

# **Becoming Human Again**

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**From Sheeple to People**

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## INTRODUCTION

### **What We Have Lost**

My father's love, adoration, and respect for nature materialized every time he mused about the Swiss Alps. He worshipped those peaks so much; the fervor would bring tears to his eyes. I loved watching him passionately planning hiking trips with his many elaborate Swiss trail maps. It was utter delight. He never failed to surprise us with new paths and hidden wonder in the midst of marvelous, far-off valleys. Surrounded by such pristine scenery, my father felt whole and complete.

Memories of his many Alps adventures were probably what he reflected upon in his last moments on Earth.

My beloved, humble father appreciated and abided by the laws of the universe. He understood and treasured nature and animals. He knew that nature is a gift to humanity that needs to be respected, not destroyed. His idealistic persona detested the waste prevalent in the world, and the abuse and devastation of things and matter. "Why do we need all this materialism, ego, and superficiality in the world, when none of it brings inner happiness?" he often wondered. His hard but rich life had always been dominated by his humility, simplicity, and goodness. I knew my father had always been content deep inside.

There was a definite resemblance between him and the Native Americans, who lived in harmony with Earth. The following quote from a Native American Elder could have come right out of my father's mouth: "Honor the sacred. Honor the Earth, our Mother. Honor the Elders. Honor all with whom we share the Earth: Four-leggeds, two-leggeds, winged ones, swimmers, crawlers, plant and rock people. Walk in balance and beauty." All things are

interrelated. Everything is part of a single whole. My dad knew this.

He never fit in to today's "screw anyone to get ahead" world. I remember our neighbor, a crook who tried to embezzle land from my family; this person haunted my father's sensitive soul for years. He never forgot the man's repulsive actions; they saddened him deeply. The rapid and widespread increase of people with selfish, disrespectful demeanors shrank his general confidence in the human race. "How can this world survive with all these self-serving egoists?" he lamented.

Whenever possible, he avoided people who exuded bad energy. He sought quality and surrounded himself with like-minded humans who radiated integrity, not dishonesty. Needless to say, my dad had few friends.

His connectedness to nature continuously sharpened his psychic intuition and ability to read people. My family called him the household psychic, as his predictions always came true. He was a man of few words. But when he spoke, everyone listened. As he got older, his insights were more and more in demand. Many asked for his opinion. He never cared about the source of this perception, this guidance. The insight was simply there and he was in tune with it.

Perhaps in a place like Mendocino, California, my father would have been labeled a visionary from the Aquarian Age, or a reincarnated medicine man. But he was simply a human, an altruistic war generation child who knew how to survive on water, bread, and his instincts. No labeling was necessary. My dad simply *was*.

All his life he had worked hard on our ranch. I had never heard him complain about the daunting workload or the long hours. Instead, he found fulfillment in working so closely with nature and with his true love—my mom. They worked side by side, every day. She was the

only woman he ever loved and had been with. The blessed couple missed their fifty-year anniversary by only a few months.

Not only did my dad have a healthy spiritual life, he followed equally high standards when it came to food. He nourished his body temple with an abundance of fruits and veggies from my mom's garden. Foods from far away places rarely made it onto his dinner plate. He thought it was nonsense to ship food all over the world and drizzle it with chemicals to ensure preservation and good flavor. Mother Nature agrees with him.

To our great shock, he left his body much too early, at age seventy-seven. His death came as the result of a combination of an accident and a physician's wrong diagnosis. I get to this in a later chapter.

When my father died, he left not much more than his footsteps behind. No massive SUV with tinted windows, no robotic lawnmower, no garage bursting with junk or a closet exploding at the seams with never-worn clothes and gadgets. He knew better than that. A new toy never gave him the same tingle as tending his rose garden did.

I can count on two hands the number of times he went on a shopping spree. Why consume excessively when less is more? Family, a good glass of Swiss wine (it had to be Swiss), good chocolate, contemplation, and nature were all that he desired. In this world, he was content and centered, and he had no reason to escape. Home meant happiness for him.

The last time I got to spend time with my dad was on a trip to the south of England. We visited a town called Lynmouth in the county of Devon. When we arrived in Lynmouth, an ebb tide held all the boats in the harbor hostage in the mire. All the water had drained out to sea. Later that evening, a fierce tide rolled in. None of us had ever seen such a remarkable change in water levels in such a short time.

My father, not in good health any more, stood by the window of our quaint old hotel, named The Rising Sun, and stared out to sea with a smile on his face. He witnessed this natural wonder with astonishment. It seemed like every cell of his body was present in that very moment. I will never forget this picture of contentment and gratitude for nature's spectacle. I am so glad that I could share this precious moment with him. Little did I know it would be our last trip together.

I inherited my love and respect for animals and Earth from my father. He taught me how to be mindful and self-responsible at an early age. From him I learned about cause and effect. What we put out comes back in one form or another. If we treat Earth with respect and listen to our inner guidance, life flows. A life disconnected from the *inner*, nature, and others causes grief.

Today, few people exhibit the positive human qualities that defined my father's character. Few of us appreciate or practice integrity, humility, or the concept of *being* or "less is more." We have replaced such virtues with ego, arrogance, gluttony, and greed. The masses choose screens over greens. With so many sales, bargains, special offers, and two-for-one deals out there, we can't resist; we behave like squirrels, piling up possessions, overeating, and elbowing our way up the ladder to compete with the world and God, and fight against nature.

Our lives are void of substance, consideration, and meaning. We seem to have fluttered blindly into a black void. What my father had—love, fulfillment, mindfulness, a connection to nature—we lack. In short, we have lost the ability to be human, to be in touch, to pursue our higher calling. The wonderful qualities that make humans human have been substituted with fluff and buzz. Surveys show that the average American receives some five thousand external stimuli per day and spends more than eight hours a day in front of screens—televisions,

computer monitors, cell phones, gaming consoles, and so on. Whereas in earlier ages people worked in their gardens, played an instrument, went fishing, read books, entertained guests, or engaged in conversation with family or friends, they now have become passive and speechless consumers of canned content. TV produces people who have lost the ability to think, reason, and just *be*.

In this book, I will share observations and facts about why and where we are off track and how we can change.

What qualifies me to write this? What makes me the expert on these topics? I am an outsider looking in. I researched our off-base society for three years and combined that research with the personal observations I made in various countries and cultures. The lessons life taught, the experiences I had, enabled me to gain the insight required to write this book.

I have lived in the US, UK, Switzerland, Canada, Sri Lanka, and Peru; enjoyed extensive travels to over seventy countries; and immersed myself in various local cultures and lifestyles. After completing my business studies at Long Beach College, I worked as a business program manager in the US and abroad for many years. I have managed a variety of large projects in the fields of humanitarian aid, banking, airlines, and logistics and information technology. I also ran an import-export business during college, and to this day, own an online clinical nutrition practice (I am a licensed clinical nutritionist). I wanted to try different things and didn't want to be stuck in the same job, or the same country, for life. Doing the same thing for too long always bored me, so I picked a profession (project manager) I could do anywhere, and at any time. I wanted to taste life from all angles.

While in Sri Lanka (working as a program manager in humanitarian aid), I studied Buddhism and Tantra. The knowledge I gained there deepened my meditation practice. At the

same time, I dipped into the areas of visualization, meditation, and the practice of Ho'oponopono. Later, at the Monroe Institute in Virginia, I learned to expand my consciousness using Hemi-Sync meditations (a system developed by the late Robert Monroe). There, I had several profound, transformative experiences. It is one thing to read about the "other worlds," but quite another to actually push boundaries and delve into those realms. My Monroe excursions made me realize that there is no difference between our outer and inner worlds. The two have always been merged together. As without, so within. As within, so without. Both worlds are a reflection of each another. Because our inner world is greatly neglected, the outer world shows the ugly face as well. If we were in tune with the humanness in us, the planet would change too.

I realized what limited versions of humans we permit ourselves to be. Some cultures have a better approach to finding this humanness than others. India still promotes enlightenment as a possible human accomplishment. But this belief in enlightenment is being eradicated as the nation also falls for the "in" Western culture of hamburgers and Hollywood.

My observations on humans, politics and cultures and the controls we willingly succumb to are what motivated me to write this book. We can *be* so much more than androids. In this book I point out what dehumanized lives we lead, how *managed and controlled* we are and what actions we need to take to go beyond that. This book will change the way you think and look at many topics. Things you thought were real and factual may prove not to be. This book will reveal the truth about topics you thought you knew everything about. Some of these revelations may shock you. Some may have been things you suspected. But all of these ideas are imperative for you to know in this day and age.



My research and insight have enabled me to understand our society, even at its deepest levels. I get the current human and political abnormalities. I see the writing on the wall. I don't believe we can continue living the way we are used to. I spent countless nights investigating societal trends. Many experts and common people agree with me. Numerous people encouraged me to share this info with you. And this is what I am doing.

I will be asking some uncomfortable questions which must be brought up at this time. Not only must we ask; we have to act—for our sake, for the world's sake, and for the next generation's sake.

Society has moved too far from reality and from being human. We run on autopilot, in a trance, hypnotized by the establishment and the media. We do as we are told. Nowadays, with vibrations getting higher, and with the Aquarian Age upon us, we must set in motion our true potential, reveal our true humanness, and wean ourselves off the pacifier. What do I mean by this? We need to start thinking for ourselves again and not simply adopt the truths that are spoon-fed to us. It could very well be that the corporations and the government did not make society's well-being their number one priority, which means it's our job to do so. We are in charge. We are alone.

The road back to self-responsibility, to humanness, is arduous, but exciting. Let's start with one step at a time. The solution to the world's looming demise is a matter of realizing what is going on, seeing the intricacies involved, understanding the connections between them, and then taking action. Enjoy this book. I hope you will learn from it and be able to make any positive changes needed in your life.

Becoming human again is the name of game if we want this planet to be able to breathe once more.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Our Way of Life Isn't Sustaining Us**

The average day-to-day hand-to-mouth hustle and bustle we call life is not life. It is mere subsistence or survival. It is just “getting by”. This frantic way of life isn't sustaining us; it does not nourish us, nor does it lead to a greater expression of our human nature. The average human, one who is not in tune with his or her consciousness, is not having the fun that he/she is supposed to have—because the average human believes that all that they are is brain only and nothing beyond.

We tend to run on autopilot, managed by our outer influences and circumstances, hooked into a matrix medium that tells us how to behave, what to care about, and how to treat folks who stray from this consensus that is spoon-fed to us. People are literally programmed into accepting an artificial false reality that bears little resemblance to what is actually taking place in the real world. Humans today are completely out of touch with their inner world. They know neither themselves nor their potential; they are not sensitive to the world that they live in. Such humans use, abuse, exploit and never give back to others or creation. This kind of human is an aberration of nature. This human fights the world, rather than lives in unison with it.

The indoctrination into our culture and society, which we undergo as children, disconnects us from the magical nature that surrounds us, a world that almost seems forbidden. The indoctrination locks us inside ourselves, inside mathematical conundrums and academic exercises, and forces us to *make* something of ourselves rather than to just *be* someone. Our indoctrination also neglects to include teachings about the other senses we may have within

us—call it consciousness, psychic intuition, or simply a gut feeling. Why, though, when it could be such an invaluable tool? Why, when during a midlife crisis some of us are finally going to discover our “prisonality,” the prison we have locked our *self* in and which has kept these senses and treasures away?

Isn't being in tune with *self*, and nature, the most natural way to live? Isn't trusting the signs that we get from the divine, and from our inner guidance, the way to love and contentment? Isn't this the path that could lead to happiness and self-expression? Or is someone afraid that we would become too powerful if we used those human senses that are inside us and rightfully belong to us? Why are we not encouraged to use these gifts, which are instead downright shunned by our institutions?

For whatever reason, we are being led down the wrong path. Instead of finding true pleasure from within by activating consciousness via meditation or some other means, we search the world over for happiness. However, true pleasure is not outside of yourself; it is right there inside you, slumbering. Consciousness, awareness, and nature can deliver it right to you.

I often wonder why we build fortresses and shoot cannonballs at creation, when it has always rolled out the red carpet for us. Fulfillment stems from integration, not defeat of the very soil that nurtures. As children, we know this; we are pure, *clean* humans. As we get older, we become stuffed with fluff and buzz. In addition, because of all the negatives, (hatred, anger, behavioral patterns that we keep repeating, bad thoughts, greed, and addictions) our minds are unable to think clearly and logically. When we do act, we are forced to make our way through this rubble first, this trash that we carry with us, which leads to results that are less than ideal. Look at the world. The world reflects what is within us. Is it healthy? No! It's sick—just like

our inner realm. Again - as within, so without. If we could manage to deep-clean our inner realm, the world would be a lot more harmonious than it is today. Hence, if more people were to live and act like my dad, we could perhaps prevent disasters such as the Gulf of Mexico oil Armageddon of 2010.

### **Debbie and Johnny**

To understand the problems that we face today, let's check out \*Debbie and \*Johnny, a somewhat typical, couple who resides in the deep Midwest. They are not so happily married, and are not sure they will ever live the elusive American dream.

Johnny's commute on pothole-riddled freeways takes an hour each way. Almost every morning, he stops at McDonald's for a fast, greasy bite. In the car, he wolfs down his substandard meal while multi-tasking: driving, using his BlackBerry or fiddling with the radio dials. By lunch, he might not even remember what he had devoured for breakfast. The quality of his lunch will strongly resemble that of the fast food he ate earlier. Most days, he arrives at the office late and stressed out because of the thick traffic and because he has been doing too many things while driving. Johnny hates his dead-end job as a business analyst and avoids his co-workers. Because of all his debt, however, he hangs onto his job like a drowning rat clings to a limb in a river. Johnny is merely surviving in his paycheck-to-paycheck world. He detests his job and the rat race.

As a child, Johnny had dreams of becoming a famous sports reporter, but now he sees no way to break out of his rut and pursue his passion. He is stuck in the mud. A career change is impossible, he thinks, and besides, he knows that deep down, he lacks ambition. So he keeps plugging away.

The reason he is in so much debt is his recent purchases—an expensive condo in downtown Chicago, and a new SUV. Debbie, his wife, refuses to live in the cheaper suburbs. With those two financial obligations, plus their student loan repayments, the couple is seriously strapped for cash. His liabilities are Johnny's worst nightmare. His reality does not look even remotely like the one his parents tried to encourage him to achieve.

After an exhausting drive home, Johnny has no interest in cooking, going for a walk in the nearby park, or venturing out to the gym. His nightly routine is to drink a can of beer and watch the ballgame on TV. His favorite team is the Chicago Cubs. He knows intricate details about every player and never misses a game. His closet is stacked with memorabilia. In comparison, world events, politics, the state of the nation—reality—are of zero interest to him.

In the evening, once Debbie is home, they throw what is supposedly good food into the microwave and devour it while watching the Cubs or surfing the Net. The couple doesn't talk about the day's events together. In fact, few words are spoken, much of the conversation is focused on TV shows and sports. To escape reality by means of entertainment is too easy. Weekends are spent in a similar fashion—at baseball games, in front of the tube, or out at the local pub discussing the Cubs.

Debbie, thirty-seven, works hard and puts in a ton of overtime as a financial analyst. She often compares herself to a hamster on a treadmill. At the bank, everyone is replaceable; it is a constant struggle to survive. She had expected the two of them to be much better off by now, but they'd spent way too much money on crap they didn't need. The garage was full of it. Despite her expensive education and work experience, life is not working out as she had envisioned. *Thank God I never got pregnant*, she often thinks. She believes that having a child

would have messed up their situation even more. She knows that buying the posh condo had been a big mistake; they had signed the contract in a moment of utter folly. But now it is far too late for what ifs. They are trapped with their dreadful investment. Some days, thinking about their gigantic mortgage makes her sick.

The abundance of fretting, bickering, and worrying saps all the remaining energy out of her and the marriage. They silently blame each other for not making enough money and for choosing bad investments. They fault the bank for approving their mortgage. In addition to his financial strain Johnny has, at only thirty-nine years of age, awful health. And Debbie cannot believe how little interest Johnny has in improving it. The situation is starting to irritate her more and more. He struggles with obesity and depression. Debbie constantly reminds him to exercise and eat healthier—without success. Johnny simply lacks motivation to move, and instead turned to Prozac. His physician had prescribed the magic pill to cure all of Johnny's ills. In some ways it helped, but it also makes him feel numb. "Sex on the antidepressant feels synthetic," he tells Debbie. Their bedroom exercises had never produced Chinese fireworks before, but on the drug, they have become an actual chore.

Their lackluster bed activity nearly breaks Debbie's sanity and spirit. At her age, she is supposed to be having the sex of her life! She feels as if she is living with a brother, not a lover and husband.

The stress, the worries, the lack of love, and Johnny's reluctance to address his obesity turned Debbie into a stressed out wreck. She developed insomnia and pops Tylenol PM to get some rest, but that leaves her a drowsy mess the entire next day. Only shopping brings her the needed relief. A new pair of shoes, cool pants, a fancy purse—such purchases make her happy, temporarily. During a spree, she can successfully block out thoughts of their bank balance. But

then, after the day of shopping ends, reality hits her in the face. Again, she has spent money they don't have.

To combat her worries, and despite her exhaustion, she somehow always manages to go to the gym a few times a week. One thing is for sure: she does not want to end up fat like her husband.

Debbie wonders if divorce is the only answer. But merely thinking about the potential hassle makes her dizzy. She has no energy for it. What would happen to the condo? The cars? Could they even afford to get divorced? On her own, she could only afford to rent a shoebox. She postpones such thoughts until tomorrow.

All she ever wanted in life was to be happy and in love with someone successful who would travel the world with her. When was the American dream going to come true for her?

### **What Went Wrong?**

Why the need for this story? Many, just like this couple, subsist instead of live. Debbie and Johnny merely survive in the shallow, loveless lives they have carved out for themselves. They don't know any better. The couple put their heads down and keeps moving ahead, instead of reevaluating life and looking at fresh choices. Sadly, they seem overwhelmed, unable to react, stuck in the mud. Who are they? They have no clue. Why are they here? They don't care. The couple is disconnected from themselves and from simply *being*. Doing is all they know. The focus is on making ends meet and hoping for a better day, and in the process, life is passing them by too quickly. They are living in a cage, cut off from consciousness and nature—or, as Debbie rightly perceives it, like hamsters spinning in a wheel, a wheel that is ever spinning faster.

The couple symbolizes much of what is wrong with today's society. They operate on autopilot. They do as instructed by the manipulating private and public institutions. They consume as told, eat as told, medicate as told, and entertain as told. In short, they *do* as told. They have no idea who they are. They are always doing, doing, and doing, but they spend no time *being*. The machine tempted them to overspend, to own and possess things they can't afford. And they allowed it to happen without any resistance. Their massive overspending rendered them mere slaves to the debt machine. Also, his overeating and unhealthy living left Johnny a slave to Big Pharma, Big Food, and so on.

The consequence of living in unawareness is having shackles for life. There is no point in blaming circumstances or other people; at the end of the day, Debbie and Johnny are responsible for their miserable existence. They created their situation. Nobody else can fix the mess they are in. Being responsible for one's actions is something we tend to avoid at all costs. It is easier to make the neighbor, the vendor, the city, or the government liable for the dilemmas we get ourselves involved in. However, to progress as humans, we need to take responsibility for *all* our actions.

To turn this world around, we need humans—aware and responsible humans—who know how to *be* with whatever issues life may bring. Living on autopilot equals living like robots, not humans.

In an ideal world, work would be purposeful and fulfilling. We would enjoy healthful food that energizes and strengthens body and soul. We would reserve medicine only for serious illnesses, not for the numbing of every little ailment. Instead of seeking non-stop entertainment, we would turn on our inner television and live grounded, and in reality. Energy derived from within may give us the strength to nurture relationships and not gadgets. Avatars



are what we ought to become—*beings* in tune with nature, as portrayed in James Cameron’s movie.

Yet blasé attitudes dominate society as a whole. Forget swine flu—brain fluff is the name of the real pandemic that threatens us. A vaccine for such brain clutter is elusive.

Focus remains on buying, possessing, and having, and not on who and what we are. Stuff may excite, but it never fulfills. Materialism—the wanting and needing of things and the resultant overspending—creates only superficial, temporary happiness. As long as we choose to live detached from *heart*, from each other, from nature, and from ourselves, true long-lasting happiness and inner peace will remain absent.

To top up our materialistic obsession, entertainment assaults us—continuously. The buzz—emails, commercials, soaps, movies, ads, the Internet, Facebook, and Twitter—helps us numb the pain of life. The streaming blitz is an anesthetic that promotes lethargy and oblivion instead of awareness, ideas, inspiration, and creativity.

Humans stand by and watch the degradation of life’s true worth. Paralyzed and apathetic, we are unaware of what is being lost. If aware, we would revolt, but since our minds are deadened, nobody cares or bothers. What is lost is heart, soul, goodness, humanness. God bless oblivion!

Instead of enjoying real lives, we pretend we have roles in movies or TV shows. They have become the new reality. We know and share more about our favorite TV drama than the actuality being played out in our own backyard. Regrettably, we care more about our right to choke down a hot dog than about our constitutional rights. However, we are not really having a life when we are watching TV or gaming, or when we are otherwise preoccupied. These are dead actions. The bustle creates only temporary joy and clutters our brains with irrelevant

information. No good energy is ever returned to us from enjoying what I call blitz, fluff, and buzz, or pointless activity, yet tuning out is easier than tuning in to the human essence. That's because what's within us is downright scary, and therefore remains unvisited like a hot, far away desert.

*Mind* is not all there is to being human; we are so much more, and finding that *more* is where happiness resides—in a vast sea of consciousness and splendor. Getting there requires work. Delving inside and discovering who we are as individuals is not a takeout meal.

With a society that believes in things and *mind*—which is where the ego is located—it is no wonder we focus on superficial stuff, stuff, and more stuff. Personal horizons end with me, myself, and I. If permitted, *ego* will run a person's life from birth to death. *Ego* knows no limits. It craves power, money, and possessions, and wants more, more, and more. The result is total ignorance of consciousness and mindfulness, and a lack of resilience.

### **Rescue the Being**

Humans are the only creatures, the only inhabitants of this planet, behaving insanely. We are the only ones working against nature while our fellow living, breathing beings (yes, animals are beings too) try to live in harmony with the *remaining* magnificent surroundings. Such alien behavior can only be attributed to complete unawareness, ignorance, and apathy. I'd argue that in our natural state, with our human essence turned on, few of us would act like the environmental bullies we are.

It is the rescue of the quintessence of the human being—the inner being—that should be our most imminent job. Only our core can save us from ourselves. That entails rediscovering and activating our internal voice, instinct, or gut feeling, which was silenced by

the teachings we all had to succumb to. Without this knowing of *self*, without being in tune with the universe, the world, and nature, we are similar to androids: human *doings*, not human *beings*.

