some wealthy man who will “provide” for her and the children. All she will have to do is spend a lifetime doing washing and cleaning and looking after the kids. And she should be happy! Because the man is “providing” for her, so she never has to worry about anything!

Poor weak women. They can't do anything on their own. They have to spend their childhoods wrapped up in cotton wool, just in case! But what nonsense is this? This is man's nonsense. This is ideology created by powerful men who want to remain powerful. Men who want to rule and conquer, men like the heads of the church and other religious organisations, men who tell their women to “cover up,” men who want their children to remain virgins until they are “married.”

Let's face it, men just want to rule everything, and they won't let anyone get in their way, especially, the fairer sex.

In victorian times, in britain, women were told “this is men's talk!” and they were sent off to talk about how pretty the curtains were in the dining room, whilst the men went off to talk about politics and war! What would women know of such things? They were here to bear children and keep the house clean, that was all. Oh, and to look pretty

for their husbands. It makes me sick to even think of men at the moment, and I'm a man!

As we saw in the first paragraph, men and women are almost identical. But I think at one time they even said that women's brains were smaller! Even if it could be true physically, psychologically there is no difference. It's just that men want them to be different. They want women to be weaker because it gives them power.

More recently women have woken up to this, and have demanded a bit more equality, especially after they noticed they were being paid less than men and not reaching the positions men had. But can you not understand why? Men don't want women anywhere near their power structure so they invent all sorts of idiotic reasons why men are better equipped for high powered work than women. Unfortunately, women have had to start behaving like men in order to acquire these positions which is a shame, but understandable.

So women! Who are you? What's your role in life? Is it to grow up wearing dresses and playing with dolls, careful not to get any scratches on you in case you blemish your perfect skin? Are you destined to become a wife of a man, and "bear him" children? Are you someone else's property? Are you a lesser homo sapiens than a male? I think not.

And how many women start pub fights, go to boxing matches or start wars. Ok, so some do, but that is probably because their mind is telling them that in order to compete with men they have to act like them. So women join the army etc. but it is still men who are in charge.

Wherever you look in the world there is a powerful man standing over everyone, especially women. He may say he agrees with more equality for women, but only if it doesn't compromise his position of power.

Conditioning

To see where we have all gone wrong, we are going to have to look to our friend conditioning.

As soon as a child is born, he or she starts being conditioned by his or her parents. Men want a boy so they can carry the on family name (and genes), and women want girls so they can have someone to share "girly" experiences with, someone who will one day be a "wife" (what an aspiration), and society backs them up with media conditioning, educational conditioning and religious conditioning.

And from day one they become “Male” or “Female.” I am not talking about their biological sex either. Each of the sexes comes with a whole host of expectations from parents, because they “know” what a boy should “be” and what a girl should “be.” For example, boys should wear blue, and girls wear pink. Girls should play with dolls, and boys should play with action figures. Girls should play soft games and boys should play rough games – and woe betide any child who crosses these boundaries.

Girls and boys should stay in their own compartments during the conditioning process in case anything goes wrong. Girls must wear dresses, boys must wear trousers. Girls who want to play rugby are ridiculed as being less than female, and boys who want to learn ballet are ridiculed as being less than male. But what is ridiculous to me is how stupid parents are that they just allow their children to be conditioned like this (oh, I forgot, they have been conditioned which is a form of brainwashing).

Who says a boy can't wear a dress! It was good enough for the romans and we saw how vicious they were. Who says a boy can't do ballet? Some of the greatest dancers in the world have been men (sorry ladies). But this is so much more than just what we wear or what we do, it is that thanks to conditioning we never really get to see individuals. Girls vs. boys. Always. And that, sadly is one of the greatest divisions of all.

One mind

So who are the boys without the conditioning? Who are the girls without the conditioning? What if you don't give your son an action figure or a police car to play with? Will he grow up to be less of a man? What if you don't give your daughter a doll to play with, will she grow up to be less of a woman? Of course not. Remember the only difference is in sexual biology. Nothing more. Ok, so women may be more emotional than men but again it is only the sexual hormones acting. When it comes down to it, we are all of the same mind.

“But surely, all a little girl dreams of is setting up home and getting married and looking after the house,” say some of you. But who tells her that is what she should do? You do! You the society. You the parent. You the magazines.

We all know that children's minds are easily moulded and adults make the best of this by conditioning their children to conform to their

expected roles in the society! Stop doing it. Stop forcing someone to be something they are not. In time, a boy will find a girl to make a child with. In time, a girl will find a boy to have a child with. That is as far as it goes. Do you not understand?

Biologists say we are a species which sets up pair-bonds for life, but that is just conditioning again. When you are young, if someone tells you you will find someone and stay with them for the rest of your life, you believe them and you start preparing yourself for that role.

We all have the same mind, a universal mind. We are all capable of great learning and great discoveries. There is no sexual boundary, do you understand. The mind is open.

It is you the society who close it; who tell it how to act, what to do, what to say, and let's face it, no one has a clue what the mind should be or could be, just how they want it to be, so that it fits in, it conforms to the society and everyone can say: "Oh, he's such a nice man, he has a good job now and a lovely wife at home wit the children! It makes me sick to think about what the powerful and the stupid have done with our children's minds by brainwashing them into believing that they have to behave a certain way, because they are "female" as in "that's not very lady-like."

So what are "ladies" supposed to be like? Slim, well dressed, polite, able to talk about things but not too much, reserved? What utter nonsense, but it doesn't mean they should try to be like boys either any more than boys should try to be like girls, do you see? In order to find out who men and women really are we must break through all the conditioning.

The battle of the sexes is all nonsense, a myth invented to keep us separate so that men could reign supreme. Self-help books will tell you there is no way men will ever understand women. What utter nonsense! Men don't understand themselves, that is, their real selves, because they have been so conditioned in the society, and the same goes for women. These books will tell you "facts" about women and men, but they are not truth, they are books to help you live "happily" within your conditioned roles. Do you understand? They will tell you men are solution oriented and women just need someone to listen to them. They will help you solve relationship problems like "why does my man always leave the toilet seat up?" by explaining something in the man's brain that is different to the women's when the answer should be "because his dad left it up too!"

We must start to see that men and women are in relationship but not as a couple. That is just society telling us we should settle down and live

with the same partner forever! Who says? Society does. It is no more biological than brushing your teeth!

We both contain an amazing mind, and although we both perform different functions during the child making, and rearing process, our minds are the same. We are both connected to the universal, we are both capable of great love and great compassion, but men have been conditioned to think that they should lock it up. Men have been conditioned to think that they are violent and war-like, but just because you have bigger muscles than females, doesn't mean you are violent, or you like boxing or going hunting to explore your caveman past! That is society acting upon your mind.

And just because you may be slender in figure than men doesn't mean you should be cleaning all day, changing nappies, and looking after your husband. Men don't have to be more feminine, and women don't have to be more masculine. The balance can only be found through deep awareness of self.

It is time to break free for all of us, but to do that we must challenge society. We must challenge the roles they have set for us. And most of all, we must challenge the powerful who set these roles. How do we do that? By using our minds. By opening them to insight. By allowing nature in.

And if you tell me here that you like your role in life, I will only have to assume you are happy to stay asleep forever.

Close the division
Challenge your role
Challenge society
Challenge your parents
Challenge your mind

M e n t a l H e a l t h

The psychological state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioural adjustment

I don't know if you've ever known anyone who is suffering from an illness of the mind? The problem is, you can't see it can you? You may notice someone's behaviour is not quite what you would expect, but it's not a broken leg, or a broken arm; it's not even noticeable like cancer or a tumour. To the naked eye, and even to the surgeon's eye, it is invisible. Maybe that's why we stigmatise it so much. We are afraid to discuss it. Instead of it being treated like any other illness, it is almost seen as a character deficiency, or a weakness.

What do you think? What should we do with the mentally ill? Try to cure them? lock them up? Keep them away from other people?

What is “normal?”

Let's start this discussion by trying to find out what mental illness really is. The dictionary definition of mental health is "*The psychological state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioural adjustment.*" I'm not sure who is responsible for defining what is satisfactory, but one would assume that this is the term used to describe someone who is "Normal," i.e. free from any mental difficulties, as defined by the psychiatric manual the doctors are using at the time. But who is normal? You? Me?

I have had many mental difficulties over the years. I have suffered from terrible anxiety which caused me to act impulsively, spoiling relationships with friends, and losing jobs I liked. I have suffered panic attacks in the past, and used to get weird thoughts in my brain from time to time... Crazy? I don't think I am. In fact I would consider myself very normal.

Would you consider yourself normal? Do you feel depressed at times, have you ever had suicidal thoughts? Have you been anxious, paranoid, or extremely fearful at any time in your life? If the answer is yes, you should at least talk to someone you can trust, whether that be a family member, or find a helpline if you have one in your local directory, or just go and talk to your family doctor. If you are suffering in any way, get some assistance. Just don't do what I did, and wait for nearly twelve years before telling someone.

