

VOLUME III
ORDER TO ZOO

THE NATURAL MIND

WAKING UP

ALAN MACMILLAN ORR

The Natural Mind – Waking Up
Volume III

~

O to Z
Order to Zoo

Alan Macmillan Orr

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

Volume III

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 three, 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.

enjoy the book!

alan

The author's journey

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

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

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

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

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

Back then my parents did need the money. My grandparents were working class folk with no savings, so every penny was important. Things

were tough; the world was just coming out of the second world war and everything was tight, so I understand why my parents wanted the best for me; they just wanted to make sure that I was secure in the world. Its only natural and I can understand that sentiment completely.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Well to be honest with you, I'd had enough of them. I was always very nice to everyone in the beginning and I respected my bosses. After all, I had been brought up very well (to be polite), but then I started to

see what they couldn't see about themselves – that they were useless, uninteresting people, who didn't really know what they were doing! (so I thought).

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

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

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

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

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

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

I decided to do something to help myself and others, although I wasn't sure what. I observed life in the cities, in the country, on the beach; and started observing myself every day in every action. It drove

everyone crazy. I would keep pointing things out, and people would patiently listen.

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

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

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

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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O

O r d e r

Established customary state (especially of society)

•

(often plural) a command given by a superior (e.g. a military or law enforcement officer) that must be obeyed

•

A condition of regular or proper arrangement

We all like order in our lives, don't we? We wake up at 5.45 am. We shower until 6.00 am. We take our clothes from the closet, and we have breakfast until 7.30 am. We drive to the station on the left hand side of the road, get on the train, and arrive at work at 8.30 am. We drink our coffee until 8.45 am and we start work at 9.00 am. We work in an ordered manner until lunchtime which is 1.00 pm. We take out our sandwich from our lunch box which has been neatly wrapped in cling film. We then read the daily paper until 1.30 pm at which time we put away our lunch box and paper and return to our ordered work. We have a tea break at 3.15 pm and we finish our work at 5.30 pm. We get on the 5.45 pm train and arrive home at 6.30 pm. We put away our work clothes, and prepare dinner, which we eat at 7.30 pm. We then wash the dishes, and watch television until 10.30 pm. We then go to bed and sleep. Repeat.

We all like to moan about it, but it's what keeps us going. We need this order in our daily lives to keep our minds calm. This is also what some people might call a routine, or a rhythm. When we break this routine, we feel nervous and jumpy. "It's not as it's supposed to be" you think, as you get up at 7.45 am. You grab breakfast and miss your train, which makes you late for work. It's not a pleasant feeling, is it? But it's not the end of the world!

You see, most of us allow a certain amount of flexibility in our routine, so if we're late occasionally, or things don't go to plan, it's no great problem, as long as the underlying order is there. We need a structure to help us get up in the morning, that's why people who are unemployed, or retired, find it very difficult. There is no longer the structure that work provided as a reason to get up in the morning. So either their minds, and therefore their lives become disordered, or they invent a new routine.

For example, an unemployed man may set himself a task of looking at the newspapers for jobs from 8.15 am until 10.15 am then perhaps go for a walk until 11.30 am. He will have lunch at 1.00 pm and then spend two hours in the library from 2.00 pm until 4.00 pm. The retired man may still set his alarm early, get up and make breakfast at a specified time, then have a plan to go for a walk followed by a cup of tea. That might be the only part of his day he plans, but at least one part of the day must be the same – every day.

Our minds do not like sudden change too much, it upsets their natural rhythm – so day in, day out, we order our lives accordingly.

Can you imagine how much discomfort you would feel, if breakfast was at a different time every day, or work started at 9.00 am on a monday, 10.25 am on a tuesday, 9.30 am on a wednesday, or you changed jobs every week? It would send your mind into turmoil.

Oh your home is so tidy!

We also like order in the home. It's where we spend at least part of our day, and more importantly, it's where we relax. So most of us like the home tidy, as it helps us relax more (tidy equals ordered). Let me tell you a story.

When I first moved in with my wife several years ago, I saw nothing of the disorder that was to arrive later. We owned nothing except our backpacks, so it was fairly easy to be tidy. Over the next few months, we

started buying things for the house, kitchen equipment, bedroom furniture, etc.

The first thing I noticed about my wife, was that even if she was the last person out of bed, she wouldn't make it, even if it meant just throwing the duvet up, and she would throw her pyjamas on the floor. At first I thought it was me being a bit obsessive, and I made the bed myself. No big deal.

Then as we spent longer in the house, I noticed that whenever she made herself something to eat she would just leave the plate on the floor and wouldn't ever pick it up! The kitchen became so filled with plates and pots that you couldn't move in it. Once again I thought, "this is my job to clean up, as I am not working at the moment," and tidied it until it was spotless. She would then come home, make something to eat and leave all the dirty plates, knives, chopping board, etc. out on the bench, and just walk off and watch tv. That's when I thought she must be just lazy. So I told her as such, and she pointed out that she was the one who was working... So I shut up.

She then started buying clothes and leaving a trail of them from the bedroom to the lounge. They were everywhere. I couldn't move in the bedroom for clothes, it was driving me mad. So I would tidy up as often as I could.

She said that there were more important things in life than cleaning and she didn't want to spend her days cleaning like her "cleaning obsessed mother." I figured maybe this was all some mother, daughter thing; mother obsessed with cleaning, daughter rebelling against it. This feeling was reaffirmed when I saw her sister's room which was exactly the same. "Ah ha!" I thought. "I've got it!" But I just couldn't stand that my wife couldn't see that (a) it was better to be tidy and (b) it was driving me insane. Her mother couldn't understand it either: "She's always been like it. I was always picking up after her."

So I just became more and more angry about it, and eventually we split up (not just because of the messy house you understand!). I just couldn't see how she could live like that. She didn't care if the house was falling around her, or there were cockroaches on all the work surfaces (there were), so I just figured she was the laziest person I had ever met!

When I think of her now, she wasn't lazy. She got up at 5.30 am on the dot every day and did a full day's work. She was never sick, and always arrived on time. It was only when she came home that her life became disorganised. So why was this happening?

Like many people, she was content with the order that work gave her, but that's because it was all ordered for her. All she had to do was turn up on time. At home, her own mind was in charge of creating order. That was the problem! So why was her own mind disordered (if that is what was happening)? It is time we left my ex-wife alone, and zoomed out to look at our planet from afar!

365 days a year - 24 hours a day - 7 days a week

If we watched the planet spinning on its axis from a great distance, we would see that it rotates around the sun in perfect order. It does not have an off day. It does not decide that a day is longer than 24 hours, it just is. The whole galaxy is engaged in this same order. Of course, a star may explode from time to time, but the whole process goes on quietly in order with no thought, no design and no control. The universe, as we know it, is in order.

When we come back to earth and look at a tree, you will see that it is in proportion. The flowers and the animals too. Wherever we look in the world, order is quietly at work. Even when we look at ourselves in the mirror we can see that our legs, arms, head, and our torso are all perfectly symmetrical, and thanks to modern science we can see that just as the earth orbits the sun, as does the path of an electron around the nucleus of an atom.

We are in perfect order. From the largest objects down to the smallest we know about, we can see that, in nature, there is perfect order. There is no escaping it. Or is there?

Let's create some disorder

So if everything is in order, how can the world we inhabit be in such a mess? Why do we fight and kill each other? Why do we crave power? Why do we live in houses that are filled with junk, and litter our streets?

We only have to look at a beautiful lake, with birds, and trees, and a mountain in the background, to see that nature is in perfect order. It just feels and looks perfect, doesn't it? Until you look down and see that some tourist has had their lunch there and thrown all the rubbish on the ground. Suddenly there is disorder. But if the human being is biologically in order, what could be causing us to create so much disorder?

Look at the cities, the cars, the pollution, the work we do, the governments, the wars, the way we treat animals and each other, the desires, the hate, the despair, the obsession with money, the rushing, the violence, the cutting down and clearing of forests. There is only one thing wrong here, and that is man thinks too much! It can be the only reason we cause so much mischief in the world.

The ending of thought

Let's go into this slowly and carefully together shall we? If I am saying that the universe is in perfect order, that nature itself is order, and that biologically all the cells in man's body are perfectly ordered, yet I can see the trouble in the world is man's own doing; the only thing that cannot be in order is man's thinking. Does that make sense to you?

We don't have to look far from home to see that everything we touch, we disorder. Thought is the enemy of intelligence. The intelligent man would not disturb nature the way we have, yet we call ourselves intelligent; and all the while desire more money and more status, only concerned with what "I" can get out of life.

Governments try to keep "order" by laying down rules and regulations about what we can and cannot do, and even enforce it by using police, courts and prisons, but it makes no real difference while we are still thinking. We kill, and we injure, we intimidate, we hate and we destroy. That is the result of our thinking, and it has nothing to do with our heritage as hunters.

This is all new. This is our big brain saying, "I want to do whatever I want to do, and no one is going to stop me." It doesn't know that it is causing so much misery, it just wants what it can get. Thought is the biggest sickness in the universe!

So how do we stop ourselves thinking?

Unfortunately, the more I try to stop myself thinking, the more I think, and so on. We cannot force our minds to do anything they do not want to do. It is only when I see that I am the cause of disorder in the universe, that change can really happen. Can you see that it is your thinking that is putting the world out of balance, which is order? I'm sure you can't. You see, you're too caught up in the "me" at the moment, and in an ordered universe, there is no "me," there is only order! Does that make any sense?

Is the moon thinking of “me” when it reflects the light onto the earth's surface that helps us see? Does the sun, think about “me” when it sends heat and light millions of miles to earth to sustain life, to give us warmth and to help the plants grow that feed us? No. In the same way as the stars do not think about “me” when they align and help people who are lost find their way home. They just are.

And if you are part of this order which is nature, then how can you escape it? The answer is, you can't. You are part of the universe and it is part of you. You only “think” you aren't, that you are separate; an individual. And it is this thinking of individuality that causes the “me” to come in, which is thought. My needs, my desires, my money, my job, my hopes and fears.

When you see that all is one, then what importance do your needs and desires have? You may “think” they are important, but that is just thought, which is disorder. When we develop true intelligence through awareness, the trouble we have caused will start to fall away and the world will return to order. If we don't, then the world will still return to order, it's just that we won't be around to see it. Now that would be a shame. It's our choice.

O r g a s m

The moment of most intense pleasure in sexual intercourse

I know this may be an intimate question, but can I ask you what you think when you have an orgasm? This may sound strange, but it is a valid question. I can tell you what I think. Nothing, absolutely nothing. It's a feeling of total bliss in the moment, the time when I feel whole; at one with everything. I have no problems; I don't worry about bills, debts, or tax. I don't think about the world, the poor, the hungry, or the sick. For me, it's a moment where although excited, I am calm inside, without thought.

Is it strange to think that as a male, our whole life is leading up to this moment. Think about this carefully. Could your whole life really be about this moment? This may seem an absurd question, but please go into it with me.

How did we get here? Through a moment, just like the one we are talking about here, I would guess. If your father, or his father, or his

father before him, failed to have an orgasm, you and I would not be here. There is no chance you would exist as you are today, with your genetic code, without generations of men in your family having an orgasm before you! Something so fast, so natural, that it has enabled generations of little you's and me's to exist.

Think on this for a moment. I will limit the number of generations in this example as we would have to go back to the beginning of time – that is the significance of an orgasm!

- (a) Your great, great, great grandfather has an orgasm which lasts approximately five to six seconds. Out of millions of sperm, one fertilizes an egg, and the process of life begins.
- (b) Your great, great grandfather is born, and when he grows up, has an orgasm, which lasts approximately five to six seconds. Out of millions of sperm, one fertilizes an egg and the process of life begins.
- (c) Your great grandfather is born, and when he grows up, has an orgasm which lasts approximately five to six seconds. Out of millions of sperm, one fertilizes an egg, and the process of life begins.
- (d) Your grandfather is born, and when he grows up, has an orgasm which lasts approximately five to six seconds. Out of millions of sperm, one fertilizes an egg, and the process of life begins.
- (e) Your father is born, and when he grows up, has an orgasm which lasts approximately five to six seconds. Out of millions of sperm one fertilizes an egg, and the process of life begins.
- (f) You are born!

So as you can see, the orgasm plays an important part in your personal history. It is in fact crucial to the continuity of life on this planet. So it's no wonder that when you experience one, it is the most amazing thing you ever have. I know women reading this will be saying: “Men! That's all they ever think about, what about us, we need orgasms too!” and I would agree with you; but for this discussion, I would like to concentrate on the significance of the male orgasm.

“Men! That's all they ever think about!”

Could this obsession, the need to have an orgasm, not just be about pleasure? Most women have orgasms that can only be described as “for pleasure,” and the man also experiences deep pleasure, but that's where the similarities stop. Why do you think that is?

Could it be, that the reason that men always think about having sex (and usually an orgasm) is that this is about the creation of life, the passing on of a male's genes to a child, guaranteeing the immortality of the genes as long as his child has a child, and so on? I think that is why an orgasm is profoundly important to a man, and one reason we should start to think a little more carefully about the casualness, and lack of significance we place on orgasm.

We casually masturbate, and have casual sex, with no intention of creating a child. I am not suggesting this is wrong, just that we don't pay enough attention to its significance. We spend our days seeking pleasure, whether watching tv, drinking alcohol, buying new clothes, and we have reduced the orgasm to the same level – as just one more way to find pleasure.

But we know this pleasure is different – it feels like nothing else. You can't buy it from the shop; you can't make it; you can't see it; you can't touch it; and most of us can't describe it exactly. It just is. And it is exactly the same when we are experiencing it, we just are; no thoughts, no worries, no problems. For one short moment in life, we just are, without politics, religion, media, culture or teachers; without conditioning or conforming. How many moments are like this in your life?

That's why I think you should place significance upon this event. An event which lasts only seconds, but could pass on your genes for an eternity. An event that is love.

Think about this the next time you ejaculate inside someone you don't love, or masturbate to pornography. “Am I treating my orgasm in the same way as I treat shopping, tv, or going to the pub? Is this just superficial pleasure or something more profound?”

Most of you would say, “don't be so serious, it's just a bit of harmless fun,” but just think the next time you have an orgasm: “I could create life.” This makes you a powerful individual, a creator; a man with great responsibilities.

You are the only person in the world who can create an individual that is one half of you. Just think about that. Every orgasm is pleasure, but that pleasure is the reward of creating life, not about having fun, although that's what it feels like to most of us.

*I am a creator, I create life.
I live eternally through my genes.
I am powerful and strong.
I acknowledge my importance in the world.
I take personal responsibility for my actions.*

P

P a p e r

A material made of cellulose pulp derived mainly from wood or rags or certain grasses

•

Medium for written communication

Have a look round you, I bet you're surrounded by it. It seems an unavoidable modern fact. We use lots and lots of paper. Although the dictionary definition tells us that paper may be made from rags or certain grasses, most paper we use derives from wood.

Although wood (*the hard fibrous lignified substance under the bark of trees*) is a renewable resource, we must also recognise the time it takes for trees to grow. Some of these trees have been around for several hundred years and support a diverse range of animals, plant life, insects, and birds (including our own species). So when unscrupulous loggers cut down rainforests and ancient trees, you may understand why people get a little bit rattled (oh, that's the tree hugging hippies by the way, not anyone else, they don't care).

Given the time it takes for a tree to grow, we can certainly fell it pretty quickly, either with a manual saw, or with man's more popular tool, the chainsaw. Trees that have been in existence for a hundred years, fall in

seconds and crash to earth. No longer will you hear the wind whistling through its branches, no longer will the birds sing from the treetops, now all there will be is an empty space.

The funny thing is, I've never seen logging operations near to where I live, have you? In fact, I've never seen them in any great quantity anywhere; so either I'm blind, or maybe they aren't cutting down as many trees as we say they are. But perhaps they're not being cut down in an area we live in, and maybe not even the in same country.

For what? A flyer for two for one pizza, and a free two litre cola, that goes straight from the printer to your bin!

Admittedly, wood has been an important natural resource for humans. We have used it to build ships, make furniture such as tables and beds, construct our houses, make flooring – the uses of wood are endless, and let's face it, it looks nice as well.

As I sit here writing this topic, I look around my room to see what is made of wood. There is the bed, the table I sit at, the wardrobe, the chair, the door, the window frame and finally, the floor. That's a lot of wood! I only hope it came from a sustainable resource, but I'll never know, will I? I will leave you for a moment to consider what you use wood for, what items are in your house. Take a good look around, and ask yourself, "do I know where this wood came from? Was the item made from an ancient forest that was cut down to make my table, or is it from a sustainable forest?" These are questions I never asked in the past, but they are vitally important, unless you can think of a way of making trees grow faster than we are cutting them down, which is happening all over the world. By people. For what? Money.

Let me tell you a short story.

Several years ago, when I was living in australia, an item of news came on the television. It was tree-hugger activists trying to save an ancient forest in tasmania. They were occupying the trees to stop loggers cutting them down. They campaigned tirelessly to government, and although people with an environmental conscience on the mainland were supportive, the local logging community were up in arms. "What are we going to do?" "What will happen to our families?" "Without logging we would be penniless, and jobless." "Don't destroy our livelihoods." Seems fair enough!

You see, if the loggers can't cut down trees anymore, they will me made redundant, they will start claiming unemployment benefit, which the taxpayer will have to cover; the government will be made to look bad for not providing adequate employment, the economy will start to suffer,

consumer confidence will decrease, and people will stop spending, and there's an election coming up next year. Best do what the loggers want, after all they do all traditionally vote for us, we wouldn't want to lose that.

So what happened? After angry scenes where the prime minister met the loggers (who you remember, are cutting down an ancient forest that took hundreds of years to grow, and is an essential part of the local (and global) ecosystem), the government reached a deal with them. They would include a small part of the forest in the national park, and the loggers were free to cut down the rest!

“On the whole, a positive deal for the environment and the local economy,” I believe the prime minister said, or even if he didn't, that's what he believed he had achieved. Balance.

An undeniable connection

I don't know if you have ever cut down a tree. I have – with a chainsaw. Fortunately, it wasn't anything like the size of the ancient forests of tasmania or the amazon.

My friend lived in the countryside next to a small forest, and wanted more wood for the winter for his fire, and rather than looking for a tree that had already fallen, he wanted to cut one down for himself.

“Are we allowed to do this?” I asked.

“Of course. The wood doesn't *belong* to anybody, it's public land.”

So we set about getting him his fuel supply for the winter. Seems fair enough. If he uses wood to heat his house through a wood burning stove, then he wouldn't be using non-renewable sources like coal and oil. On the whole a win, win for the environment, wouldn't you say?

I cut down the tree – being careful not to chop my leg off with the chainsaw – in less than five minutes. I won't try to convince you that I could hear it wailing as it gently crashed to earth, I was only concerned with whether we'd get caught, and if we'd get into trouble. Awareness of the importance of trees was still a long way off in my mind.

But today, as I sit here writing this topic I look out over a magnificent group of trees. Tall in stature, with solid trunks, they stand gently moving in the breeze, I see birds flying amongst them. I don't know how old they are, but I'd take a guess at between fifty and a hundred years. Yesterday I stood by the trees, and placed my hands upon them (I had to see what all these tree-huggers were going on about all this time). There

was no instant connection, no surge of energy through my bones, but as I stood back and looked at them, I suddenly got it.

Even if I wanted to, I couldn't cut these trees down now. I could not imagine the cold hard steel of a blade going into its bark. I suddenly realised that these trees were not just sources of wood as I had considered them before, these were living things. If I wanted any evidence of that, I just had to look at the root systems reaching out in every direction, holding this massive tree steadfast, despite the weight and height of it. I hadn't noticed before how amazing these natural structures were. The tree that is visible is just the beginning.

These trees and the earth were intertwined. They are not meant to be separated by hand. Cutting into a tree is like severing an artery in your body. I just stood there. Suddenly I could imagine the cold blade of the chainsaw cutting into my flesh and how it would feel. I had never considered a tree like this before. It wasn't, as some would call it, a "spiritual" experience (I don't like the overuse of words that refer to supernatural concepts) – it was more like a connection.

I realised once and for all, how important every plant and every tree, with their root systems taking food from the earth and growing to give life (oxygen) to us were. How foolish I had been, cutting down that tree, I thought. I had severed an artery to the earth, that couldn't be good!

But we need fuel, we need chairs and tables, and wood provides so much, and it is a renewable resource. So although I have this feeling we are severing some kind of connection to the earth that may be important, I do recognise we are draining the life blood from the whole planet every day; and oil, and coal are not renewable (well not in the next million years or so), so isn't it better to plant trees precisely for the purpose of cutting them down and salvaging other trees that have already fallen? This would leave the natural ancient forests alone and not damage the already delicate ecosystem even more than we have done already. What do you think? This is already being done in many countries as a way of tackling the growing problems we are creating. By what you ask? Why of course, by our usual over consumption.

The paperless office

Do you remember when computers first came out? They were going to revolutionise the office! No longer would people be printing out huge reports every day. No longer would memo's use up valuable paper, they

would be sent electronically. Even invoices would be electronic. But it never happened. In fact what we have now is electronic communication plus the paper!

It turned out that not only did humans prefer having something solid in their hand to look at, there was also a legal requirement on companies to keep all of their documentation for several years. From invoices to financial reports. The paperless office was dead. Long live paper.

There is something about reading a report or even a book on the screen which doesn't feel right. Maybe it's because we aren't used to it because we've been using paper for hundreds of years.

At all the companies I have worked for, everyone printed out an awful lot of "stuff" that was read once, and thrown in the bin. Its acceptable now as they use paper recycling, so we don't feel so bad about being wasteful, but shredded paper does not supply oxygen.

I cannot stand to see the waste in companies. People seem to be quite responsible at home, but when they get to work, they just lose interest, as if it's someone else's problem. Which, if you think about it, it is.

All change in business is driven from the top down. So if the management aren't doing it, don't expect the staff to be. The staff may even talk amongst themselves saying "oh, it's a real waste I know, but what can you do?" I tell you what you can do. You can talk to your management and tell them how important it is not to waste paper, whether it is in the form of invoices, reports or packaging – in products bought or sold. For the management (and for the government who demand all reports are kept on paper) I have only one thing to say. This planet depends on trees. Let's keep them where they belong. Attached.

Newspapers, magazines, books, receipts, cards, bills. They all use paper; as do the almost incessant advertising materials we get through the door. How do we know where this paper has come from? Has the receipt I was given when I bought some oranges been sourced from a sustainable forest? Did the wood it was created with even originate on the same continent? Have you asked yourselves about the people who cut it down? What were their intentions for the wood? Did they just see it as a commodity to be sold for money?

Well, going on what we know about the logging trade, it's a pretty brutal industry. In Thailand, they use elephants to move the logs which is bad enough, but you may not know that some unscrupulous loggers repeatedly inject them with amphetamines (speed) to keep them working unbearable hours. They eventually die from mistreatment or exhaustion.

Destruction of nature is brutal, and requires the hand of a brutal man. Is that fair? Am I being unnecessarily unkind? To have such disregard for nature and our planet bears the hallmark of one who cares only about what he can get for himself, namely, money. So what can you do, assuming you want to do something?

Well there is one thing. We need to control where all the paper comes from. We need to monitor the loggers. We need to make sure the source is sustainable.

This would all be very nice, but what we really need to do is use less (and recycle more). Be mindful of your paper and cardboard consumption. One sure sign you are using a lot is if you buy pre-processed, pre-packaged food, or products that have not been sourced locally. Factory produced, supermarket sold products will all have come with a mass of packaging. They have to be packed like that in order to be shipped all over the world. Think about it.

Try to remember the image of the connection I described earlier. For every product you buy, for every report or page you print from the internet, for every receipt you hold, for every book you buy. Visualise. If there is no connection there then by all means do what you like, you will anyway.

Please though, stop printing advertising material. Right now. For most of us it is worthless junk, and for the advertisers they have to send out thousands just to get a couple of replies. They may see it as cost effective because paper is cheap, but the cost to the environment is not. By stopping printing advertising material, we would also cut down on inks which come from oil, electricity in the printing process, and fuel for the delivery.

If you want to advertise why not do it the new way – through the internet! There are many search engine companies that specialise in this, where the people who come to your site are already interested in YOU! How many of you could say you know that the customers are interested in your product just by sending it out to random households.

Please stop it. It is bad for our planet, it causes a lot of extra waste and litter, and most people aren't interested in your products.

*The tree that bears witness to your sorrow and joy
Silent
Never judging
Always present*

So trees have been round for a long time. I don't know how old the oldest tree in the world is, but it certainly will be several hundred years old or more. Think about that for a moment.

My mother has lived in the same house for over thirty years. I grew up there, and through all the happy and the sad times, the new girlfriends, the failed relationships, the new jobs and unemployment, the credit card bills, the new cars, my parents divorce, and my mother's unhappiness; the tall oak watched over us. "It is just a tree," you say, but it came to me recently that this tree had seen a lot. It was there long before us, and it would be there long after my mother sells her house.

People and products have come and go in that house, but the one constant thing is the tree. Every year it sheds its leaves in autumn, and grows new ones in spring. It isn't interested in our life. It just is. We have probably gone through many of the same size trees in our time there with all the packaging we have consumed, yet the tree says nothing.

I wonder if trees have memory? If they do, every tree in the world would have a million unbiased stories to tell.

So as we come to the end of this topic, I look up at the tall trees swaying in the wind wondering what future there is for them here. I will be long gone before they finally fall to earth, unless one of us intervenes earlier. Then fifty years of growing would be finished in an instant. The same as when a bullet erases a wonderful life. Let us treat each other with respect. We, the humans, rely on the trees so much yet, we cut them down without a thought. Imagine what we would do without them.

Endnote: I am attempting to find a publisher who uses recycled paper and vegetable printing ink. I will let you know how I get on, as I am painfully aware that I may seem hypocritical for printing this book when I am talking about the volume of paper we waste. It makes no difference whether I can justify it or not. The ends can never justify the means. I can only hope that for every book someone buys, they offset it by using less paper in the office or the home.

You can, if you wish, download a copy so you can read it on one of the neat new electronic book readers! And it will be cheaper! That should please you.

The choice is yours. Although I am guessing that if you are reading this, you will have already made your choice!

P a r e n t s

A father or mother; one who begets or one who gives birth to or nurtures and raises a child; a relative who plays the role of guardian

So here it is folks. The definitive guide to parenting!
Everything you've always wanted to know about how to
be a successful parent!



You wish! Sorry for misleading you in the title, but when we become parents we want to know everything, don't we? We haven't got a clue what to do with this little bundle of joy when he or she arrives. All we know is, he's ours, and we have a responsibility to protect him, and help him grow up to be a fine upstanding member of society. So how do we do it?

Well, most people muddle through it. Some spoil their children rotten and smother them with love, and some others are guilty of no less than neglect. But most people sit somewhere in the middle, happily teaching their children to read and write, learn right from wrong, learn acceptable behaviour and non acceptable behaviour. They help them with their homework, teach them how to manage money, tell them about sex, teach them about the dangers of strangers, and generally help them to prepare for adult life.

If they have done their job well the child will happily leave the nest after the age of eighteen, only to keep coming back for money and a bit more support for many years to come! But all parents really want is for their children to be happy. Right?

Some people discipline (*the act of punishing*) their children physically with a smack on the bottom or worse (something that is now frowned upon in some countries), and all punish by threatening to take away privileges, toys etc. Many will also encourage with the promise of a reward if they are well behaved, and shout or send them to their room, or a “naughty corner,” if they're not.

Hey mum, I'm not a dog

All parents want is for their children to “play nicely,” “share,” “be good,” and “don't argue;” things that people seem to quickly forget once they get older, but then re-iterate when they have their own children.

They want them to behave and be quiet (as the old saying goes: “children should be seen and not heard”), especially when there are other adults around, because let's face it, it's embarrassing having a screaming child in public. Don't worry, you can always give it some sweets or shout at it depending on what sort of mood you're in.

Don't get me wrong, it's hard bringing up a child, it's not all fun and games, and they can be pretty testing on your nerves, especially when you're trying to get the shopping and you're laden down with bags. The last thing you want is something demanding your attention all the time.

But you love your child, and so you keep going; sometimes shouting and screaming back at him if he tests your patience. But he has to learn who's boss, doesn't he? He has to know you are in charge and won't tolerate any of his nonsense. You must put your foot down and lay down the law (kind of like the government does to you) for him. He must not be allowed to get away with unacceptable behaviour. He must learn. You will make him learn.



I have told you this many times before, but I used to be the proud “owner” (I don't like that word) of a beautiful labrador puppy. He had such a cute face, and big fluffy paws, and you wanted to cuddle him all

the time. But sometimes, just sometimes, I could have killed him (literally).

He used to eat my shoes, crap all over the carpet and pee anywhere, at any time. He constantly pulled on the lead, and if you locked him downstairs at night he would whine and whine. He was a real pain in the neck, but I loved him; so I kept going with him, chastising him in public by yanking his lead or giving him the occasional smack on the bottom when he did really “bad” things. But I looked after him well, I always bought him new toys to play with, and gave him a wide selection of doggy chews, and I made sure he went out for plenty of walks in the country or down by the sea which he loved.

As he got older, I didn't have to discipline him as much. He knew if he did something wrong I would shout at him, or smack his bottom, so he calmed down a lot. I'd have to say he was turning into a really “good dog.”

“I don't treat my child like a dog” I hear some of you shouting, “my child is not an animal, I just teach him manners, that's all.”

But of course, you *do* treat your children a bit like circus animals! You teach them a few tricks and away they go, and if they don't do what you say, you punish them.

You feed them, love them (you say), and keep them out of mischief. But what you really do is what society has been doing to you your whole life. You are controlling them.

“Nonsense, what we are doing is pointing them in the right direction” you argue. But when you control a car, don't you “point it in the right direction.”

Do this, don't do that, do this, no do it this way. This way. Not like that! And then you get frustrated and angry, walk off, slam a door, or shout. But all you are trying to do is point them in the right direction, right?

Do your homework. Stick in at school. Study more. Study harder.

Focus on your school work. Be polite to the teachers. Don't argue.

Sit down. Come here. Hurry up. Be quiet.

Good dog...

And then your beloved child makes a mistake (*a wrong action attributable to bad judgement or ignorance or inattention*) and boy does he know it.

“Why did you do that? Hmm? Tell me? What were you thinking? Why did you behave like that?”

But as we both know, a mistake means that there is a right and a wrong, not just opinion, but who's to say what the child did is wrong? You? Society?

“Go to your room, you've been a bad, bad boy! No supper for you tonight!”

Incidentally you may think I've got a cheek for writing about parenting when I don't have any children of my own, but I have been a child remember? So I think that qualifies me.

“Don't touch that, it's hot. Don't touch that, it's sharp. Don't play with those, they're dangerous. Don't talk to anybody you don't know. Don't eat that, it's disgusting. Wash your hands. Wash your face.”

“But we're just protecting our delicate children, every parent would do the same, it's a dangerous world out there.”

Yes it is. All created by adults (who used to be children)

**How do you think your children would get on if you just let them be.
I mean really let them be?**

We stop them from exploring the world, and then when they get older, we encourage it. How confusing is that? Children are quick learners, but we must make sure they are protected at all times. We couldn't bear it if something bad happened to them, could we? So we wrap them in cotton wool, and save them from the terrible monsters that are out there, which we in fact put into their heads by reading them scary stories (the imagination doesn't know they are just make believe), and they grow up being afraid of the world, because we told them to “be afraid, be very afraid.” So the child does what it's told and is afraid. Nice work!

So what would happen if you didn't follow all the rules on parenting? What would happen if you just let your child grow up? What would happen to it? Would it be no more than a wild animal with no social skills, and if so, does that mean we aren't the most intelligent species on the planet, we just pretend to be because of all the nice conditioning in our minds?

So go on, you tell me! What would your child be like if you didn't shout, didn't put him or her in the naughty corner, didn't chastise him for making a mistake, didn't punish him because he didn't do what you

told him, didn't force him or her to conform to tradition and society, didn't force him to go to school to be conditioned, and finally didn't teach him to compete.

Perhaps life would be pretty boring for you, maybe it would be more challenging, maybe your friends, family and neighbours would ostracise you, maybe society would. Are you willing to take that chance? If so, read on, otherwise you can always use the book to throw at your kids if they're making too much noise.

A simple silence

Thanks, I'm glad you decided to read on. All the people who put the book down at the last paragraph are going to miss out, but that's their loss.

As people get older, they get less and less able to tolerate loud noise, and some of them (like me) even go off to monasteries for a bit of peace and quiet away from tv and advertising and cars and buses and bars and restaurants and offices and factories!

Suddenly Sssshhh. The silence is incredible. The silence of the wind and the trees. The silence of nature. Yet it is not quiet – there is movement, but it is harmonic. There is balance. There is stillness. Now shhhhhhh. And calm your mind for a moment. Nice and calm. Breathe deeply and relax. I think we can begin.

A child is born. A wonderful screaming baby. It's a girl, say the doctors. And you smile. What love between a mother and a baby. There is no bond like it. Such wonder and joy as you hold her safely in your arms.

Now fast forward ten years...

“Hurry up, you're going to be late for school. Have you got your homework. Well where is it? I don't have time for all this, I'm going to be late for work too. Oh for gods sake! Well if you can't find it you're not going over to your friends this evening, do you hear me (shouting up the stairs) Do you hear me!”

Now back to the delivery room. And you hold your baby. Tired and exhausted from the hours of labour, but you feel calm. How you love this child. You will always protect her.

Now fast forward three years... “Stop crying!!!! What's WRONG with you? No, you can't watch tv, no you can't have any dessert. In fact, go to your room until you can be nice to mummy, all right?”

Now back to the delivery room. And she sleeps in a little cot next to you, her eyes tightly closed her hands tiny but perfect.

Now fast forward fifteen years... “A boyfriend? No he's not coming over! No arguments. You're too young to have a boyfriend. What if you get pregnant what will you do then, eh? I won't be looking after it, I can tell you. You'll have to leave school and you won't be able to get a job... No, is my final answer. Just go upstairs and do your homework.”

Now back to the delivery room, and she lets out a little yawn and her perfect little fingers and toes uncurl. What wonder in nature. What amazing creation can come from one act.

Ok, so I think you get the picture. It all starts off nice and peaceful, but as time goes on, the demands of society on you and your children take their toll; and as you are not sure what society wants from you, you conform, and you make sure your kids conform as well. After all, it's the law.

But that's not how it has to be, you probably know that deep in your heart as well, don't you? We don't want to control our children, we just want them to have a happy (law abiding) life. We just want them to do well, after all, it makes *us* proud. And we like to be proud, don't we?

More silence

The one thing I have noticed about people with children, is that their houses are very, very noisy. The kids are running around shouting, the parents are shouting at the children and each other. In short, they are what you would call mildly chaotic!

“And so you see,” you say, “that's why we have to get the children to behave, that's why we have to use discipline, otherwise it would be even noisier.”

But have you ever considered that it is the lifestyle you have chosen by conforming to society that is creating this “chaos” in the first place? Perhaps not.

You are told that your children need stimulation in order for their brains to develop. So you constantly play games with them, and buy them artificial toys like fire engines and police cars that have wailing sirens. As they get older, you buy them computer game consoles that have even more noise in them, and you shout at them to do their homework, and to “come down for dinner” and to “go to their room.”

You take them out to play sport and more sport. You get them a hobby, then another hobby, and take them to the cinema and read books to them, and teach them maths, and shout at them to concentrate and to pay attention.

Unfortunately, what none of you seem to realise, is that in order for the brain to develop true intelligence, and gain awareness and insight it needs space, lots of it and that space is called silence.

So it all starts with you I'm afraid. You need to create a life for yourself that is calm and peaceful. How else will a child learn? And I'm not talking about learning things to pass exams at school, those are mere tools so they can get jobs and join the wheel, I am talking about them learning what it is to be human, something people think is a thing you do when you get older, once you have gone through the growing up process.

How many children learn of compassion and love?

You may say you love your children, but those are just words, I'm afraid.

How many children learn of nature in its entirety, not by reading silly school books but by being taught to observe themselves, their thoughts and their feelings and just to sit and watch?

No, that would be stupid wouldn't it? We have to fill these young minds up as quickly as possible! There's no time to lose. They must study and study (external things) so they can become a valued member of the society, get a good job and contribute. That is the important thing, not this new-age mumbo jumbo about being aware of yourself. "If he wants to learn that, he can, but after he's finished his exams, he mustn't be distracted now."

But all a child wants to do is to explore and learn in his own time, he needs time to process the world he is living in, not have it rammed down his throat so he can get an "A +" in his exams; do you see? It is so sad for me to stand by and watch children being created by parents into what they think the child *should* be, as opposed to just letting the child be.

Will you not let them be?

For parents who want their children to be quiet they seem to be going about it the wrong way. Rather than leading by example and not over stimulating their own brains, they are constantly talking and discussing and arguing all above the noise of the satellite tv or the music system.

Then they over stimulate their children by keeping them on the go all the time (it's no wonder that adhd seems to be becoming more and more prevalent). Go, go, go, go, go, go, that's all it ever is. Achieve, achieve, achieve, achieve. Learn, learn, learn, learn. Behave, behave, behave, behave. It's a wonder that everyone's brains don't just explode with all of this stimulation!

I have a quick question. What do you think a child would be like if he was brought up in a monastery? I don't mean would he be religious, I mean what kind of personality would he develop? What sort of mind would he develop in the silence. A dead mind or an enquiring mind?

Fortunately we don't all have to go and live in monasteries if we want silence. We can create it at home, but remember, we must lead, we must show the way.

So we will have to get rid of our flat screen tv and satellite system to start with, and we can't have any computer game consoles, because not only are they addictive, but tend to over stimulate the mind, and we have to set out times when we eat together, in a state of calmness, so you may have to find work that doesn't involve so much rushing around.

“But it's impossible,” you say.

But remember, you are the one who is creating the environment, and you are in charge!

Mealtimes have to become calmer and a time when we can sit together quietly. Sorry, do you want to stop reading now?

And perhaps a time could be set aside when you both just sit. I mean sit. And do nothing. Together. You don't need any special training or equipment just sit in a nice space with a candle to create some atmosphere if you like, but it's not necessary.

Above all, you have to become aware of yourselves. You have to gain some insight into your own minds, and start to slow down, to start to relax your minds more. Are you with me so far? And remember, you haven't had the kids yet!

Once you have the children you have to carry on with this intentional (*characterized by conscious design or purpose*) state you are creating, there is no point in saying “Oh, we don't have time, we've got kids you know.” But children don't keep you busy, you create the busyness and then blame the kids when they get a bit hyper.

Stop buying them toys!

Lots of space remember, that's what we are trying to create here. So don't buy your kids noisy toys, in fact, don't buy anything from companies who profess to know what they're doing when it comes to children's development, instead create a toy yourself for them, something you have spent time on, it means so much to any child growing up. Even give them something from nature to play with (we all know the stories where someone bought their child an expensive toy and the child threw it to one side and played with the box!).

Why do you need an expensive adding up toy when you can give a child ten stones?

“But we want to give them things, we want to show them we love them,” I hear you shout, “why shouldn't we give them the best we can afford! Who are you to tell us what we can or can't do?”

And you're right, you don't have to listen to me; in fact, I positively want you to go out and test everything I am saying; but plastic toys made in a far away country by some poor worker (who also may be a child) on a pound a day, don't help children understand where they come from, and what they are – toys from nature do. Try it out.

We spend billions each year on toys for our children. Toys they play with and get bored with. So we can make them a new toy, or we can get them to help us with it. Do you understand?

Parenting isn't a one way process; parenting is like this book, a dialogue between two people. We should be asking the children questions instead of filling their delicate minds with second hand knowledge. We should be asking them to question us, to explore nature with their minds, not getting them to repeat what they have read parrot fashion. If you want that, buy a parrot!

Creating stillness

Instead of encouraging our children to compete, which is, after all, one of the big problems in our adult society, we should be teaching them to cooperate; and instead of teaching them to chase success, we should be teaching them about insight.

I'm sure a lot of you are saying: “this all sounds easy on paper, but it wouldn't work in the real world, as our children have to go to school by law, and they will be influenced by other children who don't have parents teaching them all this good stuff – parents who have satellite televisions and computer games. Won't our children be jealous. What then?”

Unfortunately, the way society is organised makes it difficult for any parent who wants to do the right thing, or to just let their children grow up, without conditioning them, or putting expectations on them, and if you choose to teach your child at home, they still have to follow the exam structure, it is the LAW! So you have to decide on whether to conform or not.

There is no easy answer to this most difficult of problems, but by gaining insight yourself you will see the way. Do you understand? There is no point in getting a child to take one path if you are on another.

As we bring this discussion to a close, I have a few words to offer you. When both ourselves, and our children, learn stillness (*calmness without winds*), the mind will develop in ways you could never imagine, but if you fill a mind with noise, anger, shouting, knowledge, conditioning, conforming, then where is the space for the mind to develop?

Unfortunately, the people in charge of education will never see it, because they just want your child to get a job so he can start paying his taxes. But as I said before, don't take my word for it.

If we know that in order to progress, we have to jump off the wheel, then it is our responsibility to help guide our children in such a way that they never get on the wheel, but to do that you are going to have to stop shouting, stop demanding and stop criticising.

But what do I know? I don't have any children. The government system knows best what to do with a child's mind, after all, look what they have done for ours.

Stop blaming the children
Let them be
Let them experience silence
Let them experience what it is like to be still
Let their minds grow

P a s s i o n

Strong feeling or emotion

•

The trait of being intensely emotional

•

Something that is desired intensely

•

An irrational but irresistible motive for a belief or action

•

A feeling of strong sexual desire

•

Any object of warm affection or devotion

What are you passionate about? Anything? It's strange to hear the word "passion," isn't it ? It seems it doesn't often get used these days. Maybe the reason we don't hear it anymore is because it's an old fashioned word that has been replaced by a new one. What could the word be I wonder? Oh yes, how about apathy (*an absence of emotion or enthusiasm*).

Every day, every place I go, on every street corner, I see it. A total lack of enthusiasm. Every morning on public transport, you can see it on people's faces as they trundle along to work. Before you blame the time, I know it's early in the morning, so some people may not be quite awake, but that's the point.

They are tired, so very tired, from getting up early every day, spending hours on the train, the bus or underground (or if they're unlucky, a combination of all three), doing the same job, day in day out for a little

bit of money, tied to monotony, due to financial commitments caused primarily by borrowing huge amounts of money to buy your own house (even though it takes you 25 years to pay back the money to the bank). So you trundle on. Every day. Every week. Every year.

I'm not saying you don't like your job, far be it for me to interfere in your choice of occupation; you may go as far as to say you love your job, that it is a satisfying career, and you are glad you do it! But where is the passion?

I have always liked my jobs. They were always satisfying and interesting. I used to enjoy going to work every day. I used to enjoy playing sport in the evening, going to the pub for a few drinks, going out for a meal, or maybe going to the cinema, and get up again the next morning for another day of work. I was quite happy. Half asleep, but quite happy.

I really enjoyed work, but I wouldn't say I was passionate about it. To me someone who was passionate was probably a little obsessive!

I used to know someone who was passionate about rugby. He would go to every game, home and away, and his whole conversation in the pub was centred around his passion for the game. He had played when he was younger, was involved in his local team helping youngsters, and even when he was dressed casually he'd always have a rugby shirt on. "Wow!" I thought, "he's totally obsessed (*having or showing excessive or compulsive concern with something*) with the game; that can't be healthy." But what I was missing out on was that he was passionate. He cared so much, and he was prepared to do anything to help the game of rugby.

On reflection, I admire him for it.

So I ask you once again, what are you passionate about? It could be your work, your community, your sport, your hobbies, anything. But you have to be truly passionate, not just "quite interested." Let's change tack for a moment while you ponder that question.



The word passion is more commonly used when referring to a couple. "They were entwined in a passionate embrace." What does that mean to you? How does thinking about that make you feel?

Try to think of the last time you had a passionate embrace, and try to imagine the two of you standing or lying down, looking into each others eyes. You can almost feel the flames of passion coming out of every pore. The way you clasp each other in your arms and squeeze each other like

you have never squeezed anyone before. You cannot hold them any more tightly than this or they would stop breathing, but you can't stop. You touch them all over. Your heart beats faster, your breathing becomes more shallow, you can think of nothing else but holding the one you love. You are them, and they are you. You become one. Integrated in the moment.

Ok, now hold it there. Keep that feeling in place for a moment. Visualise it. Hold it in your mind, in your heart, in your blood stream, in your lungs, in your legs, and your arms. You've got it! Now take that feeling and keep it there, inside. That's passion – portable style!



A moment ago I asked you what you were passionate about. After the last experience we visualised together, can you honestly tell me that what you feel for rugby, football or your job compared with that?

We all have that passion inside us, ready to be awakened, but for most of us, that passion stops when we leave the bedroom. But imagine taking it with you, I mean really. What amazing things you could do when the passion is ignited.

I discovered this by accident. I discovered that by developing awareness of myself, awareness of my surroundings, I started to notice things. Things that just didn't seem right. The more I saw pain, suffering, greed and apathy the more angry I became. I saw pain everywhere I looked. I could not believe I hadn't noticed this before. I was probably too busy being passionate about running or my girlfriends.

Something started to brew inside me that was more than anger. I could feel the flames being ignited inside my whole being. Why did I care so much? Why was I interested in things I had never been before? Why did I notice things so much? I would have preferred just to carry on with my old life, but I couldn't do it. Suddenly I realised what had happened.

I became passionate about life

I feel the same right now as I'm writing this. I can feel the flames inside me, and they will not extinguish. The flames of love. The flames of compassion. The flames of empathy. Can you feel it? That you love life so much it hurts (maybe not just yet!); that you will not rest until others feel it too? Not in an intellectual way that says, "oh yes, I understand

what you're talking about," but in the same way you feel passion when you are embracing someone you love?

Passion about life is the same feeling. The interconnectedness of it all. The link between my blood and the tree. The link between my self and the other selves around the world. The link between my compassion and your hatred. The understanding that you are part of life and it is part of you. There is no escaping – only denial that everything is linked.

So what do you do with your new found passion? Do you, like me, decide to write a book to help others understand what it is to be passionate about life, or do you sell up everything and decide to become a monk? Or do you carry on doing what you've been doing, working in your same job, doing the same things you used to do. Going to the same pubs, the same restaurants, the same football games...

I wish I could say you could have this passion and just carry on like nothing ever happened, but I'm sorry, it doesn't seem to work like that. Often I have actively considered giving up the lifestyle I created, and going back to a nice job in information technology, eating meat again, having a laugh down the pub with mates about nothing in particular, purchasing a nice three bedroom suburban house, with a nice labrador to go out for walks with, three kids, and a fat mortgage. But I just can't.

Sometimes I feel deep pain inside when I realise that there is no turning back. For me, life is a one way ticket, no returns. I cannot go back to my old way of living. My body is the same but my mind is not.

I cannot show you what to be passionate about, nor can I force you to be passionate when you are not. All I can do is show you my passion and hope it triggers something in you. The problems in the world can be solved by you, by being passionate about wanting to help, about wanting to make a difference, about wanting to help others and become more compassionate.

It may just be coincidence, but passion is only three letters away from the word compassion.

Kindle the flame inside

P a s t

The time that has elapsed

•

A verb tense that expresses actions or states in the past

•

Earlier than the present time; no longer current

When is the past? Now? Now? Then? Now? By the time it takes you to read this it is already in the past. If you want to prove it, all you have to do is sit with a watch and look at the second hand...36...37...38...39...40... All life is past.

So when someone talks about having had a past life, theoretically they are telling the truth! After all, your past life could have been just one second ago. One second ago you could have been a murderer, a drug addict or a dictator, but that was in the past. Now is now. And now is now. And now is now. Do you understand? You have to move fast to keep up.

However you look at time, it is never still, always moving; but we must not be fooled by our watch, that is a man-made device. All I know is that the sun comes up in the morning and goes down in the evening and repeats the very next day. This regulates my internal body clock and

that of the planet. I also am getting older, which I assume has something to do with time.

For the sake of this discussion let's talk about time in the way we know it. Seconds, minutes and days. Hopefully you now understand that the last word, "word" is now in the past, and no matter how much you try, you cannot force it to be in the future, or in the present, unless you re-read it.

As you approach "word," it is still in the future, it is still not decided, but as soon as you the letter "w" you are in the present, if only momentarily. "O" follows, and now "w" is in the past. "R" follows "o" and now "w" and "o" are in the past. Utter the last letter "d" and now "wor" are in the past. As you complete it, the whole word, "word" becomes past! Confused? I am.

Ok, so as long as we're clear, let us move on.

One of the things often said to older people is that they are "living in the past." I'm sure you may have thought it about your grandparents, and I've even said it to my mother!

Old people like to reminisce, don't they? "I remember the time when..." It bores me to tears. They repeat the same old story again and again. I am never quite sure if they know they are repeating it, or whether they even know they are boring us. For me, long drawn out stories about the war, and the "good old days" just aren't interesting, but they are for older parents and grandparents. Why do you think that is?

My mother is 74 now. She is fit and healthy of mind. She goes to the gym nearly every day and does weights and yoga, yet I often become bored with her stories. As I have said in previous topics, my father left us when I was 14, and my mother has never gone out in search of another partner. She also has no close friends who come round to the house, although she has an extrovert personality; and so the only thing she does in the "present" is to go to her gym and go shopping.

As someone who loves talking, she often tells stories, but the one thing I'm sure even she isn't aware of, is that most of these stories stem from before she was married, or from times when she was happiest. I'm sure this is normal, after all, you don't normally mention times that were unhappy.

"You've gotta get some new stories mum"

This is one thing I say over and over to my mum, and I'm sure it has started to upset her; but the reason she has no new stories is because she doesn't do anything new, and if you don't do anything new, the only place you can fall back on is the past. How many older people do you know who do the same thing?

How many young people do you know? Young people have a different outlook on life, don't they? Always exploring, ever challenging, always attempting something new. They can tell you something new they did one minute ago, then they're off again. Older people just haven't got the energy to do new things as often, and it must annoy them when we tell them to stop living in the past, but as we discovered a moment ago, the past can be as close as NOW.

The past they are talking about, is a place where they were happy, where they were enjoying life. A place where they had vitality and enthusiasm, not where they were tired, and old. But no matter how old you are, living in the present, the "moment," which is NOW, brings a sparkle to everyone's life.

I keep telling my mum to let go of the past, for it no longer serves her. It was an experience she had in the moment, but now it is gone. But it's so hard to let go isn't it? Especially if you've been hurt by someone, or a person you have loved has died. The human tendency is to hang on. We are angry in the moment, but by bringing that moment which was NOW with us to this present moment which is still NOW we are living in the past!

Being angry in the moment is ok as long as you let it go. This is the key to successful living. Live now and let it go. But we are so caught up with memory and the burning desire to keep things alive; things which are actually not alive, but exist in a space between your ears.

This outcome can only be negative, because it does not allow you to live presently in joy. Carrying the memory of someone or some event or some time is attachment, which is unreal, in that reality is NOW, not then!

Have I lost you? Ok, for now, let's jump forward a moment from NOW to some point in the future, which is NOW, no NOW. Actually, a point we cannot define because it hasn't come into existence yet. This is a very strange word because it comes with so many possibilities, yet we attach so much meaning to it.

Future

The time yet to come

In the future... I want to be

My parents, my parents friends, and even my friends always wanted to know what I would “be” in the future. I could never answer, because at that time I was just living, as I was, with no thought for the future. Not because I was enlightened, but because I was a child, and children always live for right now! In fact I live there right NOW. This has been described by many people and you may call it living “in the moment” which we will go into later. For now let’s concentrate on the invisible we wish to make visible.

Although we all know the future is undecided, people always want to know it. In fact many people go to fortune tellers and palm readers to discover what their destiny holds.

Destiny

An event (or a course of events) that will inevitably happen in the future

This is a word used by so many, but if the future is undecided, because it hasn't happened yet, how can there be a destiny? Is it possible that there could be a path laid out for me that is inevitable, and that even with free will, I will reach, no matter what I do to avoid it?

One of the greatest destiny predictors is the palm, where we have a lifeline, where a person skilled in reading will tell you if you are going to have a long life (or a relatively short one!) I think I had my palm read once in my local pub, but as I'd had a few drinks, I can't really remember what she said.

Looking at my palms right now, I really wonder what she saw in them. The thing is, if I close my hands slowly, the “lifelines” etc. just look like they are natural folds which help my hand to close efficiently. Have a look yourself right now. Examine your hands. See if these lines are real destiny predictors or not?

“Today, as the sun comes into mercury, and moves past venus, you will be at your most creative. Women will naturally be attracted to you, and you will find your deepest desires at the end of a bed in a house owned by a person whose name starts with j.”

For many years, the stars that surround our planet have been used for everything from navigation (helpful) to newspaper astrologers (not sure if they are helpful). Professional astrologers (*someone who predicts the future by the positions of the planets and sun and moon*) as opposed to astronomers (*a physicist who studies astronomy*) will take your birth chart and give you a reading for a few pounds, which will hopefully help you understand where destiny is taking you.

I am supposedly an aries. I was born on the 6th april 1969 at about six minutes past midnight, I think. Aries is the ram, which is an uncastrated adult male sheep, and has many characteristics which I seem to conform to. Having met many other “rams,” I have to admit they are quite like me, and I am quite them. Weird, eh?

So what does this all mean?

Most other people I have met say they are like their star signs too. Does this mean that people can gaze into planetary constellations and read our futures? Does this mean that someone knows what is going to happen in my life before it exists? What does that mean? Does that mean that someone else “knows” my life? How is it possible? What forces are at work to foretell my life? Are there any, or is this future fortune-telling just an illusion? Are we subconsciously just conforming to what people say we are like, because we were born in a specific year on a specific date at a specific hour?

Surely anything that shows some kind of preordained path, due to “heavenly” influences, must indicate some grand plan we are all involved in? And if there is a grand plan (or path) we are all following, does this mean we must accept that there is someone or something guiding us? It all seems pretty strange that my personality type can be deduced from my birth date, but then, maybe it can.

I am still a beginner at all this stuff, but maybe one of you can enlighten me. I have always been under the impression that when a child is born its mind is a blank slate, ready to be filled with unlimited knowledge, free to make the choices, he or she wants, regardless of the environment they are born into. Free to take their own path in life, with no preordination (*theology*) *being determined in advance; especially the*

doctrine (usually associated with Calvin) that God has foreordained every event throughout eternity (including the final salvation of mankind).

Astrologers, gypsy crystal ball readers, or anyone else concerned with predicting events which have not yet occurred, are all trying to do the same thing – give us what we want: Knowledge. Not of now, but of the future.

We want to know if we will be successful, if we will be healthy, if we will have children etc. We want to know what we will *be*.

Think about this for a moment. We are not concerned with creating what we *are*, we want someone else to do the hard work for us, and let us know we will be rich, happy and successful in life. Now we can rest easy, knowing that everything will be ok. We don't care about exercising free will (*the power of making free choices unconstrained by external agencies*) in our lives, we want someone else to let us know how it will be. Do you understand?

By letting go of free will you lose your personal power to make choices. You begin to live your life according to others telling you how it will be. That's why so many of us consult fortune-tellers and ultimately turn to the greatest fortune-teller of all, religion.

If free will exists, there can be no such thing as destiny

Do you agree with this statement? Most of you probably don't because we like the idea of “my destiny,” don't we? “It is your destiny,” has a nice ring about it doesn't it? As if we are on an important path, and we have an important mission to fulfil. Somehow just “existing” isn't good enough.

Yesterday, as I was looking at lambs with their mothers, I noticed they had started grazing as well, and I realised that not only had their life just started, as far as humans are concerned their life has ended as well. Do you follow? Their life is just one monotonous grass eating experience. Nothing more, nothing less.

They will do the same thing every day, from dawn to dusk until the day they die. They have to. It's what they do. They eat grass to survive. Nothing else is important. They won't suddenly invent a new technology which saves them having to eat so much grass, and enables them to relax more, in fact, they won't invent anything, because their brains are not structured for that kind of thinking.

They are ruled by nature. Eat. Drink. Sleep. Procreate. Nurture. Eat. Drink. Sleep. Die.

We don't want a life like that do we? We are homo sapiens, the most intelligent species on the planet, we can do anything we want, we are not constrained by a small brain. We are not locked into a biological pattern that only involves eating and procreating, are we? We are free! Free to make our own decisions. Free to take our own path.

So can someone please tell me why we are so concerned with knowing our future, which is a time not yet arisen, when the very act of inquiring into something non-existent robs us of what it is to be human. Namely, free will.

Present

The period of time that is happening now; any continuous stretch of time including the moment of speech

So where does this free will exist? Where in time can it exist? In the past? In the future? Of course not. You exercise your free will. Right NOW. NOW. NOW and again NOW.

*You sit outside the bank in your car
You pull your mask on
You get your gun at the ready
Your hand reaches for the handle
...?*

What happens next is up to you. Do you understand? Your hand may be on the handle of the car door, you may be *about* to get out, and *about* to run in shouting "get your hands up, give me all your money," but you haven't. Your hand is still on the handle. It is still the present moment.

Even though it will still be the present moment when you are waving your gun around in the bank, right now it is an event which is not even in the future, as the future is undecided. You have a choice to exercise your free will in the moment, to change the course of events. Nothing is decided until it is the present moment. At that time, and only for that instant it is real. Up until then, it is nothing.

You stop for a moment, become aware of yourself, you see a lifetime ahead not of riches and luxuries but of a grey cell, bars, and in that moment which is NOW, you take off your mask, put away your gun and drive away. Do you see? In becoming aware of yourself in the moment

you have created a new NOW. The future that could have involved people being shot, where there is anger, fear, and ultimately ends with either you being killed by the police, or ending up in jail for many years, no longer exists. Because it never really existed. It was just a possibility. Like all things in life.

The future does not exist. It is an illusion. There is only NOW

Possibility vs. Probability. There are those who would say that certain outcomes (*something that results*) are more probable than possible (if you put your hand on a boiling stove then you will burn yourself), but as each moment in the time leading up to the person putting their hand on the stove, it is still now. Therefore even though it is getting more probable you will burn yourself, it is still a future event which has not yet happened, and there is the opportunity in the Now to avert your hand and not burn yourself.

The key to living NOW is awareness. Awareness of yourself in action. Awareness that if you carry through an action it will have consequences, whether positive or negative. Without the awareness, the statisticians measure of probability increases, although it is not certain.

Let us return to the scenario at the bank, but this time you choose not to be aware of yourself in action, and without a second thought....

*You pull your mask on
You get your gun at the ready
Your hand reaches for the handle
You get out of the car and run towards the bank
Your hand goes to open the door
...?*

But just at the last second, you have a flash of awareness. You see the possibilities of the outcomes and you decide (free will) to run back to the car, take off your mask and drive home. Although it was becoming more probable you would rob the bank, right up until you do, it is an illusion, an event that is only in your mind. It is not real.

Stop for a moment. Which is now. Right NOW. And become aware of times in the past when you have not been aware of yourself. Events you have let happen because you were not aware of yourself in the moment; events you wish you had been able to change; events that up

until the NOW, were only possibilities, and let them go. There is no use reliving events and wishing you had done them differently.

Let's go back to the bank one last time and see what happens when there is no awareness in action.

*You sit outside the bank in your car
You pull your mask on
You get your gun at the ready
Your hand reaches for the handle
You get out of the car and run towards the bank
Your hand goes to open the door
You run in screaming "Get down this is robbery"
"Give me all your money"
The customers scream, some cry, but one brave man tries to tackle you
You instinctively swing round. And you fire. Once. Twice
He goes down
"Give me the fucking money," you scream
They hurriedly pack some money into a bag and you run off
But someone has raised the alarm, the police are here, you are surrounded
"Put the weapon down and come out with your hands up"
You do what they say and come out. Welcomed with handcuffs
You are tried and sentenced to twelve years in prison
You are driven to the place with the grey walls and bars and assigned
a number*

No matter how many times you reflect on your actions, it is too late to change them. They have already been completed, and they are, as you know, in the past, which was now! The only thing you can do with the past is to let it go.

This is not a topic about learning from your mistakes. This is about being aware in the present moment – the only reality. The NOW.

I make no apologies for repeating this word, as it is most important you understand it. Because it, and nothing else, is your best guide in life. You can only LIVE in the present moment. That is the time you are ALIVE. You are not alive in the past, that is just a memory, you cannot live in the future, that is just a mental projection. You live as your heart beats. Right now.

So what about the people who "live in the past?" Our elderly parents and grandparents for example; what can be done to help them live in the

present moment? Unfortunately, we become conditioned to living our life through memory, but by becoming aware of ourselves, and by enjoying life whatever it “throws” at us, we learn to de-condition ourselves.

It's funny we all think life throws “stuff” at us, but life isn't that clever. We create the “stuff” through our own free will. We make choices we blame on “life,” but there is no such reality as “life,” only billions of free wills barging into each other all around the world. There is no good, bad, past or future, just our action in the moment and the outcome.

Let's make each action in the moment a positive, joyful action. Let's live for now, this second, this moment. Live it the best you can, for all humanity, for the animals, the earth, your loved ones, my loved ones, and their loved ones.

Let us interconnect in this moment which is now and move forward, one moment at a time with love and compassion. I can see the outcome already, oops, but there I go predicting the future again!

Stop, and let's enjoy this moment together.

P e a c e

The state prevailing during the absence of war

•

Harmonious relations; freedom from disputes

•

The absence of mental stress or anxiety

•

The general security of public places

I would like to start our discussion by talking about the many misconceptions of the word peace. Peace is not an absence of war. Peace is not waving two fingers in the air making the peace sign. Peace is not sitting around smoking marijuana wearing hemp clothing and talking about the cosmos. Peace is not a universal state of mind. Peace is not becoming a monk and meditating all day. Peace is not god, and you cannot fight for peace – peace is a lot closer to home than that, and it is a lot more physical, than anything so-called spiritual.

One thing's for sure, and that is you cannot force people to be at peace. If you win a battle and overcome your enemy, then the country is not at peace, only in a temporary state of “not war.” Why? Because peace is brought about by the transcendence of internal agitation and turmoil through the loving of all things and that is something that can only be achieved individually. If I am at peace, the world is at peace.

I think it's fair to say that most of us are not at peace in our lives. The general stress and strain of modern life; paying bills, dealing with relationships, holding down a job, and worrying about the future, is enough to leave us feeling internally stressed and heading for the nearest thing to make life more peaceful. Yes you got it, your old friend the ice cold beer, the rich red wine, the zesty gin and tonic, or maybe just a plain old cigarette. Take a sip, take a puff... Ahh, that's better... Peace!

Many books have been written on finding peace in your daily lives. Some people even travel to “spiritual” countries like india and tibet in search of inner peace. Some people join monasteries. Some people write songs about praying for peace, and last but not least, governments try to keep the peace. It's funny, in a world so full of violence, there seem to be a lot of people trying to find peace, or at least force it on to other people.

In other topics, we have asked the question whether man is a naturally violent species, and we have said that although he has the tendency to express his desires violently if he doesn't get what he wants, there is nothing to suggest it is inherent in our nature. We need food and shelter to survive individually, and a mate to procreate with if we are to keep the species going, that is all; we need nothing more. As we begin our exploration of this topic together, we must also remember that peace is a man-made word, it has nothing to do with our biological heritage.

Let me start by asking you a question. Is a lion at peace? Are a herd of elephants at peace? What about the birds, are they at peace? What about a tree? These might seem like stupid questions to you, but it is of the utmost importance we find out what we mean by “peace.”

A mouse goes about his business, scurrying from place to place eating and drinking causing no visible harm to anyone else, meanwhile an owl sits on a branch quietly. Both of them could be said in human terms to be at peace. Suddenly the owl flaps his wings, leaves the branch silently, and glides towards the forest floor. Meanwhile, the mouse is still scurrying around quietly, in the darkness of night. The owl's talons extend, and he catches the mouse, lifting it high into the air. Its talons have pierced its now lifeless body and the owl returns to its branch to quietly rip off the mouse's head before devouring the whole body – bones, guts, and all.

At what point did the owl stop being at peace? What do you think? Was it when it had the intention to kill a mouse, or was it when its talons actually caught the mouse? What I want to know is, was the owl ever at peace? We can see it was violent for a split second, where it caused the death of another animal, but hey, the owl was hungry and owls eat mice,

the end! Can you follow this? What I am asking is whether “peace” (the word) exists in the animal world, or is it merely a man-made concept?

I think it highly unlikely that “peace” can exist, because when we apply it to the animal world, it means nothing. Animals are violent when (a) they are hungry, and are designated meat eaters, and (b) when other members of the species encroach on their territory (which affects the amount of food available for the group) and (c) when their dominance over the group is threatened which affects their ability to mate with all the females.

Animals do things to protect the survival of themselves, their group and their species, that is all. They are neither at peace, nor not at peace, do you understand? The word does not apply.

Let me explain.

I neither eat animals nor any products that have come from animals, which I do through choice. I eat nuts, fruit and vegetables etc. and I consider myself to be a “peaceful” man, in that I wouldn't hurt anyone deliberately; but just imagine for a moment that there was a shortage of food, and there weren't enough vegetables to go round the group. What would I do, being a “peaceful” man? Would I sit there meditating whilst letting the rest of the group gorge themselves on the available food because I vowed never to hurt another?

Imagine I'd asked them kindly to share the food with me, to show some compassion for a starving man, but they just laughed and carried on eating. What would I do? Would I once again just sit down and wait for my death? I doubt it very much.

We homo sapiens are part of the animal world, as it is part of us, and we are programmed to ensure we survive, and to survive we must eat. It is that simple. So I get up and ask once again for some food. Once again I am refused, so I pick up a rock and strike the man with it, and I keep hitting him, until he gives up his share of the food. I want to survive, so I will do “whatever it takes” to survive. I think we all have to remember that we all have the potential to become violent when our biological needs are not being met.

Imagine now that I am a non-meat eater and I am in a place where there are no vegetables, fruit, or nuts. It is winter and snow covers the ground. What do I eat? Do I go hungry and starve to death because I took a vow never to harm another animal, or do I try to kill anything that will provide fuel for me to stay alive, just as the owl did? What do you think? Are my ethics worth more than life itself?

I know what I would do. I am an animal like the owl, and when I need to eat, I find something to eat, whether it be animal or vegetable. Some people may be horrified that I have said this. "You are going against everything you have said!" I hear them cry. But how do you think man became such a successful species? He is adaptable to all environments.

I am currently writing in the north of Sweden in the middle of winter. Heavy snow has covered the ground, and nothing is growing at the moment. I am fortunate that thanks to modern growing, storage and distribution methods, I can have all the vegetables, fruit and nuts I want, as long as I have enough money.

But try to think back several hundred years or several thousand years to when man first came to colonise this part of the world. How did he survive up here successfully? By eating whatever was available. And in the winter, that was animals, like reindeer and elk. They ate the meat and protected themselves against the freezing temperatures with their skins. That is life giving life.

If one of the groups had decided to become vegetarians, or vegans, how do you think they would have survived the winter? Once again there was no peace nor violence going on, just survival. Are you starting to see?

In the natural world, outside of our thinking, there is only survival of the species. It's not personal; there is no malice aforethought; they are not greedy; nor filled with desire, or craving power. These are man-made – of the mind. These are not things which trouble the animal kingdom. To them, peace is nothing. It is a concept invented by man to describe the human world. A world we think is very different to the animal world; and in some ways is so far removed from it that it is no wonder people questioned how we could have ever evolved from apes, deciding that there had to be a better explanation, involving someone called "god."

My mind is at war
My mind is at peace

Instantly, division. Two states, both polar opposites. War. Peace. It can't be anything else, can it? It has to be one or the other, you are either at war or at peace. But being in one state assumes that the other state exists, just not at this moment. As we saw in the animal world it seemed silly to try to describe the owl as "being at peace," as it is not something that could apply to it. As far as we could see, the owl was in two different states. Eating and not eating.

That does not apply to our modern society. There is far too much greed, desire, politics, power, control and domination going on. In short, there is too much thinking going on!

Peace is sometimes described as freedom from disputes, but those disputes are always going on in our minds. And it is into our minds we shall go now.



I realised some time ago that having a super large brain comes with several disadvantages, the first being that you have to learn to understand it, and the second, learning how to control it!

If we look at the amount of time the universe has been in existence, it is approximately fifteen to twenty billion years, but in universe time, that doesn't matter. What matters is that the brain of homo sapiens has only been around for around fifty thousand years in its present size. *Homo habilis (extinct species of upright east african hominid having some advanced human like characteristics)* existed only two million years ago, and his brain was about a third of the size of ours. Sorry if my statistics are wrong, but then I never was very good at statistics, but you get the picture. Universe around for long time, human brain as we know it, not around very long.

So it shouldn't be of much surprise to us that it isn't functioning correctly. We are still on brain software version 1.0, and as all we computer users know, version 1.0 is not very stable! We don't know where we are half the time; we don't know what we want, who we are, we don't know where we are going, what we want to do with our life; there are so many choices, we don't know when to be happy, when to be sad; we don't know how to act around other people etc. etc. I think it is fair to say that in biological development terms, the human brain, as we know it, is still in its infancy.

All of this confusion must lead to a certain amount of internal agitation and conflict in the mind. This is neither good nor bad, it's just part of what makes us human, but it doesn't mean we can't jump ahead of biology and transcend this conflict, which after all, is creating the external conflict in the world.

Quiet on the inside, quiet on the outside.

When I am in conflict with myself, when I desire riches, or power, when I aim to control, or destroy, I am in conflict. Do you understand? When I see that all is connected, and the pursuit of happiness through

the acquisition of land and castles, and jewels is a dangerous illusion; when I am satisfied with the food I eat and the shelter I call my home; when I see that I am my enemy and he is me, that his land is my land, and mine is his, that no woman is a possession, nor has the right to be possessed, then I shall start to come out of the darkness which is conflict, and into the light which is intelligence. Can you see?

Peace and war are still states of conflict. Both must exist if one exists.

When I see that we have no rights on this earth; that rights are a man-made concept just like peace, and are only empty words; when all men and women stop striving and competing; something magical happens. The mind goes quiet. Who cares what happens to the outside world. The inside is the outside.

Remember the owl and the mouse.

There is no peace. No war. Just relationship.

The mouse is to the owl, as the owl is to the mouse.

Everything is just as it should be. Now, let's get back to the business of living!

P l a y

Activity by children that is guided more by imagination than by
fixed rules

One thing that guides us all in our adult life is the need to be serious. In our work, our family life, our duties to the country, and to god. Life is one long need to be serious. Now, we have covered fun in another topic, and this isn't about just having fun. This is a way of approaching life, a way of working, a way of letting go of the internal and external controls. The question is, will society let you play when all it wants is for you to conform?

From the beginning of their lives, children are encouraged to play. Whatever they do, from “drawing” with crayons, to splashing about in the water, or just running round in circles, they are encouraged to do, without judgement, without a goal. The activity doesn't have a goal, there are no winners, no losers, and no constraints or rules. It just is.

How far we are from that love of play as we reach puberty. As soon as we hit twelve or thirteen, there is a new word enforced on us. Expectation

(*belief about (or mental picture of) the future*). Adults and teachers suddenly want us to *be* something in the world. Every activity must have a purpose. If we go running it should be in a race, and we should race to win. If we study mathematics, it should be to pass our exams with an A. If we paint, it should be a picture of great beauty. If we play an instrument, we should play it so well we join the school orchestra.

It is not enough to simply do something just as method of expression. From those days on, our inner lives are controlled. Nothing without purpose. Everything must mean something. Every activity **MUST** be perfect. We must control ourselves.

All this does is lead to pent up frustration, so let's try to break down these constraints we place on ourselves. Let's try to do what is not expected of us, something people would be shocked to see us do, and I'm not talking about running around naked in the street. Although you could if you wanted to!

We have spent many thousands of years trying to become "civilised" (*marked by refinement in taste and manners, or having a high state of culture and development both social and technological*). We have quelled the brute inside, we are homo sapiens, the most intelligent species on the planet.

People look down on humans who are not polished; who say the wrong thing; who do not conform to the idea of the civilised society. But civilisation, as I see it, is a facade. It belies the true nature of the human, the true self that is lurking underneath all that refinement. Not that we are crazed animals underneath, just that the true "us" is different from the person we project, the person others expect us to be.

Think about this carefully for a moment, and think back to your childhood (*the state of a child between infancy and adolescence*) if you can. What were people's expectations of you back then? Could you do as you please, or were you controlled? Was the most important part of your life play, or was it study? Now think about adolescence. Did your parents' attitude to you change? Did they suddenly start to shout and tell you to do your homework and stop thinking about play?

There is an important point to make here and we must try to distinguish real play from just messing about; you see, in my mind, real play is constructive. Real play isn't sitting in the park drinking beer with your friends instead of doing homework, or hanging around a fast food establishment with your peers, trying to look cool; nor is it going out on your mountain bike in the country. Real play is in your mind. Real play is the way you approach any situation, whether it be work, exercise, or

study. Real play is something you find deep inside, not in a sandpit or on an easel drawing.