*Being* involves taking responsibility for *self*. In Hawaii, a healing system called Ho'oponopono goes so far as to teach we are responsible for *everything* in our lives, including other people's problems. With this technique, people learn to clean not only their negative thoughts and energy, but also those of others, by speaking about love and forgiveness. Imagine that—we are liable for every last thing in our world, including other people's problems. What a concept. What if it's true? It seems Dr. Ihaleakala Hew Len, a master of Ho'oponopono, healed an entire psychiatric ward in Hawaii with this method. This “taking responsibility” is pretty amazing stuff. Check out <http://www.mrfire.com/zero/> for more information.

The working hard, the accumulation (collection) of toys and more toys, the way we elbow our way to a promotion, gathering more money just to spend more money or buy ever bigger houses and cars, is a rat race in every sense of the word. Along the way, we never stop to ask *why*. Why all the stacking of crap? The overflow? Why do we follow the unwritten rules about amassing as much as we can just to be accepted in society? What are the blinking Nike shoes gonna do for us? Or the Porsche-designed X-Series Island grill towering in our backyard? Will this be what we reflect on when transcending into the other world? Will we remember the smell of flesh on the shiny designer grill on the death bed?

We never ask these questions. We continue making urgent, mindless purchases. If a neighbor happens to have the latest cow-broiling device, we know no better than to still the hunger, to be on par with him. We buy what everyone else buys, for whatever reason. We jump on the bandwagon and never reflect on the real benefits of any of it. What will you as a

human gain from owning a designer grill? How will that make you a better person? How will that change the world? How will that give you lasting happiness? It merely pleases the ego, because it is yet another possession. Don't get me wrong; I am not saying stop consuming and live like a monk. What I am trying to convey here is that we should not robotically pile up toys to avoid life; instead, we should focus more on what's important for us as a human being and as a involved citizen of, what once was, a free country. Perhaps spending money on an eleven-day Vipassana meditation retreat ([www.vipassana.com](http://www.vipassana.com)) in some remote location would have more lasting benefits than buying the Island grill. It still requires an investment, but it is one that is spent on you, on your being, not on your ego. Just a thought. Or how about not making a purchase at all, and using the still-perfect old grill until its final day?

Sheeple (sheep-people) drive the highway of life with the cruise control on. Frozen minds may hear the commotion and noise along the way; we may see the decay of our society, but none of it fazes us. The loss of our freedoms and rights due to ignorance and preoccupation goes largely unnoticed. Sheep go where they are led, no questions asked. We swallow the corporate and political rhetoric and live in a world of illusions and make belief. A mind affected by "sheepism" craves more apathy.

### **It Can't Be That Bad—Can It?**

Yes, it can. Examples abound. Life has been turned upside down. Just look at the political world. Wall Street was bailed out. Homeowners have not. Governments spend tax money like a drunkard at the bar. Taxpayers get shafted. The infrastructure is crumbling. Yet the fat cats get ever fatter, while citizens get poorer. But remember, the fat cats are supposed to work for us ... by the people, for the people.

There is more than enough food to go around, but we are sicker than ever. Codex Alimentarius is an FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) and WHO (World Health Organization) commission whose main aims supposedly are to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the international food trade. But it is with the establishment of Codex Alimentarius principles that we may lose our rights to freely purchase vitamins without prescriptions, as we do today.

We have enough wealth, but we are unhappier than ever. Illegal immigrants, who essentially break the law by being illegal, are protected. Citizens often end up carrying the burden and paying the price.

The world has been turned upside down.

Our government loves the fact that citizens have checked out and are not asking much-needed questions. Short-term memory, apathy or even attention deficit disorder (ADD) help those in charge continue the frenzy. This seemingly permanent state makes it easier for the government to pull the wool over our eyes. Healthy, intelligent individuals are difficult to govern. They could apply critical thinking and reasoning. Don't want that. A biased media helps their plot to keep us believing in the fairy tales we think to be our world. We are hypnotized as we watch sound bytes flash on television and CNN tells us all is well.

And what do we do? Consciously or unconsciously, we surrender; we are singing from default hymn sheets. We repeat the lines as heard on screen. No questions asked. Questioning the media or the government can be downright dangerous. People are supposed to shut up as controversial new laws such as the PATRIOT Act are being enacted. Floating midstream raises no eyebrows. Swimming against the current is not desirable. Those who speak out against trendy government mantras are ridiculed at best; at worst, they are branded as

conspirators and put on the no fly list. The media supports this concept. Anyone who questions the mainstream is considered a traitor and is even put on a watch list.

The deeper the snooze, the more power we hand over to the kings. A fuzzy mind is easy to manipulate.

It must be amusing to those drunk with power to witness humans repeatedly falling for their lies. But we are convinced that if it is on TV, it must be true.

The age-old Roman strategy, *panem et circenses* (bread and circuses), is at play right inside our homes. Keep us fat, happy, and entertained, and we won't bother interfering in politics.

### **Can We Stop the Process?**

Yes! The future of this great nation is inside of us. If we are willing to become human again, if we are willing to take responsibility and get involved in our destiny with awareness, we can change direction.

And why wouldn't we want to re-establish and sustain a system and society that once worked well? A society that was based on individual freedom and liberty? Why condemn what was built so carefully by the founding fathers? Do we really want to allow the general sellout of values, sovereignty, and rights to continue?

A shift in attitude and consciousness can move mountains. But to do this, we must turn off the TV and pay attention to ideas the mainstream media may not approve of. More importantly, we must pay attention to the truths that are within us. But this meal is not ready-made and can't be heated in the microwave. It requires work. We must brew and drink the magic potion ourselves, with minds that are fresh and awake. The government is not likely to

turn this nation back onto an even path. Too much has been destroyed already. We have to take the future into our own hands.

The world out there equals the world within. There is no difference.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Work Isn't Working**

We work like slaves for the corporate masters. The stakes are high, the hours long, the stress, intense. In this competitive setting, only the craftiest survive. Of all the fish in the pond, only a few will grow to a super size. The rest will continuously fight for food until they get caught and are eaten, or simply die off.

This is life in the big corporate fishbowl. We have sharks, triggerfish, goldfish, fake goldfish, nicely colored rainbow fish, and piranhas. All of the species want only to survive and thrive, but their efforts are stressful because food and space are limited, and the competition is fierce. In addition, thanks to advanced technology, the little fish are forced to stay connected to the big sharks higher up in the food chain even when it's dark in the pond. Communication devices, which have almost become a part of us like fins are to a fish, blink and beep the entire night, even when we are on vacation.

### **No Break for the Weary**

The work madness never ceases. It continues 365 days a year, without a break. If we dare to rest, we risk having a skilled piranha colleague swallow what has taken us years to build. The corporate warrior must be on alert, vigilant, on constant defense, and—most of all—available 24/7.

Before the introduction of cell phones and BlackBerries, the boss was unable to disturb neither our family dinners nor vacations. Before the Internet, the work pace was slower, more focused and fun. Connectivity works like a ball and chain. It shackles the diligent to the office even while they try to appreciate the Sphinx.



The shift to total torment happened around the turn of the century. PDAs, phones, laptops, and other gadgets eliminated the worker bee's scarce free time. Such attachments border on corporate slavery. Yet, we became enamored with these charming devices. What would we do without them these days? They even get to share our pillows at night. When they beep, we return from our dreams. We run. The blinking, beeping device must be put out of its tooting misery immediately. The item is like a new lover. It gets all the attention.

While connectivity gave us instant everything, it also forced us to become instant humans who must be able to put out a gazillion fires in tandem. Connectivity has not only revolutionized the way we work, but also how our entire society interacts. And this occurred within no more than ten years. In such a short period of time, the world turned into everyone's own oyster on speed.

No more expensive phone calls, letters, or faxes—we have email and skype. This immediacy—and the resultant information overload—has created enormous tension and stress. Because we are on autopilot, we don't question what the intrusion of gadgets has done to our private lives. It robs us of the free time we never had and wreaks havoc on our personal relationships. Friends and workmates frantically keep typing under the table while supposedly listening to you. Husbands eat next to the BlackBerry. Conversations are interrupted by too many text message beeps. It's awful. We need the exact opposite to stay sane and happy—quietude, time and contemplation.

Back in the 1960s, technology buffs and work analysts insisted that technology would make life easier. Companies would adopt a four-day workweek, accomplishing more in less time. Leisure time with the family would increase while computers and even robots would take up the slack.

Today, according to the Center for Work-Life Policy, the average professional workweek has expanded steadily over the last ten years, and logging seventy-plus hours is the new norm at the top. We are corporate slaves.

This increased workload weighs heavily on our minds, bodies, and souls. We are prisoners, held hostage for benefits. We live from paycheck to paycheck. Seniority does provide us with more vacation days, but in reality, who dares to take them anyway? To disappear for two weeks is almost unheard of. A dream. That is what those lazy Euros do. We're afraid that when we return, tanned and relaxed, we'll find that the triggerfish from the next cubicle took over. After all, anyone able to leave for two weeks without needing a substitute must be superfluous.

I once took a two-week vacation and went off to Bali. Upon my return, I learned from a co-worker that my boss had shared his suspicions that I was leaving the company with the managing director. Why else would I take a two-week vacation? To me, that idea was stupid; I just wanted some time off and chill. But to the reigning powers, the conclusion of me leaving the company sounded more logical. I had strayed from the script. I didn't play the game.

Humans need a balance of work and rest, a feast of different activities to keep us sharp. Without curling up, lounging around, and recharging our long-dead batteries, we burn out and become miserable. A two-week vacation is not even long enough to accomplish this regeneration. During the first week, we are still attached to the office with a silver cord; by the second week, we may have gotten into the groove of being away, but total relaxation won't occur until the third week. This is what a New Age doctor shared with me once. His entire life he followed a regimen of two days off per week, one week every three months and three weeks in one stretch once per year. He is 50, but looks 40.

Yet three weeks of vacation is completely out of question for most. So what do we do? We make up for the exhaustion by using uppers, downers, and all-arounders. How else could we keep up the madness called work for forty years or more?

We never get a break. The craze never stops. Every free minute of our lives is *made* frantic and busy. Everywhere I look, people are texting, talking, or using their iPods while running down the street, sipping on coffee, riding the bus, or driving. Concurrent to running errands, traveling, and eating breakfast, we feel that we have to tweet about it to the world. We cannot think; superfluous thoughts about chirping and Facebooking infiltrate our brain waves and make them useless for the job of real thinking. It's no wonder the City of Chicago is debating whether to ban texting by pedestrians. Sidewalks are full of blind bats that can't hear or see anything other than their mobile devices.

A response to a text message can wait. Instead of jaywalking and dodging other pedestrians and cars, we have the option to "send later."

At one time, we could escape all of this busyness while on transcontinental flights. Wasn't it wonderful to be able to stretch, doze off, or simply watch a movie? You can't do that anymore. The last sacred "offline place" is being hijacked as airlines ramp up for Internet in the Sky. Soon, companies will expect employees to work and stay connected while in flight. At least up 'til now, the FAA had forbidden using phones for talking while in the air, but certain foreign airlines, such as Emirates and Singapore Airlines, have already signed up to allow that. Luckily, costs are prohibitive, but that may soon change. Can you imagine a plane full of super-egotistical businessmen making calls on your six a.m. flight? I don't think that's too far off.

At home, instead of being with our families or spending quality time alone, we work, or waste time online. According to a poll conducted by Staples, almost half of the small business managers in the United States work during time meant for family, and 49 percent make business calls and check email messages while behind the wheel; 18 percent even read email messages in the bathroom.

What would happen if we left the craziness and enjoyed a few hours in a nice, lush park? Is it really a crime to sever the connection for a little while?

The call for non-stop busyness does not have to influence every last soul on this planet. I can choose to resist. I can play with my cat. I can meditate in the woods under a tree. I can practice yoga in the comfort of my home. I don't have to shop. I don't have to listen to podcasts, type endless text messages, send emails from an airplane, or network both online and off. It's a matter of choice. Devices do have an off switch. No law has been passed that states we must surrender to waking—and even sleeping—in tune with the messages coming in, most of those messages are not urgent anyway. It's just noise.

We're not cut out to deal with having such never-ending info and entertainment chase us like a hungry lioness. We do need to disconnect and relax. Living on the run is not really living, nor is it fulfilling. It is draining.

### **Stress, the Silent Killer**

Stress is a normal part of life, and can help us learn and grow, but too much negative stress can push us over the edge in record time. We pay the price for it with the knotted-up tight stomach, the tension headache, the insomnia, and the anger. Stress releases potent neurochemicals and hormones in our bodies, which prepare us to fight or flee. The continuous release of these

chemicals will overtax our system and can lead to health problems. Long-lasting, constant, unanticipated, and unmanageable stresses are the most damaging.

We know that effective stress management consists of having a combination of regular exercise, scheduled down time (one hour a day, one day a week, and one week every fourth month), yoga, and relaxation or meditation techniques. Finding time for all of this is tricky, but essential. Get a handle on stress before it gets a handle on you. Burnout downright sucks.

As humans, our reactions to stress vary greatly and depend on our predispositions and the susceptibility to stress and stress-related illnesses, our biochemistry, and our genes. While some of us have a higher tolerance for stress and trauma, others can fly off the handle from nothing worse than a red light.

The pressures on us have increased greatly over the past century. It will take more than a few years for our brains to adjust to this new world, and be able to cope. Evolution is a slow process. Just look at the reptilian brain, which has been with us for millions of years. Over the last one hundred years, it was supposed to take a 180-degree shift and upgrade itself in line with the industrial revolution. Yet it didn't. It still responds to the basic fight-or-flight calls just as it did during Stone Age times. This instinctive brain is thought to represent a fundamental core of the nervous system, and is derived from a form of mammalian-like reptile that once ranged widely over the world, but which disappeared during the Triassic period, after having provided the evolutionary link between dinosaurs and mammals. All modern mammals have this reptilian brain component. It is the oldest and most primitive part of the brain, yet it is not likely to go away.

Luckily, we have little control over this stubborn gift from the past because it still saves lives. But we view its processes as distressing. Our fast-paced new lifestyles literally

drive this part of the brain nuts. Because of it, anxiety, phobias, angst, fear take up residence and the rational brain can do nothing to help. It can't convince the reptile part of us to practice some "chillaxin'." In many ways, we are like Neanderthals trying to live in modern cities. We are trying to cope the best we can with the components of an ancient bodily system.

How we deal with stress is the same for many of us—we use alcohol, smoke, do drugs, use antidepressants, overeat, shop—but our attempts to escape our problems are essentially counterproductive because they create more stress for us and lead to physical and mental illness. According to Hans Selye, endocrinologist and biochemical stress expert, every type of stress leaves an indelible scar; the affected organism pays for surviving a stressful situation by becoming a little older.

We can choose self-deception, deny our stress, or become unconscious (i.e. drunk) for a while, but consciousness will come back loaded with more stress and demands for our attention. The numbing of consciousness is not a long-term strategy. The problem is that humans are always existing somewhere between consciousness and unconsciousness, and that means there will be suffering. True bliss is totality. We think we are happy while asleep and unhappy while awake. Yet, we can always choose to be conscious, in the now, the present and appreciative of what is, life and nature.

The US ranks high for creating and perpetuating stressful work environments. In other countries, folks get more vacation time. Paid time off ranges from twenty days a year in Switzerland, to twenty-five days in Japan, to thirty-four days in Brazil and forty-two days in Italy, while the average paid vacation in the United States is thirteen days. Clearly, a thirteen-day vacation isn't enough to recuperate. It isn't even enough time to take a trip to another

country. What good is it to work hard but never have the time to enjoy the fruits of one's labor?

The French lifestyle, in contrast, might be described as “work to live” rather than “live to work.” Employees regularly take their vacation days without feeling any guilt or remorse. Lars\*, an ex-coworker of mine and an executive at a Paris-based food company, leaves for a two-week exotic vacation at least three times a year. His superiors do not raise their eyebrows when he does.

Notice that Europe, in contrast to the US, largely rests on Sundays. Stores must close their doors. Only airports and gas station stores are open for business. Since shopping isn't perceived as a hobby there, and their economy does not rely solely on hysterically consuming citizens, such closure rules don't create huge issues. People kick back, go for walks, pursue hobbies, and spend time with family and friends. They have a chance to connect to *self* and others. In America, we have yet to learn that just because the malls are open 24/7 we are not required to be inside them, shopping. Resistance to the latest gadget builds character.

A good step toward making better choices could be to see for yourself how the Europeans survive without having a single major store open on a Sunday. Surprisingly, taking such a trip across the Atlantic will often be cheaper than the traditional yearly family vacation to Hawaii, or even perhaps Mexico. I have gotten fares from Los Angeles to Zurich for as little as \$600 roundtrip. A little bit of shopping around never hurts. And as far as a passport is concerned, my advice to you is to pay the fee, get that liberating document, and fly away. Become one of the 20 percent of Americans who can claim to own a passport.

Experiencing different cultures and lifestyles can expand your horizons and provide you with new ideas for living. You may pick up habits that will help you to live more calmly

and less chaotically. You might even go one step further and get a job abroad. Should you do that, please do not practice the regrettable flaw of applying American work ethics to that overseas job. Although, I must say, with Euros trying to emulate the States, much of it is going down the “on duty 24/7” road too. But if you find a place that is still “normal”, try to blend in; don’t attempt to stand out with a non-stop work demonstration. Relax. Leave the diligent, always connected, and forever-working version of yourself at home.

Many of my European co-workers loathe the overly zealous immigrants. Their obsessive work behavior could threaten to destroy the local work culture. Many Londoners have shared their grief with me about their “super available” and “always staying late” American and German colleagues. While the busybees stay in the office to network and impress, Londoners prefer to hit the local pub at five or six o’clock.

### **Multi-Tasking Hell**

According to one study done by Studer Group in 2006, approximately eleven million meetings take place in the US every day. Another study found that most professionals attend an average of 61.8 meetings per month, and indicates that over 50 percent of meeting time is wasted. The professionals surveyed admitted they did the following during meetings:

- Daydreaming (91%)
- Missing parts of the meeting (95%)
- Bringing other work to the meeting (73%)
- Dozing (39%)

Imagine the salaries wasted on all of those decision-makers. Yet meetings dominate the way companies do business today. Many are inefficient, expensive, and redundant. However,



we must keep attending them, because... because someone had the grand idea to bother others for their input, or someone else felt compelled to update the world on his or her progress, or because status meetings simply must be held every week, even if there's no update to provide.

Just look around during your next meeting and you will notice people reading and writing messages, checking the weather, and making phone calls—all while the chairperson is discussing important content. BlackBerries, laptops, and phones beckon minds into their virtual realm. Anyone simply working on just one task is old school. Meanwhile, the average person's attention span keeps shrinking. Minds wander from the restructuring project to the forecast, to the business plan, to the hot chick across the table, or to sex with the girlfriend the night before. Mind you – women think along the same lines.

Multi-tasking is a skill humans can't master, yet most employers proudly make it a work requirement. Computers can process two things at a time; humans can't. The need to be able to make speedy decisions while constantly being preoccupied doing other things ends up shooting us in the foot. I would argue that tons of the decisions made in the business world made with too much speed, and may turn out costly, because nobody takes the time to think anything through anymore.

We see this problem compounded on a larger scale in government. Proposals like a \$700 billion stimulus package, the cap and trade plan, and the health care reform agenda need time to be reviewed. It's a joke to set aside a mere couple of days for this task. Hasty decisions are just that—rushed. And any decision made in a hurry is often flawed. Yet today's world relies on speed instead of sensible, comprehensive analysis. CEOs and leaders tend to ignore history. And do they learn from past mistakes? Can you name one leader that is not repeating the same mistakes? It seems that the official farce, the one about spreading democracy by

invading and conquering remote lands, is still holding up well. Looking at history though, it has never worked out.

But back to the business world, where too many things happen too quickly, leaving no time for reflection and careful consideration. Errors occur everywhere. But give it a few days and grass will grow over the fault lines, and quicker than ever before. Speed has replaced thinking.

Consider Max\*, a managing director at a Chicago corporation and my former co-worker, a typical member of the multi-tasking family. Based on my observations as well as on the number of calls I received from him after meetings, I'd guess he absorbed no more than 20 percent of the content discussed. After every meeting, he'd ask for a summary, confirming my suspicion that he had been in a trance again. I wondered why he even bothered to attend. I watched him read emails on his Blackberry, type, doodle, and then listen to maybe half a sentence before again glancing nervously at his 'Berry. He was everywhere, but nowhere. He did two things concurrently and badly. Often, Max's judgments suffered a great deal due to his ADD approach to things.

I remember Max being impressed during one particular vendor meeting. Liking the salesman, Max suggested we try the services he offered. Although he had missed half the presentation, he committed to having the vendor's services tested in a live environment—and he wanted it done right away. The fact that the vendor had never successfully launched a project of the required size, and had never even implemented a US project before, did not matter. Max had fallen for the sales pitch. It cost me a few days of work to kill his euphoria and explain why the endeavor was senseless. Had he simply listened up during the meeting and put two and two together, I could have saved myself a lot of hassle and breath.

During my tenure at a US airline, our Florida-based vendor representatives displayed the trendy behavior of multi-tasking. In meetings, they typed away, answered emails, and served other customers. After many painful weeks of scoping out, initiating, and testing a new entertainment program, it turned out that the vendor was unable to deliver the promised software. Only after months of explanations did they truly grasp our requirements. They had never really listened to what we were saying. They were, in fact, incapable of doing so. We were ready to throw millions at this company but could not even get their attention.

We gave up, ended our discussions, and threw them out. We started from scratch with a new vendor. It was a massive waste of time and money!

I attribute at least part of the breakdown in communication to their incessant multi-tasking. It cost them the loss of a lucrative contract. Subsequently, news about the ill-prepared vendor reached the industry and resulted in more lost business for them.

Apart from the aggravations of multi-tasking, we face other challenges in meetings. There are the so-called self-promoters who relentlessly pipe up, trying to impress the leadership. Their goal—spin-doctoring—has little to do with trying to achieve the meeting’s objectives. Being heard is what’s on their agenda. In an effort to sound like an expert, they use verbose speech, often hijacking ideas and concepts and presenting them “bigmouth” style. These blowhards are masters of communication and know how to use situations to their advantage. They are dangerous predators who lurk in the halls of every corporation. This is how they get themselves promoted. Not by their achievements, but by blowing their own horns. Regrettably, management falls for this charade time and time again.

The University of California, Berkeley confirmed in a group dynamics study that people who pipe up the most and present lots of ideas are accepted as leaders—even when they

spout utter nonsense. The study showed that dominant individuals behaved in ways that made them appear competent, though their *perceived* level of competence was much greater than their *actual* competence.

Why not train the workforce on “How to Meet” to optimize meeting efficiency and add to the bottom line?

### **A New Meeting Philosophy**

Intel implemented an appealing Effective Meeting Curriculum in 2006 with great results. In a four-hour course, they provided employees with the proper tools for running efficient meetings. Intel differentiates between process, staff, and operational review meetings. Tools and templates were shared with new employees at their initial orientation meeting, which led to the holding of efficient meetings. This style is still embodied in Intel’s culture today.