I suffered in complete silence, afraid that people would mock me. I was embarrassed by the whole thing. Me, suffering from a problem with my mind? Don't make me laugh! I'm joe cool, mr confident, mr arrogant, a hit with the ladies, always ready for a laugh, always funny and happy. What would my friends think? I couldn't let them see me like this, terrified, shaking, with sweating palms, ready to escape at a moments notice. Always on the look out for a "what if" situation, always seeing the negative in everything.

Except I wasn't like that, I knew I wasn't. I did like to have fun, I did like to enjoy myself and be happy. I didn't want to be afraid, and in fact I never actually knew what I was afraid of. It wasn't anything in particular, just a general sense of foreboding, a general unease about myself, a feeling that everything was going to go wrong, and I was going to die in some terrible accident.

The first time I had a panic attack I was in sweden on business, and the next day I flew home to my mum in england instead of returning to my job in paris. Three days later I managed to get on a plane back to paris, but only to empty my apartment and drive home to england. I did

go to see my doctor, but his advice was, “pull yourself together,” which wasn't very helpful, and I couldn't do. So I never returned to the medical profession for help; instead I turned to a different doctor to get my medicine – the publican.

I would drink myself into a complete state as often as my body would allow, in order to quell the anxiety I was feeling. Looking back, I don't know how I kept it up, although the more I drank in the evening, the more anxious I would become in the morning, thereby creating a self-reinforcing cycle. The more anxious I felt, the more I drank, and the more I drank the more anxious I felt! I couldn't win, but I passed off the heavy drinking as just *fun*. Even when people began to notice that I was going to the pub more and more often, I just carried on regardless.

It was only four and a half years ago that I finally plucked up the courage to go and see someone, although not a medical doctor. I went to see a hypnotherapist, who didn't diagnose me, but merely tried to fix the supposed problem with my father. Nonetheless, I felt better after each and every session.

Unfortunately, this was a time when I was travelling the world and was not in a position to stay in one place long enough to continue seeing the same therapist.

I was desperately trying to find an answer, until eventually, I came up with it on my own (or so I thought). I believed I was suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder, and as such, went through a course of self-help and felt a lot better at the end. It was only on seeing a psychologist that she pointed out that I was most definitely not obsessive compulsive!

Anxiety disorder, attention deficit disorder, alcohol addiction. I've been through the works, and no one was able to give me a firm answer about what I might be suffering from. I have done most of the research myself, and although I could not say I am one hundred percent, I feel so much better by just being aware of myself, aware of my thoughts, my feelings and my actions. All I can say to you is if you feel anything out of the ordinary (that is what *you* term to be ordinary, not someone else) please, please speak to someone. Look on the internet, test yourself on one of many psychological quizzes. Just do something. Don't let yourself be a prisoner of your own mind. Reach out, and ask for help.

What I have been talking about here is a minor mental illness, although it has caused me many major difficulties in life, ones I would have preferred not to have experienced. The feelings were uncomfortable, but I want to share it with all of you here, as I think it is of the utmost importance that people know that having mental illness is something you

share with millions of people around the world – it is not something we have to hide from others. In fact, the more people are aware of mental illness, the less of a stigma there will be attached to having it.

The brain is a hugely complex organ. It has taken millions of years to evolve. There are millions of different connections, all working together to make us what we are today, so is it any wonder that people are suffering from wiring faults? I find it amazing that most of us function as well as we do. Given the chance for error, don't you think we are truly amazing? I do.

So it makes me sad when I see other people who are suffering from mental difficulties, and this time I am not talking about minor anxieties; these are illnesses that make people kill themselves, where they hear voices that tell them to kill other people. Illnesses, like schizophrenia, for example.

In the topic “suicide,” I talked about a friend of my girlfriend who swallowed a bottle of pills, cut her wrists and casually walked out of a sixth floor window, and later had no recollection of the event (she survived, and was diagnosed schizophrenic) Or the friend who thought that there was a conspiracy against him, and gassed himself in his car.

Mental illness is something that concerns us all, it's not something that alcoholics, weirdos, and drug addicts get, it's something that can affect every one of us. From our parents, to our partners; from our close friends to our children. That's not to say we should be watching everybody close to us to make sure they are not mentally ill, far from it, but we should learn to be aware of ourselves and others around us, so we may better understand if they are having difficulties. All too often we judge people quickly and criticise them, without knowing what is going on in their minds.

We have to learn to listen to people more, and listen with an open heart, not a critical one; only then we may gain some insight into difficulties they may be having. You probably know someone who is suffering at the moment, but they may never let on for fear of embarrassment. Remember when you look at someone and judge them, that they may be suffering inside. Try to be patient, try to empathise a little, try to help a little, try to show a little compassion.



Last week, I went to see my uncle in hospital. He is 76, but up until two months ago, he was living a perfectly happy, balanced life, with his wife,

enjoying his grandchildren; then he fell downstairs one night, and suffered a massive stroke which brought on a form of dementia (*mental deterioration of organic or functional origin*). I don't know if you have ever known anyone with this, but it is the most heartbreaking thing to witness.

My uncle and I had always shared a laugh together, and I have shared many summers with he and his wife, so coming to visit him was a real shock to me. Overnight, he didn't know anybody. He didn't know his own wife and children, he didn't recognise my mother (his sister), or me. He had no idea where he was and he seemed to be in a great deal of distress. He was incontinent and had to wear a nappy, both things a grown man would find highly embarrassing, but his mind had gone. He was in his own world, detached from reality.

How sad it was for me to think I could never have a joke with him again, couldn't speak to him on the phone, and would never be able to share a normal conversation. Overnight, all that was gone. He was taken away to a dark place which the doctors say he is unlikely to ever come out of.

He would never go back to the home he had built with his wife. He would never again sit in his armchair, watch tv, or play the guitar he loved so. He is destined to be put into a home with other dementia sufferers, where they will never interact with each other the way that most of us can. That is the end, he is now closed off from this world. There is no cure for this. No magic pill, no magic operation that will have him back to us laughing and smiling.

My aunt was also diagnosed several years ago with dementia. She too sits in a home, taking her medication several times a day to keep her calm. Although she doesn't know she is in a home, she can actually have a conversation. She can laugh, and enjoy spending time with us, but only for a short moment, before she forgets who we are, and we have to start all over again, but at least it's something, to get a glimmer of the person we used to know and still love.

I share this with you only because we take our minds and brains for granted. We do not ever think that anything bad can happen to them; we just assume everything will always be all right, and they will continue to function as normal until the day we die.

Just imagine losing your mind, right now. Imagine who you would be without a healthy mind? Yet every day we poison it with drugs, alcohol, and hateful words. It's not just the parts of the body you can see that you

need to take care of, without proper brain function, you won't be able to walk, talk or control your bladder. Think about it for a moment.

We must not only try to understand the working of the human mind, but look after it as well. Nurture it with kindness and good food! Use it only for peaceful, non stressful activities, do not poison it with hate and violence. Treat it with respect. It is the only one you've got. No brain transplants I'm afraid. When this ones done, that's your lot!

We have to remember that it is only over the last century we have started to gain some knowledge of psychological and neurological disorders, with doctors having started to learn how to treat these illnesses; but we are a long way from understanding the brain in its entirety. But understand it we must.

It is from our mind that hate, violence, greed, lies, extremism, war and power come. You may not think that someone who hates, or is violent and willing to torture his fellow man because he comes from a different country is mental illness, but remember back to when you were born.

Remember your formative years, when the world was a happy place for you, where you enjoyed life, where you loved, and now think about your life now. *Any* thinking that is not love must mean that the mind has become sick. Do you agree? You may think I have gone a little crazy to suggest such a thing, but think about it if you will for a moment.

The mind you are born with, the natural mind that contains no violence, changes as you get older. You are conditioned by your peers, your classmates, your parents, and the television you watch, and you fall into a set way of thinking. You are not a free thinker.

If you hate pakistanis, or muslims, or hate americans, or british people, do you not think that your mind is just a little bit sick? Not because of who you hate, but that you hate at all. There is no reason for hate, it is irrational, as are all violent thoughts.

Man is the most intelligent species on the planet remember, we are supposed to be above the animals, yet we behave worse than them. If our minds are what controls our actions, then I am sorry to say that I believe most people are mentally ill on this planet!

You don't have to agree with me, in fact I don't want you to. I want you to sit down and take a good look at your own mind. Forget checking to see if you are depressed, or anxious or stressed. I want you to examine in microscopic detail the thoughts that come out of your mind. Check yourselves against the immovable benchmarks of love, compassion and

empathy. See how your thinking checks out. See whether you believe war is righteous, racism and hatred is acceptable, anger and violence is ok. While you're at it, check out your opinions on guns as well.

This is not a psychological test to see whether you are in fact in need of medical attention, I purely wish to show you that even those who believe they are perfectly “normal” should do an mental evaluation of themselves. The more you look into yourselves, the more you will see that your definition of “normal” doesn't match up with my definition. I don't want you to agree with me, merely to explore your mind.

Dictionary Definition: Normal (*being approximately average or within certain limits*)

My Definition: Normal (*one who is compassionate, loving, and empathic to all living creatures on this planet, who respects his environment and respects others right to live a peaceful life free from fear and violence*)

How did you score? Are you normal? Look after your mind – Keep it healthy for all our sakes.