Of course, your teachers, parents, and employers don't want you to think like that, they need to control your mind! They want you to think a certain way, conform in thought, act a certain way – conform in action. If you didn't, how would they ever get you to perform any tasks they wanted you to do? Admittedly, if you want to be a brain surgeon you will have to learn brain surgery, or if you want to be an engineer you will have to learn engineering.

But I am not talking about specific skills here, as some are necessary for us to know. This is about using your imagination. Just letting your imagination take you on a journey into a game – a game where there are no rules, no competitors, no winners or losers. A game of play you are not even in control of. A game you just let happen.

Just in case you think I'm crazy, think how advertising agencies come up with some of their best campaigns, or the most inventive films or books are written? It certainly isn't through self-control and being civilised! It's through letting the mind go on its own path, if only for a short time.

If you are like me, mid-thirties or older, and have spent the best part of your adult life working in a controlled environment, or lead a controlled, but civilised life, this next section is for you.

It is only until recently I discovered what a powerful tool play is. It helped me to understand myself more. It helped me realise I was putting a front on everything I was and did. I did and said things I believed people wanted to hear, or because they would be impressed by the knowledge I had. This facade was the two dimensional being that most of us are brought up to become, but that is not who we are.

Sing, sing, sing!

Imagine for a moment sitting and just singing out loud. Right now. How would you feel? Go on try it. I'm not talking about singing a known song, or even something you have made up; unfortunately that requires interaction from the brain, which requires language and thought which interfere with play. No, I mean just making noise from your throat, expressing yourself from deep, deep inside. Go on, try it now. No one's watching you, no one's listening. Be as loud as you like. Get the sounds

from places you didn't know existed. Break down the barriers of civilisation! Scream if you like!

Except, sorry, I forgot to tell you, you're on a packed commuter train.

What would people do? How would they react to you? Would they think you were mad? Probably. Would they look at you strangely? Probably. What would they be thinking? "Don't look over at him, he's a crazy man, just ignore him," and you would probably be thinking the same. You see, it doesn't feel comfortable doing something with no control and no order does it?

As humans, we must feel that what we are doing fits in with everything we have been taught. A painter has been taught how to paint, and a musician has been taught how to play his instrument. For them to use their inner play instinct and just make noise or just express whatever comes out of their head onto the canvas wouldn't seem right would it? Except that would discount some of the greatest art of the last century and would certainly have put the brakes on jazz ever being invented.

The greatest intelligence comes out of play. Play makes connections in the brain that we couldn't ever make if we followed the rules. For some things you need rules, but play changes the game.

Do this play exercise with me right now. Grab a piece of paper and a couple of pens. We are going to play. Are you having fun yet? I am! Take a pen in your hand and stare at the paper. Do you notice what is happening in your brain? The same thing happened in mine for the first few times. That is the barrier between the pen and your brain coming in. It is your resistance to just let the pen flow onto the paper.

You may be thinking "*What* will I draw? *Should* I draw a tree? *Should* I draw a line?" or even, "I can't draw." That is always the one I used. So the only way to break this control barrier is to lift the pen right now and touch it on the paper. Do not let it leave the paper until you have finished playing. What did yours look like? Mine was some kind of square with some wiggly circles in the middle and some other stuff!

Did you notice the whole time you were doing the exercise that your brain was trying to interfere by offering you suggestions as to how to control the pen? Was it making judgements about the quality of your drawing, maybe suggesting things like "it isn't good," or "this is a stupid game, I've had enough, I'm going to put this stupid book down. He's gone to far this time, this is rubbish!" I wouldn't be surprised.

Remember: Thought interferes with play
Make a direct connection between the mind and the pen

Let's have one more play exercise. This one requires no skill at all, like the other exercises we have just done. Wherever you are at the moment find something to bang. You know, like a drum! But not like playing the drums, you see playing drums requires control. It requires learning and requires a certain skill. I want you to bang a table or any surface you can – loud as you like. But when you start to bang, notice how your brain is trying to control the rhythm. It will not let you just make noise, the beats must be evenly spaced, there must be conformity; is that happening to you? Let the sounds come, do not control them.

When you have had enough, reflect on the interference that happened between your hand and mind. The intention may have been to bang in a random way, but something was holding you back, wasn't it. What do you think that something was?

Play in the mind is as close to being mad, or being under five as you will get, or so civilisation would have you believe. Screaming or making sounds that aren't "tuneful," drawing patterns which don't "mean" anything, banging which does not have a beat or a "rhythm," this is what thousands of years of civilisation has tried to control. They would have you believe that after childhood you must learn and conform to what are recognised acceptable patterns of behaviour. That involves singing in a controlled fashion, drawing in a controlled fashion, and playing drums in a controlled fashion.

There is nothing wrong with hearing music that is pleasing to the brain, or looking at art that is pleasing to the eye. But there is also nothing wrong with making discordant sounds, and drawing patterns that don't mean anything. Once the judge and the censor have been removed, these things "just are." The more you invent and do play exercises, the more you will start to relax. The more you will start to enjoy the experience, and what an experience it is! It is direct, with no interference from "civilisation." As with all skills, this one requires great mastery and you must spend at least two hours a day doing it.

Sorry, that's a joke. Play can never be a skill, or it would be called a skill! And how can you master something when the intention is not to master it. Play brings a little bit of joy to everything you do. Ultimately it is not about drawing, singing or banging, but about taking the feeling of play with you in your mind, and applying it to everything you do in life. Mad? Uncivilised? Childish? Good!

P o l i c e

Maintain the security of by carrying out a control

•

The force of policemen and officers

Do not be afraid. We are here to protect you



My mum used to say to me: “If you've done nothing wrong, you've got nothing to fear from the police,” and that's pretty much the attitude everywhere. The police are seen as protectors of society, and detractors are seen as anti-authority and troublemakers. The sight of a police car, or a policeman in uniform is supposed to make the public feel comfortable, so why do I feel uncomfortable when I see one? Is it that I've done something wrong and I'm afraid I'll get caught, or is it something more than that?

Even though I have been arrested two or three times when I was younger, for what I would call drunken, foolish youth, I have never been in trouble since. Sure I've had a couple of traffic tickets for speeding and parking, but who hasn't?

Every day the police get thousands of calls from people who have been robbed, or beaten, or worse, needing help. The kind of help they need is physical help, someone more powerful than the aggressor. Who better than a force of armed (in most countries except the uk), uniformed officers of the law to sort it out? They are the legal “muscle” in our society. Men and women authorised to control the population using force if they have to.

Some of you may take offence that I have used the word control, but one thing you must remember is that the police are like the army in that they just follow orders. Laws are passed by our representatives in parliament, and the police are paid to enforce them. So whilst today walking on the street may be legal, tomorrow it may not be. Do you understand?

In the past drink driving was not an offence in the uk and neither was not wearing a seatbelt, but no one was stopped. Why? Because it wasn't against the law. A few years ago driving whilst talking on a mobile phone was not against the law, so you wouldn't have been stopped, but now it is. So although all the three things are dangerous to you, or others around you (drink driving, no seatbelt, talking on a mobile phone), you would not have been stopped and charged. It is only once the government pass a new law that the police will stop you. That means the police only act in accordance with the man-made laws.

In some countries it may be a crime to cross the street except at a pedestrian crossing, in others it may not. In some countries it may be a crime to criticise the government, in others it may not. So the police are not looking after the interests of all people on the planet, they are just following orders – however unjust or lacking in compassion they may be.

You may see the police as doing a difficult, but worthwhile job; catching bad people, and dangerous sex offenders and putting them behind bars; but there will always be a bad person and another sex offender to replace the one taken off the streets. They may break up fights in the street at night, but there will always be another just around the corner.

You may think I have a cynical view of the police, but what I am trying to do is explore their true purpose with you, and whether they are a necessary part of modern society.

The job of the police is to uphold the law, nothing more. If it is the law that all women over the age of fifty be imprisoned, they will do it. If it is the law that all dogs be rounded up and killed, they will do it. If it is the law that anyone who has a bald head be arrested, they will do it. If it

is the law that people of a different race be rounded up and imprisoned, they will do it. Remember this. Their primary job is not to protect you, it is to the law. If the law involves helping you they will do it. If the law involves imprisoning you, they will do it.

Stop for a moment and think about this carefully. What difference is there between the police forces in africa, asia, the americas or europe? You may think the police are brutal in some countries, and compassionate in others, but they are just following orders – upholding the law. The compassionate police you see in your own country will treat you very differently as soon as you break a law they are employed to uphold!

So what type of person joins the police force? Does the same type of person who becomes a buddhist monk join the police force? Are they filled with love and compassion for humanity and a desire to see peace throughout the world? Possibly, but I doubt it very much. Like most government jobs, the pay is pretty good, so are the perks and the pension, but this one is so much more than just a desk job.



You get dressed for work in the morning, put on your shirt and your jacket, attach your handcuffs to your belt along side your walkie talkie, your baton slides into place and your gun goes into its holster beside it. How smart you look, as you put on your shiny polished shoes and polish your badge. PC3234. You stand and regard yourself in the mirror, what an important job you have to do today. Upholding the law. To protect and to serve. Saving innocent people from the evil ones. You walk off on your beat, head held high. Look how the people admire you, look how important they all know you are. Suddenly, you see a boy riding his bicycle on the pavement.

“Stop there!” You cry. “Did you know that it is illegal to ride your bike on the pavement, son?”

“No, sir.”

See, he called you sir, how important does that make you feel?

“Well it is illegal, and you can be fined. What's your name son?”

“John, john smith.”

“Well john, I'm going to let you off with a warning today, but let that be a lesson to you.”

“Oh thank you sir, sorry sir, I'll never do it again sir.”

The trembling child cycles off, and you walk away, head held high, filled with the knowledge you showed your merciful compassionate side to the young lad. A tourist comes up to you and respectfully asks the directions to some tourist attraction, and you kindly help him. He thanks you graciously as he moves off, and you swell with feeling of pride. What an important job you do.

Suddenly you hear a scream. "He's got my handbag!"

You look over and there's the culprit running away on the other side of the road.

"Stop! Police!" You shout and you give chase, quickly catching him and rugby tackling him to the ground and handcuffing him.

"Thank you so much officer," the lady says as you return her handbag.

"No problem, just doing my job."

You fill with pride again. Isn't it so nice to do a job that is so well respected by everybody (except the bad criminals)? You finish your shift and return home, tired but happy you have done a worthwhile job serving the law.

So in answer to my question of what type of people join the police force, and before you come up with worthless titles like "law abiding" and "public spirited," let me add my thoughts.

I would say that the person is someone who enjoys a bit of excitement, likes the control and power aspect of the job, definitely likes the respect he is offered on a daily basis due to threats of arrest, and likes the praise he gets when he catches "bad" people. Am I close?

If you are in the police force what sort of person are you? What do you get out of the job? How far would you go if the law demanded it? Would you kill for a few bits of paper? Oh, I forgot, you do already – for stealing paper, or money, as it is more commonly known. You take another person's life for something that isn't real.

Money is only money because we say it is! Do you understand? We kill people who steal. Because the government can't have everyone running around stealing. We have to make an example of them, and if they don't stop when you shout "STOP! POLICE!" you shoot them! Dead. And think you've done a good job. What gives us the right to take another life just for a bit of paper. Can you answer me that? It's the law. It's the law. It's the law. Like a broken record, that's all I hear from you!

He broke the law and he paid the price.

Just because we view something as wrong is no reason to kill, whatever the "crime." If we are to become the compassionate world I

believe we can be, we must show our compassion to those who need it most, and those people are the ones who have wronged us. By helping them to understand compassion we are helping the rest of the world. No longer will they be a threat to us or anyone else but they can help others find the way.

Sorry, maybe I believe in humanity too much. Maybe it is too much to ask of the supposed most intelligent species on the planet. Just one thing though, I have never been able to understand why other species do not need their own police force! Ah, maybe they're not intelligent enough to need a police force. You see, the more intelligent you are, the more you need to be controlled. Imagine if the lions had other lions patrolling to make sure the rowdy lions don't get out of line!

You see, to me, it doesn't make sense why such an intelligent species needs this amount of controlling, surely we should be able to work out how to live together peacefully in a community without the need for other humans to stand over us with batons and weapons just daring us to do the wrong thing. Maybe that's just the way it is to be. The price of intelligence is submission to control.

Sorry, but that doesn't make sense to me. Does that make sense to you? We should not be controlled by anybody, let alone some stranger in a uniform with a weapon.

Maybe the police force is the conscience we are missing in our lives, but surely if that was the case it would be better to use priests and monks for that job; to help us understand where we could have done better.

I think this is more to do with keeping the rich and powerful safe from us, the common man. The working man. If you have nothing, what does the robber steal? Think about this carefully for a moment. In order to rule, there must be order and for that to happen there must be control and that control must be a deterrent to all who try to go against the system. Does that make any sense to you?

The way the media and the government portrays crime, is as an epidemic. According to them we aren't safe even in our own homes, let alone walking the streets. "The police need more power," they say. So now we have random checks. We are now being asked to carry identification to prove who we are, just in case we are a criminal or a terrorist.

We must have order. Yet there aren't millions of terrorists and criminals out to steal from us or kill us, and even if they did, money is just paper, and my life is just a life. None are permanent, so why are we

getting so worried about it all? Why is there now a panic in the governments of the world?

Because as most people know deep down, none of this is for us. It is for the powerful, the influential and the rich. The police force exists to protect them and their interests. This may sound crazy to some of you, but I urge you to think about this carefully. You only have to watch the police at work at any demonstration against government policy to know that even in a democracy, you're not in charge.

In the uk, many thousands of people marched to stop the prime minister taking us into the current war in iraq, but did it make any difference? No. We are the people that the government supposedly represent, but who are they really representing? Themselves and their ideologies and interests? Who are the police force really protecting?

Unfortunately, If you are unlucky enough to be ruled by a military junta, or you are ruled by a lunatic, you may find that the police will arrest you just for breathing the wrong way, but it is interesting to note that when the ruler changes, so does the attitude of the police. A policeman who yesterday beat you up for walking on the wrong side of the street now smiles as you pass him. A policeman who last month arrested you for speaking at a rally against the government now joins in as a member of the crowd.

So why does the most intelligent species on earth need all this protecting? Are we not strong, are we not able to sort our own problems out? Are communities and families (of which all criminals are a part) not able to help the people involved in crime? Why do we have to let a system deal with what is essentially a human problem?

Greed and violence. That's what the police stop.

The way to transcend those two vital things is through awareness of the self in action. When we can go beyond greed and violence, the police force will be no more. There will be no justification for any government control and subduing of the people. The policemen and women of the world will be on the streets looking for another job, and this time they will have to earn respect from the public, not demand it with the threat of arrest. They will have to seek their thrills elsewhere in life and hang up their weapons and handcuffs.

If you want to see a world free of police watching your every move through cctv, and controlling what you do and say then you had better listen up! No matter who you are or what you do the only way forward is to go beyond greed and violence. Understand yourself. Become aware of your greed and your anger which is violence. Learn to love. Live your life

in an authentic way and before long the sound of the police siren will be a distant memory, for if there is no crime, surely there is no need for a police force.

Sorry, am I dreaming of a utopian society? I don't think so. But if I were and it isn't possible to live without a police force, wouldn't it be a sad day for the human race that we cannot live peacefully together on this planet we have to share together?

As we close this topic, please remember this. Policemen and women are not people to be looked up to, nor looked down upon, they are merely people who do a job, where they do whatever they are told. They have no minds of their own, so you should feel sorry for them not angry against them. They have no awareness of what is right action and what isn't, they just follow orders.

So next time you are running away from a bank robbery in a country with armed police, and they shout, Stop! Police! I would stop. After all, losing your life over a couple of bits of paper isn't worth it. And your life certainly doesn't mean anything to the officer who shot you. He was just doing his job. Upholding the law.

P o l i t e n e s s

A courteous manner that respects accepted social usage

•

The act of showing regard for others

It seems to me, that sometime in the last few years we have lost something important in society. People seem to be ruder, more impolite, more aggressive than they used to be. Why do you think that is? I notice a distinct lack of care for everyone else; we seem to be so caught up in our own lives that we have lost the ability to be polite to other people. Getting on and off public transport, in public places, at work, in the pub, in fact everywhere.

It doesn't cost anything to be polite, but somehow it doesn't seem to matter to people. "Manners maketh the man," my mother used to say, which I can't wholeheartedly agree with, but it does help us all get on a bit easier.

It seems that manners and being polite are not built in to nature, in that we are not born with these attributes. These are things we have learned

from our parents, from teachers, and from observing others behaviour. So, if they are not inbuilt, why do we need them? Why do we have to be polite just because someone says that it is the acceptable thing to do? Why do we need to give up our seat for a disabled person on the tram, or hold a door for someone? Why should I? But the question I want to ask is, why shouldn't you?

If no one had told you you should be polite, would you be rude or obnoxious? I want to understand this with you. If it is not in my nature to be polite, does that mean that man as a species is an unthinking uncaring animal only concerned with himself? Well as we can see from life today, that answer would have to be a resounding “yes.”

It is only through the will of those who have shaped society that we have learned these social skills. Why else would we be polite when it is not in our nature? Our parents are polite, so we mimic them. Our parents are rude, so we mimic them. When we are growing up, we are influenced by our role models who are our parents, our teachers, and our peers. We don't “know” if being polite is right or wrong, anymore than we know if being impolite is right or wrong. We just learn from those around us. It is only in later life we can see if we conform to the norm. Do you understand?

If everyone else is being obnoxious and rude to everyone in the street and I am being polite, does it make me a better person than they are? No of course not, it just means that I am not conforming to the behaviour of the majority. It is neither right or wrong.

If I understand what it is to have compassion, love and empathy for my fellow man, do I not treat him differently? Am I not courteous, not because I have learned to be, but merely because I want to help my fellow man, because he is my brother?

All of this may seem like a load of old nonsense to some of you who might be saying “some people are polite, some people are rude, that's just the way it is, accept it.” But all I accept is that if it is not in my biological nature, because “politeness” is a man-made concept, then we have to start looking deep inside our minds. We have to start to become aware of ourselves in relationship with others, because politeness cannot exist in isolation. It only comes into being when I am in relationship with another.

It's like a dance

I guess many hundreds of years ago (when there was a fraction of the number of people on the planet that there are now), we didn't have this problem. We were surrounded by family and kinship groups, we had love for them and we treated them accordingly. We would not have needed any formal method of dealing with them. That is not to say we didn't argue or fight with them but that is not of concern to us here.

As time went on, the population increased dramatically, and with the rise of agriculture, cities were born, where all of a sudden we were thrown together with many thousands of people we did not know. That process has continued until now we have up to twenty million people living in one city. That is an awful lot of people to get to know!

So now we are surrounded by strangers, and we need some way to interact with them to show we are friendly, and not aggressive, so we invent a way of behaving that shows them some regard. Politeness is born. By creating a way of behaving that is always friendly to people, we reduce the chance of conflict, which is highly likely in cities bursting with people!

“What are you looking at!”

“Nothing, I'm sorry.”

“Good!”

If we didn't know how to show people some positive regard (even if it is false) so they don't take offence, can you imagine the misunderstandings and conflict that would be going on! I am polite to you, you are polite to me, I am polite to her, she is polite to me.

“I like your dress it is very nice” (actually I hate it, it's awful). “Oh that dinner was lovely” (it was the worst thing I've ever tasted). And we extend it to friends as well. “Your house is lovely” (who did they get to decorate it, a blind man?).

But we keep on being polite, afraid to offend anyone with our comments, so in a way we lie. We do not offer our true selves, and we cover it up with some clever language and learned behaviour. It is false, but it saves us from trouble! So we dance around each other. I take one step, you take two steps, back step, front step, being careful not to tread on each others toes!

So we have two types of politeness. We have verbal, and we have physical action, but as we have seen, it is merely a social tool which we use to cover our authentic selves. That is not to say that some people really do mean it.

“But I do like it.”

“Come on, you're just being polite.”

“No, really, I do.”

Unfortunately, we have got ourselves in a bit of a tangle with all this politeness stuff because now we don't really know who means it, and who's just acting polite so as not to cause offence! Of course, some people aren't polite at all, and we take offence to this. We blame the mother, and we blame a lack of education, but it's not that they are rude (*lacking civility or good manners*), they just haven't learned the dance steps. They are, unfortunately much closer to displaying their authentic selves than those of us engaged in the dance. When they don't like something or someone they show it, when they are angry they show it, often in public. Those of us engaged in the dance are horrified. We want something done about this lack of courtesy.

“Excuse me young man, could I possibly have a seat, I have a very painful back.”

“Fuck off granddad.”

“Charming! What a rude young man, someone should teach you some manners.”

“Yeah, whatever.”

Many people have been saying that people are getting ruder and less thoughtful than they used to be, but maybe the dance isn't being taught as much anymore. You see, the new dance is a solo affair and it is being encouraged all the time by those in power. We are told that thinking about “me” is good. My money, my things, my life. We are too busy to worry about other people. So what if I cause offence? “Fuck you.” I won't see you again, there are way too many people in the city for that.

And that's just it, isn't it? In the old days, when we lived in small tribal groups we would see people all the time. We couldn't walk around anonymously as we do now. These were people we would see every day, so being rude to them and getting away with it wasn't an option.

It's a shame, but I thought when I started this discussion with you, that we would find out after all, that politeness was in some way inherent in our nature as humans, but I see now that it's all just a cover – a way of showing others in society you are engaged in the same dance they are. We are not like it at all. It is not in my nature to hold a door open for an old lady, but something I have learned to do in order to be accepted by the majority. Unless...

I have observed myself. I understand I am always in relationship with others. I have awareness. I understand I am not an individual but part of the whole. I understand I am as much part of my neighbour as he is of me. I do not need to cover up. I do not need to lie. I am compassionate

towards him. I love him as a brother. Why would I not help him if he needed it? I understand I do not need to learn how to behave from others, just to understand my relationship to all things.

When I understand the connection, we no longer have need for clever social tools. Let me ask you one final question, why would I not help my brother? Why would I be unkind to my brother, or hurt him with my words? After all, he is my brother.

P o l i t i c s

Social relations involving authority or power

•

The profession devoted to governing and to political affairs

I was surprised when I read the primary dictionary definition of politician and found it to be something so innocuous as “*a leader engaged in civil administration*,” so I looked in a different dictionary, and found that the definition of politician was also innocuous. “*A person active in party politics*.” “This can't be right,” I thought, so I looked at another definition. “*A schemer who tries to gain advantage in an organization in sly or underhanded ways*.” Ah ha! That's more like it. So with a better definition to hand, let us begin our discussion.

I don't know about you, but wherever I have worked, there has been a certain amount of “office politics” going on, with people “jockeying for position,” attempting to manipulate and undermine to gain some position or curry favour (*seek favour by fawning or flattery*) with their superiors. People gossip and badmouth others for no other reason than

their own personal ambition. Although it can be destructive in an office, the poison normally only spreads as far as the company walls. The opposite can be said to be happening in the political world. The maliciousness spreads, not only across parties, but across borders too.

Politics has always been said to be a “serious” game, and it needs “serious” players. But all politics seems to be is like any other game where the object is winning, except the players employ more devious tactics and underhand moves than can ever be seen in a game of cards. But the objective is the same. Winning.

The business of politics has nothing to do with ensuring the well-being and happiness of all on the planet, but is actually an end unto itself. Do you follow? What we are saying is that the objective of politics is just politics, where the participants are engaged in a continual tug of war (*any hard struggle between equally matched groups*). Sometimes one team wins, sometimes the other team wins. And they continue to struggle. Day in, day out. Year after year. Decade after decade. Century after century. And what gets done? Politics.

Some of you may be thinking, “what's he talking about? If it hadn't been for politics, the slavery act wouldn't have been repealed, or the capital punishment act, or the immigration act wouldn't have been passed, or the health and safety at work act...” But what I am trying to convey to you is that whether the result is positive or negative for society, it is just politics.

For people who are supposed to be engaged in real life decisions, they seem very removed from it all. They parade around, making powerful speeches, and introducing bills on behalf of their constituents. One day they fight for the little man's working rights, the next they sign a bill allowing companies to fire their employees more easily, because the sponsor of that bill has agreed to support their bill on the environment! Do you see?

Politics is no more than a delicate dance where you get what you want by giving up something else, and agreeing with one man to undermine another etc. there is no end goal.

“You're not being fair, leave us alone,” cry the politicians. “We do our best, it's a very difficult job!” And indeed it is when everything is tied up in the dance. It is a miracle that anything gets done with the amount of backstabbing and political infighting that goes on. But to be fair, things do happen – just very, very slowly.

I'm sure when most people enter politics they do not imagine it will be like this. I'm sure when they register their candidacy, they really do

want to help make people's lives better, but as soon as they are elected, they find out that the real business of politics is much more than just making peoples lives better. It's about developing relationships, flattery, bidding your time, aligning yourself with the right people, and you realise, that to make people's lives better, you should have worked for a charity developing clean water supplies in africa. But then again, you'd be back into office politics.

“Alan, my boy,” says the political old timer, “you've got a lot to learn here. I know you just want to do good, but I've been here a long time, and if you want to get anything done, you have to get to know the right people.”

“I see,” I added nervously.

“See old smithy over there, he came into politics to save the world, but because of the company he keeps, he'll be lucky to save his job, come the next election,” he chuckled. “I used to be just like you, so full of big ideas, so full of anger at the injustice going on in the world, but the longer I was in politics, the more I realised, that if I wanted to change anything, I was going to have to keep my job, do you understand?”

“I think so,” I said, looking a little more confused than maybe I ought to have been.

“Let me put it this way. Hang on to your job first, go along with a few things you don't particularly like and vote for them, after all, it's no skin off your nose, is it? Just an X in the box and you're done, and by helping other people pass their bills you can then call upon them to help you pass your bills,” he added with all the wisdom of a sage.

“So let me get this right. You are saying that even if I think it is unforgivable what the logging companies are doing to the ancient forests, I should support the government bill which gives the loggers even more rights to log ancient forests, and in return they will support a bill that protects some of the trees in a new national park?” I asked.

“You've got it!” he replied with a smile.

“This business is complete lunacy!”

“You're learning my boy.”

So why do we keep a system like this going? Because those in power quite like it, thank you. It allows them to make magnanimous (*noble and generous in spirit*) gestures that make them feel like (a) they are very important, and (b) they are really helping the world, instead of either

making it worse, or just talking. And boy do they love to talk! The thing is, they make it sound good, but most of it is pure waffle.

“Would my right honourable friend agree that by allowing the greenbelt (*a belt of parks or rural land surrounding a town or city*) land to be used for a new superstore, he is allowing the destruction of yet another area of natural beauty that is famed for its wildlife?”

“I would like to thank my right honourable friend for his question and ask him whether he cares more for a few ducks than for the future prosperity of this country and its citizens (much laughter in the house). Can a duck feed a man and his family? Of course it can't. But the new employment that the retail park will bring will be able to feed a thousand men and their families, and I would like to assure my right honourable friend that his ducks will be moved to a new park a few miles up the road, all paid for by the new retail park owners. Is my right honourable friend still concerned, or have I answered the question?”

A sensible human being would say, “but hang on, you haven't answered my real question, which is why yet another piece of unspoilt land is being built on, just so that people can go out and do more shopping,” but the cunning politician knows that it is better to accept a small concession (which after all, is a win) than to accept defeat. Defeat means he may not be elected next time round.

As we said earlier, he is engaged in a dance with complex steps, and he must ensure that he retains his balance! So, rather than going back to his constituents empty-handed, he can at least take something back to them, thereby (temporarily) placating those who were opposed to the development.

Back in his home constituency at the town hall meeting the politician stands up to speak.

“Now quieten down everyone. I am here to report some good news – a veritable success in fact (to which the small crowd applaud). Our valued wildlife, which is currently precariously close to the dangerous m5 motorway is to be given a new sanctuary where they will be safe from harm. A new lake is to be built and new viewing platforms created so we can observe them whilst not disturbing them.”

Suddenly a constituent stands up: “But what about the retail development? Is it still going ahead?”

“I would have thought that you would be pleased about the new wildlife park,” the politician scolds.

“Not if it means more of our green spaces are taken away from us!” the constituent replies.

"I'm sorry, I have run out of time, we can pick this up at the next meeting," says the politician as he beats a hasty retreat away from his little constituency, back to the safety of parliament, where he feels much more at home.

"How did the constituency meeting go?" asks one of his colleagues.

"Well, I would have thought they would have shown a little more gratitude for the concessions I got for them," replies the young politician.

"These people just don't know what's good for them," jokes his colleague, "shall we retire to the bar?"

"Why not? It's been a very stressful day."

Well what can you do, that's politics for you! You win some, you lose some, but as long as you keep your job, you live to fight another battle. And at the end of the day, that's all it is, a job. The people engaged in politics are not more intelligent or better people than us, nor do they know what's best for you or for the country. They just get paid to play a game. Unfortunately, the results of their games played in the political arena affect the rest of us, and the planet as a whole. They only care about winning the game, whatever they say.

We have no need for people who just talk, we need people like you to stand up and take action, not wait for somebody to get a concession for us. Stand up and be counted. It is time to *act* before those in power end up destroying everything that is on this wonderful planet, including us! What do you say? Will you stand?

P o r n o g r a p h y

Creative activity (writing or pictures or films etc.) of no literary or artistic value other than to stimulate sexual desire

If you're a man, you may have looked at pornography at some time in your life (apparently women sometimes look at it too). I'm not going to lie to you and say that I find it disgusting or that I've never looked at it. I have. Most men use pornography as a means to achieve orgasm through masturbation (*manual stimulation of the genital organs of yourself or another for sexual pleasure*), nothing more. They will not become violent rapists, murderers, or devalue women because of it. They will not love their partners or wives any less either. So why do it?

Let's start our discussion with me admitting to you the reader that I have watched pornographic films, looked at still images, surfed for various types of pornography on the internet and even gone to peep shows and lap dancing bars. Does that make me a pervert (*a person whose behaviour deviates from what is acceptable especially in sexual behaviour*)? And while

we're on the subject, I have even been to a prostitute (*a woman who engages in sexual intercourse for money*).

Do I disgust you? Does the very mention of what I have done make you want to put this book down now? If so, why? Is it because you have been told that it is sinful? Is it against everything in your religion, or your morals, or values, or whatever else you like to call it? For me, looking at images of the opposite sex is stimulating. Like most men, I have a high sex drive, although that doesn't mean I want to have sex every moment of the day. I have been celibate now for over one year. That was a personal choice.

So, do I feel ashamed of what I have done, or do I feel guilty? I used to. But I have come to accept that what I did was not wrong, that is purely for others to judge. All it did was draw me further away from love.

Looking at two dimensional images of women showing their vaginas in various poses or showing them having sex in various positions is nothing more than voyeurism (*a perversion in which a person receives sexual gratification from seeing the genitalia of others or witnessing others' sexual behaviour*), although that voyeurism becomes (like all things that act on the pleasure centres of the brain) an addiction. The more you see, the more you want.

We used to have to go into the shop and hide the "top shelf" magazines in amongst economics weekly and a copy of gardeners monthly as we left. Although we were old enough to buy the magazine, we felt like cheeky schoolboys ashamed of what they were doing.

The internet has changed all that. You can anonymously sign up for sites using your credit cards, and not satisfied with seeing naked bodies, or a couple engaged in intercourse, we crave more. We (the brain that is) are bored with these images. It now takes more and more graphic images to enable us to achieve orgasm.

I don't know if you have recently seen what is out there on the net, but you can find images of (mostly) women engaged in graphic sex with animals, videos of women swallowing the sperm of tens of a men at a time, people engaged in "pissing" (urinating on, or in the mouth of someone) and "fisting" (inserting the whole hand into the vagina or anus). People even engage in faeces eating.

Although some of the images are unpleasant, I don't find it shocking that people pay to see these images, what I find amazing is that people actually allow themselves to be filmed!

As the majority of the viewers are men, it makes sense that most of the “models” in the videos are women. So why do women get involved with such things? It isn't a small number either.

All around the world, women are allowing men to piss on them, fist them, perform anal sex on them, stick their penises in every orifice, debase them and brutalise them. Why? Are the women involved held prisoner? Are they off their heads on drugs given to them by these men? Are they drunk? Or are they doing it for money? Or do they simply enjoy the fun of sex? Maybe they are they happy to get involved because they like the excitement?

I know most young men's dream is to star in their very own pornographic video. Young men like to talk about sex a lot, and they like to do it even more. It is like a coming of age. Sex for men is the most natural thing in the world. Just like the bull in the field that tries to “service” every cow, young men would like to “service” every female in the world! When it comes to sex, young males aren't too fussy who they choose. They may fantasise about having sex with an attractive model, but are happy to put up with anything they can get.

Men like sex. Lots of it. It is in their inherent nature to wish to procreate, to spread their genes far and wide. Whichever way you look at it and however you try to control it with morals and family values, it is a natural process that neither you nor I will ever stop, nor would I want to.

But what about young women? They become fertile in their teens, and are ready to procreate. It is only natural for them to want to have sex as well. But women aren't so desperate to have sex with every man they meet. Women are programmed to find the best choice of mate. Someone who is strong enough to look after her and has good genes. These are basic biological facts.

Men and women are programmed for sex. So doesn't it make sense that some women just like lots of sex the way men do, and they like to fantasise about men doing different things with them? And isn't it a natural process to want to act out these fantasies? For some maybe, for others fantasy shall remain in the realm of the mind. So although I do believe that some women are forced to do these things on camera, I believe that there is a large proportion that enjoy the exhibitionism it allows. Extroverts, exhibitionists, sex addicts, and people who just want to try it once for the experience.

I don't think we should demonise the people involved. Whoever they are, they are human beings, and unless coerced with threats of physical

violence or done through desperation due to drug addiction, they have the ability to say no. “No, I don't want to do this.”

Did you know that pornography is still the most popular thing to look at on the internet! More people browse for porn than any other topic!

That reminds me of my time in information technology, when we would monitor the internet usage of employees. I was utterly astounded at (a) the number of people looking at pornographic images and videos, and (b) who the people were that were doing it. People in high positions like managers and senior executives.

I had to laugh. These were people who were putting themselves above all of us. These were people who espoused values and morals. “Ha! Got you!” I thought; and I took great pleasure in informing them that due to company policy (which they probably wrote) they were to cease looking at pornography at work!

A long while later, I started to reflect on this situation, where people who held high office such as politicians or members of the clergy, people who dictated the values and morals of the country, were being exposed for the use of pornography, sex abuse, and involvement in prostitution. People who talked about family values, but did the opposite in real life.

I realised at that time that values (*beliefs of a person or social group in which they have an emotional investment (either for or against something)*) and morals (*motivation based on ideas of right and wrong*) didn't actually mean very much. Here were people who were telling us all how to live our lives, and not following the advice they were giving! These values they were talking about were idealised concepts of how they would like to live, but were too fallible themselves to adhere to them.

Again and again we hear stories in the popular press about how the “mighty have fallen,” and deep down, I guess it gives us some satisfaction to know we aren't evil or bad for doing it too. I have a word of advice for anyone who wants to enforce some idealistic value or moral system on others. Don't. If you want to adhere to something that's fine, but do us all a favour before you stand up and preach – keep it to yourself.

Prostitution

Offering sexual intercourse for pay

On reflection, perhaps paying for sex in a drunken moment whilst out with the lads is worse. I didn't consider this at the time, but performing

the actual sex act with someone you do not care for, have no love for, and who is probably in a deeply troubled state due to alcohol, drug addiction, or physical and emotional abuse makes you think. Why did I want to pay someone for sex?

It wasn't that I couldn't make love to my girlfriend, it was the excitement brought on by alcohol, and the cheers of drunken friends after a night out after work. There was no thought for the feelings of the girl who offered one small part of her body to me for a fleeting moment and £30. No empathy. No love. No compassion. Prostitution cuts through all of those things with a sharp knife. The knife of money. The knife of power and control.

I didn't think I was doing any of those things, I just saw it as a drunken opportunity to have fun. And it was exciting. I had never ever thought of doing anything like this before, but like lots of people, I'm easily led (not that it excuses action). I didn't even enjoy it. I think I was nervous and embarrassed. I certainly didn't feel powerful or dominant. In fact I think it was the other way round. The woman I had sex with was a professional. There was no small talk or messing around.

“Right, £30 quid before you start. No kissing on the mouth. Twenty minutes max!”

This was not how I had imagined it at all. In fact I had no idea of how it would feel. She gave me the condom to put on and I rolled it back to cover my penis. I then inserted it into her vagina and gave a few half-hearted in-out movements. I ejaculated. I put the condom in the bin, got dressed and left. I can't even remember if I said goodbye.

All that trepidation and excitement before the act, and then after ejaculation, nothing but emptiness. No love, no cuddling, no holding, no facing your partner and whispering into their ear or looking into their eyes. Just a physical act and a financial transaction.

As with all potentially addictive behaviour, I went back several times when I was drunk. It seemed a regular thing to do. Except this time I wasn't with my friends.

I started going to lap dancing bars first, ogling naked women dancing on poles. During the course of the evening I would start by giving pole dancers a tip as they were dancing, then progress to the private rooms where they would rub their breasts over me getting me really excited. I would then move on to a brothel, or just pick up someone on the streets and get oral sex, or even full sex in a dark alley somewhere.

The addiction was beginning to take root in my brain. Suddenly, I realised I was actually addicted. I no longer just went out for a drink with

my friends. After they went home or on to a nightclub, I would jump in a cab and go out to the red light areas.

I never did this sober. Whether or not this was a way of mitigating what I was doing or because sex and alcohol together felt doubly good, I will never know. I do know that the brain likes pleasure. As much pleasure as it can get. Mine was no exception. This only lasted six months or so, until I think I either ran out of money or got bored. I think it was the latter.

It was only recently, when I reflected on these events, that I started to consider them from the woman's side.

How did she feel standing on the street corner, waiting to pick up a man, any man who was willing to give her a few pounds to invade her body. To perform an act of love, minus the love. How did she feel when I entered her? Was she disgusted with me? How could she stand my alcohol soaked breath? The stench of alcohol oozing out of my pores, the smell of tobacco covering my clothes, and my heavy body lying on top of hers, fully clothed, save for the zip undone and her skirt lifted up. What must she think of me, and more importantly what must she think of herself? What is going on in her mind? Is it tormented by abuse and drug addiction as I suspect, or is she full of joy and love, and merely enjoys sex?

Although I believed the causes of women to get involved in pornography as varied, and believed that yes, they could be doing it because they enjoyed the thrill of having sex on camera, I could not believe it of the women who worked in the brothels or walked the streets.

Several months later, on my way home from work in the city, I saw the same woman I had sex with; it caught me by complete surprise. I was with a work colleague, and suddenly I was in complete shock. I couldn't speak, I just hoped that this woman wouldn't recognise me. Her clothes looked poor, she was thin, her eyes sunken and tired. Her hair was held in place by a can of hairspray and her lipstick looked casually applied. As I'd hoped, she didn't recognise me.

I felt strange as I passed this woman, feeling myself almost looking down on her! Yet months earlier I had been inside her. I had my erect penis between her legs, and I ejaculated inside her. How could I possibly be judging her now? I didn't want to, but I was. In my mind there was nothing the two of us had in common.

I tried to imagine introducing her to my friends, this bedraggled woman with so many problems, probably addicted to drugs, dressed for quick sex. How could I introduce her? I would feel so much shame that I

even knew someone like this. What would my parents think? What would my friends think, or my colleagues?

But we did have something in common, we shared a bond. She wanted money and I wanted sex. She was prepared to offer me her body for money and I was prepared to pay for it.

It only came to me recently that the only person I was thinking about in that situation, was myself. I didn't care anything for her. All I cared for was what people would think of me. I was happy to pay her for sex at the time, but to get found out would be disastrous. I saw her as no more than a worthless piece of trash. And I had treated her with utter contempt.

They say that prostitution is the oldest profession in the book, but the more I study the people who sell themselves, the more sadness I feel for the people involved. These are people who for one reason or another, from childhood abuse to drug abuse, turn to selling their bodies. Bodies that should be held in love. Bodies that give birth to life.

More often than not, violence accompanies this "profession." Desperate people are often accompanied by violent exploitative men. The two go hand in hand. These women sometimes end up raped and murdered. Not only are these women desperate, and have probably led unhappy lives, now they have someone (a pimp) who wants them to go out to sell their bodies for a major share of the money! How can people do this? How can life get so bad that this is where you end up?

Despised by men and women as the lowest of human beings, but discreetly embraced by men who want to satisfy their sexual urges.

They say that while there are men, there will always be prostitutes, but they also say that not all women are trapped in desperation, but see themselves as the ones wielding the power. The power to open themselves up to men – for a price. These women say they are making a lot of money, that is all, and that no one is exploiting them...

But let's move away from the word exploit and return to the word compassion. How can compassion flourish when the most important act between men and women, the one that is love, has been reduced to a financial transaction? How can we have empathy with others when we use the feminine form for no more than a receptacle for semen? How can there be love without a kiss?

Shhh! It's a secret

As men, we must start to understand ourselves and our sexual urges. We believe ourselves to be civilised, and we have morals and values, but when given the chance, and when nobody's looking, we can't help ourselves.

We secretly buy magazines to masturbate to; we secretly use our credit cards to join sex sites on the internet; we secretly watch dvd's when our wives and girlfriends are out; we secretly pay women for sex, or secretly go to places to watch women gyrate up and down poles.

I think we should all take a vow of celibacy until such time as we understand our own minds and how the sexual urges can be understood. We need to understand that being a human male carries responsibility. We cannot expect to be the most intelligent beings on the planet if we give in to our sexual urges as quickly as a dog or the bull in the field.

Just because you see an attractive woman does *not* mean you have to have sex with her; just because you are thinking about sex does not mean you have to instantly masturbate.

We are hard-wired to have sex, but we need to concentrate on developing our key skills in relation to it. Love, empathy and compassion. Could you ever say you experienced all three when having sex? I will not have sex with another woman unless I feel those things.

I have felt both sides of the sexual experience; the emptiness of sex with a stranger, and the fulfillment of making love to a partner. So men, please stop for a moment before you masturbate to pornography again, or go down to the local brothel, or pick up a woman on the street, and ask yourself one question "Am I compassion, or am I violence?" The answer will dictate your action.

P o w e r

Possession of controlling influence

“The development of power”
My story
by Mr A. Powerful Man



I never knew I was going to be so powerful! I had no plans or designs on power – it just kind of happened. I grew up in what you might call a lower middle class family. My father was a carpenter, and my mother looked after my sister and I, and the house which we owned – well, the bank owned most of it.

We never had a lot of money, but I wouldn't say we were uncomfortable. There was always plenty to eat, and although my parents couldn't afford much, they always made sure I had new shoes and clothes.

I didn't like school that much, but my dad said that if I didn't stick in, then I would always be struggling for money like he was, so I passed my exams and went to university. I studied business and finance for three years, and when I finished my degree, I set my heart on one day owning my own company. But first I had to learn the ropes!

I always liked the building trade, and I got a job in a local construction firm my dad knew, as an assistant in the finance office. I learned as much as I could about the job, stuck in and was always working when the rest of the office staff went home. My boss liked me and said that if I committed myself to the job, I was going to quickly progress through the ranks. I liked the sound of that!

So, in my spare time, I studied more and more, and as each year passed I found myself being promoted higher and higher. I was now running the finance department, and was responsible for a large budget and a small team of people, but as it was just a subsidiary of a larger company I didn't have anywhere else to go. My boss suggested I try to get a job in head office and that he would give me an excellent reference although he'd be sorry to see me go.

After about a year, and several interviews, I got the job. I was now finance manager for the group. I had a multi-million pound budget I controlled, and a large team of people beneath me.

I didn't consider myself a powerful man, I wasn't, I was just doing my job – although I was starting to enjoy the perks that came with a more responsible position. I had a company expense account, car, and business class travel, and I enjoyed going to meet the people who worked for me at the local offices. I liked the way I was always shown respect. I was starting to feel as if I was getting somewhere in life. My dad would be very proud.

As time went on, I started to feel as if I was stagnating; the job wasn't exciting anymore. I decided to leave, and although the company tried to persuade me to stay with offers of more responsibility and more salary, I took a job that was to change my life, although I didn't know it yet. I would still be working in construction, but now I would be a financial director!

I was on the board. I was making decisions that could affect the lives of others. When we needed to cut back, we made people redundant, and when business was booming, we hired.

I was in charge of millions of dollars, and it felt good. I had a large team of people in my finance division, and I liked holding meetings with them in my large office on the top floor. I listened to them with great interest, then I would discuss other strategies with them, but the greatest thing was, I made the ultimate decisions, except when I had to discuss things with the management board and get their approval. But that was ok, I was on top. If only my dad could see me now.

The money was rolling in. I had got married, and we had two beautiful children. We still had the “modest” house we had bought

several years before when I was just a finance manager, but now I thought the time had come when I moved up in the world and showed people how successful I was. The price stretched my budget a little, but it was worth it. A beautiful eighteenth century house in the country, with several acres of land. We bought the girls a pony each and we bought ourselves a couple of black labradors!

It was all beginning to fit into place. The job, the money, the family, the status. I felt pretty good about it all.

As the years rolled on, I began to wonder how far I could go with this company. It was all very well being a finance director, but it wasn't like running the business. For that, you needed to be even higher. By a stroke of good fortune, three months later the managing director handed in his notice, and I eagerly applied for the job. He had to work out a year's contract, but then I was handed the job.

On my first day, I felt like king of the world. One of the board members welcomed me as their new managing director and the small team applauded me. Applause, for me? Why? But I thought no more about it. I just relished the moment. Now at just 50 years old, I was at the top. I had a staff of three thousand beneath me. Imagine that!

My father said to me: "There's an old saying son, with power comes great responsibility."

"I know dad. Do you not think I'm responsible?" I replied. "I have three thousand people working for me, they wouldn't give the job to someone who wasn't responsible!"

But my first taste of real power was just something really trivial. You see, an old friend from university I had always kept in touch with throughout my business career had a son who had just finished at university, and was looking for a job, and he was after a personal favour.

"If there's anything that you could do to help, I'd really appreciate it"

"Sure," I replied, confidently sitting back in my chair. "I'm sure we can find something for the young lad here, I'll make a couple of calls and I'll get back to you."

"Thanks, I really appreciate it!"

"No problem."

So I called someone I knew from one of the subsidiaries. "Hi john. Look, I've got a bright young university graduate that's looking for a job, have you got anything going at the moment?"

"I'll keep my eyes open," he replied.

"Thanks, you'd be doing me a real personal favour."

As I replaced the handset onto the receiver and I sat back for a moment. At that moment I knew I had made it. I could ask for favours and people would try to help me out. I could never have made this happen if I was still a junior assistant back in the finance office. No one would have listened to me, but now, now I can make things happen! People do what I want them to do.

Several months later we had some problems on a large new city development we were attempting to build. There was some opposition to having more skyscrapers built in the area by the environmental lot, and our building permit was taking too much time to come through. It was costing us serious money being delayed. The land had already been purchased, the machinery was in place, and the personnel were being paid. Something needed to be done. So I called up a friend of mine who worked as a city councillor.

“Joe, we’ve got a real problem here. You guys are costing us a lot of money with all these hold ups.”

“I’m sorry,” he replied, “once the environmental lot get on the case, everything comes to a standstill, there’s nothing I can do. I’d like to help, but my hands are tied.”

“But you and the other councillors still decide what goes through and what doesn’t, right?”

“That’s true, but some of the councillors agree with the green lot.”

“Well, if you could ‘use your influence,’ there’d be something in it for you. They listen to you, they respect you, see what you can do to convince them.”

“I’ll see what I can do” he replied, “but I can’t guarantee I can help.”

“Just see what you can do, I won’t forget this.”

Several weeks later, I got a call.

“Hi, it’s joe, it looks like everything is going to come through, but I had to call in a favour from an old friend of mine at the environmental and planning authority, he’s agreed to speak favourably on your behalf.”

“Joe, you’re a great friend. I won’t forget this. Oh, how is the new car?”

“Drives like a dream, drives like a dream,” he replied, and the conversation ended.

How was I, the son of a carpenter able to get this planning permit passed? Because, as I now realised, I had power; I could influence people. This was not just about being at the top in business, this was much more than that. This was pure power. “With power comes great responsibility” I heard my father’s voice echo in my head. And I was being responsible. I

needed to get those apartments finished and sold so my workers and suppliers could get paid. So I did what anyone would, I used my influence. After all, what's the point of having influence if you don't use it?

After that, we had no more problems with building permits. If someone came up against us, we would just use our contacts to lean on them a bit. And if that didn't work, we'd put them on the payroll – as consultants you understand. These were great times. There was plenty of money for everybody, and business was booming. There was nothing that could stop our business expanding wherever we wanted it to. We just made a few calls and got someone to do us a “personal favour” and we were in business. And that's all it was. Business. I didn't think I was doing anything wrong. I needed something done, so I just asked a friend to help me out. After all, that's what friends do.

All was perfect for several years, until a new government came into power, and that's where it all started to go wrong.

Without my knowledge, there had been a government task force set up on corruption in the construction industry. Corrupt? Me? I was an important leader in the business community. I was providing thousands of jobs for my employees and my suppliers. I was creating new homes and offices for thousands of people. How could they charge me with corruption (*lack of integrity or honesty (especially susceptibility to bribery); use of a position of trust for dishonest gain*) I had done nothing wrong. All I was doing, was making sure the shareholders got their dividends on time, and people got paid. I was shocked.

I was sacked from my job, and found myself in court. How could they try me for just doing my job? I was fined several thousand pounds and sentenced to eighteen months in jail as a warning to others who tried to bribe officials. My status was gone. My “friends” deserted me. My family was embarrassed by the whole affair, and had to move house because they couldn't stand the shame I had brought on them.

But I was still in denial. I was angry I had been found guilty of what I thought was all just part of the game once you were in power. I ask you for a “favour” and give you a little bonus for helping me, you ask someone else for a “favour” and so on. But during my time in prison, I started to reflect. First, on how I could become successful and powerful again, but later on how much I had been affected by power.

I realised that power is like a silent poison creeping into our veins, until it has corrupted all that we are. I didn't even realise it was affecting me, and although I came to the conclusion I wanted none of it anymore,

there was a small voice in the back of my mind, reminding me of all the good times we had when we were in power.

But as I became more aware of how it had corrupted me, I began to see that it was an entity on its own, feeding on my desires, and offering solutions on how to fulfil them, manipulating me and manipulating others to get what it wanted (which was what I wanted). I wanted to control, to dominate, to get respect. I realise now it was all in the mind.

Sitting in a small prison cell changes you. As you sit in the same clothes every day, eating slop, and mixing with people who have murdered, beaten or stolen from the elderly, you realise you were missing out on real life. All the boardroom was, was a place to exercise your ego. But it wasn't reality. I wanted to dedicate my life to helping other people, and decided that when I got out, I would go into politics!

The end

I hope you enjoyed the story! As you can see, power is something that people with ambition are always susceptible to. But when we remove the ambition, there is nowhere left for power to accumulate. The man who is content with his life will never seek power, because he is not trying to gain anything. But are we really content? Are we happy with the life we have and all that we are, or do we want more? When we finally become aware that wanting more is just psychological desire, it will fall away, but until that time, we must be vigilant.

I cannot resist telling you one more story I read in a newspaper whilst travelling in asia. It went something like this:

Today, the minister for agriculture was arrested on suspicion of corruption. It appears he was using the government's agricultural program of giving free cows to poor farmers for his own and others benefit. He bought the cows from a business his sister owned and paid her an already inflated price of 300 for each cow. He then got his sister to invoice the government 500 for each cow, pocketed the difference and then gave away the cows to his friends.

Unbelievable, but true!

Watch your mind. Watch where it grasps for power. And never go into politics!

P r i d e

A feeling of self-respect and personal worth

•

Satisfaction with your (or another's) achievements

•

The trait of being spurred on by a dislike of falling below your standards

•

Unreasonable and inordinate self-esteem (personified as one of the deadly sins)

There's an old saying that goes something like “pride comes before a fall,” one that my mother used to quote on regular occasions; but sayings aside, it does seem that the more you love yourself, and value your own achievements, above all others, the more precarious your position becomes.

Imagine, for a moment, that we all have our positions on the steps of pyramids. If we fall off the first step it won't hurt a bit, but the further we climb the narrower the steps become, until finally you have reached the apex of your life; but you are balancing on a small point. It doesn't take a genius to work out that if even a small gust of wind comes, you will fall, and when you hit the “bottom” that is seriously going to hurt!

Well, it's the same with how much you value yourself. If you think you are ok, and life is ok, and something bad happens to you, like losing your job, or the respect of others, well, you haven't lost very much. But if

you think you are the greatest thing on earth, and suddenly find out that actually you're not, or someone pushes you from that position, the resulting fall from grace is enough to send you spiralling into deep depression.

I often wondered if I had an unhealthy love of self, and I even bought a book on narcissism to see if I conformed to their definition. I did! "What? Me, a narcissist? Never!" I thought. I might like looking at myself in the mirror, but that's just to check I don't have jam on my face, or shaving cream in my ear (wasn't it?).

Narcissism

An exceptional interest in and admiration for yourself

So I tried to understand what it was to be a narcissist, just in case! I agreed that perhaps I did sometimes take an "exceptional interest" in myself, but if I didn't, then who would. The book went on to explain that narcissists think they are very important, and asked questions such as: "Do you feel as if you have something very important to say to everyone," or "do you have a special plan for the world," or "do you want to change the world?" At this point I got really scared. I had just started writing my book I thought was important for people to read, but then I wondered if this might all be a projection of my love of self.

So I started to question whether I admired myself for creating this book, and I had to say yes in some way, but only because I had never done anything good for anyone else in my life apart from myself.

I was beginning to regret ever opening the book. The questions went on and on, and I became more and more depressed. I wasn't writing a book to help people understand the world, I was writing a book so I would become famous, and people would want my autograph or want to come and talk to me in the street...

I decided I was becoming slightly deranged, and put the book down, never to reopen it. But it did start to get me thinking about my reasons for doing things. Perhaps this book was just another way of projecting how much better I was than everyone else? I couldn't be sure, so I decided to investigate it further with my mind.

Vanity

1. *Feelings of excessive pride*
2. *The trait of being unduly vain and conceited; false pride*

So if I wasn't a narcissist, perhaps I was just vain (*having an exaggerated sense of self-importance*). Perhaps I really had low self-esteem, and I was trying to overcome it with delusions of grandeur. Perhaps I would just like to be important but knew in my heart of hearts that it would never happen, and I was destined for a life of mediocrity and insignificance.

I started to trawl back through my memories to see if there was any truth in it, and there was to some extent.

For as long as I can remember I wanted to be famous. I pretended I was a pop star in my bedroom, after all, I'd bought all the gear, I just had no clue how to use it! I even recorded a song (which was terrible) in a professional studio. I would look at myself in the mirror singing, and I would go to the karaoke night at the local pub, where (whether due to the state of intoxication of the locals) I would always sound a lot better than them (you know big fish, small pond), and it gave me great feelings of pride to be applauded by them at the end of every song. "You're such a good singer, alan," they would say, until it came time for the karaoke competition and outsiders would sign up.

I hated that they were better than me, I hated that they got more applause. I hated going home empty handed afterwards having come a measly fourteenth place. But when I got home, I would think: "I'm better than them, I'll show them," but I never did.

I never did well at school either, but I always gave the impression I did. I never did well at work, but that was because everyone else was stupid, not me! Couldn't they see how much better I was than them? But at job after job, I got sacked for one reason or other. Perhaps they could see that my own feelings of self-importance never matched up to the standard of work I produced.

But after many years of trying to get a good job, I finally landed an contract in information technology, where I was in charge, and that felt good. I had staff working for me, and I walked around the place like I owned it. I had made it, I was important it was no longer just in my imagination. But I became arrogant, I abused my position and was duly sacked.

I felt terrible, like my whole world had collapsed in on me. I was marched out of the front door, told to hand over my company car keys, my laptop, mobile phone and my corporate credit card. I had to call my

mum to come and get me. Here was I, an important person in the computer industry, sacked. All the people who had tolerated my haughty behaviour just looked on as I was escorted from the building, and I cursed my mum who had told me so many times:

“Be careful alan, pride comes before a fall.”

“I'm all right, I used to say, nothing's going to happen to me.”

I may not have been on the top of the pyramid, but even from where I fell from, it hurt – a lot. Images kept revolving in my mind about how this had happened and how stupid I had been. I wasn't important, I just thought I was.

Vanity shattered

Many years have passed since that unfortunate day, but it was a cycle of self-importance followed by a fall from grace that carried on for many years to come. I won't bore you with the details but let's just say it was the same story as the last section.

So, as I tried to resolve this in my mind recently, I tried to imagine what life would have been like if I had never had these feelings of self-importance. Given that I was quite a bright lad and a quick learner, within a few years I could have landed an important job, the problem was, I wasn't prepared to put the effort into learning the job and paying my dues. I wanted importance now, and when it wasn't forthcoming, my brain helped me invent the importance. The problem was, I was the only person who couldn't see I had created an illusion.

So as I sit down to write this topic, I come to you as a man humbled (*subdued or brought low in condition or status, cause to feel shame; hurt the pride of*) by recognition of his own lack of importance, and that whatever I do or say, has no real importance in the world, only that which I place upon it.

Am I the only one?

But that's enough about me, I want to hear your stories of self-importance! Or am I the only human on this planet whose low self-esteem brought about a state in which “I” became all important, if only to myself? Are there any of you out there that think you are more than you are? Do you believe you are important and that you have some

special gift to share with the world? And if you did have a special gift would you care if anyone saw you whilst you shared it? Do you see the point of the question?

Those of us who like to think we are special, or important in the world, need others to recognise our talents. We need people to applaud, and we need people to say how great we are as it inflates our (already) over inflated egos, and we start to feel really proud of ourselves. "We are so proud of our son's achievements," I think my parents would like to have said, but they never got the chance.

But in my mind, I was already a high achiever, even if the facts didn't quite match up. "You can fool all the people some of the time, but you can't fool all the people all the time" or something like that, my dad used to say. And it was true to some extent.

I spent my life fooling people I was better than I was, probably fuelled by my mother's constant insistence, "but you are great, alan!," and me believing it. But when the time came to prove it, the audience were left disappointed, and I walked off with my tail between my legs.

But would it have been different if I was a high achiever? Would it have made a difference to me if I had come first in the karaoke competition or managed to keep my job? Would I have felt right in saying: "Yes, I am proud of my achievements," or would it have just made me say: "I knew I was the best, I always knew it, I'm great, me!" As I've never been a high achiever I will never know. will I? But I guess the latter.

So how about you? Have you had some time to think about yourself? Have you weighed up your achievements against your own vanity. Do they equal out? Or perhaps like some people who have made great achievements, you just keep quiet, and are only happy that you have managed to do a good job?

The problem with vanity is that it doesn't just exist when people are actually looking, mainly because it exists in your own mind; but that doesn't stop you imagining all the good things that people are saying about you, or will be saying about you, when you get the nobel peace prize, or something equally prestigious. But it's kind of a sad way to live wouldn't you say? Constantly imagining yourself being awarded with prizes or showered with accolades for your (imaginary) great work.

Vanity aside, the problem still exists when the achievements are real. You still court the applause, and the admiration, whether you are a nuclear scientist, sportsman, or businessman. Because it makes you feel good. And your brain likes to feel good. So as you walk up to the podium

to collect your “man of the year” award, the brain rewards you with millions of feel good chemicals, and you look out at the audience and pretend you are just a modest man.

Modesty

Freedom from vanity or conceit

So how do you know if you are modest? Well, I think it would be fair to say that anyone who is trying to scrabble to the top of the pyramid is not modest. They are trying to *be* something, to become something, and they want recognition for it (financial and social); after all, what's the point of trying to reach the top? To save the world?

You see, it doesn't matter if you are trying to do good for the world or just line your own pockets with gold. If you want to be on top, then you must believe that you have a gift, or are in some way superior to other people. You must have faith in yourself, and you must feel important if you are to look and act important. Do you understand?

Do you think the president of any country is a modest man, or does he, like so many of them, believe he has a special purpose in the world “to free the world from tyranny and oppression,” or “to cleanse the world of all evil, oh, and the terrorists.”

You see if you have any position of power you must be important, because the position is “important,” so naturally it rubs off on your ego. And as you are at the top of the pyramid you just have to make one wrong move and down you go!

Of course, all of this climbing and falling is all in your mind. There is no such thing as importance, only self-importance. If we say that the politicians are important men, what we do is give them a label by which they can inflate their own self-importance. If you tell me I am important then I must be!

If there is ever anything important in the world, it is showing kindness to others. The rest is just nonsense, as I found out.

I came to realise that (a) I was not important, and (b) I thought I was important. If I had climbed the pyramid, I would have thought (a) I was important, and (b) I thought I was important. Do you see how insignificant importance is? But we all want it, don't we? We see someone at the top of the pyramid and we think that is going to be me someday; and if we haven't got the talent to climb, we just imagine it in our own minds, but then isn't it all imaginary? All the labels and badges we give

people to make them feel important just seek to divide us as a species even more than we are already.

I know now that “I am” and that is the end of it. I am neither important nor unimportant. I am writing this book, but it is just a few hundred pieces of paper bound together, neither important or unimportant – those are just man-made labels. If I had my way, we would remove the words from the dictionary! Then how would we describe ourselves? Oh, yes. Homo sapiens. The end.

P r i s o n s

A correctional institution where persons are confined while on trial
or for punishment

I have never been to prison, and I never want to go. From everything I have heard they are not sanctuaries of peace. Prisons are places we go when society – the people who have made the laws – find us guilty of something they have expressly forbidden, and believe we should be punished by segregating us from all the “good” people in the country (the people who don't break the law). As with all man-made laws, they can be changed at a whim by the people in power. Ok? So now we've got that straight, let us begin.

You've committed a crime, it's not your first. You've been breaking and entering into properties and stealing goods. Except you got caught – again. Now you're up in front of the magistrate, and the case is being put forward by the prosecution. Burglary and assault.

“...that you were apprehended leaving a property you did not own with goods belonging to the occupants. On being challenged by two police officers you turned violent and lashed out, striking one of the police officer causing him to receive a cut to his face requiring seventeen stitches...”

Of course, you are found guilty, as the evidence is overwhelming.

“I sentence you to three years imprisonment,” says the judge sternly. “Do you have anything to say?”

And off you go. Into the back of a police van, your hands tied behind your back with metal handcuffs. You arrive at prison, hand in your civilian clothing, and are issued with prison clothes. You will now be locked up for three years.

Your only companions have also committed crimes. No one cares why you committed the crime. No one cares a damn about you. You are prisoner 904566 and you will obey. You will do as your told. You will not speak unless spoken to. If you fall out of line, you will be confined to solitary. You are not here to enjoy yourself. You are here to repay your debt to society.

Who will you be when you come out? Will you be a new man? A man who has changed his life forever and wishes to dedicate his life to peace in service of his fellow man? Doubtful!

How about this. You do your time, you meet other people who are “professional” criminals, get a few tips, maybe even do a few drugs when you're inside (seems there's plenty available), develop hate for people in authority, become even more hardened, and as soon as you come out, meet your mates for a few beers down the pub, and start where you left off! Am I getting close?

Prison doesn't work. How can it? You cannot lock up troubled people for 24 hours a day together, they only become more troubled, and more institutionalised. The only thing prison does is take people off the streets so they don't cause any more trouble to the general public, and in the case of murderers and rapists this seems sensible. I wholeheartedly agree that people with problems in their thinking should not be on the streets terrorising others.

For your information, I class anyone who is not compassionate to others as having problems with their thinking. Shocked? Why?

Preceding every action is a thought. “I am going to rob that old lady,” and I do it. But there is a split second before the action where awareness could let compassion in, and you do not carry the act through. So take the robber or the murderer off the streets, the public are happy, they have

“justice,” and the government is pleased, as part of their manifesto was to reduce crime. Everybody's happy. Right? But no one enters into the mind of the person who has been locked up.

Helping people think more compassionately is not the job of the corrections department. Their only job is to contain and control. So you lock the man up for ten years, then you let him out again. How is his thinking? If it hasn't changed, do you not think he will just do the same thing again? Most people in prison are repeat offenders.

The angry prison

I do have empathy with the victims of crime, and I know it is terrible to be on the receiving end of such violence, but don't you think that the only way to help stop violence is to help people think better? So they never again have the thought of hurting other people?

Locking up burly, tattooed, testosterone fuelled, angry men together is a recipe for disaster! It can only create more violence. You cannot meet violence with violence, you must meet violence with compassion. I know that this seems paradoxical, but it is the only way to take the anger out of it.

Spaces such as prisons are full of angry energy. The bars have anger, the barbed wire has anger, the metal doors and locks have anger in them, the prison guards are full of anger. The whole building is in anger, and that's before you put any prisoners in!

Wow, with all of this negative energy, how can you expect to heal people's minds, which is essential if we are to prevent people committing more crime. Please spend a moment before you apply your conditioned thinking to this problem.

We need to open ourselves to major issues like this, not close them off with worthless unhelpful statements like “he did the crime, he should do the time,” or “prison is too good for them,” or “we should string up the lot of them.” We are compassionate human beings, not a lynch mob, and before we hang everyone for stealing, we have to look back at our past, and in some countries to their present.

How many people do you think have been hung, shot, tied to an electric chair, or beheaded over the years for crimes committed against society? I haven't got any figures, but I'd take a guess at “a lot.” These people may have stolen something minor, insulted the king or the ruler, or may have murdered someone. In any case, we (the powerful rulers)

decided that the only thing to do with these people was to kill them. An eye for an eye, as some old book once said. We even summarily shot soldiers in the British Army for cowardice!

Today, each country has its own scale of punishments varying from a public flogging through to having “electricity passed through your body until you are dead.” Sorry, just in case you didn't realise, these are the “good” people who were doing all the killing. The people “lucky” enough to survive the death penalty are locked up in prison for varying terms, normally a couple of months through to life (twenty years plus).

One thing you should know is that locking up prisoners costs an awful lot of money. But don't worry, the taxpayer funds it all. Oh sorry, that's you isn't it?

During people's time in prison, they may do some work, learn a new trade (depending on how long they're in for) or they may be locked up in solitary for long periods at a time. They may experience inhuman cruelty (on the part of guards, and other prisoners), mental torture, physical abuse, and may be sexually attacked or raped (this is the men we're talking about). They may find themselves having to pay for “protection” from other prisoners, and may become involved with drugs.

At the end of their prison term, they will be released back into the community, usually under the watchful eye of their probation officer who will make sure they “reintegrate.” Chances of successful reintegration? You tell me. Conditioned and institutionalised, with no change in thinking, what are their chances? How will they lead a more peaceful and balanced life? Will they continue to bring pain and suffering to the rest of the community?

The way our justice system works is ancient; it doesn't deal with people, it deals with crimes. It is a processing and enforcing system for people who have gone against the laws of the land (even if they are unjust, or breach human rights). No one is an individual. You are just a criminal. You are just a case number.

“So how do we progress?” you ask. “How do we keep people who are dangerous off the streets? We must imprison them. They must pay their debt to society!”

But dangerous people are only dangerous because their mind is in turmoil. If we have to keep people segregated for a period of time, we need to start approaching the process with compassion and understanding.

I am not suggesting we forget the victims of crime, but if we don't help the person who has committed the crime, we will have many more victims, the costs will be enormous, and we will not have progressed.

The first thing you have to know about violent offenders is that they probably didn't come from a stable family home where they were showered with love every day. They are more likely to have come from violent homes themselves, and unable to show love and compassion to others. If they don't get help to work through trauma, it is unlikely that they will become compassionate individuals on their own. Instead, they will continue to be violent, and if exposed to regular prison, will try to assert their authority by guess what? Violence.

Meet violence with compassion

We already lock up too many people. It doesn't help in the long term. We cannot deal with a problem by just locking people up. We need a fresh open-minded view. This is the view you and I will create here.

Crime and the causes of crime, are in a separate topic as is punishment so we will start this creative dialogue where people have already been found guilty of a crime. We have to assume we will still have laws and courts for the foreseeable future, and that some people will still be locked up for the security of the public (we must exclude the mentally ill from this process as they must be treated like anyone else with an illness).

The other people who are usually locked up including fraudsters, and petty criminals, should now not be locked up.

Segregation should only be used when the person's use of violence would cause people to fear for their immediate safety. So that will cut down the number of people we need to look after dramatically. I am not suggesting they get off scot free, but follow this program at a day centre.

What do you think so far? I can feel you getting uncomfortable already.

The reason we believe that most people should be locked up is out of revenge and "justice," not because we fear them, so go with me on this for a moment.

If we have to build somewhere to help people with problems of violence, it needs to be in a place where there is love and compassion, not a prison where the man-made metal bars are as violent as the prisoners

themselves. This should be a place which nurtures the person's mind and body.

Before you start saying “We need to be tougher on crime, not softer,” answer me this. “Has the present prison system stopped people offending? Are people afraid to murder people in case they go to jail?” Given the number of prisoners currently on death row in the usa, I would have to say no. Would you agree?

Instead of grey walls to hurt prisoners and remind them of what they have done, we need soft colours and gentle curves, not harshness and austerity. Think I'm mad yet? The place must be calming and the doors should close softly, not the violent sounds of metal against metal. The food should be vegetarian, to remove the violence of the death of the animal. Instead of prison warders, I see monks! Not preaching religious texts, but as teachers; teachers of meditation, one of the best ways to calm the violent mind.

The still mind knows no violence and is open to compassion and love. The present system encourages people to be violent. It is not a deterrent, it just helps governments get re-elected by citizens afraid of being attacked in their homes.

Perhaps we could teach them martial arts like tai-chi, a chinese system of slow meditative physical exercise designed for relaxation, balance and health. A tai-chi practitioner knows he has the capacity for violence, but knows he will never use it and can help the violent man to understand his violence and transform it into a positive energy. What do you think? I'm just thinking out loud here. Meditation, whether sitting or walking, calms the mind and creates harmony around us. It does so by slowing the brainwaves down. How does it do that? Don't ask me the technical stuff, it just does.

To any prisoner, a question...

Dear prisoner

Imagine you, the violent man, walking with mindfulness (the trait of staying aware of (paying close attention to) your responsibilities), strong of body, calm of mind, filled with compassion for other beings. Dedicated to creating in life, not destroying it.

Who is this man? This man of peace, who comes forward into the light?

You. Free from violence, having transformed it into positive energy.

Who would you prefer to be? The meditator who walks tall and strong through the earth, helping people and being respected for his gentleness and compassion, or the violent criminal, who gets the respect he wants by beating people to a pulp, by murder, and by intimidation? Who is the weaker man here? Please consider it.

Can I help you to transform yourself, can I give you the spark you need to go through to the other side of violence, which is compassion?

One thing I am sure of, is that the authorities, no matter which party is in charge, have no intention of dismantling these grey prisons of violence. In fact they probably intend to build more. They only see the short term solution of locking people up, that is what they think the public want, so that is what they do.

It doesn't matter if this same process has failed continually for hundreds of years. Like all politicians, they try to reform everything, but if the apple is rotten from the core, what is the point of reforming it, it is still the same apple. This needs an internal revolution on the part of everyone to see prison for what it is – a breeding ground for more violence.

Don't wait...

Don't wait for the new meditation centres to be built. Don't wait for the painters to come in and paint your cell in pastels, don't wait for the monks to come in and teach you compassion, these things may never happen. If you are ready to transform your life, I mean really ready, you will have to go it alone. The first thing you will need to do is probably the hardest thing you will ever do, and that is to become soft, and open to new energies – positive ones.

You will have to start by sitting, not talking, and just being quiet. You can also do this whilst walking. It is amazing the anger and violence that dissipates just by being silent. You don't have to try this, it's purely voluntary but if you're going to be there a while anyway, you can see it as a training ground, much like the monks do.

This is no longer a prison to cage you, this is your personal retreat! If the monks can spend ten years in isolation enduring hardship, then I'm sure you can.

No longer are the bars there to keep you in, they are unimportant. You are on a journey to self-awareness, a journey that will take you past

the most dangerous demons in your mind. They will be more dangerous than any man you have ever faced. Do not engage these demons, just watch them go past silently. They will pass and eventually, through meditation, they will disappear.

Forget the walls that close you in, you are imprisoned by your mind. Your thinking is what imprisons you into a life of violence and crime.

It does not matter where you are. Until you transcend that violence, until you free yourself from your own thoughts you will be forever in your own personal prison. Sit a while..

your friend
alan

Oh, and if you are reading this and you work for any corrections centres or government agencies anywhere in the world, please could you help me out by distributing about five million meditation cushions and providing a nice quiet space for “your prisoners” to practice in? The future victims of crime and the prisoners will thank you for it. Oh, and so do I.