To prevent the same participants from piping up incessantly, a London-based company used a ball during certain staff meetings. Each person was given the ball twice, and was allowed to speak for only one minute each time. These rules ensured that everyone’s input was received, and that no one individual hogged all the airtime. Even the quiet introvert was heard. This is a marvelous tool for getting everyone to provide their input.

Sadly, most companies spend little or no time educating employees on the management of meetings. Yet the potential for improvement is enormous.

### **Connectivity Abyss**

The combo of meetings and connectivity is causing corporate ADD. When not in meetings, we continue the multi-tasking charade in our cubicles. There, we toggle between the endless flow

of incoming emails, the business plan, and the budget, then go back to email again, back to the business plan, then over to CNN online. All day long our attention skips back and forth, in and out. We gasp for air as we run to the bathroom for a little off-screen break. Connectivity has turned the workplace into a beehive on speed.

According to Microsoft research scientist Eric Horvitz, it took workers at the Redmond-based software company an average of fifteen minutes to return to a fundamental task after having been interrupted by a phone call, email, or instant message. He was surprised by how easily people became distracted and how long it took them to get back to work. With all these distractions, are we more efficient now, in the age of technology, than before? Do we deliver more quality work? I doubt it.

Do you remember what communication was like before connectivity, when we actually needed to discuss issues face to face? When memos, letters, and meeting notes were distributed personally or via internal mail? When there were no PDAs available to play with during meetings, in the car, or on public transport? When only daydreaming, doodling, and dozing off were available as an escape?

The email craze has gotten so out of hand, it's hard to stay on top of it. When Yvonne\*, another ex-coworker of mine and manager at a Houston-based loan company, changed positions in-house, she still kept receiving emails from her previous department. She had valuable in-depth industry knowledge, but her ability to perform was being crippled by the attack of endless daily Outlook messages from both her new and old colleagues. Her productivity suffered. It started taking her days to respond to inquiries. If anyone needed her input quickly, a visit to her office was required. She spent most of her days putting out fires

and sifting through mails. And Yvonne's desperate attempts to refer people to other resources failed miserably.

But somehow, neither our work nor the steady flow of office email messages stop us from checking our personal emails, arranging trips, tracking the stock market, reading the news, ordering books, bidding on eBay, or remotely monitoring the surveillance camera installed at home. All of this is done on the company's time and dime. If our Internet @ work is not completely locked down by means of a content filter, we will surf without inhibition.

According to recent studies regarding surfing at work, employees spend between one and three hours a day on the Internet on personal business. Most of these findings are based on employees' self-reported data. This productivity loss, combined with concerns about what sites employees check out while at work, has more and more employers monitoring workers' use of the Internet.

An IT company based in Long Beach, California used to publish the name of its "surfer of the month." While embarrassed, the record surfer was never penalized. One such award holder started bringing in his own laptop and Internet connection card to work in order to get his surfing done while on the job.

During my entire career, I have rarely seen a company seriously crack down on employee surfing. While most have filters, none completely shut down employee browsing, not even for a few hours a day. I would argue that having the Internet available to employees for only a few hours per day would increase productivity. Massive protests may erupt as workers fight for what they love so dearly. But why should it be available? How many employees really need to use the Internet for work?

The experts disagree on how, exactly, we're wasting all this time. Independent research found that employees actually work only about 1.5 hours a day. The average full-time worker doesn't start doing real work until eleven a.m., and begins to wind down around three thirty p.m. The real work is accomplished some time between those hours.

Could it be that our perceived super-busyness boils down to time mismanagement due to distractions? Perhaps we are no busier than we were a decade ago; we are just more scattered due to all the technology and information available at our fingertips. And—we are hooked on it. It keeps us entertained.

The official story, though, is that we are more industrious than ever before. Yet we need to keep up the illusion of being stretched to the limit. Nothing else is acceptable in society. The person organizing her own social event on the company dime pretends she is deeply engulfed in a spreadsheet. The colleague answering his girlfriend's fifteenth email of the day postpones a meeting. The administrative assistant has no time to make copies because of skyping with her boyfriend in China. Of course, there are people who are seriously busy and have no time for private play. With all the pretense, we just never quite know who the busy ones are.

### **Corporate Politics**

This is the American dream: a worker starts at the bottom rung of the ladder, toils and toils, and ends up in the fat CEO chair. The reality of corporate America is quite different, however. Truly productive, diligent, conscientious employees who achieve real results seldom receive the rewards and promotions they deserve. Effective employees work overtime, yet someone else is given credit for their results. They leave because they get tired of losing credit or

promotions to colleagues who pipe up and sneak up the ladder. While the conscientious employee is hard at work, the “cancer” is lurking around every corner, ready to present stolen ideas or to take the credit for entire projects he/she wasn’t even involved in. The one who campaigns best wins the game. Just like in politics.

## **Bob**

A former co-worker of mine, whom I’ll call Bob\*, represents the spineless corporate soldier with no self-respect. Bob, aged thirty-five, is a married Midwesterner with an M.B.A. but zero personality. He was determined to impress at work, to land that promotion to manager, or even managing director. He worked hard at getting face time with Alex, his boss, dropping by his office frequently, following him to the cafeteria like a dog, and suggesting ideas. This way, Bob was able to finagle invitations to senior management meetings. Bob was an ace at harboring information and coaxing others into sharing whatever he needed to know to astonish his superiors. To make up for his lack of charisma, intellect, and height (he was five feet six inches tall), he reformulated the information he gathered, presented it as his original concept, and got credit for work others had done.

Bob knew that most of his co-workers loathed his mere presence, but he did not care since they could not assist him in his move up the ladder; only his superiors could. Bob believed in getting the maximum possible airtime in meetings, especially when leaders were present. He would drop buzzwords and important names, all while portraying an air of superiority. His co-workers were disgusted with his brownnosing efforts, but Alex, the managing director, drank his Kool-Aid without fail. He loved getting daily affirmations from Bob, and Bob never blushed while providing them.



Bob didn't produce much actual work because his business skills were mediocre at best. In comparison, his networking and self-promotion skills had been honed to perfection. Those qualities guaranteed outstanding performance reviews and bonuses, year after year. Bob relied on the high performers in his department, such as Bettina—a very industrious co-worker who had been waiting for a well-earned promotion for over three years. She had achieved consistently exceptional results. She despised Bob and had no respect for him and his behavior. When Bob received the promotion she wanted, Bettina got sick to her stomach and turned in her resignation that same day. Her human principles would not permit her to stay another day. She was too disgusted by the situation.

Smart politicians don't want their names associated with the wrong project. They are risk adverse and wait for others to call the shots. The minute a decision or project turns out to be fruitful, scavengers like Bob do their utmost to connect their name to it. They pile on to get a piece of the pie. I witnessed this behavior often. Management rarely remembers who was actually in charge, as everyone is suffering from ADD.

Meanwhile, the scavengers grab key project information and run to management to impress. They shove their name in just before the project deadline. As a project manager, it is frustrating to watch such scenes. Vermin often wrongly get credit for stuff they did not do.

Nevertheless, being mentioned in the same breath as a successful program is a requirement for staying on and surviving the management track. Corporate fitness requires putting on a balancing act of schmoozing, networking with the right people, doing just enough work to be noticed, and being present when leaders are around. Only an amoeba-like person can thrive in such an environment.

Playing the game is a requirement for anyone who needs and wants to get praise and recognition. If the person who truly launches a successful program does not blow their own horn, the show will be stolen and promoted by hungry weasels. They never miss such a chance.

The show is what's remembered during performance reviews and downsizings. Like it or not, you have to persistently market your successes and ideas and ensure everyone knows you are the source of them. If you neglect such advertisement, people won't know who you are and what you've done. Don't leave it up to your boss to spread the word. He may just be the one who ends up stealing your glory.

## **Dan**

Then there was Dan\*, another of my ex-coworkers. I encountered him while leading a project for a large EU bank. Dan joined our team from another bank in the UK. He had just completed his M.B.A. and was hungry for instant success. My first impression of him was less than favorable. He fit the criteria for "corporate slut" perfectly. I smelled trouble for our project. The e-business portal project we were planning was split into two sub-projects, back end and front end. Within weeks, Dan had managed to suck up to the managing director and successfully pitched an idea to merge the two projects.

She liked his smile and handed him the reins, assigning him to oversee the entire project. Things went downhill from there. The team fumed about the structural changes, but the order stood. He was the chosen one.

Dan wasted no time in doing a complete overhaul of the project. An amazing networker, he immediately involved consultants that were buddies of his from grad school.

Instead of spending a miniscule amount of money for development of the portal in-house as planned, we had to give all his friends jobs and have them do the work for us. A few of his mates, self-proclaimed “portal customer experience experts,” were flown in from New York at \$2,500 per head per day. The project quickly turned into an abstract and complex nightmare.

In the meantime, our internal web developers, the ones who were supposed to have done the work, had nothing to do. It was obvious Dan wanted all of us to resign so his pals could be employed there instead. And he was given carte blanche by the managing directors. Within a couple of months, the project cost had increased from \$100K to \$800K. Nobody blinked an eye. Dan was happy as a clam. For him, this was like a dream come true. He outsourced the entire project to consultants and had little to do himself. Life couldn't get any better for him.

Why am I pointing out these people and their behavior? For the simple reason to make you realize how out of line things have become at the job. Corporate games are boring. Those who get off on it – I am sorry – what is wrong with you? But it is humans who create the atmosphere. Humans can choose to make it hell, bearable or fun. It's not the company that is selecting the ambiance, it is humans. And self-serving egoists tend to make the workplace excruciatingly painful.

This is a call out to those find their portrayal here. Isn't it time to stop the shenanigans and be a human at work, so that everyone can have an pleasant life?

### **Rotting in Chairs**

Every company has a few people who are rotting in their chairs—dead weights that are busy protecting their jobs. Unproductive long-term workers, connected yet ineffective employees—

they're prevalent in the work world! But not all chair potatoes are as proficient at remaining on the payroll as Hugo\* was.

Hugo, another ex-coworker of mine, was a subservient fellow with no backbone. He had been sitting in the same chair at an insurance company for over twenty-five years. He knew the downsizing game well. Despite the fact he was ineffective at work, he had somehow wrangled a promotion to manager out of the company some time during his fifteenth year there. During his career, kissing his boss's behind had become his favorite pastime and survival strategy. Actual work bored Hugo. In five years, Hazel, his subordinate, had never witnessed any great achievements emerging from his cubicle. Half the company loathed working with him, but his schmaltzy self-promoting attitude had kept him in business. Hugo thought he was a hot commodity and flirted with all the elderly women in his department. About once a year, the fifty-five-year-old Hugo grew a mustache to prove his manliness. It made him look like an aged porn star, much to the amusement of all. In a smaller company, Hugo would have never survived, as his shortcomings would have been quickly exposed. Unfortunately, Hugo's role involved customer interfacing. I venture to say that Hugo's actions on the customer front were extremely destructive and cost the company millions over the years.

But Hugo was a protected boy. His supervisor loved all his flattering. Other departments had to manage projects that should have been handled by his team. As Hugo would never have been able to fight his way out of a paper bag, others had to step in and cover for his flaws. Nevertheless, Hugo never shied from taking credit for others' creations. In his delusion, he actually believed his involvement and contributions to projects were invaluable.

Overpaid Hugo (he made at least \$150K/year) never got downsized, but many competent, productive employees lost their jobs. Whenever the corporation got ready for more slicing and dicing, the beloved schmoozer stepped up his ass kissing and managed to save himself yet again. Astounding. Simply.

### **Real Workers**

People like Dan, the “corporate slut” described earlier, epitomize the typical self-promoting non-human without scruples. Anyone with some experience in big business will encounter such rats. But most will also recognize that without those despicable rat-like qualities, climbing the corporate ladder will be nearly impossible.

Remember “Debbie”? She had been with Citibank for five years in her demanding job as a business analyst. She worked hard. When the company included her in the club of blessed corporate BlackBerry owners, she succumbed willingly. She agreed to be accessible after hours, and even while on paid leave. She thought that she was finally on the path to a promotion, and willingly succumbed to the ’Berry mania. Citi people with BlackBerries were more important than Citi people without BlackBerries!

Her pre-Berry salary was just OK. Her average post-Berry wage, per hour worked, resembled that of a secretary. This little device is a great investment for a company to make. It buys them even more productive worker hours for only about a \$150 subscription fee per month. For that miniscule amount, the company gets employees to do tons more hours of work. What a deal. Debbie did not mind. At least, for now.

The chiefs do need diligent workers, who produce results and keep their heads down. These folks make the boss shine. So why should they promote such valuable resources and

putting them out of reach? That would be counterproductive. That is why productive worker bees are the ones who are shafted when it comes to hand out promotions.

Hard workers need special talents to climb the ladder. Debbie slowly learned to play the political game at work. She never wanted to, but she was tired of being neglected come promotion time. Her political skills strengthened substantially thanks to all her years at Citibank. She became a good politician, and this talent even spilled over into her private life. But Johnny could not stand having his wife be this way. He felt even more detached from her. He did not like the Citibank logo “imprinted” on her forehead. Debbie did not care, though. She would sacrifice him any day for a fatter paycheck.

But the constant pressure did eat holes into her nervous system like acid on skin. Slowly, the endless nights worrying about schedules, deadlines, her reputation, and about safely playing the corporate game started to take their toll. Debbie began to have health issues. She was exhausted all the time and her concentration was shot. A physician prescribed Paxil, which, he promised, would quickly resolve all her ailments and re-establish her chemical balance. Johnny was all for his wife taking the pills, since he could not stand having her lie in bed, tossing and turning all night. Perhaps the pills would make her a nicer person at home, too, he thought.

Corporations have neither heart nor soul. They can rob a human of health, decency, and character. For long- or even just medium-term survival in the corporate cobweb, it takes a smug, self-important (or arrogant?), slick, networking, articulate politician like Bob, the man mentioned earlier who loves to hear himself talk, thrives on self-promotion, and spends more time networking than working. People with such characteristics and tenacity are able to break

into management. They may not be the smartest folks, but the consistent application of political strategies earns them promotions.

Consequently, the cream of the crop—the people who are really good—rarely make it to leadership positions. Yet retaining the narrators instead of the intelligentsia will have negative implications for a company’s overall performance. People blowing hot air cannot deliver the best results. Wasn’t it “hot air”, in the form of the M.B.A. boys, that was largely responsible for the demise of Enron and Tyco?

### **Performance Snapshots**

If your boss does not have the warm fuzzies for you, watch out! There is no remedy for this problem. It’s human energy. Some people just don’t like each other. Even the most neutral manager can have a jaundiced eye. This is not good when it comes time to undergo a traditional performance review, because reviews involve having just one person—your boss—grade you. If the boss hates you, the review process will not be adequate, even if you gave a stellar performance. This is because reviews and bonuses are never kept separate from the reviewer’s own likes or dislikes.

A great performance may also be viewed as a threat to your superior, so be wary. They don’t want to lose their jobs to you. A manager needs productive workers, but too much efficiency is intimidating to them. A downsizing project may just be the perfect time to get rid of such hazards. Having competence, but no strategic political skills, could cost you your job. The required balancing act can be mentally and physically taxing.

So, then, are the efficient workers the corporate beasts of burden? Is the corporate world made for smooth fellows like Dan, the corporate slut, who slide by and avoid work?

Shannon\*, a fellow project manager and an award-winning project manager, launched an eight-million-dollar program on time and on budget, only to be rated “average” in her performance review. She questioned that rating, but since her boss had reserved the term “outperformed” for his favorite pet, Shannon was shafted. The pet who received the top grade had done a mediocre job throughout the year, but his great relationship with the one in charge guaranteed him that “outperformed” rating.

Perhaps a more human approach to a review would be to invite more voices to the table. How about a 360-degree survey, instead of an assessment by just one person? The boss may not have the slightest clue about an employee’s skills and potential. The employee could have worked in a matrix organization with people from other departments. Or, in a world where there have already been two or three corporate restructurings, an employee may have had several bosses throughout the year. The one in charge of grading may not even be aware of the employee’s achievements.

To give a complete view of an employee’s performance, team members could be asked provide their input. If 100 percent of a project’s team members rate someone as being below average, there must be a certain truth to it. At minimum, these other voices should be taken into consideration.

### **Consultants Galore**

The threat of being downsized—the nice word for firing—instills a deep fear in everyone. In an attempt to weed out the excessive dead weight, the knife descends at least once or twice per year in the average corporation. The dreaded internal slaughter has turned into a routine. From initial announcement to final implementation, I would argue that employee productivity and



performance drops substantially while everyone waits for the verdict. The promoted cost savings effort is intended to woo Wall Street by demonstrating corporate forward thinking and progressiveness. More often than not, that involves cost cutting, which is achieved by the firing of employees. This is the easiest, fastest corporate measure to take. After all, the shareholders require proof of the company's efforts to increase profits—yet firing is the most short-sighted measure of all.

The second the word restructuring is uttered, knights in shining armor arrive on the scene. Strangely, downsizing always requires divine input from the gods of business: McKinsey, Accenture (or is it Accidature?), or some other such hotshot consulting firm. It is believed that such a drastic decision must be weighed and crafted by oh-so-much-smarter outside experts. Management relies on consultants who don't have any in-depth industry or company know how to unveil the next organizational miracle. But how can a young M.B.A. with no business or industry experience possibly accomplish this?

The rookie consultants in Armani suits, shiny shoes, and an air of superiority and condescension infiltrate meeting rooms, listen in on conference calls, interview employees, analyze business plans and projects, and create new organizational charts. Like secret agents, they hover around for weeks on end. Their undercover mission is communicated only vaguely to the employees, and leaves plenty of room for misinterpretation. The rumor mill works at high speed. Suspicions circulate about the percentage of staff to be reduced, and what departments will be worst affected. Which heads will roll? The question is met nowadays with weariness and lethargy.

Nobody welcomes the nosy, all-knowing miracle workers known as consultants. Plenty of unfruitful exercises involving consultants have been undertaken. The cutting and slicing is

rarely done in the right area, and usually does not have any long-term impact. Nobody I know was ever impressed with the results. Worst of all, the real dead weight always manages to survive.

The money spent on the downsizing force can even prove to be much more than the actual savings achieved. Consultants are pricey. It costs millions to keep them around for months. But the corporate consensus remains that the Accidentures of the world are indispensable. Most corporations hire them.

A truth often overlooked, though, is that consultants will often suggest using the same organizational structures already in use, but with different wrappings and ribbons. Companies will go through numerous cycles of centralization and decentralization over the years. Each time the new concept bears a fancier name and promises another version of “the best thing since sliced bread”. The corporate structures are always changing, and they transform now at record speed. It’s almost not worthwhile to get comfortable in a new department or on a new team. Your next boss, department name, or title is right around the corner.

The bottom line of the downsizing exercise is change. Change that proves the company is awake, nimble, and still swinging the ax. With change, the mission is complete. Wall Street is pleased. Yet despite all these changes, not much ever really changes. A few months later, the empty desks are filled again with new or recycled bodies doing the same job, but in a new and, of course, superior organizational structure.

Nobody seems to care about the actual effectiveness of the exercise. Consultants leave the premises immediately after having shared the divine spark in the form of a nice, glossy, colorful PowerPoint presentation. The hotshot virgin consultants, with their glitzy freshly printed M.B.A.s and literally no experience, are never blamed. They focus on strategy only,

never on implementation. This way, nobody can place fault with them for any mishaps or failings. After all, they only made a recommendation. But sometimes such recommendations are deadly.

### **Consultancy Excellence: The Grounding of Swissair**

McKinsey was Swissair's prime consultant around the turn of the century. The consultancy advised Swissair, a small airline from a small country, to rival the Oneworlds and Star Alliances of the world by creating a separate frequent flier program and by buying stakes to team up with smaller airlines such as LOT Polish Airlines, TAP Portugal, and SABENA. The Swiss didn't know any better and followed this ill-advised approach.

The so-called Hunter Strategy brought Swissair, Switzerland's flagship carrier, to its knees. After spending millions of dollars on a pipe dream, the once-reputable and successful airline was grounded in October of 2001. At Heathrow airport, authorities refused to refuel Swissair because the risk of their not being paid was too high. The great strategists at McKinsey had ruined a highly regarded airline. But they claimed innocence, since it was only the strategy that was part of their advised scheme, not its implementation.

Literally, a Cloud-cuckoo-land had been designed by supposedly intelligent brains. Was the drunken effect of the dot-com bubble still affecting Swissair judgment?

The "downsizing boys" are invincible. McKinsey remains the frontrunner in business consulting. Many corporate executives obtained their initiation into the business world from consulting firms. When help is needed, the good ol' boys and their buddies are brought in to "help." The age-old relationships and clusters are unbreakable.

The business world, as the world of politics, is upside down. Common sense went on permanent vacation. Thinking and logic are absent. Tons of money is set in the sand. Fat cats get fatter. Peons get poorer. It gets repeated year after year in ever-increasing proportions. Why? Greed. Power. Money.

### **Outsourcing and Insourcing**

Companies downsize at home and outsource jobs overseas in the hopes of instantly cutting costs. But is outsourcing to India and other countries really such a great idea? Has it been a big success for companies? I have my doubts. I see more and more companies jumping on the insourcing bandwagon, although this trend is never covered in the news. Outsourcing is a pain in the rear, and many firms have become disgruntled and frustrated with it, and have lost customers over their outsourcing endeavors.

The people who complain range from the unhappy customer who has to call a hotline located in faraway India to the IT team forced to work overtime to review and correct Indian computer code. Peggy\*, an IT manager at a Long Beach loan servicing company, complained to management about her workload having doubled since the company began outsourcing to Indian programmers. The code she was receiving from her remote employees in India was of low quality. And in addition to her regular job, she was forced to correct the sloppy code, which often resulted in her having to put in twelve-hour workdays. Her complaints to the leadership remained unanswered.

Let's face it. Calling a hotline in India is like ordering Italian food in a Chinese restaurant. We are not sure if the person on the other end can relate to our demands and issues. We have a hard time understanding them because their accent is very different and foreign, yet

they pretend to know all about America and sometimes even imply they are located right down the street. The whole experience leaves a strange taste in the mouth.

Have you had to call Hewlett Packard lately? I can't count how many times I have put off calling their dreaded support line, or how many hours I have spent wanting to cut off some customer service representative's head after hearing yet another scripted response. So what did I do? I swore to never buy an HP laptop again... will that help? Not sure.

After one such outsourcing-to-India ordeal, a major US airline received some of its lowest passenger rankings in the industry. Finally, two years into the deal, management decided to improve the airline's reputation by bringing the jobs back home again. The outsourcing endeavor had turned out to be a gigantic failure.