M o n a r c h y

An autocracy (a political system governed by a single individual)
governed by a monarch who usually inherits the authority

Who are these people? Have you ever given any thought to it? Who are these people happily waving to you from the balconies of their palace. Waving and smiling to you from their limousines? Happily, we wave back, waving our flags, holding pictures of the king or queen high above our heads. Waving and smiling as they pass. Then they are gone.

?

Let me ask you another question. In what regard do you hold the king and queen (if you do not have a monarchy, maybe try to imagine this question). Do you like them? Do you revere them or fear them? What do you like or love about your monarch? Some may answer, “they hold the

country together,” “they maintain stability,” “it gives the people something to feel good about in themselves,” or simply “they are good for business,” and, “ they bring in a lot of tourists.” But the question I asked you was, in what regard do you hold them?

They have not been elected by a democratic system, and they are not writing government policy. They do not improve your employment hopes, or give you better health care. They do not pay your heating bill for you when you are old, or buy food for you when you are poor; yet still you wave your flags. In some countries it is almost treasonable to speak out against the king or queen, yet they do nothing for you.

Let us go into this a little more deeply shall we? One or two people – who have not been elected – are fabulously wealthy and privileged, do nothing directly for the people, are revered and respected. They wave to us occasionally, and we feel happy. Now I am not anti-monarchy or republican, I just want to understand with you who these people are.

Let’s go back into history when kings and queens were much more powerful than they are today. They ruled with an iron fist, levied taxes from everyone, and waged war against everyone who opposed them. This was a time when kings and queens were respected, both out of fear, and for embodying everything that was strong and great about the country. The national flag was raised in battle, “for king and for country.” The bonding of your nation against another. The pride in your nation. The pride in something bigger than yourself. The pride to belong.

Let’s quickly fast forward to today shall we? A time when politicians can be replaced every four or five years. Compare that to the monarchs who happily pass down their titles (have you ever considered where these titles came from, and who awarded them), and their castles, and their land, and their jewels, and fine arts, to the next in line in their immediate, or extended family. All very nice. Yet no one really complains.

There haven't been revolutions against the monarchy for many years, but if someone earns a lot running a big business all the workers and unions are up in arms, calling for their resignation; yet this doesn't seem to happen to the monarchy.

If you look at a prince, king or queen closely enough, I mean really examine him or her, what would they look like? Different to you and me? Maybe more expensive clothes, more expensive perfume, more expensive shoes. But if you took all that away, and stood naked next to a king, would you look different? I hope the answer you all come up with is no, because that is precisely the point. As humans, we are the same. Yet you

are a king, and I am a factory worker. You are above me, and I respect you. I will wave my flag and smile broadly as you pass, happy to know you gave some of your valued time to share with me.

To suggest you would respect someone you don't know, not because they have done great things for humanity (most have not, as you will see from their great wealth), but because someone tells you he is the king, or head of your country seems a little ludicrous to me, but then, what do I know?

So who are they? They are not individuals. They are the country; the nation. We love them, because we love our country. We don't care that they have more money or finer jewels than us, we love them, because in times of crisis they stand up and represent the hopes and fears of every citizen. They exist for the good of the country. They show the other countries we are powerful as a nation, and we are proud to belong. In short, this is no different to ancient times. The king is the embodiment of the nation.

So why do we still have kings and queens?

It's quite simple really. We are nationalistic. We love our country, we believe our country is superior to any other, and as we are only individual citizens, we need to have pride – not in ourselves – but in something greater than all of us. The nation, represented by the flag and ultimately the king and queen. That's why they need to keep the monarchy in one family, with the title being passed from one family member to another. They must have continuity.

How many politicians come and go? Do you even remember their names? The politicians who work so very hard for you to give you healthcare, employment, pensions when you're old. Do we care about them? Do we happily smile and wave our flags for them? No, of course we don't. We *need* to believe in something greater, something eternal, something that will carry on even if one member dies.

We need to believe in something more powerful than ourselves. Something that makes us feel happier, something that makes us feel that the effort we put in every day is worth it. That one thing is the king or queen. The country. The embodiment of nationalism.

Some countries have voted for a republic, for a president; and when the president, the leader of the country comes past, we happily wave our flags and smile, proud to be part of the great nation. It makes no difference if it is a king or a queen, or a president. Only when we start to forget the nation as all important, and start to think more about the world (*worldism, the term that doesn't exist*), will we ever have a strong

need to say to our monarchs: "Thank you, we don't need your services anymore."

*I dedicate myself to you my monarch.
I will labour for you,
give up my life for you,
I will respect and honour you.
For you, are the country I love.*

*I will wave to you, buy flowers to present to you.
you are so much more than I.
I do not deserve your friendship,
but I am grateful that you shake my hand.*

*I know you do not toil in the fields,
or have callouses in your hands.
I know you dress in finest silks,
but still I smile and raise my flag
For you are the country I love.*

M o n e y

The most common medium of exchange; functions as legal tender

The most valuable topic in the book! And if you buy this book you will pay money for it, I will receive money for it. I can then spend it on whatever I please (after tax of course), and the government can spend my money on anything it pleases, and the world will keep going round.

“Money makes the world go round” goes a well known saying (but hasn't it got more to do with gravity?) Whatever the case it seems we can't exist without money and it would be a foolish man to suggest we could. Money is how we pay for things. Full stop.

So how much money is there in the world? 100 trillion, 900 zillion? I don't have the figures to hand but I am guessing that it's a lot. But money could be anything, it could be gold, stones; in fact, it could be

anything given to someone else in exchange for goods or services, just as long as the recipient can then use it to pay for something else.

Trees have monetary value but you can't keep them under your bed. Land has monetary value but you can't put it in the bank. No, there has to be something that is easily transportable that everyone accepts. Money was the answer. Notes and coins issued by the government, with a well known face on them, and a number to represent what they were worth. But as we all know, just because a note says one million rupees, doesn't mean we are rich, far from it.

Thanks to international exchange rates (*the charge for exchanging currency of one country for currency of another*) and inflation (*a general and progressive increase in prices*) your one million rupees might just buy you a loaf of bread, but one million dollars might buy you a nice ranch in the united states, or a large town in a poor country. It all depends on what your money is worth in the country you take it to.

When I was in thailand, I was amazed at what 300 baht could buy – a nice hotel for the night for two people, or two days food for two people. Translated into pounds, it was about £4.00! Four pounds! That would perhaps buy you a pint and a half of beer, or a sandwich and a packet of crisps. It was so cheap! In fact we only had to work for a short time in britain to be able to live comfortably in thailand for many months. So you can see why so many people head to the cheap countries with their money.

The problem is, they're not cheap for the people, and a labourer might have to work for a couple of days to earn 300 baht. Then he would have to pay rent, and food and clothes for himself and perhaps his family. So when we say a country is cheap, we must remember it is cheap for us, thanks to the good rate of exchange we are getting, but can you imagine how long a thai labourer would have to work for to go on a two week holiday to the uk? Probably several years! So it's clear to see that the world is imbalanced monetarily, but it only really starts to show up when you move between countries.

If you live in the usa, maybe you think that everyone has the same lifestyle as you do, or perhaps you think that the people of thailand would be better off if they just worked a bit harder. But it seems that no matter how hard they work, they stay poor.

“It's because they have a weak economy,” insist some of you, “if the government managed the economy of the country better it would only be a matter of time until they were as wealthy as us.”

Rich man pays poor man, poor man pays poorer man, poorer man pays poorest man.

If you live in one of the western “developed” (rich) nations you may have noticed that your country has started importing much of the products from overseas, especially consumer goods and food. Why do you think that is? Is it that they are being compassionate and helping out a friend in need. Unfortunately not. What they are doing is using the favourable exchange rates to pay less for their goods than they would if they were manufactured in the west.

Even technology companies are starting to move their customer services operations to places like india, so that you phone a local number and through the magic of modern telecommunications, your call is diverted to bangalore, without you even noticing! Why do they do this? Is it because of the wonderful customer service skills they have in bangalore, or is it that they can pay someone £5.00 per day instead of paying someone in the uk £50.00? Pretty obvious, no?

So as a country becomes wealthier, and their economy grows stronger they “outsource” some of the more labour intensive tasks to poorer people (what would they do if we didn't provide them with jobs eh?) but then something interesting starts happening. As a poor country starts developing economically they in return become richer, and start employing people from a poorer country than themselves, for you know, “labour intensive tasks.”

But the question I want to ask is: What happens when all the poor countries have become rich? Is it possible? Or to be rich, does someone else need to be poor? You see, the way the system works makes it impossible for everyone to be rich. So it starts at the top with £100.00 pounds per hour, and then there is a sliding scale down to the bottom at £5.00 pounds per hour. It is economically impossible for everyone to be paid £100.00 pounds per hour, and if they were, no one would be rich, everyone would be the same, but now £100.00 pounds wouldn't be worth as much as it used to be. Do you see?

Someone always has to pay the cost, and at the moment, it is the economically stagnant countries. Bring in the world bank.

World Bank, World Saviour?