P r o g r e s s

Gradual improvement or growth or development

•

The act of moving forward toward a goal

•

Develop in a positive way

•

Move forward, also in the metaphorical sense

What is progress? Well, according to the definition, it is gradual improvement, developing in a positive way or moving forward towards a goal. So let's start our discussion with the last item. If progress could be defined as moving forward towards a goal, what would our goal be as the human race? Is there a goal? Where are we progressing to? Is there an end point?

I don't know about you, but I have never seen any indication of a goal we were trying to reach, although I have to admit that there have been many improvements along the way; and I'm sure there will be many to come.

Apparently, we started off somewhere in africa, with nothing but the skin on our backs, and gradually started to spread out towards asia and europe.

Let's stop for a moment and compare where we are now, with that image of our distant ancestors out looking for food every day in the forest. I think we could agree that we have progressed.

Fellow humans, animals and the planet in general, have paid a terrible price over the years, and some people would undeniably question if our endeavours – however noble they may have seemed at the time – have ultimately been worth it. But for our discussion, there is no point in looking back at the past. We are here. We are in the now. Let us concentrate on today.

Neanderthal man vs. City latte man

It's no competition, is it? Neanderthal man out scraping together some food for himself and his family, wearing clothing made from animal furs and skins vs. modern man out shopping at the latest supermarket, wearing the latest fashion, arriving in style in his car, and going home to his warm comfortable house, where his children are (over) well fed every day, and go to school to be educated. If our ancestors were alive today, they wouldn't believe what has happened to the planet.

Imagine now you have time travelled from about 35,000 years ago, and have arrived in central london. What would you think, what would you see, what would you feel? You'd certainly be shocked at the changes.

Concrete buildings, skyscrapers, cars, and aeroplanes, people in tailored clothes, food available to eat now or cook later. People dressed in suits, all rushing about, going nowhere in a hurry. Imagine the noise and the volume of people. The noise from cars and buses, the music blaring out from fashion clothing shops, people shouting, the smell from the traffic fumes, everybody passing each other in silence.

Now quickly, you are transported back 35,000 years. What do you see? Grass lands, marsh, trees, no rushing, no unnatural noise (no supermarkets either, nor comforts nor convenience and a short life expectancy to top it all).

Now quickly you are transported forward to 2100. (93 years from now) What will you see? What will you smell? Who will be there? What will london look like? I only ask you to imagine the future, because if recent “progress” is anything to go by, it is anyone's guess as to what man will have done to the planet, let alone one city.

According to scientists, planet earth was created about four billion years ago, but it is only since the second world war that things have really

started speeding up. Now nearly everybody in the developed world has a car, can buy their food at supermarkets, has satellite tv, central heating, hot water, education, healthcare, takeaway restaurants, public transportation, and mobile telecommunications. We have everything we could possibly want to make our lives easier, so in 2100 where could progress take us to next? Could it be that we don't have to go out to work anymore, and all the jobs are done by robots, so we can enjoy maximum leisure time? Maybe we will no longer need to use our limbs because everything is automated; or maybe we will not need to grow food anymore because chemists will have been able to make it artificially. Who knows where we will progress to technologically.

We are more healthy than our ancestors, we live longer, we can enjoy the world more because we are no longer having to spend most of our day out gathering berries or hunting animals. We have comfort. Even people with little money still have more than our ancestors did.

In most developed countries, we have a social welfare program, and some form of healthcare system to heal you when you are sick. Compare that with 35,000 years ago, where you would have to just lay down and die when you were sick.

Yes, we have definitely progressed in the physical material sense. We have a lot more than our ancestors ever did, and yes, we do seem to be happier. Our children are better looked after, most countries have a compulsory education system, and most people have some degree of literacy. All in all, we've done pretty well for ourselves, we homo sapiens. We started with nothing and look what we have achieved.

We have discovered how to make several hundred tons of metal fly safely in the sky from one corner of the globe to the other. We can cure all but the most complicated diseases. We can make sure we never go hungry by flying food from one country to another. Yet for all our material progress, we seem to be missing something...

People are still going hungry, people still can't read and write, people are abused and oppressed; people kill and are killed; men beat their wives; women beat their children; we cut down our forests; we pollute our rivers and oceans; we are angry; we are greedy; we are selfish; we are vengeful; we steal; we conquer; we lie; and we cheat.

"Still," you say, "we can't progress in everything at once, things take time."

Except the development of the material world has been astoundingly swift, and the mere human has not yet caught up. Unfortunately, we still share many characteristics with our ancestors, and although we have

progressed slightly by reducing the number of people we could bloodedly slaughter in any given year, it seems that for all our skyscrapers and lunar achievements, we still haven't developed compassion for others. We have a mind capable of great intelligence and the capacity for great tenderness, but we choose to be warlike. I know I have mentioned it a hundred times in this book, but I make no apologies for it.

Throughout time, individuals have got rich whilst other people suffer, all in the name of progress. But who is this progress for? Humanity? The earth?

Let's start by redefining progress, shall we?

As an individual, I may see progress as steadily getting a better job over time, and earning more money. For a company, progress may mean healthier profits every year, lower costs, and a position as market leader. For a country, progress may mean a booming economy, lower crime rates and a healthier working population. But what is the next stage up from a country? Surely it is the earth. What is the goal or objective for the earth? Is there one? And if so, who's goal is it?

It seems to me that we are only concerned with our little piece of the pie. Does an individual think of progress in terms of what is good for the planet as a whole? Of course he doesn't. He is concerned with himself, and perhaps if they are lucky, his family. But individuals have been encouraged by the state to forget about anyone else. Forget about the environment. Forget about the starving and the desperate. Forget about doing the right thing. As long as we say it's legal concentrate on what is important. Making money.

The fact that making money is placed on the priority list of almost everyone of working age, means there is no room for anything else. Making money takes up all of your concentration and energy. Sure, you may donate a few pounds to a few charities every now and then, but you certainly wouldn't leave yourself short, would you? You've got some money, so you give some away. You may even make yourself feel better by volunteering your time at some worthwhile charities, or you may even start a charity of your own like several multi-billion dollar corporations have done. The caring face of capitalism! But with some, I can't help thinking it's much like the land mine manufacturer setting up a hospital offering treatment for land mine victims!

We should not be surprised that individuals want to progress, it is human nature to want to improve, to try to do things better, but most people seem to concentrate on external, material improvements. But

hang on, here's an idea, what about an internal improvement? Internal progress.

Given we're so smart (most intellectual species on the planet and all), it shouldn't be hard for us, it will give us a bit of a challenge. We've already split the atom, we can fly to the moon and we can talk to someone on the other side of the planet who's walking down the street. If we can do all these really, really complicated things (and believe me they *are* complicated), surely we must be able to progress in the being human department?

Come on! It's so easy. All you have to do is develop some compassion and empathy for your fellow humans – you know, the ones you ignore in your busy money making individual pursuit schedule.

Do you not think that real progress in the world can be made by devoting some of that already huge attention to yourselves on something more important than self-interest? I am not talking about working for worthwhile causes etc., as most of these charities have had to be set up because of other humans who have no compassion for others. The only thing I am asking you to do – in fact pleading with you to do – is to try to develop compassion. Remember the definition? *“The humane quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to do something about it.”*

I can tell you, it feels good not to just be thinking about myself anymore. I still wish to progress personally, but not at the expense of others. All I asked myself was: “Is what I am doing affecting others adversely?” And I have made a commitment to never undertake any work that contradicts this.

It doesn't mean you have to stop earning money, after all, it is the only recognised international method of exchange, but if your personal progress is the sum of your bank account, your house, your car, and your possessions, then you truly have missed out; and so have the other people in the world who could benefit from your compassion. After all, all humans are born equal. Naked and helpless. It is the compassion and love of others that helps them grow.

Progress *is* important. It makes us feel as if we are improving. The very word indicates a positive event. War and murder could never be seen as progress. So let us progress on this earth together. Individual by nature, joined by common goal, peace on our planet. Not by protesting for peace, but by developing compassion. It's nice to have nice things, nice houses, cars, etc. but remember whilst there is no peace in man, all that is dear to you (your career, your money, your status, your

possessions) could go up in smoke at the push of one man's finger on a nuclear button.

Think about it. All the progress you have made individually would be worthless. Everything you believed in would have no meaning. Everything would return to dust. All at the push of a button.

That is why real progress can only be made internally. Everything else we progress in, is ultimately nothing. Please go into this with me now. By developing compassion, the progress you make internally will deeply effect others externally. Positively. The world around you will be different. Why? Because you will be different.

Gone will be the selfish, me, me, me, individual, who cares about nothing but making money and having a good time, and in its place will be someone who will make a difference in the world. Just by being compassionate, loving and empathic to all who exist here. It sounds so easy. Do it now.

Stop. Think about what you are doing. What are your goals? Are you only thinking about making money to support "me and my family?" "Does anything I do or say affect others adversely?" If it does, isn't it time to rethink? Remember you may be dead in a few years, but there are hopefully many more generations to come. Let them enjoy this planet too. Let us all progress together. Humans, animals, birds, fish, insects, and the planet itself. Let us progress through compassion, not technology.

P u n i s h m e n t

Impose a penalty on; inflict punishment on

You have been bad – you deserve to be punished
I am going to teach you a lesson



The need to inflict punishment – the quintessential human trait? What do you think? Do you think people who have been “bad” deserve to be punished? If so, how do you decide what is “bad.” Does someone tell you, or do you just “know?”

This is an important topic, and I would like you all to pay careful attention while we explore this. All over the world, at this moment, children are being punished for disobeying their parents, or for doing something their parents disapprove of; and grown men and women are being punished for committing offences against the laws of the country. What I want to know is does punishment work? “Of course it does,” your mind interjects, “if someone has done something wrong, they deserve to be punished, simple as that.”

Punishments range from being hit on the bottom by a shoe from your teacher, hit with a belt, or denied your freedom; to nice ones like being

flogged in public, or having your hands chopped off for such offences as stealing – if possible, punishment should always involve a bit of physical pain.

Since the dawn of civilisation, powerful men have sought to keep everyone under control with the threat of physical violence, using it freely to teach the others that if they did a similar thing, they would get the same, except it has never really worked has it? It doesn't "teach you a lesson," it just hurts you, and creates violence in the minds of those on the receiving end. They vow revenge on the people who did this to them, and to be fair, I can see where they're coming from!

I remember my childhood, which I must stress was fairly normal. My parents cared for me and I think they loved me, but I remember every time I did something that wasn't to their liking, that upset or disappointed them, (say by misbehaving at school), I was smacked on the bottom, which invariably made me cry. I was then sent to my room for the rest of the night.

Even at junior school, I remember getting "the slipper" from the headmaster, which was actually a rather solid trainer. Being made to face the wall was another popular punishment.

Senior school was no better. I was a pretty good student, although I messed around in class in the subjects I wasn't good at (which could have been distracting for other students who wished to learn, and for the teacher).

It is only as I write this, that I realise how many times I was hit, had things thrown at me, and was sent to the headmaster's office, usually to be hit again, this time with a long stick used as a cane. I had board rubbers hurled at me, and was hit on the head numerous times by one american maths teacher who used to pick up our heavy maths books above our heads and rain them down on our skulls! He also used to like hitting us with our own rulers.

Then there was the biology teacher with the huge hands (I still have visions of them). I remember being lifted out of my seat by the hair for talking with the boy next to me, and then he banged our heads together as he let go! "It never did *me* any harm," I hear most of you saying, but we will never really know what effect it had.

The idea of punishment as to help teach you correct behaviour was applied throughout the whole school. If we answered back to anyone in the sixth form (boys aged 17 to 18) or did something like running in the corridor, we were "awarded" a work squad, which involved picking up litter and other tasks *after* school. As I lived over fifteen miles away, this

meant I would miss my bus and have to phone my mum to come and pick me up. She would inevitably chastise me for “getting into trouble” and making her have to come out and get me, and I would be sent to my room when I got home. As if growing up isn't hard enough!

This is a crucial stage in a child's development. This period is not about learning mathematics or being able to repeat historical facts, this is about a child forming its world view, learning to find his or her place in society, learning about themselves and the opposite sex, and what do we get? Physical violence as our teacher!

I really want to enter the minds of those inflicting the punishment, to see what they believe it is actually achieving. People make mistakes, sometimes they do things without thinking, and anyway right and wrong is a man-made concept.

Surely the way forward to develop a compassionate and loving world is to help them understand what it is they have done, and why it has upset us so much; and at the same time look at ourselves to see why we have got upset. It is only by understanding that the reason we punish comes out of a need to control others, to force them to bend to our will, that we can start to evolve our minds.

You may argue that someone who kills or steals should be punished, but that is only a control mechanism. It does not guarantee he won't do it again.

Look how many people have been hung or imprisoned for life. People are still killing others. Just because there is the threat of punishment doesn't make them stop. I knew that by messing about in class I would get the slipper, but I still did it. I knew that my parents would be angry and punish me if I failed my exams, or was “bad” in school, but it didn't stop me failing. People are not put off by the threat of punishment. If they were, there wouldn't be so many people on death row. Humans act first and think later. What do you think? I do not want to convince you, I want you to see it for yourselves.

Several years ago, I purchased a dog. He was a beautiful golden labrador. He had huge eyes, big paws, was *very* fluffy, and I instantly adored him. The thing was, he just wouldn't do as he was told. He utterly refused to sit when I said “sit,” so I smacked him. He ran away when I said “stay,” so I smacked him. He went to the toilet on the carpet when I said “don't,” so I smacked him. He ran out in the road when I said “don't,” so I smacked him.

I didn't think I was being violent. I thought I was doing it to teach the dog something that was in his own best interest! Everybody did it, I wasn't being cruel or so I believed.

If you hadn't noticed, this was a dog that (a) didn't speak the language of humans, and (b) was only five months old, yet I treated him like a human. In fact, this is how many humans treat their children. We don't mean to be violent, but we are frustrated or afraid when humans or animals do not do what we tell them, especially, and here's the crunch, when we believe it is "for their own good."

We are afraid when the puppy runs out in the road in case he is killed. We are afraid that the child will not do well at school and so not have a fulfilling life. When it comes to it, we really do deeply believe – maybe not even at a conscious level – that violence is a good teacher.

"It's not violence," I hear one of you say, "it's just a little tap on the bottom. My parents did it to me, and it didn't do me any harm."

We still believe that punishment – which is violence – is the way to get order and submission. All it does at a deeper level is breed resentment and hate on the part of the child or the animal.

This reminds me of the way humans break horses and other animals to get them to do what they want. At first they are "wild." But through "training" (with a whip), they magically become docile and submissive. Is that what we really want for the human race – submissiveness?

I guess what this comes down to, is our human interpretation of what's right and wrong. Some would say that there are universal laws which go above man's laws, including laws that state it is wrong to kill and steal. But let's go behind the word to find out the truth of it. Let us look to the animal kingdom to view these universal laws.

You see, the animal kingdom does not have our laws and sense of "justice," or long drawn out punishments. Animals regularly fight each other (like humans), but sometimes they manage to kill each other (like humans). They are quite happy to steal food from a neighbour (like humans), and sometimes, they steal someone else's partner (like humans).

You only have to look at groups of wild animals to see how their behaviour and ours is similar. As such, maybe the things we consider to be wrong are expressions of animalistic behaviour, and that is the reason we wish to suppress them. These are traits which run through us all, even in this modern world. We all have the capacity to kill, I have it, and so do you. If we were hungry, we would steal food. If we were in love with someone, we would try to take them away from their current partner.

Is it maybe a small coincidence that these are the things humans have made against the law? We don't want humans to be like that, we want them to be different to the animals. We want to stand and say: "I am homo sapiens, I am human, I am not an animal." But of course we are, and we want to hide it. That is why we need to punish any behaviour that does not conform to the ideal of being human. We want children to conform, we want dogs to conform, we want adults to conform.

Tell me something, how different would the world be if we did not punish people for what they did, given that there are already punishments in place for breaking the law, and people still do what they like? As it stands now, most people are not killers, most people do not steal, and most people are quite orderly in their lives. They go to work, they pay their bills, children study, people pass exams. But what if you removed the threat of punishment, do you think the world would collapse into armageddon? Would everyone be killing everyone? I don't think so. Do you?

People, like animals, generally get on with their lives pretty peacefully, and if you look at the number of people in the world versus the number of conflicts, you will see that, unlike the press reports which are splashed all over our television screens, the inhabitants of the world are just getting on with the daily business of living! When animals are in conflict, kill another, or go against the rest of the herd, a natural process takes place, whereby the animal concerned leaves the herd or the conflict is resolved. Animals, unlike humans have not come up with unusually cruel and inhuman methods of punishment such as exist today.

Fortunately, they don't have the intelligence to be so cruel, although the very act of punishment indicates a lack of intelligence.

So why do it? Why create violence, which is punishment, when it makes no difference to whether a crime is committed. Government departments would argue the case here with their statistics, that "if you didn't have punishment, everybody would go crazy and kill each other," but that's what they want you to believe. If you want the truth, spend some time observing animals in action and tell me we need to punish anybody. Guide and nurture maybe, but punish? Never.

Q

Q u e s t i o n s

Uncertainty about the truth or factuality of existence of something

•

A sentence of inquiry that asks for a reply

Don't question me, just do as I say!



How many of us heard that statement when we were growing up? I certainly did on countless occasions. Parents see it as their duty to pass information to their children, and for that information to be taken as the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Parents and teachers do not expect to be questioned by children. “Children should be seen and not heard” was a popular phrase from victorian times. You would think we'd have moved on by now from that antiquated approach, but we haven't.

Adults are the fountain of knowledge and experience (as they see it), and by being that bit older, have earned the divine right to always be right. Children being children, accept what their parent or teacher is telling them – whether they actually believe it or whether they just fear to question them – in case they are shouted at or punished. But as we all know, adults can be wrong! Amazing, isn't it?

I wouldn't have believed it until I became a fully fledged adult (at the age of 38), and realised I didn't know anything at all. I was a beginner at this game called life. I had so many questions, and so few answers, and the more time I spent with my ageing parents, the more I realised that, actually, they were beginners too, and they were in their seventies! Why then did they stop me asking questions when I was young?

“Why is the sky blue, dad?”

“It just is, son.”

This is how this book came about.

I didn't plan to write a book, I just started to inquire into everything, and I realised that not only did I not have the answers, neither did anyone else. I read book upon book, seeking an answer, and I realised that actually what was missing was the right questions. The main question in my mind was, are there some things that are above questioning, some things which are absolute truths? I pondered this for a long time.

Stop for a moment and mull this over in your own mind. What could be taken as unquestionable? What is fact?

“On reflection,” I thought, “I know, the earth is round. Scientists have proved it, I have seen the pictures from space, and the only reason people thought it was flat, is that they had no way of going up into the atmosphere,” but then I stopped. How many scientific discoveries have been made and then a century or two later, utterly disproved? Could the earth being round be disproved by some scientist who asked the question another way? It has happened in the past, and it could happen again.

Obviously there are simple things which help us live our life more safely, like sticking to driving on one side of the road. You can question it all you like, but the fact remains that it is a mere safety device to stop us all from crashing in to each other! So although questions are vital, sometimes we have to accept things are the way they are for a reason, or do we? Should we question everything in the world or just the important things? But then again, who decides what is important? Maybe if you question everything you will eventually go mad. Be on the safe side, save your sanity, don't ask anything!

Children are great questioners.

“Mum? Mum? MUM! Why is the...”

“Because I say it is, all right? Now leave me alone!”

As adults, we may find children's questions cute or even endearing, but we don't really take them seriously, do we? I remember watching a tv program on the bbc, where some schoolchildren were interviewing the

prime minister of Britain. They were asking him serious questions, and although he was answering them, there was a certain dismissiveness of the children. It was almost as if he felt at ease answering questions on the war in the middle east, questions that only days earlier were being asked by a “serious” adult journalist. He certainly seemed to be less worried about the interview because it was with children. Condescending, was one thought I had when I watched it, and I felt myself getting angry about the whole thing!

Why do adults palm off (*sell as genuine, sell with the intention to deceive*) children with disinterest or show at the very most, a feigned interest in what they are asking? Is this unfair? Do adults (*a fully developed person from maturity onward*) treat young questioners seriously? Are the questions children ask, naive and stupid, or are we too busy just living life to be bothered with any more questions? We're tired. We work hard, we have to provide, pay the mortgage, pay the bills, buy the children's clothes. That's real life, not asking silly questions. When they grow up, they'll see. And indeed they do, as most children pass into adulthood having passed or failed their exams, ready to ask the ultimate questions...

“How much do I get a week?” “What are the hours?” And so the questions end, and real life begins. Forty five years of work ahead.

The time for frivolity is over. You must earn a living. You must go to work every day to pay your bills, and eventually you will have children, and you have to support them. Pretty soon, the inquisitiveness you had as a youngster is snuffed out by the need to earn money. Look how far asking those silly questions got you. You soon forget that you ever had an inquiring mind. You learn that acceptance is the only way forward. Especially if you want a simple life.

The inquiring mind searching for truth

As I have found out in recent years, questions cause pain – by questioning yourself, and all the world around you. Why am I like this, why do I behave like that? Why are people so angry? Why does everyone fight each other? Why do we destroy so much? Why does no one question anything!

If you are anything like me, once you open your mind, and starting asking difficult questions, you will find you can't stop. I question

everything! Not out loud all the time of course, otherwise I would drive everybody mad; but it is driving me mad, asking difficult questions to which there seem to be no answers. Such as, why am I bothering to ask all these difficult questions when no one else seems to care? What is the point of trying to help the world when everyone else seems quite happy and don't want to be helped? Why am I a vegetarian, when all I get is rude comments and people telling me the same thing over and over? "Man is a meat eater, he has always been a meat eater, and always will be a meat eater." Why am I putting myself through this, when I could have such a simple life?

Even as I write this now I am questioning myself. I am questioning my motives for doing this. I am questioning myself whether I will be happy when it is finished – and indeed what will I do? You see, although I am committed to world peace, compassion, and love for all creatures on the planet, I wonder how committed I really am. Let me tell you a short story.

I can't remember if I was much of a questioner when I was young, or throughout my schooling, but as I got older, and started to work, I did start to question more. Not questions like "what is the nature of reality?" but rather more simple questions like "why do we have to do it this way, isn't there a better way we can do it?" more often than not, directed at my boss. This caused great conflict in the work place for me, as questioning your "superior's" decisions isn't recommended if you want to have a successful career. So I questioned the way we were doing things more quietly, but that just led to more friction, because I would go ahead and do things a different way. "Troublemaker" was the word on the lips of most of my managers.

"Troublemaker!" I couldn't believe it, all I wanted to do was help improve things. But you see they didn't want me to question things, or help to improve things, because these were their ideas I was challenging. They didn't want me to question them, because that may prove them wrong, even though that was the last thing I wanted to do. I could see a better way, so I did it. This inevitably got me fired from more jobs than I care to mention.

I found that the only way for me to work was independently as an information technology consultant where I could question to my heart's content and people would pay me to do it! At last I had found an area where I could use my inquiring mind and not have it crushed under the weight of conformity and acceptance. Admittedly it was in business, and

not securing world peace, but that was what I knew about, and back then, I wasn't interested in world peace; just plenty of money at the end of the week, so I could enjoy the things I liked doing.

I suppose that questioning the nature of life was a natural extension to my years of questioning in computing.

You may find that strange to hear, but as soon as I left my job I went travelling to australia (two days later). Nothing had changed in my mind, but now there were no managers to question, no systems to question, there were only people and life – so question I did! Why are people like this, why is nature like that? And here I am writing it all down for you eight years later. Still questioning.

So what have I learned? Have all my questions been answered? No. But the main thing is, I am still interested enough to be inquisitive. But it's becoming more difficult for me now, as the more I question, the more upset I get at other peoples thoughtless actions. This time it's not about the change to a procedure or a work flow document, this time it's about peoples lives, peoples hopes, dreams and disappointments. This time it is about defenceless children and brutal parents.

Suddenly my inquisitiveness has gone too far. This time I have questioned too much. Maybe with hindsight I should have just left it, it would have been a lot easier! Do you follow what I'm saying? Years before I had questioned interesting, but ultimately insignificant topics and events, but now I am questioning our very existence; and it hurts. It hurts because now I care. Now I am stuck, to be blunt with you. I am stuck because I can't get out of feeling this way – this need to interrogate life, to seek truth.

I am not religious, and I am not trying to get to heaven or nirvana, I am just trying to understand why we, as the most intelligent species on the planet, continue on a minute-by-minute basis, to destroy, not only each other, but the planet we share. Why we become addicted to pleasure, and why we seek this entity called god above all else in the world?

I have posed a thousand questions to myself, and I have posed a thousand questions to you, but in the end, do either of us care enough to answer them?

I ask myself what it would take to make me go back to my old life; my comfortable flat, my nice four wheel drive jeep, my girlfriends with nice make-up and jewellery, my well paid exciting job, my evenings out at pubs and restaurants (not worrying about whether they have vegetarian options), nice holidays, and fun times? I have to be honest with you,

sometimes I don't think it would take very much. Not because of a lack of commitment to peace and compassion, but because I wonder why I should care!

What I mean is, why bother putting yourself through all of these changes, if no one else gives a damn. They are busy just enjoying their lives, earning money, they don't look like they have a care in the world. "These people may look happy, but deep down they are deeply unhappy," say the spiritual lot. Yeah? Well maybe they *are* superficially happy, but as long as that superficial happiness lasts about seventy years, they'll have a pretty good time.

On the other hand, I wonder what the world would be like if we all could live happily together?

I come from a stable, wealthy country, so whether people are killing each other in wars or not doesn't really concern me. I come from a wealthy southern town where work is plentiful and the pay excellent. By achieving social equality for all, and removing poverty across the "third world" what would that mean to me? What benefit would that bring me? If all the animals that are killed and eaten are no longer killed and eaten, what difference does it make to me? None. I am already a vegetarian. Maybe it would boost my ego and make me feel good about having done something "worthwhile" and "positive" for the world, but my ego is only good for another forty years or so. Then, like me, it will disappear.

Can anyone tell me if there is any benefit in writing this book? Will anyone read it? Is this just my vanity at wanting to achieve fame by getting a book published. Do I just want to impress people and have people say "Oh look, that's alan macmillan orr, he wrote that book; you know, the one that helped people change and ultimately saved the world!"

Maybe I want to impress you with my range of knowledge about diverse subjects. Maybe I really do care. But how will you know? You see the dilemma we put ourselves in when we start to ask questions?

So whatever my ambivalent feelings are towards the path I have chosen, whether I want to care, or choose not to give a damn, the fact remains that I have questioned; and by that very fact, I have closed off the path I came from. There is no going back. Once the mind starts to open, and becomes an inquiring mind, life can never be the same for you again. Sure, you may irritate a few people, you may anger others, and you may wish you had never bothered to ask, but that is one beautiful thing about being human, the ability to question "why?" "Why am I here? Who am I, Where are we?"

Whilst we continue to inquire we shall progress, no matter how slowly, and things will improve. People will become more compassionate towards all creatures. People will show more love to each other. People will empathise with one another.

Never stop questioning. No matter how many people tell you the “answer,” there is no one answer.

But I think this whole divide between child and adult needs to be redrawn, for I know many more intelligent children than I do adults! Innocence and naivety one might call it, but the more we stop children inquiring about everything, the more adults we will have who just accept that things are as they are.

Children are only legally children between zero and seventeen (in most countries), but on their eighteenth birthday, they become an adult. They have responsibilities. They can drink, smoke, vote, go to war, get married. Now they are an adult, people will listen to them. Yet just the day before, they were a child that everyone ignored. “Dad...why does...?”

Let your children ask questions, however many they want, do not just palm them off. They are inquiring into life, do not shut them out just because you are tired, and have had to work hard. While you're at it, maybe ask a few questions yourselves.

Never stop questioning. Ever

R

R e c y c l i n g

The act of processing used or abandoned materials for use in
creating new products

Recycling has become all the rage in some parts now. Some countries and regions still don't do it, but that will change soon, they say. People are becoming more responsible, they say.

“Oh yes, of course I recycle. Glass, plastics and cans together in the black box, grass and vegetables in the green bin, newspapers and cardboard in the black bin with a green lid.”

Some councils are really getting on the ball with recycling now. Some places will even fine you if you don't recycle. We all look for the recycle logo on the products, and we feel good when we put it in the right bin.

Of course we should feel good, we *are* actually doing something right, and just in time, I might add. It took a government awareness scheme to get people to wake up to recycling but eventually – in this country at least – we are getting there and I'm sure other countries are too...

Sorry to interrupt myself, but getting where exactly? We are all told that we are recycling a lot and that we need to recycle more, but how much is enough? Is everything I put out to be recycled, actually recycled? How much of what goes into my special bins turns into something else? I don't want to spoil the party, but could this whole recycling thing be yet another smokescreen to justify global consumerism on a massive scale?

Packaging

Material used to make packages

Let us start our discussion today by examining the causes of the need to recycle. One word: Packaging. Well, it can't be anything else really can it? Of course, there are other things like electrical goods, metal etc. but packaging is the main culprit. Plastic, paper, cardboard, glass, polystyrene – all covering the product we are so desperate to get our hands on. We greedily tear away at the packaging to reveal the prized item we have just bought, and toss aside the tree that was cut down for us.

There are companies working diligently, the whole world over, trying to make a more environmentally friendly packaging solution which will see us through another twenty years or so of consumerism. The scary thing is that we have only been on a mad buying spree since the early eighties, and we show no sign of slowing down; so if we're already starting to worry about the amount of packaging we are using, and where we are going to get the next lot from, we may be in trouble.

Businesses need to keep selling us stuff to stay afloat, pay their bills and make a little profit to reinvest in new products etc. so in order for them to keep going, we have to buy stuff. They don't want us to get an environmental conscience. If we don't buy their products, some poor man in indonesia or ipswich will lose their job.

This will have the knock on effect of him having to claim social security, which means the tax payers will have to fork out more money. He will start to lose his self-esteem, and he may become depressed and start drinking, which will mean he has no money for food. This may cause him to become angry and beat up his wife, which will leave her bandaged in hospital at the cost of the taxpayer. He will then end up in the police station and then the magistrate's court, where it takes up people's valuable time to try him on charges of assault. He is found guilty and sentenced to six months imprisonment at the expense of the taxpayer, whereby on release he finds that his home has been repossessed,

and his wife has moved in with another man. On hearing this, he flies into a jealous rage, drinks half a bottle of whisky grabs a knife from the kitchen, and sets about finding his wife and this man. He tracks them down and confronts the man whom he promptly stabs, leaving him fatally wounded. At the trial he blames the general public for not buying electronics from the company he worked for, and says that the closure of the firm sent him into a spiral of events that eventually led him here. He was sentenced to life imprisonment at the expense of the taxpayer.

What a sorry state of affairs. The only person who seemed to constantly be picking up the bill here was the poor taxpayer, who you will remember, is the consumer as well. If the consumer had concentrated on being a consumer instead of interfering in politics (the environment) then he would not have been called upon as a taxpayer!

Taxpayers should stick to being taxpayers and let the government sort out the tricky stuff, whilst the consumer should concentrate on buying stuff. It's that simple. The government will let you know if it needs your input on anything.

As a consumer, you could be held responsible for the man who killed his love rival and were lucky not to be put on trial as an accessory. Let that be a lesson to you. The world's foremost experts in environmental packaging are on the case (no pun intended), and will have worked out how to make packaging out of thin air very soon. Meanwhile don't be alarmed. Keep buying. Lots of love, your government.



Fantastic. It's so nice I don't have to worry about anything. In fact, as a consumer, I don't. I won't stop buying for anybody. You gave me the green light to buy, so you worry about the environmental repercussions. I wanted a tv. I bought a tv. I don't need the packaging, so I throw it away. Big deal.

Except it is a big deal. To make cardboard requires wood, same as paper, and you know where wood comes from. That's it. Trees. Now, I'm no tree hugging environmentalist, but I can see that there's a problem. Trees are vital for the survival of this planet, and we keep cutting them down. No more trees. No more planet. Simple.

So would I trade all my packaging for a more sustainable environment? Ha! Don't make me laugh! That's what recycling was brought in for. To keep the world running at the unsustainable pace it's running at, and try to keep up by using packaging again.

Sorry, I've just had a crazy idea, why not use less packaging, by buying less stuff, or in fact, if you want something so badly, go and pick it up from the factory with no packaging. Would you? Of course not.

Most stuff needs packaging because it has been container freighted from a factory on the other side of the world to "save money." If you fancy going to china to pick up your tv, then maybe you could do without packaging, but hang on, you'd have to put it on the plane, and they wouldn't let you on without ample packaging. So back to square one!

We need to package products to make sure they don't break before they're delivered, because if they break, you'll want a refund or replacement, and that costs money. Too many refunds and the company will go under, and you saw what happened to the man who lost his job in the previous paragraph. Surely you don't want that on your conscience, do you?

It's a tough question, this one of packaging, although it seems so easy. Buy less, and you won't need so much packaging. But our world now relies on people buying stuff, that being the reason we are all so comfortable here in the west. We sell a lot of stuff and we make a lot of money. That lot of money gives us and our employees a nice life, and the tax dollars go back into the community to help urban regeneration projects, education and health programs.

If we stopped buying stuff, the world would be a much darker place. Parks wouldn't be built, new highways wouldn't be created, civil engineering projects would be put on hold, there would be no more aid for the third world, people would starve in the poorest countries. People wouldn't be able to go on holiday anymore.

What do you think? Do you think the world as we know it is dependent on consumers buying stuff, and is therefore also dependent on packaging to put all the stuff in? Governments also buy stuff, but where do they get their money from? That's right, the good old consumer. Oh, that's you and me by the way. So I guess that gives us a lot of say in the matter if we want to ensure that the whole world isn't reduced to recycled cardboard and paper. You may be able to recycle it but you can't turn it into a tree again! Now that would be a cool magic trick. Unfortunately, once the tree has been cut, it cannot ever be reformed.

There are two ways we can look at this. One is to stop buying so much stuff, which would reduce the amount of packaging, and the other is to invest in a more sustainable form of packaging. Trials of different products have been looked at but nothing has actually been proposed to

fully stop trees being used for packaging. Maybe you have an idea. Maybe you can invent something. Maybe you also know why people need so much stuff in the first place. But that's another topic!

Recyclable products are a good thing. It is a positive step. We need to encourage all of our neighbouring countries to recycle too, if they don't already, but we also need to identify the biggest culprits in packaging – those products that are used by the most number of people and have the potential to become landfill and litter.

Although electronic goods do use large cardboard packets, we tend to only buy a new tv every five or six years I would guess, whereas we may drink two or three bottles of soft drinks a day, maybe even more in summer. What happens to them? What material are they made from? Are they recyclable?

Plastics

Generic name for certain synthetic or semi synthetic materials that can be moulded or extruded into objects or films or filaments or used for making e.g. coatings and adhesives

Plastic was a great invention wasn't it? I mean that in all sincerity. Derived from oil, it is durable, flexible, doesn't rust and is strong, but lightweight. A truly ingenious invention. You name it, and it's made from plastic. Bottles, plates, bags, cups, toilet seats, mobile phones. There are numerous industrial applications. Plastic has been around for many years and is here to stay.

It gets a bad name from the number of plastic items that wash up on the world's beaches, but that isn't the plastics fault. It was built to last, and last it does. As usual, the problem arises when humans get involved. Humans are the ones responsible for the bottles and plastic bags on the beaches, and in fact all over the world, but it's nice to blame an inanimate object.

Although plastic bottles are a scourge everywhere, I decided to look at the life cycle of some plastic products to see whether the resulting environmental pollution was in fact warranted. I decided to pick a soft drink as my example.

Water, additives, labour, electricity are needed to make the soft drink. The drink is bottled in plastic and distributed using labour, fuel, and electricity. It is then stored using electricity and labour before being distributed to retailers, who in turn store it in a fridge, using electricity and labour to stock up the fridge. The thirsty customer comes in, hands

over his money and opens the drink. It takes less than a minute before he finishes it and tosses it into the bin (or not, as the case may be) resulting in environmental pollution. Now someone has to think about what to do with the bottle. Someone has to empty the bin, sort the rubbish, and get it to a recycling plant where it will be turned into a ????

I don't know if it's just me, but can anyone else see that this is a complete waste of time? Wouldn't it be better to cut the whole process out and not make the soft drink in the first place? These drinks are not beneficial to the system, so why make them?

"Because they taste good," say you, "who are you to tell us what we should or shouldn't drink?"

And you'd be right of course, but if you stop and think for a moment. I mean really stop and think for a moment. What are the positive outcomes of drinking a cola drink? Refreshment? Try water or juice! The artificial flavour is what we love. The same as all the other processed foods we buy on the street, whose packaging, incidentally also usually contain plastics, and will also not biodegrade. Why is it that the food and drink we buy which is not good for our system, is also not good for the environment? Maybe there's the link we need right there!

The idea that we bottle water is also a little crazy as well, although people would say they have a right to have bottled water. You see, whatever reason I give for not doing something, you will always have a counter argument ready! Why do you think that is? What are you protecting – the soft drinks industry? Or maybe it is your brain addicted to artificial sweeteners and flavourings doing its best to hang on to the stuff it loves.

People talk about being addicted to alcohol, but these fizzy soft drinks are much worse. They contain so many unnatural ingredients yet we love them. We crave them. Tap water! No thanks, I'll have a sparkling drink. Tap water isn't cool, but natural spring water is. The only problem is, it may be "good" for you, but it's still in a plastic bottle, and someone's got to do something with it after you've finished it. Just because you put it in a recycling bin doesn't excuse you from your responsibilities.

Imagine how many plastic containers you would have in your house if you had to keep all the plastic bottles you have used over your life? From drinks to multi-surface spray. Think how much plastic you have accumulated that someone else has to get rid of!

I noticed how much I was using, and I started to use a simple measure. If the container was a plastic single use type I just wouldn't buy the product. That included confectionery, soft drinks, or bottled water.

The same applied to packaging around fast food. I just stopped eating it. I just stopped going to takeaway restaurants. If I couldn't eat it on the premises I just wouldn't eat it. I extended this vow (*Make a vow; promise*) to all paper and polystyrene takeaway food and drink products. The net result is that I am much healthier (and wealthier)!

No longer do I drink or eat products that are pre-packaged and pre-processed. I extended this vow to supermarket food as well, which meant that if I didn't cook it from the raw ingredients (which were sometimes packaged in plastic) I didn't buy it. Net result. I am eating healthier food as well. Although (due to travelling in many parts of the world at the moment) I am finding it very hard to achieve this, but I will keep going with it.

Can you start to see the link forming between packaging, consumer waste and health?

Anything that is made in a factory never has the same love as something made at home. The home product has none of the packaging, and also has none of the industrial ingredients, but contains a lot of love. Home made anything. Toys. Food. Drinks. Clothes. Cards.

Made-at-home products don't tend to need industrial strength packaging, because they don't have to travel far to their destination.

In our reliance on companies to provide us with everything we need and want, we have started to lose traditional skills and creativity. Things that not only shouldn't be lost, but should be expanded upon (more in other chapters). Handing over control to someone else isn't progress, it's just a form of laziness. It's not through lack of ability either. Man has proved again and again that he is a species that can turn his hand to any task, but machine-made isn't the same as hand-made.

I am not suggesting you give up buying products from companies and make everything yourself, but I think that a return to individual products as opposed to mass market products will be a definite improvement. There is money to be made in creating products with love that are in tune with the natural environment, I assure you. People are always prepared to pay more for products that are hand-made as opposed to machine-made. You can control the packaging. You can be environmentally aware of the effect your product will have on the environment (if any). Think about it. Now is a great time to start thinking, not about mass production, but about individual hand crafted products.

There is real beauty in the workmanship of the hand and only dull conformity in the mass produced

This is one way we can reduce the impact humans are having on the earth, whilst still maintaining a decent income, and being more individually creative. And perhaps at last, we will stop using products that are harmful to our health, the environment; and products that are so global, they alter the eating and drinking habits of entire nations, through cleverly manipulated marketing campaigns.

Ultimately you will make up your own mind – that's not for me to influence. But think carefully about what we have talked about here, and monitor your own use of packaged products and note what benefit each of them have on the system as a whole. If it doesn't benefit us or the planet then stop using it. By benefit, I don't mean satisfy a craving or addiction!

The less packaged products we all use, the more the world will start to move into a more peaceful phase. Home grown (or local), home cooked products have love. You don't need to tell the carrots you love them; it's all built in!

Machines, and that includes hens, locked up and forced to lay eggs, or dairy cows who have pumps attached to their udders for hours on end, do not love what they do. Their work is forced labour and as such it makes sense that there will be little positive energy in the output.

Buying unpackaged products seems to be the way forward. You can't make processed foods if you've got nothing to package them in! You can't transport goods tens of thousands of kilometres if you've got nothing to protect them with. It means that products start to move back to local producers where packaging is minimal, and only to avoid breakages.

This may herald a new era of individual products where local (and regional) people can minimize the environmental impact, whilst still offering exciting and new products for the consumer. This is something I will be starting right away. Just because it's local, doesn't mean it has to be boring! Unlock your creativity.

Unpackage your life!

R e l a t i o n s h i p s

A relation between people; ('relationship' is often used where 'relation' would serve, as in 'the relationship between inflation and unemployment', but the preferred usage of 'relationship' is for human relations or states of relatedness)

•

A state of connectedness between people (especially an emotional connection)

•

A state involving mutual dealings between people or parties or countries

•

(anthropology) Relatedness or connection by blood or marriage or adoption

We all hear talk about relationships all the time, we may even be in one; and if we are having trouble with our “relationship,” we can always go and see a counsellor or buy a self-help book. The dictionary defines relationship in several ways but all the definitions talk about relationship being between humans. “A state of connectedness” they write; but in this topic I would like to explore this more deeply with you. The relationship I would like to begin with on our journey has nothing to do with humans per se, but affects us all in the most profound way, without us even realising it.

The sun, the moon and the earth

We have all heard the term “lunatic” being bandied about for someone of “unsound mind” who needs constant supervision, but the term comes from “luna” (latin for moon) and originally indicated someone insane, who was believed to be affected by the phases of the moon. But after numerous scientific experiments, they have found no evidence that the moon causes this effect. But dogs howl at the full moon and people often report strange goings on, so maybe there is something in it, but we mustn't speculate!

What we must examine is the relationship we are in with the universe, but let us first look at the relationship between the planets in our solar system.

All of us have learnt that the earth is the third planet from the sun, and moves around it every 365 days (the length of our calendar year), and the moon moves around the earth every 28 days or so. The earth also spins on its own axis (23.5 degree tilt) and makes a full rotation once every 24 hours (the length of our earth day). When we are facing the sun it is light and when we are facing away from the sun it is dark! With me so far?

We also have eight other planets in our solar system. Mercury (the closest to the sun), jupiter, venus, saturn, uranus, mars, neptune, and pluto (the furthest from the sun, taking many years to move around it to make one complete rotation), and all of them quietly obey the laws of nature, without giving a second thought to “am I on the correct path?” or “should I speed up or slow down.” They just sit in their assigned place, held on to by gravity, that strange and wonderful force that stops us all from flying around.

And day after day, year after year, century after century, millennia after millennia the relationships stay intact (sorry about the science lesson).

Our sun, the bringer of light and life to our planet emits a solar wind which contains plasma from the sun, and we are protected from the harmful particles by the magnetosphere (*The magnetic field of a planet; the volume around the planet in which charged particles are subject more to the planet's magnetic field than to the solar magnetic field*), and we can see these particles colliding with the earth nearest the poles, the so called “aurora borealis,” or northern lights (and the corresponding southern polar lights), which gives an eerie green or red shimmer to the sky, like curtains blowing in the wind, looking almost supernatural or like a special effect from a film.

So we could say that our planet's magnetic fields are in a relationship with the solar wind. Do you agree? Ok, so let's move on.....

The menstrual cycle

The time of the month, a period, her monthlies; there are many expressions for a woman's menstrual cycle (*a recurring cycle (beginning at menarche and ending at menopause) in which the endometrial lining of the uterus prepares for pregnancy; if pregnancy does not occur the lining is shed at menstruation*), and it is marked by mood changes, tension, stomach cramps, cravings for certain foods etc.

Some women have an easy time of it, but in my experience many do not; and it is usually the men in the physical relationship that suffer (sorry ladies, I know you suffer more!). You see, men can't understand why someone who was normal one minute, is crying the next, or angry, or complaining of a stomach ache – it doesn't happen to us. So we say, “jeez, why are you crying?” or “why are you so moody!” Men! We don't understand anything do we?

But strangely (or naturally), the woman's menstrual cycle is almost exactly the same as the cycle of the moon. We could normally pass this off as just coincidence except we have a lot of evidence that the tides are controlled by the moon's influence on the earth through something called tidal force. So I think that somewhere down the line we have to accept that there are forces acting, not only on the planet, but on humans at a level we cannot comprehend through mere thought alone.

One other interesting thing I found out from one of my friends, was that when she was having her period, her two closest friends had theirs at the exact same time, even though they weren't living in the same house!

So the sun is in a relationship with the earth, and all other planets in our solar system; the moon is relationship with the earth, and women's menstrual cycles and the tides are in relationship with the moon.

“All very interesting,” you might say, “but what has this got to do with this topic? We're not here for a science lesson, we could get a book at the library if we wanted to find this stuff out! What's your point?”

The seasons

Spring, summer, autumn, winter. The four seasons. In the cycle of nature we could say that spring represents birth, and winter represents death,

but this is not a philosophical discussion. We are talking about the cycle of life in real terms. The rhythm of life. The cyclical nature of everything.

In winter, everything dies back in the ground, but come spring, everything comes alive again. Year in, year out. But there is nothing magical about this, nor superstitious, it is a natural process controlled by our friend in relationship, the sun.

Earlier, we mentioned that the earth rotates on its "axis" which is always at an angle of 23.5 degrees to the sun, so winter in the northern hemisphere means that the earth is farther away from the sun; and conversely, the southern hemisphere is closer to the sun, so they have what we call summer. As the earth moves round the sun on its 365 day voyage, the northern hemisphere becomes closer to the sun, thanks to the angle of the axis, bringing spring and then summer, and the southern hemisphere moves further away, bringing, you guessed it, autumn and then winter! So far so good.

We plant our crops in the spring and harvest them in summer and autumn so we have plenty of food for the winter. It all seems logical, doesn't it?

So the relationship we have with the sun directly affects all growing cycles depending on whether we are closer or further away. If the earth's axis was straight, we would have continual summer as we do at the equator. Ok, let's recap:

We have said that all planets in the solar system are in relationship with each other. They are also in a relationship with the sun. We are in relationship with all the other planets and we have a relationship with the sun that affects temperature and growing cycles of plants and vegetables etc. all controlled by the position of the earth's axis. We also have a relationship with the moon, which affects tides, and women's menstrual cycles, (and makes dogs howl). So what have we learnt?

I would say that it is quite clear that *everything* is in relationship. There cannot be a winter without summer, and there cannot be a north without a south. Are we in agreement?

A fine balance

It seems that although there is nothing to show what we are physically in relationship with everything (as we have no wedding ring), there is order, and there is relationship in everything we are and everything we do, controlled by forces we cannot see.

Unfortunately, lots of people believe that this could not be possible without a creator, someone who had come up with all of this, but that is because we are using thought which is limited and believe that the universe was created by someone using thought. So we try and we try to understand it, and we investigate it with our science, but we never really get to the eternal question “Why?”

And I'll give you one reason why we can't understand it. Thought. A process created in the mind by memory and experience and conditioning and knowledge, all of which is limited because it is past. So for now let's not try to understand how this relationship was created as we will only frustrate ourselves!

It is interesting to note that thanks to just an 23.5 degree angle we can have scorching hot summers and ice cold winters, which is why we have to respect the fine balance the world is in with the sun, yet we do all we can to get the better of nature using thought, which can never be intelligence.

We are so damned clever, aren't we? We think we know everything there is to know. And so we career through life, testing nuclear bombs, dredging the sea, digging up the entire planet for our consumer needs, polluting the atmosphere, knocking down huge areas of rainforest, polluting the rivers and the oceans, and we haven't even started talking about the relationship between man and the animals, and man and man. But do we have to?

If we can see that there is something invisible that can control the tides, women's menstrual cycles, summer and winter, then we must accept that there is something we cannot “see” that is affecting all of us. But we shouldn't be surprised, after all, we are all made of the same stuff. We are all part of the whole, the universe, and each other.

So next time you think about diverting a river, blowing up your neighbour, destroying ancient forests, punching someone in the face you don't like, or getting angry at your partner for complaining about stomach cramps, remember everything is a part of you, and that the whole world is kept in balance by an invisible relationship and a mere 23.5 degrees of tilt. How can we think that we can keep going the way we are, without something in the relationship changing? 23.5 degrees – the angle that keeps everything just so. That the summer comes every year and so does the winter; that the cycle of life is maintained.

If we think that relationship just means that two individuals who are spending time with each other, or living together, then we really know

nothing. But I am sure you see it now. Everything in relationship. And remember – 23.5 degrees.

What would happen if it changed? It probably doesn't bear thinking about.

Suddenly the selfish, greedy, angry lifestyles we lead would seem kind of insignificant compared to what would happen to the planet. Then again, maybe one day the snows will come and cover up all of man's hatred and desire.

R e l i g i o n

A strong belief in a supernatural power or powers that control
human destiny

•

An institution to express belief in a divine power

Well, here it is, the day I have been dreading, has come. It has now come time to discuss religion with you. Why have I been dreading this day? Well you can criticize a man's clothes, his home, his government even his wife, but on no accounts criticize his religion or there'll be trouble.

But I don't want to criticise anybody, nor anything they believe in, I've said it right from the beginning of this book. What I do want to do, is explore the universe we live in, and our access to that universe – our minds.

If you choose to believe in islam, buddhism, christianity, hinduism, sikhism, or any other ism, who am I to criticise! You are a human being just like me, and you have the freedom in your mind to believe in anything you choose. If I criticise you, that is just me trying to say that

I'm right and you're wrong, and the way I see it, there is no right and wrong, just personal opinion and insight.

So that's what's got me confused about this whole religion thing. Yes,. I can understand the desire to believe in something greater than oneself, it certainly does bring comfort where only fear existed before, and it is nice to think that there is a place after this life of misery, and desire, and greed, where people are all, well, just nice to each other.

I can understand why people talk about days of judgement and heaven and hell, because it does seem that some people manage to get away with doing some terrible things on this earth without having to face the consequences, and that people who do the right thing should be rewarded. All that, I *can* understand.

I also understand where the religious books talk about people not stealing from each other, not running off with other people's partners, not being greedy nor lazy, and not killing each other. All those seem to be pretty sensible.

In fact, I have to say that there are great words in the koran, the bible etc. and it seems like there are a lot of things that can be learnt from reading these books.

So all that being said, I have nothing against anyone that believes in god, in fact the people I have met, muslims, christians, hindus and buddhists seem to be some of the few people who actually have some values in life above just consumerism, and what "I" can get.

But. And there is a but, as I am sure you would expect.

Well, where do I begin? Let's start with talking about who is right and who is wrong. It seems that the christians have always said they are right, that the true word of god is in the bible. The muslims would disagree, and say that the true word of allah is only in the koran. And then of course, everyone fights about who's right and who's wrong.

Wars are started, hatred abounds, and millions of people die or suffer. For what? The ability to say: "See, I told you I was right," whilst standing over someone with a sword.

It makes no sense to me.

As someone who is trying to investigate the true nature of everything in search of universal truth, I cannot for the life of me understand what is going on with everyone. Somebody many, many years ago, wrote down words that were supposed to be from god, and suddenly everyone is fighting over whose god is the best! Surely that cannot be true intelligence? Surely we are missing something somewhere?

No other books in the last few thousand years have sparked such a stir and carried on causing such misery and pain for everyone in the world.

I have already said they contain some interesting things, but that's all. Whether god the entity exists in the form we imagine him to be (in human form using language and thought), I have no idea. But as we have discussed in other topics, the idea that somehow there is a “person” behind all this is somewhat strange.

I have found throughout my journey that there is a whole, there is an indivisible, but would I call it god? No, why? That is a man-made word, a label for something that cannot be described by words alone, and definitely not come to through words alone – through insight, most definitely. But not by reading books and repeating what they say. Do you follow me?

You may think I am being blasphemous, but I think religion is all a bit too easy; the idea that you can find the eternal, the indivisible, or the whole, just through reading books someone else has written (whether or not they are the true words of the god who created the universe). Do you know what I mean?

If I was to read any of the great books such as the koran, and the bible, I would finish it, hungry for more, wanting to explore further; to investigate, not to wait until I die to find out. But so many people seem satisfied that it is the word of god, and it is all that is to be known about the universe and nature. But we are told we must not question the word of god!

I cannot believe that god (when passing the words to the prophets) said explicitly: “Hey, and make sure you tell everyone that they are not to question any of this, ok?” Why would he do that, what purpose would there be in creating an intelligent life form with the power to question everything, but then limit him and say: “Yeah, but don't question what I say. Because this is everything you need to know. And if anyone else questions it, you must kill them!”

But I don't want people to question the texts. They are complete works. I want people to question the whole of life with their whole beings. I want them to question why a flower is a flower, why we can feel air but we can't see it, why we love, why we hate, why we are greedy. I want us to question ourselves so deeply that we discover something truly wonderful – not just read a book, attend a place of worship, listen to a sermon or two and then go about your daily business of making money, being unkind to people and planning a war with countries of unbelievers! Do you understand what I am trying to convey to you?

How many of you talk about your “spiritual life” as something external to everything that you are. All that does is cause more division of the self. If there is a “spiritual life” then live it as part of the whole, not as a bolt-on, as in “my personal life,” or “my business life,” as if there is more than one of you.

Power and division

We are all whole, we are all one, yet we divide ourselves into so many compartments, don't you think? And if you think we are divided by colour and race or country, how divided do you think we have become through religion?

I am a muslim. And so we divide. I am a christian. And so we divide.

But the people in charge of the religions kind of like it. In fact, they are almost the same as the political leaders, and in fact in some countries, east and west, the head of the church and the head of the government are the very same person, which makes some of the decisions they make all the more questionable.

You only have to look at the followers of religions worldwide, including the so called “peaceful” religions like buddhism, to see how much power these religious leaders emanate. Unfortunately, power and religion go hand in hand, and we have seen, over many centuries, the crimes against humanity which have been carried out by these people in the name of religion.

So who are these powerful men of god who get other men to do their bidding, and kill others on behalf of god? Well as you probably guessed it, they are primarily men. What a surprise. Men trying to control everyone else. I think it is fair to say that we don't see many women at the head of most religions. So forgive me when I say I think that when we talk of powerful religious leaders we are talking about powerful men. Except they do not dominate in the name of the country, the nation they dominate in the name of god.

Why else would women have to cover themselves at the vatican, or muslim women have to cover themselves in public, and in some parts of the world, can only be seen by their husbands!

What is this? This is not the whole, this is men trying to enslave women as they have tried to do since the beginning. This is man trying to force women to be subservient to him. Don't you find it strange that

something which is the omnipresent creator of the universe turns out to be a “He?”

Don't you think god would be something which could not be described by words, something which is unattainable by human thought alone.

Men!

Everywhere I look, I see men in positions of power and women trying desperately to be as powerful, but power is a sickness and it corrupts all that it touches. It is present everywhere in our society, and religion is no exception. Maybe it is something inherent in the nature of a man to want to be the controller of the universe, maybe it is because we are conditioned to be that way by our parents, and our leaders, and educators, maybe it is just because we have bigger muscles than women, who knows?

All I know is, that as soon as man stopped interacting with nature – as the rest of the universe does – and started worshipping gods, men saw an opportunity to control everyone else (women especially), and he made sacrifices to these gods in order to appease them – such as sacrificing a woman to the sun god so there would be a good harvest. What nonsense is this?

And just as the governments have created huge towering institutions, so the religions have too, and have used hard working people's money to build them.

How many people who have nothing still give to the church? How many of them donate their money so that powerful men can coat their temples in gold leaf, as an offering just in case the gods get angry? So what if they get angry, we are all going to die soon anyway. We will all return to the earth, and the earth is just another part of the whole.

We are told we must never cause offence to the gods and specific rules are put in place to ensure conformance or obedience. And woe betide anyone who falls foul of these rules.

Some people don't follow religions per se, instead they enlist the services of a guru (*a recognized leader in some field or of some movement*), and for signing up with the promise to follow them, they will instruct the follower in the “spiritual.” But more often than not, these gurus are men, or at least powerful people who charge vast sums of money to the desperate and the fearful.

But why do we follow these people? Can we not investigate the nature of all things with our own minds? Or are we just too busy acquiring material wealth houses and possessions to bother. Is that why we follow gurus who promise us access to the eternal for just a few gold coins? Or are we perhaps trying to reduce the guilt we feel for all the greed and suffering we have caused ourselves and our fellow man?

Whatever the truth of it, all there is one thing certain. In each religion there is a hierarchy to be followed, just like in business or politics. Except, instead of the managing director at the head, you may have, for example, the pope. But never forget that this is a power structure like all others. It requires you to obey the rules (praying five times a day for example).

But we are so desperate to escape the life we have created, that we will do anything for salvation.

“We want to be saved,” we cry.

“Sure, just sign up here,” the leaders say, “and everything will be fine.”

But what happens to people who don't sign up for these religions? What happens to them when they die? They have not recited the bible or the koran, nor any other scripture. They have been compassionate and loving for their whole lives. They have shown nature respect, and they have been free from greed and envy. What happens to them? Do they still get the preferential treatment or is that it for them?

Have they blown their chances by not going to church every day, nor fasting at lent, nor reading from texts? Does god really stand judging everyone at the gate? Is he (there we go with that he again) a creator of all things, yet still has the human frailty of judging everyone he meets? Is he not compassion? Is he not love? Is he not the eternal?

I think we all need to start asking ourselves some serious questions. We owe it to ourselves. And let's face it, without the big brain we have, we would not even be able to ponder these questions. Without the huge brain, we would not be able to read, or have thoughts about god. Where would we be then? What would we do on the day of judgement?

Do animals go to heaven?

In fact, here we are talk, talk, talking, about man all the time, and I clean forgot about the animals, the birds, the fish, the insects, and the microbes. What happens to them? They have no power of thought, and

certainly no reading powers, nor praying powers, but they are born and die just like us. They are part of the whole, the indivisible, the universe, but they have no access via words to it.

What happens to them? Are they not part of this life? Do they not give up their lives so we can eat? Surely they deserve a say in the matter?

Some religions think that if you do badly in your life then you are reincarnated as an animal, but surely that is showing some disrespect to the animals! They do nothing wrong on this planet. They keep it in perfect balance. But then we mustn't forget that man thinks he is the greatest thing in the universe (I'd like to see some evidence), so of course, everything here is for man's use and abuse (including women).

Try hard as I might to empathise with you on the subject of religion, I find myself keeping coming back to the thought that religion is just another form of control, and actually has nothing to do with helping people find out if there is something more than this world we inhabit. Somehow, the access to the eternal seems all too easy. Follow a little rule here. Give a little money there. Read a book here. Pray a bit there.

Things this complex are not as easy as that. I have spent the last few years engaged in a search for truth and although some of you may offer to lend me your scriptures to help me along the way, I have come to realise that truth is only discoverable for yourself. No one can tell you truth. You must find out for yourself.

So in closing this topic, I would like to offer all of you my love and compassion, and hope I have not offended your minds too much, but ask only one thing of you. Will you sit with me a moment? Will you share yourself? Will you join with me in a dialogue for one minute in search of truth? Will you put down your religious books and just sit for a while, and we will engage in a dialogue of silence? For in the silence there comes great wisdom.

Let us have it now. A dialogue in silence.

R e s p e c t

The condition of being honoured (esteemed or respected or well regarded)

•

A courteous expression (by word or deed) of esteem or regard

•

Behaviour intended to please your parents

•

A feeling of friendship and esteem

•

Courteous regard for people's feelings

Do you respect me? I want you to respect me. I don't want to earn your respect. I just want respect. Do you know who I am? How dare you not show me some respect. I am the great, the one and only, alan macmillan orr. You must respect me. Blah, blah, blah.

Ok, so it's nice to be respected – to be held in high esteem by your peers, isn't it? It makes you feel nice, there's nothing wrong with that. So who do we respect, what types of people do we respect? What do they do? What have they achieved? Think about this carefully for a moment, because it is of the utmost importance.

What I want to explore with you here in this topic is whether we pay respect to people just because they wear specific clothes, have reached a high position in society, or just because they threaten us to get it! Surely respect is just a measure of what you have done, and not who you are as a human being. What do you think?

In most countries, the king or queen is held in high esteem. People wave flags, they sing the national anthem, and in some places, even mentioning a bad word against them is a treasonable offence. Monks are respected for the robes they wear, soldiers are respected for the uniform they wear, presidents, prime ministers are respected for the office they hold, chief executives are respected for their job title, wealthy people are respected for the amount of money they have.

So what about you and me. Who respects us?

I have noticed in life, that many people demand respect from us. First our parents. They want our respect and they will get it! But why do parents want this from their children? Does it make them feel good, powerful, or important; does it give them the respect they always craved and never received? Surely it's a pretty sad way to get people to hold you in high esteem, don't you think? If the only person you can get to respect you is your children, and only because you intimidate them and they rely on you, what does that say about you as a person?

The same goes for people in any position of authority. Lawyers, judges, magistrates, or police. These are very important people, don't you know! Except strip away the clothes and there is, but a man underneath. That doesn't mean he is worthless without his title and clothes, for he is still part of the most intelligent species on the planet – homo sapiens.

The thing we all seem to forget is that underneath our clothes we are all the same. Clothes and titles are like a second skin we put on before we leave home in the morning. They may be part of us, but they are definitely not us. Not our authentic self, not our true self.

Imagine for a moment you line up a group of people next to each other wearing their second skins. A king, a judge, a politician, a chief executive, a priest, and a soldier. Then put an alcoholic, a murderer, and a wife beater next to them. Now tell them to strip their clothes off. Who do you respect now? Where are the visual clues you need to tell you when to respect someone and when to despise them? You may look at the faces to look for airs of authority, but what's to tell you you're not wrong? After all, there are many people in high positions who are also wife beaters and alcoholics, and being in a high position does not preclude you from being a murderer!

Underneath our clothes we are all the same – human

Let's try to get inside the minds of the people we have just undressed for a moment. What are they thinking as they are asked to undress. How do they feel? Who has the most to lose by undressing? Does the murderer care if he takes off his clothes? After all, no one respects him anyway. He is despised and reviled by all in society. What about the king? His whole rule is based on outward displays of grandeur. How would he feel? What would be going through his mind as he stood next to the murderer? Wouldn't he be thinking, "I hope no one thinks I'm the murderer. Don't they know I'm the king. I am the most important person in society."

But naked, they have all been exposed. They are revealing their true selves, albeit unwillingly. For a man (or woman), undressing in public is highly embarrassing – it demeans and it devalues, at least in the minds of those who are asked to strip off. It seems that after millions of years of evolution, we are actually afraid to show off our own bodies! Imagine animals being afraid of showing off their bodies.

A short while ago, I was in the bathroom, when I noticed a small spider busily spinning its web. As I stood watching it I wondered whether it had any delusions of grandeur, whether it needed respect, whether it compared itself to other spiders to see who was more important and worthy of respect; but as I watched, I had to concede that all the spider was interested in was spinning its web. You may think that this is a silly example, as a spider is a simple creature, and that we are a technologically and socially advanced civilisation. But I reiterate: only when we are wearing the clothes. Underneath, we are timid creatures, afraid to show the world who we really are. We project an image of who we want the world to think we are.

Let's face it, we are attached to the clothes, we are attached to the office, we are attached to the power, and we are attached to the respect. When we lose the clothes, the rest crumbles of its own volition.

So who are we without this respect? I mean, really? Are we all we seem? Or are we, as I suspect, filled with fear, afraid to be alone in the world, with a desperate need to be liked and admired, so we do not feel empty. Are we perhaps afraid of ourselves, afraid that when we lose the cloak of power and respect we see ourselves for who we really are?

Self-respect

The quality of being worthy of esteem or respect

Do we need to have done anything to respect ourselves? Do we need to be an “important” man or hold an “important” position, or can anyone do it? This is the key to respect that most people miss. They think that by wearing the cloak of office (whichever that may be, from a father of children to the king), that the cloak somehow endows them with self-respect as well. That, unfortunately, is not the case.

So how do we get this self-respect, where can we buy it? How much does it cost? What job do I have to do to get it?

As you all know, you can't get it from anywhere else apart from yourself. So where do you look? Nowhere, it's already there. It's already inside, just waiting for you to activate it. It requires no job titles, no funny robes, you can even get it while you're naked.

Stand in front of a mirror and tell yourself: “I respect myself. I value myself. I am worthy of myself. I need no external validation.” There you go, done it! How does that feel?

I am guessing it doesn't feel as good as being the president, a senior judge, or a monk.

Who will respect you just because you respect yourself you may be wondering? Everybody or nobody? When you value yourself you have no pretensions about other people. You do not need to wear the robes (real or invisible), to feel important. Do you want to know why? Because you are important. You are alive, part of the human race, part of the earth and the solar system beyond.

You made it!

Out of all the things that could have gone wrong during the pregnancy and your subsequent birth, you were born. You breathed earth's air and *lived*. You are still alive today.

Whether you wear the cloak of office is not important, it is how you live your life that is. The only way is to live it authentically. To integrate (*make into a whole or make part of a whole*) yourself. To match the real you with the external you, the you you project to the outside.

All too often we hide our true selves from the rest of the world lest they laugh or make fun of us or don't respect us, but once you realise that their respect is actually not worth anything, you can begin to show yourself to the world. Not the person you think *they* want to see, but the person you really *are*.

People may show you respect, but you do not need it. Any time you start to get delusions of grandeur, just remember who you are without your clothes! Whether you have done great humanitarian work, saved the whales, or saved the world, it does not mean you need to be shown

respect, do you understand? All that is happening is that the respect is pandering to your ego (*an inflated feeling of pride in your superiority to others*). You feel *important*. But remember what we said earlier in the discussion, you are important, but so are the words you use and the actions you take.

Take the first step in dismantling this falseness that is respect. Toss away the symbols of respect, the invisible (or visible) robes, and walk as naked through life as if you had just been born. Value yourself as a human, not a position, and in valuing yourself, let the authentic you shine through like a golden light, through the armour you have built up over the years, and at the same time, let the light in. Once you have told yourself that you value yourself you do not need to keep doing it. You do not need any external validation, it doesn't matter what people think of you.

Remember this: One day they may offer you respect as their king, the next they want to cut off your head! External respect is transient. Self-respect will stay with you for as long as you live, all you have to do is let compassion and love be your guide in life.

R e v e n g e

Action taken in return for an injury or offence

•

Take revenge for a perceived wrong

I was listening to the broadcast of the trial of a well known dictator and murderer, last week, where he was sentenced to death by hanging for the crimes he committed. One of the spectators was asked whether he thought it was a good thing he was being hanged, and he said:

“Hanging is too good for him, he deserves much worse than that”

I thought this was interesting. I would have thought that seeing someone's life extinguished by breaking their neck by hanging, would normally be sufficient punishment; after all, in legal terms, it is the ultimate punishment. Death (*the event of dying or departure from life*). So I thought to myself: “Why is death not enough?” It can only be one thing. Revenge.

If someone rapes or murders your child, or someone close to you, how would you feel? Hurt, depressed, angry, shocked? Yes, but if you could get hold of the person who hurt the one you love, what would you do to them in the moment? Beat them, stab them, strangle them, or hurt them so much so they would know how much you hurt at the loss of your close family member?

Even violent gangsters, who may regularly murder rivals, feel such grief, hurt, anger at losing one of their own loved ones. They vow to find out who did it, promise to torture them, make them suffer, then kill them and their whole family.

Let's face it, revenge makes you feel better doesn't it? And certain religious texts condone it as well. So why not? Someone takes away the thing you cherish the most, and you hurt and suffer terribly at your loss. So you decide to deal with the hurt and suffering you feel, by doing exactly the same as the person did to your loved one, to them; and normally you want to make them suffer more – just for putting you through all this.

I want revenge!
I will take my revenge!
We'll get our revenge!

Let me ask you. When you take your revenge, how do you feel? Well, much better I would suppose. You have righted a wrong, done to *you*, and that's the end of it. They murder someone you love, you murder someone they love.

I would call this hurt transference. You feel hurt so you want someone else to feel exactly the way you do, and revenge covers this quite nicely, thank you. So in essence, revenge is just away of dealing with hurt emotions, that's all.

Even the most peaceful, non-violent man, who hears his ten year old daughter has been raped and murdered, feels revenge boiling inside him. He'll hurt the man who hurt his daughter, he'll make him pay. And believe me, revenge is a very real emotion. It sits just beside hurt.

It's not hate, it's not aggression, it is a one-off, an emotion brought to the surface for one time only – to take action, in return for a specific offence (“He slept with my wife.” “She hurt my feelings.” “He destroyed my career.” “She ran off with my friend.” “He cheated me out of money.”), although the action taken may be disproportionate for the offence caused. “He slept with my wife, so I killed him.”

This is revenge, not for the offence committed, but for the emotion generated, and that emotion is hurt (*psychological suffering, cause emotional anguish or make miserable*).

Even aggressive, violent people feel hurt. They are not immune. Hurt is one of the strongest emotions in humans, generated typically by feelings of loss or betrayal, usually something that another human being has done to them or is perceived to have done. "I lost my business and my wife because of him. He's going to pay." And when someone says "he's going to pay" they do not generally mean financially, because once hurt has been unleashed it stirs a feeling unmatched by any other, especially if the perceived cause was someone in a position of trust like a friend.

Let's look at this closely.

If someone breaches your trust you feel hurt, and if you also have lost something you value or love you will feel hurt plus anger, and that begins to generate feelings of revenge. You want to show the person who hurt your feelings how hurt you are that they hurt yours, and in order to do that you have to hurt them! Does that make sense?

"My daughter was killed by a drunk driver, I want him to suffer as much as she did."

I'm sure you've heard that on the news. The father sobbing violently, his anger almost uncontrollable. He has just heard the news that the man will get off with a two year ban and a large fine, but no prison term, and he just can't bear the news. "It's too lenient. My daughter is dead. In a couple of years, that man will be back on the roads, but my daughter will still be dead."

He's not thinking about how his daughter felt at the exact violent moment when the car struck her, throwing her body into the air and crushing her bones, but more how he feels. It is *his* loss. He is grieving for himself, not her, even though she is the one who is dead! He feels hurt that he has lost someone he loves. It is he who feels sorry for himself. He is hurt and someone must pay. But think of this.

If the man had been sentenced to ten or twenty years, would that be enough for the father out to avenge the death of his daughter? I don't think it would be; in the same way the spectator said that hanging was too good for the dictator. Even death was not enough.

I think what we want, is to inflict suffering on the person. Not just a prison sentence or death, but unlimited suffering determined only by *us*,

by how much hurt *we* feel, until we don't feel hurt anymore. That's why the man, who wants to make someone suffer in revenge, would not kill him instantly with a bullet. With a bullet, there is no "cleansing of emotions." He would rather torture him and kill him slowly with a knife, while he begged for his life.

No one can put a limit on how much suffering is enough to satisfy revenge, it is purely subjective. The suffering of the person who caused the loss is directly related to how much suffering and hurt the person taking revenge feels. That is why hanging is not enough, a bullet too quick, and twenty years not long enough.

So how do I transcend this feeling of hurt, and reach forgiveness – but miss out the act of revenge?

Forgiveness is only possible after the grieving period is over, whether your wife ran off with your best friend, or your child was murdered.

In the beginning, you cannot think of anything apart from how hurt you are, but consider that the very reason you are hurt is because of the love you felt for the person you have lost. This means that you can experience love, and if you can love, then you can forgive. Forgiveness is love.

You are showing that you can love the person who caused you pain. This is very hard for most people to come to terms with, but it is this very act of forgiveness that is responsible for allowing you to be at peace with yourself. If you cannot forgive, you will be stuck in the cycle of hurt, anger and revenge.

Hurt and anger are natural emotions to experience at the loss of a loved one, but the next action must be forgiveness. Remember, the person who was driving the car and killed your daughter, or murdered your child, or ran off with your wife, has to live with themselves for the rest of their lives. In forgiving them, you do not excuse their actions, but rather acknowledge that you feel hurt, and accept that this action was not directed at you personally and forgive them. You don't have to say it to their face, but if you say:

"I forgive you"

out loud, you not only show your capacity for love, but free yourself from being locked into a negative pattern of thinking your whole life. You see, the only alternative to forgiveness, is revenge, where you serve unlimited suffering on the person who caused offence.

But believe it or not, when you are standing in the court accused of murdering the man who murdered your daughter, his brother is now planning to avenge his brother's death by murdering you. And so the cycle of violence continues.