The airline, like numerous other firms saw a golden shimmer of miraculous profits hovering on the horizon. Everyone went to India. There had to be gold in that remote land. Factors such as customer satisfaction, repeat business, retention, consumer rankings, workload of its local employees, and quality of the work only came to the forefront after the deed was done. It was like, "Oops, we thought customers would like our new exotic workforce." They did not.

In an effort to race to India, we forgot the human aspect. We overlooked the two different work ethics, cultures, and ideologies involved. They weren't important. Companies jammed Western ways of doing business down Indian throats and hoped they would stick. But Indian culture is very different from ours. It's not easy to grasp. The complex religion of Hinduism has caused many Westerners to scratch their heads. The culture is 180 degrees different from what we are used to. But without understanding at least the basics of it, how can we expect to succeed? Perhaps we should have bothered to explore and learn first.

Trying to train Indian workers in the US style leads to poor results. Indian employees aren't used to teamwork, employee empowerment, flexible work hours, making decisions, asking questions, or sharing input. They are used to being told what to do. They don't ask questions. People who ask questions appear to get fired in India, because asking is interpreted as not knowing their jobs, or the subject matter at hand.

When it comes to Indian-US communication gaps, perhaps none looms larger than an Indian's way of saying yes; a response that is typically reinforced by a bobbing of the head. Indians will readily agree to any requirement asked for by a US client, whether there is a realistic chance of their achieving it or not. When the Indians say yes, they mean, "I'll make an honest effort," or "I'll try," not "It's 99 percent certain to happen and I'll take personal responsibility for it if it doesn't." Over-promising is the most common problem faced by Western businesses working with India.

Indians like to please, to say yes. However, American businessmen interpret the Indian yes as meaning what it does in America—something definite—and they expect results within the given timelines. They will then experience a rude awakening when the seemingly mutually agreed upon deliverables are not submitted by the deadline. Experiences of this sort have had many Western business people tearing out their hair in despair.

I learned about this the hard way. I hired and managed twelve people in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's culture is very similar to India's. My initial Western approach didn't get me anywhere. At first I thought it was simply the Sri Lankans' lack of command of the English language, but I quickly learned there was more to the story. In meetings, when I asked for suggestions or input, everyone nervously looked around. Nobody budged. That's when I

learned about the “no questions” rule. To them, asking a question means admitting they don’t know their job. And if they don’t know their job, that means they could be fired.

I had to go out on a covert mission to discover what my employees were capable of. By walking up to the database guy unannounced, I saw he was unable to use MS Access, as he copied row after row into Excel. I learned the secretaries were afraid to talk to local government officials on the phone due to issues with either Tamil or Sinhalese heritage. I slowly got glimpses into what working is like for that culture and in that culture. I discovered their limitations and understood what tasks could be handled by whom. Nobody would ask a question. Nobody would admit they were not perfect. If I had asked them to take a trip to the moon, they would have nodded and gotten a ladder.

Luckily, I was able to hire an experienced professional who used to work in Bangalore for a large US bank. He was a native Sri Lankan and wanted to move home. He understood Western work ethics. He turned out to be an invaluable asset to our office. His English was decent, and he taught me tons about the local work culture. I was open to learning. With him as the mediator, the office flourished. Everyone was happy.

I made a point of treating locals the same as Westerners. All too often I witnessed the abuse of local workers and the segregation of the workforce into two types. Certain NGO (non-governmental organization) workers confused humanitarian aid with Neocolonialism and let their power go to their heads. The result was an operation bordering on slavery, which was very sad to witness. The locals are human and simply need to be treated as such.

Our project turned out to be one of the most successful tsunami rehabilitation efforts in Sri Lanka. The World Bank inquired about the secret to our success and hired us to analyze the methodology and progress of their efforts on the Island. We were glad to help.

## **What Can You Do?**

As companies race to include the latest fad on their menu of strategies (outsourcing, downsizing, centralization, decentralization, etc.), humans have been devising strategies for not going insane over the resultant, incessant stresses and changes. Firstly, it is clear that life should not consist of only work and sleep. It is also obvious that we can't live without money. But those facts are no excuse for completely neglecting the human in us.

Of course, a company does not care about you, and how you are doing or feeling. All a corporation wants is to squeeze as much out of you as possible. You are the only one who actually cares about *you* in this relationship. The company will heartlessly toss you aside should you become no longer useful to them. It is in your best interest to be aware of the truth of this relationship. You need to be a bit selfish here. If the squeezing becomes too much, you must make changes. Otherwise, you will become ill. Health is the best asset you have. Make sure you take good care of it. Empty batteries are just that—useless and dead.

Learn to listen to your body. You may never have noticed, but your body, mind, and consciousness try to schedule appointments with you when things are off. But you keep ignoring these warning signals. The signals may come in the form of high blood pressure, depression, burnout or panic attacks. The slower your response to these calls, the deeper you dig yourself into a hole. When you finally can't take the aches and pains any more and reach for help, your savior is usually found in the form of blue or white pills. You sedate the flags until further notice. You are chemically stabilized enough to go back to work and function like an android.



But drugs do not solve problems. Until you address your root issue—your damaging lifestyle, your gorging on garbage, or your too many wired hours at work—your well-being will be lacking. Humans are not machines. Humans are delicate creatures who cannot be fixed with the simple ingestion of chemicals.

The red flags are important messengers. The sooner you take them seriously, the better. The longer you wait, the sicker you get. The rash, the anxiety, the back pain, the carpal tunnel syndrome: these are all messages. The best approach is to listen to your inner voice. Try to stay connected, to meditate, and to feel balance. If you can't feel *you* anymore, your health is likely to go downhill.

Just as you go to the gym to exercise and build your body, so too must you also take time to sculpt the biggest gift humans were ever given—the human within. There are ways to teach a company that you have a life outside of work, and that your health is important.

What I pointed out in this chapter is how inefficiently some people work. The surfing, the time wasted at work are just that—a waste. Why not use the time at work for work? Why not surf after hours? For many people, most of the stress they feel comes from simply being disorganized—and from procrastinating. Learn to set more pragmatic goals and deadlines—and then stick to them. You'll find that not only are you less stressed, but your work will be better. I bet the time saved this way could have you leaving work earlier.

I am completely aware that some companies won't let you go until the boss has left. I have seen this phenomenon before. But if your work is done and the boss has been painstakingly educated about your efficient work style, change may be feasible. Not in every case, I am sure, but a twelve-hour workday isn't the smartest way to work, either. Your boss should know that. And you are not being paid your boss's salary. You should be working

fewer hours than the boss. Check out *The 4-Hour Workweek* by Timothy Ferriss for more tips and tricks on reducing your work hours.

Advanced employers know the value of good employees, and many are willing to find ways to support and help employees deal with the permanent changes caused by family situations. These can include flextime, job sharing, telecommuting, and part-time employment. Your first step is to research your employer's guidelines. Maybe your company policy is more flexible than you might think. Perhaps you could already be making plans to work from home as soon as next month.

Life is simply too short, so don't let things pass you by in a blur. Take steps to stop and enjoy the things and people around you. Schedule more time between meetings, don't make plans for every evening or weekend, and find some ways to distance yourself from the things that are causing you the most stress.

An hour here and there for lunch, a fifteen-minute break in the morning and afternoon used for a walk in the nearby park, a quick meditation, a yoga session, a breathing exercise: these are worth gold. If you start such practices, and continue them for at least twenty-one days, then by the last day the new routine will turn into a habit. Remember this.

Sometimes it's easier for us to allow ourselves to feel weighed down rather than to take charge and make a prioritized list of stuff that need to be done. You need to buck the trend. Develop a list. Set priorities. And then enjoy the contentment of crossing items off your listing.

And since you do spend quite a number of hours at work, why not be good, or even great, at what you do? Why do it in a mediocre way? Why not give it your best while you are

stuck at the desk? As long as you need to be a hamster on the treadmill, be a hamster that has fun and excels.

Fear plays a huge role at the workplace. Fear of not being smart enough, fear of not being good enough, fear of not making it up the ladder, and so forth. Often, you harbor such fears for absolutely no reason. If you are confident in your shoes, calm, relaxed, and competent in what you do, your fears are totally unfounded. Those who show fear and hesitancy aren't the ones who get promoted, as previously explained. Competency and self-confidence are what will get you promoted. Why not ask yourself what you are afraid of? If you lack knowledge about your job or industry, then go out and get it. If the problem is your relationship with your boss, then evaluate what's wrong and see how you can improve it. Leaving is always an option, too (remember to set an intent for a great new job).

Do you really need to compete for every rung of the ladder? Do you really need to be vice-president of communications? Or can you live happily as a business analyst whilst have more peace and quiet in your life? Earning a tad less money and working fewer hours could free up enough time to turn your hobby into a profession. Extra money is often eaten up by taxes anyway. If you learn to invest and spend the money *you make* wisely, and not live paycheck to paycheck, less money can mean bliss and give you freedom.

Use the manifestation technique to achieve your goals at work. Use them to help you get permission to work from home, as Debbie did. Not only is this a powerful tool, it forces you to define what you *really* want. Be clear about your wishes and release them to the universe. Set a strong intent. Don't let anyone interfere. Magic does happen. Many people have no clue about what they want. They simply live day after day and expect destiny to work it all out for them. There is no flipchart in the sky with your life script written out on it. You

must write on that flipchart. Nobody else will do the job for you. You are in charge of your own life.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Relationships Don't Relate**

Just a decade ago, we met real people and had real conversations—often. Today, in a withdrawn and fearful society, it is tough to find a decent new friend or partner, as people shun strangers. In the '90s it was the norm for a chap to hit on a chick in a bar; now that would be considered downright offensive.

In coffee shops, we used to chat and interact with one another. The scene looks different today. Everyone is connected; to laptops, iPods, and PDAs. Nobody wants to miss a “;)” from a stranger halfway across the world. A smiley face sent from Chennai is more significant than a real-life conversation with another human. Isolation has taken over our lives and we pretend it's just so cool. If a stranger initiates a conversation, we classify the dude as a weirdo—instantly. Often, he is. One really has to be insane to try to make conversation today. Who could be so nuts to simply want to chat? We have built huge bunkers to hide in, have outsourced human contact to the Internet, and are suffering a great deal because of it. The community is dead. Long live the Internet community that is not.

What humans want, deep down, is to be happy. It is human interaction that can help that process along. Having a group experience is much more powerful than wandering alone. Yet, the concept of socializing has been ostracized. Having a few shallow friends who text under the table while we pour our hearts out isn't what makes a soul feel warm and fuzzy.

A hearty, deep friendship is fulfilling and inspirational. It is fact that we feel rejuvenated and contented the day after a fun night out with great friends. We need this. We need to be heard; we need to connect, touch, laugh, and relate to other humans. We need this

because we are human. But just to have a fulfilling conversation is somewhat challenging nowadays. That's because a discussion is a two-way street. I ask a question and you listen. You answer and I listen. You ask a question. I listen. Then I answer. The process should go something along these lines. It is the listening part that is totally missing today. Speaking is key. Everyone wants to croak from the top of a tree, be heard, but nobody wants to listen. It's all about the big show and a plethora of airtime or a boasting about how good we are. "Look at me", we scream.

Jeffrey\*, an acquaintance of mine, who recently moved to Acapulco, Mexico from Houston, *tells* everyone about his old life in the States and his recent move, whether they care to hear it or not. He completely ignores statements others make about *themselves*. Who are they? *They* are there to listen to his monologue, *nada mas!* The funny thing is that Jeffrey is now a real estate agent. A good realtor's key traits are: 1. listening, and 2. intuition. Without those talents, Jeffrey will have a hard time finding the right properties for his clients. If he were to actually listen to them, however, he'd know what their needs are.

Jeffrey is not an anomaly. I have observed this phenomenon often. People who speak for the sake of speaking, not for the sake of having a two-way conversation, are everywhere. They love to hear themselves talk. The conversation of two desperate housewives lunching in California can sound more like a TV commercial than like people having a real human interaction. The pretentious laughs, the aloofness, the nail polish comparisons, the buzzing, the glossy pink PDAs—it's all a travesty. Superficiality is the norm. It's not limited to Orange County housewives.

Is this the best we can do as humans?

Humans are wonderful when we allow ourselves to *be* who we really are – human. When ego is put aside. When we peel away the nonsense, the fake smiles, the shallow façades, and the bullshit. When our thick layers of rusty armour are stripped away, and heart comes to the surface. That’s human. I once witnessed how twenty-four people attending a Hemi-Sync meditation course at the Monroe Institute in Virginia turned into true humans in the space of only a few days (Hemi-Sync relaxes the brain waves using frequencies—binaural beats—that can put the user into an altered state of mind). For one week, our group meditated and shared the deepest, innermost experiences that occurred at the core of humanness. This created a bonding of a different kind—a bond of the heart, not of the head. There was no pretense, no superficiality, no fake rush – it was simply humans concerned with being human. All it takes is to open up and delve into the tunnels of the unconscious mind. Deep down we’re caring, loving beings, seeking to be understood and to give and receive love and happiness.

Yet the societal isolation of the new world has created a new “single-serving” phenomenon. It can be witnessed in public places all day long. For example, I was once in line at the grocery store when a voice behind me started chatting about a party that was being held that evening, and about the reasons why she had bought some Hess Cabernet. She spoke, but didn’t see me. She was simply talking for the sake of talking—giving a monologue, a rattling speech, aimed at nobody in particular.

Similar incidents occur on airplanes when entitled passengers feel the need to share. If you are the lucky neighbor of such a character, brace yourself to hear speeches about their amazing career, exciting lifestyles, and the toys they purchased, or even their recent colonoscopy. But don’t expect a goodbye at touchdown. You simply fade into the background. You were a means to an end. That’s a single-serving friend, used once and then thrown away.

As a way of recognizing your bad habits when talking with others, ask if you would enjoy having a chat with someone like yourself. If you don't think you would enjoy it, perhaps others don't either. Humans like to talk to caring, warm, considerate humans, a species that will be extinct one day if we keep the ego games at the current rate.

Talking about the world in the clouds... flying seems to evoke other strange behaviors. A selfish, inconsiderate demeanor and a sense of being special are common. Just as you doze off, a thoughtless passenger behind you grabs your backrest for the hundredth time, waking you up. The person next to you changes her kid's diaper; the smell kills on arrival. Children scream at the top of their lungs without being consoled by their parents. It's me, myself and I territory.

On a flight from Zurich to Los Angeles, a woman in the row behind me demanded I raise my backrest. When I refused and explained we all paid for equal space on board, she started yelling, shaking, and pushing my seat frantically. I called the flight attendant, who explained the rules and tried to calm her down. Although the seat earthquakes eventually subsided, the whining old bird resorted to coughing through the gap between the seats for the remainder of the flight.

Space in the air is limited. Aware humans consider the impact their actions have on others and try to be courteous to make flights more enjoyable for everyone. Anything less would be rude and selfish. It is this type of consideration that is missing in our egoistic world.

I have a hard time believing what I am seeing sometimes. As I type this, I am forced to listen as some dude in the business lounge watches a comedy blaring from his notebook computer. He is not wearing headphones. Everyone is forced to listen to his favorite show while he laughs out loud and pretends not to notice that people are becoming annoyed. This is



an airport business lounge. Ten years ago, one could hear a pin drop in here. Things have changed. Today, everyone is entitled to having rights and being special. We are a bunch of princes and princesses with imaginary crowns on our heads.

## **Alone**

Not long ago, families and extended families lived under one roof, in constant contact with each other. It's only been in the last few decades that people have started living in smaller groups, or alone. According to the Associated Press, about 27.2 million Americans lived alone in 2000, accounting for about 26 percent of all households and about 9.7 percent of the overall US population. In about 21 percent of households, married couples lived without children. In eight percent of households, single parents lived with at least one child. With smaller families and more people living alone, we have discovered a lack of social connections causes dissatisfaction in life as demonstrated by our feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression. Lonely people look for ways to connect, often turning to such devices as the television, the Internet, their Game Boy, or their iPod. Although these tools are poor substitutes for human contact, many continue to search for happiness electronically, especially on the Internet.

## **Desperately Seeking Dates**

In such an environment, one wonders how we ever managed to date without the Internet. How did we cope before speed dating, Craigslist, and eHarmony? It seems that Mr. or Mrs. Right has merged into html code. For those who suffer from social ineptness, the Internet provides the perfect portal for dating in the twenty-first century. What Amazon.com is to books, eHarmony.com is to humans. We shop for partners by category. Doing online scans for dates

or partners fits perfectly into our world of speed and efficiency. There is no time for anything else.

It's the eHarmony rush special for the Friday night lonely. Get a date on credit; pay later. Get someone. Get anyone. It may be a freak, but at least it's a date. At least we can pretend for one night that are in demand or desired by someone.

Alright. Some people do actually get married to Plentyoffish.com members, but seriously, online daters enjoy only a tiny margin of success when you compare the number of good dates they line up to the number of freaks. My eHarmony expert friend Caty's main complaint was that most dot-com men immediately inquired about her readiness to take it up the behind. She stated that her "no" or "none of your business" reply always triggered a "let's go no further" type of response. The Net is a catalogue of anonymous humans. Anything goes.

### **Delilah, the Dot-com Cougar**

Delilah\*, forty-six, mature, and attractive, is a resourceful cougar. Despite her fading looks, she had still been managing to drag guys home from the bar at least once a month. The process had become too tiring, though. Increasingly, she began to outsource her hunt for fresh prey to the Internet. She hoped to find Dr. Charming online. The websites Match.com, eHarmony.com, and Plentyoffish.com came in handy for finding exactly that—plenty of fish in the sea. For a small fee she could leave the magic up to the Web. Overnight, Delilah became a dot-com bloke-shopping addict.

One of the many dates the cat dragged in was a man whose supposed claim to fame was that he was an "alien investigator." Instead of schlepping him out to a bar to have her friends check him out, she knew no better than to take him to our private beach party. I could

not believe the insanity. Nobody there had asked to meet a never-before-seen alien correspondent. As soon as we could, we Googled the dude. Our gut feeling was right. The dude was a fraud. None of the info he provided stood up to scrutiny. No company. No website. Nada. But by that time, Delilah was already enjoying a close encounter of a different kind. When she finally dumped him a few weeks later, he insisted on being introduced to one of her girlfriends to get his money's worth.

Some of the guys she met online had uploaded fake pictures, and in real life looked more like seventy-year-old Massachusetts congressman Barney Frank; others may have more closely resembled their photos, but were not right because they were simply looking for a quickie, not a relationship.

It used to be that the workplace was the perfect place to meet potential mates. Today it is risky business because sexual harassment, political correctness, and nepotism have castrated such romances. Work was a great way to meet marriage material: the company provided the initial people scan, and daily teamwork revealed candidates' true personalities. It was easier to trust co-workers than strangers. But those days are nearly past. Lawsuits have put a damper on that. In addition, opening up at work creates other risks. Private information shared with a workmate may be used against you if the relationship goes sour. It can destroy your career or lead to an expensive lawsuit. Therefore, we have become wary of dating at work. It is too dangerous.

The recent introduction of love contracts further restricts dating at work. Certain companies have started asking workers to sign contracts that shield employers from liability, should intimacy later provoke a sexual harassment lawsuit or create some other discord. The contracts, most common in the entertainment industry, also act as a formal way for couples to

disclose their relationship ahead of time in the event that their alliance might one day affect the company's bottom line or generate negative publicity.

Lawyers and mediators believe love contracts may become more common. A recent survey found that 43 percent of US workers admit to having dated a co-worker, and many of those relationships led to marriage. Some, however, feel that a contract diminishes the romantic quality of a relationship.

### **Trapped or not?**

Eventually, almost everyone finds someone, somehow. Some marry when still in love. Others marry not 100 percent sure if the feeling still is, or ever was, love, but don't care or question it, because other qualities are thought to make up for any lack of love. Tired of the game, tired of being alone, we often settle for less, or just not enough. I don't want to sound like a doomsday messenger, but look around you. Marriages take place for many reasons—for money, for power, or to end loneliness, just to name a few. These are not the right reasons to enter into what should be a long-term union. If there is no love, no deep love, why commit to a deal that is bound to bring anguish? Chemistry and good sex aren't sufficient for a life-long commitment. You need love, which is deeper. Love requires nurturing, like a plant. Without nurturing, weeds will grow rampant, or else the plant will just die.

As humans on the run, we don't seem to have time for such cultivation. And the result is not pretty. The median duration of a first marriage that ends in divorce is 7.8 years for males and 7.9 years for females. In the UK, that number stands at around eleven years. Pretty gloomy, these statistics. If there was only a 60 percent chance the car you had your eye on was

a lemon, would you buy it? I am not saying we shouldn't marry. I am simply pointing out statistics.

To wed is certainly customary. It's a nice celebration for friends and family. The assumption is that the union will provide security for life. Perhaps we need to take a more rational approach to the subject. Why not have a long trial session, i.e. live together? If you still want to marry after a few years, why not? A ton of people are doing this already. Myself, I've been living with my partner for twelve years. Why get married? Just to have a license? Just to change my last name? To throw a good party? To be an acceptable citizen? For insurance or retirement reasons? Most of these things can be arranged without a wedding.

Living together is a great test for a couple. Too many people decide to marry based on initial physical attraction and romantic dreams. They see marriage as butterflies might see a field of flowers—an endless feast of love and good times. If, after the trial, you can still say, “Yes, this is it, perhaps even true love,” then do it. Awesome!

With the exception of my parents, I honestly don't know many people with decent long-term marriages. I just don't. Most of my middle-aged friends have gone through a sour breakup or divorce; some have remarried, while others remain single. But then there are couples who just can't cut the ties. Some stay in an acidic environment for the children's sake; others stay because they are afraid to lose the comfort, the money, the security, or their nice home. The starting over, the difficulty of finding a new love, the disbelief there *is* a new love, keep the fearful locked in a prison of gloom.

Staying in bad, toxic relationships makes all involved sick. Sure, we make pacts to cope until the day we get a better job or have more money in the bank, and then, perhaps then, we will claim our independence. Until that day, we waste time; we settle in misery. We lose

years by *pretending to live*, sometimes losing even the best years of our lives. With increased frustration, either depression or anxiety sets in because love and intimacy, the most important parts of life, are missing. We prostitute ourselves for whatever deal we signed with the devil. This is a rather sad existence. Spending years hoping for better times is a waste. Life is too short for such suffering.

All of us deserve to experience love, closeness, and intimacy. To get that we must take action, visualize, and make it materialize. A good union means work. None of it comes free. Human intervention is required to keep a relationship healthy and intimate. We know that, but few practice it. We wait until it is bad enough to see a counselor. However, the issue should be addressed way before then. In fact, it should be addressed every day, starting right then on date number two.

The butterfly season of chemistry seldom lasts more than a year or two. If you get married during that season, you better get ready to plan for preservation. Don't expect your partner to provide infinite happiness. If a marriage is based on the other person providing happiness, it is doomed to fail. True happiness and contentment can only originate in one place—in yourself. You are the creator of happiness. If you don't love and respect yourself, nobody else can't either. Nobody can find the happiness, the love you deserve, except the true you.