1. *World Bank: A United Nations agency created to assist developing nations by loans guaranteed by member governments*

So in order to stimulate economic growth the world bank loans money to economically and normally socially unstable countries under the pretext of helping them become wealthy “just like us,” but then they saddle them with crippling interest rates they can barely afford to pay back, meaning that the countries who have loaned the money get rich off the interest rates, and the poor countries get poorer. Just the way we like it. Greed, pretending to be compassion!

Not everyone's going to be rich stop fooling yourselves

It's a trick, a con by powerful magicians, making you see what they want you to see. You are enslaved to the rich, doing their bidding, so they can get richer. You don't seriously think they would let you get rich, do you? Who would make all the cheap products for their consumers? Perhaps we can enslave the monkeys, and teach them to make jeans and t-shirts for the masses, after all we would only have to pay them peanuts! (sorry for the pun)

Maybe all this searching for extra terrestrial life is actually a cover to find some new race of people that the rich can exploit before their cover is blown on this planet. But their cover is blown, we see what they're up to, but unfortunately it's not them that are the problem, it's us.

We want to be rich, we don't want to spend our money, we want to hoard it for ourselves, and although we may know in the back of our mind that someone is being exploited we shrug it off and say, “at least they've got jobs. If the west didn't give them jobs, who would.” And so we greedily rush through the clothes stores saying: “WOW! Jeans £4.00? I'll take three pairs.”

The poor are working for us. It's just we can't hear or see them because they are thousands of miles away. Can you imagine the uproar that would be caused if we paid children a pound a day to work twelve hours in a sweat shop (*factory where workers do piecework for poor pay and are prevented from forming unions; common in the clothing industry*). We wouldn't let it happen.

Celebrity campaigners do all they can to raise awareness of these issues and all credit to them but unfortunately, they can't change the world. You see, we are all on a collision course that may take ten years or fifty years, but come it will, when the poor realise they are still poor, and they have been conned (yet again).

But what is this desperate desire for a good quality of life, for economic riches, is it not greed on everyone's part. You see, the poor people are under the illusion that to be rich is better, but as the monks will tell you, they are quite happy leading a simple life, with simple food and accommodation. They are not unhappy. In fact, most of them will tell you they love life. But we are shown people in desperate "need," and we think: "poor people, if only they had better jobs and a better economy, they too could have what we have." Which is?

Let us turn our attention to the continent of africa, long touted as being one of the poorest places on earth; we regularly see video of people starving, people walking a mile to get water, who live in mud huts. How sorry we feel for them, and how sorry they must feel for themselves. But hang on, we've said it before, haven't these people been survivors throughout history? Have they not been quite content with their lives? I believe they (and us) were quite content with life in general, until someone told them they shouldn't have to live like this – that it was "unnatural for a man to live in nature, off the land," that we were "a civilised species, and we should live in brick houses with air conditioning and satellite tv, and we should go on holiday and go out for meals."

Well, you can just imagine what happened. People thought that that was what they should do, so they left their villages in search of this money so they could have all the things they were told they needed, but quickly found out that the cost of getting these things, was the cultivation of desire and greed, and disappointment at not being able to get the money only lead to suffering.

But by now they were hooked. They had given up their simple way of life (which if you remember the monks seemed quite happy with), and were landed in cities ready to be exploited by each and every rich and powerful person. Kept in a virtual prison, where the only (supposed) escape was to keep working for as many hours as possible. But in the end they never escaped.

Let's help the poor, buy more stuff

We have already heard it said, by certain people, that by outsourcing the manual labour to poor countries, we will help them become wealthier, so does that mean we have to produce more and more stuff we don't need – a process that is already taking a terrible toll on our limited resources? Are we saying that economic development in the "developing" world is

dependent on mass consumerism? Let me get this straight. We must make more, so we can help more? Is that right?

But we only want to pay these countries a fraction of what we sell them for in our own shops (it's not us... exchange rates dear boy, exchange rates...). And they will get money, so they can build cities just like ours, so they can go shopping all the time, and waste even more resources? Is that what we want? We want everyone in the world to have a car, and a mobile phone and have access to junk food, and consumer electronics. Is that what we really want?

I think that some people think it is. And it will be a sad day when everyone becomes just like us, because I'll tell you one thing. If everyone consumed resources like the australians the british, the americans, and the other "rich" countries the world as we know it would collapse. The oil would run out, the gas would run out. There would be nothing left to exploit! Do you understand how serious this is?

We are saying that the people in the developing world should have access to a lifestyle like ours but the cost of this happening is the collapse of our own lifestyles, and I'll tell you something, the political and business leaders of the west know that. They know that the developing countries can never be allowed to have everything we have otherwise it would spell doom for us all. So we set up world banks and aid agencies and we pretend to help, but secretly we make sure they never reach our standard of living. We are just the moneylender, the shylock greedily rubbing his hands together, after making yet another "compassionate" loan to the "third world."

But on a last note, what's so great about our standard of living anyway? We only need clothes, shelter and food to have a happy life, the rest is pure greed. Why do people aspire to living a superficial life? Because it looks good to have (on paper) I think the monks might be on to something, so I might throw in my lot with them rather than mr world bank, and if I need to know what world economics really is about, I just have to turn on a tv.

Some people say that money is the root of all evil, but there's no such thing as evil. Greed and desire wants money, lots of it, but once your mind sees through that, things start to fall back into place; and who knows, maybe you would like to try living without money for a while. I bet it's not as bad as people make out. But if you become attached to it, being without it is probably one of the loneliest places to be in the universe.

*Break free of desire and greed,
and then see how much money you want.
Being poor is a state of mind.
Think about it.*

“But they are poor, they are,” cry the celebrity campaigners, as they travel from village to village in their jeeps and their sunglasses. “If only they had what we had, they would know what it really is like to be happy. We must get more money for them, it's the only way out.”

Is it?

M u s i c

An artistic form of auditory communication incorporating instrumental or vocal tones in a structured and continuous manner

•

Any agreeable (pleasing and harmonious) sounds

Most people love music don't they? I know I do. I like blues, rock and roll, classical, electronica, folk, and jazz, but I'm not so keen on boy bands, country and western, or rock. Some people only like rock, death metal, and grunge, others only like cheery pop songs, others opera, but it's all music. Some we like, some we don't.

More than anything else, music has the ability to stir up emotions, such as when we hear a rousing ballad, or when we hear a song we used to listen to when we were in love with someone.

Music and the emotions are wholeheartedly connected. A film without music just isn't the same. A horror is not really "horrifying" unless you hear the screech of the violins, and who would feel a tear well in their eye if the music wasn't just right, at the moment the stars of the love story kiss for the first time?

All this music can play havoc with the emotions. For some reason, it seems to connect, able to communicate complex emotions without words. It is in essence a language on its own, able to do what a thousand words cannot. How is it possible that the plucking of guitar strings in a certain combination can produce such emotions? After all, it is only a tightly wound piece of metal attached to a wooden box (sorry to over simplify it) tuned (*adjust the pitches of musical instruments*), and plucked, or strummed, by someone skilled in the art of the guitar. Let us find out why music affects us so much and what its connection is to our minds, and perhaps the universe!

My family have always had music playing in the house. My dad always liked jazz music, and my dad thought that my mum liked country and western, and that's what he bought her, when in fact she liked jazz! It's no wonder they divorced.

Like most teenagers, I only liked popular music, as that is what everyone in my peer group liked (no doubt I would have liked opera if that's what it took to get me accepted into the in-group), and I never really paid that much attention to what my parents were playing, until the year that my father decided to leave my mother. It was at this time that I noticed a distinct change in the type of music being played.

I can remember coming home from school sometimes, and my mother would be sitting in the lounge, drinking sherry, and listening to a song by a depressing irish duo whose name escapes me. There she would sit, hour after hour, day after day listening to this same song, crying.

I used to ask her, "mum, can't you turn this music off, it's so depressing."

To which she would reply, "no leave it on, it's nice," when it was so obviously helping keep her in a state of melancholy.

She played the same song for several years after my father left, sitting in the same chair crying. She wouldn't listen to anything happy or upbeat, although whilst we were still a family, she always listened to up-tempo stuff. She was, I think, using the music to adjust her emotions, or perhaps it was the other way round, but she was sad, so she needed something to help keep her in that state.

Music was the answer. She didn't want to break out of the sad state, and in a way, the chords, and therefore the vibrations, were affecting her, not only psychologically, but physically. She didn't turn on the tv and watch a soap opera, or listen to a talk show on the radio. The only thing she wanted to do was listen to a specific type of music.

What do you think? Do you ever listen to music to put yourself in a specific physical state? When you are going out to a party, what sort of music do you put on before you go? Is it slow and emotionally depressing, or is it fun and upbeat? When you are having a romantic evening with your girlfriend or boyfriend, with candles and a nice bottle of wine, do you put on dance music? No, I think it's fair to say that we choose music that fits our "mood," (*a characteristic (habitual or relatively temporary) state of feeling*). When the mood passes we change the music.

Some of you may say: "I just put on music I like, it doesn't matter what mood I'm in;" but if you watch yourself carefully in the moment, you may see something interesting happening.