*He killed her.
I'll make him suffer.
I'll make him wish he wasn't born,
I'll make him pay!*

*I'll cut off his hands, one at a time,
Then his ears, one by one.
A leg, a foot an arm then his throat,
He'll wish he hadn't made me hurt.*

*Forgive him? Never!
He destroyed my life,
He raped and killed my only child.
The one I loved, the one I cherished,
I'd gladly hang, to see him die.*

R e v o l u t i o n

A drastic and far-reaching change in ways of thinking and behaving

•

The overthrow of a government by those who are governed

•

A single complete turn (axial or orbital)

Throughout history there have been many revolutions. In the main part they have been bloody affairs where many people have lost their lives and some have been caused by sheer people power with millions taking to the streets and demonstrating. They all want change. They want an improvement. Above all, they want someone different in power.

But all these revolutions have managed to effect is the removal of one power, and the installation of another. And as many citizens have found out, the replacement government is sometimes no better than the first, and in many cases turn out to be worse. But hey, you win some, you lose some.

“We want freedom!” shout the people, as they tear down the symbols of power, the statues, and set fire to the institutions. But once it's all

over, once the mess has been cleared up, there is always someone still in power. That's just the way these things work after all.

You don't like what the government is doing, and so you set yourself up as the leader, organise yourself into a group, arm yourselves, and try to attract the support of the people. When the day comes you go in all guns blazing, proclaim that a “revolution” has taken place, stand waving to the crowds, and sit yourself quietly down in the old leader's chair. But nothing has really changed, only the names and faces of the powerful.

Pretty soon, you're up to the same tricks as the old lot, and the people are once again imprisoned by the powerful, waiting for the day when a new revolutionary leader comes along and offers you a better life. They don't need guns (although it helps), just the support of the people; and so a new revolution is started, and the new leaders are installed in power, and they sit themselves quietly down in the old leaders chair... Are you starting to see a pattern here?

And the wheel keeps turning

The other definition of revolution is (*a single complete turn (axial or orbital)*), and that's all these physical revolutions can do, they just turn the wheel. Can you see? But what I want to discuss with you here is not breaking the wheel, nor creating your own wheel, but jumping off it once and for all.

When I first started to get some insight into the world, I thought the only way to change things was to become an activist (*a militant reformer*), but then I started to realise that the word “reform” (*change for the better as a result of correcting abuses, A campaign aimed to correct abuses or malpractices, Self-improvement in behaviour or morals by abandoning some vice and even Produce by cracking or Break up the molecules of*), could not do anything to the wheel, except make it change shape – the wheel would still exist. We could make a wheel a square or a triangle but it would still, in essence, be the wheel!

So I got to thinking: “How is it possible to have a revolution without a revolution? How could we not only change the shape of the wheel but leave it for good? How could we as a species leave the wheel turning without trying to change it, but have no part of it?” I realised that the only real revolution could come from inside. Not by coming up with a new idea for how society and the world should be, that after all is just thought, and we can see where ideas, which is thought, have got us!

Instead of trying to change everyone else (a mammoth task), why not change yourself, not at a superficial level, but right at the very core?"

As I started this process I felt like my whole insides were being ripped apart, that everything I was and believed was being shredded into tiny pieces and it was a time of great confusion and conflict for me. How could everything that my parents told me, everything that society told me be an illusion. Why would my parents lie to me?

I started to think that maybe it was just me, maybe I was even having a nervous breakdown because it definitely felt like I was starting to lose my mind. Which funnily enough was happening, but not as the result of mental illness, but the result of having the curtains pulled up and reality starting to shine in brightly.

It was a time of terrible upset for my relationships, first with my wife, and then everyone else I knew. They thought I had gone mad! They just couldn't understand why I was changing. They liked the old me better they said; the one who would go out partying and liked laughing and joking. And here was me, angry, confused, drinking more and more to stop the conflict, arguing with everyone about why I was right and they were wrong. Let's put it this way, I was losing a lot more than I was gaining.

I started to wonder if all this was worth it? I suddenly wanted to be back to the old me, the one who just lived to have a good time, at whatever cost, but try as I might I couldn't go back. A process had started inside me I couldn't stop. I went to several psychologists who just said that perhaps I was going through some mid-life crisis, and that perhaps it was all to do with my father leaving when I was young, but I couldn't believe all that. They didn't have the answers I was seeking, so I had to go inside. And when I looked, I didn't like what I saw. Not one bit!

But as I tried to make sense of this new awareness, I started writing things down that I saw and felt. This book is the end of that process.

But the more I started to write, the more I started to realise that there was no one answer, that everything was intrinsically connected, and therefore could have no conclusions. That frustrated me more than you could ever imagine!

Maybe I just wasn't clever enough to see the answers, maybe the politicians and the scientists were the only ones that could provide the answers, but deep inside I knew they didn't have answers either; they were just playing their part on the "wheel of life." But I didn't want to just be "a cog on the wheel" as my dad put it, I wanted to be free of the whole wheel!

In the beginning I thought I could change the wheel, that I could affect it with my views and my opinions; but then as time went on, I realised it would merely accept my views or reject them and keep turning.

I was in turmoil. What would I do? What could I do? I could never go back to the way of life I had before. I had become socially isolated with my opinions and was becoming a complete bore at parties.

“Did you know that when we cut down a tree it...”

“Yeah whatever alan, have another drink!”

This went on for sometime until late last year (2007) I decided once and for all to jump. And so I did. I jumped off the wheel and was greeted with nothing. Not even darkness, or emptiness, just nothing. This disturbed me even more. How could there be nothing when I thought there was so much, and as I closed my eyes, I could see the wheel disappearing into the distance. Still silently turning as I floated. It was as if I was the spaceman ejected from the craft forced to watch it leave me forever alone (sorry for the imagery but I don't know how else to describe it).

“This isn't how it's supposed to be,” I thought. “This isn't what I expected,” and suddenly, I felt fear, a great fear I was now alone. Although I was still in society, and still had some of the same friends as I had before the process started, I felt very lonely. Who could I talk to about this now?

Maybe I needed to go to another retreat, or join a monastery, or get some psychological help, I just didn't know what to do. Maybe I should read some religious scriptures, or something to give me hope in the darkness, or talk to a monk or something?

But as quick as I had these thoughts, insight grabbed me by the balls and reminded me I had made the choice to jump off the wheel, and that although it was scary at first, once I accepted it and welcomed it, I would see that it was not dark nor empty, in fact it was the same place I had jumped off, I was just viewing it differently, but now I could really *see*.

I realised how foolish I had been when I was thinking about becoming an activist, standing around waving banners and campaigning for change, that is purely external. And although some groups manage to convince those in power to change laws or manage to save a few lives through external pressure, I could see this was still the wheel turning. The people in power didn't mind a bit of change too much. As long as the wheel was turning they would be safe.

But they would never think in a million years that anybody would jump off it. Why would anyone in their right mind jump? Surely they

had too much to lose? But there was one thing they didn't know. I was in my right mind.

And the greatest thing about it? I didn't have to go anywhere I was still here.

**Once you understand the wheel you'll be ready to jump off it
forever.**

It's time to jump, are you ready?

R u n n i n g

The act of running; travelling on foot at a fast pace

I don't know if you've ever been for a run or a jog, but my dad started me off when I was young. I was never going to be the fastest in the world, but to this day I still run as often as I can. Don't worry if you've never done it before, running is natural; you don't need any special skills. You just need to start lifting your knees up alternately, and gently move slightly onto your toes. Put one foot in front of the other and then put the other foot in front of that one and so on. That's it! You're doing it. You're running!

You don't need any special clothes or equipment. You can run in anything, as long as it's comfortable. If you are going to buy anything, it's a pair of shoes, and that's it. Before all the medical profession start saying I am promoting something which you should be careful in doing if you are overweight or have a heart condition and that it's not good for your

knees etc. I will just say I hope people exercise personal responsibility in everything they do, this being no exception.

So why is running good? We can go to gyms to get fit, even go on running machines and do aerobic classes, but nothing takes you back to your natural state quite like running can.

Humans evolved into great hunters, tracking prey for days to bring back food to their families, and we covered great distances looking for water. Unfortunately, modern culture has meant that that the closest thing to hunting we do, is in the local supermarket for a breast of chicken in a white wine sauce, and maybe a bottle of chardonnay!

We lead stressful lives, working long hours, spending precious little time with our family and friends. We eat unhealthy food. We drink too much alcohol and smoke too many cigarettes. We spend too long in air-conditioned climates and polluted atmospheres – but there is a cure. Running. For all those people who are saying, “I could never run,” as they sit in the bar with a cigarette, beer in hand; remember, you did it when you were a child, and it's not that difficult to pick up again.

1. Find a route that means not too many cars or pedestrians.
2. Decide how long you want to run for.
3. Put on a pair of shorts or tracksuit, t-shirt, and a pair of comfortable shoes.
4. Start running as slowly as you like.
5. Stop if you have to.
6. Come back.
7. Drink water.

I'm not going to pretend that everyone will find this easy, but I promise it will get easier the more you do it (like anything). In the beginning you will feel like an old steam train being started after fifty years of inactivity, which is pretty much what is happening in your body. Think about this when you use all your muscles together like this, propelling you forward. Think about this when you use your lungs, helping you to breath more oxygen then ever before.

You cough and splutter, and ache and moan, and groan, just like the steam train, but once it's going, it becomes a finally tuned machine, with every part working in sync, just like the human machine.

Your body is already prepared for running, it has been for thousands of years. It is just waiting for the first steps, the raising of the knees, the putting of one foot in front of the other. It will do the rest. It will start

the heart pumping faster to get the oxygenated blood out to those muscles. It will work the lungs to get more oxygen into the system, and prepare the sweat to cool you down. This is an amazing machine just waiting to be allowed to work. It's waiting for your instruction.

I won't bore you with the amount of kilo calories you will burn when you run, you can look that up for yourself, but for one thing, you will feel better. Why?

Many of us have sedentary (*requiring sitting or little activity*) jobs, yet our bodies are ready for action – we need to be using the energy we have stored – yet we sit in cars and offices all day, doing little or no real exercise, and the only time our heart rate goes up, is when we (or someone else) makes a mistake at work, or someone pulls out in front of us when we're driving. In both cases, stress has built up in the body as well as the mind and needs to be released.

It must be noted that a man doing a physical job will feel better than an office worker at the end of the day. Although he may be tired physically, he has worked out any stress he has in his body or mind. So if you can't work it out at work, you need to do exercise afterwards, that's why the city gyms are so packed these days, full of stressed-out city workers.

Most sports need either two or more people to play, or require specific equipment or location. Running requires none of those. You can run in a park, on the streets, from your front door, from the office, in the mountains in the forests, or by the ocean. You only need a pair of shoes. You don't need to compete with anyone else. And when you are out running, you don't need to worry – in fact, worry is the last thing on your mind for two reasons:

- (a) Running releases endorphins which are a natural pain killer.
- (b) You have to concentrate on your breathing!

Running is nature's mood lifter; it can lift a low mood or stop anxiety in minutes. This isn't a medical fact, I'm telling you this from experience. I suffered for some time with anxiety and panic attacks and running was the only thing that helped me. It cleared my mind of all the nonsense that was going on, and calmed my shaky body down too. You see, there is no time for feeling bad when you've got to keep putting one foot in front of the other for the next five miles.

Your brain starts to regulate itself, your breathing calms down. You start to notice feeling significantly less stressed. You stop thinking so much.

One thing that happens when I run is that I take more notice of things. I start to notice people, buildings I hadn't seen before, I pay attention to my environment, it becomes more than just a run, it becomes like a mini-adventure! What will I see today? What will make me laugh? What will make me sad?

In fact, a large part of this book is the result of observations made over years whilst running, because with a clear mind, you can see further; and that's one thing running gives you – a clear mind.

The first thing I noticed were the cars, not because I had really thought about pollution in a deep way before, but because the fumes were making choke. I really couldn't breathe when I was running, and believe me, when you're running, the last thing you want to be breathing is anything less than pure O₂!

I also noticed that whilst car drivers were in the traffic queue, beating their fists on the steering wheel, urging the traffic to hurry up, I sailed right by them in their shiny cars, with nothing but foot power!

I felt better that day. I felt like I understood something that was so much more than just caring about the environment. I could feel them looking at me, as if to say, "I'd swap this lump of metal right now for a pair of those shoes;" and I realised that for all the money they had invested in their cars, in that moment, they actually envied me. For a runner that's a great feeling, even if it is only in your mind.

There are many things you start to notice as you go for a run, both about yourself and the outside world – some good, some bad. The main thing you notice is the feeling of being free. Free to experience the world at first hand, to get up close to things, to animals, trees, people. To run wherever you choose, to change direction a million times, and no one tell you you're going the wrong way; to breathe the oxygen that gives us life, to use the muscles in our bodies, to appreciate what an amazing species we are, and what we are truly capable of.

Remember, you don't need to take a university degree to find this out, you just put one foot in front of the other and let yourself fall into a run, it's that easy. There's no competition with anyone else, you don't need to enter a race, or time yourself, you just need to get out there and experience life.

At the end of your run as your system starts to slow down, your heart rate returns to normal, you have a warm shower or bath and just relax. Total relaxation. No urges to do anything – your mind more at peace, your body calm. It sure beats having a drink or a cigarette to "relax" any day!

I am not trying to convert you to a new sport, or get you to spend money on running shoes, I just want to share with you something that has given me years of joy. Something that helped me relax, feel good about myself and get out into nature, whilst getting fit at the same time. You may have your own sports and hobbies, but if you have never been for a run then I urge you to try it.

In the beginning you may only run 100 metres, but the more you do it, the better you will feel. What have you got to lose? You start to lift your knees up, put one foot in front of the other, the body starts running... You can stop any time you like, for as long as you like, and you never have to try it again. But if you can, try to experience the joy and freedom of running.

Remember. It's free!

S

S c i e n c e

A particular branch of scientific knowledge

•

Ability to produce solutions in some problem domain

•

Research into questions posed by scientific theories and hypotheses

Science is fascinating, don't you think? I never liked it much at school, but that was probably because (a) I couldn't understand it and (b) I couldn't see the point of all the experiments we were doing. But recently I have become more interested in it.

Thanks to the endeavours of thousands of scientists around the world, we have learnt so much about the world we live in, and we have even learnt to control some parts of nature through it.

Unfortunately, science doesn't make many friends in the religious arena, especially where it attempts to explain how the world was created. Big bang theory vs. creationist theory.

Right now, I am sure there are hundreds of arguments going on as to who created the universe, and as you can imagine, both parties seem to be upset at the others' stance. On the one side you have the scientists who use laws and models to do their intricate investigation, attempting to

unravel the mysteries of the universe; and on the other, the religions just “believe” or have “faith” in the books written about god creating the universe. But both have one thing in common, they both seek truth.

Truth

1. *A fact that has been verified*
2. *Conformity to reality or actuality*
3. *A true statement*
4. *The quality of being near to the true value*

So what is this mysterious thing that the religions and the scientists are seeking? Truth. Such an innocuous little word but, has so much power behind it. What I want to know is, can we ever find the truth of everything? Will we know so much through scientific enquiry that we can finally say: “Yes sir! We’ve got it! We know everything.” Unfortunately, history has taught us “that it ain’t necessarily so!”

I do not have room for all the scientific theories that have been disproved over the years, and remember that science has been in existence in one shape or form for many thousands of years, so why do the scientists keep saying, “yes, that’s definitely the truth, that’s definitely the way it works?”

Now don’t get me wrong, I think the scientists do a wonderful job, but as a friend recently told me “science can explain how things work, but not why, that’s not our domain.” So why do scientists keep telling us they have the answers, why do they pretend to be universal authorities on everything, when science is still in infancy (maybe just out of nappies!)

“Oh, but we know so much more now, we have much more sophisticated instruments, we have supercomputers, a more complex modelling software, we’ll find out the truth soon enough,” say the world’s best authorities, and we believe them, because it all sounds so convincing. They have amazing experiments that “prove” things.

We don’t have to go back far in our history books to find sir isaac newton (1642-1727), one of the world’s most eminent scientists, whose theories were widely accepted until an unknown scientist disproved some of them nearly 200 years later! That scientist was albert einstein (1879-1955), whose theories on relativity are now widely accepted.

Tell me how many years (given we have plenty of “time”) will it take for einstein’s theories to be disproved?

“But we *know* that man came from the apes, we have evidence, we have traced him back millions of years. We have skeletons, we have fossils, we have evidence!”

And that, my friends, is what the religious crowd are missing at the moment – evidence. Sure they've got their texts (which are the word of god), they have some miracles, and erm, what else? Anyone?

Unfortunately, their theories don't have hard facts behind them, just a lot of belief (*vague idea in which some confidence is placed*). So in this instance I feel slightly sorry for them. The wolves are closing in. The evolutionary biologists, the physicists, the chemists, the mathematicians, they are all working hard to disprove the creationist theory; but I can tell you one thing, given what we know about the nature of truth (not a lot), there is as much chance of there being an all powerful supernatural being who created the world, as there not being.

So we found a few bones, so we did a bit of geological research, but like the religious lot, I sometimes find it hard to believe we originated from the apes, and weren't created just as we are. It just doesn't make sense to me.

We are told by the scientists that we have been evolving for millions of years, so does that mean we will keep evolving? Will we not stay like this forever? And one more thing. If we evolved from the apes, why haven't they evolved into humans?

To a “serious” scientist these might sound like stupid questions, but I want to know. Perhaps some scientist would be kind enough to fill me in? But although the scientists think they have evidence, perhaps they are just making the science fit the idea? (something that was done to prove that a certain race of people were in fact, not the same species as us, amongst other dubious scientific experiments done in the past.) How do we know the truth of it all, can someone else tell us this truth?

Mathematics

A science (or group of related sciences) dealing with the logic of quantity and shape and arrangement

The mathematicians think they can. And as a friend recently said to me: “alan, everything in life is mathematics.” And she went on to explain how developing a model (*a hypothetical description of a complex entity or process*) using specific language (mathematical notation), they could predict almost anything.

She explained that the Egyptians had developed mathematics for practical use over 2000 years before the birth of Christ, and that the ancient Babylonians had invented a position system based on the number 60, which is still in use today (if you look at your watch or a clock you will know what I am talking about). She also explained the role of the Chinese, the Mayans and the Indians in developing mathematics, and that it is used now in economics, politics, and the natural sciences. It was all a bit hard for me to take in, but I understood one important point and that was that it was all about relationships.

So I sat down to think about it, and suddenly I realised; of course! If we didn't have numbers and a way to compare them, how would you add up your shopping? How would you know which product was the cheapest? How would you know what was later and what was earlier? If I had no numbers (*the property possessed by a sum or total or indefinite quantity of units or individuals, A concept of quantity involving zero and units*) to use, how could I measure anything?

It seemed to me the invention of numbers and a method of comparing them was a crucial turning point in man's history. But they are something we take for granted today, aren't they?

"Oh, I missed the 10.35 train, I'll catch the 11.35."

It seems so simple to say, but what is a number? Is it something real? Is it something inherent in the universe? Well, actually they are man-made, but all the religions in the world give some numbers greater significance than others; such as the number 3, also known as the trinity (*the union of the father and son and holy ghost in one godhead*) and 666, the number of the beast. We even have mysterious superstitions about the number 13 being unlucky, even though it is just the sum of twelve and one.

But why use numbers to describe these things? After all, numbers are just man-made ways to compare things in a relationship. I couldn't believe that there was anything more intrinsic (*belonging to a thing by its very nature*) in them. Numbers were man-made concepts.

But I started to wonder about whether a natural form of mathematics existed in the brain, something that was inherent, not created by thought. I wondered why we found some faces more attractive or ugly, or why we liked certain body shapes better than others.

The scientists would tell you we like these shapes because of the way we respond to them sexually. So we like a woman with large eyes, small nose, full lips, large breasts, flat stomach, rounded bottom and long legs, because these shapes are what arouse us sexually. But that couldn't be the

truth of it, after all, in some countries the men dislike skinny women, and instead opt for more plump figures, so perhaps it is just cultural? Perhaps it's to do with the relationship between the dimensions of each of the individual body parts, and there is much evidence to support that. One part being half the length of another, or double, or equal to another. I wasn't sure at all. Was there some secret numbering system going on in everyone's mind that could tell them everything they needed to know without having to think about it?

The problem was, I couldn't be sure what was going on!

We used comparison on a daily basis. "I'm richer than you;" "you're more powerful than I am;" but what could mathematics really tell us about the nature of everything? After all, it seemed to deal more in probabilities and possibilities than truth. My friend explained.

"My grandfather had a car accident the other day. With mathematics we could develop a model to predict, not only how probable it was that he was going to have an accident, but also why it happened. To find out why the accident happened, we would need to measure the speed he was going at (the other car was stationary), then we would need to measure the tyres and the depth of the tread, the surface of the road, the camber of the road, and the weather."

"But how do you account for the fact that he may have looked away for a second, or his friend distracted him, or he thought of something which took his mind off the road, or a song came on the radio he liked, in fact there could be a myriad of possibilities!"

She looked at me and smiled.

"That, alan," is the human error we factor in to all calculations."

"What?" I said. "Then we are no nearer reaching the truth than we were when we started! But tell me how you can measure how probable it was that he was going to have an accident?"

"Well," she said, "He doesn't normally go out in the car, so the probability that he was going to have an accident would be very, very low, but that day, my aunt phoned him, to invite him to his granddaughter's birthday party, so the probability went up. The weather conditions made the road icy, so again the probability went up, and the time he was driving meant that there were more cars on the road. But," she explained, "if the other driver had had an argument with his boss, and had left work angry, and was driving carelessly, then the probability would go up. Also, you had to factor in his tyres, and whether he was distracted. And you could factor in that if my grandfather had been driving a little quicker, then he would never had met the car because the

car would not yet have arrived at the roundabout, but then there could have been another car who was in a hurry and the accident could have happened anyway....”

I think I had heard enough. All this science could do was predict possibilities, but it was pure chance, or as some of the more superstitious among you might say, luck (or bad luck in grandfathers case!).

Chance

1. *An unknown and unpredictable phenomenon that causes an event to result one way rather than another*
2. *A possibility due to a favourable combination of circumstances*
3. *A measure of how likely it is that some event will occur; a number expressing the ratio of favourable cases to the whole number of cases possible*

So how are we doing? Are we starting to understand truth or, thanks to “human error,” can we never possibly predict everything? You see, human is what we are, and we make the rules that govern science; and we also make the mathematical models.

Is there a chance, even a small chance, we may make a mistake? After all, we always have to factor in human error. I'm sure if there are any scientists reading this, they will be livid by now, saying that's not how they work, and they test everything against all possibilities. But they can never know the truth of it all, because science is developed by thought, and thought is limited, due to the constraints on it by memory, knowledge, conditioning and experience. Do you understand?

So here we are, back to square one, where the creationists have as much chance of being right as the scientists; but I am not going to start another argument about who has the most evidence, this whole topic of conversation has become, shall we say, a little tedious!

I don't think it matters whether or not the world was created by chance, due to favourable conditions existing in the universe, or by a supernatural being, do you? Why would it? We are here. The end.

But of course, due to man's inquisitive nature, he just can't help asking the questions why and how! And don't get me wrong, scientific discovery has done a lot of good for the human race, but it has also done a lot of harm in the development of weapons and poisons, to name just two. So, in order to find out truth, we must not discount both theories, but merely pay no attention to them; they are, after all, just theories.

“But we seek truth” say all of you, “where will we find it?”
But let me ask you a question: What is truth, is it really something solid?
Is it something that can be told to everyone and they just say: “Oh yes, of course, how silly of me?” Of course not, it's like me telling you the answer is $E=mc^2$.

What would that mean to you?

It would probably mean as much to you as it does to me – nothing. We are told it is an important equation, but can you see what it is just by looking at it? It is the same with all scientific books and religious texts. They present an answer.

“And man was created in gods, image,”

But that's the equivalent of writing the answer to all life's problems is $L= C+E^2 \times \text{sum}(S2 - 3.023)$. Does that mean anything to you?

Well, believe it or not, that is the formula I have created to explain everything. From now on you don't need to understand yourself, you don't need to be compassionate and loving, you don't need to explore everything you are and everything you think, you don't need to deconstruct yourself and break free from society's rules and regulations. This formula is the truth. I have been working on it for many years and I promise you it is the answer. I WOULD NOT LIE TO YOU. This is the truth. Believe it.

$$L= C+E^2 \times \text{sum}(S2 - 3.023)$$

This is the answer to all of your problems

This is absolute truth

Blah, blah, blah

Funnily enough, as I found out, truth is a kind of personal thing, it's not something you can share with others, it may not even be absolute truth, it is just your truth and in fact the answer is irrelevant, it's how you get there that matters (as any science teacher will tell you!)

S e l f

Your consciousness of your own identity

•

A person considered as a unique individual

No mind tricks
No double life
No division
I am



For so many years, I have posed the question to myself: “Who am I?” But after writing the two topics today on brain and consciousness, I feel a little bit foolish. You see, I have spent the last few years on a journey into myself; I have attended retreats, and almost joined a zen monastery in japan in the desperate search to find out my true identity; but it was staring me in the face the whole time. I am me. In fact, I am, to be more precise.

“But who are you?” you ask.

“I am,” I reply.

You see, we spend so much money and time going into this by attending retreats and reading “spiritual guidance” books, all because we want someone else to tell us who we are. Now it all seems like easy money for them! Any time we start to pose ourselves the question “who am I?” we create division and can never see the truth. We separate

ourselves into two people, one asking the question and one providing the answer. But it really is simple, and if you go into a dialogue with yourself, you will find out soon enough.

We are whole, undivided, but because thought cannot understand how it is thinking, it poses the question: "Who is it that it is doing the thinking here, me or someone else?"

Silly old thought, it is so limited by knowledge, experience, and memory that it cannot ever hope to understand itself. It is like asking a computer: "Who are you?" Or it asking itself the question! Sure it can ask the question, but because it is limited by the programs inside, it will never be able to answer the question. Do you understand?

When we perceive (*become conscious of*) something, we are perceiving it through the process of memory, experience etc. so it is limited; but when all conflict between the consciousness and the subconscious is ended, we are conscious of everything around us at all times.

We see the man suffering; we see the tree; we see the pollution; the grasping for power, and the greed. We do not need to take a journey into self to see it. We do not need to sit in the lotus position for hours on end chanting mantras to clear our mind, that is still conflict which is division. Do you see?

When I try to force my mind to be quiet, the forcing is the conflict, which becomes the division, and blocks us from seeing the whole. So how do we "see" it? Well, we won't see it by reading books about it, we won't "see" it by meditating, we won't "see" it by abstaining from sex, and do you know why? Because we are already the whole, and all this trying to perceive it blocks it from our view.

I spent years looking for myself and "wham!" one day, here I am, just as I had left me!

We must start from the position that there is nothing more to look for, and with that comes the acceptance that we are already all that we can be. All this trying, and forcing is causing more division of self.

Although we are saying that self is whole, that doesn't mean you will become conscious of that fact immediately, just because I have written it here. You must explore it for yourself. But do not look for anything else. You (your body and your mind, which is part of your body) are already here. What we must do is wake up to this; and the only way to do that I am afraid, is through insight (*grasping the inner nature of things intuitively*).

You can sit on a cushion meditating on compassion for your whole life and never get it, because in the formal meditation you are trying to

“become” enlightened; but in that very process of becoming, you divide. You are already enlightened. Trust me! Actually, don't trust a word I am saying here, test it out for yourselves!

What does enlightened mean? Enlightened is “*make free from confusion or ambiguity; make clear*”.

Now, if we are saying we are already whole but we divide ourselves through conflict, it must mean we already see clearly, but somewhere down the line (probably through conditioning, conforming, desire, education and greed etc.), our sight has been blocked by these processes of the mind.

Accepting wholeness

If we are to pull down the curtains of conditioning, memory and knowledge, we first have to accept wholeness. We have to let it back in to our lives. Then comes the tricky process of “deleting” the programs that have caused the temporary blindness. This isn't something that comes in a flash, like insight does, as it takes time to run through the code, that are – what I call – bolt-ons, or unnecessary programs. But step by step, as we deconstruct all we have, all we think we are, all we believe, and all we try to become, we will start to see more clearly. Accepting that you are all that you could ever want is the first step in this process.

“Ok, that's all very nice,” I hear some of you grumble, “but tell us who we are!”

But you don't need me to tell you who you are, you know. You are a builder, a plumber, a nice man, a horrible man, a priest, a managing director, a gangster, a politician. You are the label you give yourself, or someone else gives you. You are “first in your class,” “last in your class,” “a success,” “a failure,” “rich,” “poor.” You are a label. “Funny guy,” “serious guy,” “intelligent,” “stupid.” That is your “self” you talk of.

“Oh, yes, david; he's a very successful businessman, he also has a very witty sense of humour, but he can be a bit arrogant at times, and dare I say it, just plain rude.”

So how many labels did you find? Successful, businessman, witty, humour, arrogant, rude! All in one sentence. And as we label someone, we start to define their “self,” and they start to define it too.

“How do you see yourself david?”

“Well I guess I am positive, definitely a self-starter and a good leader, I am quite demanding of my employees and I don't like people who

don't listen, so I guess I can be a bit 'short' at times. But deep down, I am a nice guy and a good father.”

I'll let you pick out the labels in that sentence.

So when we talk about self, are we talking about the whole, the indivisible or are we talking about labels that are assigned to parts of us, like “nice” and “father.” David just is, but he would have difficulty in getting anyone to understand that.

I have a friend from a retreat where I volunteered for a short while and I used to ask him in the morning:

“How are you john?”

To which he would reply:

“I am.”

And that would really infuriate me. I wanted him to say happy, ok, upset, but he didn't want to label himself. I couldn't see it at the time but I do now.

“I just am,” he would keep saying, and it would really throw the retreat visitors.

“Oh, that's nice,” they would say.

But he was right.

He had no need to define himself anymore than he was already defining himself by being in the room.

We wanted him to conform, we wanted him to be “like us” to label himself but he couldn't do it. He knew he was whole, he knew he was the indivisible – and over time, I came to really understand him. And now if he was to answer the question: “How are you john?” with a “fine thanks” or “not too well, got a bit of a cold,” it wouldn't sound true. He just was, like I am, and you are. Why don't you give it a go one day on your path to acceptance of yourself as the whole.

“How are you doing today?”

“I am,” and smile and walk off. That should confuse them!

But seriously, what we are talking about here is not becoming anything nor changing anything but just pure acceptance that you are. NO labels. I am.

You are not a muslim nor a buddhist. That definition instantly divides and causes conflict. No matter what you believe, do not label yourself, that is the path into darkness, not light. NO Labels.

You are not a managing director, you are. You are not a criminal, you are. You are not a religious fanatic, you are. You are not a christian, you are.

Can you see? We must remove the label before we begin our journey. Please, this is so important. I want you to ponder this for a few moments. No labels.

When you stop labelling yourselves and everyone else, when you stop trying to become something, and recognise that you are the whole and the whole is you, you can begin your work. Until then, start to pay careful attention to your words. They will either set you free, or keep you imprisoned in division and conflict. Those are the only words I can offer you.

So next time anyone asks you how you are, remember what my old pal John would say: "I just am, thanks." And let that be all.

S e x

Activities associated with sexual intercourse

Having sex! It's good isn't it? When we have sexual intercourse, or to use a more polite term, "make love," we feel pretty good about ourselves; and in the main, we are not doing it to reproduce, we are doing it because it gives us pleasure – pleasure for both partners, male and female (I am sure that people of the same sex have just as much pleasure). And the best thing is, it's free; unless you are so desperate that you have to pay someone to have sex with.

Men think about sex a lot, they love to have sex; I know I do. When I have sex, my mind is clear in the moment; no stress, no problems, just unadulterated pleasure! And like most men, if I could have sex all the time, I would.

In the animal world, most animals only have sex to reproduce, whereas we have sex in the most part just for fun. Not because we want

to show our partner how much we care about them, but purely to express our primeval self.

The scientists have said that the way that humans have sex is what sets us apart from the animals, giving the reason we are the only species to have sex face to face (apart from an ape relative, I believe), as other animals have sex from behind, but I would suggest to you that having sex is what makes us just like the animals in the world, whether we do it face to face or in any other position.

We like to think of ourselves as being superior to all other species in the world, and in many ways we are. We are aware of ourselves, we walk upright, we have articulate speech, and have superior intelligence. We can make tools, aeroplanes, rockets, guns, buildings that reach far into the sky. We can philosophise about life, we can study literature, write literature, and we can make complex calculations that help us to build bridges that span huge rivers; we can make decisions that affect the whole world.

We are powerful, intellectual beings, capable of great discoveries and inventions. We theorise about the nature of all things, such as the origins of the universe, and the existence of god. We stand in judgement of fallible men who steal, and kill, and go against our civilised societies, and we imprison them, or kill them. We have morality and ethics. We have democracy and government. All in all, we are a pretty advanced civilisation, wouldn't you say?

Yet sex is what brings the most moral of men down, the leaders of great nations; powerful church men, people in positions of authority and responsibility, people in positions of trust. We trust that these men (for it is mainly men) are above the "earthly desires" that us most mortal of men have.

We cannot control ourselves when it comes to having sex, if the opportunity arises, whether we are married with children, engaged to be married, single, or living with someone. It appeals to our natural self – the self whose purpose here on earth is to procreate, and spread its genes far and wide; just like all other creatures here on earth. We are no different in that respect, except we pretend we are.

We pretend we are not like the animals, that we are not a product of evolution, that we didn't start as a simple organism, billions of years ago, and that the natural world exists independently and subordinately to us. We started just as we are now, they say. "Man was created in god's image. Adam and eve were created by a divine power."

But if you think about it carefully, sex is the one thing that shows us we are the end product of a long process, and no doubt will keep evolving for millions of years to come.

Let's go into this together shall we?

If you look at two dogs having sex, or two cows, or two chimpanzees, do you see the similarity between them and us? Can you see the connection between two dogs having sex and you and your partner having sex? Can you see that in the moment, we are exactly the same?

For many centuries humans have tried to distance themselves from the animal kingdom, and rightly so! We are a breed apart, we have nothing in common with them, save the fact we share the planet. Animals are here to be used by humans as food, pets, and whatever else we wish to do with them. We would never admit that we are actually just the same, except for the wonderful twist of fate which allowed us to walk upright, thereby freeing our hands; and the unlikely development of consciousness, which has made us what we are – homo sapiens; human.

In our desperate desire to become civilised (*having a high state of culture and development both social and technological*) we have pushed sex into the darkroom of life, something we know we all want but do not talk about. Sex has become a cause for embarrassment.

We all do it behind closed doors, and although your mum and dad do it, all your friends and family do it, your teachers, and your leaders do it, it is something that must never be discussed. We all know it is necessary for reproduction, we all know it gives us great pleasure, but please never talk about it.

Can you imagine your president or prime minister engaged in the act of sex? They encounter a woman, their eyes meet, the passion is inflamed, they grab at each other kissing passionately, and they quickly tear off their clothes, they kiss each other all over each others bodies, licking and biting playfully, she takes his penis in her mouth and he in turn licks her vagina. By now, his manhood is fully erect and he inserts it into her vagina. He pumps furiously, in out, in out, she moans and groans and lets out excited little screams of pleasure whilst he grunts. Their bodies are entwined with sweat glistening over their naked bodies. Soon she shudders and cries out as she has an orgasm, and shortly afterwards, the president, still pushing in and out, sweating and breathing heavily lets out a long moan and ejaculates into her vagina. They lie for a moment breathing heavily, their chests rising and falling, sweat dripping from their foreheads.

“Wow that was great!” they both say.

Shortly afterwards, the president goes back to the manly task of running the country, sending troops off to war, and talking about morality and the sanctity of marriage, thanking god for his wonderful wife, whilst all the time wondering how he will explain himself if he ever gets caught out!

Tell me, does this fictional little story not remind you of the animals? Can you see your primordial self within here, or does this story disgust and embarrass you?

How many times have we seen our leaders, or people in positions of responsibility, being caught out having sex with someone? There's always some story in the news about a priest, politician, or teacher getting caught up in some “sex scandal,” at which point they come out and with head hung low, apologise for letting everyone down, promise never to do it again, say they love their wife, and they are very, very, very sorry!

Why do they do this? Because they are all preaching to us about morality (*motivation based on ideas of right and wrong*), and telling us how to live our lives, when what they should do is acknowledge that sex is a natural act, as we are, in fact, part of the animal kingdom and the natural world, and that there is nothing dirty, or disgusting with having sex, and that all the ideas of sex being only in the sanctity of marriage is pure dogma, and in fact, they do not practice it themselves. What an admission that would be!

What I am trying to discuss with you here is not the sex life of one fallible politician, it is to understand that we are a part of nature, that we are not above nature; and that sex is not something that shouldn't be talked about, or hidden away. It is the most natural thing in the world. Two people who have primeval desires, who wish to express them with each other – whether married or not.

This is not about morals (which are only man-made rules), it is about acknowledging that sex is not something to be embarrassed about, or shut away, but solely a method for procreation in the natural world, and for us humans, probably the one pleasure that is out of the control of judges, politicians, religious leaders, teachers or parents.

It is something to be enjoyed with another, and we have to ask ourselves why anyone would want to control it, or teach people that it is something only to be enjoyed by a “married” couple. After all, marriage is just another way of controlling society.

I am sure some of you will be horrified by the way I have openly discussed sex (the insertion of the male penis into the female vagina), and you may wish to complain to someone that this kind of literature should not be made available on the shelf; that it should be kept out of the reach of children, and in fact probably shouldn't have been written at all! That maybe I (as the writer) should be locked up for peddling this filth. But then you must examine your own attitudes to sex, and try to discover why you think it is “dirty,” or something not to be openly discussed; after all, billions of people are doing it every minute of the day.

Parents, teachers, and all those in positions of responsibility try to condition us to thinking a certain way, but if – as the previous example shows us – they cannot control their sexual urges, why should we?

It is not something that should be controlled or condemned, but expressed naturally. It is not even something that has to be between two people who love each other – again that is only a man-made idea. Do you think chimpanzees who have sex “love” each other? “Love” is only emotional expression, nothing more spiritual than that.

The time has come when humans must admit, that although we have developed a more civilised society, which dictates that people can't have sex in the streets with whoever they want, sex is a lot more civilised than killing people in war. Our attitude to sex is only conditioning, and when we break through that conditioning, we will realise, that although we are the most intelligent species on the planet, and must respect each others wishes with regards to sex, it is not what makes us human, it is what makes us animal.

Although it is probably quite frightening for most to think of ourselves as nothing more than animals, when it comes to the act of sex, there is nothing human in it all. Human qualities are of the mind – the awareness of self, the ability to show compassion for others, and the ability to use our imagination – sex is of the primal brain, the brain that runs on automatic pilot, that provides us with all our survival instincts; sex is one part of that.

In the act between two people who want to have sex with each other, awakening the animal within provides a welcome relief from being human, which is all about self-control and discipline, although the great thing about being human is that we have the ability to experience, enjoy, and understand this ancient animal urge.

Many people say that having sex is the one time they can lose control in life (just ask any politician or judge), so go on, enjoy having sex, in the understanding that is not something dirty or embarrassing, or immoral,

but something so natural, the whole world have been doing it for millions of years. And next time you see two dogs having sex, remember, that underneath your fancy clothes, your important job and intellectual ideas, you are exactly the same as them.

S i l e n c e

The state of being silent (as when no one is speaking)

•

The absence of sound

The world is a noisy place, isn't it? Our lives are filled with noise at work, home, and at play, that's why we need to go off somewhere peaceful for a holiday whenever we can. Have you noticed what kind of noise it is though? It's not a natural sound, it's mechanical and artificial. Cars revving their engines, and sounding their horns, noisy trucks hurtling by, planes coming into land and taking off again, music in the car, music in the shops, music in the pub, even in your head.

We're surrounded by talking, laughing and shouting, but the one problem with the design of the human being – the one thing we don't have control of – is the ability to shut off sound coming into our ears and our brain. We have an “always on” connection to the world. It's not like

being able to close your eyes, to disappear off into a dream world for ten seconds, you're always listening, always ready to take in new input.

Have you ever been in nature and noticed the noise? Sometimes it can be deafening! But it's a different kind of sound; a natural sound that comes from the animals, the birds, and the wind shaking the trees. It's a place you can sit and listen, without feeling stressed, as if all the frequencies of the notes you hear, are perfectly in tune with your body and mind.

Have you ever been at the ocean on a wild winter's day, and watched the waves come crashing in against the rocks, the wind whipping up against your face? The sounds are incredible, but they do not make us stressed; instead when we leave, we feel invigorated by our experience.

Now transport that scenario to the city you live in. Imagine recreating that volume with city noise. It would be unbearable, don't you think?

Have you ever watched a sailing ship glide by? It moves quickly, yet seemingly effortlessly and silently through the waves, the wind billowing in its sails. Now compare that to a speed boat or a jet ski passing, and imagine the noise of the motor and the sound of the hull crashing against the sea.

It's interesting to notice that although nature is powerful, the noise does not disturb us in the same way as man-made power does. It's as if we are able to process natural sounds calmly, but mechanical sound grates on our nerve endings.

So, although we may hate noisy cities, and are always complaining about cars and planes, we deliberately fill our heads with noise every day. We get up in the morning, listen to the news, turn on the radio in the car or listen to a music player on public transport. We have noise in the office or in the factory or anywhere we work. We talk on the phone all day, we talk to other people all day, we finish work and get back on public transport or into the car, and turn on music or news. We get home, we talk to our partners or friends on the phone, we turn on the tv for the latest news or soap; we may go out for a meal, or to a pub where there is loud talking or music, we come home and go to bed... Our brain utterly exhausted from the days input.

Now compare that day to the sound of the sailing ship gliding by, or listen to the sounds of a waterfall, or the ocean, or the birds in the trees. It is easy to see how we can become so stressed in such an environment, don't you think?

Most of us live in such highly urbanised environments, full of unnatural sounds that are not in tune with the natural world. That is why

meditation and relaxation cd's have the sound of wind, waves, whales, and streams flowing on them, it's what puts us back into our natural state of relaxation.

It may have taken us millions of years to evolve as humans, but we have only been exposed to these unnatural sounds for 150 years, tv's for 50 years, and personal music players for the last 25 years. We have not had time to adjust to these new sounds.

In ancient times, people had no tv or music players to keep them company, but they did hear the sound of the wind, rain, birds and animals, even at home, whereas now modern houses are so insulated from the outside world that there are no natural sounds allowed to get in. Double glazed windows have made sure you can't hear the wind and the rain, and wall insulation has meant you feel no draught. You are cocooned in a house, alienated from your natural state, now able to hear your own thoughts. For most people that's a scary proposition.

Have you ever wondered why you get up and put the tv or radio on straight away, or fill your head with music whilst walking to work, or even whilst out for a walk in nature? We normally just put this down to living a modern lifestyle, but it's much more than that. Let's look into this more deeply shall we?

Have you ever *not* turned on the tv, or put music, or the radio on? How often have you sat in your home and done nothing,, with no external stimulation to keep you company? Once, twice, never? Have you ever had any reason to?

We constantly fill our ears with input, keeping our brains busy during the day. We never allow ourselves to be with our own thoughts. We are never quiet enough to hear what's going on in our own brains. We never give our mind a moment to rest. We have become so accustomed to hearing artificial noise that now we can't live without it. But sitting with our own thoughts does require great patience, although requires no effort. All you have to do, is to sit in one place, momentarily.

Close your eyes and let the thoughts of your brain wash over you. Don't try to interact with them, just watch them as if they were being carried along by a wave. It's hard at first; your first reaction being to open your eyes and fidget, or go and do something else – but just sit. You don't have to study meditation or listen to whale music to do this. Just sit. Try it with me now if you wish. You will need to read through it first, as you will want to close your eyes...

- (a) Turn off your tv and music player, and make sure no one will disturb you for about two or three minutes.
- (b) Sit upright in a comfortable position and focus for a moment on a point on the wall.
- (c) Take three deep breaths (one thousand, two thousand) remembering to breathe out slowly (one thousand, two thousand, three thousand, four thousand), and gently unclench your hands and drop your shoulders. Close your eyes...
- (d) Now, visualise a perfect wave in your mind, and gently let it envelop your entire body, let it relax every muscle and nerve ending in your body, from the tip of your toes to the top of your head.
- (e) Now pay attention to your thoughts; don't fight with them, don't tell yourself not to think.
- (f) Just try to let any thoughts you have come and go on the wave. Breathe normally and do this for about a minute or so...
- (g) When you feel ready, take another deep breath (counting one thousand, two thousand), and breathe out slowly (counting one thousand, two thousand, three thousand, four thousand), and start to notice yourself being more aware of your environment, and gently open your eyes.

Congratulations, you have experienced your natural state for that short time. Don't worry if you don't get it straight away, just keep practising this simple exercise until you feel comfortable with your own thoughts. The more you do this, the more relaxed you can become, and the more you will find you don't need the tv on all the time, or the music player blasting in your ears.

We are beings of the natural world, not the artificial world. Silence is not boring! It allows us time to gather our thoughts together, and to relax momentarily in a busy world. Just imagine it as bringing the ocean and wind and the rain and the birds to your mind when you don't have time to go on a trip into nature. You can do this anywhere, in the office, on a break, on the bus or the train (just don't try it when you're in the car or operating machinery). You don't need a special mat to sit on, just three minutes to close your eyes.

When we are talking about silence, we are not talking about being in a vacuum, because remember nature isn't silent, it's just that we are in

tune with those sounds. If you have ever been on a camping trip and fallen asleep to the sound of rain on your tent you'll know what I mean. Try it. You never know, you may enjoy your three minute holiday from the stress and noise that artificial life has created for us. You are part of the natural world after all.

S m e l l

The sensation that results when olfactory receptors in the nose are stimulated by particular chemicals in gaseous form

•

The general atmosphere of a place or situation and the effect that it has on people

•

The faculty that enables us to distinguish scents

•

The act of perceiving the odour of something

•

Emit an odour

Roll on
Spray on
Splash on
The great cover up!



Many years ago, I used to share my house with a labrador. I don't know if you've ever had one, but his sense of smell was acute! He could smell the fridge door opening at over four hundred metres. Whatever was cooking, wherever he was, he would hunt down the smell and sit, tail wagging, mouth salivating until he was "rewarded" with some of my food. Our sense of smell isn't as well developed as his, but it is still one of the most powerful senses we possess.

Smells get right into the brain instantaneously, and produce a reaction, which may be pleasant, sensuous, calming, stimulating, or just downright disgusting.

Some smells affect only individuals, whilst others are liked or detested by people equally. For example, an addicted smoker finds the smell of the cigarette being lit wonderful – he just can't wait until he takes his first puff. This is also the case for many ex-smokers who have given up for

years, but suddenly catch the smell of cigarette smoke, and are motivated to start thinking about buying cigarettes again!

It sounds crazy doesn't it? But having been a smoker, I can relate to it. The chemicals in the smoke we inhale, react with chemicals in our brain, and provide us with a sensation of pleasure. For someone who's never smoked, someone lighting up next to him might be the most disgusting smell ever. His brain has never made a pleasure connection with the smell and as such, rejects it as it rightly should (only an addicted smoker thinks that the smell of cigarettes is nice).

All around us, we are surrounded by different smells, all competing for space in our olfactory system. The whole world smells of something, but whether we find it pleasant, is a different matter.

During my life I have travelled to many different countries, and the first thing I notice when I leave the airport is how each place smells different. Each is unique.

Across europe, the smells vary less, but when you reach asia it really hits you. Whether it is the smell of fuel from the taxis, unfamiliar foods cooking, or a combination of many things, I am not sure, but I feel excited, just by smelling a new place!

Of course, for the locals it's just another day; they don't notice it because they are used to it, but they would notice a difference if they came to the uk.

Before we get caught up in discussing all the billions of different smells in the world, and their effect on us, let us look, or indeed, smell a little closer to home! That's right, ourselves.

Are you aware how you smell? Are you aware of the odours you give off? Do you think you give off any odours? How do these odours influence others around you? If I was to ask you on a rating of 1 to 10, how you rate your smell, would you give it a 1 (nice), or a 10 (unpleasant), or somewhere in between?

Most of us in the western world, myself included, would find that hard to answer, because of several factors.

The first, is our breath. We brush the minty gel all over our teeth, and our gums, and our tongue, and scrape away any impurities. We gargle with minty mouthwash, and for the in-between times, we chew minty gum.

The second, is our hair. We wash our hair with perfumed shampoos and conditioners so it doesn't smell bad.

The third, is our body we wash daily with shower gel, that makes us smell like a tropical fruit punch. “Ooh, alan, you smell so positively fruity.”

The fourth, is underarm deodorant and anti-antiperspirant, just in case we sweat a little, which is natural – I hasten to add – and leave a little sweat (*salty fluid secreted by sweat glands*) on our shirts. We spray or roll on “arctic mist,” guaranteed to keep you dry, and smell free your whole life.

The fifth, is aftershave or perfume. This is the “piece de resistance” (sorry, borrowed from the french), the crowning glory of humanity. The smell that attracts a thousand suitors (or not, if you choose the wrong one for your body type). This is the smell that people identify us with. This is the smell you connect to a face.

How many of you have smelled a woman's perfume or a man's aftershave in passing and instantly looked round sure to see an ex-partner? This is the power of smell. The power of association we have in our mind. We have all become so addicted to smelling like this that we have forgotten what we really smell like.

That isn't to say we should never wash. The smell of stale unwashed bodies is one that most of us turn our noses up at. I used to joke with a friend of mine that just because he cared about the environment didn't mean he had to smell!

This is nothing to do with washing. If you didn't know it already, washing our bodies to get rid of the daily dirt is a necessary affair. It makes you feel refreshed and clears the mind.

We all smell of a brand.

We don't even have to wear their fashion labels.

We emit their corporate logo, every minute of the day.

The real problem is, that in our desperation to become more than animal, we seek to mask our true identities artificially. Not only do we wash with products containing perfumes, and put perfume on our skin, we also wash all of our clothes in perfumed detergent. We have *no idea* what we smell like as a species! How funny is that?

As we know from other topics, the body is a pretty advanced system, and the idea that it would smell bad to other potential mates by design, is ludicrous. The bad smells emitted from our bodies have more to do with covering ourselves up with clothes all day, so the body cannot breathe (thereby trapping bacteria in the sweat glands), and the toxins we ingest on a daily basis. Come on, you didn't think you were going to get away

with that one did you? The old saying “you are what you eat” applies here. Sweating is one way for the body to emit toxins.

Have you ever smelt someone (or yourself) after a night out drinking, smoking or taking drugs? The smell is disgusting. It is pure poison. We happily ingest these poisons and wonder why we smell bad! The same applies to the foods we eat.

That is why it is of the utmost importance to pay attention to what we ingest, as it reflects outwardly. But I know all of you like drinking, and partying, and eating unhealthy foods, and as long as you do exercise, everything will be all right. Right?

Cosmetic cover-ups are fine as well, as long as you realise that that is what they are. “Eau de nicessmell” is not your natural species odour. You and I don't know what it is to be human. We are not even aware of the subtle smells that attract us to each other, and we do our best to interfere with these processes by wearing deodorants and strong perfumes. The strange thing is, we are now conditioning our minds to be attracted to women wearing specific corporate branded perfumes because we like that smell.

Does this mean we will be attracted to anyone wearing that perfume? Of course not, but it is something to consider.

So what do we do? We like the way these products smell, and as a social animal we don't want to smell bad around other people; so it seems we have no option but to continue using these products more and more.

In some monastical (*of communal life sequestered from the world under religious vows*) retreats, they undergo long periods (six months or more) without washing, shaving or brushing their teeth; in order to purify themselves. To most of us that seems disgusting. Why? Because it reminds us of animals; and deep down it reminds us that if we didn't interfere with nature, that is what we would look like too.

People often despise “dirty smelly unwashed hippies,” and I can't say I have ever found that an appealing lifestyle, but in reconnecting with nature, that is precisely what we need to do. If the body is free of toxins there is nothing to contain smell but our clothes. Those are the things that trap bacteria.

Our body has clever natural processes to allow us to sweat naturally; the process of perspiration helps the body maintain homeostasis (*(physiology) metabolic equilibrium actively maintained by several complex biological mechanisms that operate via the autonomic nervous system to offset disrupting changes*). So who is going to be first? Ok, I will!

It is often said that if you allow your hair to become really oily, and don't wash it for a long period of time, then the body starts its own self cleaning process (remember that we are the most advanced species on the planet). The only problem is that we don't allow it time to work.

Because we are now “civilised,” the very idea of going to the office with unwashed hair is unthinkable. So we interfere with nature. Clean hair is now associated with the smell of “almond milk shampoo.” The association has been made between the olfactory system and the brain, and is now ingrained in the culture. This is what “clean” hair “should” smell like – according to the producers of shampoos; even if it does strip away the hair's natural nutrients!

As consumers, we have no idea if any of these products are doing what they say they are on the label. Is shower gel actually cleaning away the dirt any more than scrubbing with water would, or is it just a foamy confidence trick?

As none of us (well some of you may be) are scientists, we will never know, but for thousands of years we have got by without foamy shower gels and shampoos. It is time we looked into this carefully and not just accepted what we are told. Someone, anyone, please find out on our behalf and let us know! What do we need to get our skin and hair clean? There! A challenge to you! Is water and a loofah (*the dried fibrous part of the fruit of a plant of the genus luffa; used as a washing sponge or strainer*) sufficient, or do we need something stronger?

I do not have the skills to test this, but if we need one, I am sure there is a natural product out there that complements our body processes at the same time as cleaning our bodies.

Our clothes are a different matter, as they contain bacteria we have picked up during our daily activities. Clothes do need to be washed quite often, as they are against our bodies, but that doesn't mean we all have to smell of “mountain dew” fabric softener. These products are artificial. What we are looking for is something that gets them clean, and does not put chemicals out into the environment through the water system.

The key to smell is whether it is natural or unnatural. Natural smells are important to us, and we know this through using essential oils in “aromatherapy,” which have become popular over the last few years (although probably used for thousands of years). Think lavender to calm and soothe, and ylang ylang for sensuality. These smells have a real marked effect on the brain and the emotional system. Smells to calm, smells to uplift, to excite, and to comfort.

The smell of fresh flowers and herbs in your garden or in your house helps to restore harmony. It brings nature's reality indoors where it has long been shut out through brick and glass. Bring some flowers from your garden into your bedroom. Choose different smells for different moods and different rooms. Burn essential oils. Make a sterile concrete home, a natural living place again. Smell the difference!

Talking of smelling the difference, have you ever walked into a room where fried food is being cooked and noticed the smell coming from the food? And tell me, have you ever walked into a room where vegetables are being steamed, and noticed the difference? I don't think I have to say any more do I? Greasy fatty food is a nice smell for some when they are hungry or hungover, but after they have finished, the true pungency of the scorched oil takes on a different smell, don't you think? It also permeates every fibre of your clothing, leaving it smelling rancid. I will leave it up to you to decide if fried food is good for you or not. After all, you do belong to the most intelligent species on the planet.

Have you noticed how smell has also become a status symbol? How wealthy, successful people smell successful, whereas less well off people smell less well off. Is this true?

Well, without making sweeping generalisations, you can see how it could be possible. The more money you have, the more you spend on perfumes, and expensive perfumes use more carefully blended, rarer ingredients which cost much more to produce than the cheaper chemically manufactured mass produced ones. So smelling expensive really could be a possibility!

It is nice to smell nice, that is sure. It gives us a positive feeling. We feel confident, or sexy, but we must remember that it is a confidence produced artificially (even if it is from natural products). We must not rely on external products. We are a human animal with our own smells and they need not be bad. If we don't like bad smells, we should do something about them and so we must let our bodies detox from poisons we have ingested through eating drinking, injecting or smoking, and allow them to purify themselves. They are pretty clever things these bodies.

During this time (a week or a month or however long you wish to do this) do not cover your body smell with artificial perfume. Sure, you may smell a little toxic, and a bit rancid for a short while, but after only a week or so of drinking lots of water, and eating healthy vegetables, you will notice your sweat no longer smells like it used to.

In order to purify yourself, you will have to go through this process with no deodorant! It may help to tell others what you are doing in case they think you are just lazy or don't care that others have to be around you. Most will be impressed. Hey, they may even try it themselves.

After purification, there is no reason not to put a little natural perfume on your pressure points. I don't want you to suffer too much (if being without artificial smells is suffering!). It can even enhance your natural smell (good smell not bad).

The problem with covering ourselves in artificial smells is that we have spent so many years trying to deny we have anything in common with nature. Don't deny it. Remember the monks purifying themselves and what they look like – like hairy neanderthal beasts! That is what we would all look like without shaving, nail clippers, and cosmetics. Remember it, and go into life unbranded – a fully fledged member of the natural human race.

S m o k i n g

The act of smoking tobacco or other substances

**Warning: Smoking is Harmful, it contains over 4000
different chemicals, it can harm your child, it causes
lung cancer...**

“Blah, blah, blah,” says your addicted brain, “heard it all
before. Let’s have a smoke.”



My friend gave up smoking today. I have given up a million times before, sometimes for over a year at a time, but gone back to it. But today she and her mother decided to stop together, so I felt it only polite to show willing, and give up alongside them. They are both heavy smokers (twenty five to forty per day), and my friend has never tried to give up before in thirteen years of smoking.

I never have a problem giving up, I don't feel nervous or anxious, I just stop. Then I'm angry with myself for starting again eight months later. I don't know why I start again, it's not even when I'm stressed, something just triggers a desire and a craving to buy cigarettes. Within thirty minutes I'm at the shop, puffing away on my cigarette thinking, "what am I doing...?"

Warning: Putting your head in this machine will cause a slow and painful death

Smoking is one of the great mysteries of our time. If we know that it is not good for the system and we are the most intelligent being on the planet, why do we continue to do it? We see photos of smokers who have cancer and think it's disgusting. Our breath stinks, our houses stink, our clothes stink, it stings our eyes, it makes us cough, it stops us doing sport – sorry, what was it good for again? Well, in the days before the government health warnings, smoking manufacturers told everybody it was good for them. Cured asthma, helped your breathing etc... But I think we can probably discount that advice now, don't you?

So I started a list of what benefits smoking gives me. Here it is:

1. Makes me feel less stressed when I'm anxious about something.
2. Gives me something to do when I'm bored.
3. Makes me feel good in the company of other smokers.

I seriously couldn't think of anything else to write here. I won't bother about making a list against smoking as I think I have enough information on that now. Cigarette advertising is banned now, and I'm sure there are government figures on how many people have not started smoking as a result of it, but to be honest with you, I haven't noticed a marked decrease in the number of cigarette ends I see littering the streets. So I'm not really sure if banning cigarette advertising has harmed the manufacturers. And anyway, what would their message be? "Smoke Brand X, it gives you something to do when you're bored." Not very exciting advertising, is it?

Which leads me to the real reason it doesn't really affect their tobacco sales. Oh, yes, it's *really* addictive.

They know that once you're hooked whether as a teenager at school or later on in life, that you'll be addicted within the first few packets and unless anything goes wrong, (like you die or somehow manage to give up), they know they've got a customer for life. Not a bad business, is it?

Warning: Drinking lethal poison increases your chances of an early death.

So it got me to thinking about this drug, the one that these global multinationals are selling legally in their nice shiny packages. The drug that kills millions of people worldwide. That costs business and healthcare organisations billions of pounds a year.

What is it about this drug that makes me feel nervous if I'm going to a non-smoking restaurant, or if I'm flying for over two hours or staying in a non-smoking house? What is it about a cigarette that makes me do anything to crave it in spite of all the knowledge of the health costs? Let me tell you a quick story.

A friend of mine told me recently he had been on a detox: a liver detox to be precise, and had not drunk any alcohol, eaten any wheat, dairy or meat, and was feeling much better as a result.

"Did you stop smoking?" I asked him.

"No, I don't think I could cope with giving up everything at the same time!" He replied.

When I explained that actually the one thing he should be giving up is smoking, as it is the worst for his health, he still seemed unconcerned. This struck a chord with me as I have done the exact same thing: gone on a retreat, meditated, went on a fast, detoxed, and do you know the first thing I did when I finished? Had a cigarette!

Warning: Jumping of this building could harm your unborn child

This may seem crazy to those of you who are fortunate enough to have never smoked, but it's even more crazy to someone addicted like me, where I just can't stop smoking. I just can't stop. In a battle of wills, the addiction wins by offering all sorts of promises or threats to make sure I get the nicotine into the system. It doesn't care if it's good for you or not.

I acknowledge that I am the most intelligent being on the planet

I will do what is best for my system

If I do not do what is best for my system

I acknowledge that I am not the most intelligent being on the planet

If you remember, this was a statement we used in the addiction topic. I am not going to cover the addiction side again, but what I want to discuss is that as the most intelligent beings on the planet, most of us try to do what is best for our systems by eating a diet that contains fresh

vegetables, fruit, and limit the amount of alcohol we drink; but we can't seem to acknowledge that smoking cigarettes is not good for the system. This is also why we pay no attention to government health warnings.

If I read on a tomato that it could cause lung cancer, or other serious diseases do you think I'd touch it? Not a chance! If I read on a lettuce that it could increase my chances of an early death do you think I'd eat it? Not a chance! I think it is clear that if we could, we would do what is best for our system. So there has to be something blocking our ability to choose to do what is in the best interests of your system. There is: Addiction.

Warning: Eating these grapes could harm you and others around you

Addiction is just a mistake, it has to be; a mistake during the long process of evolution that has left the brain believing that it actually needs cigarettes for survival. If the human body is the most perfect machine on the planet, why do you think it would have allowed itself to become addicted to substances that are not beneficial to the system? I do not have the answer. I am quite lucky in that I can go for months at a time without a cigarette, but I have always gone back to it. Having alcohol always seems to make me want a cigarette too. In fact I never crave a cigarette until I have alcohol but then I could smoke twenty in one night!

It seems crazy and illogical, doesn't it? Especially to someone who has never smoked. They see it as being weak-willed, but it isn't.

I have given up many things in life, including meat, and never had a problem with cravings, but smoking is different isn't it? It prays on your thoughts like a parasite, hijacking rational thinking with a quick "let's have a cigarette" interjection. You feel a little pang of excitement about getting the reward (the cigarette) and are motivated to action to get a packet. It doesn't even matter that it is expensive, and I can't afford it, I just find the money from somewhere! All for something that is killing me.

This addiction is exploited to the max by the cigarette manufacturers. They make billions of dollars keeping us addicted.

Recently I started to wonder how the chief executive sleeps at night, knowing he is selling a product (albeit legally of course) that is killing millions of people round the world and costing health services billions in looking after patients who have developed smoking related diseases. He

would argue that people are exercising free will, making a personal choice in buying cigarettes, and he doesn't promote them to the under 18's. So technically, all he's doing is providing a service, much like the drug pushers.

He would have you believe that he is making a different product to cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and alcohol, but although the products may have different effects, they all are to provide pleasure to the brain and are highly addictive. This being the case, free will and personal choice don't come into it. If you are addicted to something, your brain will motivate you to get it whatever the costs to yourself (financial, physical, or emotional).

Tobacco is an industry that employs thousands of people around the world, and contributes billions of dollars to the government in tax raised from the sale of every packet. So you can see that it isn't technically in the government's interest to ban this product. They must have weighed up the health care costs versus the tax raised and fallen on the side of allowing these companies to operate. Despite many government "war on drugs" programs they consistently fail to recognise tobacco as the biggest killer. This is more than likely for economic reasons.

So let's go back to these tobacco companies, these companies who sell death on every street corner.

A moment ago I was wondering how the chief executive sleeps at night, knowing that millions of people suffer as a result of a product he makes, and it came to me. He sleeps the same as the man who is the chief executive of a company that makes nuclear weapons or guns – soundly!

He is happy his company makes plenty of profit, has happy shareholders, a complicit government, and a large salary to boot, what more could he ask for? He doesn't care about the end product, he is concerned purely with the unemotional task of running a business, giving jobs to the community, delivering a product on time, and getting his invoices paid. He is not in the community care business, this is a commercial venture, which exists merely to make money. Why should he be bothered with such paltry things as the health of the nation, that's for the government to deal with. As long as the product he sells is legally approved by the government, he doesn't have to care about addiction, that's for someone else to worry about – someone like you and me.

As I have spent literally thousands of pounds and bought over 3,500 packets of cigarettes over my lifetime (estimated), I was thinking about writing to the chief executive of the cigarette firm, whose brand I am addicted to. The letter would go something like this.

Dear mr chief executive

My name is alan orr. I have been smoking your cigarettes for the past 17 years, although I have hated myself every time I bought them. I have been to hypnotherapy, tried patches, gone cold turkey, and really desperately wanted to stop smoking for good.

As you have managed to addict me, I wondered how you plan to help me stop smoking your cigarettes. I don't want them, but I crave them, and the cravings are sometimes too much to bear. What is it you put in these legal products that I can't stop having them?

I await your reply eagerly, as I would like to stop smoking, and having tried everyone else, I thought that maybe you have the antidote, but don't want to use it as you would lose money.

If you help me, I promise to keep it a secret between us.

Yours sincerely
alan macmillan orr

What do you think the answer would be?

Do you think the cigarette company wants you to stop? Of course they don't. As we discussed previously, they are a commercial business, and are not in the business of spreading good health to all corners of the globe, but maybe they could! Forget what people say they want, that's merely addiction talking. If the cigarette manufacturers wanted to do something good for the world they could.

So how about stopping making cigarettes, there's a radical idea!

I'm not talking about banning cigarettes either. If you ban something, people are so stupid that they want it even more, even if it's not good for the system. I'm talking about cigarette companies wanting to do the right thing for humanity.

Of course, if you work for a cigarette company you may lose your job, but you'll get another one. Isn't the health of the planet important to you? Probably not. Of course, clandestine cigarette making operations would set up to provide the "customers" with what they wanted, selling at black market rates, but if you went to that trouble to get your hands on cigarettes wouldn't you see that you were truly addicted, that you would do anything to get your hands on a small stick that you inhale acrid smoke into your lungs with?

So smokers of the world (that's you and me), let us try to do something that so many have failed in, and that is giving up cigarettes, and showing all the chief executives of the cigarette companies that we won't support their expensive lifestyles or their luxury villas anymore; and that we do care, not only about our own health, but we also take personal responsibility for the litter that smoking causes and the billions of dollars of other people (tax payers) money that gets wasted trying to save human beings that are addicted to smoking.

We also take responsibility for the disgusting smell that permeates so many of our cafes, bars, and restaurants, and we acknowledge that although it was not our fault we became addicted, we will not let smoking control our lives anymore. We want to breathe real air, not air filtered with tobacco and a thousand other chemicals, and we want to be able to exercise without having to stop for a breather every minute or so. We will stop supporting the employees of cigarette companies who are having rather a nice lifestyle at our expense.

I make this commitment with you today to stop smoking forever and I hope you make it too. We may feel anxious at the thought of giving up, but I for one do not want to be suffering with lung cancer in five years while cigarette company shareholders are enjoying their dividends.

Do it today. Make this your personal revolution. Don't be kept in the prison of addiction that makes us weak and powerless. Exercise your power to do something for the benefit of your own system, and then... Exercise! Cough up that phlegm that's been stuck in your chest all these years. Clear it out, then breath deeply. Remember, deep breathing is what gives you most of the pleasure you get when you inhale a cigarette! Think about it.

If you get tense, just inhale some nice fresh air and you'll feel 100% better. Fresh air isn't going to kill you. Smoking probably will.

S p i r i t u a l

Concerned with sacred matters or religion or the church

•

Concerned with or affecting the spirit or soul

•

Lacking material body or form or substance

These days, spirituality is often used in preference to “religious,” as in “I’m spiritual but not religious;” but what exactly is it to be spiritual? Is it real, or is just another man-made concept – a projection of the mind? Is it perhaps just a feeling that there is something else, that maybe this life is not quite so black and white, that maybe after all, there is another life waiting for us, or that although our bodies die, “we” do not? That’s what we are here to investigate.

We all like to believe in something, and hold on to the remote possibility that there is more to life than just living and dying! We hope we will find our true purpose in life when we “cross over” to the other side; but what is this “other side”?

Some of us believe we have a soul, and the soul can never die: it being our life force, the thing that keeps us alive. But do you really believe we

can exist forever, or could it merely be a hope we are not going to just slowly decompose in a hole in the ground, never to be heard of again.

Soul

1. *The immaterial part of a person; the actuating cause of an individual life*
2. *A human being*

“Spiritual” has become the new buzz word for the so-called “new age” community the world over. I found this out quickly when I went to live at a buddhist community in scotland for a short while.

“You know, alan, I’m a very spiritual person, I’ve always known that. I’m very in tune with the aura and the spiritual world in general.”

Unfortunately, when people use the word spiritual all the time I tend to tune out with what they are saying. I get the feeling that most people just want you to know they are something more than they seem, that they are somehow involved in a secret, hidden, other world that only the few have access to. All this talk of spiritualism really starts to make me wonder about the human race.

Now whilst I am fairly sure (although one can never be sure of anything) that matter and energy never dies – it transforms, like a rain drop falling as snow, then melting into water only to be evaporated by the suns rays – this is a process of the universe, of life, not of some special spiritual place.

The idea that man retains his consciousness and his memory when he dies is, I’m afraid, just the good old mind projecting what it wants to believe. But that is not truth.

Whilst at the buddhist retreat, I met a lady who was obsessed with “angels,” and she told me that because I didn’t believe, I would never see the angels who were there to protect her. I asked her what would she believe in if no one had ever mentioned the word “angels” to her, which confused her somewhat.

“If you had never heard of angels would you still believe in them?”

“Errm, of course! What a stupid question,” she replied.

This is not about belief or disbelief. We are not here to argue whether there is a spiritual world or not, that would lead us nowhere. What I want to understand with you here is why we have become trapped into thinking about this spiritual world, and why we have to (a) try to convert people to believing, and (b) keep talking about it all the time. Ok, you believe that there is a spiritual life. Great. Enjoy your belief. You’re not

harming anyone else as long as it stays in your head. It's also great if you don't believe that there is a spiritual life, fantastic! Just keep that to yourself as well.

But why do we have to keep talking about this?

For thousands of years, people have been trying to convert others to become believers in the “soul,” but as I said in the afterlife topic, if someone tries to sell us car insurance, we stop, question it, and question it again. With this spirituality stuff, one person mentions that there is a soul, and onto the bandwagon we all go. Do you understand what I am trying to say here?

For millennia, man has been projecting this idea of a soul onto other people, telling stories of contact with the other side, of ghosts and poltergeists, demons and angels, but what is the truth of it? We have to investigate this ourselves thoroughly with an open mind, not conditioned by what others believe.

Ghosts and other worldly apparitions!

For as long as history has been documented, there have been stories of ghosts appearing, like poltergeists making pots and pans bang in the kitchen, throwing stuff about, and generally making a nuisance of themselves. There have been stories of people possessed by demons, and most people will be able to relate a story of ghostly contact that happened to someone in the family. My mother has one.

“On the night my mother died, I stayed in her flat. After a traumatic day I went to bed. As I was lying asleep in her bed I could hear breathing and then I felt a hand in my back. There was no one else there.”

Woooooo. Scary!

My girlfriend's mother recounted one to me just the other day.

“It was 2.20 am, and I was lying in bed with my husband and the phone started ringing. He picked it up and said 'hello...hello,' but there was nobody there. I later found out that my mother died at 2.20 am that night.”

Another scary story!

So what do we believe? Was my mother telling the truth, did her mother really come back and do some heavy breathing and place a hand on her back just to “reassure” her she was ok, or was it all in her mind? As my mother didn't have a chance to say goodbye to her mother, did she secretly want her mother to tell her it was going to be all right, or did her

mother, free of her earthly body come back and place her hand on her? What about my girlfriend's mother? Was it just coincidence that phone rang at 2.20 am, or did her mother use the spiritual operator to make a "silent call" to her? I'm sorry, I can see I have now placed the seed of doubt in your mind and you are not sure what to believe!

Again and again, these kind of stories come up, reaffirming to us that there must be some truth in there being another world. But we don't hear *that* many stories. There aren't millions of these ghosts around all the time, touching people on the back and calling them up, and a lot of people die *every day*! So what's really happening here?

Some people say that when we see ghosts it is because they are trapped between this world and the next, unable to continue their journey to the next world for some reason. Some people say we hear or see strange things the day our loved ones die if they haven't had a chance to say goodbye to us. There are many explanations.

Some of these apparitions are obvious hoaxes, and some are apparently very real. I do not want to believe or disbelieve any of these stories because I have never seen a ghost with my own eyes.

One thing I do know, is that energy cannot die, it merely transforms, and if we are energy, then of course, we cannot die (in the physical sense yes, our bodies are only machines with a fairly short operating life). But we must not get caught up in belief of a spiritual world, as belief comes from fear.

Let's try the ouija board!

How many people round the world have tried the ouija board (*a board with the alphabet on it; used with a planchette to spell out supernatural messages*), trying to contact dead relatives? They sit around the table, light some candles and turn out the lights, waiting in trepidation for the phone to be connected to the other side, sitting in silence, filled with fear. They ask a question and all of a sudden the glass starts moving and a message starts arriving via the inter-dimensional teleprinter!