## **Sex Warfare**

The sounds of today's lovemaking rituals remind more of huffing and puffing in the weight room than anything that should emerge from between silky sheets. Sex today echoes the act of pumping iron more than a sensual experience. We perform ever louder, bigger, deeper, painful,

and extreme sexual workouts. Pornography is the new idol. The porn business never suffered a recession. About 260 new porn sites are launched each day. Porn is in demand. It's available to meet every taste and preference; every fetish has its followers. While it is mostly men who view porn, couples use it for inspiration too. According to a porn study conducted in 2007, 89 percent of porn is created in the US, and 72 percent of porn viewers are men. The annual revenue is somewhere around \$10 billion.

Porn influences us whether we want it to or not. The scenes, positions, and handling of women as whores or sex slaves become ingrained in our minds. Blindly, we invite these practices into the bedroom, because it's the thing to do.

The current demand is for rougher, deeper, and more extreme sex. Double penetration and anal sex are run of the mill today; so is a chick doing sixteen blokes at a time. How much further can we take it? The abundance of perverse sex acts and ever more violent porn do not lead to more fulfilling orgasms. Do we need to have violence because we can't feel anything unless it's painful? Have we become that desensitized? What is the desire behind all this brutality? We search for the ultimate high in the wrong places. Super orgasms will not send us to nirvana. It's a temporary fix, similar to a shopping spree. What we need is a human orgasm with true love and feelings attached.

My girlfriend Simone complained about her husband Andy's porn addiction. The couple never enjoyed the best sex life. Their standard, for years, was sex once a month. Andy grew increasingly restless. He was rapidly approaching mid-life crisis territory, and discovered porn to get out of the lull. Once the babies were asleep, he would watch anal and double-penetration scenes on a big screen TV. Andy did not attempt to hide his newly found addiction. Simone was disgusted by it. I guess instead of cheating, her husband resorted to

porn. After that, sex for the couple changed. It became more violent. He handled her in a rough way, without foreplay, and demanded to penetrate the other cavity. Simone confessed: “He makes me feel like a whore.”

Female bodies aren't really designed for penetration of the rear. I mean, anatomically, it is certainly possible, but hell, it hurts. Don't tell me it doesn't. Simply opening the rear for business because the male public demands it? No way. I would have nothing against it if it was capable of taking me to a higher state, but it isn't. I have no religious hang-ups, but if I can't experience pleasure, why should I suffer in pain? Do I have anything in there that could facilitate an orgasm? No. What good does it do me? Just because every chick on [www.youporn.com](http://www.youporn.com) is willing to do it doesn't mean I have to conform.

When children accidentally catch their parents having sex, they often mistake it for a fight. That's not what sex is supposed to look or sound like. Sex should be a peaceful union between two bodies. Our human bodies will know precisely what to do during a sexual act if we let ourselves enjoy it and surrender. Instead, we keep practicing sex the same way insects do. Mindlessly.

Sex acts are planned and rehearsed in the mind. We ought to look good. Performance anxiety is felt by all parties involved. Yet sex turns into a show. Deep, long-lasting fulfillment is not there. Perhaps you think this is because you have never experienced anything other than the quick and intense orgasms we generally have in the West. The lack of satisfaction does not stop either party from repeating the exercise. The chase for the ultimate orgasm persists, and we keep trying peculiar positions and more intensely vibrating dildos to reach it.

Human bodies are perfectly designed for enjoyable sex. Bodies know what to do, if permitted to act. More on that in the Tantra chapter ahead.



Hundreds of years ago, the Catholic Church capitalized on guilt—sexual guilt in particular. Sex was deemed dirty and repulsive. Women in particular needed to feel guilty and shameful about sex and femininity, and female orgasms were definitely not acceptable. The fact that women can have multiple orgasms was intimidating to the masculine world. That needed to be hidden away, stowed, along with menstruation and the general world of females. It was dirty.

Men felt they needed to control things by putting female power down. Never should a man feel inferior to a woman, especially in bed. Men had pleasure, not women. Men could use the female temple as they pleased. For centuries, and even today in many cultures, feminine sexuality was and is taboo. The world revolved around men and the male orgasm. All this has turned women frigid. Only over the past decades have women slowly started to rediscover sexual pleasure.

In a perfect world, during a natural sex act a woman can have many orgasms and feel entirely relieved and relaxed afterwards. When women can't achieve orgasms regularly, they become angry and fight with family and loved ones. Orgasm-deprived women are frustrated without knowing why. Pure relief and relaxation can be felt only if a woman is properly taken care of.

Because society is so far removed from intimacy and sex, the problem is not easy to fix, and often, the way we try to fix it has no effect. Deeper, harder, more violent sex is not the solution. We succumb to this nonsense because we are disconnected from *heart* and can't love. Women need more than penetration. To orgasm, most females need a lot of clitoral stimulation. What works for one doesn't work for all. Without communicating about sex and

orgasms, men will never know the secret female pleasure dome. They tap in the dark, wondering whether we enjoyed it or not. Women need to state what works for them.

According to research, only 25 percent of women can always (or almost always) reach orgasm from vaginal sex (while in the case of males, achievement of orgasm is well over 90 percent). Just 25 percent of women have vaginal orgasms. This means that 75 percent of women need more than an in-and-out movement to trigger their mechanism.

It's simple: if there is love involved, and if the two bodies are allowed to speak, great sex can unfold naturally. Bodies know what to do; it's the mind that interferes.

Some couples can have satisfying sex for their entire marriage. My parents did. But more often, the daily demands of life combined with the inability to make love may cause the fire or desire to die. We blame bad sex sessions on stress.

For men, the ability to perform sexually is a major ego issue. Impotency is shameful; a breakdown of the tool is not acceptable. The demands of the modern world affect the male performance and drive. We now see men as young as thirty taking Viagra to avoid embarrassment. A Chicago natural hormone replacement specialist confided to me that most of his male clients in their late thirties or early forties suffer from low testosterone levels, which negatively affect their sex drive. He reported that men, after just a couple of months of testosterone treatment, had improvements in energy, sex drive, mood, and muscle tone. They felt reborn. Sexual desire returned.

Testosterone is a great fix, but the underlying issues can't be ignored. Stress, poor eating habits, and lack of exercise may contribute to a lack of desire or inability to perform. There is no reason why libido should be absent in a healthy man in his forties. The member

should work well into retirement age. Testosterone should be naturally available; if not, something must be seriously off.

As humans, we are blessed with a great mind, a soul, and consciousness. With all those distinct blessings that separate us from animals, why can't we manage to have sex that is more mindful? Why don't we involve the heart and soul when making love, and not just the head?

### **Why Not Manifest Love?**

Thoughts become things. According to Norman Vincent Peale, if you change your thoughts, you change your world. Your thoughts affect your life and love destiny. Negative thoughts create a negative world; the more negativity you spread, the more comes back. The more doubt you have about finding true love, the less likely you are to find it. But if you change your thoughts, luck in love can change. You create the world around you, and that includes lovers and partners for life.

A popular book and corresponding movie, *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne, portray how to visualize a partner by placing and releasing an order to the universe. At the very core of *The Secret* is the idea that you get what you think and feel the most good about. The very essence of it is that thoughts become things. If you think you are not worthy of love and respect—guess what? The universe responds to your thoughts.

*The Secret* can work. Put a description or a picture of your perfect partner on a vision board. A vision board is a board upon which you place things that represent your desires and dreams: peace, a mantra, or pictures of a home, partner, or car, or whatever it is that you desire more of in your life. Place the board where you can easily see it and visualize your goals, your dream partner every day. Imagine having him or her in your life already. Be specific with your

requests. Describe the attributes of your future partner in detail. Make sure you say he needs to be available and ready for a relationship. Describe in exact detail the type of person you want to attract. Any conflicting statements may be counter-productive. Keep the message clear, simple, and straightforward—and feel it. Feel as if you are already in a relationship. Feeling it is the most important part of visualization. This will turn the signals you radiate from “I am not desirable” or “I will never find anyone” to “yes, I am finding someone perfect.” Thoughts become things. Thoughts are things. The positive message sent out to the universe will be answered. Trust the process. Trust it has already happened. Simply stating “I want a hot dude in his early thirties who loves me” won’t cut it. You have to be specific, and feel and believe it. It’s about intent. Strong intent will turn into strong results. Numerous studies done at the Noetic Institute in California show that intent may influence molecular structure of an object of intention. Read the *The Intention Experiment* by Lynne McTaggart for some amazing revelations. Visualizing is not just New Age babble. It turns out it is proven fact at Institute.

My friend Paula\*, 52, decided to clear some clutter from her brain and practiced Ho’oponopono to achieve just that. She then put together a vision board and the first thing on there was a picture and description of a handsome fellow. I found the picture disturbing, because the man was in a pool, with his face half submerged in water. I did not get good energy from it. Just a few weeks later, she met a man on a sailboat who bore a strong resemblance to the man depicted. She called me in ecstasy. The two hit it off instantly. They kicked off a hot affair. However, to Paula, it all felt too good to be true. Something was wrong. It was too good. After a few weeks of hot, sultry sex, the guy told her he was married.

Her visualization had not been specific enough. She told the guy to get lost and added “available” to the partner description on her board. Six months later, love entered Paula’s life

again. A single man moved into her building. The two were head over heels. This time he was a keeper. He found her. She didn't even have to leave the building. The relationship turned out as visualized. The couple is very much in love to this day.

Anything you truly focus on can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you send negative signals to the other gender, guess what? You will get negative results. If you keep repeating, "I will never," "I just can't," or "I am not lovable," then so it will be. If you think about having a better life or love and start shifting your thoughts and feelings, your life can change. Thoughts become things.

Legitimate effort is required for good results. Superficial, wishful thinking won't do the trick. One of the most important actions is to be grateful. You need to be grateful for what you already have. There is a lot to be thankful for. If you don't appreciate the gifts already received from the universe, the giving may cease. It's like placing demands on friends and never returning a favor. If someone keeps taking from you without giving back, eventually you get tired and discard the person. It's the same with the universe. Say thanks. Be grateful for what you have and you will get more.

A friend who knew that Debbie (our example from Chapter 1) was in despair, recommended she watch *The Secret*. Knowing how miserable and hopeless she felt, Debbie jumped on it. She needed an upper. The movie was just what the doctor ordered. The method made total sense to her. Right away, she put up a vision board. She felt this was the key, the answer, to some of her issues. She'd been way too negative about everything for a long time.

Debbie wanted to focus on two areas in her life, initially. She was tired of going to the office every day and wanted to work at least part time from home. Also, she knew her marriage to Johnny had to improve or end; the status quo needed to change.

Her first action was to stick a picture of a happy couple and a contented woman working at home on the board. The scenes felt real, achievable. Her intent was strong. To her surprise, it was easy to see and feel as if these situations had already occurred. Working from home would put her at ease, so she could focus more on her relationship and improve in other areas of her life, such as by eating healthier. Changing the work situation was key for her. Everything else would then fall into place.

She imagined her boss signing up for the deal. She set up a cozy office at home, and even got a new office chair. Every day she spent time visualizing—on the train, in the car, at the gym, and standing in front of the board. After a few weeks, it felt as if her visions had manifested in some sort of another realm. Then finally, she approached her boss with the suggestion to work from home. He approved the plan within three days. Debbie was overjoyed, but not surprised.

Johnny noticed the different energy at home. The new dynamics somehow gave him hope for the first time in years. Perhaps, this could be the start of a turnaround, a new life?

### **Keeping the Love**

If a couple grows together in a human way, spiritually, intimately, the union has excellent survival prospects. As the saying goes, “The couple that prays together stays together.” Why not visualize and focus on good traits, instead of finding fault in each other? Such focus emphasizes the positive in a partner and brings it to the forefront.

If we don’t take the time to truly get to know one another, if we persist instead in leading superficial, business-oriented partnerships, then we shouldn’t be surprised at the

current failure rate of marriage. As humans, with infinite consciousness, we have the capability to raise a bond to higher levels, instead of running from fling to fling.

Laziness and preoccupation with trivial issues prevent couples from reaching that higher level of consciousness. But instead of getting a divorce, or resigning yourself to your loveless marriage, why not attempt to improve it?

Perhaps we should hear what the ancient Greeks had to say about love. The Greeks divided love into three different types: *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*. *Eros* consists of a passionate, intense desire; it is often referred to as sexual desire, hence the modern notion of *erotic love*. The physical love for an object, idea, or person in and of itself is not a proper form of love, because it is connected to purely sexual desire. That kind of love is a reflection of the object, idea, or person that resembles ideal beauty. Hence, the attraction we feel for someone during initial dating is a reflection of our own desire—that butterfly feeling of magical romance.

In contrast to the desire and passionate yearning inherent in *eros*, *philia* entails a fondness and appreciation of the other. For the Greeks, the term *philia* incorporates not just friendship, but also loyalty to family and *polis*—the Greek word for one's political community, job, or discipline. *Philia* cannot emanate from those who habitually quarrel, gossip, or treat others aggressively and unjustly. The best characters, it follows, produce the best kind of friendship, and hence, love.

*Agape* refers to the paternal love of God for man and of man for God, but it is extended to include a brotherly love for all humanity, as expressed in the term “love thy neighbor.” *Agape* arguably draws on elements from both *eros* and *philia* in that it seeks a perfect kind of love that is at once a fondness, a transcending of the particular, and a passion without the necessity of reciprocity. This could be what we call *true love*. *Agape* love has two other

important qualities: it desires what is best for the person loved, so it is selfless, and it requires a decision—an act of will. Thus, when the romance wears off in a marriage, the partners must decide to love, and not just stay married for the children or whatever other reason they may have. They must decide to actually commit to and love the other person, regardless of emotion. If they truly commit to love, even when they don't feel love, the feeling of love will grow and a type of romance much stronger than butterfly attraction will develop.

Some believe that a relationship travels through these three kinds of love, if permitted to do so. Since we are fighting to keep the butterflies alive, we may face a harsh transition when we move from *eros* to *philia*. When the initial mad desire suddenly dies after one or two years, we question love. Divorce is legal and accessible, although expensive, and we would rather go down that road instead of accepting *philia* and working toward *agape*.

The greatest high in the world—the chemistry, the emotional lava flow we feel when we fall head over heels—is, unfortunately, finite. It doesn't last. Unless we work hard at it, evolve spiritually together, and are able to keep our vibrations in sync. Trust me, I believe that growing old together is sexy, if the couple is happy. What we should avoid at all cost is staying together just for the sake of not being alone. Suffering, longing for another partner, and a lack of love and lust hurt the soul. But for a couple who successfully and cheerfully manages to overcome the bumps in the road and stay close, an incredible bond far superior to *eros* can develop.

Love should not be a chore. Love is meant to be beautiful. Essentially, love is all we have. If you don't feel love at a deep level, you are missing a huge part of what life can give. Loving another profoundly and sincerely is worth living for. But the feeling must be love and not simply friendship. Some couples describe their relationship as one where they are good



friends, and while that's important, love should be present. Otherwise, it is not deeply satisfying.

You need to be honest with yourself and admit to any lack of love. You know, on a deeper level, if it is lacking. You know when you are deceiving yourself. Ask your higher self; go beyond the cluttered mess of thoughts and ask your inner self for truth. The answer is there inside. You can trick yourself for years and talk yourself into thinking you are in love and content with what you have. When it's not real, when love is phony, you are the one who is being hurt. Faking it means just that—you are being fake.

Love as such is unpredictable. It is insecure. It needs to be allowed to stay vulnerable to be alive. Opening up and admitting to being in love with someone exposes us, and that's the beauty of it. But we find it difficult to say, "I love you." We have a hard time handling insecurity and weakness, so we try to make everything secure. The way to secure love is by getting married. The union secures a partner with a contract. There is less danger in that, but it may kill love.

Dead things are permanent; anything alive is bound to change. Change is the very essence of life, and with change there is no security. If you want to enter deeper into the realms of life, you must be ready to be open and not try to have a guarantee for the future. Security is dull. Insecurity is alive and beautiful. You can be secure by shutting your doors and curtains and sitting in the dark, but you are not alive. Security is crippling and depressing.

If you can achieve love, then be aware of love's relative—hate. It is easier for us to hate than to love. While love *should be* ubiquitous, it seems hate *is*. Hate is everywhere. Religions hate each other; nations, races, people, and couples hate each other. There are so many sources of hate out there, and hate accumulates. Who is responsible for all this hate?

Organizations teach hate. The Ku Klux Klan, Muslim extremists, and other radical groups taught and teach hate. But hate is not only something that is taught, it is a feeling that is hard to control. We all have preferences and dislikes, but hate is a strong emotion, and if left uncontrolled it can be downright dangerous. Hate breeds hate indefinitely. Hate is easier to feel than love and as such outweighs love.

Be aware of what is happening to you, be it either hate or love. If you hate, hate with awareness; if you love, love with awareness. Love is natural, and so is hate. Whatever the emotion—love, hate, anger, passion, compassion—be aware. Let emotion arise out of the awareness. Without your saying or doing anything, awareness dissolves what is ugly in you into what is beautiful in you. If you are conscious of anger and hate, they will disappear. If you are aware of love, it will become stronger. With awareness, you will find the layer of hatred disappearing. An opposite quality, a mix of compassion and kindness, may be left behind. What disappears with awareness is sin.

Try it and you will be amazed. There are emotions in you that can't last with awareness; they disappear. Experiment. See what remains and what disappears. You can see what is right and wrong for you. Stay in awareness with all your actions. This is not repression. This is the beauty of awareness; it never depresses anything.

## **Tantric Bliss**

The word Tantra refers to ancient Hindu writings that describe a largely misunderstood Indian tradition. In regards to sexuality, the Tantra teachings are about “peak orgasms” and “valley orgasms.” The peak orgasm is the orgasm we traditionally have, the one in which, in a very short time, we climb high and fall hard. The valley orgasm is achieved by two bodies “melting

into each other,” with or without physical orgasm. When two humans can deeply enjoy every touch and caress offered, and when they can stay in the present, they won’t be in any rush to finish. Their bodies will instinctively know precisely what to do, if permitted to do so. When the mind is shut off, the love act is an exhilarating experience. That is when *heart* speaks.

When all five senses are awake during sex, the participants can touch nirvana. Such a valley orgasm can be the most profound experience ever. This is when sex energy is moved upward toward the heart, and *heart* sex is what we are supposed to experience. It is non-competitive and non-judgmental. It is the dissolving of two bodies into one. It fulfills and satisfies both partners. Practicing such sex allows a woman to have numerous orgasms in one session. It is also not essential for the man to ejaculate. A valley orgasm can occur without climax, yet is felt at a much deeper level.

Regrettably, the way we interpret Tantra in the West has little to do with its actuality. We limit our knowledge about it to sexual positions and the delaying of orgasms. But real Tantra is not a philosophy or a religion; it is a way of life in itself, and it reaches way beyond sex. The Sanskrit word Tantra means “expansion of consciousness.” The teachings are about saying yes to life and sex, instead of subsisting as a sinner.

## **Happiness and Love**

We convince the mind that we are happy, but this contentment is largely superficial. Without a connection to *self*, to who we are, without knowledge of our inner life, of consciousness, there is no way to exude happiness from the inside. We continue to rely on our partner or outer circumstances for satisfaction. And the minute those conditions change, the happiness is gone. There is no peace. Our happiness signal keeps being interrupted. Despite our failure to

experience harmony, we continue to hunt for serenity in the wrong places because the mind rules our lives.

*Mind* goes back and forth, from happiness, to anger, to frustration, and back to happiness. It is like a pendulum, ever shifting, unpredictable, and uncontrollable. We connect thoughts, analyze, redirect, and think about what to eat for dinner concurrently with several other thought streams. *Mind* travels endlessly. It's like a train without a destination.

Mind is a great tool, but erratic, and it can never lead to happiness. *Mind* has its own life and will run your life if you let it, putting you in different moods throughout the day. *Mind* never stops and jumps from thought to thought, making connections, and running off into numerous directions. Even at night when you try to sleep, *mind* continues its chatter. It's hard to shut it off and get some rest.

When you are sitting with your beloved, not talking, both of your minds keep prattling on. Each mind is in a different world: at work, on the other side of the globe, in a meeting, or worrying about the children or the dog. You are not present with your partner. In silence we could connect. Silence is the universal language. When we sit in silence together, we can have intimacy. Language is limiting. Silence says it all. Unfortunately, most humans can't be silent. Silence is uncomfortable and creepy. We use language to avert intimacy and escape silence. The shallow gabfest continues endlessly. Intimacy comes from nothing, from not thinking.

Human closeness is possible—in silence. Sit in silence with your partner for two minutes and you will feel him/her—for the first time, perhaps. Look at and touch each other without needing to bed each other. Just *be*, sit in silence, and enjoy being together. No TV, no radio, and no distractions. Just the two of you, alone in silence, close to each other.

Silence and the closeness that results from it can bring understanding, happiness, and insight into the soul. This is the kind of bond you feel from deep within. If these types of connections do not occur on a regular basis, you drift away from each other. You slowly become strangers.

If you are aware in silence, *ego* is inactive. Awareness and *ego* can't be in union. It is like night and day. It is either light or it is dark; it can't be both at once. The few moments of awareness are chased off by *ego*. *Ego* wants to run the show, and you're letting it. The ego may fool you into believing you are aware, but merely thinking about being aware is not awareness. There is no thought in awareness. You simply *are*—in the moment, without thought.

The ego is unreal. It has been created by you. It does not exist, and *can* be dissolved. You are one with reality, even though *ego* may make you believe differently. When *ego* is not there, you feel good. When you focus on a task intensely, either when you are in deep meditation or are fast asleep, not dreaming, your ego is not there. The reason you feel refreshed after a good night's sleep is that *ego* hasn't bothered you for a few hours.

It is hard to differentiate at first between *ego* and a glimpse of awareness, because *ego* has always run our lives. Try a practice of being randomly aware and present in reality several times during the day. Slowly, you may discover the gift of awareness and all there is without the constant surrounding chatter.

If you had peace inside, you could stop running, drinking, smoking, speeding, watching porn, beating your wife, or doing whatever other bad habits haunt you. I would argue that these activities happen because of a lack of harmony in the belly. With such harmony, you could sleep and wake up refreshed, eat sensibly, and simply live life as it happens. As it is,

when you do feel happy, you are superficially happy for only a few moments, until the wheel turns again and you feel unhappy. Learn that you don't have to hurry to move closer to happiness. It's already there within you. All you have to do is find your inner self and stay there.

According to Osho, an Indian mystic, happiness is looking at the trees, the birds, the clouds, and the stars. With your eyes opened, you will be able to see that the whole of existence is joyful. Everything is simply happy. Trees are happy for no particular reason; they are not competing to become prime ministers or presidents, they are not going to become rich, and they will never have any sort of bank balance. Look at the flowers—for no reason other than to notice how unbelievably happy they are. Osho—also known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh—was a guru and philosopher whose syncretic teachings emphasized the importance of meditation, awareness, love, creativity, and humor. In the '70s and '80s he garnered a substantial international following. His teachings have had a notable impact on Western New Age thought, and their popularity has increased markedly since his death in 1990.