When you work out at the gym, and your heartbeat is high and the blood is pumping, do you listen to classical or opera? I don't think so. We need music at a certain tempo in a certain rhythm to help keep us focussed on the task. The same goes for when we feel angry, don't you think? We don't put on quiet calming music, we want loud, booming music that mimics our emotional state, and perhaps even intensifies it.

Perhaps you've never thought about it, but take a moment now to consider it. The speed of the music connects to our heartbeat, and the harmony connects with our emotional centres in the brain. That music can do this is no accident.

If we look back to the time when our distant ancestors were around, they used drums made of hollowed logs, tuned to a specific pitch via a stretched animal skin, and were beaten with the hands in a certain rhythm and tempo during rituals, in which the "music" got faster and faster to get the participants into a heightened emotional state. We can see the same thing happening in nightclubs today. The music has a fast tempo and repetitive qualities, that enable the dancers to "lose themselves" in the music (even without drugs), because the music acts like a drug on the brain.

It is as if our bodies and minds have become one with the vibration of the music. We lose inhibitions, we lose the "me," and we start to wave our hands, gyrate our hips, and move our feet faster and faster just like the ancient tribal rituals. With each beat, the pulsing, repetitive music and lights put us deeper and deeper into what could almost be described as a trance (*a state of mind in which consciousness is fragile and voluntary action is poor or missing; a state resembling deep sleep*), in which we lose our control over our bodies, and just allow them to be carried by the music.

People take ecstasy (*a stimulant drug that is chemically related to mescaline and amphetamine and is used illicitly for its euphoric and*

hallucinogenic effects) to heighten the effects, but as anyone who dances will tell you, you don't need it to feel euphoric. It's the music that takes you on a hypnotic journey into a state of being that has lost all sense of "I," and you become one with the music.

Have I lost you, or are you still with me?

People have often been heard talking about "the universal vibration," and although it was generally doped up hippies talking about it, there could be some truth in this. What do you think? We have already seen that music has the ability to affect our emotions quickly; that it affects our heartbeat and the speed our brain vibrates at, but could music be the key to understanding something important in the universe?

There was a famous film in the eighties, where the scientists played a series of tones to communicate with a spaceship that landed on earth, and although this was science fiction for entertainment purposes only, if we look into this deeply together, we can see that everything in the world is vibrating – even you and me – at such a fast speed that we appear to be solid. But we aren't.

We are a mass of vibrating atoms, bonded together, but not by glue. So if our atoms weren't bonded together, would we just float into space? Or more seriously, would we become part of the universe? Actually, by saying, "become part of the universe," I am implying that we are not already a part of it, which we are. We just think we are separate.

It is only by accepting we are made up of molecules, which in themselves are not solid, that we will start to understand our place, not in the universe, but right here on earth, and realise that nothing is more important than that which already is.

If we could unbind our molecules what would happen to us? Would we die, or is there something, which those of us who have been grasping on to "life" as we know it "down here," are missing? Is there really a universal vibration? Who knows. I just know that things are not as they seem, and that the only way we can find out the truth of it is to examine it carefully with our open minds without judgement.

Music is much, much more than just the next rock star strutting their stuff on stage. The right tones at the right tempo speak to us in a language way clearer than our own man-made language. How else can you explain the ability of a song – which is after all, just vibrations – to make us suddenly cry, feel excited, or happy? Music is a language we understand. We do not have to study for years to understand it. We do

not have to take any exams to understand the connection we have to it and the connection it has to us.

Life is not solid. We are not solid. Music is not solid. Pure vibrations. Think about it.

N

N a t i o n a l i s m

Love of country and willingness to sacrifice for it

•

The doctrine that your national culture and interests are superior to any other

•

The doctrine that nations should act independently (rather than collectively) to attain their goals

In the opening dialogue, I asked you to visualise a simple scenario; one where you imagined for a moment, that you were a traveller from another planet, far, far away, and you have travelled for many years in search of intelligent life on other planets. You live in a land some may call utopia, where people are happy in themselves, tolerant of others and have plenty of food to eat. They don't need stimulants to distract them, know no violence, care for the planet, and don't need religion because they are not afraid.

They don't kill animals, live in self-sustaining communities, harness power from the sea, the sun and the wind, and share resources. They don't need retail therapy, and are not blinded by desire or greed. This is a land where governments don't exist, there are no guns, no armies, no generals. The oceans and rivers are clean. A planet where life is just about perfect... I would like you to imagine this again right now.

As you silently pass through the galaxies and star systems, a world appears in the distance; small but getting larger by the second, as you approach it. Closer. You see colours of blue, green and brown. Then you distinguish great oceans, mountains and land. Closer. You pass through the atmosphere, you see farm land, lakes and rivers, and closer still you begin to make out small dots... Could it be? Yes! Your computer system confirms that there is life on this planet!

As you come into land, you can make out buildings, transportation networks, and finally...people; just like you. You excitedly radio back to your base many millions of light years away that you have found what looks to be intelligent life. You are so excited, you beam the biggest smile. After so many years of searching, you have finally found what you set out to achieve – to find intelligent life on another planet.

As you do not wish to cause alarm to the people of this world, you land in an isolated place and make your way on foot to the city. This will be the expedition of a lifetime, to study another planet and its people, and eventually make contact with another human being.

On your expedition, what would you find here on earth? Do not answer straight away. I would like you to consider this very, very carefully. This is a topic of the utmost seriousness. I wonder if you would find something similar to me when I did this visualization. Now I am not pessimistic or optimistic in my approach to the world, I just try to see it how it really is, and I would ask you to do the same.

My expedition to planet earth : A visitors report

I arrive hoping to find a world like my own. It looks similar. It has breathable oxygen, water, sun, and green land to grow vegetables. The climate is bearable in most areas, and life seems to have permeated across the globe. On arrival, I begin to notice that things aren't quite the same as at home.

In the first place I visit, I see people starving, begging, full of disease; children with no family, no running water.

In the second, I cannot breathe properly. The toxic fumes from their transportation vehicles are killing me. I see people deliberately inhaling toxins from some kind of device. I feel claustrophobic; there are so many people in such a small space. The buildings rise tall above me, the noise is deafening; loud artificial sounds. I see a man beat another man to take something from him, I see people, so very angry at each other.

In the third, I see men killing each other for no apparent reason, although I did notice they were dressed slightly differently. I see men raping women and killing children, and other men living in luxurious palaces made from gold.

In the fourth, I see the forests being destroyed.

In the fifth, I see people kneeling before an image, with a man killing another man before a large audience of people who are clapping as if pleased with the event.

In the sixth, I see groups, with people whose faces I cannot see, bearing weapons, I see a huge wall dividing land, I see a woman blow herself up killing others, I see anger and hatred. I see men fighting to be the most powerful.

In the seventh, I see a man being tortured, by a man cutting off his fingers one by one. I see paper being exchanged for something whose purpose is death. I see men happily working on a project that can kill millions. I see division of people.

In the eighth, I see men drinking a strange liquid which makes them unsteady and fight with each other. I see a young boy kill an old man. I see such hatred such anger.

In the ninth, I see desperate women raped by groups of men, others killed for speaking in public, and people forced to work all week for no pay. I see people chained up and beaten.

In the tenth, I see women having sex with many men in exchange for some paper and something they inject in their arm. I see cars patrolling the streets. I see fear. I see people hurriedly locking their doors. I see smoke from big factories. I see animals being murdered.

I see no happy faces. But why? The world I see here is abundant and full of beauty. I cannot comprehend the peoples who inhabit this world.

I unhappily return to my spacecraft, and report that, alas, I have failed in my mission to find intelligent life on this planet, and leave.

End of visitors report

I would like each of you to do your own visitors report. Even if it is something you just visualise. You may think that this is unimportant, but it will help you define your world view as it is at the moment. Next I would like you to think about the place you live in, the place you call a country (*the territory occupied by a nation*). You may not identify with any of what I “saw” as existing in your country. You may think I have only

seen the bad in every place I visited, that in fact there are many good things that exist in the world today.

I do not want to get into an argument with you about this, all I ask is that you look around you and tell me what is great about your country. I'm sure you have a thousand answers. High Employment, large disposable income, democracy, free education, and health care for all. How about home-ownership, plenty to eat, negligible violence, and a stable government free from corruption with a police force to protect you? What we are inquiring on here is nationalism. Not the dictionary definition, but what it really means to be nationalistic.

Tell me if you have ever heard the term worldism? I know I haven't. It's not an "ism" we have in our language, like atheism, vegetarianism, fascism or racism. The definition of an ism is "*denotes a state or condition, belief or principle,*" so tell me, is the world in which we live not worthy of an ism? If the definition of an ism is something we believe in, then it may become clearer why there is no such word as worldism.



What do we actually *feel* when we feel nationalistic? For me, it's a sense of pride in people who have the same place of residence on their passport (*document issued by a country to a citizen allowing that person to travel abroad and re-enter the home country*). It is a feeling of superiority over someone else, not an individual but over billions of people who have a different passport, or who speak a different language. It's a feeling of belonging to a bigger group.

When you feel miserable, your relationship has failed, and you owe a lot of money etc. there is always the nation to feel good about. Your country. A place whose borders were carved out of war, many centuries ago, and are protected by the army.