I don't know why people want to do it, but people want to get some message back from "the other side," just to prove that there is an afterlife after all. But it all seems a bit clumsy don't you think, what, with a glass moving around on a table, and three letter messages being spelt out, a bit like the medium who asks the audience: "Is there anyone here who has

lost a relative whose name begins with the letter A?" Magically, someone's dead husband's name was alan! What are the chances of that?

I'm sorry if I am taking this all a bit less seriously than you would like me to, but that is the reason I am poking fun at you and all of this nonsense! Life is a joyful affair. If there is a spiritual world, should it not be even more joyful than this land, now that all who have passed on are free of desire, greed, fear, and hate. What do you think?

So can I ask you why we are so scared of ghosts, or even the idea of ghosts and spirits? Surely being contacted by the woman you were married to for fifty years should be a happy occasion, even if she does just drop in through the wall to visit you!

I'm sorry, but if life is funny, then why can't the supernatural world be funny? Why do the religious people treat it all so seriously? If there really is a soul, and there is a god and there is a next life, we should be happy about it; joyful even, that we are going to be free of this body and we will be able to roam the cosmos in an ethereal body without having to pay the gas bill anymore. Surely that is something that should be celebrated?

But it isn't projected like that by those in charge (religious organisations). This afterlife thing is projected as a very serious affair indeed, as we can see by the huge churches, temples, and mosques they erect, and by the obedience they demand in return for eternal salvation. If you don't obey then you can expect no less than eternal damnation in hell! So we must look closely at this together, because the religions rely on fear to get you to conform to their way of thinking. We must break through this, and try to find out the truth of it.

It doesn't actually matter if there is a soul, ghosts, or angels; what is important is to understand ourselves, our relationship to the universe, to nature, to water, to the animals, to the trees and see that we are as one with them.

We are the rocks and the sky and everyone else, there is no separation, no division between anything. There is no other world, there is just the whole. Other implies division. Do you follow what I am trying to say here? In describing ghosts or angels, or god or spirituality, we are separating ourselves from the universe, which is everything. Our blood is not our blood, our minds are not our minds, our skin is not our skin, it is part of the whole – all seamlessly inter-connected. It is time we accepted this, and stopped trying to prove that there is another, the other is us and we are the other.

So next time you talk about being a “spiritual person,” please realise that by labelling yourself, you are separating yourself from the whole.

The definition “spiritual person” means nothing, except maybe to impress others that you are in some way better than they are, that you are concerned with matters which are much more important than the lowly business of living. It is merely a projection of your mind wanting to become something more than it already is. Give up the illusion, and accept the wholeness that already exists. Everything is perfect.

S t r e s s

(psychology) A state of mental or emotional strain or suspense

•

(physics) Force that produces strain on a physical body

•

Difficulty that causes worry or emotional tension

The one thing we will all probably agree on is that life is stressful. We have all suffered from stress at one time or another, and some of us are stressed all the time. But why should we be so stressed? And anyway, what is stress?

As we begin our discussion, let's take a moment to consider how we are feeling right now. Do you feel tense or anxious? Is there something on your mind that's bothering you? Are you having relationship problems, money worries? Well hold them in the back of your mind, and for a short while, just let go. Allow yourself to become fully immersed in our dialogue, for that is all that is important now.

My father always told me the reason I was so stressed all the time was because I had no money. My therapist said I was so stressed because of my father! But even when I had no money worries, and I had resolved the

issues concerning my father's parenting during my early years, I still found that seemingly unstressful situations were making me incredibly stressed.

I went back to another therapist and asked him what he thought. He suggested I was suffering from anxiety (*(psychiatry) a relatively permanent state of worry and nervousness occurring in a variety of mental disorders, usually accompanied by compulsive behaviour or attacks of panic*) and I had to admit to him that several years before I had suffered a series of panic attacks.

“Ah ha!” He said, “I think we've found the reason you are so stressed!”

And although I didn't like to be labelled with having a mental disorder, in the back of my mind, I was secretly pleased that there was a technical definition for what I was feeling. “Hooray,” I thought, “I'm not going mad, I've got a disorder!” Anxiety disorder to be exact. After several intensive sessions, I came out feeling a lot better. I still got anxious occasionally, but on the whole, I was fine.

What he had done, he said, was to lower my base stress levels. To help me imagine it, he drew me a graph. “That line towards the top is where your old stress levels used to be. Now if that is your base stress level, and you encounter a stressful event, it's going to tip you right off the scale into panic” He then drew a new line towards the bottom of the graph, and said “that's where your base stress levels are now, so if you encounter a situation where you would normally get hyper-stressed the peak of the stress will still not tip you over the edge into panic.”

I wasn't sure I understood all this, but from what I could gather, I was now going to be less stressed (or anxious) in my daily life. Magically, it worked! It didn't resolve my money worries or “fix” my whole life, but I now knew I would at least be able to handle situations without going into sheer panic. That was a great turning point in my life.

But that's enough about me and my worries! What about you?

You may not feel as anxious and stressed as I did, but given that you probably don't live on a peaceful mountain retreat tending your crops surrounded by pure serenity, I'll take a guess that you probably live in a highly urbanised society (or close to one), and go out to work every day in order to pay your bills, feed and clothe yourself (and your family if you have one). You may have credit cards, a hefty mortgage, and direct debits (*system for making regular payments directly from a bank account*) coming out of your ears! In fact, I would say that most of your life is spent managing money.

So can I help you? The answer is probably not! You see, the price you pay for having a consumer lifestyle is stress. Do you know what I mean? For having a comfortable lifestyle you must pay. If everyone didn't work this hard, there wouldn't be so much stuff. So, unfortunately you are stuck.

You are trapped in a capitalist consumer society driven by greed for more. You want more? You're going to have to work longer. You want fast internet? You must pay. You want to go out for nice meals? You must pay. You want to jet off somewhere sunny? You must pay. Even the rural farmers who may not think they are caught up in all this must pay. They must pay because they are providing products to the society. So what's all this capitalism about anyway? Is it really the cause of my stress? Surely not...

Capitalism

An economic system based on private ownership of capital

The protesters always blame the system, but *we* mustn't blame the system, after all, it was created by man. To understand it, we must look to ourselves. So before we can say that private ownership of capital is evil and that capitalism must be destroyed, we must think about what it has done for us.

First, it has given us the freedom to be inventive, and create jobs, and wealth for the people without the interference of the government. Owning capital (*wealth in the form of money or property owned by a person or business and human resources of economic value*) can't be a bad thing. After all, why should the government control who has what? Capitalism allows individual freedom of expression, freedom to build wealth, for the individual, the wider society, and the country (levied in the form of taxes).

It has helped people collaborate on projects from all over the world, resulting in the invention or creation of products that the stale environment of government control could never hope to achieve. And look what has been created in such a short time.

Most of us (even people who complain that they have no money) have somewhere comfortable to live, with central heating, warm clothes and a job to go to every day to provide all the bolt-ons that make modern life so exciting, like satellite tv, internet, mobile phones, laptop computers, holidays by plane, and endless shopping for stuff we want but don't need. So before you start complaining about the evils of the capitalist society,

take a good look around you, and see what has been created by you, and for you. Because remember, you helped to build it too.

Would you really like to have the government control everything you say, do and own as happens in strict communist societies? I'm sure you don't.

If you read karl marx's communist manifesto, you would probably think to yourself, "actually this seems like a good idea!" But unfortunately, like all good ideas, they are implemented by man, with all his ambition, and desire for power and wealth. Pretty soon, you find the utopian society you hoped to create is now full of inequality, with the few owning the most, and controlling the many. That just seems to be how it goes. And capitalism is no different.

It is like a pyramid with those at the top controlling everything and the wealth and status gradually filtering down to the widest point. The base. That is where the workers sit. They are the ones who provide all the labour necessary to keep the show running. In communism that is where they would stay, but with capitalism, the world is their oyster! Instead of struggling to climb the (deliberately) slippery slope to the top, which, under government control, would just result in you sliding back to the bottom (sorry, sliding back to equality). With capitalism, you just start your own pyramid!

Now you are at the top, and everyone else is underneath you. Of course, you will have to work very hard, you will have to have a better product, and better business strategy than your competitors, but if you play your cards right, you will not only stay at the top of your pyramid, but can takeover other people's pyramids! This is the joy of capitalism. No one is forcefully kept down in order to ensure "equality," which as we have seen with communism, is just a myth circulated by the powerful to dominate the weak. Their pyramids involve them sitting at the top, surrounded by barbed wire and soldiers with guns, with you at the bottom. Some equality.

But capitalism is only a system, one that was touted as being a way out of poverty for the masses by the scottish economist adam smith, who, in the eighteenth century, advocated private enterprise and free trade. One man, one idea. And on the other, we have marx, who comes up with a new system 100 years later, touted as being a way out of poverty, based on abolishing private ownership. The two systems went head to head, and now in 2008, most countries have adopted the capitalist system, or are heading towards it. Smith 1 – Marx 0

A new future?

It is incredible what the idea of one man can achieve, don't you think? With every system, there has to be an idea, and ideas start usually with one man. But don't worry, I'm not going to start promoting any new system that will "free man from oppression," ideas have caused enough misery as it is.

But one day, I am sure someone will come up with a new "way" forward, and as long as the powerful can see benefit in it for themselves, they will ensure it becomes widely adopted. We must always remember that communism was forced onto the people, and so was capitalism. By who? I'll leave that up to you to work it out...

"So if capitalism isn't the answer, and communism isn't the answer, what is the answer?" you ask.

Well, unfortunately, there is no "answer," as with all systems they are run by people. And if people like what they get from the system then why would they (a) want to change it, or (b) want to change themselves? Lots of people have benefited from capitalism, just as the few benefited from communism.

"So," says you, "let's stick to the one that has benefited most people."

"Hear, hear" say the crowd.

And capitalism is installed as being "the only way forward."

But like an election with only two parties, the choice is somewhat limited, wouldn't you say? And that's normally what happens, isn't it? Conservatives vs. the socialists; Capitalism vs. communism. These are your options. You must choose one of them.

"But why must I choose one of them, I don't like either of them. Isn't there a third way?" you ask.

"No, there isn't."

Of course, these days, even the capitalists are starting to come up with ideas for "social businesses" where the business is in business to do some good in the community, or co-ops (*a jointly owned commercial enterprise set up for the benefit of the owners*) are set up, but the underlying theory that the political and economic system runs on, is capitalist. So maybe one day, some clever social theorist, or economist will come up with a new book on how to run the world with equality and wealth for everyone. It will become widely adopted, and eventually one man will sit on top and the rest will work for him, or the system. And so it will continue. Round, and round, and round.

But whose really to blame for all this? The system, or you, for blindly following it?

I'd have to say, unfortunately, it's you. You are a member of the most intelligent species on earth, yet you blindly follow someone's whimsical idea! Do you not know that it is ideas that got us in this mess in the first place? And what a mess it all is.

Idea

1. *Your intention; what you intend to do*
2. *A personal view*
3. *The content of cognition; the main thing you are thinking about*

Now before you start, I am not about to blindly criticize ideas. Ideas have solved many of man's problems (and caused as many, sorry). When ideas are limited to the bottom steps of the pyramid – whatever system you are in – they merely help solve limited technical problems, whether they be social, financial, or commercial; it is only when the ideas originate on the top steps, that things start to become worrying.

“Hey! I've got a great idea, let's start a new religion!”

“Hey! I've got a great idea, let's go to war!”

“Hey! I've got a great idea, why don't we set up a new economic and political system”

“Hey! I've got a great idea, let's not have any more great ideas!”

You see, when ideas are created at the top level, the person at the top uses their influence, their will, or soldiers to enforce it. He is the great man; the great leader. His ideas must be listened to, people should follow his ideas; after all, why else would he be on top?

Let us get this straight. Ideas are created by thought, which in other topics, we agreed was limited. Ideas are never created by insight, as insight is just insight. So why do grand ideas always cause misery for everyone and everything? Because, as they arise out of thought, which is just the accumulation of experience, knowledge, and memory, they are never “well thought out!”

How can something that originates in the “me” possibly have thought out all the connections and the consequences of the idea? If you start from “me,” then you obviously have a vested interest in the idea. You would not implement something that hurt you either financially,

physically or emotionally, would you? So an idea can never be for the benefit of all beings in the universe.

Our whole world is built on ideas, there is no escaping it. Actually, I've had an idea! Maybe the reason that the animal kingdom gets on so well without us is that there are no ideas! No lions standing up and saying, "now listen everyone, I've had an idea that will benefit all of us. What we are going to do is to share the feeding ground more equally so everyone gets enough to eat"

"But lion, there is already enough to eat, why do we need to change it?"

"Because, I say so," growls lion.

You see, there is no such thing as a good idea or a bad idea, just beneficiaries of the idea. But in the end, no one benefits. There is just suffering. Sometimes the result of the idea is financial suffering, sometimes psychological, sometimes emotional and sometimes physical.

Do you follow what I am saying here?

Capitalism is an idea, communism is another idea, but the end result is suffering for all concerned. But we are human, and we can't stop having ideas, that is one of the great beauties and curses of having such a big brain, capable of so much complex thought.

The only way we can stop having these grand ideas, is to give up all desire on power and control over others. It is the only way out of this mess, where we have man fighting man over land and money, and destroying our natural habitat for profit. We may not have created the system of capitalism, but we are sure taking full advantage of it to benefit ourselves. We love being able to work hard and enjoy the material benefits of our labour.

Thanks to the way the system is set up, all you have to do is give your labour to it, and you will be rewarded with wealth. You don't even have to be at the top of the pile to enjoy it, you can be anywhere in between. But you must compete for it. You must have your own self-interest at heart at all times. You must forget compassion for all beings, and think about yourself, your needs and your desires, always, if you want to taste its riches.

Be careful though. Once you join, you are trapped forever, constantly in a state of acquisition; for it is only through the acquisition of more material goods, and money, that the system can survive. If you do not desire a new tv or a new car, or a bigger house, how is the tv manufacturer, car manufacturer or builder expected to satisfy his desires? How are his employees to fulfil theirs? It is a constant movement of give

and take. You give your labour and your time and you take material gains as the pay off.

But what happens when the body says, "I can't cope with this anymore. I thought this game was fun in the beginning, but now I want out." I'll tell you what happens. Your body ends up competing with the system to see who will win!

Are you ready for all this, caveman?

We may have come a long way financially, technically, and artistically since the days of our cavemen ancestors, but in universe time, not long has passed. What's a few million years in a universe that has been going for billions?

If we are to believe that we evolved from the apes, sometime ago we came down from the trees, had to adapt to our new environment, started walking on two legs, were forced to look for food elsewhere, finally discovered fire, developed simple tools for hunting, were forced to wear animal skins for protection against the cold climates we wandered into, had to compete, and then collaborate for food with other tribes as the population grew, eventually invented the wheel, and then a long time later, someone had the bright idea to start agriculture. We domesticated several species of animals, started specialising, settled in one place, built a wall around it, and someone proclaimed themselves the leader. And the modern city was born.

Fast forward 10,000 years and here we all are; living in cities, ruled by leaders, competing, and fighting for resources. What's changed? Well, intellectually we have changed a lot, but biologically we are still the same animal we were all those thousands of years ago.

Stress has always existed, not as a hindrance to man, but as an asset, to help motivate him succeed in surviving. And even 10,000 years ago, all we were doing was surviving. Even when we started to trade with other nations it was about trading one resource you had, for another you did not. Pure survival. But that's not what life is about now.

Thanks to the industrial revolution, and backed by a capitalist economy, we are mostly secure in our survival needs. Most of us have sufficient food, shelter and water, but we have been offered something more enticing. We have been offered the chance to compete for as much as we could possibly imagine in the world. Untold gold, diamonds,

money and success could be ours if only we give ourselves to the god of greed, capitalism.

Remember, we don't need all this stuff. If we look to the monks of any religion, you will see that they live happily with a basic meal, basic clothing, and basic accommodation. After all, that's all we need to live happily. They do it to free their minds from attachment, and desire to the earth, but it doesn't matter the reason. The fact is, they do it, and it's no hardship. One could say they actually had an easier life because they are not subjected to competition.

But we don't need to compete. We don't need to be rich. We don't need to be successful. We don't need all the latest gadgets. We want them! Something in our mind clings to the idea of being rich, probably because we see how the rich live. People respect them, people cook for them, clean for them. Why wouldn't you want it? We see how the kings and queens live, and the god of capitalism says, "You don't need to be a king or queen to have it all, you just need to believe in me."

The god of capitalism

You may think it is strange, but that's what it is. It is something we believe will lead us to a better life. It is exactly the same thing people are looking for in their spiritual life. A better life. Except with capitalism, you don't have to wait until you are dead. You can taste the riches while you still live on this earth.

So believe you do, and every day, you pray to your god for more money, a better car, or a bigger house. The god answers that you can have it all, but first you must do his bidding.

I decided to interview a well known successful business man about life...

Him: What did the cavemen know about living? All they were doing was wrapped up in goat skins, going out hunting every day so that they could eat, they had no intelligence and they knew nothing about the world. Now I have it all. I have a beautiful home. I have a successful career. I have plenty of money. I have great knowledge. What more could I ask for?

Me: I don't know, what more do you want?

Him: Well, I've had my eye on a boat, an ocean going cruiser, nothing too flash.

Me: Why do you want it?

Him: Why? Well because I've pretty much got everything I need now.

Me: You mean you want?

Him: Whatever. But the point is. I am so much more than my ancestors. They would have been very proud to see what I have achieved!

Me: Which is?

Him: I am rich and I am successful. What more could you ask for ?

Me: Do you not think that there is something more to life than just money and acquiring things?

Him: Sure there is. I love golf, and I love going to the theatre, and I'm taking a course in ancient history now, all made possible because I worked hard.

Me: So is that what people have to do. Work as hard as they can? What if they don't make as much money as you have, what if they aren't able to start their own company or get promoted? Won't they feel bad about themselves, that they are in some way worthless because they are not measuring up to rich people like yourself?

Him: Look. In today's world, everybody has the ability to make money. Heck, I didn't even go to college and look at me! If they don't make it they are either too lazy or too stupid!" (chuckling)

Me: But doesn't all this ambition come at a price? Doesn't all this becoming something better than you are cause a great deal of stress?

Him: Sure I get stressed. I'd be a liar if I said I didn't, but it's all part of the job.

Me: So even if you suffer incredible stress with trying to become rich, trying to pay your bills on time, fending off credit card companies, having your relationship suffer, it's all still worth it?

Him: Hell, yes. Of course it is. If you want to become rich, there's always a lot of stress.

Me: But what if you don't want a stressful life?

Him: Then you shouldn't live in this country. Stress makes the economy go round. It's good for the 'spirit'.

Me: So if I don't want to become rich would I have an easy life?

Him: I don't see why you should have an easy life when we're all stressed!

Me: What I mean is, if I don't want any part of this would my life be simpler?

Him: Of course it would be, what a stupid question, but let me ask you a question. 'Why would you want a simple life when you can have all this?'

And he's right. Why wouldn't anyone want a sports car or a swimming pool? They're nice things to have, but not at the cost of living your life in constant stress. You see, when you think about it, biologically, we're not ready for the life our ideas have created. We are used to our bodies being under stress as a tool to help us find food, but this has gone on way beyond that. With the psychological and physical stress we are under to just keep up with this society, our bodies have gone into meltdown. It's the stress equivalent of hunting 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It's no wonder people turn to alcohol as a "de-stresser." It has surely saved many people from having (and caused many people to have) nervous breakdowns.

We are, at best, simple hunters, who have had the unfortunate burden placed upon them of a mind that craves more than it needs. A mind that has taken the simple art of competing for food into all out war for as much as it can gain. Maybe in another 10,000 years we will have the biological adaptation necessary to live in this world of stress, but what would be the fun of that?

Stress is the fun of the chase, but this time we are not chasing an animal, but material wealth. As it has no way to satisfy us biologically like a meal could, we keep chasing after more and more, for you see, the desire for wealth can never be satisfied. It is not a natural thing. It is not a natural drive. It is invented by man, and for that we must pay the price.

So, no, I am not going to give you any tips on stress reduction, you can pay your therapist for that, or go to a yoga class or take tai-chi! Stress reduction is not about learning yogic breathing or doing meditation, although it may give you a break from competition. Stress reduction is not about re-aligning your city self with your natural self by going on retreats, although they may help temporarily.

Stress reduction is only about one thing; and that is the realisation that the god of capitalism is a false god. He can no more help you to achieve happiness than I can. Once you let go of this longing for a better life, he will disappear. And you will be free to choose the life *you* want.

*And as we let go of the god of ideas and the gods of ambition and
success, we pay tribute to them,
but acknowledge that their time has come.
They were good company while it lasted, but now we must move on.
Let us not look back.*

S u c c e s s

An event that accomplishes its intended purpose

•

An attainment that is successful

•

A state of prosperity or fame

•

A person with a record of successes

Humans have always been successful, haven't they? If they hadn't, you and I wouldn't be able to have this discussion. From our earliest beginnings (apparently) in the trees in africa, through to standing on two feet for the first time, and eventually spreading north to europe, and east to asia; we have overcome great difficulties such as wars, famines and disease, and we are still here.

Other species have fallen by the wayside. They have become extinct, never to reappear on this earth, but we keep going. In fact, we get more and more successful by the day. But could all this success have gone to our heads, could the most successful species on the planet finally cause its own demise? We shall see.

From an early age, it was drummed into me that success was all I should be striving for (after all, no one strives for failure). "Study and pass your

exams, get a good job like your father, and you will be successful like him.” And successful he was. He managed to climb through the ranks of office paper pushers, to become a managing director, employing a couple of thousand people worldwide. He provided a nice house, plenty of money, and private education for me. As a role model for success, he was it.

“Work hard my boy and you too can have all this.”

Unfortunately, it didn't impress me all that much. Why try to be successful when I already had it all!

My parents were most displeased with my attitude. They cajoled me, got me into private study lessons, arranged interviews; in fact they tried everything to help me become a successful person, because you see, that is what is important in life.

I never did become successful in the way my parents wanted, maybe because in my heart I knew they would leave me some money or a house; but deep down, I just couldn't see why we all needed to be so “successful.” I didn't want the adulation of others, or to have power over several thousand employees, and I certainly wasn't interested in making millions of pounds. I just wanted to enjoy my life and have fun – something that was seen as frivolous by my parents.

So what is success? Biologically, success is ensuring the reproduction of the species. Physically, success is having enough to eat, having warm clothing, shelter, and a mate to reproduce with. That's it. Nothing more. The rest is only psychological desire.

So why do I need to be more successful than this? People would say that without ambition, we would be no better than the animals, but given the state of our minds and the planet, I'd have to say that at the moment, we are in a lot worse shape than the animals.

Oh he's very ambitious, he wants to get right to the top

Climbing, climbing, climbing, that's all we ever do, isn't it? We are always on our way to the top, we are never satisfied with what we have and what we are. In fact even when we get there, we just can't stop climbing. When we eventually reach the social summit, and there is nowhere left to go, we invent new ways that not only put us even further above others, but make it harder for people to topple us off our “throne.”

This ambition engulfs us, and takes on a life of its own. We are so desperate to be successful, which in reality is having more than others

(more status, more money, more possessions), that we will do almost anything to get there, even kill other human beings.

But none of this is personal they will tell you. It's just business. The business of being so ambitious that you will climb and trample on anyone who gets in your way. They show no concern for anyone else, although if you questioned them about it, they would say that it blatantly isn't true, and of course they care, but we can see the truth of it, you and I.

The ambitious and successful amongst you may have constructed some slick counter arguments just in case you are challenged on this.

“Listen, if people weren't ambitious, and gave up wanting to be successful, do you think that people would have electricity in their homes by now, or be able to get fresh produce whenever they wanted? What about healthcare? If people weren't successful do you think we would be able to vaccinate millions of people against potentially lethal diseases?”

But what I am talking about is not the need to cure people with disease, or supply them with electricity for cooking and heating (all of which is run by ambitious companies), I am talking about you, the individual, needing to be ambitious, to be successful in your life for personal gain. It is rare to find someone who does something out of unconditional love for everyone and everything on the planet.

Everyone has ambition, even the monk wants to be a successful meditator; only his ambition is to reach god, to find enlightenment. None of us are free from it. You see, it's not solely about money or possessions but our need to climb, to get somewhere, to get more knowledge, to discover more things. We are all ambitious. Because our minds are wired that way.

Victory is mine!

I find it hard to talk about war being “successful,” but that is precisely what happens when one army overcomes another. They are the winner of the struggle. They have defeated their enemy – the evil one, and they can stand high on the hill, and declare “*victory!*” at which point everyone cheers.

After the second world war, the leaders of the western world declared victory over germany and japan, and, oh, how the crowds cheered, and waved as the troops passed through the streets. It was a very happy affair. The campaign had been successful.

But success is not something I would call the deaths of countless millions of people, even if it was for my “freedom.”

“You are ungrateful” I hear you cry. “My grandfather gave his life so you could be free.” But I am bound to the blood that was spilt for me. I am bound to the soldiers that tore apart flesh. Did they do it for me? No. They did it because our successful leaders did not want to be controlled by other successful leaders.

There is no right and wrong in war, all it does is create misery, and suffering for all involved. After all, you are only seen as the one in the “wrong” if you are on the losing side. “But we didn't start it,” I hear some of you saying, “we were only doing it, to protect ourselves and to free the people who were under the rule of a tyrannical dictator.”

But the germans didn't see it like that, they thought they were doing the right thing. It would have been hard for the leaders to get so many people to kill on their behalf if the people didn't think they were in the right.

The only aim of each of the countries involved was to be successful, not to create a peaceful harmonious world where all of us live in balance with nature. You only have to look around you now to see that it changed nothing. Sure, we are not ruled by germans, russians, or japanese, but war still surrounds us. Misery still surrounds us. And that misery is caused by ambition, the need to be successful, whatever the costs.

Let's go into this more deeply shall we?

My leaders tell me I am free, because they defeated an enemy on my behalf, but their definition of freedom is not mine. They tell me I am free to think and do what I like (as long as I conform to their laws). When I don't conform, I will soon find out that this freedom they are talking about is given, or loaned to me temporarily, and is not actually a human right. Do you understand?

The leaders want to be successful. They want to be the most successful leader on the planet, and they will stop at nothing to get what they want; whether economic success, or military success, it doesn't matter. I am a mere pawn in their ascent to become successful, and if I am killed on the way, whilst fighting for “freedom,” then so be it. What matters is victory; reaching the summit.

But if my success as a human being has been dependent on others being killed so I can live in a country free from tyranny and oppression, I don't know if I want to be part of it. Tyranny and oppression are just the methods of ambition.

The freedom fighter

Imagine you live in a country that is controlled by a military junta or dictator. You are not allowed freedom of speech, you are brainwashed, and you must conform or go to jail, so you decide to free yourself and everyone else. How do you go about it?

Well, you have three methods available at your disposal – peaceful protest, civil disobedience, or fighting.

You have seen that civil disobedience has worked in other countries, but here in your country, the military are under orders to kill anyone who is disobedient, so you ask for help from another country to supply you with weapons. They also want rid of the leaders in your country, so they agree to help. You raise an army, and march on the capital.

For several years, there is terrible bloodshed. Women, children, and the old suffer most, and most of your troops are killed along the way. But you will not stop until the last man dies. You will get your freedom whatever it takes.

Eventually you get help from another country, which sends in troops. They kill the remaining “opposition” soldiers, or force them to surrender, and you arrest the leader (now ex-leader) of the country. Victory is yours! The people cheer! The troops pass through the streets on their tanks waving to the grateful people like celebrities, and you execute the ex-president for “crimes against humanity.” There is a democratic election and you are installed as the new president. You speak to your people on the day of your inauguration.

“My people, we have fought long and hard for this day. Many of you have been wounded or lost loved ones during the battle for our freedom. But our day has come. You are now free from the tyrannical and evil president who made you suffer so much (lots of cheering). He is dead, a new day has dawned, and you have freedom. We will rebuild this country and regain our status in the world. We shall become powerful and never again will we let those who seek to control us have their way. Our day has come...”

Blah, blah, blah. And so the cycle begins again.

You start your new job having climbed to the summit through the ambition to “free the people” and you are now on top. You have spent the last few years fighting your way to the top, killing and maiming, all in the name of freedom, but what makes you so different from the person you replaced? Oh, maybe because you added the word “freedom,” you

think it sounds better; but you are both the same. You will do anything to achieve your ambition. Success is paramount. Just like the man before you.

What cost success?

Maybe this ambition (*a strong drive for success*) stems from the time when man was a hunter, when the need for survival was the only thing driving him, and success meant (a) getting enough food to eat, (b) defeating enemies and predators, and (c) staying alive long enough to pass his genes on.

Now, most of us have plenty to eat and with modern medicine, we all live much longer and so have plenty of time to procreate. There aren't many enemies and no predators to speak of, but somehow this biological hard wiring is still with us, and it is causing immeasurable suffering on a global scale. The problem is, most people don't even know they are suffering.

This ambition is causing man to behave in ways which are not only not beneficial for himself, but for the rest of the planet as a whole.

Ambition is cutting down rainforests, breaking families apart, killing innocent people, digging up the planet, addicting people to everything, polluting the skies.

So whatever anyone tells you, *you* are *all* you need. Everything is already in you. You are already successful. Do you follow? Thanks to the biological drive to survive by your ancestors, here you are! You are a wonderful human being, filled with love. Why do you need to be anything else? Do you need a title, which is meaningless, or a large office, or people bowing down to you, showing you tribute and respect to be more than you already are? Do you need to control people, to show you are more than you already are?

The more ambitious you are, the more you separate yourself from others, the more you are divided. You stand, not grounded, but as a precarious rock on top of the mountain that takes little to knock off. Remember, there are several billion people below you just waiting for the chance to take your place.

This ambition is just psychological longing to be more than it already is, but when look deep inside, you will see that being successful is just a man-made concept. You are already a wonderful human being. All this climbing, and then nothing. What's the point of that?

S u f f e r i n g

A state of acute pain

•

Misery resulting from affliction

•

Psychological suffering

•

Feelings of mental or physical pain

Life is suffering, as some of the ancient religions have taught. Everyone must suffer here. It's your job! But don't worry, the next life will be better, or if it's not, definitely the afterlife. Sorry, could someone explain this to me? I mean in plain english, where I can understand why everyone must suffer.

Of course, there are probably a million religious or philosophical ideas as to why life is suffering, but I'm not buying into it, and neither should you.

Physically, I had a normal childhood. My parents looked after me well, and I didn't want for anything materially; but when my father left us, I felt lost and abandoned. I couldn't understand it, and neither could my mother. She went into a deep state of depression, and I struggled on

through my schooling; but I was still alive, well clothed, and warm in the winter.

Throughout my adult life, I have suffered from anxiety and panic attacks, but not at a conscious level. One moment I was fine, the next I was having cold sweats, shaking and feeling the need to escape anywhere.

Through close self study, the development of awareness, the use of positive imagery and self talk, I have managed to transcend the suffering in my mind that has caused me to finish relationships, leave countries I was living in, and run away from jobs. I now accept that this mental illness (because that's what it is) was a part of life, and part of living, and perhaps the price I had to pay for having such a large complex brain (as we all have).

When we talk about suffering, most of you will associate images of children dying of starvation, populations devastated by flood and war, and images of people living in extreme poverty. Although these people are suffering terribly, the suffering is caused by their external environment, something they could always try to escape.

The suffering I want to talk to you about is not physical, but it is also not through mental illness. This is daily suffering, brought about by thinking. Suffering that cannot be escaped from. You cannot run away from yourself, after all, except through perhaps killing yourself, but why go to all that bother when the answer may just be a question away...

“How's life alan?”

“How's life? I'll tell you how life is, it's utterly shit! I hate my life.”

“Oh, sorry for asking.”

So when asked about how your life is “doing,” what are you basing it on? Financial and personal success in business? The prettiness of your wife? The size of your house or car? The envy your friends show you? Have a good long think about that and I'll be back to you in a moment...

The problem is, we look at how other people are doing, and then we compare ourselves to them. If our best friend is successful and happy, and we aren't, we then think there must be something wrong.

Stop Suffering NOW

I'll tell you how your “life” is, like mine, it's just perfect. Remember, we are not comparing anything here. You are alive and living on a wonderfully abundant planet (compared with, say mars, ooh, sorry we're not meant to be comparing!). It's only when you start thinking that

things start going wrong. Where desire and greed rear their ugly head, where you bring in comparison and start to think, “jeez, I'm really miserable.”

I have one thing to say to you. Unless you are incarcerated in a mental hospital for your own and others protection, this is the life you have created. You are the creator of everything. There is no point blaming everyone else for the situation you find yourself in. It is only through thinking you have started suffering, which is mental anguish. After all, physical suffering is through torture, malnutrition, lack of water etc.

Some monks actively pursue this kind of physical suffering in order to attain enlightenment through fasting, or self flagellation (*beating as a source of erotic or religious stimulation*), but I don't recommend it! If you want to lose a bit of weight, go ahead and stop eating for a day or so, or if you fancy a bit of erotic pleasure get someone to beat you with a whip, but suffering for religious reasons is pointless!

When I set off on my journey of self-discovery, I thought that that kind of suffering was to be encouraged, after all, we slovenly sit around watching tv every night drinking beer, and generally getting fat, so in order to be different to the masses, fasting and a strict simple lifestyle were a must.

The lifestyle of a monk, I concluded, was where I was headed; a strict diet served in a simple bowl with lots of serious meditation and being serious. Only through this path could I attain enlightenment, leave this feeble earth body behind, and join in with the rest of the enlightened ones as part of the universal consciousness! After all, that's what the other monks are trying to do, get out of the cycle of suffering, and do a little bit of praying for the poor souls left behind.

After a while, I began to think this was all a little bit selfish, and a little bit pointless. Why would I have to punish my own body in order to cleanse my mind? Couldn't I do it without subjecting myself to a religious institution where the first lesson you learn is that all life is suffering? I thought it all a bit negative and decided to go my own way!

Several years went by, and I was still “suffering.” I began to think that maybe these monks were right after all, so I returned to a retreat to do some serious thinking. “Why am I suffering,” I thought. And then it came to me: “I thought,” that was the key to this! Why couldn't I see it before?

Without thinking, life is just as it is. The trees blossom in the spring and the leaves fall in autumn. Every day the tide turns. The mountain is still the mountain. Water is water. Sometimes it rains, sometimes it

doesn't. Sometimes I am happy, sometimes I am sad. Sometimes the weight of the world is on my shoulders, sometimes it isn't. Sometimes I make money, sometimes I don't. Water is still water, and every autumn the leaves fall from the trees. I can see why the monks want free of this life, maybe it's not exciting enough for them!

That's when I decided that all this "life is suffering" was frankly a load of old crap! If you think life is suffering, chances are you will create a life that is suffering. Come on, we're supposed to be the most intelligent species in the universe, it's not that hard. You normally get more of what you think about.

If you think life is suffering, then in all probability, it will be. If you think all is perfect, then it is, do you follow? So after reading that, "how's your life? Shit? Or just perfect?" In fact, it isn't either, life just is. How's your thinking?

So when I ask you are you suffering what is your answer?

Don't beat yourself up with a whip, or fast for days on end; start to use your intelligence. If life was meant to be suffering, how come it's only you suffering and everyone else isn't? The monks would say that everyone is suffering, and they are just living in an illusion by denying it, but we don't need to buy into that; that's just their opinion, after all. How do they really know that life is suffering?

Sure, some people may be unhappy, or have no money, no job or no car, or be oppressed by a vicious dictator, but that has more to do with the society we have created than anything else.

When we see people starving on the tv, we agree that, yes, they *are* suffering, but not because it is part of a divine plan, but because their economy is dead, the country is in political turmoil, and more often than not, there are too many of them for the land to support.

Do you think our distant ancestors were "suffering?" They may have had to scavenge for food and fight off attackers, but that has more to do with the natural world and how life was back then. You did everything you could just to survive. It is only now when we have a relatively abundant harvest of food that we all have the time to wonder if we are suffering or not!

So I ask you again, are you suffering? You still have no money, no job, no prospects. But If you have some food and a little shelter you are off to a flying start. Forget about your job, that's unimportant. When you need

to, you will create the job you want. Remember there is only you in charge here. This is survival.

What would our cavemen ancestors do? Sit around twiddling their thumbs, questioning the nature of suffering whilst going very, very hungry? I think not. You, and only you, have the power to create what you want in life, but now is not suffering. Having a job may ease some money worries and make your life easier in the financial sense, but if you think you are suffering then you will. Do you follow?

Your life is perfect already. Once you understand that, the rest will start to fall into place; but until that time, you will still believe that life is suffering. “Why does he have a better job than me?” “Why is his girlfriend prettier than mine?” “Why does she have a better group of friends than I do?” “Why have I always got all these bills?” “I want a better job, I want a better life.”

Remember, there is no such thing as a “better” life. Life is just life. It goes on all around us and doesn't care if we are suffering or not. Do you understand?

Water is water. The trees shed their leaves in autumn. The flowers grow in spring. The trees shed their leaves in autumn. Water is water. Life is life.

There is no such thing as suffering. It is not real, it is an imaginary concept created by a mind that is constantly grasping for more, constantly striving to gain more status, more money, more happiness, but the thoughts your mind gives you, those are the real illusion.

So give up the illusion of suffering, and enjoy every minute of your life. It's a wonderful planet (better than mars or the moon: sorry there I go comparing again), full of such joy. You just have to wake up to see it. Those who are caught in the belief that they are suffering just can't see it. But *you* can. You can go out today and experience life as it is. Even if you have no job and no money.

Remember you are in charge of the creation process. So go out there and *create*. Let's just say that suffering is at an end.

The universe doesn't suffer, does it? The universe is everything we are, and we are everything it is. If it doesn't suffer, why should we? It is just another idea put forward by religions to keep people enslaved to them. You and I are free. Let's enjoy ourselves!

S u i c i d e

The act of killing yourself

•

A person who kills himself intentionally

*What great violence is this
What incredible suffering
What sadness
What mind that turns on itself
and in the end destroys its own existence*



I don't know if you've ever known anyone who has killed themselves, I have. He wasn't a close friend but I knew him from the local pub. He never drank that much really, but I had a beer with him the week before he died. He seemed normal, although he said that people were watching him, the police were tapping his phone, and that there was some kind of conspiracy against him. He kept himself to himself pretty much, but I wouldn't have said he was on the brink of attaching a hose to the exhaust of his car and gassing himself to death, something he did the following week. That was it. The end. Death. And for him, maybe peace.

Back then, I had no knowledge of the human mind. It wasn't something that interested me a great deal. I had my job, my girlfriend, my own problems, and to me, he was just another guy drinking in the pub. So when he said people were watching him and tapping his phone, I

didn't make any connection that he may be suffering in his mind – that the feeling people were watching him, or conspiring against him may be a symptom of schizophrenia (*any of several psychotic disorders characterized by distortions of reality and disturbances of thought and language and withdrawal from social contact*), or some other illness of the brain.

You see, in every other capacity he was a regular guy. He had a job, a car, liked music, and the way he explained that the police were tapping his phone sounded, although unlikely, quite plausible. After all, strange things do happen.

I only wish I knew what I do now. I wish I could turn back the clock, and get him some help (because help is available), and save him from carrying out the faulty instructions of a diseased mind. One that has made all the right connections in so many respects, but has one faulty connection. One that enabled him to use his human body and mind to do the one thing that humans are programmed not to do – terminate their own lives.

If terminating your own life was actually a program option in life, the human race would have been wiped out thousands of years ago. Our natural drive is to survive at all costs.

How many stories of courage and bravery have we heard over the years, where people involved in terrible accidents have dragged themselves many miles to a hospital and survived against all odds? The human is programmed for survival, and anything that goes against that natural drive is an error.

When people hear of others committing suicide, they say, “but she seemed so happy, I can't believe she did it to her family. What about the children?”

From the initial shock of hearing of someone's death, comes the accusation that what the person did was a selfish act, without a thought to the family she would leave behind, but suicide isn't like that.

If the natural drive is to survive, what drives people to terminate themselves? These are not people who want to die. Their brain may be telling them they should kill themselves, that it's the only option left, that they should do it now, but can't you see, this is a faulty brain that causes them to think like that. It is not their own thought, there is a physically anomaly in the brain that allows the person to turn on themselves.

Could *you* kill yourself? Right now?

You have debts, a failed marriage, no job, a court case coming up. It seems the only option is killing yourself; but killing yourself is not that

easy. If I sit with a knife ready to slit my wrists or my throat, could I actually carry it out if my mind was working correctly?

Everybody has debts, and problems with relationships, these are just challenges in modern life, and in the end, even if you feel at the end of your tether, there is hope, because you are alive! And whilst you're alive, you can fix the problems. Debts are just debts, and if you can't pay, you can't pay, simple as that. If you have no job, you look for another one. If your marriage has failed, so have a billion others, there are plenty more people with whom to start a relationship with.

Life is an adventure, sometimes you're up, sometimes you're down, and talking to anyone about a problem makes it seem half as bad; but people with a few problems don't kill themselves.

I believe there is evidence that shows that most people think about suicide at sometime in their lives, even for just a second, but the pull of life is so strong it's enough to silence these fleeting thoughts. People who drink heavily may kill themselves, but that is because the chemicals in alcohol actually affect the brain in a physical way. Suicide requires the brain to have made the physical connections that permit the body to harm itself.

Fleeting thoughts in the imagination are just that, imagination, and how many of us can honestly say that we've had what we can only call "crazy thoughts" or "weird ideas" at some time in life? I know I have, and most would be too embarrassing to even discuss with you here! But they pass quickly, and you get on with the business of living. The brains of people who commit suicide must be wired differently, if only at the crucial time they decide to kill themselves. If everyone who had a problem in life committed suicide, there would be nobody left on the planet.

Let's compare two people for a moment to see which one would contemplate suicide. First, let's take the successful man who has lost everything, his wife, his home, his job. Everything he worked for is gone, he is facing court on charges of fraud, and his life seems at an end. He is miserable, and desperate. The second man still has his wife, although he has no water. His country has been at war for twenty years, his children were raped by soldiers, and he scavenges just enough to eat to stay alive. He is miserable and desperate. Who would you think is more likely to kill himself?

While you ponder the question, let me tell you a short story.

Last month, a friend of my girlfriend decided to kill herself. My girlfriend said she had no idea her friend was unhappy. She didn't drink much, was always helping other people with advice, and just two days before she decided to do it, was talking about how much she was looking forward to christmas. Then she did it.

She swallowed forty pills, cut her wrists, then casually walked out of a sixth floor window. Amazingly, she is still alive, thanks to the wonderful doctors who saved her life, and is making a full recovery. Some of you may say that if someone wanted to die that much, she should have been left to get on with it, after all, she didn't give a thought to the family she was leaving behind, nor for the expense and effort in saving her life. But do you know what? When she woke up in hospital, she couldn't remember anything, and she asked the doctors, "was I in a car accident?" She was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Three weeks later a psychiatrist told her what she had done. She could not believe what she was being told, as she had no recollection of the event.

She will now have a different life from that which she imagined as a child. Medication may calm her, and make her less psychotic, but it will always be with her.

Are humans the only species on earth to kill themselves?

The brain is a complex and delicate instrument, and it all needs to be wired correctly for us to function normally. Given the complexities of the brain, it is surprising that so many of us are able to function at such a high level! There are statistics galore on suicide, showing higher rates for men in a certain age bracket, or for women of a certain race and a specific age, or increased suicides in different parts of the world at a specific time of year; but the truth is, these are just statistics.

According to reports, about a million people globally are recorded to kill themselves each year, and compared with the world population of six billion, I'd say that isn't a bad percentage. Given the stresses that are put on us to achieve at all costs, the fact that people manage, either to work through their problems with a friend, counsellor or other support service, is very positive.

It is always terrible if someone actually ends their life, but we have to accept that once they are wired for suicide, it is virtually impossible to

stop them unless you get to them in time. The fuse has been lit, and unless you can disarm the bomb it will go off....

So who is likely to kill themselves in the world apart from those with a diagnosed condition such as schizophrenia? Is it the man who has lost everything or the man who has nothing?

First we have to look at the society we live in today, and what it is wired for. One word: Success. The whole world is wired for success, and let's face it, not all of us can live up to expectations can we? Success as a wife, success as a mother, success at school, success in business, social success. Everything we do is geared towards us being successful. And what if we're not? We're termed a loser, a waste of space, a no hoper, and we are ousted from the in-group.

People want to associate with winners, and if you're shy, had a troubled childhood, aren't well educated, or find trouble "fitting in," you're going to feel pretty low, aren't you? You see everyone else looking "successful," and you can't match up to them. You're an outcast, a nobody.

So although organisations may bandy around suicide statistics on the type of person likely to commit suicide, or the type of employment that may cause people to take their own life due to stress, it isn't about that. I think we all have the ability to commit suicide if we push ourselves into the darkness of despair, and feel that everything is worthless, and we can't see the point of living; but life is hard. It took several billion years to get us to where we are today, in times a lot harder than we are having now.

I wonder what the percentage of cavemen killing themselves was, back all those millions of years ago? Did it happen? Or is suicide a "new" thing?

Do you think there was suicide before conscious thought, and the development of language, as that may explain why we are probably the only species to deliberately kill ourselves. We have the ability to be aware of ourselves in our environment, we have the power of imagination to feel bad, and feel sorry for ourselves. We can feel. We feel depressed, and angry at the world, and we see no other way out of the situation so that anger starts to turn inwards. The brain, not being able to tell if it is a real threat or imagined, starts to make connections that support this negativity and offers us solutions.

Consider for a moment, the multi-millionaire executive whom everyone respects and looks up to. He is at the pinnacle of his career, but due to greed or inappropriate sexual desires with children, has been caught doing something that no one would expect him to do. They

would feel total disappointment in him. He would be shunned; he would be made an outcast of the very society he loved being a part of. How could he face his wife, his own children, and all of his peers?

That fall from success, coupled with anger directed at himself may be enough for his brain to make all the connections necessary to decide to end his life, and save himself from lifelong embarrassment. The same goes for politicians, generals and anyone in a position of power with something to lose. The same goes for children who are expected to do so well at school, but know they will fail.

It is strange to think that the drive for success, or more appropriately, the fear of loss, could be a reason why we believe it is in our best interests to kill ourselves.

In our short example earlier I asked you who you thought would be more likely to kill himself, the successful man who has lost everything or the man with no food and no water. What do you think now?

Can you see that the man with no water is not driven by success or fame, but by the desire to live. The natural human drive to survive. I have no information on suicide statistics in africa, but poverty is not the key ingredient in making the connections, otherwise the millions of starving people in africa would have killed themselves long ago.

Loss of face, loss of position, and loss of respect from your peers are more likely to be key ingredients. You may be depressed that you can't get a job, or your wife has taken the kids and left you, but your life isn't worthless. You are a magnificent human, with the power to do anything in this life.

As I have found out, if I sit having negative thoughts about life, my brain inevitably helps me stay depressed! I know you may find it hard to think of positive things if your world looks grey, but stop for a moment and think of the millions of people in the world who are worse off than you – people who can't eat, get fresh drinking water, or may be oppressed by a cruel and brutal dictator – and try to see how good your life is.

It doesn't matter what has happened to you. It cannot be that bad. Death is bad, life is good, and whilst you're still alive, you have a chance to do something good. You will only be alive on this planet for a few years anyway. If you kill yourself, you are no more than a statistic, time will pass and you will be forgotten like the billions of people who have died before we were born.

Life is great.

If you are depressed where you are, change your environment; never let yourself get caught up in great seas of negativity. Instead of

conforming to what others expect of you, or striving so hard for success that you leave yourself a long way to fall, try to experience life at its most simple. Walk in nature, Spend time by the ocean, talk to a friend, talk to a doctor, talk to anyone who will listen. Do not keep problems locked inside so your brain can help you make the negative connections that may end with you turning on yourself.

Love someone. Love animals. Love people. Love nature.

For a man with love in his heart cannot think negatively about the world or himself, but *please* don't let yourself become another statistic. You have so much to see and learn here, and you won't find it unless you go outside of yourself for a moment, and look at yourself objectively.

How bad can your life be? You are alive. Cherish each moment you live. You are special. You are homo sapiens, a human being, the most advanced species on the planet; and like all complex things, sometimes they need a little maintenance.

The way out of every problem is through love, and when you love yourself, the world can throw all the shit at you it likes, and you know what, it just slides off.

Enjoy your life. It is the only one you have, and it's very, very precious. It has taken hundreds of generations to get you here, billions of years of evolution, and two people to create you. No matter what people have done to you (and in some cases, terrible things), take small steps in the direction of *love*. I have, and I can tell you, it's all been worth it.

S u p e r m a r k e t s

A large self-service grocery store selling groceries and dairy products
and household goods

Everyone's giving supermarkets such a bad rap these days, aren't they? I think they're a great invention. I don't know if you remember the days when you had to go around different local stores just trying to find the goods you needed! If you come from a developing country you may not have supermarkets yet, but hang on in there because they'll be on their way soon.

We used to have to go to the chemists to buy toiletries, the greengrocer for our vegetables, the butcher for our meat, the hardware store for our household mops and cleaning products, and finally, the off licence to buy our alcohol. Imagine having to walk round different shops to buy things – what a terribly old fashioned idea!

These days, mega-marts are everywhere. Huge warehouse type constructions filled with everything you don't need, and need, and there's tons of it. Literally millions of tons of consumer goods. All at LOW

LOW prices. There's always a saving to be had. They've thought of everything; some of them even offer their own credit cards, insurance, and loans. I will assume you have actually been into a supermarket and actually know what I'm talking about. They make it so easy don't they? It's irresistible. You just turn up in your car (make sure it's a big one) to any one of the major supermarkets where parking is never a problem – open 24 hours a day in some cases.

You grab your mega trolley, and away you go! First through the veg section, you grab whatever you can – whatever is on special. Oh, look at those beautiful strawberries imported all the way from farawayland!

Through the meat and fish section, taking lamb, beef, cod, steaks, mince, cutlets, and through to the tins, grabbing peas, beans, corn – on to pickles and jams, passed marmalades and marinades, into dairy; 2 litre semi-skimmed x 4, 4 kg block of cheese x 2, yoghurt, make it natural, x 6, mustn't forget a dozen eggs. Dried goods next, here we come, a bag of rice, a sack of spuds. Plain flour, wholewheat flour, rye flour.

Oh damn! Back to dairy, a pack of butter.

Raisins, sultanas, apricots, oh so good, go lovely with my organic 12 berry cereal, mustn't forget my pumpkin seeds.

On to bread, a dozen kinds, morning rolls, dinner rolls, evening rolls, sandwich rolls, oh, and I fancy a cake too. But hang on, where am I?

I'm in the clothes section now. Wow! What a bargain, some socks, some underwear, a couple of t-shirts and I'm on my way. Step up a gear now before the food starts to warm up, and now it's time to chill down, frozen here we come.

Pizza italiano, chicken breasts, bags of chips, maybe some frozen veg, but definitely some ice cream. Quickly now just one more stop, some cleaning products in Aisle 10, no time to lose, the frozen food hasn't got long.

Screech into aisle 7, toilet rolls, soaps and shampoo, and maybe something to turn the toilet bowl blue. In the queue now. Five people in front. Can't they see I'm in a hurry?

I grab some chocolate as a treat, and maybe a celebrity magazine or two. Checkout now. Do I have card? Visa or mastercard? Yes, of course I collect points! Enter your pin, transaction complete. You rush to the car, load up and start up, and a few minutes later, you're home safe and sound.

Unload. Unpack. Unwind.

Anyone got a comment to make? Does this sound like you or anyone you know? Well it should do, because most people do their shopping in huge supermarkets, although there are still a few shops left on the high street.

Why do people go? Because it's convenient and we're lazy. Well, we're not lazy, we are just so very busy, being caught up in our busy lives, that if it weren't for the supermarkets how would we cope? I have heard friends talking about how bad they think supermarkets are, but then admitting that they actually use them all the time, even though they know they *shouldn't*, but they are open late etc.

Let's face it, for us humans with a tendency to laziness, they are one of the greatest inventions of our time. Think back to your grandparent's day, when your parents were young, when the local shops were all they had. They weren't well stocked, and they didn't carry a huge range of products. How did they cope? They didn't have credit cards to pay with so they had to use cash! There were no reward cards to collect points on at Mr Smith, the grocers. It must have been terrible back then. Come to think of it, they didn't have mobile phones or cashpoints either!

I'm glad I didn't live back then. Life must have been depressing. Not only was life hard financially, it must have been tiresome going between different establishments just to buy the basics. What do you think?

So let's all agree that supermarkets have been a good thing. They have given the consumer access to a wide variety of products, from all over the world, at a reasonable cost, and as there are many competitors in this market, price has been kept low. They have also provided employment for many people.

Many people have benefited from the introduction of a supermarket to a small town, and there are jobs at a national level, from management to distribution, and extra pickers and packers on the farms to satisfy demand. Supermarkets really are the ultimate modern retailer.

Having used supermarkets my whole adult life without a care, I have to say, that on the whole, I enjoyed the experience. I liked that there were fifteen different kinds of deodorant. I liked choosing from five different brands of baked beans. I liked the challenge of comparing products vs. price. Why was this one so much cheaper than that one? I wonder what the catch is? This was consumer empowerment at its finest.

No longer were we being dictated to about which products we had to buy, now there was a choice and if we liked a product but it was too expensive we could go to another supermarket.

In the uk, in the nineties, there was a price war between retailers which ended up with one supermarket reducing the price of its “own brand” baked beans in tomato sauce (a british favourite) to nine pence per tin. Compared with the leading brand organic, naturally sweetened beans at sixty five pence per tin, this was too good to be true. I know which one I would buy. Do you?

Imagine if there was this kind of choice in your grandparents day! They must think we have got it sooo easy. Which they would be right about. We have, and we take it all for granted.

Let’s build a supermarket!

If the retail figures are to be believed, opening a supermarket can be a lucrative business indeed, so that is exactly what I have decided to do and I want you to be my business partners. I assure you a good return on your investment. You just have to go with me on my decisions, even if you find them unethical, or not in line with your values. What? You're not getting cold feet are you? Come on, you *do* want to make lots of money?

“So here it is, the plan for my new supermarket, councillor.”

“Ahh, very good alan, I see you have thought about almost everything, I don't see a problem in pushing this through, after all you are creating a lot of employment in the area, and as I've always said, a happy worker is a happy voter!”

“Quite,” I remarked, putting the plans away in my briefcase.

Several months later, the planning approval came through. There had been many objections to our proposals – we had expected that. From concerns about increased traffic through the town, to building on what used to be greenbelt (*a belt of parks or rural land surrounding a town or city*) land. People even had concerns about businesses being affected.

We are a little behind schedule, but still on track for the grand opening. The steel frame is going up, and now it's time to concentrate on getting suppliers. We have to have branded products that people recognise but we also have to have the lowest prices around so we will have to drive a hard bargain with the suppliers. It's no use trying to source the cheaper brands from the uk though, so we will have to look further afield. China is a good place to start. What with their massive manufacturing infrastructure, and minuscule wages, we should be on to a winner there. We will have to source from other countries where labour is cheap as well if we want to keep costs down.

There is the problem about storage when we fly all this stuff in, so we will have to create some kind of central distribution area. Where would we find land? A quick call to the local councillor and we were recommended several greenbelt sites that would suit our requirements. We have had a few difficult suppliers but we eventually drove down the price of fresh vegetables with them. They weren't happy, but what could they do? We will be their biggest customer, so they have to do what we say!

With the building almost complete, supplier negotiations finalised, distribution and transportation arranged, it's time for advertising. We have a large budget for tv, radio, and print. We will be sending out thousands of flyers to local homes and we will have a celebrity to open the store. This is going to be great.

“Nice to see you all here today for the opening of our new superstore, where people will be able to find everything they need under one roof... No need to brave the british weather anymore dashing from shop to shop. This will be a unique, integrated experience! You will never need to go anywhere else, we are your friends now, ready to support you every day with new products and fresh bargains! Did I mention we will be contributing money to your local charities? All you have to do is keep spending here, and we will donate books and computers to your schools. We will also set up an environmental charity to protect the planet...”

“I think the opening went very well alan.”

“Thanks for your support, councillor, we won't forget this.”

“Oh, it's a pleasure, what are your plans now?”

“I can see the future councillor, and it will have our supermarket logo all over it. I want to take choice and low prices to the consumer, wherever he may be... It's time to build, build, build.”

Our supermarket is complete, with more on the way. Profits are soaring. I'd say it's the start of a beautiful friendship my fellow partners, don't you? All we have to do is keep people coming through those doors.

Why do I feel ever so slightly uncomfortable every time I see a new supermarket going up on the edge of town? Is it just a case of nostalgia for the town centre that starts dying as soon as the supermarket has set up? After all, we *do* live in a free market economy. The local traders could have set their own supermarket up, couldn't they?

It's what the people want. Choice and low prices. Choice and low prices. Choice and low prices. Like a buddhist mantra, it goes through

your mind over and over and over. Choice and low prices. Maybe a little more like brainwashing I think.

Maybe it's just me. Maybe I can't bear to see desire and greed ruin the local community. Maybe people will think I am being nostalgic (hey, I'm only 38), but wasn't it nice wandering through the little stores in your high street?

"No" says you, the shops were expensive. The choice was limited. The staff were unfriendly. I just like going to the supermarket. It's bright and shiny, the goods are bright and shiny, the staff are bright and shiny, the prices are low (which makes me feel bright and shiny), and the car park is huuuuuge. Why would I go back to shopping in the town? No thanks. Give me the supermarket any day!

Supermarket 1 – Local Business 0

I feel slightly detached from reality when I go through the doors with my huge trolley. There is something disconcerting about the whole experience. Something like being disconnected from nature (and plugged into a different channel – the brainwashing channel).

"Welcome shoppers... Everything will be fine in your life, just listen to what we say... Buy some out of season strawberries today imported all the way from mars, they're lovely. And on special offer today, we have multi-packs of cardboard biscuits. Buy one get ten free."

You may not have read the topic on "fast food," which relates to anything we don't grow ourselves, but it was about just picking up food from the shelves without any thought as to how it got there.

Supermarkets are the epitome of separation from nature. Not only is the food presented for you indoors in a climate controlled zone; it is packaged for you in a shiny plastic wrappers, in case it gets contaminated on its journey across the sea.

They have nothing in common with the local farmer any more. Meat doesn't look like meat, it is just a square shape in a container. Fruit and vegetables take up five percent of the available space, and the rest of the space is dedicated to manufactured products. These are products which have been made in a factory by machines. (even the humans working there are machines).

The companies making them are not charities either. They are massive companies dedicated to the pursuit of profit, whatever the cost. They will cut corners wherever necessary to maximise their profits, adding weird

and wonderful ingredients to every product. They may say it's to preserve it, but who needs biscuits with a shelf life of one year? Oh yes. Supermarkets.

You wouldn't need all these preservatives at home, because even the most extravagant baker would only bake enough for what they could eat.

Tinned, shrink-wrapped, and “sealed for freshness!” Our ancestors would roll about laughing if they saw what we were doing with our food. Like all products that are made a long distance from the point of consumption, they have to be packaged well to make sure they are not damaged during the transportation process. Funnily enough, this results in a massive use of resources. Plastics, paper, cardboard. Yet the supermarkets only tell you about one.

The great plastic bag swindle

That's right. It's the good old plastic carrier bag. Some time ago, an environmental group got onto the supermarkets for the amount of plastic bags being consumed and soon the supermarkets were chastising the poor old general public about it. “*Save the Environment!*” they screamed. “*Stop using Plastic Bags!*”

Of course, everyone took notice, and, thoroughly shocked that they were personally responsible for destroying the environment, rapidly bought the companies “*bag for life*” in which to transport their shopping!

Have you got one? I've got about twenty, because I always forgot mine when I was out shopping, and having a guilty conscience, was forced to buy a new one.

You can get all sorts of bags in all shapes and sizes. Most are plastic, usually with a picture of dolphins or some other image designed to make you think you are in tune with the earth. Some are made of cotton or hessian, which are a much better image for the environmentally aware supermarket shopper.

Except. Wait a minute. Has anyone else noticed this, or is it just me? It doesn't matter a damn what you are carrying your shopping out in!

“Do you want a bag?”

“No thanks, I'm saving the environment,” you reply as you carry out your plastic wrapped biscuits manufactured 200 miles away, which used electricity to make them, and fuel to transport them, and plastic to wrap them, and cardboard to box them. Ok, so your vegetables are loose in your hands, but they didn't come like that. They were washed, boxed,

then air freighted from the other side of the world! It doesn't matter that you hold your mango in your hands without a plastic bag! Can't you see it's a smokescreen, designed to keep your attention away from the real environmental problem, and that is the supermarket itself.

Just think of the amount of energy it takes to not only make all those products you casually toss into your family car sized shopping trolley, but the energy it takes to get them from half way around the world to the shops, and finally to your home and to your table, where they are consumed in seconds.

Stop. Stop for a moment and think what that means.

Our laziness has meant that products we can easily make in our kitchens, or grow in our back gardens, or greenhouses, are being flown around the world. What would our ancestors think of fruit from a tree not being eaten by local people, but packaged and flown 10,000 kilometres to another country, where it is driven around, stored in a cool storage facility, driven some more, spending time under lights, and finally driven some more, stored in a cool storage facility some more (your refrigerator), and then maybe eaten, or discarded. Do you think they would be proud of our “progress”?

Hey everybody, let's buy a ready meal!

Now this is a fairly recent invention. A supermarket interpretation of a takeaway. All it requires is reheating – fantastic! You don't even have to go to the takeaway anymore. Everything you need is in store. In the UK (and coming soon to a country near you), is the plastic lasagne, the rubber indian meal for two, or the two millimetre thick cardboard pizza. Not only are we buying food ingredients imported from all over the world, we are now actually buying our complete meals from a chiller in a warehouse. No more home cooking needed for us humans, fifteen minutes in the microwave, and it's ready to be served.

“Who cares what's in it! As long as it tastes good, it's cheap, and is ready in under a nano-second, I'm happy. I'm too busy you see. I have children you see. I work you see. I...”

What has happened to us? I mean really happened to us? We are the most intelligent species on the planet. We have amazing levels of creativity, yet we have let that go in the one area on which our survival is imperative.

Do you realise that without food you will die? Do you realise that the food that has been processed, reprocessed and reheated by machines, has

no love in it? Do you know what cooking with love means, where you put positive energy into the creation of something that sustains us in our daily activities. Do you know what it feels like to grow and harvest vegetables, or to bake bread in the oven, or to take time over the preparation of a meal?

It doesn't matter how rich or successful you are, you need food to survive. But this isn't just about survival, it is about recognising your connection to the earth. That you are an animal like all the others on this planet, yet every day we grow further and further apart. It's almost as if we want to deny all connections to our past; as if we want to say: "See, we couldn't have come from the apes, look how sophisticated and refined we are in our modern civilisation." Yet it is all an illusion. The connection is still there, only less and less people have it.

Less people farm the land now than ever before. Everyone now works in jobs in towns and cities. "You see, I went to university, so now I use my mind, rather than my hands for work." It amazes me that with so many intelligent human beings on this planet, none of you can see what you are missing every day you shop in the supermarket. All our food is so clean and hygienic now, there is no trace left of its origins. Not a drop of soil remains...

Do you even know that food has to be grown? I'm not being funny here but it seems to me that most of us assume that a chocolate biscuit grows in its wrapper on a chocolate bar tree! The number of ingredients necessary to make all of these processed foods is huge, and that means resources. Chocolate has to be grown (in only a few countries) in the form of cacao beans that have to be harvested, roasted, ground and then processed into our favourite chocolate bars, then wrapped and shipped to distribution points. Then it's off to the individual shops, then unwrapped in three seconds and eaten in ten. What a waste.

"But I enjoyed it," you say. "I like chocolate."

Food that takes a second to buy and eat has no love in it. When you stand over a cooker, carefully preparing and mixing the ingredients, then watching it cook in the oven, and finally sitting down to enjoy it; do you feel satisfied? I do. Anyone who has ever done home baking will say the same. It may be more expensive to make. It may take a long time. But it is the knowledge that you have created something which has taken time. Something you have given your attention to. Something you cared for, and nurtured as it was cooking.

Compare that to a frozen supermarket pizza, shrink-wrapped and boxed, made by machines, and heated in the oven for 25 minutes. Is there any difference? Can you still not see it?

Making the connection

I am currently writing this book on a small island in Scotland. The whole island is a retreat and environmental preservation area, and I am volunteering as a chef. We have an organic vegetable garden, but still have to buy in dry goods from the mainland as well as the majority of our vegetables. As a vegetarian I told people I cared about the planet as a whole, whether that be humans, plants, animals, fish, insects, or trees, but it was really only intellectually. I couldn't really ever say that I could feel a physical connection between myself and the earth. Until recently.

A lady came to volunteer in the kitchen who was a Chinese herbalist and acupuncturist. We were talking about healing energies from the earth and the healing energies that came from food. I was interested, but not overly convinced. As a westerner conditioned to needing proof of things, I listened with a little scepticism.

One afternoon when I mentioned I was going to walk over the mountain (the island is two miles long, half a mile wide and the summit is just over a thousand feet) she mentioned I should do it barefoot!

"Barefoot?" you've got to be kidding!"

Although grassy on the flat, it quickly turned to loose rocks which were pretty sharp, even with shoes on. Everybody else who walked over the top always put their strongest walking boots on (very sensible). But being the adventurous type, I decided to take her up on it.

"Are you coming as well" I asked.

"Sorry, I have other things to do this afternoon," she replied.

So, equipped with only a water bottle and my noticeably white bare feet, I set off. It was a strange sensation going out for a long walk with no shoes on to protect my delicate soles. As I started walking up the track, it got steadily narrower and more rocky, not large stones, but little sharp ones whose points seemed to find every tender spot on the soles of my feet!

This was no connection, this was agony. I also noticed that due to not knowing where to comfortably put my feet, I felt strangely off balance. I didn't feel like the strong confident human being I was supposed to be, especially as only days earlier had powered up the hill in my off-road

trainers! I was suddenly very weak, very fragile, and every short step I took was hard. I wondered whether or not our ancestors traversed the land like this thousands of years ago, or were their feet slightly tougher than ours! I finally reached the top with scratched, bruised and cut feet. They were throbbing. "This is no fun," I thought, having wished I had brought my shoes with me. I got down the other side three hours later, feeling *very* tired.

"How was it?" asked the chinese lady.

"Fine, just a bit sore" I lied.

"You must be mad, alan" remarked another volunteer. "You wouldn't get me doing that."

"Do it for five more days" said the chinese lady again, "and you will start to feel the power and energy of the earth; you will feel the rocks pressing the reflexology points on your feet, and the rocks massaging your soles."

Not one to give in to a challenge, I accepted.

The second day I felt stronger, though moving just as slowly to watch where I placed my feet, and I did notice that the larger stones seemed to massage the very areas that felt painful the day before. Day three, and my confidence grew. I was quicker over the stones, my mind became more alert, although my balance grew worse as I tried to go faster. Day four and I slowed down again. This time it felt like I was going at a more natural pace, my feet naturally started to feel for the shape of the rocks under my feet. The mud I had avoided the day before (and at all other times to stop my trainers getting dirty), I gladly waded through, taking time to savour the luxury of squidging it between my toes (hey it feels good). Day five, and I playfully moved from rock to rock, ever mindful of the placement of my feet. I started to enjoy this new found freedom. A walker in the opposite direction remarked:

"Wow, you're doing it barefoot! I think I'll take my shoes off." To which her companion replied: "Don't be stupid, come on, let's go!"

That final day, I took time to think what it had meant to me to be walking barefoot, over miles of painful rocks. What had I learnt? Was it just a good physical challenge, or had I truly learnt the connection of man to the earth? One thing I did know was that I would never again wear my shoes to walk up that mountain.

Boots seemed so unnecessary. They seemed almost like a barrier to experience, which is precisely what they are. The shoe represents man's control over his environment. His mastery of nature.

No longer do we have to tread carefully on the earth, we can crash through it without a care. No gentle footsteps, only heavy footprints. I realised whilst walking barefoot that I was made of the same stuff as the soil I squidged my toes in. I looked at the mountain goats and wild horses clambering on the steep hillside, and felt like them for the first time in my life. I was an animal too, and by removing my shoes, it was a symbolic gesture that placed me on equal footing with them – although they seemed a lot more sure footed than I could ever hope to be!

For a short time, I didn't feel part of a dominant species. But it didn't last long. As soon as I had showered, and scrubbed my feet, I lay down with a nice cup of tea and relaxed. Human again.

“Nice story, alan, but what did all that have to do with supermarkets?”

Think about it for a moment. Let the story sink in.

From the soil, grows everything. The vegetables we eat, the trees that absorb carbon dioxide and replenish the world with oxygen. The trees that bear fruit, the grass that grows that feeds the animals that other animals eat. The soil (*material in the top layer of the surface of the earth in which plants can grow*) is perhaps one of the most important features of the earth, yet the more “developed” we become, the more we seem to forget that fact. Supermarkets, and all shops in general have removed the connection, not deliberately, but nonetheless it has happened.

How many of us know where cotton comes from that makes most of our clothes?

We seem to think it is companies who provide everything, but the raw materials have to come from somewhere. It is just a hidden process now, everything is produced behind closed doors, until it is finally unveiled in all its glory in the shop.

It's not just food, it's everything we buy, from clothes to computers; tv's to tomatoes; flat packed tables to packs of biscuits. Everything is produced in the factories. Massive production lines, produced where the labour is cheapest, flown or shipped in, all ready for fast consumption. I fail to see why we need so much stuff on the shelves though.

Oh yes, of course. We need to keep making things to keep people employed, so that people can use the money they earned to spend on the goods that the people spent time making so that staff can get paid and the government can get its tax revenue!

Or maybe you crave this stuff. Maybe you can't do without the choice or the low prices, which if you think about it, is just to encourage you to buy more stuff you don't need.

As we have discussed in other topics, need is purely subjective, save for food, water, clothing and shelter. The massive choice available at prices we can afford (or not) is there to encourage us to spend more. Why do you think supermarkets sell everything?

“I just came in for a bag of carrots, but I left with a new mountain bike for my son, a whole weeks shopping, a new t-shirt and a new cd for the car.”

It's too eassy. You don't even need to think about cash, do you? You don't need to think, “I'm buying food today, I will take out £30 from the bank, and I won't spend a penny more.” We've got credit cards to take care of that now. Who cares if you've only got £30! You can spend spend, spend much, much more than that! Don't worry about it. Take it easy. Relax. You can afford it, you don't need to worry about the price. We're already the cheapest in town and you can spread the cost all around! You're here anyway, why not have a look down aisle 12 - clothing, or aisle 3 - cosmetics, how about aisle 34 - kitchenware, or aisle 18 - garden furniture. You don't have to buy anything, just have a look, it costs nothing to look....

So this is going to be the way of the future, is it? People going into massive warehouses designed by retail psychologists, led around from product to product, tempted until veritably salivating. I want it. Why can't I have it? Look how cheap it is! We won't get another bargain like this again! Let's get it. We can put it on the credit card. Oh, look. There's a buy now, pay in four years scheme at zero percent interest. Who could say no? They are positively throwing the stuff at you. But like everything in life, things that come too easy are never valued.

Can you remember really wanting something and then going out to work until you get it? No. Neither can I. Can you remember saving for a whole year to go on holiday? No, why would you? You can stick it on the credit card and pay later. Everything has a cost, but this has nothing to do with price. The cost we pay with this frivolous meaningless lifestyle is our connection with nature.

If a horse could understand what we were doing don't you think it would find it hilarious? Imagine the animals crowding round to see what these silly humans were doing. “Why are they buying all that stuff? What do they need that for?”

Imagine the animals who eat what they need and no more, doing a shopping run in one of the big supermarkets. “Right, we've got all the grass we need for today, how about an outdoor table with a matching parasol?”

Choice and low prices have hooked into a section of our brain, called “mindlessidiot,” where clever humans have realised that they can make a lot of money out of us. The section: “mindlessidiot” resides just right of the amygdala (*part of the limbic system it plays an important role in motivation and emotional behaviour*), and the marketers know just which buttons to press to access it. Don't worry, you don't even know they have you under control, but they do. Not in some conspiracy theory way, but in a real “we don't even have to convince you to spend your money way.” You just come in your droves. The lazy man with too much money.

Let's face it, it is nice when you don't have to do anything yourself, isn't it? The less real work that needs to be done the better. That's called progress. That's why humans are number one. We know how to use our minds. We don't have to use our hands anymore.

Except someone is making all this stuff. Someone you'll never meet. He's probably working in a factory thousands of miles away from you (or maybe close to home), and paid a pittance for his labour. He, and advanced manufacturing techniques which use machines, are the reason for your cheap plentiful products. The reason you want them is because you are addicted to buying “stuff” you don't even need.