Being fundamentally happy is the reward of a meditative life. It is important to differentiate between pleasure and happiness. Pleasure is something derived from a cause; happiness as I'm using it here is a state of joy without any cause. This joyfulness naturally emerges. It starts to flow from deep within, and when you are in this kind of joy you simply rejoice and celebrate life.

This happiness comes when you simply reside as yourself. Thus, there is freedom from comparison, and freedom from chasing the *other*. There is no sense of feeling “less than,” or of there being something lacking, which would normally be brought about through the insanity of

trying to see how you measured up against a fictitious ideal. This means that you don't have to try to become something other than who you are. In Zen speak, the frog becomes the frog.

A most beautiful thing starts to happen when you reside as yourself; joy starts to spontaneously flow; it gives birth to the miracle of love.

And love is what you want to give to your loved ones. It is the gift of life.

### **Off-track Offspring**

The natural practices of having sex, getting pregnant and going through childbirth have been turned into methodical and planned events. Birthing used to be a magical moment; now it must fit into a busy work schedule. Thank God for the quick Cesarean and the convenient post-birth tummy tuck.

Birthing has been reduced to a calendar entry. We dislike extended labor and pain, and sign up for surgery to circumvent them. About thirty-one percent of American mothers now choose to have a Cesarean. Professional women have no time for surprises and painful contractions. Despite the nasty scar and prolonged recovery time, we succumb to this procedure.

Unfortunately, surgeons tend to promote C-sections for precisely the same reasons as the professional female. It's quick, profitable, and can be planned. C-sections have become Outlook calendar entries for doctors as well. No doctor has time to endure a twenty-two-hour labor session. For the hospital, long labor is unprofitable and a waste of time.

According to research, the estimated risk of a woman dying after a Cesarean birth is less than one in 2,500 (the risk of death for vaginal birth is less than one in ten thousand). The

common side effects of a C-section are infection of the uterus or pelvic organs, increased blood loss, decreased bowel functions, and respiratory complications, among others.

C-sections require a longer hospital stay and recovery time. Three to five days in the hospital is the common length of stay, whereas it is about one to three days for a vaginal birth.

The procedure is wildly popular. Women don't realize that such a procedure affects the baby's life as well as the mother's. Natural birth, while not without risk, is simply that—natural—and a C-section is not.

If a mother can deliver a baby without surgery, why won't she? It does not leave a scar. Labor and the associated pain last only for hours, not days. I am certainly no expert, but isn't there something miraculous about a child being born at precisely the time she/he is ready? Perhaps the universe had a plan for a child, a special constellation? Does ripping it out of the womb mess with that plan? Isn't this a shock to the child's system? Or could this even cause trauma? Why not permit other humans to arrive on Earth in the most human way? Yanking a sensitive soul out of the dark, warm womb, I imagine, isn't the coziest way to be introduced to the lights of the real world. Or is it this real world? Perhaps, the real world is where the baby comes from? What an even bigger shocker that must be then.

Common sense suggests that the C-section should be reserved for true emergencies, in cases where a natural birth isn't feasible.

The psychological or physical damages may be subtle and difficult to attribute to the delivery method. According to some studies, a woman who has a Cesarean has less early contact with her baby, is at higher risk for depression, and may have an unfavorable reaction to her baby, as well as negative feelings about the delivery and possible post-traumatic stress



disorder. These emotional complications may occur alongside the physical complaints mentioned above.

Up until a few decades ago, a midwife, not a doctor, helped to bring new life into the world. The few midwives that survived the takeover of birthing by the hospitals can still facilitate delivery in the comfort of a mother's own home. Midwives honor the normalcy and physiology of birth, looking to the mother to guide the birthing process. They lovingly help mother and child to prepare for the special moment of birth.

The University of California San Diego (UCSD) Medical Center has the only dedicated in-hospital birth center in California—one of only a few in the United States. By 2010, when the UCSD birth center celebrated its tenth anniversary, its midwives had attended close to nine thousand births. One third of those births occurred in the birth center itself. The midwife team reports a primary Cesarean section rate of only 13 percent compared to the national average of 31 percent. In addition to having a low C-section rate, the midwives have a 74 percent success rate for vaginal births after a C-section. And their episiotomy (a procedure where the skin between the vagina and anus is cut) rate is less than one percent.

A natural delivery takes a little preparation, but good things take time. Fast deliveries, just like fast food, fast sex, and speed dating, leave victims behind. It is evident that big pharmaceutical companies and hospitals make more money with Cesareans. Is this the reason behind the easy access to this surgery?

Ricky Lake produced a remarkable film about the delivery business. She describes the midwife alternative in great detail in *The Business of Being Born*. It is worth watching. It is very human.

## **Raising the Next Generation of Egomaniacs**

What happens to our babies after they are born? Just as romance can fade between a husband and wife, so can the joy and wonder of having a baby diminish as the responsibilities involved in raising children increase. Even if no damage is done to babies at birth, we still seem to be rearing a generation of egotistical, irresponsible monsters.

Claudine's\* cute little girl Alexandra\* was overweight by age six. Her parents did nothing to correct the onslaught of obesity. They felt that Alexandra needed to be self-empowered and make her own decisions. Alexandra decided herself on quitting her gymnastics and other physical education classes. The parents did nothing to intervene. This choice, along with a mostly unhealthy diet, turned her into a fat girl. Her parents sat by and watched it happen.

Not once had Alexandra's two-year-old brother David\* slept through the night. His parents failed to let him cry himself to sleep as a baby. Instead, at the slightest whimper, they rushed to his side and picked him up. His mom would sleep in his bed for years to accommodate little David's wishes and desires. Her actions prevented the kid from developing normal sleeping habits. Consequently, David never learned to drift off to sleep naturally. He was used to being cuddled with and comforted whenever he awoke at any time in the night. All this was his parents' fault. After two years of sleep deprivation, the couple finally attempted to teach David to sleep alone. They tried to shut the door to his room at night. Not a good idea. Little David would pick up the any nearby item, such as a trash can, a phone and hurl it forcefully against the door.

The parents' refusal to provide any sort of strictness nearly cost them their sanity. Both spent their days at work utterly exhausted and on edge. At home, the slightest disagreement

created massive fallout. Deep down, they resented and blamed each other for their “inconvenient” children.

As a child, I had no business making decisions about the classes I wanted to attend. I had to eat what was on the table and help with household chores. I went to bed early, around seven p.m. It was only at age twelve that I was allowed to stay up and watch *Dallas* until ten p.m., and then only occasionally.

Claudine’s young children stay up until eleven or twelve. They go to bed at different times and sleep a maximum of eight hours per night. They can do as they please. There are implications for early sleep deprivation. A child needs around twelve hours of rest per night, and bedtime should be the same every night. According to researcher Dr. Avi Sadeh, director of the Laboratory for Children's Sleep and Arousal Disorders at Tel Aviv University, even minor changes in sleep may impair a child’s learning, memory, attention, and concentration at school. Having a bedtime ritual, especially for younger kids, may help them slow down and get ready to sleep.

At Claudine’s house, the family’s garage is stuffed to the roof with toys to appease and entertain the children. Every imaginable plaything has been accumulated and is available for the children’s amusement. The parents did not want to traumatize their children by using the words “no, you can’t have that.” At a young age, they were used to having it all. Alexandra had even traveled as far as Australia at the tender age of five. They received all the superficial, materialistic goodies, but did they get the love and support they need from parents?

Children are just that—children—and therefore have no business making decisions or claiming to have rights. Kids are called minors for a reason. Parents should have a dictatorship at home, unless they want their lives to become hell.

I see parent leniency in every store. A child in a shopping cart grabs a toy from a shelf. Mom says to put it back; the child ignores her. Then the idle threats begin: “I will count to three. Put that toy back on the shelves. One, two, two, two, put it back now, come on now, it’s gonna be three soon; Mommy will be upset with you if you don’t put it back.” No punishment occurs for the child’s disobedience, and often Mom ends up buying the toy anyway!

Why should children take such a feeble warning seriously? Kids aren’t stupid. They will push the envelope and continue the obnoxious non-consequential conduct. The princes and princesses live in a rule-free world. The rug rats are consulted rather than taught rules and the consequences of breaking them. Children who never learn the meaning of the word “no” become narcissistic, entitled adults with bloated egos who believe they are royalty, who believe they own the world.

The following is an example of how a child can be taught how to behave and never forget it. This is the story of how little \*Mikey learned to be quiet while at dinner with his parents.

On the drive to a restaurant, Mikey’s parents made it clear to the children that dinnertime was adult conversation time, and that they shouldn’t be heard. Little Mikey didn’t know any better and happily chirped away during dinner. Mikey’s dad had warned that if anyone became obnoxious, they would have to walk home. Mikey didn’t think he was serious. Yet on the way home, his dad pulled over and told the surprised and now crying little boy to get out of the car. Mikey had to walk the remaining three miles home. This was the last time he made a peep during adult dinner outings.

Children must understand that parents are authority figures in charge of making decisions. Otherwise, there is no peace in the home. Too many “I love you’s” and not enough

“no” result in children getting big heads. Little Billy is praised even if he just blinks an eye. Nothing he does is ever wrong. Mom praises him day in and day out. Billy can do no wrong. He is a rock star.

I would argue that a decent blend of love, discipline, and reality never hurt anyone. The trend to empower children at all cost has major repercussions at home, in the classroom and, later, even at work.

If parents don't teach children what “no” means, who will? Teachers are unable to act with authority nowadays. The empowered children, lawsuits, political correctness has handicapped them too. The fear of being penalized for being strict or not correct turned teachers into sitting ducks. Now, “no” is nearly taboo for teachers too. We can't hurt the princes and princesses of the world with negative statements, can we? This leaves it up to the workplace to teach young adults the meaning of “no”. Can we hear the echo of the “me, me, me” generation as it enters the world of work?

### **A Generation Canyon?**

In the '60s, the term ‘generation gap’ was a popular description of the difference in attitudes between parents and their flower children. Today, we might find that canyon is a better descriptor of the distinctive differences between the generations.

Generation Y (people born between 1981 and 2000) has been getting its feet wet in the workplace over the past few years, and has had a hard time adapting. Apparently, the new generation needs much more feedback than Generation X (born 1964–1980) and the baby boomers (born 1946–1964) did. Every move the trophy kids made as children was praised with something like “good job,” “Mommy loves you,” “you are so cute,” or “you are so smart.”

Members of Gen Y expect to keep hearing such positive affirmations once they reach the workplace. This feedback mechanism is ingrained in their brains. Their parents' daily positive reinforcement is a needed drug that the workplace is expected to deliver, but many will be disappointed, as corporations do not revolve around pleasing Gen Y.

Gen Y, also known as the Millennials or the dot-com generation, is looking for fun, freedom, and fulfillment at work. The Millennials believe in work/life balance, which isn't a bad thing. They are achievement and team oriented, tech savvy, and crave attention. Gen X and the baby boomers scratch their heads at seeing these attitudes at the office, but Gen Y's positive outlook can be a plus. With the acceptance and integration of rejection into their world, Gen Y may turn into a great asset.

How will the newest generation (born 2001–present) be defined and named? Generation Z, C (the “c” can stand for click, content, celebrity, computer, or community), and V (“v” for virtual text) have been suggested. Another name could be Gen NOW, to reflect the culture of immediacy. One influence on members of this generation is the fact they are the first born to parents who grew up with technology; the parents are “connected,” so they and their children embrace technology together.

The results of this fundamental generational difference are still unknown, but children are becoming connected at younger ages, and more frequently. This new generation is being molded to use interactive learning techniques, and therefore has been set up to be unique. Gen Z children are exposed to an environment that is heavy on stimulation and weak in interpersonal relationships.

In spite of the effects of technology, we owe it to little humans to teach reality and not sugarcoat the world. Every generation faces problems, but unless children are taught to be

human, respectful, responsible, and self-sufficient, they will not be prepared to overcome problems. Nobody will be there to serve these children once they are out of the nest.

As adults, some may rise to fame and enjoy celebrity privileges, but most will never receive the red carpet treatment their parents lavished on them. We do everyone a favor when we prepare children to be responsible, caring humans.

## **What Can You Do?**

What can you do to have healthier relationships? To raise your children to be humans?

1. Gear down.

Slow down the speed at which you do everything with your partner and children. Take time to make love, to love, to listen, to eat, to speak, and to cook. Slow it all down. Savor the taste of life. It's not required that you be busy at all times, especially not around loved ones. Stop the punishing multi-tasking. Notice how much more valuable things become when you have a slower and more focused pace. Sit with your partner in silence. Then really listen when they are speaking. Or perhaps there won't be a need to speak. Silence is a language that is much more powerful than words. Go and explore. It may seem funny at first, but if you take it seriously, you may be able to catch a glimpse of your partner's soul.

2. Spend more time with real people. People with heart. Stay away from phony users and abusers.

Why waste time with a person who is solely meeting with you because they want to land a job at the company you work for, because you get discount vitamins, or because you drive a convertible? People are friends with people for many reasons. But the friends who know you—your heart, your soul, and your quirks—and still love you, are the most gratifying.

But wait. You say you don't have any such friends? Get some. Set your intent on attracting real friends.

### 3. Raise humans, not monsters.

Look at how the last generation raised children. I know you'll be able to pinpoint tons of bad last-generation parenting examples. But one thing was different - children were not nearly as spoiled and entitled as they are today. Also, children were much more connected to nature, animals, and their surroundings.

I watch my mom spend time with her "adopted" grandchildren. Their mom wastes tons of money on the latest toys, the perfect birthday party, and fancy weekend trips. My mom takes those kids to the vegetable garden or loads them up in a cart and hauls them to the woods to look for wild strawberries. It's simple. And the children absolutely love it. They love it more than the perfectly matched birthday balloons and candles. Children have special connections to the other world, which is out in nature. For me as a child there was nothing quite like searching the woods for treasures.

Take the kids out to nature. Teach them where food comes from. Teach them to respect animals. Teach them about cause and effect. Teach them to be mindful and they will be good people one day.



## CHAPTER 4

### **Food Gone Wrong**

At a tender young age, children are supposed to learn, amongst many other things, how to eat. Parents set the example, but many set a very bad example. If we miss the opportunity to teach them about food, children will carry their bad habits and food selections into adult life and forever struggle with them.

All the busyness of work and the inadequacies of our relationships affect our eating habits. Mom microwaves breakfast and serves it on the fly. While running out the door, we flush a donut down the gorge with coffee to go. And that's just the start of the day. We snack on high-sugar cereal bars. Lunch takes a mere five minutes and consists of a quick bite at a local fast food eatery or at the desk. We take trips to the vending machine. Chips, cookies, and candy bars are supposed to kill that three p.m. sugar craving.

Our choices for dinner are varied. How about that delivered pizza? That low-fat TV dinner? That Mexican takeout? Or perhaps we can manage to cook on our own once a week. This behavior is copied, in increasingly worse ways, from generation to generation.

We teach kids that a trip to McDonald's is a special treat. The toys and food are addictive and memories of them will forever be stored in their minds as something positive. When they have birthday parties at McDonald's, they further associate the fast food joint with good things. Dana\*, a friend from New York, stated, "Every time we excelled as children, or brought home good grades, we got taken to McDonald's." This type of treatment in childhood instills in us the idea that fast food is a reward, a treat, and is associated with good, not bad.

The association of fast food with good memories doesn't help the size of the waistlines. Imagine how much skinnier the nation would be if children were taken to eat raw or vegan food as a reward.

If children don't learn to feed and care for their bodies, they will keep abusing them. They don't know any better. The body is not disposable; it is instead a temple, as the Bible states: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple." (1 Corinthians 3:16–17).

Bad habits die hard. Even though we can teach adults about food, during stress and tough times, junk food comes to the rescue.

Doug\*, an ex-football player from Olympia, Washington, was used to overeating. He grew up in a family that devoured way too much junk food. The sons competed to see who could eat the biggest amount of food in the fastest time. In college, he needed those extra calories to play ball. After an injury, however, his football dream ended. What did not change, though, was the size of the food portions he consumed. Ever since his college years, Doug has battled obesity. He can't control his appetite, so he swallows diet pills instead of following a sensible regimen. A few times a week he climbs on the StairMaster, but this is not enough to burn the incredible number of calories he takes in.

Doug won't listen to anyone's advice. He believes exercise alone will solve the problem and refuses to cut the calories. Since he works long hours, he can never exercise

enough, and with this ingrained exercise only philosophy, he is doomed to be fat. His food addiction is stronger than his ability to judge and reason good food vs. bad food.

According to a French study done in 2009, children who learn to eat properly in their early years have a lower chance of becoming obese. Some French schools have implemented eating programs to teach children how to pick and appreciate wholesome, mainly organic food, and to sit down and take the time to eat.

Stacey\*, a dear friend whose children are five and seven, is challenged by their allergies and recurring coughs. She never linked her children's health problems to their diet. Her older girl is obese; the younger child is allergic to just about everything. Ironically, the parents are in good shape; they work out, practice yoga, and eat an Indian diet. But while the parents eat yellow curry with tofu, the kids gorge on Whoppers. When I asked about this anomaly, Stacey explained her children did not like Indian food and needed to feel good about what they ate. She did not want to hear them complain. As a child, I didn't really like vegetables, especially green beans, cauliflower, carrots. Did that mean I was allowed to skip the veggies on the dinner table? No way. I had to eat the green stuff too.

Stacey's girl had become self-conscious about her physical appearance, as friends and family dropped remarks about her fat belly. It was clearly the parents' fault; they had not taught the girl what and how to eat. How could a child know what impact greasy food loaded with chemicals will have on the waistline? Parents have a responsibility to educate their kids about fat and food. A porky kid has a predisposition to stay fat into adulthood. Their chemistry and fat cells have already been tainted by all the fat and sugar they've consumed.

With my ex-neighbors, the Dorfman\* family, the situation was similar. Luckily, *only* one of their three children suffered from obesity, even though they were not taught proper

eating habits. Breakfast consisted of either bacon strips, sweet Danish doughnuts with sugar and jam, or sugar-loaded cereal. The refrigerator was stuffed with light and low-fat products instead of wholesome real foods, which children and adults need. For healthy fare, the Dorfman family firmly believed that light, fat free, low cholesterol products were the way to go. However, these foods consist of preservatives, artificial sugars, and fats, which wreak havoc on a body's biochemistry, especially a child's.

Just look at the alarming diabetes rate amongst children. Type 2 diabetes used to be classified as a middle-aged person's disease. Today, between one quarter and one half of children nationwide with diabetes have Type 2 diabetes, which is often related to obesity. New York health officials estimate that in the city the rate is closer to 50 percent. Junk food and a lack of exercise are the main reasons behind these appalling statistics.

If parents don't know the facts about nutrition, their children will pay the price. If we don't teach them, they will suffer a lifelong battle with food, obesity, diabetes, or any number of other conditions. Good eating habits are easier to learn during childhood, just like learning a second language is.

Do your children a favor and enlighten them about food and its relationship to health, nutrition, and exercise to prevent the stats listed below from increasing over the coming years.

Thirty-three states had a prevalence of obesity equal to or greater than 25%; nine of these states (Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and West Virginia) had a prevalence equal to or greater than 30%. During the past 20 years there has been a dramatic increase in obesity in the United States. In 2009, only Colorado and the District of Columbia had a prevalence of obesity less than 20%. Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/trends.html#Race>

## European Eating Habits

In America, on-the-go fast food is the name of the game. Eating is even considered an inconvenient necessity at times, one more thing to squeeze into a busy schedule. Across the pond—in Switzerland, for example—families traditionally still sit down for dinner. Fresh, quality food, plenty of vegetables, and small portions are the norm. Children learn early on to focus on vegetables and fruit; they rarely touch fast food and seldom overeat. TV dinners, prepared meals, and pizza rarely end up on the dinner table.

Swiss adults, when they go out to dinner, stay out for several hours, or even all night. Couples, friends, and groups sit, talk, and enjoy a meal and sip wine. Eventually, they order dessert, or perhaps an after-dinner drink, and then, finally, they go home. For restaurant owners, it is nearly impossible to calculate the average time spent per table. Unless there is a specific time-per-table policy, restaurants can't book tables several times per night as in the States, where guests vacate after 1.5 hours or less.

When visiting me in Los Angeles from Switzerland, my sister was amazed at how my friends would drive in from all over L.A. on congested freeways for a dinner that took barely an hour or two. She wondered why we didn't spend more time together by having coffee afterwards, or going for a walk on the beach. She was shocked people did not take more time to just *be*.

Is it really the resveratrol in the wine that keeps the French in good health, as some suggest? Or is it *how* they eat and drink that prevents them from getting coronary heart disease? I would argue it has more to do with the *how*. The combination of slow eating, loving the food, good quality wine and food, socializing, and having fun while eating is relaxing and

therefore healthy. Swallowing resveratrol pills alone, without incorporating any of the other French eating customs, will most likely not have the same effect. Medical research never really takes the *how* into perspective. The focus is on *what*. How we eat also has a lot to do with what food does to our systems.

### **You Are What and How You Eat**

Over the last decade, food companies, without objection from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), have slowly but surely replaced real food with preservative-loaded, colored, processed garbage that is depriving the nation of nutrients much needed to deal with the stressful lifestyles.

The food industry aims to make products appear and taste appealing without consideration for their nutritional value or the consumer's health. Loaded with additives, flavorings, food colorings, and other chemicals, such food is intended to be addictive, and the primary aim for that is to increase corporate profit.

Our living human cells have no way of keeping up with the onslaught of chemical concoctions sold and consumed as food. The ingredients on your small Twinkies label read more like the components of rocket fuel than food fit for human consumption, with unpronounceable preservatives manufactured in labs instead of on farms. A sheer drop in food quality in the last few decades most certainly disrupted the functioning of our bodily systems and cause disease. Our bodies have not been forewarned to adequately prepare for this type of attack, yet are forced to work overtime to fight off disease.

If you happen to have been wolfing down the traditional US eats for years without serious damage to your health, it is only due to your body's stupendous resistance. As we age,

the cumulative effect of toxins increases the risk of becoming a host to disease. The body can absorb toxins only to a point. When things become too contaminated, disease develops. Our human systems are marvelous creations, not designed merely for sheer survival or for keeping a step ahead of illness. Humans should experience abundant health and well-being.

We live like no other generation before us, participating in a giant experiment of toxic ingestion. In this game, the stakes are high. We may consider our way of eating normal, but the modern diet is about as normal as a test tube full of chemicals is. Our bodies' chemistry is being destroyed by the intake of a myriad of food additives and environmental pollutants.