Although some borders are invisible, there are many countries who build a physical barrier between themselves and their neighbours, thereby creating division between people who are genetically identical (in that they belong to the family homo sapiens, distinguished slightly by language and subtle defining features). Yet, when physical barriers are put up, people begin to feel different, thanks to the powerful influence of culture, media, tradition, politics and teachers. You are no longer plain old homo sapiens. You are now british, chinese, american, german, iranian, argentinian, australian, swedish, thai, and proud of it! You feel pride (*a feeling of self-respect and personal worth, Satisfaction with your (or*

another's) achievements). You now say: "I am proud to be british." "I am proud to be chinese." "I am proud to be iranian."

Listen to those statements, what do they mean to you? Well, in relation to nationalism, self-respect and self-worth cannot be applied, as it has nothing to do with your individual achievements. This is the group we are talking about here, the "we", the group whose one thing in common is the passport they hold. Even if you are of chinese, saudi, indian, jamaican, thai, or somalian birth, once you hold a passport that says "usa" or "japan," you become part of the group, and that group is your extended family. You are now brothers, bonded by the great nation, the nation that will look after you when you are sick, fight for your beliefs during war, help you find a job, and look after you when you retire.

Let's face it, nationalism makes you feel good about yourself in a way that worldism never could. Why? Because, unlike worldism, which by its definition would have to be inclusive, nationalism separates us into individual competing groups each trying to beat the other. War is a great example of this. When politicians and generals decide that another country is doing something *they* don't like or *they* want to invade or occupy, *they* declare war. Through government propaganda, they stoke the fires of nationalism and rally support for "our boys, out there fighting for YOU!" In war, nationalism has nothing to do with being morally right or wrong.

In the second world war, the germans had the same nationalistic feelings about their country, as the allies did about theirs. It is a feeling so strong, that if anyone mentions anything bad about your country you're willing to fight them, in war time, or peace.

Nationalism

Love of country and willingness to sacrifice for it

Imagine that! You who know nothing about the people of the other country (except what your leaders have told you), and are prepared to give your life (and take many others) in the name of *your* country.

If you actually met a german, british, american, spanish or japanese man, I'm sure you would find most of them very nice, not at all like the demonised image your country leaders gave you of them during war.

You see, stirring up nationalism is good for governments when they need to do something, and they want to enlist your support to help them

do it. After all, the second world war would have been no more than a bar room brawl if it was just hitler and his cabinet vs. churchill and his cabinet. Imagine that, they would have sorted out their differences, or even killed one another, and then everybody could have got back to business as usual. Instead, they stirred up the nation, turned individuals into a mob and motivated everyone to go to war.

How can you turn against a whole nation of people? Especially as we were all good friends prior to the war? How can you suddenly hate all british, all germans, all americans, all japanese, and all french? Well, as was proved in the various wars, the key ingredient was nationalism. By instilling a feeling of such superiority over every other nation, and the feeling we are good and they are bad, political and military leaders have – throughout time – been able to appeal to people to forget their individualism and come together as one. One Group. One Nation.

This appeals to us, as it instils a sense of pride in us. We sense we are doing something for the greater good, that the nation is all important, and we dutifully sign up, ready to be cut down by the first bullet, or blown to pieces by a bomb.

By using propaganda that makes us feel as if we owe the nation (after all they've done for us), governments can rely on the fact that they will have plenty of willing volunteers to do their bidding; safe in the knowledge that no one will take the time to consider whether it is ethically right or wrong. After all, what's good for the nation is good for me!

In peace time this is expressed through sport, namely teams or teams of individuals that compete head to head; to be the best in the world. (e.g. the football world cup or the olympics). This replaces war as the method to achieve superiority over other countries. It may not cause bloodshed on the field of battle, but it can in the stands, where people are prepared to fight one another, just because one is wearing a green shirt and the other is wearing a white one!

Have you ever heard football supporters screams, cheers, yells, and the abuse they give the other team? They are like a pack of wolves out for the kill, they have lost their individuality and are now collectively one nation. Proud to be superior.

I love my country

Do you love your country? I've asked you before, but what makes you different to everybody else, what really defines you as a nation? What makes you great? Sorry, just before that little voice strikes up, with the voice of years of conditioning, let's imagine another scenario. Imagine the science fiction films were right and we were about to engage in a world between worlds – that armies from across the galaxy were intent on destroying us. Where would your nationalism be then? What use would it be? What would it matter what colour you were, what religion you were, how you dressed, what language you spoke?

The invaders wouldn't care about that. To them, you're all the same, human. They are intent on killing every last one of you, just because they don't like your way of life, they think you're all evil, are a threat to their way of life and actually... just because *they* want to own the earth now! Makes you think, doesn't it?

So, before you spread division throughout the world with nationalism; before you make children hate other children because they come from a different country; before you dislike whole nations because they look different, or they support a different team, or they belong to the wrong religion... *Stop*, for a quiet moment, and ask yourself: "What is our ultimate goal as humans? Is it not the continuing existence of life on earth?" You tell me.

Worldism – a term never destined for the dictionary whilst
nationalism is still there

N a t u r e

The natural physical world including plants and animals and
landscapes etc.

Have you ever been for a walk along a rugged coastline, or a walk through woodland forests or mountains? With no music players to distract you, or people constantly talking? If you have, you may know what I mean when I describe the feeling as “being in one's natural state.” If you haven't, let me delve a little deeper.

If I could explain it, I would say I felt connected to the earth whilst out in nature. Lots of you actually know this feeling when you go on holiday somewhere beautiful (I'm not talking about the latest five star beach resort!), I mean that there's something about the place in its natural state, which makes you feel as though you are in a different world. And in fact you are!

A place where there are no buildings, no cars, no artificial noise; just natural sounds, like the wind in the trees, a trickling stream, or the rush of the ocean. And you don't need to go to the corners of the earth to find

this; most of us have places in our own countries where we can experience it. Even a stone wall seems to fit in. But let's explore this together.

Why do we feel calm here? Why do we say: "Wow! This place is amazing?" Because we know, that deep down, this is us. We are nature and nature is us. But most of us live in areas full of artificial noise and concrete – both unnatural. If you are ever in the countryside and you hear a chainsaw, or you are standing by the ocean, and you hear a jet ski, you will know what I mean. The mechanical sounds grate on our nerve endings, and we feel tense, as the sounds do not fit in with the surroundings. The same way as a concrete wall in a mountain range not only looks out of place but also feels out of place.

But how relaxed do we feel when we sit by the ocean, just listening to the sound of the waves crashing on the shore? It is intense, magnificent. A place where we feel calm, where we feel free to daydream, where hours can pass without needing to rush home and watch tv, or go to the pub for a beer. A place where all our troubles melt away with every wave.

Yet we surround ourselves with artificial noise all the time. Television. Walking with an mp3 music player. Playing computer games. Going to pubs and clubs where the music is so deafening, we cannot hear ourselves think. And that is the key – that we cannot hear ourselves think. You see, most of us don't want to spend time with ourselves, without noise, that's why people put the tv or music on when they are alone, "just to keep them company."

We live in such a noisy world now that we feel anxious and nervous when there is silence. We do not want to be alone with our thoughts any longer than is necessary. We need to keep busy, to always be doing something, to always have noise in our brain. Because we don't really want to hear what's going on in our head, do we? That would be much too frightening. So we use excuses like "I'm watching an interesting program," or "I love music."

How many people could say they have ever come home from a hard day at work and sat there in silence? It wouldn't be very comfortable, would it? But nature is different, because nature is never silent.

How many of you love to hear the fierce wind in the trees whilst in bed at night, or love to hear the rain against your windows whilst watching and listening to the faint crackle of the wood fire? I'm sure most people do.

The ancients believed that the universe was made up of four elements, wind, fire, water, and earth, so don't you find it interesting that these

elements are also what relax us the most? Music created for relaxation in the home uses the same principles.

The sound of the wind
Watching and hearing a fire crackle
Watching and listening to the sound of a stream or the ocean
Walking on the earth

As humans, the most intelligent advanced beings on the planet, we view nature as something to be looked at, not something we are part of, and it is in this fundamental mistake that we have lost our connection to the earth. We create artificial environments to live in, sometimes hundreds of feet in the sky, we live in communities where no one knows anyone, and we don't work in harmony with nature, we try to control it.

We also treat it as an inexhaustible supplier of goods. You see, since the beginning, nature has always been a supplier who happily balances the books every year, with each customer taking and receiving what he needs for survival. Until we came along. Nature didn't count on us ordering more than we were prepared to give back, and come to think of it, since the industrial revolution, we have just been takers.

In our never ending race to make our lives ridiculously comfortable, seeking anything to make us happier, we have been on a non-stop mission to effectively alter the balance once and for all; by raiding nature of all its resources, something that a lion or tiger hasn't done in a million years.

We dig, and we dig, looking for coal to fuel our power stations; we raid the oil in the earth to fuel our cars and make plastics; we mine for precious gems to become wealthy and powerful; we make chemicals to spray on our vegetables to make them grow bigger; we pour millions of tons of waste into the seas. We dig and we keep digging. We alter the landscape permanently to create new homes, and we can't stop. We just can't stop. Where will this end?