“We had to work like that in the factories for 200 hundred years,” says you. “It's only fair that someone else has to work in them for a while. They'll get richer, and then they'll get someone else to do their factory work, that's the way it goes.”

Except one day we'll run out of people who are prepared to work for a pound a day. Where will you get your cheap goods from then? You better enjoy this while it lasts, before the earth's resources, or the abundance of cheap labour to exploit, disappear. I wonder which one will be first?

A letter you might want to write...

Dear supermarket chief executive,

Just a quick note to say thanks for setting up these big stores where I can get all my “stuff” for cheap. I have had a great time spending money I didn't have on products I didn't need, but I think it's fair to say that I've had my fun now, and I'd like it to go back to how it used to be.

You see, I used to enjoy walking down my local high street, going into local shops. I used to enjoy chatting with all the people, it was kind of like a community, where people were specialists in their trade, and I got the feeling that they knew what they were talking about. Sure they didn't have the same range as you, and they were a bit more expensive, but these were local people, who lived and worked in the local area, so they had to earn enough to pay for everything they needed. I had to wait for things like tables to be built, because the carpenter had to make it by hand. He was expensive, but I knew the product would be built to last.

I wasn't going to bring it up, but some of the "stuff" I bought from you didn't last; I think there was some pretty shoddy workmanship going on, but it was cheap, so I didn't complain.

Funnily enough I talked to my local farmer for the first time, and he was telling me that although he didn't have the "stuff" I used to buy from you, it was because it was out of season, and that if I could wait, it would be the most delicious thing I'd ever tasted. He said it'd be a bit more expensive, but I could save up. He wasn't as friendly as your staff, and he didn't have a uniform with a name badge on, but I think he was tired, as he has to work long hours in the fields.

On another note. I'm not sure all your staff are as happy as they make out. I saw some of them walking home in their uniforms, and they looked pretty miserable. Maybe they don't like factory work. So anyway, here's the point of my letter.

I'm sorry to say, but I think it's time for you to close up your warehouse. I don't need 30 kinds of toothpaste, or fruit imported from outside the solar system. I think I'll go back to buying local. In fact, I may set up my own fruit and veg shop. It might not be as big or as flash as yours, and I can't promise to smile all day, and I definitely won't be able to afford all that fancy refrigeration, but it'll come from the local farms in my area, so I won't need to have big lorries – that'll save me a few pounds on the old fuel.

As for flying stuff in, if my customers want a coconut I'm afraid they'll have to fly over to the tropics and get it themselves. Maybe I'll even try planting a coconut tree but I'm not sure it'll take with our weather here in England.

As for selling other products, I think I'll leave that up to someone else. After all, there'll be plenty of room for some new local business, once you go.

Oh, and sorry that you'll lose your job, but you're pretty intelligent, I'm sure you'll get another one and so will the staff. I'll even promise to

give some of them a job myself, but you might try to rebuild your empire from my fruit and veg shop; So on this occasion I'd have to say no to you.

yours sincerely
alan orr

You see, that's all it takes to regain control of our communities. Do you want to have a lively town centre again? Do you want to see local businesses prosper? You have to support them or they collapse. After all, every man needs to eat and have a roof over his head!

Are you prepared to set up a business yourself? Wouldn't it be so nice to have local food for local people! Local products made by local people. Real skills used in the community for the community again, instead of just living in a place and using a massive corporation as your community.

Do I have your attention?

The way of the supermarkets is unsustainable. We cannot continue to live like this. We are so out of touch with the natural world that it is time to rebuild the connection with the earth, and to do that we need to grow local produce and keep it local, or regional. You may think you will be missing out on things, and I am not suggesting that everything you want will be available instantly in every local town, but this will be a big shift. We will be instantaneously cutting down on the amount of energy we use, by not flying, or driving, produce half way around the world.

The more you support local business, the more prosperous the town will be, and the more opportunities will be created by local people. Try it. What have you got to lose? Nothing, and all to gain.

Without this shift, we will soon be so reliant on imported food and supermarkets, that it will be almost impossible to go back. Please don't let it happen. Let us try to make this a success. Future generations will depend on it.

I have made a vow to only use local vegetables and fruit and will be working my hardest to make sure this happens. This is a process, but if we all care about the future of our food and our local communities we will succeed. Every country with arable land and enough water can produce the food it needs for its people. If I want to have exotic fruit, I'll just have to go somewhere exotic.

In the uk, we have become used to eating certain fruits, or used to eating food all year round when some is clearly seasonal. If you are eating

strawberries in november, the chances are that they have had to be grown in another country for your pleasure. We need to learn the art of patience when it comes to food. It is not an old fashioned concept.

Most fruit and vegetables are harvested at different times of the year, so if you are eating something out of season, it has either been grown under artificial conditions, or is from another country where it is in season. Wait. It *will* be worth it. We do not have a divine right to eat strawberries all year round. They will be in season when they are in season, after that you will have to wait.

We have become so used to getting what we want when we want that this will be a difficult concept to grasp for many of you. Don't panic when you can't get what you want. You don't really “need” anything in particular. You won't die if you can't get something you used to get at the supermarket, but you will get used to living without it if no one grows it locally, and you can't grow it yourself.

Ultimately, the human being has been so successful, because he has been so adaptable. Allow yourself to adapt. You are a wonderful human being. You are not reliant on chocolate biscuits from brand X, you don't need processed foods from machine controlled production lines. You have great dexterity in your hands to “manufacture” food yourself. Spend some time learning to make food with love again. It's called “home cooking.” Not a revolutionary concept, just something that the large supermarkets have been attempting to extinguish in the name of choice, and low low prices.

Ultimately their motives have nothing to do with offering you choice and low low prices, but everything to do with profit. Food isn't supposed to be like that. Food is what makes children grow. Food is what nourishes the brain and the body. Food is a symbol of love. Let yourselves become a part of real food again. Plastic bread versus home baked bread. Hot house tomatoes grown a thousand miles away, versus tomatoes grown in your back garden. It is your choice. Only yours.

I leave it up to you.

S w e a r i n g

Profane or obscene expression usually of surprise or anger

Warning: this section must only be read by adults over the age of 18. It contains many “bad” words that may offend!



We all do it from time to time. I don't want to, but sometimes I am taken aback by something that someone says, or does, or something makes me very angry and it just comes out. I am not going to discuss the historical reasons why we use the words we do, but let's say that most of the words we use are sexual insults. I would like to break down the barriers on these words with you.

For so many people, the use of such words is embarrassing, and they don't want to hear them mentioned. Parents say "not in front of the children," the television stations do not broadcast programs containing specific words before a certain hour; newspapers or magazines rarely contain the full word; and the more sensitive folk amongst us are horrified when they hear "foul language" being used in public.

You never hear swearing used by politicians in public, by educated people, in opera, or in fact anywhere in more polite society, yet it is rife

in society the world over. Fuck you, fuck that, Fuck off. Have I started offending you? Do you want to stop reading now? Can you bear to hear the words or are you like the children in the playground, been so conditioned to hearing it that it goes over your head now.

“I am writing to complain I read the “F” word in this book I am reading. I have never been so disgusted in my life”

Educators, governments, parents and media, desperately try to protect us hearing these words, but children *want* to hear these words. These are grown up words. It is taboo to say these things until you are an adult, like smoking and drinking alcohol.

They don't want children to start smoking before the age of eighteen, and will actively punish anyone who sells them cigarettes the day before their eighteenth birthday with a large fine. But the very next day, they can start smoking themselves to death with everyone's “legal” blessing.

The same goes for drinking alcohol. No alcohol before you are eighteen! Eighteen being the age when governments, teachers, and parents have decided that you are legally an adult and can make adult decisions; like drinking a substance that, as we have seen in previous topics, adversely affects the human emotional, reasoning and balance system. But now you are eighteen you can do whatever you like. Whatever the cost!

So swear words are something that children whisper in the playgrounds; parents can use when they are frustrated with their children; politicians and media types can use when they're talking off air; and angry adults can use any time they like. What I want to understand is: Why we are offended?

Why don't we want other people hearing these words? Are we afraid we will corrupt society? Do we think the youth will turn to drugs and crime if they hear swear words and start using them? Or is it something altogether more academic? Maybe we want to protect the integrity of our language, and we don't want simple words used to express complex emotions?

Who do we think we are offending by broadcasting or printing these words? Well, there is always a part of society who is offended by something. Someone is always going to complain, or start a pressure group to stop us doing or saying something; but this is for their own

reasons, their values, their conditioning by their parents, teachers or media of the time. But that is not what we want to discuss.

We want to find out why words such as shit, piss, fuck, or cunt are so offensive, and why we use them. Some of you may wonder why I've gone to the trouble of printing the words instead of just talking about them. Well, it's the words we are interested in, and our attitude to them, so take a good long look at these statements.

*Shit! I've fucked up! Fuck you, asshole! I'm pissed off! You're a fucking cunt!
You stupid cunt! Oh fuck!*

These are just words, but if you notice, they are all words of sexual nature. Shit and asshole are to do with the rectum and faeces, fuck is a slang term for having sex, piss is related to urine, and cunt is the female sexual organ, the vagina.

Throughout our history, these words have been developing as the lowest form of insult, until we have them in their present form. We generally reserved these words for when we were at our most angry, or upset, or startled, but they have now crept into everyday language to the point that the insertions of sexual words is quite natural in a sentence. Read these following examples.

“Yeah I was really fucking drunk last night really pissed, I couldn't even stand up, fucks sake. I was trying to get in the fucking cab, and my mate, he's such a cunt, he just let go of me and I fell on the fucking floor before I got in the cab!”

“My boss is really pissing me off at the moment! I can't believe he wants me to come in at the weekend, who the fuck does he think he is?”

“Fuck off! I don't believe you! Did you really fuck her? You're having a fucking laugh! You're such a lying cunt!”

How many of you believe that conversations like this go on? Does it seem real that someone who is not actually angry, viably upset, or startled, has used so many swear words? Well, these conversations go on all around the world, without any real reason for using these words apart from emphasis – which on the surface would just look like a lack of language skills on the part of the speaker.

But this is not generally the case now, as in some youth culture, it is now “cool” to speak like this, to gain respect from your peers, and obviously makes up for a lack of education in the language too. Although some people grow out of the use of this kind of language, it is very prevalent in modern adult speech. And adults use it a lot when they are angry, frustrated, happy, shocked, or excited.

Comedians use it to get more laughs, as they attempt to shock the audience. Film directors use it to add more “reality” to films. People use it on the web because they can.

I would suggest that the more educated you are in language, the less tendency you have to use words of emphasis like this. There are many writers and comedians who manage to engage the audience without resorting to swear words, as indeed there are many people who manage to express themselves without so much as a “fuck” or “shit.”

Alan, if you say that word again you will go straight to the headmaster’s office

The problem with creating a taboo on something when we are young is that it creates a magnetic effect on the more influenced amongst us. The more I am told it is wrong to say fuck, the more I rebel and use the word. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, in order to offend the prohibiter. Whether the person banning it thinks it is in the best interest of the child or is just offended by the word, the fact remains that no parent, teacher or educator will have a lengthy discussion like this one with a child. It is wrong, you will be punished. Without ever knowing why!

Children need to know why. They are very inquisitive, and just to be told, “it is wrong!” is not enough. If you were to ask a child or an adult: “Why did you use that word? Could you not find another one to suit?” they would be very surprised, and may tell you to fuck off.

You see, fuck off is a very aggressive statement, one that leads to innumerable fights amongst men. If you said “go away” to someone you didn’t like very much, you wouldn’t get much of a response, in fact they would probably think you were quite weak and may respond with other taunts which included sexual swear words.

The other use for the word “fuck” as a substitute for the sentence “make love.” “I could really do with a fuck” or “I’d really like to fuck her.” This is another way in which we debase emotion, that we turn an act of love

into a physical animal act, more reminiscent of the natural world. It is almost anger. Can you hear it being used, have you ever said it?

Listen again: "I'd really like to fuck her." There's no love there, this is purely sexual, and it makes the female seem like a cheap object that you place no value upon.

Language is such an important tool in life, we really need to find other ways to express our emotions in the heat of the moment. If your partner really annoyed you, you may say: "For fuck's sake, would you stop bothering me, just fuck off." This would inevitably cause a lot of hostility, and perhaps tears in the moment. But later, if your partner asked you why you swore at her, and you explained that you were feeling tense after work, and that she kept pressing you for an answer on whether you would go to her mother's at the weekend, when actually you wanted to go shopping instead, she may say: "Well why didn't you say so!"

We need to use language that calms the situation down, instead of inflaming it; to look for words that communicate true meaning. Using words that are just common insults does not help resolve the situation, in fact it normally makes it worse. The more complex the language used, the more the other people will understand your position, thereby significantly reducing misunderstanding, whereas common insults are highly likely to increase misunderstanding!

Swear words are insults, even if they are directed at one's self, and act to raise the anger or frustration levels of the individuals using them, or those on the receiving end of them. We need to find words that calm, not heighten our stress levels.

Even if they are used in common social circles, humour or film, hasn't the time come when we say goodbye to simple, insulting sexual language and start to use the gift of speech for something more than insulting other people? After all, we are supposed to be the most intelligent being on the planet.

Banning or prohibiting swearing is not the answer, understanding why we use it and then moving on to more advanced speech is the only way forward to a more relaxed, calm state. Of course, some people will use words to intentionally inflame the situation and provoke someone into a physical fight, but that is another topic.

Fuck You – *I really don't like you*
Fuck off – *Go away right now, I can't deal with you*
Fuck it – *I've made a mistake and I'm annoyed with myself*
You're a cunt – *I find you very irritating, annoying and I really don't like
you at all*
I'm pissed off – *I'm upset*

becomes

I really don't like you
Go away right now, I can't deal with you
I've made a mistake and I'm annoyed with myself
I find you very irritating, annoying, and I really don't like you at all
I'm upset

Can you see how it takes the instant anger out of the language? Try it for one day. Use different words to replace swear words you would normally use. You will feel calmer and more in control of exactly what you want to say, and you will definitely have fewer misunderstandings.

S y m b o l s

Something visible that by association or convention represents
something else that is invisible

Symbols are very important to us as humans aren't they? The symbols themselves aren't the thing that is important but what they represent. They're just things that trigger different thoughts and emotions, but nonetheless carry great power, and unfortunately here we are back at the word power again! The religious symbols are powerful, the political symbols are powerful, and the social symbols are powerful.

Imagine for a moment, the flag of your country waving around in the breeze, or seeing the presidential palaces or the king's castle, or walking into a cathedral – what emotions are triggered as you imagine these scenes? What about seeing the man driving past in his expensive italian sports car? What thoughts are going through your mind at the time? Are you thinking: “Wow, look at that car, I wish I had a car like that, I bet he's rich, I bet he's got a big house,” or even “look at that flash bastard showing off!”

Whatever you are thinking, the symbol has done its job! The car is a status symbol, and the meaning that the car (although it's just a bit of metal, and wires) is supposed to convey is "I've made it, I am successful, you should envy me." It's incredible, isn't it? How something so innocuous as a car has some invisible meaning behind it, but it works the same in reverse as well, and if you see a man driving a beaten up old "banger" (A car that is old and unreliable) what do you think of him, what is the car silently conveying to you? Is it conveying that the person inside will be sharply dressed, and be successful, or is it saying this man driving is a bit of a loser, probably earns no money, and probably doesn't care about his appearance?

Unfortunately, you would probably be right in your snap judgement of the man, and that's the annoying thing about symbolism. You see, if you look at a huge house behind big gates with security guards and dogs, what is that trying to convey to you – that the man is modest, and has simple tastes, or that the man is very important and very rich?

So symbols are everywhere, we know that. We also know that most people are using the symbols consciously to convey a meaning of power, and status, and riches, but there are those who use symbolism to convey the opposite. Take for example the dreadlocked guy walking down the street in hemp clothing. Does he have his hair like that because he likes it that way, or is he trying to convey something deeper?

What I see is someone who is silently telling us he is "concerned with the environment," or does not want to be part of the corporate culture, but he is just trying to make a statement so you will know what he cares, or doesn't care about. It doesn't tell us who he really is. And that is the point I am trying to convey to you.

All of these symbols are meaningless until we ourselves attach meaning to them, until our brain remembers what we have been told they are supposed to represent, otherwise a flag is just a bit of material, a presidential palace is just a load of bricks, and dreadlocked hair is just hair.

But we can't be content just to be, oh no, we have to convey a deeper meaning to everybody! We have to let people know that there is more to us than meets the eye. That the pile of bricks represents our nation's power and wealth over others, that the dreadlocked hair represents a man who does not want to be part of the consumer society, or that the monks habit (*a distinctive attire worn by a member of a religious order*) represents freedom from attachment to material things.

The bottom line is, we all want to be noticed! We all want people to comment on us, on our clothes, our cars, our public buildings, our cathedrals. We want people to know that we are different to them, that we are superior, that we are not content with being what we are but need to present an image that “represents” something else! If man is supposed to be the most intelligent species on earth, I fail to see where the intelligence is.

We are constantly in a state of comparison, albeit, sometimes subconsciously. You see, even the monk who has given up all of his worldly goods, and takes a simple robe to wear every day, is engaged in symbolism. He knows that when you see him, you see, not a man like yourself, you see the robes (*clothe formally; especially in ecclesiastical robes*) and know that here is a man dedicated to the spiritual, dedicated to god. He wants to stand out from the crowd. He knows that if he was to wear jeans and a t-shirt like you (which after all, are just clothes) you would not notice that he was different to you. You would not notice that he was a “man of god,” and would merely pass him by.

Do you understand?

But isn't true intelligence where you see that all of these outward symbols mean nothing? That these symbols are the mark of a man who still desires recognition, who wants to be noticed, who wants to stand out? Once you see that these symbols are only keeping us trapped in a state of becoming, as opposed to a natural state, where you just are, the need for symbols, whether status, religious, or political will naturally drop away, and you will realise how estranged from nature we have become.

The symbol, misconstrued

One thing a symbol can never do, is give you access to the mind behind the man who is hiding behind it. How can you tell that behind the fast red italian sports car, and the designer suits, lies a man who is in turmoil, who has addictions, who has problems with his marriage? The simple answer is, you can't. How can you tell behind the doors of the presidential palace lies a leader, who is unhappy with his life, who suffers from depression and anxiety, who secretly wishes he had chosen a more simple career? You can't. How can you tell behind the large cathedral that the priest is starting to question the existence of god. You can't. Do you understand?

We all hide behind these protective symbols, but the symbols are not who we really are. They are not our thoughts and our emotions, and they are not living, they are dead, yet we carry on using them without a second thought.

I want to ask you a question. If you see a man who is living on the streets with one set of clothes, who is he? Is he a poor wretch of a man who has no intelligence, who has no hope of making anything of his life, or is he a man who having been through the process of attachment, and desire, got insight into the nature of all things and decided to live this way? You may say, “no man would choose to live this way,” but how do you know? Can you see inside his mind?

The symbol that is being represented is one of poverty and desolation, of sadness – that this poor man has nothing, but in his mind he might be free as a bird, and extremely happy, having seen what can happen to people who are always trying to become something more than they are. He is now happy just to be. But we attach a label to him, and say, “down and out.” We never think to question any further than that. The symbol is speaking volumes about who he is, but it is only who we think he is, do you see?

I have a friend who keeps plastic bags of all shapes and sizes, and washes them out so they can be used again. I thought that as she cared about the environment, this was some symbolic gesture to show how wasteful we all are in the world, but when I questioned her about it, she said, “No, it's because freezer bags are expensive, and I don't have a lot of money.” The symbolic gesture of saving the bags had a different meaning to me as it did to her. My understanding of it was environmental, and for her, it was financial. So you see you can never know what's truly going on in someone's mind, and it is the mind we have to understand, not the symbol.

Breaking the symbol

I know we all love our symbolic representations; you have to look no further than art to see it put to good use. “Actually what this hammer represents, is the state's oppression of the people,” and that's fine in art, but it is time we started to use our very large minds to see what is behind the symbols in real life, and to deconstruct them; we must challenge our thinking when we see symbolism, and watch our thought processes very

carefully, to ensure we are seeing what is really there, and not some invisible meaning.

Ultimately breaking symbols has nothing to do with tearing down the physical, remember that the real symbol is just an imprint on your mind.

When we see a monk, we should just see a man

When we see a church, we should just see some bricks and art

When we see a presidential palace, we should just see some bricks

When we see a sports car, we should just see some metal and some wheels

When we see a man in a designer suit, we should just see a man

When we see a flag, we should just see some material with some colours

When we see a man lying drunk in the street, we should just see a man

Do you understand? Because it is so important that you do. Once we can see that these are just items made up of atoms which are everywhere, the symbol loses its power. A brick is a brick, a car is a car, a flag is a flag, that is all. They have no hidden meaning.

The molecules in the golden cross that the priest carries are just molecules, and they will return to the earth one day, the same as every other symbol. It's time to let go folks. Symbolic meaning is not a universal force, it's just yet another man-made idea. It's time to see through it NOW.

T

T a k e a w a y s

Prepared food that is intended to be eaten off of the premises

*I want it NOW,
because you tell me I can have it NOW,
and if I don't get it NOW,
I will start to become annoyed. Ok?*



I have included takeaways as an independent topic, as I feel they warrant exposure as one of our main urban food sources. Whether they sell burgers, fish and chips, curry, sushi, sandwiches, mexican, or any other type of instant food, they are all selling products that have been made, not with love, but for the express purpose of making a quick sale to stressed and hungry city dwellers.

I do not blame them for trying to make money, after all they need to make a living, nor do I blame the consumers for buying the food, after all, they are probably hungry, and many miles from home. Let us instead look at the reasons we are driven to eat takeaway food.

For most of us it's just rush, rush, rush – no matter what job we do; whether it's on a building site, a hotel, a hospital, an office, or the boardroom on the twenty first floor. If you live in an industrialised

country, chances are you are going to be commuting to your job, via overcrowded motorways, or overpriced, and overcrowded public transport. You'll have to get up early, and come home late, so you probably have a busy lifestyle, especially if you have children too.

Every day has a strict schedule, with work taking up all the daylight hours (or maybe the night if you are a shift worker) for at least five days a week. You need this work to pay your rent/mortgage and bills, and need some for de-stress tools like alcohol and summer holidays. Chances are that, although you might complain about the hours, secretly you probably like the buzz of being so busy, being so important that you never have a spare second!

I for one loved it. I was up at dawn, travelling to the airport, or hurtling up the motorway at the speed of sound to get to an important appointment. I didn't have time for anything or anybody. Quick bites to eat here and there, snatched telephone conversations with my family. "Sorry, got to go, in a rush!" I liked the excitement of always being in demand. It appealed to my ego.

I ate hamburger meals, kebabs, sandwiches, pastries – anything that would keep me fuelled for my day's work.

I'd start off with a takeaway breakfast roll (sausage and egg in a roll) followed at lunchtime by a takeaway fish and chips, or burger, followed at three, by sweet pastries. All of course washed down with the must have ten cups of coffee a day. Don't get me wrong, I wasn't some kind of wired crazy guy, I just did what everyone else did, and I enjoyed it. Why? Because all of it tasted good. Strangely enough, a portion of steamed broccoli wouldn't really have cracked it for me in the morning!

We all have become conditioned to living our existence like that. Work has become so central to our lives that it leaves no time for anything, let alone eating a decent meal. Most of us can't go home at lunchtime for our meal, because most of us work too far away, and anyway, even if we did, we only have maximum one hour for lunch, so how could we think about starting to prepare a balanced healthy meal? Cooking at lunchtime just adds to the already stressful morning that most of us have already had.

So what do you do? You see a shop on the corner that sells you hot food in a matter of seconds, and it's cheaper than buying all the separate ingredients and taking them home and cooking them... and did I mention it's ready in a matter of seconds?

I recall being in burger restaurant in new zealand several years ago, where I overheard the following conversation.

Customer: ...and I'll have some onion rings.
Staff member: Sorry, they aren't ready, they'll be 90 seconds.
Customer: I don't have time, I'll have something else.

I couldn't believe it, I just started to laugh. It finally dawned on me how ridiculous we had become. We had bought into this rushing thing so much that we weren't even prepared to wait for fast junk food. You'll see it all over the world now, people starting to get tense waiting in a queue that will take them maximum five minutes to clear. They grumble about it being ridiculous that they are kept waiting so long. Do you do it? Are you as impatient as I was? Are you used to getting everything you want in a quarter of a second?

Let's just STOP a moment and think. Let us approach this very important topic from a different angle. Let us forget about what is important to you and your busy life, and talk about reality.

Do you know how long it takes to feed a calf that becomes a cow? Do you know how much water, how much feed and attention it takes to fatten the animal for slaughter? Do you know how much land and forest has to be cleared for grazing? Do you know how much money and time it takes to process the animals, butcher, and prepare them, and turn them into your deluxe cheeseburger?

Do you know long it takes to fatten a chicken in the factory, how much time and effort it takes to slaughter them and process them so you can enjoy them as part of your organic chicken and rocket wholegrain sandwich with a light lemon mayonnaise? How many seeds are sown to grow the crispy lettuce that adorns your burger roll, or sandwich? How many tomatoes are grown? Do you care? Probably not. I can see you are actually very busy and obviously very hungry, but let us continue anyway.

Think about the amount of input that is required to make your really tasty, but probably not very nutritious, manufactured meal that you devour in a single mouthful for a measly couple of loose pound coins in your wallet.

First, you have the millions of calves who are born and raised very carefully to be ground into your burger. Next comes the lettuce, which is sown in miles of fields, to hang limply out the side. Then the acres of tomatoes, and the chickens who are bred in captivity for the sole purpose of providing the egg on your burger, or to make the mayonnaise that tastes so good. And the wheat that is grown in the miles of fields, that goes to the miller to make the flour that goes to the baker to bake the bun, to the potatoes that are grown in millions of acres to make a small

chip, to the water that is used to top up the sugar syrup, that came from the cane, that came from the field, to the trees which are cut down in droves to make the wrappers that coat the products for a maximum of a five minutes, to the plastic containers which are manufactured from oil we don't have (phew, that's a long list!). But actually, you weren't that hungry, so the remains end up in the bin, with the temporary containers too. Oh, if you are like a large percentage of the population around the world you won't even put it in the bin, let alone recycle it.

So what does that tell us all about takeaways? That they are bad? That the governments should close them down? No. I'm sure even government ministers are all rushing about so much they have to stop for a takeaway, which you remember, is not just greasy burgers and fish and chips, but anything we consume which comes in its own packaging (recyclable or not).

From the economic view of the consumer, takeaways are a marvel. Hot food that fills you up for cheap. Can't say fairer than that! From a business perspective, takeaways are also a good money spinner, they must be, they're always full, and a lot of them open 24 hours a day. Which brings me nicely onto alcohol. What a fine pair these two make don't they? Alcohol and takeaways.

When you come out of the pub or the club at 2.00 am drunk, tired and really hungry, what better way to ward off those hunger pangs than to stuff your face with greasy pizza, burgers, or any other kind of ready-in-a-minute meals. You don't give a stuff how long it took to grow all the ingredients for your meal, how much labour and transportation was required, how much animal suffering was caused. Why? Because you're drunk, you're out of control and the only thing that will make you feel better is greasy food. You are probably 99 times more likely to dispose of the food you cannot finish (due to feeling queasy or actually vomiting) in the street. You have no self-control left. No self-discipline – alcohol has seen to that.

What lack of respect for all that has gone into making your minute meal. The minute meal that took a year to produce, but ended up soaking into the gutter in one drunken moment on one night.

What kind of people have we become? Who is this homo sapiens who has spent millions of years evolving into the most intelligent species on the planet? When I look at the waste of life and natural resources on feeding a load of drunken youths on the streets, or feeding a stressed employee who has no time to appreciate what went into making his food, it makes me very sad.

For many years, I did exactly the same thing, nobody educated me that it was a bad thing to be doing. In fact, after seeing all the adverts all over the world and knowing that everyone else was doing it, it seemed almost a positive thing. This was a reflection of the progress we had made in the world. Food available through a drive through intercom in less than a minute! Wow! Look how far we had come since the days when we had to put up with mum's home cooking and the times when food was scarce. Now food we wanted was available 24 hours a day at a price we could afford! Surely some modern revolution, this takeaway.

Indeed we all thought so, until health professionals started telling us that high fat, sugary processed food could be bad for us. Really? The takeaways fought back, using a new marketing campaign, and before long, everyone believed that takeaway food was – if not good for us – then certainly acceptable, if taken as part of a “balanced diet.” It seemed that these companies were oblivious to anything else but the sound of money ringing in their tills, which of course is perfectly acceptable, as they are a business.

No amount of campaigning about takeaway food being bad for our health, or education about the suffering of animals involved in the preparation of this food, or the use of unsustainable resources moved us, the consumer; and why should it? We don't care about anything apart from our pleasure in this precise moment, and the addictive ingredients in fatty foods make sure that our brain craves more.

Can I ask you a quick question? When you are hungry at work, what do you crave? A plate of steamed vegetables, which are full of essential nutrients, or processed fatty foods? Surely as a highly developed species we would crave the former, if anything, but that doesn't seem to happen, does it?

We never crave plain food when we are hungry, because plain (real) food doesn't make the tastebuds go Mmmm (until we re-train them). Only a pastry, or a burger with a sweet sauce or chips with ketchup, or a sandwich with mayo, will satisfy those tastebuds. Of course, you may live in a country that has different types of takeaways I haven't covered here, but you can be sure that the amount of inputs required to make even a sushi hand roll are too high. Fish caught out on the sea from an unsustainable ocean, rice grown in mass fields, seaweed harvested, soy sauce produced, condiments such as wasabi and ginger, transport, labour, fuel, storage, retail rent, electricity, plastics, paper.... Shall I go on?

Whatever the takeaway product, no matter if it is “healthy” or not, the long term inputs are too high to justify the short term gains. Money

for the economy, yes; employment, yes; satisfied hunger, yes. To most of you, that seems like a pretty good deal. These are the arguments that all involved with this industry will try to persuade us with.

It is probably the same in the cocaine industry. It employs many people who would be out of work if cocaine production and distribution came to an end. What would happen to those people? How would they feed their families? They would lose their homes... It doesn't mean that cocaine is a positive thing for the human system or society does it? It is just a series of excuses to justify what they are doing. Nothing more. It is the same with the takeaway industry.

There is no point in blaming other people, we all have a personal responsibility to each other, the rest of the animals we share the planet with, and the planet itself. If anything, we are all to blame. How many of us happily eat takeaway food whilst talking about “the environment” and “going green?” This isn't about going green, it's about thinking why we are forced to eat on the move and why we can't eat at home.

Why we happily eat food that has been prepared on a production line by machines is no mystery though. If there wasn't a takeaway industry, the industrialised society wouldn't be able to march at the pace it does. If people are hungry they can't work, and they certainly can't work many miles away from home for as many hours. The takeaway industry, in its many guises, is helping businesses keep us working like machines.

Imagine if you would, a scenario where you weren't able to get food on the go, where you had to eat at specific times at specific places – at home, for example! Or what if you could only eat in a restaurant, because there were no cheap takeaway meals? Without takeaway food, life would change, in my opinion, for the better.

Imagine eating a proper breakfast at home, using fresh ingredients, instead of a rubber muffin and a bucket of coffee along the way. Or a meal at home at lunchtime, when the body still has time to use the energy you are putting into it, as opposed to eating when you come home late at night (in some countries they eat a full meal at lunchtime already, normally in a restaurant).

Imagine if you weren't rushing to work and getting caught up in the mayhem that is commuting. The anger and the tension caused during this morning rush would no longer trouble you. But if you didn't commute, how would you get to work, where would you work, what would you do, how would you pay the mortgage, and how could you further your career? And many other questions!

Some of you must be thinking, “he's lost his marbles this time, linking careers, commuting and takeaways,” but it's time to give it some serious thought. How prepared would you be to do what you do for the company you work for if you didn't get access to food on the streets at any time of the day or night? How prepared are you to sit back and let the massive industry that is takeaways use up precious environmental resources, change the way we eat, the food we eat, and influence the culture to such an extent that their food is all that young people crave, want and desire?

Do you care? Do you care that takeaways are linked to alcohol abuse and drunkenness? That they will serve anyone, in any state; that they only care about the money going into their tills? They know who their customers will be at two or four in the morning, and they rub their hands in glee. The drunks don't care what they're eating, as long as it is full of animal fat to soak up the alcohol (they hope). The drunks and the proprietors don't care about the litter everywhere in the street. A fair bargain was struck, and both parties go away satisfied. Do you care?

Do you really care?

Would it be so hard for you to give up takeaway food? Would you not prefer to eat healthy tasty, home cooked food instead? Would you not like to see what a difference it could make to your life? Not just for health, but in the way you thought about how you organised your life?

Wouldn't it be nice to see our streets free of litter and food waste (which took a long time to grow remember), and free of the tacky neon signs that are on every street. Imagine a street free of the drunks who hang around shouting obscenities whilst gorging on their junk (which took a long time to grow remember), and casually tossing the half eaten food on the floor.

This is all possible. Not by forming a campaign group to close down your local chip shop, or by lobbying your member of parliament, but by stopping going there to eat. It's very simple. If you don't go there to eat, and don't take your young daughter to eat there “as a treat” (I fail to see how eating junk food is a treat. I thought the idea of a treat was to have something better, not worse), and when you begin to realise what you are doing is affecting all of us in a negative way, and become aware of your actions, these businesses will close. People will lose their jobs, but humans are very resourceful, and they'll get other ones.

Let us move forward into an era where eating actually means something. Where we respect the land, and the animals, and we do not just use every available resource just for our one minute of eating pleasure. Food is what sustains us, it is also what sustains every living creature on this earth. Let's stop and think about what that means to us before we rush down to neonville and grab a burger just to fill a craving that quickly comes back. We can do it together.

I have made a vow (*make a vow; promise*) never to eat in a takeaway shop (clarification: a shop who primarily sells food to eat off the premises and packages all food, even if there are seats to eat in) ever again. I have been left very hungry on several occasions, but this has taught me that I need to plan my eating habits more carefully, which is what we should all be doing; not just stuffing our faces at every available occasion, because it's quick, available and it's cheap. We expect that food will be there for us whenever we want it, but we have no notion of how to grow it, nurture it, or harvest it.

Stopping buying and eating takeaways and starting eating more locally grown home cooked food will start to put us in touch with the source of the food. The earth.

T a x

Charge against a citizen's person or property or activity for the support of government

There's an old saying that goes something like: "there's only two things for sure in life, and that is death, and taxes," and I think we'd all have to agree. No matter who the government is, whether they're the communists, the conservatives, labour, republicans, socialists, the green party, democrats, christian fundamentalists, idealist workers party, the alternative idealist workers party, or the new reformed christian socialist idealist workers party – if they get into power, they're going to need some cash.

I don't know if you are aware that governments don't have any money. They don't sell anything, and they don't make anything, so they need to get money for their big projects another way – they need to get money from *you*. That's only fair, as you did put them in to power (hopefully, if you live in a democracy), and gave them a mandate (*the*

commission that is given to a government and its policies through an electoral victory).

They need money for all sorts of things such as healthcare, social welfare and housing, education, public transport, and defence. There is a department for each of these areas which receives a budget from the treasury every year, which the treasury – surprise, surprise – gets from you. This is commonly known as tax.

The primary tax is income tax, which is a percentage of every pence in the pound you earn. This is a personal tax that everyone must pay and companies also have to pay corporation tax. You'd think that's where it would end, but no, there's a goods and services tax known as vat (*value added tax*), which applies to most items you buy in stores, and any extra money you get from any investments, you also have to pay tax on, right up until you die. Oh, but just when you thought they couldn't tax you anymore, they do. It's called inheritance tax, and it means that if you leave any assets behind to family or friends, tax has to be taken out.

At every stage in the game of life, they will tax you, re-tax you, and then tax you again, just to be sure you were taxed enough. If you count it up you have probably paid tax 100 times on the same money.

Governments are always attempting to show that they are cutting income tax in “real terms,” but you may notice that more tax is added onto fuel, alcohol and tobacco. Not because the government is concerned with your health or the health of the environment, but because they know you are all addicted to your cars and your distracting pleasures. Basically, you're all easy targets for the tax man.

So why does he need so much money from us all?

Because the government's got lots to do!

Before you voted them in, they published a manifesto which detailed what they would do for you if they were voted into power. More money for this service, more money for that service, lower this tax, lower that tax. The money doesn't grow on trees, unfortunately.

When the chancellor (or whoever does the budget in your country) prepares the budget, he writes down how much money he is proposing to give each department and on the other side, how he proposes to pay for it. In case you didn't know it, running a country costs billions and billions of pounds per year. Most people don't realise when they see new public roads being built that they had, in fact, contributed to it through

their taxes. They also probably don't realise that they are paying for all the failed projects and new initiatives that were quietly disbanded, or new computer systems never implemented after forty million had already been spent, not forgetting the millions spent on consultancy fees and other government “expenses.” Phew, I'm getting dizzy thinking about all this money being spent. Imagine it all being laid out in five pound notes – that's an awful lot of paper!

It is well known that governments waste money. I thought they were wasteful in the uk until I saw what was going on in some “less well off” countries, or rather countries run by greedy dictators or even worse, incompetent idiots. At least you know where the money's going with a dictator (probably a personal swiss bank account!).

They just don't seem to care that the money they are squandering (which on the surface may seem worthwhile projects, just a little over budget) has been given to them by someone who has gone out to work every day and given them a percentage of their earnings.

We all think that the mafia protection rackets are despicable, that someone should be forced to give a percentage of his earnings to the mob in return for “protection,” but isn't that what we do every month? Paying a sum for the state to “protect” us (look after our health, our education, our retirement, and a large army to protect us in case anyone invades). They may not be holding a physical gun to our head like the mob does, but if you don't pay, you'll end up in jail, very swiftly convicted of tax evasion.

Make no mistake, tax is a very serious business if you are in government. Remember, a government with no money can't govern, simple as that, which makes it all the more surprising to watch all our hard earned pounds go down the drain. It is unfortunate, but with governments, the expression, easy come, easy go, always applies. If the country was a business it would always be bankrupt. A company couldn't keep wasting money on failed initiatives and projects, or blowing millions on consultancy fees. One of two things would happen: (a) the chief executive would be fired, or (b) the company would go under. Simple as that.

I have never thought that paying tax is a bad thing, nor tried to avoid paying it. I figure that if I use a service (the country), I should contribute to it. If I drive on the roads (isn't the road tax supposed to pay for that?), or use the public transport (but isn't it all private now?), or use the healthcare system (which I have used so infrequently, and doesn't cover things like teeth), or use the education system (wait a minute, I'm 38 I

don't go to school anymore!), and hang on a minute, I don't have a drug addiction problem, I'm not a minority, I work for a living, and don't need unemployment benefit (actually I'm volunteering), and I don't need housing benefit, and I don't have any children – so excuse me for asking, mr chancellor of the exchequer, but what precisely am I getting for my twenty pence in the pound?

I don't need the services of the army, navy or police as I live on a small island with only fifteen people, and anyway, I don't believe in the idea of an army, as I probably didn't tell you that war has never solved anything, and it's a complete waste of my money and soldiers lives sending them to countries that (a) I've never been to, nor am likely to go to, and (b) because I don't know the real reason why they are there (for world peace probably!).

The more I considered this, the more angry I became. When I am working for money, I pay a percentage of my salary to the exchequer (*the funds of a government or institution or individual*), and I have no idea what it goes towards and why I have to pay for things (a) I don't use and (b) don't want my money to go towards. I realised that the only way for a government to operate, is to tax everyone equally, and use their judgement to distribute the money where it is needed most – after all, that is what you elected them to do.

In a democratic system the power ultimately rests with the people. They are your elected representatives. But even if your government is not elected in a democratic way, they probably still collect taxes centrally, and distribute them to various departments. But as they are undemocratically elected, may favour certain ones – say, the large missile department, or maybe the retired generals department. The only way to be sure your tax money is at least reaching departments that help the people who have paid for them is to work towards democracy. It isn't the solution to all our problems, but at least it's a start.

I'm not giving any money to the army, I'm a pacifist you know!

This idea has been touted around for sometime now, whereby you withhold a percentage of your salary, which is earmarked (according to budget figures) for defence. I was a big supporter of this idea until quite recently when it suddenly dawned on me...

Can you imagine what would happen if we were invaded one day? Who would the army save?

“Hey, I paid for you, protect me,”

“Err, I didn't pay for you, but now you're here, could you save me? I'd rather not die, and I'll back-pay my 5.4798% I should have contributed out of my monthly income to the defence department.”

Can you imagine it? It would be utter chaos!

So how do you ensure your money, that you have all worked so hard for, goes to the areas we want to help most? The answer is. You don't. The only way to do it if you wish to follow the existing political process is to (a) start your own political party, or (b) vote for a political party that agrees to spend more money on the issues you care about; but will probably get caught short on their budget and have to transfer money from the “peace and love department” to the defence department. You can't win! Or can you?

The first thing we have to realise, is that no system is perfect. It isn't now, and it never will be. A government is no different. You can't spot reduce your tax contribution, the tax system cannot cope with that. Everyone must pay into the pot or the system collapses. Withholding tax may be one approach, but what benefit do we get from it? No hospitals, no schools, etc. You may want that if you want a destable and anarchic environment in which to live, but that's not the way forward.

I don't want that. We have come too far to go back, we need to progress. But if we are going to keep this same system, we would be wise to have a government whose primary aims were peace and compassion for all. I think I would be happy to pay my taxes to a government whose motivation for governing was the health and total well-being of the people, not just to make a richer more powerful country. What benefit has that served us? We may have more money, but we are definitely more stressed, less compassionate and more violent. When money rules, everything else is pushed to the back.

Maybe you want to start a party with compassion. Maybe I will. Or maybe, we'll just continue the way we are. But if you aren't happy about where your money is going, don't just complain about it. Do Something.

Make the rich pay more

Everyone keeps going on about the poor old rich. Well, I don't know about you, but if I was rich, I wouldn't be very happy about that.

“Just because I got up early every day, worked my ass off, built a business, gave people jobs, and made a success of myself, in a very competitive world. Why should I, who has done more for this country than most, pay more than someone who has contributed less!” And you can see his point.

He probably does charity work, maybe has a foundation to help disadvantaged children, and maybe even campaigns for world peace. He has a nice car, because he worked for it. He has a large house, because he worked for it.

Answer me one question. If you were doing well, why would you stop yourself from succeeding? If you spent your life trying to improve yourself and you succeeded, why would you stop yourself from earning money? That would seem pointless. The rich man is already taxed more heavily by the government than people who earn less, and he already makes more of a contribution than the poorer people, so why tax him even more heavily? These are the kind of ideas touted around by the “robin hoods” (*legendary english outlaw of the 12th century; said to have robbed the rich to help the poor*) of our time, who believe that people who haven't been successful should be given money by people who have been successful.

A rich man uses no more resources in a country than a poor man, does he? Income tax is supposed to be for hospitals, defence, schools, etc. This is just one more example of people who have less wanting more.

If I am a poor man, have no money or assets, then I complain about the “rich scum” who are taking all the money from the poor. But if I then become a rich man, do I not change my view, or am I happy to refer to myself as “rich scum?”

Down with the government and their capitalist ways!

Oh, but I'll have your money thanks...

I may have told you in other topics that I am volunteering at the moment in a tibetan buddhist “spiritual” community as a chef. I wanted somewhere peaceful to finish writing my book, and was happy to hear I could volunteer a few hours a day in exchange for food and accommodation – seems a pretty fair trade to me. This whole centre, dedicated to world peace and health is staffed, as they say in their brochure, “entirely by volunteers.” As I found out yesterday, this is not entirely true.

Whilst sitting at lunch, someone happened to come in with the mail, and I said to one of the very long term (greater than ten years) volunteers, jokingly:

“Oh, is that a tax return?”

“No,” he said, “it's for my tax credits.”

“What's that?” I asked.

“Well, basically I get about £40 a week, as I only work for my board and lodging, so I am classed as a very low paid worker.”

I was quite shocked by this.

“So, you're telling me that you're not a volunteer?”

“Technically yes, but I work here, so it's only fair I get something. If I didn't claim this tiny amount every week, I'd have to go out onto the mainland to work in a normal job, and anyway the rich government can afford to give me a few pounds instead of spending it on weapons and killing people. I am here doing an important job for the benefit of other people, creating an island of peace, and actually the government sets the minimum amount of money you are supposed to have to live on...”

“So why doesn't the charity pay you? If you are a volunteer who is 'actually working'.”

“Look, I'm only claiming what I'm *entitled* to.”

You see, it all sounds good doesn't it. Rich imperialist government going around the world killing people vs. volunteer in spiritual community building an island community dedicated to world peace, who only wants “a little.” No competition, is there?

“Give him the money, he deserves it, he's working for a good cause.”

He was quite angry when I told him that although he thought the people on the mainland were living an illusion and had miserable lives they were the ones going out to work every day, to pay for him to live on an island deep in contemplation. These were the people who didn't complain, who just got up every morning and went to work – even if they disliked their job. He had the cheek to complain about them, and their ways, and their government.

“But I work for a charity,” he said.

“Then they should pay you, not the working man in the street.”

The conversation ended.

I subsequently found out that most of the “volunteer” residents here were doing the same thing. In my mind there's something about a man who does not contribute. They talk in this community about helping, “all beings achieve peace,” and they meditate on that for hours a day, but what they are forgetting, is that most of the general public would prefer

to be on the island meditating instead of trying to earn some money and put something back into the community in the form of tax, which pays for everything we use in a country.

I have known many “hippies” who wanted to start communes, and live in the woods away from everyone else. They have rejected western ideals and want to get back to nature, except they sign on the dole every week, and someone else (whose ideals they have rejected) has to pay them unemployment benefit every week.

But they don't know what getting back to nature means. It's not wearing a loin cloth and rolling around in mud, failing to wash – that is getting back to being an animal. Getting back to nature requires nothing more than a shift in thinking.

Don't complain about your government or your society, then claim money from them, it weakens your arguments somewhat. If you want to complain and moan then do it the right way. Contribute first, that *includes* you, and gives you a voice. Otherwise, don't complain.

You may want to reject modern life, and the society you live in, but please, do it on your own money, oh, and while your at it, don't use the hospitals, the education system, the roads, the electricity, or the water supplies – but by all means use your own.

The man who stands alone free of the ties of society is indeed a brave man, and I wish you luck in your quest. But please don't involve everyone else in your cause (financially that is).

This topic on taxation is not about who has more money, or who has less, and who should pay more, tax is about the whole community (the world) putting up a certain predetermined amount of money for the benefit of others. We must not get caught up in arguments about the rights and wrongs of tax. If the money were distributed by monks would you feel better? Would you think it was going to the right places?

Governments are only made up of people like you and I. They are not from a different planet! They are doing what they think is right for the country, however misguided it may be. You cannot select what to contribute to at this time, but I still feel it is right for everyone to contribute. I just wish it was spent on disarming us, and educating people in the ways of compassion and empathy, instead of on nuclear missiles and education just to get employment. We have a voice, you and I, it just depends if you care enough to use it.

It's ok to help others.
It's ok to pay your share.
It's what it goes on that I care about.

T e c h n o l o g y

The practical application of science to commerce or industry

•

The discipline dealing with the art or science of applying scientific knowledge to practical problems

To begin this topic, I would like to ask you what the you think the greatest invention was? It can be anything you like. For me, it could be a hundred things – anything from the knife and fork, to the discovery of fire, the wheel, or agriculture. You may be thinking of more modern inventions like the electric kettle, the television, the car, digital music, or satellite television. It doesn't matter what you pick, we will all have our own favourites.

The point is, that over all other species on this planet, man has been inventive (*used of persons or artifacts*) *marked by independence and creativity in thought or action*).

The apes are the only other species who also have some degree of inventiveness. All other species, no matter how clever we think they are, are operating on some form of blueprint, a predetermined path, based on how successful it makes them as a species. So we are not talking about

man adapting to his environment to increase the survival chances of the species, we are talking about using the mind in such a way, as to invent items which are not directly related to survival.

So why have people invented things? The question is as broad as asking why does man do anything. The simple answer is because he can! He has a mind which has developed sufficiently as to ask questions. Complex questions such as “what if?” and “why can't we?” It is precisely questions such as these that lead to inventions, coupled with man's desire to make life easy for himself and his family.

We have all seen the animals and the birds out hunting for food or grazing every day, but did you know that even if they had the mental capacity to comprehend the concept of a day off, they couldn't have one, as they need to keep looking for food! No two week holidays in the sun for them, no weekends off, just work, work, work. That's exactly what it used to be like for us. Hunter gatherers. Hunting for animals to kill, and gathering berries etc. in the forest. Every day.

*Thanks to inventions
I am human
Without them
I will surely die*

Imagine, just imagine for a moment, that we were suddenly thrown back to those days. How would we cope? We, who are so used to going to the supermarket or pulling something out of the freezer and putting it in the microwave (for clarity, I am using a western example here, as I know in some countries you do not have access to this kind of technology). How would you cope? I know one thing, a lot of us would starve to death!

How many of us know anything about the food we eat? How many of us could identify fungi and berries in the forest? I know I can't, and neither could my parents.

How many of us could catch a wild animal and kill it (without a gun), skin it, and identify the best parts for eating, before starting a fire without matches, and finally roasting it? Please think about this for a moment because it is very important. Can you see why we are talking about this?

It is precisely because of man's inventions that we have lost some very basic skills. It is all very well having technology, but what if one day, we don't have it anymore? Remember, all of this technology requires earth resources to make, and use -so what if it runs out? Where will we be then?

Many people have said that they are not concerned for the future, because when the earth's resources run out, man will just come up with more inventions. But can't you see that these inventions are the very things that are disconnecting us from the planet? These inventions have placed us so far away from nature that now we believe we are different from all other creatures on the planet. We cover ourselves in our inventions, surround ourselves with them, talk about them, fly in them, eat them, live them, breathe them. Our whole life is based around technology; man's discoveries to make life more pleasant and bearable.

Except no other species seems to need them. You may argue that they don't know what they're missing, that they could have such a better life if only they had the brain capacity to invent! But really, what would they do with it? How would you improve a bird's life? How could you better soaring in the sky, free from control, from suffering.

Birds and animals do not need to consider a better life, because they are already living it! They may or may not know they are living a good life, but they are part of the earth, working with the nature to ensure it is kept in balance, whereas we just want an easy life, and we invent technologies to help us with it.

Remember, alcohol was an invention, and look what that does to us. It keeps us as far away from nature as possible.

Everything we do for work and for pleasure is the result of human invention. Everything we see when we look around in our cities is the work of human invention, and yes, I am amazed by what humans have created in the last few thousand years (roads, water supplies, bridges, brick housing, aeroplanes, spacecraft), but all the while I look around me, I keep thinking to myself: "Imagine if we used this brain capacity for something else rather than to make our lives easier and more superficially pleasurable?"

When fridges and cars were invented early in the twentieth century these would have been considered as, and maybe more, exciting as mobile phones today, and they very quickly became essential items to the human animal.

Bolt-ons and more bolt-ons

Bolt-ons, as you may remember from other topics, are items which I consider non-essential to the well-being of the species. Artificial additions which have become as inseparable from us as our limbs!

I would like to create a list of ten items I feel I couldn't be without now, and please write your own list at the same time. They don't have to be in order of importance.

- (a) Laptop, and fast wireless broadband internet, please.
- (b) Mobile communications
- (c) Banking (cashpoint and mastercard/visa for paying online etc.)
- (d) Many different sets of clothes.
- (e) Public transport and / or private car.
- (f) Money.
- (g) Electricity and running water.
- (h) Hot water showers.
- (i) Shower gel and toothpaste.
- (j) Flushing toilet.
- (k) House with heating (in winter).

I consider myself to be one who has let go of most modern desires, but I see from my list I am still very much addicted to modern living. How does your list compare?

What do you think the list would contain if it had been completed by someone 150 years ago or 300 years ago? It would have looked very different, I can tell you (only because, apart from money, the things I have listed hadn't been invented).

I am trying to remember what I used to do before the cash machine was invented – it was only invented recently, but now I couldn't live without it. The same goes for a debit card to pay for items without having cash. In fact what would I do if I didn't have a bank? Where would I put my money? Under the bed probably!

It seems to me, that humans don't miss something until they have had it, and then lose it. I'm sure everyone was quite happy without credit cards (invented around 1960) or cash machines. They just went to the bank, stood in line and took out their money, but if you removed them now, there would be an outcry! The same goes for mobile phones.

I have had one since they became digital in 1995, and give or take a few months here and there, it has been on permanently, quietly receiving text messages of zero importance and loudly receiving phone calls, none of which (over ten years or so) could be considered important or a matter of life and death!

“What are you up to?” “Are you going out tonight?” “Did you see?” “I'll be there in five minutes” Blah, blah, blah. I have wasted thousands of

pounds talking absolute rubbish. I used it to pass the time in traffic jams, on trains, in airports, when in fact it was just wasting time, and keeping me separate from the now. Wherever I was, I was somewhere else.

Do you notice that these days? People will be out in company at a pub, restaurant, or even the cinema, in fact, anywhere, and they are engaged in a text conversation with someone else? Everywhere you look in the street, people are talking with someone who isn't there! Anything to keep them distracted from what they are doing. No one can just sit and have a coffee at a cafe now, they have to be doing something else, like phoning a friend, or texting. They have to distract themselves from living in the present moment.

But it wasn't always like this. In fact, it has only reached epidemic proportions in the last few years, when mobiles have become financially accessible to young people.

So what did people do before they could waste their time talking to people on the move? The same as they did before cars were invented, or the same as they did before fridges were invented – they got on with their lives. It seems very strange to me that we have such an addiction to technology. Maybe it's because we are fascinated by it? I don't know, but one thing I am sure of is that once we have it, it switches something on in the brain that can never let it go.

I'm sure you don't know anyone without a mobile, do you? Everyone argues that they are an essential part of our accessory pack. Parents happily give their five year old children one, just in case they need to phone home. Husband and wives have them in case they need to let each other know that they will be thirty minutes late for dinner. Elderly people should have one in case their car breaks down. On the face of it, it seems like a good idea. Everyone being able to keep in contact with each other, just in case. But all I want say is, what did we do without them twenty five years ago? Fifty years ago? One hundred years ago? One thousand years ago? Was life better or worse without them?

Another great invention is Sat-nav in the car which uses the global positioning system satellites and some nifty software to plot your route. It even tells you when to turn left and right! Once again, like the mobile phone, it's a great invention, testament to man's ability to be inventive, and like all technology, it's nice to have, but do you really *need* a computerised flight plan for your car journey down to the supermarket? What's wrong with looking at the map?

The more we become reliant on technology, the less likely we are going to be able to cope without it. Whether that day comes or not, we must

learn to rely on our own human skills, to use our brains, instead of allowing ourselves to become addicted to the lazy way – something humans are becoming more and more likely to do. Ask yourself what you would do without even one thing on your list. Even better, do as I did, pick one item and let it go. Like your mobile phone! Instead of feeling lost without it, I feel free. The addiction is broken.

So why do you think we felt a need to create all this technology? Is it built into the human to constantly improve, or were these the inventions of people who wanted to make money? Was electricity created so that people's lives would improve, or was it an invention to make money? Was running water in the city invented to help people improve, or as a way to get water to the people in the city so they could work for the powerful men who ran the city?

Why was the mobile invented? For the people, or for the back pocket?

Cynical you may call me, but every modern invention has been created for profit. Try to think of one that wasn't. I am not suggesting a return to the dark ages when we had no technology, just an awareness that the technology the marketers have addicted us to, is unnecessary to the happy existence of the human race.

It facilitates modern cramped city and town living. It allows people to work long hours so they can get rich or make someone else rich, without having to worry about going out to hunt food, fetch firewood, or tend crops. Technology allows for specialisation, and specialisation is where people get rich!

So is technology just another way for people to get richer than their fellow man or could it be philanthropic? Did the great inventors of our time come up with these ground breaking inventions purely for the benefit of other human beings, or did they do it for the fame and the money? I will leave that for you to decide, but know that nothing we have is necessary to our survival, we just think it is. It may take a while to get used to the idea of not having, but like all highly adaptable species. We would adapt.

The monastical experience

I have only spent a short time in what could be called a monastical existence. I was only there as a lay person and had (and have) no intention of becoming a monk, but something moved me in the time I

spent there. What really struck me first was the lack of outward attachments. No fancy clothes, yet the clothing seemed perfectly adequate. No cd players or mp3 players, but the silence was in fact more captivating than any concert. No fancy food, but each meal was delicious. No talking at mealtimes, but the food tasted the better for it...

Most of you, and young people of western culture especially would say “Borrnnnnngg!” which doesn't surprise me. Anything that isn't the newest and shiniest technology is considered boring. Forgetting the religious aspect to monasteries, these are places of contemplation and learning. They give the mind space to breathe, without all the modern gadgets we are addicted to.

They are simple in design, the living is simple, but the thoughts one can generate in the silence, can be incredible! The monks have lived almost the same way for hundreds (if not thousands) of years.

Of course, this simple life may not appeal to you if you live in a city surrounded by constant traffic, noise, bars and nightclubs, fast food outlets, fashion and technology retailers, cinemas, art galleries, museums, fast moving companies, slow moving traffic, and enough neon lights to block out the stars at night, but can't you see how artificial it all is? Nothing we have in the city is natural, it is all man-made. It is all born through invention.

Sure, we may build a few “natural” parks with lakes etc. to make the people believe they have something in common with nature. But there is nothing we have in common with nature anymore, technology has seen to that. That is why all of us, whether we are religious or not, could benefit from spending some time in a monastery, where the only technology employed, is the technology of the mind in action. Where you can start to develop a true awareness of yourself, where you can start to find out who you are, and begin to understand your place in the universe. Of course, you could just buy a meditation cd and listen to it on your mp3 player in the lounge!

To quieten the mind, to be as one with the universe, takes no effort, just silence! You don't have to repeat mantras nor sit in funny cross legged positions, just be. And where better than to just be, than in a place specifically built for people who want to just be? You could just spend time alone in the mountains, or by a stream, but please don't take your sat-nav or mobile phone with you!

Is technology a help or a hindrance?

Any technology that makes humans' lives easier so they can work more is a help to employers, but is it furthering humanity? Are we just using more and more of the earth's resources to enclose ourselves from it? It seems quite ironic! Some of you may say, that without modern technologies we would still have problems in the west from contaminated drinking water like they do in parts of asia and africa, but if society was not organised into such large social groups would we need to pipe it round the country?

If we didn't all work miles from our homes we wouldn't need all the technology to get us to and from the cities. If we lived in small enough communities, we wouldn't need technology to stay in constant touch with our friends, we'd go round and see them.

There are so many reasons why technology is a hindrance, but then again you may see it differently. I believe that technology is the barrier between seeing reality and living in illusion. If you start to become aware of yourself, you will have done something that technology will never be able to do.

*Leave technology behind you,
let space enter your mind.
Finally you will be free,
to discover what's truly inside.*

T e l e v i s i o n

Broadcasting visual images of stationary or moving objects

•

An electronic device that receives television signals and displays them on a screen

What a great invention. The television. It allows moving images to be broadcast in colour over invisible waves, and beamed right into your living room, bedroom, or indeed any room you want. You can have cable tv, Satellite tv or Terrestrial tv. You can receive thousands of channels in many different languages. Yes, the tv is really a remarkable invention. There's great drama, comedy, and factual programs. You can watch movies you missed at the cinema, and you can get up to the minute breaking news from around the world. See all the sports live! All beamed directly into your living room. You don't have to do a thing. Just sit there and let yourself be educated, informed, or entertained.

Education. Information. Entertainment

Children rush home from school to watch cartoons; you catch up on the latest soap every night; you all watch the movie at night; your partner watches the car show; you watch the home shopping channel; you both watch the latest blockbuster from hollywood; The children watch the kiddie shows; you watch the nature show; your partner catches up on the day's news. It's time for bed, but there's just one more show, one you just have to watch... And soon, you drift asleep. If you wake up, there's always something on; a commercial, a movie, or a show that's being repeated.

You see, television never sleeps. It's not like it used to be, where the tv station closed down at midnight. It's all changed now. Tv is in your home, even when it's off. You're always receiving. And as soon as you push that button, on comes the news, the headlines, the drama, the comedy, the movies, the serials, and the commercials.

Round and round, you click that remote, until you find something that satisfies. "Ahhh, that's better, something I can relax to."

And that's it isn't it? It's relaxing, even if it's an interesting science program. You don't have to think, you just open your eyes and ears, and in it comes. No effort required. Not like reading a book or studying. This is pure relaxation. It's the one time you don't have to *think*.

The most exciting new piece of television since the last most exciting new piece of television

And the tv companies know it. They know what you want, after all, they control what you see. Did you ever think about that? Who decides what you see? Who decides what *you* relax to? Multinational television companies broadcasting worldwide, controlled by a handful of men, as rich as you could ever imagine, these are the people who decide what you see. These are the people who are in your life 24/7. Do you know anything about these people, their values, or their ethics? How do you know that the content on the news channel hasn't been guided by the political bias of the tv station owner? The answer is, you don't. You don't know anything about them.

Children's tv

Let's discuss the station owners, the ones you don't know anything about. These are the people who decide what education your child gets

from television. These are the people you leave in charge of your children, when you're too tired to play with them. While you rest, these people are addicting your children, to the latest craze, the latest game, the latest merchandise from the most popular tv program. They've addicted your child, and now you have to deal with them. They know you'll give in eventually.

“Mum I need the latest backpack it's from...”

“Mum, can I have the new pencil case/lunch box /dvd/game/t-shirt/shoes, they have the logo from my favourite series on them. Mum Pleeeeeeease!”

“Mum, all the kids at school have them, if I don't have them I'll be the only one without them, and no one will talk to me, mum, pleeeeeeease!”

And so it goes on, from what seemed to be just a harmless children's show, now becomes a major shopping expedition for you every month as soon as the latest craze appears! And if you don't comply, you will see the face of a screaming child who hates you and never wants to talk to you again, until you buy it. Then it's “thanks mum, I really love you mum.”

Is this addiction? Have the tv companies successfully addicted your child so young? Well, they do know psychology. They know what works. They know how to make you spend money. Are they smarter than you? After all, you are the most intelligent being on the planet. Could the tv companies have tricked you, without you knowing it? Maybe not. But they know who to get to instead. Your child. He will make you buy the products. After all, you love him and you don't want to see him unhappy. But it's not all just about merchandising.

I'm sure you think about limiting your children's tv time, and making sure they only watch programs designed for their age group. But have you ever considered what watching tv is doing to your child's brain? Sure, these programs seem harmless enough, cartoons or fairytales, in fact some children's programs seem better than adult ones. But by watching tv they are creating addiction, a need, something they can't do without. If your child had never had tv in the house do you think he would miss it? I doubt it.

From the age of two, to the age of sixteen, how much tv will your child watch? Imagine the healthy things you could do together in all that tv time. The one thing tv breaks down is communication between parent and child. Whenever there is a problem with a child, especially a teenager, they retreat to their room and put on the television. Teenagers

need a lot of space as they grow up, but retreating to a world which just numbs the brain can't possibly be of any help.

*“Quiet mum I'm watching my favourite program!”
“Mum, leave me alone, I'm just watching tv all right? I'll do my homework in a minute!”*

Television is all encompassing, all addicting, and once you're hooked, you can't give it up.

Adult tv

Do you think it changes when you get older? Once you have a job, a routine, less physical activity, you're tired after work... You just need to relax! And what's good for relaxing – apart from alcohol? That's right, tv.

It just feels nice to sit in front of the tv, to curl up on the sofa and just relaaaaaxxxxx. It doesn't really matter what's on, although it would be nice if it was your favourite program, and so you flick through the channels on your remote control, seeking anything that takes your fancy, probably grumbling, “there's never anything good on when I want to watch tv.” Of course, the program you like is never on when you're in, or it's on too early, or too late.

This is interesting. If we go into “there's never anything good on when I want to watch tv.” what this means is that you are merely sitting down relaxing, and the tv itself is unimportant, yet we turn it on all the same, making it a substitute for human company, one we don't have to interact with.

We want to relax, and this is the quickest method to do it. But what would you do to relax if you didn't have a tv? There are many things which are relaxing, but you can't really be bothered can you? You're tired, you've had a hard day...

I watch tv to relax, what's wrong with that?

So we have seen that the content is not as important as the fact that it is there and on, but I hear you saying: “I only watch the programs I am interested in, and I don't turn it on at other times,” which is most commendable, but that's not what I want to talk about. I'm sure all of

you could come up with numerous programmes that are worth watching, but there's always programs that grab your interest isn't there? Especially if you are interested in documentaries and nature programs.

You can always say they're educational, but these aren't subjects you are deeply interested in, are they? Are you deeply interested in arctic whale watching or deadly snakes, in your spare time? Or are you interested in pre-world war air planes, or the history of world war one? Maybe, but isn't the main reason you want to watch it is that it has been provided for you by the television companies as entertainment; something you can be interested in but at the same time relax to?

Entertainment

An activity that is diverting and that holds the attention

That is what tv is at its best, entertainment – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year; hundreds of channels, mind boggling brain mush.

How many of you have been motivated to really do something, really change something, really get involved with something, really help the world because of something you saw on tv? Maybe you bought that new power washer on special offer; or the food processor that was advertised as buy one get one free; or maybe you rushed down to the store to pick up the new anti-ageing cream that has just come out, and guarantees you'll look younger.

Advertising

Companies pay huge sums of money to get access to you. In fact, none but the richest can advertise on national television – it is seriously expensive. These companies also pay huge sums of money in producing the tv ads. Why would they do it? Well, even if you don't think you watch a lot of tv you are being exposed to advertising. They make them catchy, with tunes and slogans you remember. You find yourself saying “I like this one,” but you would never admit it influenced you into buying their products, would you? But still, these companies keep on advertising their products.

They advertise shampoo, clothes, anti-everything creams for women, special offers at the supermarkets, and anything that children can convince their mum to buy. Why do you think I say mum? Because

advertisers aren't really targeting men with their anti-ageing creams, or their fancy shampoos and hair care products, are they? Who generally keeps hold of the household budget? Women. They're the ones being targeted because advertisers know they love a bargain, and statistically speaking, love to shop.

So, if you're a man, you may not notice advertising as much when it's about ice cream on special, but you will notice when a new car is sexily advertised, or beer is advertised with sexy women on the screen.

If you didn't know it already, advertising uses carefully selected psychology to win you over. They know what pushes your buttons. They know what makes you reach in your pocket and pull out the cash for their products. They know you better than you know yourself, but it all just seems like a harmless bit of advertising, doesn't it?

Let me ask you again, do you really think that these global companies would have got to be global companies if they didn't know how to seduce you with advertising? They don't care if the product they're selling is good for you or indeed anyone, but they do know one thing – they know they've got to sell a lot of it to pay for all that advertising, and make a big profit to keep the shareholders happy.

But why should we let them into our home? We didn't invite them did we?

How annoyed do you get if someone phones you and says: "Hello alan, I'm calling to save you money on your phone bill," or "good evening alan, I would like to save you money on your electricity bill" Oh how angry we get! "How did you get my phone number! I'm in the middle of my dinner! I'm not interested!" Even if they *could* save us money, we hate that kind of direct sales, the intrusiveness into our lives, don't we?

What about the poor old door to door salesman? Is that a tough job or what? Because if we don't like telephone sales, we certainly don't like real people turning up at our door unannounced, they could be anybody, and "I'm in the middle of my dinner, I don't care what your selling, I'm not interested. Goodbye!"

So let's look at this shall we? We don't like people intruding into our home, either by telephone, or in person even if it saves us money, or they want to talk to us about poverty in the third world. It's our home, our private space of relaxation away from the outside world, and we don't want it intruded upon, thank you very much.

So let me ask you this question. If you dislike telesales, and really dislike door to door sales, why do you feel comfortable with hundreds of

companies advertising their products to you in your private space of relaxation away from the outside world, every fifteen minutes, in the middle of your favourite program, in what we have discussed, is really your relaxation time?

Please stop and think about this very carefully as it really is most important.

You are sitting relaxing, and adverts about fast food, cars, magazines, and supermarket special offers come on, and they float right into your head.

Imagine how you would feel if you received that many phone calls in the middle of your favourite program or several men turned up to sell you products in the middle of the news. I don't need to ask you how you would feel, do I?

But with tv ads it's different, isn't it? For starters, they're not "real" people, although you can see and hear them, and they are not threatening in any way. They're not forcing you to buy their product, they just give you their short message and leave your screens for another half an hour. They're friendly, they smile nicely, the models are attractive, and they wear colourful clothes.

Everyone in advertising looks happy. It's fun and nice and inoffensive, unlike the unattractive door to door salesman, standing in the rain, in his grey suit and mismatching tie, using his well worn pitch, and unexciting voice. Compare this now to the glamour of tv advertising, the catchy music, the feel good voice over. What's the difference?

One word: Entertainment

That's right! It's still entertainment. Remember the definition? *An activity that is diverting and that holds the attention.* You are being entertained, while the message subtly finds its way into your brain. Think about it the next time you are happily watching adverts and the phone rings with some commission only salesperson desperately trying to make a living!

They're both trying to sell you something, but only the tv advert can add the glamour to make selling a mobile phone, or a car, entertainment. That's all it is. And guess what? We buy into it.

There's just one interesting thing though, if you, as an individual, wanted to buy some advertising space for something of importance to the world, say, for example to bring the plight of workers in the third world,

or arms trading issues, or criticism of the government, to the attention of the people, and you had the money to do it, who do you think would put your advertisement on national television? The answer, a concrete, no one.

Why? Because they rely on advertising revenue, and they don't want their advertisers to get scared. They want to keep everything running smoothly with nothing controversial to spoil the ratings. That's why you get the same types of programmes all the time. Nothing too challenging, just keep it middle of the road, that's what the advertisers want. Of course, occasionally, there is some investigative journalism, expose of criminals and fraudulent companies, or an award winning report from the war front. So now, if you want to know who the people really are behind the tv companies, you'll have to look to the global corporations. They pay the salaries of the station employees.

There's just one more group that I'd like to discuss with you and that is the public broadcasters. Some do not broadcast advertisements as they are solely funded through the taxpayer and some countries levy a mandatory television licence fee, but this is not for the tv itself, it is to pay for the national broadcaster, whether you watch their stations or not.

National broadcasters are in a unique position to put programming in place that is not just "entertainment," and to produce programs that challenge us, and educate us in ways we have not considered before; but they never will. Why? Because all we want is to be entertained – to relax. We don't really want to be challenged, do we? And as a broadcaster spending taxpayers money, they have to give us what we want, and that is: Entertainment.

So why do you think we need to be constantly entertained? What is it that makes us watch television for hours on end, even when we're tired and should go to bed? What makes us finish work and slouch in the tv chair all night, apart from relaxation and entertainment?

One word: Boredom

That's right, you're bored (*tired of the world*). You've lost interest in the world, and tv helps, doesn't it? You just can't think of anything to do, but you can't just sit there alone in silence, can you? Television numbs the mind; it is like elevator muzak for the brain, and it gives just enough stimulation to keep you from thinking about your own life. It makes sure

you don't spend too long with your own thoughts, it gives you an escape from reality and places you firmly in fantasy land.

That's really what entertainment is about isn't it? Escapism from reality. That's why we just leave the tv on, even if there's no interesting programs we want to watch, that's why we just leave the adverts on. The point is we just need to escape for a while, but not in quiet! That would be much too disturbing, wouldn't it?

Have you ever watched tv with the sound down? Strange, isn't it? On the one hand, you have the visual stimulation, but on the other, you're missing the audio stimulation. You see, we can't be in quiet for too long; we don't want to be alone with ourselves, so we need to fill our mind with both visual and audio stimulation to muffle our thoughts – and to some extent, it works. Until you turn it off, and then there is an eerie silence.

So you phone someone, talk to your partner, go to the pub, go to the cinema, play a game, read, anything to stop the thoughts. Anything to stop the boredom, to stop the creeping thoughts that life is pretty pointless. “What am I doing with my life? I hate my job, I hate where I live...” When activity stops, that's where reality comes in.

But tv is different to reading a book or chatting with someone on the phone, as a means of distracting yourself from reality, isn't it? At least you are in control of your other distractions. With television, the companies push information at you, help you to form opinions, subtly convince you to buy their advertisers products, addict you to their programs, and tell *you* what is important, what *you* should be thinking about. All in the guise of information, education and entertainment.

Remember, *you* don't decide what should be shown on tv. The advertisers and the tv executives do, and polls tell them which is the most popular of the programs they choose to show you. The ones they get the most people to watch. In the end, it's about ratings. And ratings are about money. That's all. It's not about anything else.

Companies can't exist if they don't make money, pure and simple. So they will come up with any formula they can to get you to watch their programs as opposed to their competitors programs. It's not about who has the most interesting, the most intelligent and most honest and varied content to educate and inform you. It's just about how many people watch a show, and how much money they earn from advertisers.