What happens when a people starts eating an American-style diet is best demonstrated by what happened on the small island of Nauru. The people there had had little contact with the outside world until it was discovered that part of the island abounded with huge quantities of bird dung, which contained the precious phosphates used in fertilizer. The native islanders grew affluent by selling this resource, and with their new-found wealth and Western influence, they started importing foods from the industrialized nations. Their new North American diet caused one third of the people of Nauru to develop diabetes.

Because artificial ingredients are used in most of the common fare available at grocery stores, a muffin label, for example, may indicate "made with real eggs," a macaroni and cheese carton may state "made with real cheese," and a yogurt label may claim "real fruit chunks inside." It's sad that real ingredients need to be pointed out on product labels. Shouldn't ingredients always be real? Nowadays, it is more common to use the chemical alternative than the real food, due to cost issues. Additives, flavors, chemicals, corn syrup, and trans fats can be manufactured cheaply, but it's at the consumer's expense, with physical effects detrimental to their health.

The words low fat, low sugar, and low cholesterol on a label indicate that a natural component such as fat or sugar has been replaced with an artificial substitute. And that substitute is typically no healthier than the natural component. People think they are eating healthy food when they buy low-fat or non-fat products because the media and food corporations proclaim it so. In my clinical nutrition practice, I never met a skinny low-fat foods eater; most slim people eat real food.

Here are some examples of toxic food.

- Store-bought lemon juice is no longer made of lemon juice. The chemical form of lemon juice is called 2-methyl-3-(p-isopropylphenyl)-propionaldehyde, which is much cheaper to produce than real lemon juice.
- Formaldehyde, used to delay corpse decomposition, is used to disinfect frozen vegetables.
- The blue shimmer on the surface of cold cuts is from sodium nitrate. In the stomach, sodium nitrate is converted into nitrous acid, which may inflame stomach cancer.
- Dried fruits contain sulfur.
- Feed for raising chickens contains arsenic to stimulate growth, increase egg production
- Aluminum compounds are added to baking powder, aspirin, antacids, beer, table salt, and antiperspirants. Aluminum has been found in high concentrations in the brains of Alzheimer's patients, and is suspected of contributing to most awful disease.
- Ice cream contains propylene glycol, the same substance used in antifreeze and paint remover. Carboxymethylcellulose is a stabilizer used in ice cream, salad dressing, cheese spreads, and chocolate milk. It produced tumors in 80 percent of rats injected with it, yet the FDA point-blank denies it is a carcinogen, because when it was given to



the rats orally, it didn't cause cancer.

- An additive called ADA (azodicar bonamide), a bleaching agent, is banned in Europe and Australia but is used in bread in the US. In Singapore, the use of azodicar bonamide can result in up to fifteen years' imprisonment and a fine of \$450,000. Former president George Bush permitted the use of this asthma-causing additive in breads.

There are millions of such examples. Millions. Traditional fare can be downright poisonous.

The conglomerates would have us believe that new food additives are stringently tested. But the testing methods used are unreliable and performed by too few qualified technicians. Owing to budget cuts and excessive lobbying by food companies, additives that are marginally carcinogenic, mutagenic, or teratogenic stay in use.

If human systems can barely deal with this poison overload, a sensitive fetus can cope even less. Whatever toxic substances a mother eats flow largely unimpeded into the fetus. Unlike an adult, a fetus lacks a protective detoxifying system. Teratogens are toxins that harm fetal development; there are certain food additives that are considered mildly teratogenic.

Food expos such as The Worldwide Food Expo host exhibitors that are largely food processing and packaging companies presenting the latest and greatest food processing and treatment procedures. There are no farmers exhibiting apples or plums. What is shown is how to produce foods ever cheaper, thereby adding to a food company's bottom line. How about that new robot by Sealed Air that slices and dices cows, bringing them from stun gun to steak? That will put the illegal aliens currently doing the task right out of business.

Product labels at conventional American chains such as Vons, Albertsons, Jewel, and Safeway come close to listing items normally found in chemical warehouses instead of grocery

stores. The shelves are loaded with shiny, colorful, chemically treated and perfectly— yet excessively—packaged food products. It is our duty to evaluate food labels. If you are confused about the information on a label, follow this easy rule: Don't buy what you can't pronounce.

As consumers, to find decent, organic, and somewhat untreated food, we have to go to specialty stores and pay premium prices. A trip to Whole Foods or Trader Joe's is required to find edible fare. But even there, many products are treated to increase shelf life and appearance. Other alternatives are local farmers' markets, ethnic stores, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) systems, and organic markets. The search for real food requires a bit more creativity.

The French would most likely take to the streets if they were served the chemical concoctions we are forced to devour. They would have rebelled had their government permitted this kind of food degradation. But a lack of US governmental regulation, corporate hunger for profit, and consumers craving the cheap quick fix have turned food into a silent killer.

Take coffee, for example. The favorite morning beverage of 108 million Americans and probably billions more in the rest of the world is very acidic. Although many claim coffee prevents diabetes, Parkinson's disease, and colon cancer, it also shoots a temporary caffeine boost into the system, gives us the jitters, and prevents a good night's sleep. Then take milk. Milk forms mucus in the system. Humans are the only creatures that drink someone else's milk. We are like parasites on cows. Cancer cells are said to feed on mucus. Cow's milk may cause respiratory illness, and may cause or worsen allergies, all because of the excess mucus.

Then there's sugar. The average American consumes an astounding two or three

pounds of sugar each week, which is not surprising considering that highly refined sugars, in the forms of sucrose (table sugar), dextrose (corn sugar), and high-fructose corn syrup, are being added to so many foods. Foods such as bread, breakfast cereal, mayonnaise, peanut butter, ketchup, spaghetti sauce, and a plethora of microwaveable meals. The list of bad effects sugar can have on a person's health is long. Effects range from obesity to a weakened immune system, along with diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, allergies, and premature aging. Then there is meat. I dedicate an entire section to eating animals. Let's save that one.

To try to find Western fare not containing any of the above is like looking for a needle in a haystack. Yet all of the above turn the body sour by increasing acid, and we buy them even though it's known acidic bodies are more disease prone than alkaline systems.

A very effective way to keep the body in an alkaline state is to eat a raw diet, something that is gaining in popularity. Raw food advocates eat nothing heated over 116F. Their diet consists of 50 percent dark, leafy vegetables, 25 percent fruits and vegetables, and 25 percent nuts, seeds, sprouts, and similar foods. No dairy, no meat, and no fish are allowed. Only vegan products in their raw state. "Raw" people are amongst the healthiest in the world. The eating of living foods enhances the immune system, and is rejuvenating.

To follow a raw food diet is no walk in the park, and most who follow this regimen don't just quit regular food in one day. The majority have transitioned to raw from being a vegetarian or a vegan. Raw living requires a completely new approach to eating, but the payoffs are well worth it. Celebrities Alicia Silverstone, Sting, Angela Bassett, Woody Harrelson, David Bowie, Robin Williams, chef Charlie Trotter, and Canadian rocker Bif Naked have gone raw, and look fabulous.

Eating raw may seem extreme. Even if we feel we can't go that far, we can at least consider decreasing the consumption of toxic food that breaks down our bodies. Look at the increase in allergies. Nowadays, it is easier to count the people who are not allergic to food, animals, or the environment than the ones who are. In one Chicago apartment complex I know of, nine out of ten residents were allergic to cats. Just a decade ago, it was uncommon to meet an allergic person. Allergies occur because an immune system is hyper reactive and off balance. It's a body crying for help. But instead of paying attention to its calls to detox, to cleanse, to watch our diet, and try some alternative remedies, we devour Claritin or ZYRTEC and add chemicals to our already messed up system. We always prefer a quick-fix solution.

If you can't follow the radical raw food diet, what should you eat to stay in decent health? How do you avoid contaminants?

One of the best strategies is to stick to food left in its natural state: non-processed and free of chemicals. Eat nuts, seeds, fruits, vegetables, eggs, pasta, non-processed cheese, plain yogurt, cereal, and whole grain bread, pasta, and rice. If you must eat meat or chicken, buy the organic version, as the regular version is full of hormones and antibiotics. Buy wild fish, not farmed. I would avoid shrimp. If you ever saw how shrimp are raised in Asia, you would stay far away.

Cook or prepare food on your own. It is an easy thing to make a pasta sauce from scratch. Eat a lot of raw food throughout the day. You need those enzymes. Dark green leafy vegetables are especially good for you. Tofu, if adequately spiced, can taste just like meat. If you are lost in the kitchen, take a cooking course, perhaps with your better half. Preparing food together can be fun.

Stay away from aspartame. According to the researchers and physicians who have studied the adverse effects of aspartame, chronic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, chronic fatigue, Parkinson's, and Alzheimer's may be triggered or worsened by ingesting aspartame.

Some of the foods with the worst reputation are the following: burgers, bacon, French fries, potato chips, hot dogs, doughnuts, sodas, cookies, cakes, processed meats, processed cheese, ice cream, and Miracle Whip. Low-fat and light versions of such foods are no better. The fat or sugar may have simply been replaced with artificial sweeteners or flavors, or hydrogenated fats. Substitutes are more harmful than actual fat or sugar.

Eat less processed, sweetened, or preserved foods, and add more wholesome, organic foods that have been left in their original state. If you can do that, you'll be a whole lot healthier. Serving your family healthy food is just like buying a health insurance policy. It is hard to avoid processed food, but with food education, health consciousness, and awareness come smarter shopping and eating habits.

Without good health, what do you really have?

### **Murder in the Barn**

The breeding and slaughtering of animals for food is just like everything else nowadays—dirty, and done quickly and completely inhumanely. We make cows, pigs, and chicken *grow* rapidly and cost efficiently. Animals are viewed as disposable items. Barn space is so limited that livestock cannot even turn in their tight stalls. The process is lean and cheap. Only profits count.

Union jobs have gone the way of cheap labor, and illegal immigrants hired to feed and kill animals generate even more savings. Animal welfare and humane slaughter are the least important factors when calculating the profit of a hamburger. As PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) investigators uncovered, many animals are still screaming and kicking when they are hung up by their legs and cut up. This is reality. It is what we eat.

If I was a cow, I would pick either Switzerland or India to call my home. In India, cows are considered holy, free to roam the streets, eat plastic (yes, they seem to prefer plastic over grass), and cause traffic jams. In Switzerland, they are grass fed, and are free of antibiotics and growth hormones. The Swiss government dictates that there be a minimum of humane living space per animal. The transport to the slaughterhouse occurs in a trailer with padded walls and ramp, to minimize the stress the animal experiences on its way to death. Stunning is done properly; no cow is sliced in half while still alive, which is what has been documented in many PETA reports. Slaughtering is not done to meet a daily quota, in the fastest possible fashion. It is done in a way that inflicts a minimal amount of harm on the animal, as it is a living, breathing being—like you—that feels pain.

Thus, less stress hormones end up in the meat because the cow is not completely stressed out having to watch her cow friend being sliced while she is still alive and mooing. Stressed meat is not something you want on your grill. A stressed cow is a tough cow due to the presence of adrenaline and other stress hormones in the flesh. I doubt anyone in today's society needs additional stress hormones in their diet.

Despite popular belief, the majority of meat in the US doesn't come from small family-owned farms but from corporate-owned factory farms. Apart from animal abuse, these farms cause a host of other problems, such as greenhouse gas emissions, excessive grain

consumption, and animal waste. Animals live in crowded, unsanitary conditions on huge farms bent on maximizing production. In order to survive in these dreadful conditions, the animals must be stuffed with antibiotics and growth hormones before the dreaded, or, perhaps, desired, trip to the slaughterhouse. The quality of this type of meat—loaded with stress hormones from the shock of the inhumane transport to the slaughterhouse and the torturous death—is awful. Upon slaughter, the meat must be treated with nitrates and other chemicals to make it edible.

In recent years, food companies have been injecting red color into hamburger, steaks, tuna, and pork products by packaging the meat in a mixture of carbon dioxide, nitrogen, and a tiny amount of carbon monoxide. This method, called modified atmosphere packaging, can give meat a fresh red hue several days after it would have otherwise turned brown. The EU banned the use of carbon monoxide in 2001 because it is a poisonous gas.

Our per capita consumption of meat hasn't changed much over the years; it remains at about half a pound a day. On average, Americans eat about twice as much as the fifty-six grams of daily protein recommended by the United States Department of Agriculture (a guideline that some nutritionists think is too high).

In the American diet, meat is considered a key staple on the dinner plate. The popular slogan “Beef. It’s What’s for Dinner” has been ingrained in our psyche. In other countries, meat is the garnish to a dish; bits or slices of it accompany stir-fries, salads, and gratins, as well as bean, rice, and noodle dishes. Meat is seen as a treat, not as something to be wasted or gobbled up as if it were air.

The eating of less meat would have a major impact on the environment, animal welfare, and human health. According to *The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* by Peter Singer and Jim Mason, it takes thirteen pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef,

and three pounds of grain for one pound of chicken. The more meat we eat, the more grain is required to feed the animals that provide that meat—in addition to the extra water and land (often deforested) used to grow that grain, the extra energy to harvest it and to run the slaughterhouses, and the extra chemicals to fertilize it and deter pests. We would save all of those resources and their related emissions by eating that grain directly.

About 70 percent of all antibiotics made in the US are used to fatten cows. It takes six hundred gallons of water to produce one hamburger patty. US farm animals produce about 1.4 billion metric tons of solid manure each year—130 times the quantity produced by people. This figure includes pigs and chickens as well as cattle, but cattle are the single largest source.

The World Wildlife Fund estimates that, every year, an area of the world's rain forests larger than the state of New York is destroyed to create grazing land. In Latin America, says the United Nations, some 70 percent of forests in the Amazon basin have been cut down to raise cows. It takes more than eleven times as much fossil fuel to make one calorie of animal protein as it does to make one calorie of plant protein. We can make a bigger impact on the environment and pollution by going vegan than by switching to a hybrid Prius.

Unfortunately, with nations the size of China developing, worldwide meat production is set to double by 2050. Globally, the livestock sector now produces 228 million metric tons of meat. To meet rising demand, this will need to double in 40 years, putting added pressure on industry and governments to find answers to problems impeding one of the “fastest growing” parts of agriculture, according to the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization).

Even though the eating of less meat would have a major impact on the environment, you might still ask, “How will I get my protein without eating meat?” The answer is, by being omnivorous. As long as your diet contains a variety of grains, legumes, and vegetables, your



protein needs will easily be met. One hundred grams of raw soybeans contain 36.5 grams of protein; lentils, 28.6 grams; raw kidney beans, 25.33 grams; raw peanuts, 25.19 grams; cooked chicken breast, 29.8 grams; turkey meat and skin, 28.71 grams; and roasted pork leg, 30.94 grams. As you can see, plant sources are competitive to animal sources. By eating a variety of proteins, you can get all the essential amino acids. Consider the amount of protein in these foods also:

- Oranges (8%)
- Romaine (34%)
- Oatmeal (15%)
- Brown rice (8%)
- Cantaloupe (9%)
- Carrots (10%)
- Cucumbers (24%)
- Tomatoes (16%)
- Spinach (49%)
- Broccoli (33%)

All of our fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and beans have plenty of the protein needed for human health and fitness. Whether a certain essential amino acid—the building block of protein—is provided by a plant or animal, it remains the same amino acid. The common belief that only meat can deliver a complete protein works well in protecting the interests of certain lobby groups, but it is essentially wrong.

Vegetarianism and veganism are becoming increasingly popular. According to Goveg.com, there are over twenty million vegetarians in the US, and that number is growing

by as much as one million people a year. Statistics show that vegetarians live longer and are healthier than their carnivorous counterparts. The risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, and high cholesterol is drastically reduced with a no-meat diet. In addition, more than one hundred animals can be saved each year for every one person who becomes a vegetarian.

It is even possible to survive Thanksgiving without turkey abuse. Cutting meat out of a holiday meal won't make it any less delicious. You can easily prepare alternatives, such as tofu and tempeh, making them taste just like meat. The National Turkey Federation states that the price of turkeys has been dropping dramatically every year, due to production efficiency.

However, this efficiency harms not only the turkeys, but human bodies. The average turkey weight has increased in recent years due to the use of hormones and antibiotics. A larger bird makes for a family feast of white meat, dark meat, and hormone-enhancing drugs. The hormones, antibiotics, and bacteria do not go up in smoke when the bird is cooked, and these substances can wreak havoc on the human body.

The more commonly eaten birds—chickens—endure potentially the toughest existence among livestock. Chickens are the least protected of farm animals in the US. All farm animals are exempt from the federal Animal Welfare Act, but unlike other types of livestock, chickens are also exempt from individual state laws prohibiting cruelty to animals and from the federal Humane Methods of Livestock Slaughter Act.

Neither the way we slaughter chickens nor the bloodcurdling egg production business are for weak stomachs. Chickens are stuffed with antibiotics and growth hormones, and then they are squished into tiny cages, without any straw, to produce eggs quickly and cost-effectively. Such treatment is an insult to any living creature. Free-range and cage-free animals aren't treated any better, despite popular belief. The latest rage, cage-free, is supposed to mean

more humane treatment, but the truth is far from that. Cage-free simply means the animal is not in a cage. Instead, cage-free chickens are now crowded into huge dark barns where they have no room or space to turn. Supposedly, meat production is most efficient this way. According to an ex-chicken farm worker, the birds are crammed in this way so that their muscles can't develop. The meat stays tender. If we seriously sat and pondered what it is that we've been stuffing down our gobs, would we still ingest it? Would we even touch it? Would we go near it?

But wait, they advertise *organic* on the egg carton. The birds that produce these eggs go through hellish torment, but eat organic delicacies. Is this supposed to cause birds to release fewer stress hormones? Is this supposed to magically make chicken meat healthy? All these debeaked chickens—sitting in their own poop, drenched with ammonia, antibiotics, and growth hormones, crying in despair in dark barns—are fed organic feed. Will that make the eggs healthier and superior in quality? Just because they are eating organic crops, are these highly stressed animals supposed to magically produce healthy eggs?

A new profession is being created in the US—the organic food inspector. Diane\*, a friend of a friend, was looking for a new challenge and signed up for the program. According to Diane, the inspectors scrutinize organic production processes and animal feed on farms, but they do not analyze the welfare of the animals. The barn where the animals are kept is not to be touched. Diane is in favor of not being exposed to the poor living conditions of livestock. If she had to inspect both animal welfare and food, she would not pursue this career. The pictures of abused animals would linger in her mind.

“So, what is the purpose of this profession?” I ask. How can stressed, abused animals yield healthy food? The consumer sees the words free-range and cage-free and an illustration

of a happy hen on a carton and thinks he/she has made a good choice. Sadly, according to some who monitor the egg market, there is not enough consumer demand for eggs from true free-range chickens to change practices.

Pictures of crowded, dark pens with chickens literally sitting on top of each other are all over the PETA website. Free-range hens, their beaks chopped off with a hot blade, are kept in sheds with one hundred thousand or more of their sisters. No straw, no daylight, just the smell of ammonia, poop, and dead birds. These are common conditions. The spent, featherless, defeated, and humiliated birds are gassed in sheds outside the pen if they reach two years of age. There is no humane mass egg farming in this country. The sale of eggs labeled cage-free or free-range is a scam. Eggs are best purchased from a small local farm or CSA.

In the European Union, as a result of consumers' outrage about the conditions under which laying hens were kept, battery cages are slated to be banned in 2012, as are gestation crates for pregnant sows, beginning in 2013. In the interim, as public opposition to inhumane animal agriculture practices rises, an increasing number of EU supermarkets and restaurants are offering meat, eggs, and dairy products produced according to stringent standards for more humane care.

Cage egg production was outlawed around the turn of the century in Switzerland. Free-range hen farms are inspected by the Swiss equivalent of the FDA, and if it is found that animals are being kept inhumanely, the farms are shut down. It appears the Swiss government is still trying to protect the health of the average citizen, and Germany just passed a law in 2009 outlawing cage hens.

The EU food regulations have a focus on safety, instead of on cheap food and profit, because people demand it. We can do the same in the States. The consumer ultimately holds the power over what ends up on the dinner plate and therefore can push for change.

### **So-called Food Safety**

So why doesn't the FDA regulate food safety and chemicals and therefore limit our exposure to detrimental health hazards?

We know that many FDA executives have previously worked at food corporations, and vice versa. The watchdog becomes the food producer. The food producer becomes the police officer. Regulators are supposed to be neutral consumer advocates; they should not act in favor of food companies.

Food companies spend millions successfully lobbying Washington, DC. The peanut salmonella outbreak in 2008 was blamed on a private food inspection company the Peanut Corporation of America had hired. According to Representative Bart Stupak (Democrat, Michigan), there is an obvious and inherent conflict of interest when an auditor works for the same supplier it is evaluating.

Having third-party food safety audits is like allowing patients to write their own prescriptions. It defeats the purpose of the regulating and safety agencies. Consumers bear the risk of such practices, and consumers pay the price in bad health, for the government's negligence and lack of motivation in regulating food production.

Compared to the rest of the world, our life expectancy average isn't the greatest. Despite an advanced medical system, too many of us become sick due to clinical malnourishment, stress, and poor lifestyle choices.

With all the food and ingredients produced in China, the safety of imports has become a major concern in the US. Food production in China may not even adhere to the most basic Western food safety regulations. In addition, 65 percent of the Chinese population expressed concern over food safety in a 2007 survey, according to China's State Food and Drug Administration.

The use of chemical fertilizers and toxic pesticides is rampant, while fraud and corruption often thwart what lax controls exist. We saw the serious results when we imported Chinese candy containing sulfites, which can cause fatal allergic reactions, and infant formula missing vital nutrients, which left a dozen babies dead in 2004.

A label may read "Made in the U.S.A.," but the ingredients are from China. Many packaged foods contain dozens of components from around the world; they are acquired through complex networks of traders and brokers before they reach the manufacturing plants, where production companies have direct oversight into how they are made. For example, the ascorbic acid in your vitamin C most likely originated in China. Since listing the origin of all ingredients is not a requirement, the safety of the ingredients is questionable.

A salmonella outbreak, or the discovery of toxins in Chinese toys imported to the US, may cause a temporary uproar, but the issuance of a mild warning to the Chinese manufacturers is the only visible reaction. Few US companies care about production practices in China. The Chinese manufacturing style is not for the weak-minded. Footage has shown animals living in horrific conditions, and sweatshops with people working long hours for literally no pay. US corporations importing from China should investigate the production standards in China and conduct regular inspections. If anyone cared to investigate, the Chinese would be out of business tomorrow. But we don't care because products from China are cheap.

China exported \$2.5 billion worth of food ingredients to the United States and the rest of the world in 2006, an increase of 150 percent from just two years earlier, according to Chinese industry estimates. It is now the predominant maker of vanilla flavoring, citric acid, and varieties of vitamin B such as thiamine, riboflavin, and folic acid—nutrients commonly added to processed flour goods such as Mission tortillas and Tyson breaded chicken.