Well, one day, the earth will have no more resources, and we'll have to move. But let's face it, you and I won't be around then, so it's no good thinking about. But what I want to understand is why we continue to damage the planet we are on, when there is no obvious replacement earth within the nearest x million light years, and indeed, even if there were, how would we get there?

We are as much a part of nature as the seed that grows into a tree, the egg which becomes a bird, or the bee that pollinates the flower. We've just forgotten how.

In our super fast evolution to become homo sapiens (which you remember is characterized by superior intelligence, articulate speech, and erect carriage), we somehow developed the idea that we were better than nature, as opposed to part of it. Whilst we continually find ways to control and contain nature, it is happily existing, forever changing, never complaining, just getting on with it.

Looking back over the years, the natural world has done a pretty good job of looking after the planet; constantly balancing the books, with floods, droughts, extinction, renewal, rebirth. The problem is, this looking after the planet business is pretty complex stuff; something our brains do not really have the capacity to understand as yet, and maybe never will.

Think back to when you take a walk in the woods, the large animals, the fungi, the micro-organisms, the trees and the plants, all here to perform a specific task in the business of keeping the world in balance. Do you ever think about the purpose of seemingly useless (or even annoying) living things on the earth?

In the summer, we all wonder about wasps, whose only purpose in our minds, is to ruin our barbecues and sting us. In the warmer countries, we wonder about mosquitoes, who only come out at night while we are sleeping to bite us! Or how about the common house fly or spider we chase round the house, trying to kill with a rolled up piece of newspaper?

Let's face it, we just don't understand nature, and to be honest we don't want to. We want to keep it at bay; to look at it through the glass window of an aquarium or the bars of a bird cage. We don't know how to interact with nature, we're scared of it, because unlike the animals in the woodland or the big lions in africa, we don't quite know our purpose; how we fit in.

We don't know our role, except we are told we are the supreme predator – due to our supreme intelligence and tool making ability. We only know we are in a position of power, that we are better than the fish, the animals and the trees, and rightly so! After all, who has heard a tree discuss philosophy, an ant build a suspension bridge, or a parrot build a skyscraper? Anyone who suggested such a thing could be possible would be dismissed as crazy!

We are the most intelligent beings on the planet. We have a consciousness. We are aware of ourselves. We have the power of complex language. We have the capacity to learn new things every day. We have the power to create beautiful things; but we also have the power to destroy. Imagine coming head to head with a lion, tiger, or even a bull, and try to kill it with your bare hands! Wouldn't be much of a contest would it? I think we all know who would be voted the ultimate predator.

But the thing is, even these animals who could tear us to pieces, with their teeth, or their horns, haven't really got the slightest bit of interest in us, unless we threaten them. They aren't interested in eating us. Why? Because we're not on their menu.

Every animal eats specific things in order to do what's best for their system, and assist nature retain balance, even if they are not consciously aware of that fact. Look at some of the biggest animals in the world, what do they eat? Grass! Look at whales, what do they eat? Microscopic plankton! Everything on this earth is doing something for a reason, and that reason is to keep the world in balance. A bull might not be aware of why he is eating grass, but even if he were, he would keep eating it, as his system is finally tuned to process the nutrients out of it, something we could never eat, as our system could not digest it.

All in all, we're a bit lost really. Having lost our place in the natural world as a contributor, we have started using our complex minds for different ends, namely, for enjoyment and acquiring wealth. We have become greedy. We want everything, and we will do anything to get it. We won't let anyone get in our way. This is not about need; humans could live happily, if they had a garden full of vegetables, fresh running water, and a nice warm place to sleep.

This is about organising ourselves in such a way so that we can acquire wealth. That is the main goal of humans now, not living as part of the natural world as a contributor. We live in places where it is impossible to grow your own vegetables, where the most important thing is to be close to where you work, the place where you earn money. And of course, close to where you can spend your money.

Food production is no longer in your hands, as you are too busy earning money to worry about that. Huge companies have been created to grow food for you, raise and kill animals for you, and pre-make your food so you only have to heat it. You can even have food that is grown in different countries brought to you by the miracle of modern transportation.

*Who are you now, ultimate predator?
As you walk along the supermarket aisles with your fine clothes on, selecting
choicest meats, and succulent tropical fruits, perusing dairy products packaged
for you, oh, so nicely.
Delicately smelling and selecting.
The only requirement is money.*

“Progress!” I hear you shouting. “This is progress! We don't live in mud huts anymore, hunting and gathering, growing vegetables, storing rain water. This is the modern world! We must progress! We cannot go backwards!” But in some countries people do live like this! Some people live simply, growing their own food or raising their own livestock to provide their family with food. They may not have “progressed,” as we know it. But there is one thing I'd like to ask you: Who do you think is more connected with nature? Us, the modern city dweller, who buys his food in nice packages that have been shipped across the globe, or the man who plants a seed and waters it, nurtures it watching it grow, tending it throughout the season, and when finally it is ready, harvests it and eats it?

In our modern life, we still need food, water, and shelter, we just pay someone else to provide it for us. You see, the acquisition of money has changed the way we connect with nature. We are no longer at one with the world. We are outside, looking in. We now fear nature. We fear coming into close contact with wild animals and fish. We feel scared if we are in a wood alone. We fear for our very existence. We think that the wildlife want to harm us, when in fact most of them are more scared of us than we are of them. We need to control nature, to tame it, to domesticate it, so we feel comfortable living in the world. Surely this is not what progress is about?

As we don't understand the delicate balance that has been achieved over millions of years, we never realise that changing nature (like the damming of rivers and the felling of ancient forests), can cause environmental catastrophes. For us, nature is a means to an end. A means to live comfortably, to acquire money and enable us to live in isolation, surrounded only by other humans, where we feel safe in the knowledge that no wild animal will be able to get into our city, our house or apartment! But think on this. More humans are harmed every year by other humans than ever by wild animals, but still we are afraid.

Connection to the earth can only come through letting nature back into our lives. This is perhaps the reason that when we are walking by the

ocean watching the sunset or looking out over mountain ranges that the place feels special to us. A place where we have not tried to change nature, a place where we exist in harmony with the earth. Just being, not trying to control, not trying to overcome. Just listening and understanding.

In this place we are not bored, we do not complain, we marvel at the beauty of the world and we do not want to leave. At the end of our short lives, we return to the earth. It's the living we have to work on. The time when – instead of defeating nature – we become its partner.

Connect!

Do you feel part of nature now? Probably not. You see, as humans, we've spent a long time trying to get out of nature, so there's no reason you should feel different after reading four or five pages! But if you feel like something's missing, if your life feels somewhat empty, starting to reconnect with nature is a good start. It doesn't mean you have to dress differently, hug a tree, or go and live in a wood. Just start to look around you more, start to be more aware of yourself and how you interact with your surroundings.

When you are shopping in your supermarket, remember the animal who gave his life for your fillet steak in the nice plastic wrapper, or the tomato plant that grew from a small seed to become a filler for your sandwich. Look at your urban landscape, think of the material your homes and your offices are made from. See your cars polluting your air with noise, the smoke coming from industry. Listen to the sounds of the city. Try to watch yourselves, as you sit bored, watching tv or dvd's. Think about the cattle who provide the milk, when you complain about the price of cheese. Remember the forest that took longer to grow than you have lived when you toss away the piece of paper.

Now think back to a time when you experienced nature in its entirety. Visualise the mountains with their snowy peaks, the stream running through the hills, the ocean waves pounding the shore. The peaceful walk through the forest covered with leaves and birds in song. Visualise the first time you saw a creature in its natural habitat. The rabbit bounding across the field, not in its cage, the birds flying freely high in the sky, not behind bars.

Now think of your city, think of the fun, the bars, the nightclubs, getting drunk, spending your money. The cinema, going bowling, spending a night at the arts.

Now remember the peace, the calmness and the stillness. Remember the wild beauty of nature.

Now back to your wide screen plasma tv, your surround sound, your king size bed, your car, your job. Your problems, your lack of money, the boredom of it all.

Now camping in nature, looking at the stars, the quiet knowledge you exist in a place surrounded by billions of other worlds, and yet have no idea where you are. The hoot of the owl, the night creatures stirring, all ready to contribute to keeping nature in balance.

Let me ask you, which one of the above is your *natural* state? I know where mine is.

With the pace of modern life, we only “go into nature” as a treat, a holiday, or a break from earning money. It is seen as something we have earned the right to do – to go camping for two weeks in the hills. Yes, it relaxes us. We are in awe of the beautiful scenery, but at the end of the two weeks we sadly pack up our tent and return to the city where for the first week we hate being back in. Give it a week and you're back in your modern life, with all thoughts of nature placed firmly on hold until next years holiday.

“So apart from giving up my urban life and moving to the country, where I live self-sufficiently with my ten chickens, one cow, and a vegetable plot, what can I realistically do to reconnect with nature?”