It may be just entertainment and boredom relief for you, but to them, it's all about money

But we could all start a tv station if we wanted to! All we have to do is raise a few million pounds for the licence and broadcasting equipment, have our content approved by the government, and off we go. But what would we show? Another crime drama, more breaking news of some terrible disaster happening right now? A religious program? A sports show? A reality show? (there's an idea!) How about a home improvement show? A comedy show? A singing show? A nature program? A consumer investigation show? The choice is endless!

But what if we decided to break with tradition and use the medium of television, one of the most powerful forms of mass communication in the whole world, for something different. Something that made us remember we are human beings, something which attempted to bring us more together as a planet – programs whose content weren't dictated by advertisers, government or religious agenda. Would anyone watch it? Would you? Or are you quite content being entertained?

Will you stand up to television giants and tell them you aren't going to be dictated to anymore, that you don't want them invading your private space 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year? There's an easy way to do this you know. One which doesn't involve taking over the tv stations, protesting in the streets, or writing to your members of parliament. It's so easy, even a child can do it!

Turn off your tv

That's right, the red button on the corner of your tv. Not on the remote. Turn it off properly at the mains and unplug your aerial. And that's it! It won't be long before there's no more tv advertising, no more reality shows, no more breaking news stories every ten minutes. Could you do it, I mean really turn off your tv?

If it was sitting there could you stop yourself from turning it on, just for a minute to see if “there's anything good on.” Could you? Could you do something different instead of watching tv? Something that is healthy for your system, something truly relaxing. Could you just sit for a moment in quiet, and let your brain and your body relax. With no noise?

It's difficult to begin with, but once you master it, you will enjoy it so much more than the latest home improvement show. Turning off your tv

is similar to giving up smoking or alcohol. It's an addiction, and it will fight with you every day. And if you don't think you are addicted, try turning your tv off for one week. How do you feel when you see it, aren't you just a little bit tempted to switch it on and be entertained just for a little while?

No one wants you to unplug the tv! They're all screaming at you: "Nooooooo. Don't do it! You won't be able to live if you turn it off, think of what your missing, pleeeeeease, don't do it, we have families to feed, we'll lose our jobs, how will we pay the bills?" But that's not your problem, is it?

The advertisers don't want you to do it, the tv companies don't want you to do it, and the government definitely doesn't want you to do it. Why? Because they need to keep you happy, just like entertaining the troops in the war. They don't want you to have too much quiet time alone otherwise you might just start to think a little. They need you to work every day to keep the country moving, to get taxes paid so they can get on with the projects they want to do. But to keep you working, they need to make sure you are thoroughly entertained in your quiet time. "Don't complain, just keep working, there's a good chap, and why don't you relax after work with some nice entertaining tv, that'll make you feel better, all ready for work the next day."

Turning off your tv will free you from another addiction, and although I know no one is about to stop watching tv, think about it, think about what tv is stopping you doing, what tv is making you become. Where would you be without tv?

I know a television set is essential to watching dvd's or videos, but I am not discussing that, it is only the reception of television programmes we are interested in here.

You will start to have more free time, more energy, more willingness to go outside after work, even if it's cold. The tv no longer controls how you live your life. Without you watching it, the media giants will start to crumble, their power over you becomes weaker and weaker. You can always get your information from other sources.

The internet, for one, has more information, entertainment and education than you could ever imagine, and most of it's free, but one word of warning: Don't substitute one addiction for another; it's very easy to do.

What will become of television is in our hands. Do you really think you still need a service which chooses what you will see every night? I'm

sure the tv companies are thinking hard too, trying to come up with new ideas to “put you in control,” but it's still their choice of programmes.

You don't need that now. You are free from their addiction, the moment you unplug the aerial. Try it.

T e n d e r n e s s

A tendency to express warm and affectionate feeling

•

A positive feeling of liking

•

Warm compassionate feelings

•

A feeling of concern for the welfare of someone (especially someone defenceless)

Most of us think of tenderness as the way we are with a partner we are in love with. We caress them gently, we touch them softly, we pay attention to their body and their mind. We envelop them with love. We would not let anything bad happen to them. We feel a warmth inside our stomachs and in our hearts when we are near them. But then the moment is over and it's back to normal life. Especially for men, who aren't well known for their ability to be tender at the best of times!

What I want to discuss with you here is taking the feelings of the tender moment, and applying it to your life, not just to your loved one.

So what is it to be tender? What are the key characteristics of one who is tender? Someone who is gentle, caring, concerned, or kind perhaps? Someone who is compassionate? What I want to understand is how we

can enter into such feelings with the one we love but then switch off as soon as we leave that person, and become angry, spiteful, hateful, jealous and cruel.

For me, tenderness is something we carry with us through our life, and every being we come into contact with, we act with tenderness. When I told a good friend of mine I was going to be writing about tenderness today, she expressed surprise.

“Why are you surprised?” I asked.

“Because men really don't know the first thing about being tender.”

On reflection I had to agree with her.

Men are the strongest of the human species, the most violent, the most dominating. They act in ways which are opposite to what women would consider as tender! They can be aggressive, ambitious, pack animals who think being tender is a sign of weakness (*the property of lacking physical or mental strength; liability to failure under pressure or stress or strain*). But I'm here to give men the benefit of the doubt! After all, I'm a man too, and I don't consider myself weak because I am tender.

Let's just put all this down to good old history. Let's just say it was an evolutionary plus point for men to be violent and aggressive, after all, the human brain was only in its infancy, and we had to fend off predators and other males who had designs on our women folk. We had more muscle than the women, whose task it was to give birth to and rear offspring, so we took up the task of protecting our family, and were prepared to use whatever force necessary to do it.

But let's put that all behind us, that was oh, so very long ago, and man is a different creature now, right? Our minds have evolved since that time. We no longer have to fend off blood thirsty predators, and although other men may have designs on our women, we can now use complex language to explain that they are in fact with us at this moment in time, and so won't be going off anywhere! So there's really no excuse for men not to “let their guard down” and let themselves develop the tenderness that women have had for millennia.

To me, It seems that evolution may be lagging behind our brains and has left us men with a modern scientific brain, and the emotional system of our cavemen ancestors. Still, let us not be daunted by a slight failing in evolution. We are the most intelligent species on the planet, and as men, we can easily learn something new – right lads? So now we know where we are in our emotional development, we can move forward.

Let's get one thing clear between us; this is not about letting your guard down at all, nor is it about being more like women. This is about

all of us approaching life more delicately. The word delicate might appeal to men because its dictionary definition is “*marked by great skill especially in meticulous technique.*” So let’s look at this as a challenge to develop a meticulous technique shall we ? Ladies feel free to join in on this discussion.

For most of us, we just bash through life, swatting and swiping at whatever gets in our way. We mow people down caring nothing for their feelings. We trample all over the world leaving our indelible footprint wherever we go, leaving chaos and mayhem in our wake, all for what? A bit of success, a bit of cash, a big house?

Will it all be worth it in the few short years you have left on this planet? I say short, because even if you are only eighteen, you will only live to about eighty if you're lucky. And on an earth that has been in existence for approaching four billion years, sixty odd years is not even the smallest drop in the widest ocean. So let’s start from the beginning, shall we?

Tenderness is a skill we must develop by paying close attention to ourselves. One good way to start the process off, is to *slow down*. Not a little. A lot.

Take a leaf out of the book of walking meditation, and take each step thoughtfully. Slowly. Taking great care not to crush anything in your path. Try it for a moment now if you wish, just for a minute or two.

Take small, slow steps, almost examining every crack on the floor, or speck of dust on the carpet. One step after another, watching your feet. It may seem like a silly exercise, but you will start to notice more of a connection between your mind, your body and the earth you walk on. You just aren't going to get that kind of feeling when you're moving at the speed of sound.

Developing tenderness requires patience; and patience (*good-natured tolerance of delay or incompetence*) takes time to develop as well. First you have to slow down. Slow down in your speech. Slow down in your work. Slow down in your thinking. Slow down in your actions. If you don't, you will never learn this technique (you wouldn't learn woodworking or car mechanics if you were doing everything so fast either).

Tenderness is something that makes a man stronger. It shows that although he has great power in his body, that he has mastered himself, and uses the power he has to hold his partner, his child and the whole world in his arms. When a man is unsympathetic, tough, and violent all he has shown is that he has not mastered his own emotions. He is still at

the beck and call of an emotional system that developed millions of years ago.

Real power is in picking the most delicate of flowers with the strongest of hands, all the while taking great care to preserve it intact. Real power is in knowing you have the strength to beat someone to a pulp, but instead extending him the hand of friendship. Real power is in knowing you have it, but will never use it. Women have respect for men who have mastered their power, and are tender. No woman truly respects a man that is violent, because she knows that one day he may turn on her and her child.

So as we continue along this road to tenderness let us stop for a moment and think. Is tenderness an action, or is it a part of who I am?

I like to think that tenderness is something I carry with me at all times, something that affects what I do and the way I do it. I approach working with tenderness. I choose the job I do to be tender to the planet. I speak with tenderness, to convey my point in a way that shows I am aware of myself, and I am aware of the impact my speaking may have on other people. I carry it with me in my feet that touch the delicately balanced planet, in my hands that could so easily destroy, in my mind that could so easily create violence, and in my heart that could so easily be cold.

So many people think that this kind of love – which is what it is – is only for women; that men have *real* work to do, like building skyscrapers, chopping down forests, creating wealth, and providing for the family. They don't have time for this soppy stuff! But men love tenderness. They loved it from their mothers, and they love it from their partners. Men have the ultimate responsibility now to learn this vital skill. A skill which may save us from future wars and conflicts, stop dominance of one over another, and save the planet from being destroyed by men who run businesses that trample all over our precious resources at the speed of sound. It is vital we all learn this. I cannot stress this enough.

When a man has mastered himself, and is concerned for the welfare of others, above his own personal wants and desires, then the world will truly be a special place to be.

Imagine a world where men approached each task delicately. Imagine, you, as a man, being able to be tender with everything in this world, not just your closest loved one. Take this tenderness with you, everywhere you go, feel its power in your fingertips, and in your mind. You are on the road to self-mastery. But first, you have to slow down.

T h o u g h t

The content of cognition; the main thing you are thinking about

•

The process of using your mind to consider something carefully

•

The organised beliefs of a period or group or individual

•

A personal belief or judgement that is not founded on proof or
certainty

Have you ever travelled by tram, bus, or train? Have you ever looked at all the people around you, and wondered what they might be thinking? I have, and it's amazing to watch! You can tell they're thinking as they blankly stare out the window, or into space, but you don't know what they're thinking!

Everybody's thinking about something different. One man is thinking, "I wonder what I'll get my wife for her birthday tomorrow," whilst the other is thinking, "I'll grab his wallet as he goes to get off." One woman thinks, "I need a cigarette right now," whilst another thinks of her dying mother in the hospital. One boy thinks, "that girl's quite cute." One girl thinks, "why doesn't that horrible boy stop staring at me?" All in all, that's a lot of thinking going on in one tram, and we can't see any of it.

Imagine if you could see thought! What an interesting place the world would be. Embarrassing for some, dangerous for others, or just plain comical. You see, you never really know what people are thinking. You can try to judge facial expressions and actions but you never really know...

The politician talking on camera, discussing morality, whilst thinking about meeting his mistress.

The schoolteacher chastising a child for smoking, and secretly wondering if he'll ever be able to kick his own smoking habit.

The soldier who has killed an enemy, thinks of his family, and how he would feel if one of them had been killed.

The film star smiles broadly for the fans whilst wishing he was at home in bed.

The world is full of thought, which is silent, but if one acts on a thought, that thought becomes a reality. You can think of declaring war, raping a girl, murdering that old man, kissing that girl, telling someone you like them, telling someone you hate them. You can think of quitting your job, leaving your husband, having one more child, or having sex with a prostitute. You can think of stabbing that man, fighting the football fan, telling your parents you love them, robbing the bank, or killing your friend and stealing his money.

But it's all right, there's no good and bad thought, just thought. No one can see it, it's just in your brain, in an area specifically reserved for putting everything together. A thought is innocuous. It cannot directly harm another being in the entire world, until we turn that thought into action.

I stabbed that man. I raped that girl. I hate you. I declare war on you. I have quit my job.

Before every action there is thought. When someone says, "I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking," what they mean is that they are sorry they weren't thinking straight. Action cannot take place without thinking even if you didn't mean it. There is always thought present.

Try to ask for a kilo of bananas turn left in the street, light a cigarette or make a phone call without thinking first. It's not possible. You must have already thought (*the process of using your mind to consider something carefully*).

Meditators spend their time trying to transcend thought, to quieten the mind from its incessant mind talk, to achieve a state where thought does not exist, only pure consciousness and clarity. They attempt to do this through various means – by chanting mantras for instance – to force out all other noise, but we will discuss meditation in more detail as a separate topic. Let us just say that thought has been giving anyone concerned with the mind a great deal of problems over many years!

We already know that thought is a process, but what we are probably not aware of is that thought can only use what already exists in the mind to work with. This will make sense to all of you, as you would not be able to work out a complex mathematical problem if you had never studied mathematics, nor be able to speak in french, if you had never bothered to learn the language.

Thought relies on what has been learned already. In short, memory. This can only mean one thing: that everything you think, is based on events from the past. Education, experience, teachers, parents, politicians, media, your peers. In fact, every person, and everything, you have come into contact with, is going into your memory, ready to be pulled out if needs be, to construct complex thought.

You couldn't live without memory, otherwise you would never remember how to drive your car, do your job, or even remember where you live. That would lead to a lot of confusion in the world. So memory is vitally important to the smooth running of humanity. The problems begin when thought comes from the conditioned (*a learning process in which an organism's behaviour becomes dependent on the occurrence of a stimulus in its environment*) mind.

We all have conditioned minds to some extent. Do you remember when we had our first discussion about why you thought the way you do? Remember the following example, where we tried to understand where our views came from, and how we could transcend them. How over generations, our opinions were being formed by the attitudes of our teachers, parents, media, politicians, culture and friends?

I support the death penalty
I am opposed to the death penalty

Where the conditioning of our minds made us not able to think openly, even if we wanted to. Where we looked at the above statements and chose our side instantaneously, without “thinking.” Well, thought was there, it just happened very quickly! So let’s look into this very carefully, shall we? If I can make a snap decision like that, based on thought alone, thought must be the single most powerful weapon in the world. Imagine that! Your mind as a weapon.

They say that countries don't start wars, people do, but I'd like to take that one step further, and say that people don't start wars, thought does. Remember, before every action there is a thought. Do you see how dangerous this can be?

If I have been thinking about a certain race of people, and based on my conditioned mind, think that they are a dirty, evil race who have come here to take over my country, I could use this thinking to condition and convert others into starting a war against them. Just like that.

Although some of you will say that thought can be used for good, let me say that true love, the love of all other living creatures, could never come from thought. You never think you love someone, you love them with your whole being. You feel love. When you care for another human being who is sick or dying, you do it out of love, not because of thought. When you see suffering, you help out of love; out of empathy with another being who is suffering. You do not need to “think” about it.

I love you dad

You didn't need to think about that, did you? Thought causes suffering and pain, thought causes jealousy, greed, war, ambition, power, desire and violence. Love is all that thought is not. Love is a feeling of peace between all men. Love is harmony, where thought is destruction. Thought is where “I” get in the way of love, with all my wants, needs, desires and prejudices. All acted out as a result of thinking. When all these are gone, there is only love. But let’s look at thought in history shall we?

Can anyone really tell me that anything good has come about from thinking? Governments starting wars, religions going to war, kings going to war, all for what? Honour, or for a noble cause? I'm afraid that maybe the conquest of land, the conversion of people to a different religion, the greed of men, the arrogance of kings, and the desire to rule the world, are more like it! And all this pain and suffering, caused to millions, over

thousands of years, has been the result of someone somewhere thinking... “I’m going to take over france,” or “I think we should kill the unbelievers,” or “there’s gold here, it’s mine,” or “look at all the oil, I want it for myself.”

No, thinking should be relegated to the history books, it hasn’t really done us any good.

What then is to be done about thought? We can’t just turn it off, we can’t just flick a switch and replace thought with love, and see all the problems of the world clearly. We can’t force our brains to stop thinking, or take a pill and see reality without the smokescreen of thought. No. The only way forward is to be aware of yourself, aware of yourself in the moment, where thought is occurring, and step aside.

What do I mean by step aside?

Well, to put it simply, we get in the way of clarity, with prejudice, ideas, opinions, education; what we have heard our politicians say, our friends, or the media say. We have put up so many barriers, that clear awareness of the problem is not possible. Conditioning has closed our minds to all but the past. The only way forward is to decondition our minds, to remove the layers of conditioning and see what is really there, not to limit ourselves by thought anymore.

We are the most intelligent beings on the planet, but when we look at what we are doing because of thought, I sincerely believe we should give up that title. So next time you are riding the tram, bus or train, have a look around you. I mean, have a *good* look around you, and look at each and every one of your fellow passengers.

Try to see what your mind is doing when you focus on the man with the shabby clothes. Listen to the voice within, which is you, the judge. Listen to what you’re saying about the man. Listen to the terrible things you think about him. And at that point, try to step outside yourself. Try to visualise sitting on your shoulder as a virtual observer, and the physical you becomes the observed. This is a very important exercise in developing self awareness, but don’t try to think “why am I thinking this way?” That is only you getting in the way of yourself again, just watch.

The homeless man, the woman who is not so beautiful, the schoolchildren fighting. The man who smells of alcohol, the man with the tracksuit who looks like he might rob you, the old lady staring at you. The group of youths laughing at the other end of the tram, the business man in his sharp suit, the man with the bitten dirty nails. The woman with shabby hair, the man whose coat is torn, the blind man with the

stick. Thinking, thinking, thinking, that's all we ever do. We can't help it, we have to think, think, think...

“Urgh, look at that homeless beggar, urgh, I bet he stinks of urine, I hope he doesn't come near me, or touch me, he's disgusting.”

“That woman should really do something with herself, she's really ugly. Maybe if she got better clothes, wore a bit of make up, she might look better...”

“I wish those schoolchildren would stop that, it's really annoying. Why do they let schoolkids on the trams at this time, it's really inconvenient. They don't even pay, and they're really loud...”

“That guy looks like a criminal, his eyes, the way he's dressed, he doesn't look like he's got a job. I better check my wallet, and make sure I've got my hand on it just in case...”

“Those youths are really noisy. I bet they're aggressive. I wish I could tell them to keep quiet, but they'd probably attack me, yeah they look like that sort of people...”

“That man looks like he's got a lot of money. I wish I had a lot of money. Maybe he hasn't, maybe he just dresses like that to impress people. I bet he hasn't got any money, that's why he travels by tram, otherwise he'd go by car...”

“Urgh, that man's nails are disgusting, they're filthy, why doesn't he clean them? I wonder what sort of job he does, he doesn't look clean. I bet he doesn't wash very often.”

“Why doesn't that woman do something with her hair? It looks awful, she should look after herself more”

“Look at that man's coat. I wouldn't go out wearing a coat like that, why doesn't he get it fixed? Maybe he can't afford a new one. Who can't afford a new coat? I'd be embarrassed wearing that coat...”

“Look at that blind guy, it must be awful not being able to see anything. I bet he wishes he could see, he's missing out on so much. I wonder how he lost his sight, maybe it was an accident. How does he know when to get off...”

We judge and we criticise, and the great thing is, we don't even know the first thing about these people! With the way we think, it's a good job thoughts are not visible, otherwise we'd hurt a lot of people's feelings!

How would you feel, if you knew you were being judged and criticised all the time; not verbally, but psychologically? Not by someone who loves you, but by a complete stranger, who you will see for a fleeting moment once in your life. And from that meeting, without actually acknowledging each other, you will use all of your conditioning (from

parents opinions to teachers; from media opinions to politicians; from experience to peer group opinion) to make instant judgements about them. A person you will never know, who has had no effect on you, becomes an object. An object for judgement. Why?

Well, in evolutionary terms, watching other people could have meant life or death in some situations. You had to decide very quickly if this person was friend or foe. It was all about survival in the old days, and to some extent, we still need our early warning systems in case of attack. But this is not about survival, is it?

Imagine the previous tram car scenario. Who do you think the only person not judging, or not criticizing was? Was it the homeless beggar, because he was at the bottom, addicted to alcohol, with no where to live? Or was it the ugly woman, because she couldn't very well criticise other people with a face like hers? Or was it the youths, because they *obviously* don't think a lot?

Wrong on all counts! The homeless beggar is judging you for not giving him any money, the ugly woman is looking at another woman and criticizing her clothes, the youths are judging the oldies because they aren't cool enough. The only person not actively judging and criticizing is the man with no sight, not because he has no prejudice or conditioning, but because (although conditioning will in the most part be through language) the object of the conditioning must be visual.

There is no point in being told that criminals have a certain look, dress a certain way, or behave in a certain manner if you can't see them to apply this rule you have been told. Without the visual cues, the conditioning is incomplete and worthless. You are conditioned by society (criminals dress/look/behave a certain way), you have a visual cue (someone who fits this conditioning), you process this against your conditioning (does the visual cue match the conditioning?), and come up with a thought...

“This man must be a criminal, I should watch out.”

Amazing! The brain is amazing! You see, it doesn't matter now if he is a gentle family man on the way to meet his wife for shopping, or a hardened criminal, ready to stick a knife in you for your last ten pounds. He matches the profile you have in your database, so the judgement has already been made for you. No amount of convincing would allow you to accept he wasn't a criminal.

“No, my mind's made up, there's definitely something funny about him...”

And so it goes on, the constant judging and criticizing of our fellow man, through conditioning of the brain, and thought, its messenger.

As the most intelligent species on earth, don't you think we started to lay thought to rest for a while? Is our thinking really helping us improve the world or just helping to judge it and criticize it a little more, and feel oh so smug, when we're proved right.

“See, I told you he was a criminal.”

*Thought can only lead to violence.
When thought is absent love is present.*

Can you see that? Only if we love the criminals, the ugly women, the homeless beggar, and the man with the dirty nails, can thought cease. Most of you will be saying: “This is extremely difficult, how am I to put aside years of prejudice and conditioning to experience love? And what if I am right about them?” (there goes your thinking again.)

Love is not effort. You cannot force yourself to love another human being. You cannot decide to love. Love is all encompassing, love is a feeling that warms your whole body. Love is just being. And if some of you are confused now, let me ask you a simple question. When you say

“I love you dad”

what are you thinking? Are you judging him, because he is old, or for the things he has done in his life, right or wrong?

If your dad was a criminal, could you still say “I love you?” What if your dad was a homeless beggar could you say “I love you?” If he was stupid, smart, wise or ignorant, could you still say “I love you?” When you truly love you cannot judge. Now go back to the last moment you told your parents or someone very close to you “I love you,” and remember how it felt.

What were you thinking when you said it?

When you love, the conditioning crumbles, you start to see reality as it really is. You stop judging, and criticizing, after all, where does it get you? It only makes you feel worse thinking negative thoughts – about yourself, or anyone else.

Negative thinking is responsible for causing wars. For if it was positive thinking, that would be love, not thought, and when you love something, or someone, you certainly don't want to destroy it!

When a leader of a country thinks negatively about another nation of people, it won't be long before you are all thinking negatively; and, thanks to conditioning (propaganda/education/media), you will suddenly hate and want to destroy an entire nation of people! Amazing. And most of you will never have met someone from the hated country, and will know nothing about them, but are still prepared to go to war and kill them.

So in order to hate you have to think. Remember this.

I am not asking you to walk around preaching peace and love to the world, just try one thing when you are next in a restaurant, at work, on the tram, at school, or in the pub when you see someone you want to judge or to criticise. Stop!

Close your eyes for the briefest of moments, and imagine that someone somewhere told them "I love you." They are someone's son, daughter, husband, wife, girlfriend, boyfriend, best friend. Someone loves them very much, someone who told them "I love you" with no judgement or criticism, the same way you said to your parents or someone close to you, "I love you."

Why are you judging them, why do you criticise them in your mind? They are loved, as you are loved, why waste precious energy turning love into thought and negativity, when love is already present?

T i m e

An indefinite period (usually marked by specific attributes or activities)

•

The continuum of experience in which events pass from the future through the present to the past

•

The time as given by a clock

As we begin, what is to be, the final topic of this book, I complete a process that started in 2002, and involved almost four years of writing notes and making observations. A long time in my life, but in the life span of the universe, insignificant.

Scientists have speculated that the universe was created in a big bang many billions of years ago, that out of nothing, came something, but I can't buy into that.

Everything is, was, and always will be; out of nothing, comes nothing. Sure, this universe may have started expanding again billions of years ago, but that could be the result of a massive contraction from a previous universe. The word uni means "*one, single*" but why should there only be one universe? Perhaps it is all our minds are ready to perceive at the moment, and as we cannot "see" another we all agree that this is the only universe, but we all know how reliable our eyes are! But that is just our

minds telling us that if we can't see something it cannot exist. If you have ever tried to push two magnets together and felt them repel or attract each other you will know that just because the eyes can't see something, and the mind can't perceive, it doesn't mean it isn't there!

Perhaps there are a billion universes just like this one; perhaps this is the largest; perhaps this is the smallest. There are many “perhaps” but we shouldn't discount anything. We have many intelligent scientists all using their big brains to tell us what happened, when, and why, but they can only go on what has already been discovered and build on that.

“Perhaps” we should throw away our science books and just let the insight come to us, but that doesn't mean we should just sit back and sleep whilst life passes us by, not that the universe cares though.

Several days ago I was outside looking at the stars. The temperature read minus twenty two degrees celsius, and I suddenly realised I was getting incredibly cold. I started to think what would happen to me if I stayed out all night and surmised that I would probably expire from the cold but as I looked up at the stars and the trees and the snow on the ground. I realised that only my girlfriend, friends and family would care. The stars would still twinkle in the night, the snow would still be on the ground and the trees would still sway gently in the breeze. It was only man who “cares,” and who attaches meaning to everything – the universe just is. It is in order. It always will be. Even when the sun and the earth are gone, the universe will be in order.

For some reason we seem to think that the earth is the centre of the universe, that everything “revolves” around us, our needs, our desires, our sadness, our happiness, but none of that matters to the universe. It is not that it is cold and uncompassionate, these are man-made words to describe man, do you see? The language of the universe is indecipherable to us, but still we try to explain it in man's language, which is limited

How we cling to this life though. How we long to make it last forever. How we desire to see just one more day on the planet. To do what? To hate, to destroy, to desire, to conquer?

“Just one more day so I can see the sun rise,” we ask some indeterminate supernatural being. “We want to live, we want to feel the blood through our veins, we don't want to die.” But if you watch a snowflake melt in your hand, is the snowflake really dying?

Give me some time

We all want a little more time, don't we? We all want more hours in the day. For what? To work so we can pay our electric bills, or go on holiday, or buy a new computer? What would the universe think of all this? Insignificant?

Well, it should be clear to you by now that everything we have ambition for, everything we desire, is insignificant universally. Even the good work you do trying to save the rainforest is insignificant in the universe. Remember in four billion years or so, they predict that the sun will expand, taking us and most of the solar system with it. We shall be no more.

But that shouldn't concern us; you and I will only be alive for maximum of 100 years more (probably a lot less), so instead of dedicating ourselves to work, and causing suffering for everyone else, shouldn't we be looking inward towards the universe, and trying to understand ourselves? Because we are the universe.

We are part of the whole. No birth, no death, just change. But still we are frightened of death, which is more natural than any other process. No beginning, no end, just change. Do you see? And yet we stand at funerals giving eulogies, and weeping, asking ourselves how we can carry on living without our loved ones; and the stars still twinkle, and the trees blow gently in the wind... Are you starting to understand? I hope so.

Time is a man-made process, although the movement of the stars, the rising of the sun and the change in seasons is a natural one. Yes, days end and night comes, but then day comes. If we are to truly understand what is going on, we will have to stop creating division between everything including day, night, today, yesterday, tomorrow. Do you see? They have no significance.

You will argue that time is evident in man, especially where you can see the ageing process taking place, but does that mean that all time is going from birth towards death? Surely that is a man-made concept?

Last week I tried an experiment. I changed my computer clock to some random time and some random date (I couldn't figure out how to turn it off!) I took down clocks, didn't read the paper, and didn't watch tv; instead, I immersed myself in my writing, and before long I didn't know what day it was or what time it was except by looking out the window and seeing it was getting dark.

For the first few days I suffered a lot of pain. I needed to know the time. I needed to know what day it was. What date it was. It just seemed like a part of me was missing. Like I was missing out on life by not knowing where the week began and the week ended. But after five days I began to relax. I wasn't missing out on anything, that was just my mind playing tricks on me. And when I looked up at the stars that night, I realised I hadn't missed a thing.

So why do we place so much importance on time? Is it that we think we don't have a lot so we have to do, and acquire as much as we can in the limited time available? What if no one told you how long a human life was? What if no one forced you to learn everything you could between one and eighteen? What if a time limit wasn't placed on the amount of time you worked? What if there were no weekends to look forward to? What if no one told you to retire at 65? Do you see? With every step of the human life, we attach time to it. We break it down into blocks and analyse it.

“Right alan, you will go to junior school from 5 until 12, then you will go to senior school from 12 until 18, then you will go to university from 18 until 21, after which, you will work for 44 years exactly, until you retire at 65, and then you can do what you like from 65 until you die. Oh, and make sure to plan time to have a family, that's very important too!” It's too much, isn't it?

Why do we keep the human controlled like this?

Well there is one reason, and that is so those in power can get the maximum out of us while we are alive. Why else would they be so insistent that we went to school at 5 (or earlier) and learned as much as we could until 21? Why wouldn't they just let us be? It's simple, because we are born to serve. We are born to serve those in powerful positions, and help them become richer. No other reason.

But the human is so much more than that. He is not a servant of the rich, he is the most intelligent species in the world characterized by superior intelligence, articulate speech, and erect carriage (remember?). He has a mind so large he can explore the entire universe with it and beyond. He is part of the whole. He is not someone to be pushed around into little time slots, even the birds and the fish (with their distinctly inferior intelligence) don't get controlled like that, and they're just birds and fish!

Breaking free of time

How hard would it be to get rid of all of your clocks and your calendars? Impossible?

“Must dash, got a train/bus/tube/plane to catch.”

“Oh no, I'm late, my boss will kill me!”

But we must free ourselves from the bondage of the timepiece. A great invention, I grant you, which helps keep our economy “ticking over” quite nicely thank you; but unfortunately, it is something we run our entire life to. Does the universe care if we are late for a meeting, or are late for drinks with friends? No it just carries on in order.

Time, as we see it, is unnatural; it is not universal time, but time invented to control man. Whatever the physicists say about time, we will never understand it until we let go of our attachment to human time. Remember what we said about science? They could be wrong! Oh, and in fact, have been many, many times.

We want to know if it is possible to go back in time, or go forward in time, and the scientists do their calculations, some saying it is possible, some saying it isn't, but isn't all this talk of time travel just wanting to get to any time instead of *now*? Instead of being present in this moment, which is *now*?

You may go away thinking, “he didn't answer any of the questions I wanted to know about time,” but time is indescribable in human words (whether by means of verbal language or mathematical models). We don't understand it, and we will never be able to, unless we surrender ourselves to the moment. The point where time is neither moving backwards or forwards. And anyway, what is backwards, and what is forwards? And while we're at it, which way is up in the universe, and which way is right, and which way is left? We will have to explore it with our own minds. That is all I can say.

T o l e r a n c e

A disposition to allow freedom of choice and behaviour

•

The act of tolerating something

•

Willingness to recognize and respect the beliefs or practices of others

I have never liked the word tolerance. It always implies that somehow we disapprove of somebody's ethnic background or religion, but we put up with it, usually under duress. It is almost like saying, "I hate what you believe in, but I have to put up with it, the government told me to," when really you would like nothing more than to see the back of them.

Bloody immigrants, get rid of the lot of them

You hear it down the pub, at work, round at friends houses, all over the western world at least. Sometimes people's views are more extreme, as has happened in Britain, where political parties have been set up, whose

manifestos are to get anyone who isn't white, repatriated to their "home" country, even if they were born in the uk.

Some people hate that there are people walking round with different coloured skin or different clothing, and especially if they believe in a different religion to us. There are always news items where someone has been murdered because of their skin colour, but fortunately, it does not happen too often.

We, the expansionist western countries, like the uk, france, and spain, travelled the world, violently colonising countries in africa, the caribbean, south america, and asia, amongst many others, including ireland.

After the second world war, britain needed cheap labour to help rebuild the country and the economy. They didn't want the immigrants mixing too much so they set up "areas" for them to live.

They were disliked by those in power, but "tolerated," because they worked long and hard for very little money. These immigrants suffered taunts and violence at the hands of unintelligent "locals" whose only skill was being white and british. The irish, who were under the control of england for several hundred years were often abused, and suffered violence at the hands of the british yobs when they were only there to earn some money to send home – and were welcomed by the british government, I might add.

The powerful will always tolerate people, but only for as long as it benefits them

So in came the immigrants with their strange languages, strange food, and strange customs from india, pakistan, and jamaica, amongst other countries, expecting to be welcomed by the british, but they were just tolerated. The people in power didn't like having the immigrants running around out of their control, which didn't happen in the old days, in the colonies. They were here, working and living as free men and women, and it wasn't long before they started having children, who became british citizens.

The racists in charge of britain must have been seething that these people were free british subjects to be afforded the protection of her majesty. Indians, pakistanis, west Indians. What was going to happen to our culture?

The west indians are often blamed for bringing in drugs and starting street crime in britain but what was happening to their culture, and more

rightly, their self-esteem by moving here? Tolerated by the government, only because they provided cheap labour, and despised by the people for their black skin. What must that do to a person – a human being? It is no wonder we have trouble with “ethnic minorities” in countries.

Who dares judge a man for the colour of his skin? We all came from africa (according to the scientists), and what colour do you think our skin was there? White? Skin colour is just a biological adaptation to the environment, nothing more. We must all remember that when we are being “tolerant.”

Tolerance has nothing to do with compassion. Tolerance places you above the person you are being tolerant to, do you understand? It places you as a powerful superior, and it is only by your good grace you allow them to exist at all!

In my mind, we have to take this word out of the dictionary if we are to progress as a species. We must accept all who we meet as brothers, for they are. We are forged from the same steel. We are one with them, what does it matter if they speak a different language, believe in different gods, eat different foods, and have different skin colours? We are all part of the whole, the indivisible. There is nothing else. You will see this when you gain more insight.

So instead of “tolerating” people, we must embrace them (not physically, although you can if you like!).

We must accept them as homo sapiens, members of our own species, and give up the insularity of nations. Nations are just political borders created by powerful men with weapons at their disposal. They mean nothing. An immigrant is not an immigrant, he or she is just another human being, just like you and me.

Admittedly, some immigrants are just after a quick buck, and do nothing to contribute to the community, but merely take; but they are giving their labour and that is all that is asked of them. Some immigrants bring crime and violence with them, but how can we expect anything else from humans? They bring themselves, and if they are violent, they will bring violence, do you see? If they are compassionate and loving, they will bring that.

Unfortunately, we cannot always see deeply into a man's mind, and I agree that there is no point in allowing people to immigrate if they are intent on causing misery to the people who have given them at home, that is clear. They can carry on doing that in their own country, but we must not expect people to conform to our way of life. We have to understand that to them, our culture is alien.

I found this out myself when I emigrated to australia to live with my australian wife. I just couldn't understand why people drove so slowly, and why they didn't let you out at junctions. I couldn't understand why they were so loud, or so obsessed with sport. I came from a country which had sent the ancestors of some australians to colonise the country, so you would have thought that it would be easy for me, but it wasn't. They weren't tolerant at all, they expected me to conform, or “bugger off back to england,” which is ultimately what I did.

So imagine coming from a culture with a different language, followed by the fact that people are looking at you because of the way you dress, not to mention your skin colour, and you can see why people who emigrate to find a better life, (which is what our ancestors did when they left africa) are frightened when the country of their dreams turns out to be not so rosy. When the people shout hurtful names at them in the street, and their children are bullied at school, or beaten up just because they come from another part of the earth.

We are all immigrants.

So remember, next time you think of being tolerant towards someone, don't bother, offer the silent hand of compassion. There is nothing to be tolerant of. Maybe if you get to know someone “different” from yourself, you will start to see the similarities.

T o r t u r e

Extreme mental distress

•

Unbearable physical pain

•

Intense feelings of suffering; acute mental or physical pain

•

The deliberate, systematic, or wanton infliction of physical or mental suffering by one or more persons in an attempt to force another person to yield information or to make a confession or for any other reason

How can you!
How can I?
How can I do it?
How could I even consider it?
It's my job.
He deserves it.
He knows something.



As the most intelligent species on the planet it stands to reason that we could come up with something so cruel. No other species has been able to think up this one, so I guess that makes us kind of unique. And what an honour, to be unique in, not only killing a fellow member of our species, but making him suffer with unbearable physical, or mental pain first. Truly a remarkable achievement.

For what?

Governments are well known specialists, the military too, it's part of the training you know! Organised crime gangs are notorious users of torture as well. After all, it normally gets you what you want. And what you want is *information*. They want to know when the attack will take place, where

the money is, who you told, who else is involved, where the guns are, what your mission is, or why you betrayed us.

Do you notice they aren't torturing someone to find out anything nice? That would be absurd, wouldn't it? "Where's the restaurant?" "What time does the next bus come?" "What is on at the cinema tonight?" "Are the shops still open?" "Tell us now or we'll kill you!"

No. Torture is reserved for people who "breach national security," "are involved with terrorism," "are agents of enemy states," "have passed information to the enemy," or perhaps "are planning an attack." For organised crime it is likely to be "anyone who is against them, or who does something to upset them." So on that basis we'll leave them out of this discussion for now.

So as we can see, torture is an instrument of war "*the waging of armed conflict against an enemy.*" Well that all seems pretty clear.

In war, your mission is to overcome the enemy by any means necessary, so I guess all things considered to be torture, are as excusable as bullets, missiles, anti-personnel mines, rocket propelled grenades, cluster bombs, or basically anything that can explode and kill human beings. Yes, I think torture sits quite nicely with all the other instruments of war, and is perhaps in a way kinder, as killing is not the main objective – whereas you couldn't really say that about a cluster bomb could you?

And while we're at it, the person who is being tortured only has themselves to blame for the pain and the agony, because if they told their torturers what they wanted to know it would all be over quickly. The problem is that the people being tortured have also been trained not to say anything, so that makes the whole sorry situation all drawn out.

Torture is such a wide and varied craft. From simple things, like not letting the person sleep for a week, to more varied methods, such as removing a finger, holding their head under water, or using electrodes on genitals. It's so hard to keep track of new developments.

There is only so much pain that the body can take before blacking out, and the torturers take extra care to keep the pain level under that threshold, so you stay conscious throughout the whole process. They may eventually kill you, even if you give them the information, so most people hold out for as long as they can. Of course, torturers aren't bad people, so they'll let you have some water, maybe a bite to eat if your lucky, talk nicely to you, just so they can torture you some more. After all, a dead body isn't any good to them, well at least not until they've got the information they wanted!

Had enough yet?

I have. How can one human being inflict this amount of suffering on another human being. Are they such monsters, these torturers? Do they have sadistic tendencies (*sexual pleasure obtained by inflicting harm (physical or psychological) on others*)? That maybe so, but I don't think that's it. Do they have no empathy (*understanding and entering into another's feelings*) with the rest of the human race? Perhaps. But even if you have never tortured anyone – and I hope you haven't – I would like you to consider this.

Imagine you are a torturer. You torture people to get nationally important information from them. The only people you torture are “bad people,” set on destroying your way of life. Now, imagine that the person with electrodes on their testicles was your father, and imagine the girl being half drowned while gasping for air was your daughter. Someone you love is being subjected to unbearable mental or physical pain, what would you feel? What would you do?

They have, through conditioning, become involved with plots to blow up buildings and people, they have lost sight of love and are only thinking negatively. Do you still love them? Could you bear to see them suffer? Could you torture them yourself, even if it was your job? This is a very important question because the people being tortured are someone's son or someone's father. Somebody loves them the same way you love your family and couldn't bear to see them suffer either.

I hear you saying, “what if this man was about to detonate a nuclear weapon and kill millions of people, wouldn't it be justified then?”

Let me just say that someone always has justification for something in the world, and we are trying to reach a point together, where this scenario will not exist. When there is clarity of mind, there will be no one trying to kill millions of people for an idea, a thought. Negative thought is a sickness of the mind, and we should feel compassion for these people, and try to guide them back to love. Fighting hate with hate will only produce more hate.

Let's come back to the torturers. What we are trying to understand together is the ability of a human being, whom we believe can feel empathy when seeing another human being suffer, to willingly inflict unbearable pain and suffering on another. We do not know if they actively enjoy it, but we have to assume that through unclear thinking, this is a distinct possibility, as we know that some people with

psychopathic tendencies – who enjoy the power over another – have the ability to do this without any remorse.

Do you agree? Or could a soldier, government agent, or someone who has been conditioned to believe that whatever he is doing has “right on his side” (in the interest of the nation), make another human suffer in this way? No job is that important. What would your wife, girlfriend or mother think about your job? Would they be “so proud” that their partner/son tortures people? Would you be happy to tell everybody in your local community what you do? Would you tell your children, “it was all in a good cause.” Remember the old saying, “the ends never justify the means?” Otherwise where will it end?

Will the supermarket bosses start torturing their rivals to find out where their cheap source of bananas came from? Will a husband have his wife tortured to find out if she slept with another man while he was away?

You may think I am being ridiculous here, but if you think about it, if you really want to know something, how far are you prepared to go to get that information? If you believed the information was really vital to you, would you do anything to get it? Well, that's what governments do. They believe that the information they require is vital to national security, to the nation – their nation, not yours. After all, they don't consult you if they wish to declare war, torture people or execute them; it's not your business, it's state business, remember that.

*In order to preserve peace, it was necessary to torture these 3,000 people to get the information about the weapons and stop them from launching an attack.
It was unavoidable.*

Surely not the words of a human being, the most intelligent species on the planet? One whose intellect and use of speech is superior to anything else on this planet (and maybe the galaxy). We really cannot say that we are an advanced society when we resort to violence to keep the peace. I will not say that torture is wrong, that is for you to decide, but I do ask you to remember your son, your mother, your father, your wife, and I ask you to remember their faces when you told them you loved them.

Now try to imagine the feelings of the people being tortured. The pain, the unbearable pain, the screaming, the violence, and try to remember that they also told their parents, their son, their wife, or their daughter they loved them. They know love too. They are human beings.

T o u r i s t

Someone who travels for pleasure

In most parts of the world, people are becoming richer, wouldn't you say? And if there's more money to spend you can rest assure that people are going to want to do some serious holidaying. In fact one of the biggest businesses in the world is now tourism. But it's not the two week holidaymaker to the beach we are concerned about here, it is something more profound than that. You see, as I have been observing people recently as they go about their daily business, it came to me that actually the whole human race are really tourists on this planet!

I can hear you muttering and disagreeing already. "Why, the human is the finest species on the planet, look what he has achieved!" Indeed, let's have a look at what the human has achieved.

Spent the last few millennia killing each other.
Spent the last few millennia controlling and killing other animals.
Spent the last few millennia digging up the earth for profit.
Spent the last few millennia cutting down trees for profit.
Spent the last few millennia distancing himself from nature.

And that's just the start!

I'm sure you think I am always being negative, but in terms of what good the human has done for the planet as a whole, we can wholeheartedly say, nothing. That's why it's so hard to for people to understand what we are doing here! We work, we earn money, we pay our bills, we bring up a family, and contribute to society (forcibly through taxation). What else is there to do? Oh yes, go on holiday! But the going on holiday is just the final act of tourism, the real tourism involves what we do every day. From work, to school, to the arts, and even to science.

Let me ask you a question. What is our purpose on this revolving mass, in the middle of nowhere? Any idea? Nor have any of us. Some of us think we are here for a higher purpose, some think we have to go through this life before we reach heaven. In fact most people think that the reason we are here is because we are waiting to go somewhere else – sort of like a holding area before you move on to greater things!

It's no wonder that people happily trudge into work every day earning money just to pay the bills and save enough to go on holiday once or twice a year.

The point is, the six billion of us on this planet have long since been an asset, and I include myself in that. We may believe we are here for a higher purpose, but back in reality, which, like it or not, faces us every day, there is a real planet, with real resources, and real animals, and real birds, and real oceans that we trample over.

Let me ask you one more question. If life is give and take. when have humans ever given to the earth? What could we possible offer an earth that is already in perfect harmony and balance? Nothing. So we just keep on taking, and we argue with each other over whose bit of land it is, and we kill each other over whose god is better. Let's face it, we have become...

Surplus to requirements

Sounds harsh? Well, unfortunately, I am yet to be convinced that the human with his large brain, tool making hands, and wanton desire for destruction is doing anything other than being a tourist on this land. A species that was no longer contributing may be expected to go extinct, but oh no, not us, we have used our intellect to overcome nature and control it. Nature no longer rules. We do.

It all seems a bit strange sitting here writing that we are superfluous (*-serving no useful purpose; having no excuse for being*). Maybe everyone else worked this out a long time ago and that is why they have attached themselves to a higher purpose! Maybe our ancestors looked at nature and thought: “Well, we control everything now, What's next?”

In our rush to conquer and dominate, we have forgotten one important thing. We are not the only ones on this planet. Yet that seems of no concern to the powerful.

“If they wanted it, they could take it,” they say, “if only they had the brain power to do it. We are the dominant species, and that's that!”

I wonder how many times the same patch of grass has been conquered by different parties, all fighting to the death, all to be able to put up a piece of cloth you call a flag – to stand “triumphant” in battle. All the while the rest of the world just carries on with its daily business. The trees sway in the breeze, the animals graze, the birds sing, the ants keep building their nests. It's almost as if they don't even know we exist. If they have any kind of awareness of humans, they keep it to themselves. What would they be thinking? I know if I were an animal capable of complex thought, I would think: “Whose idea was it to create that species?”

Are you following my line of thought here, or do you find it rather distasteful to be described as surplus to requirements? Don't worry, I'm not singling out any race, or person in particular, I'm talking about all of us.

We spend our leisure time on planes, and boats, and roads, we observe with great interest the giant panda in the cage, we observe with great interest the castle of the queen, we observe with great interest the artefacts in the museum, and all the while the world passes us by...

The mighty
The powerful
The brave
and other pointless words used to describe humans...

If I were to try to understand this world, I would see it as a place where different species exist. Where every species has an innate (*not established by conditioning or learning*) purpose, that of keeping the planet in balance – nothing more, nothing less. But we came along, didn't we?

Whether we evolved from the apes, were created by “god,” or flew in from another planet, it doesn't really matter; what matters is what we are up to now, which is basically nothing.

Everything we create is pointless. Everything we create for meaning, has no meaning. Do you understand?

We go to work every day to earn a bit of cash to feed the family, buy stuff, save a bit, and go on holiday.

It doesn't matter whether you are a spacecraft designer, a road sweeper, an atomic physicist, a doctor, or a door to door salesman. All the education you have is just so that someone can give you a job. No matter how interesting the job, it is all an illusion, it does nothing to help this planet named earth to survive. In fact most of what we are doing is probably shortening its life by a few years, but we won't be around for that.

We are truly an observer in this world. It's just like sitting in the land rover gazing over the savannahs of africa on our thousand pound safari; observing all the pretty animals and birds, being scared of the ones with big teeth, and knowing we have ultimate control over all that happens here.

We know this because we have created the atomic bomb, and in a matter of hours, we can destroy the whole planet. Every human, every building and most animals.

But after we are gone, there will always be an insect or organism left to keep life going on this planet.

But we will be gone.

No animal or fish will ever remember us because they never knew we were here in the first place, and the world will once again try to regain the balance that the humans destroyed. In summary, it's no wonder people drink alcohol. At least they can find some kind of meaning in the bottom of the glass.

Wake up to what you are doing fellow tourists.

It's time to stop sightseeing and start contributing to creation,
not destruction.

T r a v e l

The act of going from one place to another

•

A movement through space that changes the location of something

•

Self-propelled movement

*Step outside the gate, once in a while,
how the bread smells rich...
the people, the children laughing,
the rich aroma of coffee brewing.
Cross your invisible borders,
and maybe, just maybe, you will step outside yourselves.*



What do you think of when we talk about the word travel? Sunny beaches, bikinis, swimming, relaxation, exotic food, holidays, winter sports, flying, adventure? It could be all of those things, it could be just going on business. Travel overseas is exciting, isn't it? Especially if you haven't been there before. The expectations. What will it look like, smell like, taste like, what will the people be like?

It's fantastic for a holiday, but could you live there?

“Oh no, I couldn't live there, it's too hot, the food's too spicy, the people are too rude, there's no english newspapers, I'd be scared.”

Basically, it's too different from what you know, and what you're used to. I think everyone can understand that, because once your brain gets used to a way of doing things, it doesn't like too much change.

I have travelled extensively during my life, and lived in several countries for extended periods of times, and it *is* hard to adapt. I am now writing this book in the czech republic, but I started it in australia, was born in scotland, and brought up in southern england.

The first thing I noticed is how breakfast is different here. I am used to cereal and a cooked breakfast, followed by toast and jam, whereas the czech people may have a roll with ham and cheese. I drink tea at breakfast, they drink coffee. They have lunch as the main meal of the day, I am used to having a sandwich, and then dinner in the evening. They add butter to the outside of their rolls, I cut the roll and put the butter inside. The food tastes different, smells different, and the combinations are different.

I was once even offered a sweet pasta with ground poppy sauce and fruit compote on the side as a main course, which I told my host I would normally eat as a dessert (if at all)!

So although we have only talked about food, we can already see some major differences between two northern european nations which I believed to be quite similar.

Every country is different. They all have their own language, mannerisms, culture, etiquettes, and we need diversity in the world. But the longer you stay in a country, the more you start to see through all the differences and discover that we are exactly the same! We may look slightly different, or have different skin colour, or behave in slightly different ways, but there is no denying that we are human. That is the most important thing.

Over thousands of years, people have been exploited, murdered, enslaved and judged, because of the colour of their skin, religion, or traditions. Nations of people have been attacked, and attempts have been made to wipe out specific races. Why? Because one nation believes that they are superior. They are superior because of the colour of their skin. They are superior because they are more civilised. The list goes on and on.

There is always someone who can come up with a reason why they are superior to another. "I am white and you are black, therefore I am superior." Can you see the stupidity in all this? Can this be clear thinking?

It seems crazy when we discuss it here, but that is what's happening all around the world. We have to get underneath the clothes and the skin; the religion and the politics; the food and the traditions. We have to get into the mind of the individual. We have to understand him, to see we

are both the same, we are both products of conditioning, of tradition, and culture, and underneath we are all compassionate human beings full of love and generosity. Above all, we have to be interested in someone other than ourselves.

The more interested you become in other people, wherever they come from, the more you will see how much your nationalistic feelings reduce in intensity. When you learn another language, you are not only able to communicate with people, you see that your language is no more important than anyone else's. When you talk to someone about their life, you will see that it mirrors yours, that they are full of the same hopes and dreams.

They want their family to grow up in a peaceful world. They want a good job so they can pay their bills, so they can go on holiday, so they can have a nice house or buy a car. They are the same as you. It is only when you listen to your politicians and the media that you start to dislike, fear, or distrust entire nations of people.

People are the same the world over. They have the same size brain and exactly the same bodies – it's what's inside their conditioned minds that's different that's all; minds full of tradition, culture, politics, religion, media, parents and teachers. But if you take time to listen, to seek out, to spend time with people from other countries, and allow yourself to put aside your conditioning of what they “should” be like, you will find new friends the world over.

It is only the conditioned minds that can dislike each other. How can you dislike, hate or fear someone you have never met? Surely that doesn't make sense does it? It is thanks to history, and the teachings in school, amongst other things, that we believe we know a whole race, as conforming to a specific type, and apply this knowledge religiously wherever we go.

So when I talk about travel, I am also talking about travelling to a different place in your mind, without the need to fly anywhere. Travel to a place where we are all born exactly the same. Travel to a nursery and watch the chinese, kenyan, japanese, english, german, iranian, or pakistani children as they interact and play together. Do they hate each other? Are they afraid of each other? Do they judge each other? Does one child believe he is superior because he is from one country? Do they not laugh the same when they're happy, cry the same when they're tired and hungry?

Now imagine all of those different children when they grow up to become adults. Imagine what a world we would live in if we were not

conditioned. If we could see the adult kenyan, the german, the iranian exactly as they were when we played together in the nursery, before we were burdened by religion, politics, media, and war, could we hate each other? Would we be scared of each other?

For most of us the only time we get to meet individuals from other countries is in our own country, or when we go on our short summer holiday. If we are to live together on this earth happily and peacefully spinning in space, we need to shift our thinking, and get out and explore. Don't just accept what you hear about countries and the people who live there; go and see for yourself.

*Go for longer than a week,
live with languages you don't understand,
with alien traditions, with foods you don't know,
and silently listen to the judge in you;
the voice that mistrusts and fears the unknown.
See through it, and embrace new experience*

*See the individual, not their culture
treat them as you would your family, with kindness.
We may live in different lands,
but to someone coming from a different planet, we are all the same.
Human.*

U

U n b e l i e v a b l e

The way humans treat each other and the planet we share

V

V i o l e n c e

An act of aggression (as one against a person who resists)

We all read reports in the newspaper of violence. We see it on television, we see it in films, and in computer games. We see it at football matches, in the pub, on the street, and we may even have experienced it in our own homes. Violence is pervasive. It transcends religion, ethnicity, language and culture. It finds its way into all of society. It does not care if you have little education or have a PhD in astrophysics. The intelligentsia may try to suppress it, but given the right stimulus, it is there, ready to rear its ugly head against any who dare to challenge it.

As we begin our discussion today, I would like you to just observe yourself quietly, as you ask the question “am I violent?” and “what, if anything would make me violent?”

The answer, will, of course, be different if you are a man or a woman, won't it? After all, how many women do you see fighting on the streets,

or attacking people because they support a rival football team? In fact, how many women end up in court or prison for violence related offences? Of course, given the right stimulus, state of mind, and social environment, women are just as capable as men at being violent, but it does not seem to be nearly as widespread.

Think about it for a moment. Violence generally resides in the domain of the male, but what we are here to find out together is why.

“Oi! What you looking at?”

“Yeah come on then!”

“I’ll knock your fuckin’ head off!”

“You fucking black bastard come here...”

“Who you calling a...?”

I am not a social scientist nor a psychologist, but it does seem to me that there are different types of violence in our societies. For example, the ill-educated man may have learned on the streets that anyone looking at him the “wrong” way is an insult, and must be dealt with violently to reassert your superior social “position;” whereas a slightly more educated man wouldn’t even notice that someone “looked at him the wrong way,” but may get violent if his girlfriend cheated on him with his best friend. A highly educated man may not care if a man looked at him the wrong way or get violent if his wife cheated on him, but he may resort to calculated violence if his position was under threat by a rival, and may arrange to have him “dealt with” thereby becoming violent by proxy (*a person authorized to act for another*).

Governments are a great example of this. You could not imagine your university educated prime minister involved in a bloody fist fight could you? They stand there in their sharp suits, speaking eloquently, and getting someone else to do their dirty work. They want to fight with another country, but because they are educated (and probably never had a fight in their lives), could not possibly do it themselves, so they employ less educated men to do the real fighting. Perhaps if the leaders just got in the ring to sort out their differences it would save millions of lives! But they wouldn’t do that, they are non-violent men, and they would tell you that themselves.

So maybe the ill-educated man on the street is more authentic, at least he shows his true colours to all – the intelligentsia just get someone else to do it.

Whilst it does seem that people who develop their minds do not become as involved in the sad street violence we see in poor deprived areas, it doesn't remove the ability to use violence if an individual deems it necessary, it just means the violence becomes less reactive and more calculated. It does not mean it has been removed.

Are we naturally peaceful or aggressive?

How many scientists have tried to study this? How many philosophers have asked the question? Still we cannot find an answer. Every day someone somewhere is a victim of (usually male originated) violence.

As a species, we are remarkably adaptive, and we can change our personalities and behaviour instantaneously to suit most situations. If a man is brought up in a violent district in the city, he will quickly learn that to be able to survive, he needs to be as violent as the next man. That is not to say that through education, the development of self-awareness and compassion, he cannot transcend it, no matter what background he comes from.

Remember, some people such as monks live in absolute “poverty,” albeit through choice, and it is rare these days for violence to stem from a lack of food, it is more likely to stem from greed and power – both learned, not inherent.

So, is a baby born with a violent streak passed on to him by his violent father, or is it something that is learned through copying? If a child sees that you get what you want by being aggressive, is he or she not likely to make the connection that that is the right way to behave, in the same way that others learn that being polite is the right way to get what you want? Whatever the case, it appears that the males in the family do have a tendency to be more aggressive than females.

When I asked myself the question earlier “am I naturally peaceful?” I thought that no, I wasn't. But I am not naturally aggressive either. So where does that leave me? I believe I personally have the potential to be violent, but situations never arise where I ever have the cause to be, and I have never had a fight in my life! I have got through 38 years of never hitting someone with my fists, and although I may have been hit once in my teenage years, it wasn't a fight. I did something someone didn't like, so they hit me, and that was that.

I have always been quite fit, but never very strong, and I have always had a slight fear that someday someone would attack me, and I wouldn't be able to defend myself. It has never happened, but as I often travel to countries that are unknown to me, I decided to take a course.

I am currently being trained in a technique called the “keys fighting method” which was developed over thirty years by a spanish man who had spent his youth fighting on the streets. It is extremely brutal, and is designed as a skill to help you survive in a life or death situation. We are taught things like tearing off the cheek or blinding them in the eye with any weapon you have available. It is a technique that could kill if used correctly.

Since starting it, I have felt slightly unsettled in that as a peaceful person, I am actually learning to be aggressive. I am learning to hurt others, and going against my vow to never harm another human being. I am learning to potentially kill if the need arises.

So why learn it?

On the one hand there is fear, the fear of being attacked, but on the other is self-confidence, knowing I can comfortably walk down a street at night alone. Unfortunately with all self-defence techniques, there is the tendency to fantasize about what it would be like to actually be in a fight and use your skills, and that is where trying to overcome fear with violence unsettles me.

The one thing that makes me carry on, is that I understand there are people in the world who are violent, people who need to develop love and compassion, and there is no point in me giving up my life at their hands, just because they do not know their own minds. I have a responsibility to stay alive and contribute to this world.

We cannot let the violent overcome us and destroy us.

Unfortunately, I am all too aware that this is precisely the sort of thinking that starts violence and ends up with powerful people saying that the ends justify the means. Gone is the idea of self-defence and in comes pre-emptive attacks to stop violence from (potentially) happening.

“We cannot let the terrorists win, we will hunt them down and destroy them. We will not give in to cowardly attacks.”

So, as we are seeing in different parts of the world at the moment, government leaders are employing violent thinking to get rid of violent people, although, as you will also notice, they never actively take part. Violence by proxy.

Testosterone

A potent androgenic hormone produced chiefly by the testes; responsible for the development of male secondary sex characteristics

We have all heard about young men walking around causing trouble fuelled by testosterone, but if one hormone was solely the explanation to violence it would be easy to fix. We could just give every man with too much testosterone a quick injection of female oestrogen to balance them up!

Certainly, as men get older, and testosterone decreases, there is a marked decrease in violent behaviour. We don't see groups of 75 year old men going around beating people up, even if these were the same violent men, who 50 years earlier, were responsible for brutal behaviour. Maybe it's their hormones, maybe their bodies and minds are tired, and maybe they have learned that violence is not the way, or maybe it's a combination of all three.

So what does it feel like to be violent?

I'm sure most people don't feel bad when they physically attack someone. If anything, I imagine they get a high from it. From the few training sessions I have had in keysi, I know that when you start hitting and kicking, you start to feel the adrenaline flowing. First it's the fear of being hit by your opponent, then quickly you realise that in order to "survive," you have to take them out. Your breathing changes, you start to feel charged up, and even afterwards it takes a while to "come down." The feeling is almost like a drug.

It feels good every time you hit one of the pads. So you hit it a bit harder "Come on... Hit it... Harder... Harder..." shouts the instructor.

You are moving fast, like a wild animal catching your prey. Adrenaline surging through your veins. For a moment you feel alive. You start to recognise what your ancestors must have been feeling when they encountered other tribes or wild animals. The thrill of the chase. The excitement of the kill. The reward at the end. All in a days work for them, but something which should have been long forgotten with the development of our large brains.

Unfortunately, we have the ancient aggressive instincts still in our bodies. We have not grown out of them, merely covered them with education and developed acceptable social behaviour, which if you don't adhere to, you go to prison.

We all know we are still at heart a violent species, but in our desperation to leave the natural world behind, we have created a legal system to deal with “violent people.” We have tried to say that it is not the norm, that people are inherently peaceful, and it is with that thinking that people are “made examples of,” and sent to prison. But I noticed within myself when “fighting” for the first time in the gym, that it felt good to punch things. I felt as though a new wave of energy was surging through my bones (even some therapists encourage people to punch a pillow when they are feeling aggressive), but as I reflected, I felt, not guilt, but unease, that maybe underneath an outwardly peaceful man, was a violent creature waiting to get out just given the chance.

Most animals fight amongst themselves at some point but generally not to the death (humans are one of the few species who kill their own). They bare teeth, they display, trying to intimidate their opponents, they bite and they scratch and they lock horns, just as humans do, except for some reason we are shocked by it when it is human against human – perhaps because we have been told by our parents, teachers, and government that it is not normal to fight, but it is.

We should have left the old fight or flight mechanism behind thousands of years ago as we developed language and reasoning skills. We learned to cooperate, and started to build social networks. We developed diplomacy skills, and developed ways to live in harmony, but we didn't realise we were going to be held back by our brain. Whilst compassion and love for all humanity are skills that have been developed in the conscious brain, violence remains an unconscious program that sits there until called upon.

Without warning the program can start all by itself.

For those who can't recognise it, violence is just another outdated piece of software in the brain, version 1.0, already obsolete, another useless bolt-on. The only problem is, it hasn't been deleted yet. Maybe it's just going to take a long time for violence to evolve out of us, maybe it never will, and if so, we must learn how to delete it.

Please do me one favour though, and stop blaming it on your lack of money, your social situation, or that you come from a violent family. I appreciate that these things can have an effect on you, but as a fully fledged member of the human race, the most intelligent species on the planet, the only species with a brain complex enough to make decisions like this, you have a choice. A lion has no choice.

Today, you have a choice, to remain violent and listen to your old brain, or go on a journey of peace with your new brain. You can *choose*.

You have free will. You may be conditioned to be violent, but you can choose to be a man of peace today. You can vow with me now never to use violence unless it is in self-defence of you your family, or your fellow man, and only if they are in immediate danger. I vow the same to you.

We must leave our old animalistic selves behind, and forge new connections in the brain. We must expand our minds, not imprison them in history. We may have developed many technical skills, but whilst we rely on ancient programming, we can never truly progress as a species. The day we leave violence behind will be the greatest leap forward for the human mind, human race, and the planet as whole we have seen. It may not happen in my lifetime, but if just one of you makes a shift, you will be affecting the world more than you can possibly imagine.

*I accept that I am violent
and through that acceptance
I can transcend it*

*Through transcendence
I can develop compassion and unconditional love
I can let the past die
and live today in peace*

So the final question is, should I keep developing self defence skills? Should I learn to protect myself from violent individuals, or should I walk through life preaching peace as some people who have practised non-violence have and be murdered?

I like life. A lot. So I think I'll take my chances with self-defence. As far I'm concerned, I have one life as alan orr, and I'm going to live it to the full. If only everyone knew how to protect themselves, it may just reduce the fear in the world by a couple of degrees. Women would no longer have to worry so much about being attacked by men in the street, as from what I see, some of the self-defence moves are lethal on male "areas" if you know what I mean!

Learn self-defence, develop your instincts and your skill level, and then let it go. Forget you ever learned it. You'll know when it's time to use it. Until then, enjoy your life.

W

W a r

The waging of armed conflict against an enemy

•

A legal state created by a declaration of war and ended by official declaration during which the international rules of war apply

So many people have discussed the probable causes of, and possible solutions to, avoiding war, including poets, philosophers and many more learned and intellectual people than myself. But as war has continued raging for thousands of years, I think we all have to admit to ourselves that no one has come up with a solution.

Why? Because war is created by the human mind, not by governments, warlords, despots, or army generals – not even kings. These are just titles that people bestow on themselves, or have others bestow upon them. War is a state of mind, war is a series of connections made in the brain. War is a product of thinking, and it is our thinking, not the actual act that I need to discuss with you here, because it is of the utmost importance.

What is War? War is nothing. War has no meaning. War is not about freedom. War is not about oil, War is not about hate. War is not about

nationalism. War is not about ethnic cleansing. These are only words. When the historians look back at war they try to find meaning, to justify the suffering, but in the end, war is just a distant memory.

War is nothing. There was no meaning in the death of your sons and daughters, there was no heroism, no great deeds done worth remembering, no crimes against humanity worth remembering. It was just war, a word that means only one thing. The organised murder of others for an idea. In discussing this with you, I am not attempting to desecrate the memory of your loved ones, I am merely trying to explore the human mind that creates such violence with you.

I sit here writing this book on land that may have staged bloody battles, where soldiers fought hand to hand, with swords and daggers, rifles and pistols, on horseback, on foot, or in tanks; where men suffered in agony, screaming, gasping to take their last breath, in fear, panic, knowing they would die. This was the end, this was it, a life extinguished before its time. This was their finale. Death. For what? Freedom? A just cause? Righteousness?

And now, years later, on this same spot of land, where men may have fought with each other to the death, stands an apartment block, surrounded by trees, with the sound of birds singing, and the occasional car passing by. War is gone, war is no more, the land has been reclaimed by the earth. The earth does not wish to remember, nor wishes to erect a statue of remembrance for the fallen; nature, and so life, just carries on, without a passing care for your dead family and friends.

Like the hundreds of millions who have been killed before, the earth swallows their memory. It is us, the humans who choose to remember, “so this may never happen again.”

Unfortunately, war is created by the human mind, through an absence of love, empathy and compassion for other living creatures, and the earth (that allows us to exist on this small planet together). This mind is invisible to the naked eye. If only we could see into the mind that creates war.

When a child is born, his parents have no idea he is going to become the next tyrant to take over a country, ruthlessly murder his own people, and then fight with anyone who challenges him. To them, he is a child – nothing more.

What makes this child grow into someone who will kill, or send other people to kill, on his behalf? What twisted thinking has developed, that killing other people even becomes an option? Is it just a lack of love by

the parents, as some psychologists might propose? But these are not people like the serial killers, and sadistic child murderers we abhor, these are “normal” people. These are people who also abhor murderers, yet become them. They are people like you and me. They are just a product of their environment, their country; conditioned by their parents, their culture, teachers and the media. They are, in fact, brainwashed, and they in turn, brainwash the people.

Brainwash

1. *Persuade completely, often through coercion*
2. *Forcible indoctrination into a new set of attitudes and beliefs*

There can be no other explanation for it. These are people who do not start out as warmongers. You just have to look back through history, right to the present day, to see that leaders – whether military or political – are not generally insane (*afflicted with or characteristic of mental derangement*) in the medical sense, (although one could argue that their actions do not seem like that of a sane human being), or they would not have been voted into power, either by the people or the political party, or even by other soldiers.

On the contrary, these are people who probably have a good standard of education, probably have wives and children (nearly all leaders of countries are men), may have strong religious, moral and ethical beliefs, and probably believe they are doing the right thing for the people and the country. These are not criminals or madmen.

Whether the controlling party is democratically elected, or declares themselves “elected” without the mandate of the people, someone has had to elect a leader, and that leader will not be a drooling madman, rocking in the corner. He will be confident and eloquent, able to make people listen to his ideas for glory for the nation. He will convince people he is right, that his views are the only way forward, and people listen to a convincing speaker. In order to declare war on another country the people must believe in their leader and they must be convinced he is in the right, otherwise war is not an option.

Leaders may declare war, but they don't go to war on their own, otherwise it would be no more than a bar room brawl, or a fight in the school yard between two men, even if it was to the death. People go to war, people like you and me. Normal, well adjusted, conditioned, brainwashed people, who happily give up their lives for “the greater

good” of the nation. No one goes to war for the greater good of the planet, that would be somewhat paradoxical, don't you think?

You cause war. You and you alone are responsible for war.

You may be disgusted by what I have just said. You may be in the army and think you are only doing your job, but you are going to war for one man's idea. But it is also your idea, how else could one man force you to kill in his name? You sign up, sometimes of your own volition, sometimes because you are forced to, and some may argue that they would have been killed themselves if they did not go to war, but if everyone refused to go to war, would the leader kill all of his own people? Perhaps, but then he would have no one to lead, rendering him powerless, and leading is all about power.

Behind every leader, there is someone complicit in the idea, and that person is you, even if you never pick up a rifle in your life. You agree with him, and you believe him, that is all that is necessary to start a war.

How many of you have fought in wars, lost loved ones in battle, or had family members killed? How many of you have lost great friends? For what? Freedom? Good vs. evil? Fighting to protect what is right? Fighting for your own interests over another's?

Why?

Because you were convinced that what you were doing was right. You would not have gone to war otherwise, would you?

Are you so afraid of what will happen to you if you do not go to war? The people are the power of the nation, even unarmed. They have the power to stand up as a collective and say: “No! I will *not* fight”, but you don't, because the leader has appealed to your nationalistic pride. The pride, which is conditioning, that has been developed over centuries. The pride that makes you say: “I am proud to be british,” and whatever is in the best interests of britain, I will do it. You just tell me where to sign up. We'll show that other country not to mess with us.

Let's go back to the child before he became a leader for a moment, shall we? The young man destined to send millions of people to their death... Who was he? Was he normal?

You see, I am not talking about psychopathic lunatics here, I am talking about your leaders, most of whom have been democratically elected.

His parents, or guardians, probably instilled a fine sense of pride in him. He was taken to watch parades, where he happily waved his flag for the nation, he was taught history, and learned what a great country he came from, he was in fact being conditioned without his knowledge into becoming a patriot (*one who loves and defends his or her country*). He sang the national anthem at sports matches, and screamed in excitement with all the adults when his country scored. He believed his leader, teachers, parents, and media were telling him the truth when they said they had to go to war to protect freedom, and their way of life; or they had to go to war because a neighbouring country had stolen land or assets that were rightfully theirs. Without knowing it, he had been indoctrinated. The flag, which is just a piece of coloured cloth, became his symbol of freedom. The army became the method with which to uphold that freedom, and the child became a man.

There are a million reasons why countries start wars, but they always start with an idea that whatever they are doing it is right. They must also identify an enemy (*any hostile group of people*) who must be fought and overwhelmed, for no other reason than the leader, and subsequently, the followers, believe they have right on their side. They are not fighting over universal truths like love and compassion – as these exist within each and every one of us, and do not need a bullet to enforce – they are fighting over nothing more than children in the school yard fight over:

“That's my pen and I want it back,” or “I want your pen, give it to me now, or else!” or “give me your lunch money, I haven't got any,” or “I hate you, I want to fight you!”

Countries have no more to fight over than children; nothing they are fighting about is as serious as they want you to believe it to be. What is serious, is that the leaders and governments (who are just people too) involve us in school yard fights that kill millions of people. You can forgive children, for their minds are not yet fully developed, but adults have no excuse – except perhaps that they do not know their own minds.

A mind that is filled with love, compassion and empathy, can never send another human being to kill, no matter what the cause; and a mind filled with love, compassion and empathy can never fight, let alone kill another human being, whatever the cause. There is no right and wrong, these are man-made concepts. There is only love, compassion and empathy. If you can find those three things in your mind, you will never start, take part in, or agree with another war. Ever. It really is that simple.

People will always try to convince us they're right.

“Look, *we* are the compassionate loving ones in *this* nation, and that other *bad* nation wants to destroy us, and take away everything we've got so we have *no* choice but to go to war. We have no quarrel with the people of the country; we are only destroying legitimate military targets,” they say.

So we all think, “oh, that's all right, they're only killing the military (who are not people of course).”

What do you think the people of the country under attack think of this? Does it not start to stir nationalistic feelings in them too, to see their soldiers, who you remember are someone's husband, son or brother being killed by a bullet or a bomb? Do you not think their leaders will use this as a way to brainwash their citizens into hating your country? In fact, if I saw my husband cut down in a hail of bullets, it may not need any brainwashing to convince me to pick up a gun and fight.

War creates more war, that is sure. It is a never ending cycle of idea, indoctrination, and ultimately death. There is never a winner, only losers. And the biggest loser of all is the human emotion, compassion. War slowly erodes love and compassion, and in their absence hate fills the void. Understand your own mind, and see that whatever the justification for war, it can never pass the test of “is it compassionate and loving?”