Well, you all come up with your own ideas, but here is one I would like you think about. Grow something. I don't mean buying a plant from a garden centre and watering it every day. I'm talking about something you can ultimately eat. I am talking about taking a seed and nurturing it, watching it grow, feeding it with water and sunlight, until it is ready for harvest then enjoying it. It truly is a rewarding experience. This is something you don't need a huge garden for, you can grow it in an apartment, or on a balcony.

Take the seed and plant it (tomatoes for example), water it, and look after it. You are responsible for the life of the plant. If you leave it, it will die, but given love and care, it will grow into a plant and provide for you. When it is ready, harvest it gently, and take time to savour its taste. You have given life to the plant, and in return it will reward you with the nutrients your body needs to sustain life. Try it. You may be surprised how you feel.

N e e d

Anything that is necessary but lacking

•

The psychological feature that arouses an organism to action toward a desired goal; the reason for the action; that which gives purpose and direction to behaviour

•

Require as useful, just, or proper

Part 1 – Objects

What do you *need*? I mean *really need*? You may answer: A new car, to help you get to work every day, or a new washing machine to clean your clothes, as your old one is broken. You need a bigger house as your family is growing. You need a pay rise because you can't afford to pay your bills. You need a holiday because your work is too stressful. But would you say you actually needed all these items?

These are all modern day requirements (*anything indispensable*), but would you say you *needed* to have them? Maybe we should use the words “nice to have.” It would be nice to have a new car to help you get to work every day, or nice to have a new washing machine to clean your clothes as your old one is broken, or nice to have a bigger house as your family is growing. When we discuss need though, what are we talking about? Is it

something that is necessary for the healthy functioning of the system like food and water, or are we talking about this “nice to have?”

Let’s start by saying that in order to survive, we need food and water, but we also need clothing, shoes, shelter, and warmth. To avoid disease, we need a sanitary system to dispose of the waste products, and we need to have a job to earn money to pay for these things. You see, in the beginning, when we lived in caves, wore animal skins, hunted or gathered our meal every day, and went to the toilet outdoors – as animals continue to do today – our needs were limited. But as we, and as a result, society became more complex, we began to need things not necessary in cave dwelling times.

Urban communities

Modern post-industrial revolution society has been organised into high density living areas, close to places of work, where people with little in common, live very closely. Most of us do not know our adjacent neighbours at all, apart from brief hello's, and maybe invites for dinner, and certainly don't know anyone who lives more than 200 metres away or on another street, unless it is a friend we work with, went to school with, or play sport with. As a result, this has lead us into creating compartmentalised lives, relying on no one in the outside world – becoming insular in our approach to the rest of society.

It makes sense that we have had to acquire items which allow us to operate on our own without the need to rely on other people, or we employ companies to do work that needs doing, like plumbing or electricians. In fact, most of us feel embarrassed or unwilling to ask a neighbour for help with something, even if it means making our lives more difficult.

How many of us would ask a neighbour if we could use their washing machine or toilet, as ours is broken, or share a lift with them to work, as we don't have a car? Few if any, I'd guess, and even if they were asked, neighbours would grumble and complain about the inconvenience of it. “Do you know they had the cheek to ask me to take their kids to school the other day,” even if your children go to the same school.

As communities have broken down, and been replaced with independent people who just happen to live next door to each other, the need has increased to be self-reliant. So when you, or I, who live in an

urbanised setting says he needs a car to get to work, there is a genuine requirement for this, as you need to get to work to pay your bills!

Rural communities

Let's look at the rural community for a moment, and take a small village as our example. There are, say, 150 people living there, all with different skills; a small school, or village hall and a local pub.

How many of you have tried to move to the "country" and found they didn't fit in? This happens quite often, as people with money decide they want more space and a bigger house, and to live in a nice environment. The only problem being, that you bring your independent, self-reliant attitude with you, where you don't need help, and you don't think anyone should ask you! But you see, rural communities aren't organised like that.

How many of your neighbours in the city would drop round with some eggs, or apples because they had too many? How many would help out because your car had broken down, or ask around to see if anyone had any work because you had just been made redundant? People in rural communities share more, even if it is only time they are giving you.

They meet regularly to discuss the village, they will provide assistance willingly. The whole village becomes like an extended family. They are different because they want to be involved with each other, they are contributing to the well being of the village in addition to making money for themselves. I am not suggesting rural communities have the best way of life, I am illustrating the differences between rural and urban communities.

Who knows, perhaps things have changed in rural communities and they have become like their urban cousins?

But let's get back to discussing *need vs. nice to have*.

I think all of us would agree, that if it came to it, we could live in mud huts, wash our clothes in the same water we bath in, go to the toilet in the ground, and gather food every day, but that is merely surviving, not living, isn't it? And as we have come so far, it seems a pity to have to go back hundreds of years. Let's say that the basic needs for "living" in today's world as opposed to just "surviving" are the following:

- (a) A house or apartment with hot and cold running water, electricity for lighting, and cooking, a kitchen area to prepare food cooking utensils, a room for sleeping and a room for living and a flushable toilet.
- (b) Several items of clothing and shoes.
- (c) Basic toiletries, like toothpaste and soap.
- (d) Some form of heating if you live in a cold country.
- (e) A job that pays for the above.
- (f) Access to health care.
- (g) Access to education.
- (h) A telephone for communication.
- (i) Access to basic foodstuffs for sale.
- (j) Access to a washing machine to clean clothes and linen.
- (k) Access to public transportation.

What do you think, is that a fair list? I'm sure a lot of you would like to add tv to that list, but I think that's a "nice to have" don't you? Everything else must be a "nice to have," from holidays, to pay rises, although anyone in a low paid or stressful job may disagree. What one person needs, another just wants to have.

For me, the concern is that we are starting to confuse desire (*an inclination to want things*) with need (*anything that is necessary but lacking*). If you replace the word desire, when you say: "I want a new tv," to "I desire a new tv;" "I desire more money;" "I desire a bigger house;" it suddenly feels sordid, as if you are doing something bad, and "immoral", but I think we have come to a point in our acquisitiveness that to replace need with desire would be much more grammatically correct.

People in africa need fresh clean running water

I need a new tv

People who have lost their homes in floods need somewhere to sleep

I need a new dishwasher

Children who are starving need food

I need a new dvd player

-

I need somewhere to sleep

I need a new king size bed for my bedroom

I need new tools to farm my land

I need some new power tools

becomes

People in africa need fresh clean running water

I desire a new tv

People who have lost their homes in floods need somewhere to sleep

I desire a new dishwasher

Children who are starving need food

I desire a new dvd player

-

I need somewhere to sleep

I desire a new king size bed for my bedroom

I need new tools to farm my land

I desire some new power tools

This does not mean that desiring a new tv is a good or bad thing. I just believe that it is important to differentiate need and desire. It is important to show them as two opposing states, and maybe when we start to transpose desire over need, we will begin to think about what it really is we need in life – what the ultimate *need* that will make us happy is. Although we all feel happy when we get a new tv. Right?

Part 2 – Emotional needs

We have discussed need as a physical expression. We have explored whether the need is necessary for human survival, or if it is just nice to have – which we have labelled desire. But there is another human need; one very basic, and one you can't buy, no matter how much money you have. It is the need to feel love. To love another human being and to feel loved yourself.

We talk about people having emotional needs. A need to satisfy something you can't find physically in the body. A need that one cannot see, or show to another; a need for something invisible but very real to the person experiencing it.

I need you, I really need you. How many of us have used that expression? Who do we use it to? Certainly not a co-worker, friend, or family member. We use this to someone we care deeply about, someone we love, whom we share a special relationship with. Someone who makes us feel happy whenever they're around. So need, in this case, is perhaps an expression of love. Not need, as in possession, but need in the sense of I want to be close to you and show you how much I love you.

I think we can all agree we “need” to feel something. A need to not only feel but express our emotions, ranging from fear, to hate; from anger, to love; from joy to sadness.

Expressing complex emotions makes us human. It shows the world we are not just a machine but emotions can be all encompassing, engulfing. We can be overwhelmed by them, unable to cope, unable to deal with life; or filled with energy, with love, and with joy.

*Have you seen the face of a man at a birth
filled with joy, light beaming from his eyes
How he loves the child, he would do anything for her
His life is complete, he feels at peace*

*Have you ever seen the face of a man who has lost a child
tortured with sadness, inconsolable with grief
How he loved that child he would have given his own life
Just for one more minute with him*

When we are talking about the need to feel. Some people would say that feeling any emotions is better than feeling none at all, but I would say we only need to feel love. I don't wake up in the morning and think: “I need

to feel anger,” or “I need to feel jealousy!” I may wake up in the morning and think I feel jealous, or I feel angry, but I don't actively need to feel these emotions. Why? Because they are negative. I only need to feel positive emotions, that's why I need to feel love. I need to feel loved.

As a child, how would you *feel* if you could not *feel* love from your parents? How many children around the world have this need denied to them by coming from broken or violent homes?

When a child's emotional needs are fulfilled, he grows up complete, ready to express the same love to his children. But when they are not, he still needs to feel love from someone, but is unable to give it in return.

I need love, nothing else.
When I love and am loved
I am complete.

Closing Dialogue ~ Volume II

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 I 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.

Alan

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ps. If you would like to help translate this book into your own language please contact me.