I remember a story about the impromptu football match that took place between the british and the germans on christmas day, during the first world war. Well, apparently, it really happened. Both sides put down their weapons and played football on no man's land, proving that the soldiers didn't hate each other at all, they had just been indoctrinated by their leaders. For that small window in time, they knew their own minds, and they knew their “enemy” could have been a friend they played football with every saturday; if only he hadn't been born in different country.

It is a real shame they resumed killing each other the very next day.

We have been at war for so many years now, in some shape or form, that maybe we have forgotten what it is to be human. We boldly stand and tell people that ours is the greatest country on earth. What a boast. Great, is what the earth is. Great, is the diversity of wildlife. Great, is the atmosphere that protects us from the sun's rays. Great, is the water that runs through the rivers. Great, is being alive.

Given that the chance of becoming human was so small, great, is getting the chance to experience this amazing planet, that is our home. There is no time to be at war with each other, we live for such a short time, perhaps 80 or 90 years at best. Let us live every day with joy and

laughter just at being here, and getting the chance to make a small contribution to an evolving planet that has been here for four billion years.

One chance to do something good, and what do we bring to it in our short life? Violence, death and suffering. The most intelligent species on earth?

If nature had known what we would have turned into, maybe we would have been naturally selected out of the evolution process, and remained a single-celled mindless organism. Oh sorry, I forgot, that *is* what some of us have become.

*If all you can do in this life is be kind to someone,
you have done more than was ever expected of you.
You have shown you were truly human,
and that everything the earth went through to get you here, was worth it.*

W a s t e

Any materials unused and rejected as worthless or unwanted

•

Useless or profitless activity; using or expending or consuming
thoughtlessly or carelessly

•

The trait of wasting resources

•

Spend thoughtlessly; throw away

•

Use inefficiently or inappropriately

I don't know about you, but I like going to restaurants. It's nice to get dressed up and go out for a meal. It saves cooking (and the washing up), and you get to try all sorts of different food you wouldn't get at home. In the west, going out for a meal has become commonplace. For a lot of us, eating out is just like any other activity we do, it doesn't have to be a special occasion anymore. We have the money to do it so why not? Let me start this discussion by telling you a story.

Over the past few years, whilst travelling, I found work cooking in several pub kitchens. I am not a trained chef, but somehow I fell into it. I found the work quite easy, and quite satisfying and it was a good feeling cooking lunch for two hundred people on a Sunday. Anytime I was short of travelling money, I found work as a chef. It was during this period I (a) became vegetarian, (b) learnt a lot about myself, and (c) learned about how much we waste.

The pointless existence of a restaurant lettuce...

I don't know about your country, but in the uk it is commonplace to provide a “garnish” with the meal, which is basically a small side salad comprising lettuce, tomato, cucumber, and maybe some mixed peppers, or coleslaw, and a salad dressing (oil and vinegar). For several thousand meals I carried on putting the side salad on without a thought. Then one day, I had a moment of clarity, and I became aware of my actions.

I was mid-way through scraping the almost untouched side salad off a plate and into the bin, when it came to me. “Someone has grown this food from a seed (maybe even in a different country) and I am throwing it into a bin where it will become compost or more likely landfill!” So I created a little flow chart which went something like this.

Take a seed and plant it which requires peat/compost water, labour, and a plastic container if it is not grown in the field directly from seed (and electricity if it's on a production line). The seed is nurtured using water, electricity and labour. The seed needs space to grow and so a field is needed. The lettuce is constantly watered and may be sprayed with chemicals, which requires labour. At the allotted time, the lettuce is harvested, which uses labour. The lettuce is washed at the farm which uses water, labour, and electricity. The lettuce is packed, which requires plastic, and labour. The lettuce is transported to either a distribution point, or market, which uses fuel and labour. The lettuce is purchased by the pub or restaurant, which requires money, labour and fuel to deliver it. The lettuce is then stored in a refrigerator, which uses electricity. The lettuce is then washed a minimum of two to three times to make sure there are no bugs left in it, which uses water and labour. The lettuce is then stored in the fridge which again uses electricity. The order comes up for a steak and chips (with a garnish of course), and the lettuce (and all the other salad ingredients which also have had to follow the same process) is served onto the plate, which uses labour. The meal is delivered to the customer, which requires labour. The customer eats the steak and chips and ignores the lettuce. The lettuce is then transported back to the kitchen which uses labour. The lettuce is put in the bin using labour. The bin is then put outside using labour. The rubbish is collected using labour and fuel, and something happens to it (either burial, or maybe composting if we're lucky) which uses fuel and labour. Any questions?

Please feel free to go over this again if you feel there is a point you would like to argue.

Over and over, I saw this happening, until one day I decided to put a stop to it. I told the management I was no longer going to be putting something on a plate that was being ignored as it was a complete waste of food, which is precious (maybe not to us, but think of the people who are starving). Do you know what? They weren't even interested. I was told to keep putting it on as customers “liked a bit of greenery” on their plate. It didn't matter what they left on their plate, because “it was all included in the price.”

This really shocked me. I tried to explain that just because we had paid the farmer, and the customer had paid us, didn't make it right to waste food. I was told to either keep doing it or “if I didn't like it, I could find another job,” which I did.

I couldn't believe how irresponsible people were. How could they not care that we were wasting so much? The more I looked into waste, the more I realised that the only thing that was important to businesses was getting paid, and the only thing that was important to the customer was getting what he wanted. After he had paid for it, it was nobody's business what he did with it.

Easy come, easy go. That should be the motto of the developed world these days, especially in massive consumer countries like the USA, UK, and Australia (and any other country that values these ideals). We have no idea of the process to get a product from concept to the consumer, and the amount of input and effort required or the number of people involved. But then it hit me. Whether we needed the product, or even used it, didn't matter a damn. What was important were the steps in between. These steps created the wealth of the country, and kept people in jobs.

How many times have you been into bargain stores and picked up some plastic rubbish made in China for £1.00? You certainly didn't need it, it wouldn't last long before falling to bits, and you probably wouldn't use it. You bought it because it was there, and you wanted it!

It seems to me that waste is an inevitable consequence of economic development. There are only so many things that people (or the country) really need in life, and that wouldn't keep everyone in jobs. So they have to produce things that people don't need or in the case of that poor side salad, don't even want in order that people stay in work. Think about it.

If the pub I worked for didn't buy 100 lettuces a week for their pointless side salads, what would happen to the poor old farmer? He needs to make a living too you know! What if everyone decided not to put garnishes on the plate as eye candy? The farmer would get no more orders, he wouldn't be able to pay his bills, and pretty soon he would be broke. And we know what could happen there don't we? He would start to drink heavily, he would become a burden on the taxpayer, his self-esteem would diminish, and he wouldn't be able to pay his own taxes anymore, which would mean that the government would have less money to spend on essential projects such as defence.

"Look, let's save ourselves all this trouble, and be good consumers and keep demanding a garnish on your plate" says the minister.

"*Don't deny us our Garnish*" will be on the placards waved wildly by stooges from the garnish industry.

"Don't worry farmers" says the minister, whilst attempting to pacify the angry mob. "Pretty soon, the consumer will come round, then you'll all be back in business"

Cheers and shouts of "Hoorah!" can be heard up and down the country...

It seems that waste is acceptable as long as people keep their jobs, because let's face it, if people didn't want to change their car every two minutes, or upgrade their bathroom suite or kitchen, or buy a new pc every six months, what would all the people who work in those industries do? They wouldn't be able to work for eight hours a day, and there wouldn't be enough work to go around for everybody. They would all have to be moved to part time, and then some may lose their jobs. If business is still slow, the companies will close down, making everyone unemployed. and leaving the government with the problem.

As far as a government is concerned, a little bit of waste is far better than a lot of people out of work. Come election time, the unemployed may decide to vote for a government who can provide them with work. Waste vs. Votes. Easy choice, no?

Maybe you don't realise that everything we buy has had to come from somewhere? Materials do not just magically appear in the atmosphere. All materials have come from the earth. The computer I write on, the desk I sit at, the chair I sit on, the window I look out from, the curtains that adorn the window, the curtain rail, the screws that hold it into the wall. The building I sit in, the pen I write notes with, the notebook I write them in, and the cup I drink from.

Considering the industrial revolution started only a couple of hundred years ago, and global consumerism has only been around for thirty or forty years, we are consuming raw materials at a massive rate don't you think? What do you think is going on in the factories around the world at this moment? Whilst you are reading about waste, tens of millions of people are engaged in making something we may or may not need, just so they can have a job!

I am not against people having jobs, far from it, we all need to work to provide for ourselves, but it is the choice of work we undertake, and the products we make that is vitally important to the earth. We are literally eating our planet away from the inside out. We dig, and we dig, we drill and we drill, we chop and we chop. For what? Progress?

I have often sat and watched people dropping rubbish off at the local "tip" (they do separate a lot now, so more recycling is done) and the sheer volume of "rubbish" that people don't want anymore amazes me. With so many eye catching products on sale, at dirt cheap prices or on long interest free credit terms people feel compelled to upgrade. They love the latest gadgets. They must have them. They must have something new. In my mind this is nothing more than a simple addiction.

People are conditioned to believe that buying new "stuff" is why you work. It is a right, a privilege, you have earned, by going out to work for forty hours a week. You are *Entitled*. Of course this is just marketing hype from the government and the companies making the products, but you begin to believe it. That is the reason to go to work. Not for the benefit of mankind, but to buy new stuff. What a waste.

Let's go into this really carefully, shall we? Why do we believe we are entitled to waste the earth's resources? Remember, most things we mine and dig for are millions of years old and will take millions of years more to be created again (if ever). Are we really that uncaring that we would leave future generations with nothing but a used and abused planet?

"Thanks very much," our descendants will say. "You screwed it all up for us when we weren't even born, just so you could satisfy your desires. Desire to have a big house. Desire for status. For a big car. For lots of money in the bank."

And that's it isn't it? Whatever we do we do for money. Just for the sake of money and having nice material things you can't take with you when you die! Imagine your epitaph: "John smith. Died. 2007. He took what he could, and put two fingers up to the rest of the world. He loved his family though."

There are those of us in the world, including you, who care what happens to our planet. After all, it's the only one we've got. So what is the answer to this problem of waste, which goes on, not only in the poor old consumer's house, but also on a much, much larger scale in manufacturing and the service industries? Not by telling people to use less, that's for sure!

As we have discussed earlier on, people feel entitled to use and waste things as long as they've paid for them. They don't care that the cost of the inputs far outweigh the final output. They want to enjoy themselves. They want to spend the money they have earned working hard all week. "Don't spoil our fun" they say. "After all I do, I'm entitled to enjoy myself a little, aren't I?" Entitled (*Qualified for by right according to law*).



One of the "little" pleasures that british folk enjoy, is the traditional english breakfast. A massive affair, which contains many items, enjoyed at the weekends, in cafe's, hotels and bed and breakfasts throughout the country.

Full English Breakfast Menu

Selection of Juices
Cereal or Porridge

~

Eggs (done as you like)

Sausage

Bacon

Mushrooms, Tomatoes

Hash Browns or Fried bread

~

Tea or Coffee

~

Toast with a selection of jams or marmalades

To most people, that is just a nice menu of tasty items to be enjoyed at breakfast. To me, it represents massive (that word again) inputs, and like most restaurant food is from the cheapest source around.

To start with, the fresh juice is likely to be made from concentrate, but more importantly, imported from a country that is able to produce

cheap fruit juice which requires labour, packaging, and transportation to get to the breakfast table, followed by porridge or cereal which has to be grown from corn or maize in enough quantities to make it economically viable to grow, and requires land, labour, transport, processing, and electricity, followed by bacon or sausage which requires a pig to be reared, fed, fattened, and watered before being slaughtered, processed, packaged, stored and transported, which uses fuel, electricity, labour. However you like your eggs, they require chickens to be kept laying their whole un-natural life. The eggs then have to be stored and processed, before being delivered. Tomatoes and mushrooms must be grown, which uses water, and labour, and electricity for processing, followed by fuel for transportation. The tea and coffee are required to be imported from a country far away, using ships or planes, which pollute the environment, and sugar to taste, and milk to be added. Followed at long last by the toast which is wheat, which must be processed and turned into flour which is then processed into bread and baked and delivered, topped with butter from the cow which must be milked every day, and the milk churned to make butter, which is wrapped and transported.

Phew this is tiring me out writing this! Are you tired reading it yet?

Last but not least there is the jam or marmalade which must be harvested from oranges or strawberries, packed and transported to the jam factory where sugar must be added. It must be packaged and transported, which as you know uses....

I'm glad that's over, because it probably took me longer to write those sentences than it would for you to eat your full english breakfast!

You may think this is an extreme example but you can substitute "full english breakfast" for any product. You can then look at the real cost of the product you are buying. For example, when you go to buy a table, a car, a house or a window, do you consider the environmental inputs? Of course not. How about when you stay at a hotel or you shop at a supermarket? If, like me, you decide to consider the environmental inputs, and not just the finished products or price, you will find that not only will you drive yourself mad but you will drive the rest of your family and friends, not to mention the salesman, MAD!

**Consider the environmental inputs before you buy
Do the inputs cost more than the final output?**

So is it worth bothering with? You tell me. I think it is! But a much easier method would be to turn this whole thing on its head, and instead of making it the consumer's responsibility, make it the supplier's. Make them tell us what the environmental (and social) costs that went into making their products, so we can make an informed decision as to whether or not to make a purchase. Simple eh? This could be a benefit for the supplier as well. People are happy to pay for a product that has been produced in a manner that respects the environment in which we live. There is a growing movement of people, like you, who are not prepared to waste any more of our natural resources on frivolous products and activities.

Simplicity

1. *The quality of being simple or uncompounded*
2. *Absence of affectation or pretence*
3. *Lack of ornamentation*

Now before you all start complaining that I am preaching we should all live like austere monks on wooden mattresses on the floor, let's examine what it means to be simple. Does this mean you have to stop wearing normal clothes and wear one home spun piece of cloth? Does this mean you cannot enjoy your life anymore? Does this mean you mustn't have a nice house with a garden or take a bath every day? No, of course it doesn't.

Simplicity is not external, and that is one of the biggest errors people make. It is not about getting rid of your car, growing your own vegetables or living in a mud hut in the forest complaining about the evils of capitalism. Simplicity is in your mind, and can exist only in your mind, although that will affect your external actions.

So how do we learn to be simple; how do we rid ourselves of desire and greed?

The first step is awareness. Awareness of yourself in action. You must watch yourself closely. Awareness is that fraction of a second between thinking about something, and doing it. In that split second, we have to learn to let compassion in. Love, empathy and compassion as you will remember from other topics are the three keys to life. This is of course only my opinion, and I urge you to test them. Do not take my word for it.

Once you have discovered awareness, you will free yourself of desire and greed, and the urge to be wasteful will be like a dream you had many years ago. Things you once thought were important to you will no longer enter your mind.

I spent my entire twenties being wasteful, although I felt no guilt at being responsible for so much waste. I just didn't care about anything apart from what I could get for me; whatever the cost. I was so greedy. I wanted everything, and I wanted it right now. I wasn't prepared to wait. I didn't care if the table I bought came from an unsustainable rainforest or the salad I bought that came prepared in a bag, had been produced in an african country, where there was scarce enough water for the local people. I was not a bad person, I just wasn't aware that my actions had far reaching consequences. It was not until I developed awareness that I realised what I was doing.

Life is a learning process and I will not say that I am simple in my mind, but every day, I try to be more aware of myself, and the effect I have on the world. In the end that is the best you can do. The rest will fall into place.

W a t e r

A fluid necessary for the life of most animals and plants

•

[archaic] Once thought to be one of four elements composing the universe (Empedocles)

•

Binary compound that occurs at room temperature as a clear colourless odourless tasteless liquid; freezes into ice below 0 degrees centigrade and boils above 100 degrees centigrade; widely used as a solvent

Water, our most precious resource for sustaining life on the planet, not just for humans but for all the other inhabitants of this earth. Approximately seventy percent of the earth's surface is covered by oceans; the catch being that all land animals need fresh water to survive, not salt water, that is why a man cast adrift at sea would die of thirst! This seems illogical, doesn't it?

As land dwellers, we are reliant on the water from rivers, lakes and streams. Without this water we would die, as would the animals and the plants, although we could live without food for a couple of weeks quite comfortably.

Like the earth, we are made up of approximately seventy percent water, and we were surrounded by water for nine months in our mother's belly, so it's no wonder we love to play in the ocean, dive into swimming pools and take long luxuriating baths or showers. Water is an intrinsic

part of our life. It is involved at all stages of our life from conception through to death.

Water is also one of the four elements that ancient scientists and philosophers thought constituted the physical universe, as well as fire, air and earth.

H₂O, as it is known scientifically, is a binary compound that occurs at room temperature as a clear colourless odourless tasteless liquid; freezes into ice below zero degrees centigrade and boils above one hundred degrees centigrade. A truly versatile little compound!

Imagine if you will, your typical day. Imagine the part that water has to play in it. Everything from the cup of tea or coffee you start the day with, to the water you shower in, to the water that helps the vegetables grow before you can boil or steam them, to make them easier to consume. Think about this quietly for a moment. The connection between life and water is undeniable and although it is necessary to sustain all life on earth, we don't seem to get it do we?

Everything on this planet is in perfect balance (except us). In each area, there is enough water and food to sustain a specific amount of life, and no more. So what happens when you build a city? Well, you need massive amounts of water which must be fed from other areas to supply the needs of the people. Water that has been running in an area for thousands of years is taken and transported over many hundreds of miles so you can have a double espresso and a bottle of sparkling water "to go."

You are in your kitchen and you reach over and turn on the fountain of life, what goes through your mind? If you're like everyone else, probably nothing. Do you know what I see? I see life running through man-made pipes, pumped, filtered, and treated. I see water that is no longer pure, that no longer contains the energy it did at the source, that has been fundamentally altered by man. But then that's just my opinion!

Back to the tap, and as you turn it on, the water runs out, but before you catch it, it runs away again. Water is so slippery you have to be really alert to catch it!

"So what's all this got to do with me?" I hear you asking.

Well, as usual, it's back to the whole waste thing again, I'm sorry to say. Not only have we diverted water away from its natural flow, we have dammed rivers, flooded valleys, and created huge reservoirs, which have forever changed the ecology of particular areas – all so we can live in industrialised cities. There is no connection to the stream where you

gather water or the well you dig in your garden – the man-made tap sees to that.

Where does it come from, this water stuff? Do you know where your water comes from? Most of you will no doubt quote your water company's name, but please stop, and think about this. If we are in agreement that water is one element that gives life, surely we should know where it comes from!

*From an ice cube in your drink to a steam bath
From steam engine to the ice skating rink
From the polar ice caps to the children playing in the snow
Water holds life together in all of its wondrous forms*

As I have explained in other topics, I am currently writing at a small “spiritual” community on an island in scotland. As they have no mains water, this morning I took a walk to find out how we get it. I traced it back from the solar heated hot water tanks to the main tank which has a ultraviolet light filter to remove any harmful bacteria (sorry for killing you, bacteria), the pipe runs up the hill to a primary holding tank, which then has three plastic pipes inserted. I traced these 100 metres to a small hole dug into the hillside. Inside was water flowing down from the hill and going out again through a perforated plastic pipe. Is that it? Where is all the fancy machinery?

I made enquiries to the maintenance man, and was assured that the water came from natural springs, and that the system was simple. Water from a spring one hundred metres away through to my tap. Perfect. I could see the whole process, from start to finish!

How many of us have ever enquired to our many privately owned water companies how the whole process works for millions of people? I think it would be very different to the system we have here which provides uninterrupted water supplies for 60 people, most of the time – except in the summer when the springs have been known to almost dry up! What a sight that must be, to see the one thing that keeps you alive dry up.

Seeing your water supply dry up must be like looking death in the face. Millions of people have this problem in the driest countries on earth, but once again there are too many people competing for small supplies of water.

I often wonder how the tribes people of africa have managed to survive all these years, when every day I see pictures of people dying of

thirst and walking up to twenty miles just to fetch water. How did they survive?

For a start there were not as many of them. Nature provided for a specific number of people and when the people started to gather in one place instead of many areas (for work), nature's supply ran out. Of course if you live "in the west" you won't have to look death in the face when the water runs out. They'll just pump it in from somewhere else! After all, you pay for your water, who's to tell you to use less?

"Water is a human right," you cry, "I am entitled to water. I don't care where you get it from, just get it!"

Government advertising campaigns in countries such as Australia, are urging people not to wash their cars, not to water their lawns, and to turn off the tap when brushing their teeth, but just down the road, people are sitting in retail precincts and restaurants where all the vegetables are washed two to three times, and water is being used frivolously washing plates, and cups and serving cappuccinos. When the customers have finished eating, they all go to the toilets and flush, flush, flush, and wash their hands in plentiful supply. Somehow or other, this "*SAVE WATER OR WE ALL DIE*" campaign, loses its authenticity.

Consumers are told to save water at home, but businesses seem to be exempt. Surely we shouldn't be so cynical as to think that this has to do with money? That if people stopped using retail establishments as much during water shortages, it may create an economic crisis, and people would start losing their jobs, which would have a knock on effect, which meant the unemployed would be a burden on society, and the government would lose its tax dollars! Surely not?

One thing you may or may not be aware of is that business is by far the biggest consumer of water. Investigate it for yourselves. The laptop I am writing this book on required huge amounts of water in its manufacture! Am I crazy? As you will discover, the electronics industry is the one of single largest consumers of water! Making these high-tech semiconductors requires water. Lots of it. I wonder if you could guess what else requires water in its manufacture?

So before we all start sharing bath water between a family of four, maybe we should look at our choices outside the home. The place where no one can monitor our use of water resources. Maybe the reason we all comply at home is fear. Fear that we will be found out. And maybe even at home we don't really care, water being a "human right," and all.

I did consider some time ago that water is a human right and that it should be provided for all, at no cost, but then I remembered we were talking about human beings here, the most intelligent, but most wasteful species on the planet, who at every opportunity live for “me.” If people can get away with something they do. That is why in the topic on law I concluded that the human race wasn't ready to get rid of law. If there was free water, they wouldn't use it carefully and thoughtfully, they would keep using it until it ran out, and then complain that it had run out and someone should be doing something about it!

So, charging people for what they use seems the only way at the moment. We are not ready to be given unlimited access to something so precious. Isn't that a terrible shame? It fills me with sadness to think we don't care about water. It is vital to life, so perhaps we should start preserving it. We must see it not as a commodity to be traded, or something to be wasted, but must start to see every drop as being a part of us, and we of it. We are linked, bonded by the molecules in it. It is our life. Let's not throw away our life.

Treat water in the same way you treat your family – with tenderness and care. Save it. Don't let rainwater run off your roof and into the gutter – use it to water your vegetable garden. Recycle it. You can use it again! There are systems that use old bath water to flush the toilets etc. Amazing, isn't it?

Next time you run your tap, try to imagine the source, and try to reconnect with it. You may not live as close to the source as I do, but try to ask yourself *why*. Why do you not live close to the source? Ponder that question for a while. You may be surprised at the answer. On the other hand you may not!

Fire

1. *[archaic] Once thought to be one of four elements composing the universe (empedocles)*
2. *The process of combustion of inflammable materials producing heat and light and (often) smoke*
3. *The event of something burning (often destructive)*

I don't think any of us really know when man first discovered fire, but it would have been pretty amazing sight to witness. From a single spark came heat and light. It took several billion years of life on earth before we finally harnessed (by accident probably) the power that brings life to our planet every day – the power of the sun, before that. We would have been

eating raw everything, and it would have been pretty cold in the northern hemisphere in winter!

Every minute of every day, the sun generates enough energy to sustain this planet. Too much heat and we would all die, too little, and life could not carry on. A pretty fine balance, wouldn't you say?

Plant life is incredible on earth. They take in energy from the sun, and use it to split water from the ground into hydrogen and oxygen. The hydrogen released from the water combines with carbon dioxide to make sugar, the fuel that the plant needs to grow. The final stage is the release of oxygen, which we all know, allows us to breathe. So without this process, enabled by the sun, we would all die.

I sit at my desk having washed my hands with solar powered hot water, well in this country it is only lukewarm, but it is enough to heat the water somewhat. Free energy from the sun? I like it!

Sorry to interrupt myself, but I must just quickly tell you this story.

Just last week I downloaded some designs for solar cookers from the internet, and it is amazing what you can do with a piece of cardboard, and some aluminium foil. Without getting into the technicalities here too much, you basically shape your cooker so it reflects heat onto a black pot, which you put into a clear oven bag.

On the website, I saw photographs of happy african women using their solar cookers, but I didn't imagine it would work in england in may! How amazed I was, to come back and check on my risotto, two hours later, and find it had been cooked to perfection (the great thing is, the ovens do not burn the food, as the heat is much more gentle than a conventional oven. Since that day, I have cooked all manner of different food, including baked potatoes, curries, and bread!

For something that was designed to help people in the poorest countries in the world, it was fantastic to use it in a country, which, although not desperate, needs to find better solutions to their energy problems. Here I was, a westerner, cooking my lunch and dinner with the power of the sun. And do you know what the best thing about it was? The energy was free!

I now propose that we have an "international solar cooking day," which I would be happy to help organise. You see, I think they were missing the point with these solar cookers, they aren't only for people in desperate need of fuel to cook with, they are also fun, easy to use, and save huge amounts of energy. We could get children from schools interested, and they can pester their parents!

We shouldn't look at it as a “save the earth day, ” like those annoying environmental groups organise, we should see this as fun! Something that could take the place of the traditional family barbecue (which uses lots of natural resources by the way). It may be more difficult to grill things, but hey! You're the most intelligent species on the planet, I'm sure you'll figure out a way!

Imagine for one moment will you, that even one tenth of the population used a solar cooker to cook some food, even three times a year (most countries get a lot more sun than that), how much energy do you think we would save?

Have a think about it.

Unfortunately, solar power is not the only answer for us in the north of Europe, but neither is the way it is produced now. But for now, let's get back to our main discussion.

Following the same principal as the water topic, I would like you to imagine the source of the light in your lounge, or the heat in your radiators. Electricity is generally created by burning coal, and if you have ever had a coal fire, you will know how much coal you would have to use if you wanted to heat the whole house. Well I'll tell you. It's a lot. An awful lot. And someone has to dig for this coal.

Have you ever seen photos of coal miners coming up from the mine a mile below ground all covered in black dust? Well they're digging for your electric light, they're digging to power your tv, they're digging to power the microwave.

Coal (*fossil fuel consisting of carbonized vegetable matter deposited in the Carboniferous period*), as you can see from its dictionary definition, has been around a long time. I cannot be sure personally, but science has told us it was created from about 345 million to 280 million years ago! Science has also told us that we are running out, and it is bad for the environment to burn carbon based fuels. Oops. Oh well, I won't be around that much longer anyway. What about you?

So should we bother worrying about it? Well if you care that your children have a planet left to enjoy, we better start doing something, say the scientists. But what?

Nuclear energy, which is energy released by a nuclear reaction, is on the surface, greener than coal, but unfortunately the waste created during this process is highly radioactive, and needs to be buried somewhere (not in my back garden thanks) so remains controversial. Natural gas is seen by some as greener than coal, but like everything, that takes millions of years to form, gas is going to run out too. Help! We're all going to die!

One of the main problems, as I see it, is not that we need to urgently find renewable sources, but that we consume too much. As usual the wasteful human (that's you and me by the way) is chomping his way through the earth's natural resources at an alarming rate. "Save electricity," the government cries, or do they? In fact, we are never really told to save electricity – after all, it is a human right to have light, isn't it? We have our kitchens to think about, our games consoles, our computers, our televisions, and our tumble driers. We have bought all this stuff from our hard earned wages! We are entitled to use them, are we not?

A few years ago, I learned a good lesson about electricity and how it doesn't grow on trees. I was working on a farm saving money to go travelling, and was staying on-site in a mobile home. The electricity was on a coin fed meter, and I had to remember to put a pound in every day or so, to keep everything in the cabin going. It was only when it ran out one day, and I didn't have any coins to put in the meter I realised how dependent we all are on electricity. Everything in my life needed power. My computer, my television, the cooker, the fridge, the freezer, the shower, the lights, the heater.

As I sat in the dark for a short while I made the connection. All of modern life required electricity. Without it we were nothing. Whether it is generated by nuclear, gas, solar, or coal, we are addicted to it. Industry couldn't run without it, so they could not make the products we buy that rely on it. Modern life, as I know it, would fail to exist.

One switch, and twenty-first century life as I knew it would end. That scared me. All the things I liked doing. Watching dvd's, having nice cold drinks in the summer, freezing extra food I had made, heating food quickly in a microwave.

Then it really dawned on me that this wasn't just about my cabin not having electric for one night, this was about not being able to do anything I liked. There would be no going to a restaurant, day or night, because there would be no one way to cook the food, let alone turn a light on. Cinemas would be obsolete because no one would be able to edit the films, let alone show them. I wouldn't have a computer anymore because there would be no electricity to make it, let alone plug it in and turn it on. I was shocked. The world as I knew it was an illusion. This was not reality.

Unplug us from the grid and the dark ages would return.

Fortunately, the next day I remembered to get some change, and I quickly forgot the previous night like a bad dream. But it stuck in my head, and I started to pay more attention to what I was using. I didn't

take electricity for granted anymore. I could see that unless someone came up with a way of providing self-regenerating energy, we would soon be looking for new hobbies in the evening that work well around candle light. (at least we still have fire, imagine what life was like before they discovered it).

But hold on, we have energy from the sun. Sure, it might not be as efficient in some parts of the world, but as long as the financial and environmental cost of producing solar panels was acceptable, it would be a start.

I was living in australia not long after my experience in the dark, and I decided to look up on the roofs to see how many people were using solar panels. I could not believe it! Almost nobody had them. Australia, as it turned out, was a country that not only had enough sunlight to power most of the earth, but also had access to about 600 years of brown coal. It seems they chose the latter option. Solar was expensive to install. Coal was cheap.

The more I looked around, the more waste I could see, and I started to remember my time working in information technology. I remembered leaving my pc on every night – as everyone did. All the faxes and printers were on too. All burning coal, and no one was even there!

I started to look at the office buildings with all their lights on at night. Who could be possibly there at 2.00 am? The shopping streets were lit up like the aurora borealis, all so consumers could browse in the shops when they were closed! Street lighting, cafe's bars, nightclubs, cinemas, there was no escaping it. I even noticed that my flatmates had left the music equipment, tv, and dvd player on standby – all using electricity whilst everyone was asleep! I would hate to be the man who was on shift that evening, digging coal to be burnt for no purpose.

But then most of what we do is frivolous. We don't give a damn. It's me, me, me. Maybe no one has told you about all this before, maybe you are in the dark like I was. Well, now you're not! If you continue to overuse resources they *will* run out. Use your huge human brain.

If you run a business, turn off all the electricity when you leave at night. Doesn't it make sense? You will be doing us all a favour (and saving money on your electricity bill). In the home, turn off pc's at the wall. Don't leave things on standby. Don't light up the house like a christmas tree. Find out about energy efficiency, have your home insulated to keep the heat in. Install better windows. Find out for yourselves.

Imagine having no electric bills, or having free hot water (probably lukewarm in the northern hemisphere, especially in winter).

Run solar, then by all means use, use, use. There may be times when you don't generate enough but that will help you to understand that you can't always have what you want when you want it, an idea that is foreign to all of us in the western world. Maybe by running out a few times you will learn you don't always have to have tv or computer on all the time. Maybe for once you could start a conversation, you don't need electricity for those.

Try solar, there's plenty of fire from the sun, and the great thing about it is no one has to get dirty digging for solar power. There's another load off your mind.

Air

1. *A mixture of gases (especially oxygen) required for breathing; the stuff that the wind consists of*
2. *[archaic] Once thought to be one of four elements composing the universe (empedocles)*

Right now I am breathing, and I hope you are too! We don't have to think about it, it happens automatically; in out, in out. You can't see the air we breathe, it's invisible, yet it really is there. Planes fly in air without falling out the sky, and so do birds, it really is a magical substance.

Air constitutes 78 percent nitrogen, and 21 percent oxygen and 1 percent of other substances. Without water you would die of thirst, without fire from the sun you would die from cold and starvation, but without air you would die of suffocation (all unpleasant deaths I assure you).

I love to go running, I go as often as I can. It clears the mind, and strengthens the body, but I can't stand running in cities. When you go running you need to breathe pure oxygen, nothing else will do. Unfortunately, cities aren't like that. First there's the smell of traffic. You know that can't be good for you. The fumes makes you choke, and then somebody will walk past you smoking a cigarette, and you can almost taste the poison. Next there's the smell of food cooking. Normally none of this bothers me too much, but being able to run requires a deep steady flow of oxygen to the lungs. Anything else is rejected. For me that's pretty good indication of what should be going into the air.

Imagine the factories spewing up noxious fumes into the atmosphere, polluting the air we breathe. It should be noted that this doesn't happen as much in the uk anymore, because most manufacturing has been moved offshore, to countries like india and china, which, along with the usa have become mega-polluters.

For some reason, because we can't see the air, we don't think that polluting it matters. It's only air after all, what good is it to us? We can't sell it. And as long as people keep demanding more and more stuff, we will continue to pollute. The general public demanded it, so how can we let them down? How can we let the world down?

Since the dawn of industrialisation, our cities have been covered in blankets of pollution, but it was all in the name of progress; progress that has made a few men rich, that is all. The legacy that has been left to us is pollution. It is interesting to note that nature leaves no trace when going about its complex work – everything is left in balance. We, on the other hand, have only been able to progress through the manufacture of machines.

To understand this better; next time you are by the ocean watch for a sailing boat on the water, powered effortlessly by the wind, silent and graceful. Compare that to the modern jet ski or speedboat which grates noisily through the water – its machine parts working at full speed. The sound is strange, it doesn't fit with the serene beauty of the ocean; like all man-made machines, their sound is artificial, metallic and not in harmony with nature. The sound of a car vs. a bicycle, the sound of a glider vs. a jet plane. There is just something about these man-made sounds which upsets us internally, which make us stressed.

Imagine all the cars in the city were powered by pedal power! How would the noise change? How would you feel? The wind (*air moving sometimes with considerable force*) from an area of high pressure to an area of low pressure can be very noisy, yet even the full force of a gale does not disturb in the same way as man-made noise, perhaps the tone is in balance with ourselves? Do you notice that it even feels strangely calming to be in bed when a gale is blowing?

I feel much the same way when standing by the sea during a storm. The wind is strong and the waves are crashing onto the shore, which is an altogether more noisy experience than standing by a building site, but which one is quieter? Which scene would calm you inside? Which scene would exhilarate you? The building site with its angle grinders, cranes, and hammers, or nature – angry and fierce? I know which one I would choose.

The power of the wind is incredible; it can flatten whole towns, so it seems only natural to want to harness some of that power. Using nature to power man-made machines is nothing new. Windmills have been around for several hundred years powering mills so it makes sense to use the wind to create power.

The new technology is called a wind turbine (*rotary engine in which the kinetic energy of a moving fluid is converted into mechanical energy by causing a bladed rotor to rotate*). Some say they are beautiful, others think they are a blot on the landscape, but whatever your view, they generate electricity. They just require two things, lots of wind and plenty of space, so they are pretty impractical if you want to have one in a city on your apartment building, but many generating companies have set up wind farms in isolated windy spots, and then carry the power through the grid (*a system of high tension cables by which electrical power is distributed throughout a region*).

Good or bad does not really apply here. It is renewable sustainable energy and has to be a positive step away from fossil fuels, gas, and nuclear, although we will never be able to generate enough electricity for us to keep consuming at the current rate – unless you want the whole country covered in windmills. The way forward is to reduce consumption, not try to match current consumption with “green” energy, don't you think?

Wind power is so new that negative aspects haven't been fully considered yet, but time will tell.

Man will always have an impact on the earth, as he is never satisfied, always exploring, always inventing, and inevitably, it is the earth and our fellow inhabitants who must pay the price. So next time you get in your car, or spew pollution from your factory, remember, you aren't the only one who needs to breathe the air on the planet.

Earth

1. *The solid part of the earth's surface*
2. *[archaic] Once thought to be one of four elements composing the universe (empedocles)*

The final part of the ancient four elements. The land we stand on. Terra firma. This is where we live. This is where we are born and where we die. This is where we love. This is where we hate and kill. This is where we are greedy and selfish. This is where we give birth. This is where we eat.

As we are not likely to grow gills and survive in the oceans any time soon, don't you think we had better start looking after this area. When you think about it, if you remove the oceans and the polar regions from the map, the available space we have for living is pretty small.

Wherever we live, whatever we do, whatever religion we are, we all want a piece of it! Just a small bit of land to call our own. Kings and rulers have been going to war for thousands of years just to get a bit more. You see, they all want what's in it. Not only is "owning" land a status symbol, there's also gold, minerals, and oil buried underneath it. If it's arable, crops can be grown on the surface, or if there are trees, they can be cut down for paper and wood.

For some people, the earth is just a means of making more money. They don't care what happens to the animals, insects or birds, they just want the money. Money to make themselves more important, to buy more influence with.

I wish I could say that this kind of attitude to life makes me angry, but it just makes me sad. Sad for the earth that is being exploited, and sad for the man who believes that making money is more important than being a custodian of the land for future generations of humans and animals.

A custodian sees a tree as something that brings life to the planet, that supports communities of birds and insects, whereas an exploiter just sees it as a commodity. I don't know about you, but to me, this seems terribly short sighted. We are on the earth for a maximum of one hundred years, then we die. Does it not seem important to you to look after something that has been around for four billion years? Can you understand that figure? 4,000,000,000! Four billion years versus our ludicrously short one hundred years (normally it's shorter).

Why are we deluding ourselves as to our own importance, when we can only live for a hundred years! What a joke we are; so full of self-confidence, so arrogant, so emotionally weak that we have to conquer everything and everyone in our path.

The more I consider the human being, the more I am convinced that he, unlike any other animal on this planet, is the odd one out. Needing assistance from the moment he is born, the human is not like the wild foal I watched being born last week, as it fell from its mother to the ground, and forty five minutes later – although shaky – was on its feet. No, humans are dependent on their mothers and fathers for protection for many years.

We do not instinctively know how to hunt for food; we do not even know what food it is we need! We have no fur to keep us warm; we are not strong enough to kill an animal with our bare hands; we have had to invent knives and forks to eat, and discover fire to cook with. We have had to invent clothes and shoes. We just don't seem to fit in. We are violent, we kill our own species for no reason. We seem so different from every other living thing on this earth, are we even sure we belong here?

Maybe we're on the wrong planet! Maybe we *did* originate somewhere else. Maybe we were made by a creator who wanted to make us "special." Maybe we are an alien race trying to fit in. Maybe we didn't come from the apes after all.

I think this can be the only reason we are so ignorant of our surroundings. All other species interact with the earth in harmony. They all have tasks to do, and do them well. We on the other hand destroy as much of nature as we can and kill each other as much as we can and kill as many other species as we can! We truly are unique, although the label of "most intelligent species on the planet" is looking pretty shaky now.

"Ahh, but the reason the animals work in harmony with nature is because they don't know any better" says you.

"That must be the reason we are intent on destroying everything, because we don't know any better," says me.

The alien theorists are right, I have to hand it to you guys. There is no way that homo sapiens originated on this planet. I have studied the evidence, and found no common link between us and this planet. All the other species have contributed to creating a harmonious world except us. Maybe we are all part of an experiment. Maybe to be human is just a test to see what we would do given limited intelligence, maximum ignorance and zero compassion?

Maybe we'll succeed in the next life, maybe we'll succeed on the next planet, or maybe we'll just go extinct. I'm sure there's an animal sweepstake out there betting on how long we'll last. Or maybe they're betting how long they'll last with us in charge.

For many years the four elements were thought to make up the physical universe. Now we have "disproved" the theory, but nonetheless these four elements, water, fire, air and earth make up the physical world as we know it. They are all equally important in our life, and the life of the planet as a whole. Science may have created new theories about the universe, but without these four elements this world would not exist.

These elements are still used in chinese and indian ayurvedic medicine, both widely respected throughout the world.

Let us tread carefully. Let us develop compassion, and be kind to the earth, to the air, to the fire, to the water, and all other living creatures, who are our fellow inhabitants. Let us show we *do* belong here.

W o r l d

Everything that exists anywhere

•

All of your experiences that determine how things appear to you

•

People in general; especially a distinctive group of people with
some shared interest

•

The 3rd planet from the sun; the planet we live on

•

The concerns of this life as distinguished from heaven and the
afterlife

As I was looking up at the millions of stars in the sky the other night, I unfortunately pondered the age old question, “I wonder where we are?” It may seem a strange question, but this is one which all of us want to know the answer to.

We all know we live on earth (the name we have given this spinning mass), but where are we?

Scientists have shown we are the third planet from the sun, and we are surrounded by galaxies, stars, and planets. For many years it was believed that the earth was flat, but it was then proved to be round. That means that if we live in the northern hemisphere, the people in the southern hemisphere live below us, or do they live above us? As space is potentially infinite we cannot say with any authority if there is an end, and we do not know which way is left, right, top or bottom. All we can say is that the earth moves around the sun and spins on an imaginary axis held in

place by gravity, and as that is the limit of my knowledge, I will not try to impress you further with my science!

So for now, we will all just have to accept that we are in something called “space” (because that's what it is, a space), and we are not able to put a physical location in it. This has troubled the greatest minds who have ever lived (including some of yours I imagine), because we cannot understand the concept of space. If it was created in a big bang, surely it had to be in a physical place? How could something be created out of nothing? If there was nothing before, what or who created something?

Needless to say, there are many people dedicating their lives to finding out more about our extraordinary planet, the space that surrounds us, and the origins of life; but for now, I would like to talk to you about something all together less scientific.

When I looked up at the stars the other night, I suddenly began to feel very small. The world I knew seemed, well, insignificant. I started to think about my life honestly, and what I had done, about what I used to believe was important and I came up with a short list.

1. Having fun
2. Going on holiday
3. Having nice things
4. Earning lots of money
5. Having attractive girlfriends

Shallow? Unthinking? Maybe, but for my age group and peer group these were what was important at the time. Can you come up with a short list of what you used to believe to be important in your life? Do it now if you can. I noticed that the things that were important to me were just enjoyment and acquisition of possessions. How many of you have similar things in your lists? I then wrote a new list of what is important to me now and compared it to the old one. I was astounded by the change.

1. To make a positive difference to the earth, and its inhabitants
2. To learn more about myself
3. To learn more about the world, and the universe
4. To help people understand themselves

When I finished writing, I realised that somewhere along the line I had recognised that there was a lot more to life than just my pleasure. Write a new list for yourself and see if anything has changed recently.

Every day on the news, we see video from some poor country around the globe. Great famines, floods, wars, corruption, or murders, and we think “that’s just terrible,” and may send a few pounds to a disaster relief campaign, or just shake our heads at “the state of the world;” but then we turn over to a nice sitcom, have a coffee, and carry on with our own lives.

“It’s a shame,” you say, “but what can I do?”

We see it as something so far removed from our own lives, that although we are sorry it happened, we are glad it doesn’t affect us. So, we *are* interested, but only as voyeurs, not as people deeply concerned for the rest of our fellow humans on this small planet.

When I think of the stars I watched the other night, and look at the images of earth from outer space, I realise it is only by looking at something bigger than your pleasure, your house, your street, your town, your city, your county, or your country, that you can really start to appreciate what the world is.

The magic, this amazing planet, the life, the beauty, the possibilities.

Now think of the other planets you see pictures of – the mass of swirling gases, the grey rock, the planets with no life on them, the freezing and boiling temperatures, storms covering the entire planets... uninhabitable... empty. Now think of the picture of earth again. The blue of the oceans, the greens of the fields, the browns of the deserts, the white of the clouds, and tell me where we live isn’t the most perfect place in the entire galaxy!

Some people obviously don’t think that the world is perfect, because they constantly want to destroy it, through wars, pollution, and the constant mining of resources. Perhaps some people haven’t looked up at the stars recently, perhaps they haven’t talked to the scientists, because if they did, they would realise we’ve got nowhere else to go.

Let’s face it, there isn’t anywhere like the earth that we know, and if we found somewhere, there would be *no way* to get six billion people there. Maybe the global leaders have found a new planet, but you can be sure there’d be no room for us on the plane!

It’s interesting to note that the same leaders who have developed and produced nuclear weapons which have the power to destroy everybody, and everything on this planet, have also developed nice nuclear fallout

bunkers, where they can live out the rest of their days happily, whilst everyone else is dead, or sick from radiation poisoning. Still, at least they killed *their* enemy.

So the next time you get a chance, look at a picture of earth on the internet, or in the library, and take time to just stand and stare at the stars one night, and just imagine how envious someone looking at the earth may feel. Everything in the world is perfect. The atmosphere is perfect. The oxygen is perfect. The animals, birds, and indeed all living creatures that share this planet are perfect. As humans we are perfect.

The only imperfection is our thinking

I can't understand what happened to us. We stand today as the most intelligent species on the planet, but after several million years of evolution, we still can't seem to get it right. Instead of using our massive brain capacity for the good of the planet and the benefit of our fellow inhabitants, we use it for greed, for power, for destruction, and for violence.

In fact, we are no better than we were a million years ago. We are still fighting over territory, women, food and water in much the same way we were when we started the long process of evolving all that time ago. Maybe we don't appreciate what we've got here on earth; maybe because we are only here for a short time we don't care; or maybe it will take another million years of evolution to get our thinking straight. Maybe the future inhabitants of earth will look back on this period in much the same way as we have at the cavemen – as savages. As humans only in name.

Perhaps we will be considered savage in our treatment of each other, our mistreatment of the animals, and the planet we live on. Perhaps the future inhabitants of earth will think themselves lucky that the planet wasn't destroyed, or maybe there won't be a planet left for them.

Maybe we will have destroyed it, either by war, recklessness or greed. Imagine that, our great earth lying dead. A giant mass spinning in space with the oceans destroyed, the atmosphere so hostile no life can exist; life as we know it, wiped out, extinct. For what? Because one man wants to get rich so he cuts down a rainforest, or because we can't walk anywhere, so we take the car, or because one man hates another because of his nationality, or doesn't agree with another's belief?

Imagine yourself as the visitor from another planet again now. Imagine sitting in your spacecraft above the earth, watching how we act, seeing what we care about, observing how we think. What would your opinion of us be? An advanced civilisation? Your forefathers made a report on the earth five thousand years ago. How has it changed?

Civilisation

A society in an advanced state of social development (e.g. with complex legal and political and religious organizations)

Report on earth 2006

Still fighting over religion and existence of god.

Still fighting over land.

Still hostile to other groups from other areas of the planet.

Still as violent as ever.

New:

Have invented transportation that is causing massive pollution.

Are using up resources at an extraordinary rate.

Have invented paper money – power and greed on a global scale.

Although food and water abundant, many millions starving to death.

Report conclusion: Do not visit for another 5000 years

We may have advanced in many ways in the last 5000 years, but what hasn't changed is our thinking. We may call ourselves civilised, with all our culture, and technology, such as opera, ballet, art, poetry, global agriculture, planes, skyscrapers and computer games. But we still haven't learned to show empathy, kindness and respect to each other; let alone care for the animals and the planet.

Look up at the stars tonight, and remember, that although we don't know precisely where we are in the universe, how the universe was created, or if we are indeed alone in space; there are six billion people here, plus all the billions of animals, birds, fish, insects, and reptiles to keep us company. We need to take care of them first. Starting right now.

Take your list of what you believe is important and see if the earth is on there. It didn't use to be on mine, but it is now.

W o r s h i p

The activity of worshipping

•

A feeling of profound love and admiration

•

Love unquestioningly and uncritically or to excess; venerate as an idol

•

how devotion to (a deity)

•

Attend religious services

This topic is going to be a hard one for me to write because I don't think I worship anything! I don't go to church, or a mosque; I don't go belong to a religious institution; I don't have images of christ or vishnu on my walls; I have no statue of the buddha; and I have no altar, but that's ok, because you probably do. So maybe you can help me understand why you worship a painting or a statue?

You say it is not the image that is important – because you know it is just a bronze statue or a painting made by man, but what is behind the image – the unimaginable, the powerful, the almighty, the unquestionable.

I shouldn't be surprised that people worship things. Since the dawn of man, he has been afraid. He was afraid of the sun's power, so he worshipped it. He was afraid of the stars, so he worshipped them, etc. And why wouldn't he be afraid? Born into emptiness, with no knowledge

of nature and the universe, he had no scientific evidence to show him he shouldn't be afraid.

He saw the devastation that sun, wind and rain could do. Great floods, great droughts, great ice ages – he had reason to be afraid. He was out of his depth here, and he didn't know how to control nature. So rather than trying to understand it, he supplicated himself in front of it. He made animal and human sacrifices to appease the “gods,” who were in fact, just nature at work, without design, without malice, without thought – but man wasn't to know that!

He thought he had offended the gods, so they brought great storms upon him, and he offered the only thing he had – no, not himself – other people! And if this didn't appease them, he sacrificed more people and more animals. How was he to know that if he just waited, the storms would calm down!

Man has always been afraid of the unknown, and as the obsession with science has proved, it is his desperate desire to be free of the unknown that has driven him to explore the universe and all things in it. To explain the unexplainable.

But even now, when we know so much about the universe scientifically, it's not enough for man. In the past he had no way to explain the messages the prophets brought about gods wrath, and the ending of the world etc. So just in case the messages were true, he decides to keep worshipping, just in case god gets angry. Thankfully, in most countries, human sacrifices have stopped as governments became jumpy about their citizens being murdered (even if it was in a good cause), although animals are still regularly slaughtered for this purpose.

So why is man still afraid of the wrath of the gods? Well, because he can't see god, and he can't explain everything, and rather than accepting that we are all part of the universe, and understanding that worshipping is keeping us in a state of fear, rather than releasing us from it, we put up our altars, we place images on them and say: “worship or be damned!”

For such a supposedly intelligent species, it makes me uneasy to think we are praying to what is little more than someone's interpretation of what this god looks like (whichever religion you support). Whether you worship allah, jesus christ or buddha (amongst others), it makes no difference. You are prostrating yourself in front of no more than a nice painting. Wouldn't you agree?

*How dare you insult our religion!
You will be damned, unbeliever!
You will spend all of eternity in hell!*

So ok, some of you may now have thoughts racing round in your head about the nerve of this man who is no one, insulting us, and the god we worship. But can I ask you one question before you hang me from my neck until dead? Why do you worship something which you cannot see? What purpose does it serve? Will you be given eternal life? Will you be offered a lifetime of wine and virgins to serve you? Or will it just be a beautiful place where you can float about looking angelic? If these places do exist, then why do you need to bother praying and worshipping to get in? Surely if god is the most powerful being in the universe, then he left space for everyone, not just those who say their prayers every day. Do you understand what I am trying to convey to you?

I do not want to offend the delicate thoughts in your mind, but if your parents and your teachers had not shown you how to pray, or taken you to the synagogue or the temple, would you go anyway and worship a statue? Of course you wouldn't. If I showed you a bronze sculpture of myself, would you worship me? If your mother had a painting made of herself, would you sit in front of it every day, praying to be saved from eternal damnation? No, unless she made you do it from a young age, and told you you would endure terrible suffering in the next life if you didn't.

You see, at the heart of it, we are terribly impressionable people, in that things make an impression on our mind, and if that impression is strong enough, and made at the right time, it stays with us forever.

I don't care if I go to hell. I don't care if I suffer the wrath of the gods, so why should you? Why not lead a compassionate and loving life here on earth, and let that be the end of it? If there is a day of judgement we will face it then, but if we have lived in service to others and loved our brothers and sisters like our own, then I'm sure even the most intolerant god would see fit to give you a pass, maybe even with distinction.

Remember, the most violent men on the planet worship god, but that is all show. They have been told that they should, or think that people will respect them because of it, but their lives reflect none of it. Kings and presidents have slain millions around the world in gods name. If I were god, I'd be saying: "Now wait a minute... I didn't agree to this..."

Let us pray

From an early age, our parents and religious leaders have forced us into prayer.

“Remember to say your prayers every night before you go to bed.”

And it all seems fairly innocuous. “What harm can it possibly do?” the parents ask. But you are being conditioned, you are having the image of god imprinted on your brain, you are being brainwashed.

Did you ever choose to pray, or go to church? Perhaps, when you needed support, but generally, worshipping god starts at a young age, adults make sure of it, and anyone who doesn't go is an unbeliever, a follower of satan, a moral bankrupt, and other pointless terms used to describe someone who doesn't conform. But god doesn't want you to do this. God didn't come and ask you to do this. God, who cannot be described, did not threaten you, or make you afraid – man himself did that.

Some people say that the act of worship makes them closer to god, but how do you know, have you investigated it for yourselves? You may feel better when worshipping, but it is fear that causes that. You feel fear, so you turn yourself over to a higher power because the books (written by man) tell you you will be safe.

I can hear the rage building in you now.

“How dare he! How dare he!” but listen to yourselves, to your own mind. Why is it annoyed I have said these words? Is it because it is now conflicting with everything you believe in – with everything you are? Good, that's promising! But let's move away from religious worship for a moment to see if we can shine a light on this from a different angle.

Worshipping celebrities is a new phenomenon, although the practice of worship is not. We hang the images high above us on our walls, and we gaze longingly at them. I say celebrities, but what I am talking about is well known people.

My girlfriend's mother has two huge posters on the lounge wall, one of che guevara (*an argentine revolutionary leader who was fidel castro's chief lieutenant in the cuban revolution; active in other latin american countries; was captured and executed by the bolivian army (1928-1967)*), who for some reason, became an icon, even though he was, in essence, just a soldier, and marilyn monroe (*united states film actress noted for sex appeal (1926-1962)*)

Now, whilst she cannot be said to be actively worshipping these icons, why does she have them hanging on her wall? She doesn't have huge poster size pictures of her neighbour down the road on the wall! This can only be part of the human need to look up to someone greater than himself. A parent is never enough. This person must be beyond reproach, or as we said earlier, above questioning.

Pop stars and “heroes” of the screen can be seen on children's walls, and whilst they physically replacing the religious icons, they do not replace the idea of being in awe (*an overwhelming feeling of wonder or admiration*) of someone they can never get close to, that they could only ever dream of meeting, because they are so wonderful.

Are they are so wonderful in real life? I'm not so sure, but it is the idea that makes people worship them, not the reality.

So on our little journey around the topic of worship, we can see that man has worshipped the sun, the moon and the stars, gods of the sea, and gods of love, through to the “one true god,” and finally, the gods of music, and the screen. Maybe it is just in our nature to worship beings we could never hope to be like, or things we are afraid of, or maybe I'm making a big mistake and am going to pay for it in the next life. But I won't be worshipping anything in the near future. An image can never be greater than all that we are. It is but an image.

I am a member of one species of planet earth – alive, vibrant, seeking truth. I am part of the universe and the universe is part of me. I am. I am indivisible.

Who am I? Just another ordinary human being. Not worthy of worship, but then again, why would you worship me? Then again, why would you worship anybody? You are great. Powerful. Creative. You are universal, but at the same time individual. You are perfect. Everything is in order.

X

Nothing to report thankfully!

Y

Y o u t h

A young person

As we reach the age of puberty (*the time of life when sex glands become functional*) something starts happening to the sweet little child the parents have known for the last twelve or thirteen years. Suddenly they find themselves living with a teenager! I have no children of my own, but I was a teenager, and I know what I was like...

Before I started writing this topic, I became concerned I wouldn't remember what teenage life was like as I am now 38, but fortunately, I have my girlfriend's 15 year old sister to observe, and the funny thing is, it seems teenagers haven't improved!

“But mum, why do I have to get up?”

“Because it's one o'clock in the afternoon!”

“Leave me alone, I'm tired”

“Get up you lazy *****”

“**** off”

The conversations that my girlfriend's sister has with her mum seem like a mirror image of the one's I had with my own mum twenty years ago. "No I won't come with you." No, I won't tidy my room." "No I won't help with the washing up." "I need some money." "I want to go out with my *friends!*" "You don't understand me!" And indeed, most parents can't understand their teenagers behaviour. It suddenly seems as if their beautiful child has been replaced by an evil alien from another planet.

"How could the child I brought up to be respectful, and thoughtful, be behaving like this? He must be taking drugs, there is no other explanation for it!"

Mum: I need to talk to you about your behaviour. Are you taking drugs?

Teenager: What?

Mum: I asked you a question!

Teenager: No, I'm *not* taking drugs!

Mum: Where are you getting the money for the drugs? Are you stealing from us?

Teenager: I told you, I'm not taking drugs, now get out of my room and leave me alone.

Mum: Well, where do you go every night? You didn't come home for two nights last week. Who are these people you are hanging round with? Are they taking drugs? Are they the ones giving them to you?

Teenager: God, I hate you, why can't you just fuck off and leave me alone. (slamming door)

Mum: (To herself) I knew he was on drugs, I must get him some help.

In how many homes do scenarios like this take place? A few, some, all? Well, the mum may not be talking about drugs, but I'm sure there is something they disapprove of their "child" doing. In other words, the parent is thinking: "why can't you be more like us."

Just because they don't go to rock concerts and don't wear the latest up to the minute fashion, don't have an mp3 player permanently attached to one ear, and a mobile phone attached to the other, they think their child shouldn't either.

It's not that they want to restrict their child, it's just that they compare their own childhood (in which they behaved perfectly of course) with their own child's, and come to the (usually wrong) conclusion that

their teenager is heading down the wrong path, will make a mess of their life, and won't achieve anything. But then, suddenly, the teenager is 18; the magic number! The government calls them an adult, and off they go to university or work.

Suddenly those few years of hell seem like a dream. Of course, most teenagers become well adjusted (even boring) adults. They were going through a phase, and it's now over.

Let me go mum

When we talk about the teenage years, we are not talking about a specific age, but specific things that are happening in the teenagers body, namely, they are reaching sexual maturity – the ability of the human to procreate, to start a family of their own.

Unfortunately, society has decided (sorry, the powerful in government have decided) to fight nature, and say that actually, no, you are not old enough to have children, you are not old enough to hunt and bring in food, and no, you are not old enough to live on your own. You must wait until you are at least 18. Until then you must do what your parents tell you!

We already have the longest childhood of any species on the planet, where a parent is legally responsible for a child for a minimum of 16 to 18 years, and we are kept tightly under control (for our own good, you understand?). When we reach puberty, we are ready to break free – at least biologically. We are ready to go out into the world and find a mate, and we are constantly tugging at the leash. But our parents know that if we went out into the modern urban world at 14, we wouldn't survive, although only 60 years ago, most of my mum's family had to leave school at 14 and go out to work, with one uncle even lying about his age to get into the merchant navy.

They (parents and those in power) say we are not mature enough, yet nature does. They say we will not survive out there as it is a dangerous world, but it is also dangerous when you are 18 too. So what's it really to do with? Well, there are two things.

First those who control society want you to study and pass exams so you can get a good job and start paying your taxes. Second, parents and teachers fear that if you go out into the world at 13, you will not be psychologically mature (although you will be physically mature) enough to deal with life, will possibly be exploited by others, and if you are a

female, probably made pregnant, where you would end up on the street, with no way to feed and clothe yourself or the baby. So all in all, it's best to stay at home, do what your told, and wait until you are psychologically mature enough to deal with life!

It's not like it used be, I remember in my day...

We are not biologically equipped to deal with this modern world we have created. Nature didn't count on us building desolate concrete cities. Perhaps nature still imagines that we will be living in the forest, or somewhere like that, where we will hunt, and gather berries, clothe ourselves in animal skins or something similar, and bring our children up in small tribes. That is, of course, not how we have organised our society these days.

We are getting further and further away from what we are biologically equipped for. But there's no point in fighting it. This is the society we have created and we must live in it. Thanks to modern society becoming so dangerous, and parents being so loving, I'd say that teenagers have never had it so good. In your grandfather's day, you'd have been forced to leave school and get a job. You'd have had to look after yourself, and the family you would create.

No, life's pretty good these days. Teenagers get to hang around trying to look "cool," talking a load of rubbish, drinking, smoking, taking drugs, having sex, and still they get looked after! They get their meals cooked for them, their clothes washed, they get shelter, food, water, some even get money.

Hey, what are you complaining about? Life as a teenager is great. You may have the biological urge to go off and have sex with anything with a pulse, and yes, your parents may not "understand" you, but it's a darn sight better than having to go out to work every day, pay for your rent and your food, and support a family, in addition to the fact that you are not seemingly psychologically ready for the urban lifestyle. So if I were you, I'd keep my mouth shut about how bad you've got it, you've got a pretty sweet deal!

In some countries, children are sent out to work as soon as they are able to, and they get none of the benefits of the western lifestyle. They send children and teenagers out to work in sweat shops that provide us with cheap clothes, and some even are forcibly conscripted into the army in some parts of the world! Imagine what that life must be like as a

teenager in places where you are forced out to work in a dangerous job? No hanging around the shopping malls looking cool, swapping ringtones on your bluetooth enabled phone. Just work. Work. WORK.

Are you the future?

Everyone says that the teenagers are the future. They say these are the people who will look after us in our old age, so let's make sure they get the best possible chance, the best education, and the best support! We make them study, study, study, at a time when their internal clock is telling them "it's time to flee the nest and start procreating!"

"If you don't study, you will be a failure," we tell them.

"How will you get a good job?" We ask them. Because of course that's what it's all about, getting a good job. So they reluctantly study when they would rather be out practising their newly developed social skills. Do you see?

Forcing teenagers to study goes against all of their natural instincts, but as adults, who live in this competitive urban environment, we see at first hand what happens when you don't study – you are forced into a dead end manual job, with long hours, and little pay – and as we brought you into the world we are going to make damn sure it doesn't happen to you! So we say study, study, study. And the teenagers who cannot yet see the monstrous society we have created say: "Why? I just want to go out with my friends tonight."

But we want them to fill their heads with knowledge to pass exams. We want them to conform – not because we want to control them – but because we know they will be miserable in later life if they don't put the effort in now. But this is not the time to be filling teenager's heads with knowledge. They are not interested in doing what someone else tells them to do, they are doing what any self respecting homo sapiens should be doing, and that is exploring life! And explore life they do, whether it be sexually or socially.

We must remember that man is a sexual social animal, so to deny it is more dangerous than permitting it. Teenagers must explore their own bodies, and each other's bodies. They must mingle with different social groups to find out where they feel most comfortable, but we say: "No! You *will not* go out with these people. You *will not* have sex before you are 18" and the teenager rightly says: "Up yours, I'm going to do it

anyway.” So we must not let our children stop exploring life. They will make mistakes and they will learn from them.

They are capable of great things these young people. But to deny them their freedom of expression just because you don't like it, is idiotic! It doesn't matter if they are “making a fool of themselves,” or “they are making a big mistake,” it is their life. They are the future, but only because they will live longer than we will (perhaps).

As parents, or as educators, you have to learn that this is an important time for teenagers. Because it is *their* time. It is not a time to be enforcing rules and regulations, but helping them to explore life to its fullest extent. You may think that because you have experience of life that you have the answers, but nobody has all the answers that these teenagers are seeking, because they are looking at life through fresh eyes, which hopefully have not been conditioned too much already.

I didn't study hard at school. I didn't go to university. I didn't even finish school properly, now I come to think of it. I did nothing my parents told me, in fact, I did the opposite. I got drunk, slept around with women, got up late, and did little work; but did it affect me as an adult? I mean really affect me? Of course not. It was all part of growing up, of tugging on the leash; until one day it broke, and I was free to make as many great discoveries, or mistakes as I wanted to. By then though no one cared. I was over 18. I was an adult.

University and beyond

I'm not surprised teenagers are tired and irritable while they are growing up. They are having to deal with some serious chemicals in their bloodstream (no, I'm not talking about taking drugs). I'm talking about hormones. Boys are discovering the power of testosterone, and girls are discovering the wonders their monthly cycle (*the monthly discharge of blood from the uterus of non-pregnant women from puberty to menopause*) can do to their emotions. Crying, anger, you know the sort of thing. At the same time, they are forced to study, and fill their brains with mainly useless knowledge which will probably never come in handy in later life.

Eventually at the age of 18 you are finished. Your hormones have settled down, the government has told you you are an adult, and you can go and fight for your country, or drink beer. Unfortunately, in some countries, you have to wait until you are 21 so you can find out what you have been missing!

You can get a job, or if your grades are good enough you can apply to go to university (which is like school except you can drink beer, have sex and party without your parents being around, and it puts off having to get a job for another few years), oh, and sorry, learn a lot about a subject you are deeply interested in.

If you complete the three years or more of study, you will be able to get a much better job than if you left school at 18, or you can continue studying and maybe go into academic life.

At university you will get to use your mind more. You will explore, you will be creative, and it will be encouraged by your lecturers. They do not want you to just repeat what you have read. They want you to redefine it, investigate it, argue the case for it and against it and at the end of your course of study you will usually be asked to do a dissertation (*a treatise advancing a new point of view resulting from research; usually a requirement for an advanced academic degree*). If you pass, you will be awarded a degree, and sent off into the world much cleverer than you would have been if you hadn't gone to university. Then, unless you are carrying on in academic research you *will* have to get a job of some kind!

Now, I don't want to go into all the boring stuff about how important it is to choose the right company for your career. In fact, I don't want to go into jobs at all. I want you to think about university. I want you to remember the magic of discovery, of investigation, of being immersed in a subject you were passionate about, and now think about what life has in store for you in the future.

Is that the end of learning? Are you now just a conformist?

You may have been a revolutionary at university, and now you are going to be a corporate banker! Think about how you felt when you were with other students all embarking on an exciting new journey of discovery. The things you learned from each other, the things you discussed, the passion you displayed when arguing your case, and now think about your future. What will you do with that investigative spark, will you just let it die, and join everyone else in the rat race, getting up at 6.00 am, home at 8.00 pm?

“Nice day at the office, dear?”

“Terrible, I need a drink.”

Do you want to join in with the misery we have created for ourselves, or do you want to find out if there is something more, something wonderful? All this learning, all the pain of being told to go and study and do your homework, being told you can't go out, you can't have a boyfriend, or girlfriend. All the protection that was given to you, and

suddenly it's all over, and you are tipped out into the madness of the modern world.

What was the point of all that learning? What was the point of all the trouble you put your parents through while you were growing up? Is there any point at all? I urge you to use your mind and go and explore the universe with it! Never stop questioning. That's what learning is all about, exploration, not passing exams or getting a job. That's just plain boring! No wonder teenagers hate it.

Z

Z o o

The facility where wild animals are housed for exhibition

Have you ever been to a zoo? I have, but not for many years. It's a place where you can see animals, birds, insects, reptiles, and fish at close hand, in a safe environment. I was amazed by the giraffes, the bears, the tarantulas, the monkeys, and seals. They had every type of creature imaginable.

Schools often make trips there so the children can see the animals. Most adults, let alone children, would never get the chance to see a parrot from south america, a bear from china, or a penguin from antarctica, so zoos are an important part of the education process.

Zoos started several hundred years ago with the explorers bringing back exotic species to their own countries. They studied them, labelled them, and put them on view for the public. Of course, the public were in

awe of these magnificent creatures, and it gave the scientists a lot of prestige for discovering new species. Today, millions of people learn about creatures they have not seen before, and scientists breed animals in captivity who would otherwise go extinct. They also protect endangered species.

So is there anything wrong with zoos? They all seem to be doing a pretty good job – until you see it from the animal perspective.

I am not saying that these animals are not cared for or loved by the people who look after them, but recently, I started to think about the animals in the zoo in England I had seen, all thousands of miles away from their natural habitat. Elephants in concrete pens, tarantulas behind glass, parrots behind bars, and I wondered how free they would feel back in their home. I imagined the elephant running across the plains of Africa with her herd, the spider creating her web and catching prey, and the parrot stretching her wings, and flying through the treetops. Then I thought back to the dull man-made environment we had created for them. For our pleasure, not theirs.

We say: “They’re not unhappy, they like it here,” but we can’t know that. If I was used to being able to fly in the treetops, a cage would come a pretty poor second, don’t you think? We say: “They haven’t known anything else, they were born here,” but animals belong in the wild. We say: “If they were in the wild, they would become extinct,” but it isn’t our job to save all animals from extinction – natural selection takes care of that complex task.

On first inspection, it would seem that we care deeply about the living world around us, but if we look more closely, we see that once again, it is our need to control our environment. We can’t work with it, we don’t understand it, so we capture it, lock it up, study it, and charge people to see it.

We have internet, we have books, we have tours, we have film. We have so many resources available to us if we wish to study nature in its own habitat, but we’re too lazy, we prefer to have the entire natural world arranged for us in an exhibition that takes no longer than two hours to get round. Think about it. Are you that interested in nature that you would fly or cycle around the world to see it, even if you had enough money? I doubt it.

If it’s easy we’re interested. If someone else lays it all on for us, we’ll go, but don’t ask us to go to the Amazon to study the bird in its natural habitat; (a) it’s much too difficult (b) we’d probably want to open a new

hotel there, and (c) as the dominant species on the planet, it is our right to do whatever we want!

But just imagine for a moment that we weren't the dominant species on the planet, and there was a species that was smarter and stronger than us, and wanted to collect us, study and exhibit us.

Imagine being stuck behind a glass cage, with something strange looking at you, all day, every day; or imagine being stuck behind bars so you couldn't run, or locked in a concrete pen every night away from your family and kind. Even if you were born there, even if they say you would become extinct out in the wild again, wouldn't you want to be free in your natural environment?

Pet Shop

A shop where pet animals can be purchased

For me personally, pet shops are similar to zoos, in that they have a voyeuristic quality to them.

How many times have you gone into a pet shop – as a child or an adult – to look at all the “cute” animals? We look at all the different kind of pets, which you remember are “*a domesticated animal kept for companionship or amusement,*” choose one, and hand over money. At this point we become the owner of the pet. It is ours by law, and anyone who takes it from us can be prosecuted for theft.

Think about the word “owner.” We apply it to everything we possess, except the items we normally own are not alive and do not feel pain or distress. We always want to own things, to possess them. We want to accumulate “things” and animals become part of this desire. We want them and we shall have them! All we need to do is come up with £2.00 for a mouse, £8.00 for a guinea pig, £10.00 for a rabbit, £200.00 for a cat, or £300.00 for a dog. How much are you worth? £10.00? £200.00? £1,000? £100,000?

This discussion is not about money though, it's about how we humans place a monetary value on everything. Everything becomes for sale. It doesn't matter if it's a table, a tv, or a south american parrot. Everything is just a commodity to us. We just can't see the planet as a whole; we still cannot see animals, birds, spiders, and fish as being part of our world, in the same way we are part of theirs. We isolate ourselves from them, and isolate them from each other by keeping them in our homes.

We have domesticated some species to such an extent that they are now dependent on us for food and water, and in return, they keep us amused, until they do something wrong or we grow tired of them.

How many of you have owned a dog? I had a golden labrador. He was very amusing, but ate his way through most of my apartment, including shoes, clothes, furniture, and a good selection of electrical cables. I loved him to bits, but he was so uncontrollable; I didn't train him right and he used to run off whenever he felt like it, or eat food off the table. I used to hit him every time he did that, but he still kept wagging his tail. I used to get so angry when he didn't do as he was told, why couldn't he just listen to me?

The problem is, we blame the animal for behaving in an animal like way, when in actual fact we want them to be like us. We want them to know it is wrong to go to the toilet on the carpet (what's a carpet?) or eat food from the dinner table (what's a dinner table?). We want them to behave (behave?) and obey us (obey?).

You see dogs can't understand these concepts, but we still expect them to, and when they don't understand (as they are animals who don't speak our language), we get frustrated, and show this physically in the form of anger at the poor dog. If it becomes too much you can always give him away, or if he becomes a bit "aggressive" you can always "put him to sleep" (have him killed) as someone I know did.

Before I went travelling around the world I gave my labrador away as I couldn't take him with me. It was a good home, and he was probably well looked after, but I can't help thinking I treated him in the same way as I treated my sofa and tables and chairs. I just gave him away like I would any other possession, with no respect for the fact that he was a living creature, and that's the problem with keeping pets. They are just for our amusement. Not because we love nature. Not because we are deeply interested in dogs, cats, reptiles or birds; but just because we can have them and we have some money to buy them.

Whatever our reason for keeping animals out of their natural environment, whether it be scientific, because we want to protect them, or just look at them whether in a zoo or at home; if you have to keep something in a cage to stop it from running away, it probably doesn't want to be there.

Let's hope no future intelligent species decides to keep humans as pets otherwise we've got an unhappy future ahead of us, with a collar attached to a metal lead stuck in a cage, with one meal a day and a bowl of water with people looking at us all day. At least cats and dogs have come so far

in domestication that we can leave them to run around freely; you couldn't do that with a human, he would keep trying to escape.

So next time you look into your bird cage, watch your fish swimming in the tank, admire your reptile, or visit the zoo, imagine the land where they came from, and imagine them back in the wild, free where they belong.

Closing Dialogue ~ Volume III

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 II

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
alan@thenaturalmindproject.org

Telephone : +44 (0)20 3239 1422

Ps. If you would like to help with the translation of this book into your own language please contact me.