The EU has some of the highest food safety standards in the world. Numerous food additives and chemicals used in US food and personal products are banned in Europe. The EU is continuously coming under attack for policies banning genetically modified (GM) foods; the general community is highly suspicious of genetically modified foods and the agro-industrial pressures that drive their use. The problem with GM foods is that there is insufficient research and understanding of its effects on human health. The widespread public reaction to GM foods is largely negative. People are suspect of non-natural foods, not just in the US, but also abroad. The recent public reaction to trans-fats is reason enough to support a precautionary attitude for food companies.

Recombinant bovine growth hormone—or rBGH for short—is not allowed in Europe. In contrast, US citizens struggle even for laws that allow labeling of hormone-free products so that consumers can make an informed choice. This should be an easy black and white decision for all regulators, and for any corporation really concerned about sustainability: give consumers the information. We deserve control over our food choice.

The chlorination of chickens intended for human consumption as practiced in the US is not tolerated in the EU. According to a press release from the European Parliament, such food production methods are at variance with the relevant community standards and are threatening to the EU's entire set of food production standards and rules.

Chemicals within food are killing us, yet we are generally unaware of the problem. When we get sick, we look for an easy cure rather than investigate possible causes. We would rather take medicine than correct the obvious—issues in our refrigerator.

### **Meditation, Not Medication**

This anesthetic society suffers from a quick-fix obsession. Health issues are no exception. Who has time to deal with an annoying illness? It is mandatory that we function, so any slight ill requires an immediate patch or pill so we can continue the madness. Doctors are trigger happy with their prescription pads; any pill goes. Prozac is not just prescribed for depression, but also for weight loss, insomnia and a whole range of conditions. Lunesta is supposed to cure insomnia, Modafinil increases concentration, the list goes on. When you see all their pretty commercials on television, you “know” that you need those drugs.

According to *USA Today*, the number of Americans taking antidepressants in 2005 was twenty-seven million people, or 10 percent of the entire population of our country. This was before the government looted the economy. The 2005 number had doubled from 1996, so I hesitate to imagine where it stands now.

Big Pharma pushes drugs like never before, because it can. And us sheeple gulp pills like candy. We believe in the nicely crafted pill marketing plots as seen on late night TV. In the name of good health, we demanded restrictions on ads for tobacco and alcohol, but we allow commercials for prescription drugs that basically summon us to the nation’s doctors to get our meds. If I was forced to choose between reactivating my smoking habit and swallowing Prozac for life, I believe I’d light up again.



Pills to remedy insomnia, depression, incontinence, diabetes—you name it—are pitched just like laundry detergent. “Ask your doctor if (blank) is right for you” has become the medical theme song. We are misled by the woman waking up refreshed after a night of Ambien-induced sleep. Countless people suffer from insomnia. Ambien is not the solution. I felt like crap after an Ambien night. I tried it for research reasons. My brain was on vacation the entire next day.

Most sleeping pills have nasty after and side effects: lingering drowsiness, lethargy, dizziness, and heartburn. Doctors know this and advise patients, but they don’t usually refuse to write the prescription. I never had any problem getting the prescription drugs I wanted in the States. Never.

Instead of making amends to improve our long-term health by upgrading our lifestyle and eating habits, our health problems are outsourced to doctors and pharmaceuticals. Just like a car, we take our bodies to a repair shop, where we pump it full of drugs. But the complex human system can’t be dealt with like a machine.

Quick-fix drugs are part of life, just as fast food and fast sex are. We must function at all times. Without drugs, we could not make do. But we don’t even understand what we’re ingesting. We mix pills with more pills and create lethal concoctions in our stomachs, blood, and bowels. Nobody knows the exact side effects a noxious cocktail of pills really has. Nobody!

The intricate organism of mind, body, consciousness, and soul requires more than a simple drug to fix an issue. Body parts can’t be isolated and treated. A disease affects the energy bodies, the mind, the soul, and the physical body. Robots can be cured with the simple application of a fixer-upper, but not humans. If we just swallow pills and don’t pay attention to

the root cause of a health issue, there may be further consequences. But with only ten sick days per year, we can't miss work. We don't have time to be sick. The madness appears unstoppable and drugs help to keep it going.

Take Don\*, my ex-coworker, for example. He had been drinking eight cans of Diet Coke per day for years. All day I heard the clicks in his office as he opened can after can. I warned him about the impact his consumption would have on his health. He just laughed. But at age forty, Don was diagnosed with diabetes. His physician stated Don's very unhealthy diet soda consumption was in no way linked to his condition. He simply wrote him a prescription—for life—and Don happily kept consuming can after can.

Researchers looked at people's diet soda consumption between the years 2000 and 2002, and then screened them for type 2 diabetes between 2002 and 2007, as part of the Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis, or MESA, an investigation involving more than 6,800 people between 45 and 84 years old. People who drank at least one diet soda a day at the beginning of the study had a 67 percent higher relative risk of type 2 diabetes than people who drank none. Zero-calorie soda also increased the risk of metabolic syndrome—a group of risk factors linked to obesity that increase your chances of heart disease, diabetes, and stroke—by 36 percent.

Physicians are eager to prescribe medications and keep patients on them indefinitely. It's easy to do, and it's a money-maker for them, but writing prescriptions won't heal their patients. Patients often take several prescriptions concurrently, yet the possible side effects of the combinations are chiefly unknown. Drugs may be prescribed by different doctors who may not even talk to, or know of, each other.

Over twenty million useless antibiotics are prescribed annually. This leaves it up to us to manage our various physicians and medication interactions. If we don't, it can cost us our lives. Toxic drug combinations are a common cause of death. The deaths of Heath Ledger, Michael Jackson and Brittany Murphy are only a few examples of this.

About 7.5 million unnecessary surgeries are performed on a yearly basis, according to Gary Null, Ph.D. and author of *Death by Medicine*. Not only are they useless, but they also add to the cost of the medical system, which is already the most expensive in the world. The actual price of drugs is much higher in the US than in other countries. Most other nations follow the European drug control pricing system to protect the population from inflated prescription drug pricing. In the States, the sky is the limit for drug pricing. Pharmaceuticals argue that imposing European-style price controls on prescription drugs in the United States would result in modest cost savings that would be more than offset by shortened life spans, but the argument does not hold up. As we know, US life expectancy is below that of most EU, and even some Third World, nations.

The Swiss are some of the longest-living people in the world. The average life span in Switzerland is 80.74 years; the country ranks as number eleven worldwide. The US, with the highest costs in health care and prescription drugs, lags at number forty-six, with an average life expectancy of 78.14 years. (Source: Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Fact Book*, 2008). As you can see on the website <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2102rank.html>, Macau is in first place with a life expectancy of 84.33 years, followed by Andorra and Japan. It should be noted that Bosnia, Jordan, and South Korea rank ahead of the US, according to the CIA.

Another argument for price control is that overseas drugs may be of lower or poorer quality. Yet if that's true, wouldn't these treacherous drugs have reduced the life expectancy in those countries that allow their use? The drug companies rip us off, yet the government wants to overhaul the entire health care system instead of fix the obvious problem.

In 2007, after my appendix ruptured, and because of the ensuing peritonitis (infection), I stayed in a Chicago hospital for five days. My PPO (preferred provider organization) insurance covered the bulk of the cost, but I still suffered from sticker shock when I glanced at the bill. The cost of the entire procedure and hospital stay amounted to \$35,000 at network-negotiated pricing. The non-negotiated standard price for someone without insurance would have been about 40 percent higher. What blew me away was that almost 40 percent of the total cost went to drugs.

With general health care costs soaring, wouldn't it help to at least have access to less expensive drugs? It is argued that forty-seven million Americans are without health insurance and therefore pay full price, not insurance company-negotiated rates for doctor visits and drugs. Negotiated rates are proprietary. The legal citizen without health insurance is paying a ton more for the same care as an insured patient with insurance. Mind you, the illegal alien receives ER (emergency room) services for free.

The Dutch health care system focuses on preventative medicine and even makes physicians available 24/7 for house calls. According to Netherlands health officials, this approach has proven to be more cost-efficient than emergency room visits. In the Netherlands, the ER is reserved for true emergencies like ruptured appendixes, gunshot wounds, and heart attacks. The emergency room is the wrong place for such conditions as a mild flu, a backache, a migraine, or Irritable Bowel Syndrome; this is because it is the most expensive form of

treatment. In American medicine, there is an overuse of emergency room services. People suffering from most injuries and maladies could receive better treatment from general practitioners, yet people run to emergency rooms for everything from sore throats to ingrown toenails. Better access to doctors and better knowledge of preventative medicine may decrease the very expensive use of the ER.

Yes, the health care system is in dire need of reform, but could we update the existing system and eliminate some of the over-priced goods and services?

### **Self-Responsibility**

Consider replacing some of the quick fixes with alternative medicine. It is not witchcraft. However, don't look to physicians; they are not permitted to recommend natural alternatives. Their licenses could be revoked. The emphasis of our health care system is not on prevention, or low-impact healing, but on fixing problems quickly with hard-core medication or surgery. If, for example, I have insomnia and want to try something like homeopathy, Chinese medicine, Ayurveda, or orthomolecular medicine, I have to research it, try it, and pay for it on my own. No health insurance will cover such treatments, which are cheap compared to doctors' fees, drugs, and hospital fees. But you owe it to yourself to try natural treatments. Why pump the body full of poison when there is no need?

Thus, this is the age of self-responsibility. Forget relying on others to take care of you. The only one who can truly do the job is you. With all the information available on the Internet, it has become easier to investigate and research diseases and treatments. The Internet has even given us the liberty to research the performance of a doctor or therapist. Doctors want

to outlaw the ratings provided on such sites as Yelp.com, but it is only fair to be able to grade them just as any other professional establishment today.

You owe your body temple the best and most natural treatment possible. Those treatments you have to find on your own. Your trusted doctor won't help. As Buddha stated, it is our duty to keep the body in good health, otherwise we shall not be able to keep the mind strong and clear.

Instead of aimlessly swallowing quick fixes, try to understand why your body is sick. Neither anxiety, stress, depression, the flu, colds, back aches, pain, fatigue, insomnia, or migraines, nor the sudden onset of diabetes, mean you have to sign up for drug dependency right away. Although your doctor might *order* you to take medication, you can still get other opinions and make up your own mind.

Many illnesses are lifestyle related. We are too lazy to get off the couch and exercise, or to cut down on soda consumption, fast food, and beer. Perhaps, you are too tired to practice back exercises to relieve your pain? Or is there no time to do yoga for relaxation and wellness? It is a choice you have to make. The alternative is reliance on pills, perhaps for life.

Of course, people who are very ill need appropriate drugs. How would anyone survive cancer without drugs? Well, that's another book. There is absolutely no question that drugs are required. But we don't need them for every minor complaint. At least give nature, a lifestyle change, or exercise a shot. If nothing works, drugs will always be there as a last resort. And the physician will be happy to help by means of his prescription pad.

And watch out, as drugs affect everyone differently. What is good for the goose is not necessarily good for the gander.

## **Biochemical Individuality**

Individuality does not stop with the differences in our human characteristics, behavior, or looks. It extends into our anatomy, physiology, psychology, endocrine glands, and enzymes. We are extraordinarily and exceptionally unique. Our biochemical individuality raises certain issues regarding the prescribing of drugs, surgery, and even natural medicine. Everyone reacts differently to the same medication. Essentially, this is the reason there are so many side effects printed on drug labels. It's an annoying factor for pharmaceutical companies. Things would be simpler if human body types were more universal.

Thank heavens for the differences amongst us. What a boring place the world would be if we were all the same!

There is no such thing as an average person. We each have specific environmental requirements and must meet different nutritional needs in order to function optimally. Some who never smoke at all will still die of lung cancer. Some will die after a few years of smoking. Then there is West German ex-Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, still happily lighting up at ninety. Certain folks sleep like logs through an earthquake; others wake up when the cat meows. The way we process nutrients also varies. A low-fat diet may just be what one particular system needs, while another body requires more fat to produce energy. My boyfriend only has to look at food to gain weight, while I can eat three times as much and still not gain an ounce.

My liver may have a completely different shape and size from yours; it may successfully detoxify and deactivate toxins and produce an average amount of cholesterol, while your liver might be seriously overwhelmed when presented with the same contaminants, and may manufacture excess cholesterol. Our biochemical differences may make my liver

much more forgiving. Or, I may have a deficiency in an endocrine function somewhere in my body, such as a hyperactive thyroid. It may be caused by digestive functions that are inefficient or lacking, and/or by the breaking down of a protein, especially tyrosine. This problem may be unique to me. You may have the opposite issue: a hypoactive thyroid, for which the exact cause must also be established.

Our differences also affect our psyches. Psychology is still largely based on Freudian principles, meaning experiences that cause problems are analyzed and treated. What is not taken into account is the biochemical makeup of a person's psychological functions and the cerebrum's size and chemical functions. This disparity will most likely have an impact on the effectiveness of a person's psychological or psychiatric treatment.

It has been observed that closely inbred rats may share some similarities in biochemical functions and anatomy, yet even those ratios greatly vary. For that reason, close family members may have completely different biochemical processes and functions.

Prozac, Paxil, and Xanax may have the intended effects on some people, but others may suffer from debilitating side effects such as headaches, dry mouth, blurred vision, nausea, or vomiting. The list is endless, and needs to be. Medicine, supplements, and nutrients are assimilated differently.

Now, if we can't assess the exact side effects that will be presented from the use of merely one drug, how can we accurately confirm the interactions of drug combinations? And just think: those combos affect everyone uniquely. So far, research on this topic has not reached an advanced state. The variations in our individual enzymatic processes, endocrine functions, organ shapes and sizes, and psychological makeups call for extensive studies for which the funds are largely not available.



How different we really are biochemically has not, and possibly cannot, be accurately expressed. The average model of a human is too difficult to pin down. Individual ranges are simply too significant to be generalized.

If our biochemical uniqueness were to be taken into account when it came to administering remedies, an improved solution could be found. This would entail that all unique results and ratios are properly analyzed before reaching a conclusion. The only way to get to the root of the problem is by doing extensive blood tests, analyzing unique ratios, and providing individual supplementation. Universal all-purpose medicine may work for some, but it largely masks the symptoms and never cures the root cause.

As a result, you should learn about food and vitamins. Don't run to the doctor and get an antidepressant or tranquilizer when you feel down or can't sleep for a few weeks. Hold off on getting those prescriptions and give the body a chance to heal itself. Try to address the health issue in a natural fashion first. Depression is the body's way of saying you are not connected to *self*, that you are off track and that you should pay attention to your inner self. Blood tests really are a snapshot of a single day, and perhaps your cholesterol was high on that one day. So is that one result sufficient reason to swallow statins for eternity? There are so many ancient and natural treatment methods you can try before signing up for drugs. Try a hair analysis, biofeedback, kinesiology, fire cupping, a detox, Bach Flower Remedies, or something else. The list is endless.

You are one; your body, soul, and mind combine to create one individual. Don't outsource your best friend to Big Pharma. Feed yourself good food; honor and treasure your body like a shrine, not an enemy. You only get this one life to live. Even if you believe in reincarnation, you will never come back as the exact same person. Are you living your life the

best you can in this one “shell”? Or are you procrastinating your life away, waiting for some better, yet imaginary, tomorrow?

If your life is unsatisfactory, it is because you have made poor choices in the way you live. Ill health, obesity, wheezing, allergies, and other physical problems have their roots in bad food, lack of exercise, and work-related stress. Unhappy relationships may also stem from poor choices. In this case, emotional ones: holding a grudge, expecting someone else to make you happy, or failing to work at building a good marriage or friendship.

You can learn to make better choices—good food, reasonable exercise, and a less-stressful job. You can choose to make friends, to love, to care about others, and to be kind and considerate. Good choices will lead to a healthier, happier life. It is always your call. One day, you will wake up and be seventy-five. Don’t be the one who regrets that you didn’t do this, or you didn’t do that, and who says “if only...”. Make sure you are proud of your life and accomplishments.

It is easy to fall for the quick fix, the path most people choose. It’s what the mainstream does. You may think it will be too difficult to reach within, to live a healthful and wholesome life, or you may think that there will never be enough time to address your health, weight, or depression issues from within. That may be why you give in to drugs—out of frustration or a lack of patience. Physical and psychological health should be your number one priority. If you don’t have good health, life soon loses its luster. Health is an important building block for happiness. When the body cries out and sends signals and reminders to improve its caretaking, please listen.

## **Where Is the Care in Health Care?**

A doctor's job certainly isn't easy, but with the fees charged, one could expect better service, no? I have serious doubts that a doctor is capable of making an accurate decision in fifteen rushed HMO minutes.

A specialist once determined, at lightning speed, that I had trigeminal neuralgia, simply because of some mysterious pain behind my eyebrow. He prescribed hard-core medication that rendered me useless. I was drowsy, lethargic, and unable to function. I stopped the medicine after a few days. The pain went away just as quickly as it came. I reckon the pain was probably from toxins in my system that needed time to clear out.

All too often the medical establishment relies on its tunnel vision, focusing on one symptom and overlooking the human being as a whole. A disease is isolated and treated without consideration of any of the side effects that might damage the body. A disease happens because of dis-ease in body and mind. Some believe disease always starts in the mind or soul, so the cure must come from a 360-degree analysis of body, mind, and soul. Western medicine does not adhere to this philosophy. Instead, the physical symptom is singled out and attacked (treated) like an enemy. We fight disease!

I experienced another nightmare diagnosis at age twenty-eight. I had started to suffer from an odd numbness in my right arm. The whole right side of my body felt weaker in general than the left. And working on a computer every day did not help things. It was strange. I went to see a physician, who was clueless, but he sent me to a famed neurologist. After what I thought was a very short examination, the specialist announced that I had multiple sclerosis (MS)! He stated cold-bloodedly, without blinking, that he would do blood tests, an MRI, and a spinal tap to confirm his suspicion, but he was almost certain. I nearly fainted. MS? Me? I was

outraged that this person could make such assumptions without any preliminary tests. He talked about MS as if it was the flu.

My gut told me he was wrong, but I was forced to sign up for the ordered tests. Waiting for the results turned me into a nervous wreck. I cried and cried, and my whole family was on edge. The neurologist finally called on what happened to be my birthday. The heartless individual did not even have the nerve to start with, “You are lucky; all tests are negative; you don’t have MS.” Instead, I could detect disappointment in his voice. He could not add me to his “patients for life” list. He offered to run more tests. I refused.

I was so pissed off that I felt like filing a lawsuit (something I don’t believe in) against him for malpractice. But instead, I consulted an alternative chiropractor, as I should have done in the first place. After a thorough examination, he diagnosed me with Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, and over the course of a few months, he relieved the pain via electro-stimulation, ultrasound, and supplements.

Sometimes, our bodies simply need a kick-start for healing to take place, or something even simpler—time to adjust, heal, or detox. Without patience, we overreact and run to see the doctor, who feels compelled to do something, anything.

### **Lethal Drug Interactions**

My father developed Parkinson’s disease around age seventy-five. The cause for his condition was most likely an undetected massive tissue inflammation in his lower back, which developed after he fell off a ladder. His physician only took X-rays. No CAT scan or MRI. He failed to notice the tissue inflammation. For months following the accident, my dad

complained about pain in his lower back, and visited various neurologists, physical therapists, and other specialists, but nothing helped him.

One evening a year after the accident, my mom found him lying on the couch, pale and lifeless, with a high fever. He was rushed to the hospital. After a couple of days, they finally established he had meningitis due to the inflammation in his back. The infection was so bad that he had to stay on an antibiotic drip, in the hospital, for five weeks.

My dad never really recovered. After his release from the hospital, numerous health issues emerged. He experienced strange hip pains, problems swallowing food, neurological symptoms, glaucoma, knee pain, and an increasingly dangerous loss of balance. Every day he fell. My mom tried to watch over him closely, but dad was stubborn. He insisted on working outside in the fresh air, which made my mom a nervous wreck. Getting up after a fall became increasingly more difficult for him. And because it was too late by the time his glaucoma was treated by another “efficient” physician, he was basically left blind in his left eye. Needless to say, my dad—the man who had climbed mountains up to age seventy-five—did not like his new and much smaller world.

We waited for months until his family doctor finally diagnosed Parkinson’s. My dad’s world fell apart, but at least we now knew the reasons for his bizarre symptoms. The diagnosis was a tough pill to swallow for all of us, and it catapulted my dad into a depression.

One of his friends already suffered from Parkinson’s. Despite a lot of heavy-duty medication, the man shook horrifically. Looking at his friend’s rapid deterioration frightened dad and the rest of us. Never had he been sick in his younger years; he had led a very active and healthy life, was often outdoors, and was married to the love of his life.

Still, the diagnosis and his increasingly unsteady constitution did not keep him inside. My mom interfered when he attempted difficult tasks such as climbing up ladders and other such endeavors, but feeling useless was like death for him.

His doctor prescribed levodopa, the most common drug for Parkinson's, but the results were not as successful as hoped. The doctors finally replaced levodopa with another drug and overlapped the two for a few weeks. According to my own research, the overlap time should have been no more than three weeks. The doctors, however, erred again and missed the deadline. It was during week five of taking overlapping drugs that my father died. He fell mysteriously right in front of our house in Switzerland and died within minutes. My mom rushed to his side, only to see him take his last breath. He had always hoped to go quickly and painlessly. His wish was fulfilled.

Everyone was paralyzed. I was in London when my sister called to share the shocking news. I broke down. In a state of utter shock and denial, I made my way to the airport and took the next flight to Zurich. Up in the clouds, I thought I saw him. I cried, hoping it was all a bad dream. I could not believe he was no more, until I saw his body. I will never forget the sight of him lying there peacefully, hands folded, in a coffin.

I felt a deep, indescribable pain when I said my final goodbyes to my beloved father. He had given me so much in my life: My love and respect for nature, animals, and the world; my honesty, integrity, modesty, and humility; my healthy skepticism; and the knowledge that I should live a healthy, wholesome life. I sat there staring at his loving, peaceful face, not believing reality.

The first night after he died, my partner and I stayed up crying and talking the entire night. Some time around four a.m., a ray of white light entered the room. It looked like a laser light, streaming in and out in silence. We both knew it was my dad saying goodbye.

Then, the mourning set in, a deep heaviness, alternating with hollowness and unbearable pain. I stayed with my mom for an entire week, until the day after the funeral. We cried together, nurturing and supporting each other whenever possible. It was good to share the pain. It was good to grieve with her.

My family refused to have an autopsy done.

During that week, I went to see his physician to get a Valium prescription for my mom, to help her sleep. She needed to get some rest and couldn't. I inquired about the drugs my dad had been prescribed, and expressed my interest in having an autopsy done. This physician had the nerve to blurt out, "Your father is cremated now, and it is too late for such things." I realized he was the one guilty of overlapping my dad's drugs, and he knew it was his own error. He may be to blame for my dad's death, but he was right; nothing could be done now. Lucky for him. I had no proof—again. And nothing would bring my dad back from heaven.

### **Human Ways Back to Health**

An abundance of natural therapies awaits those who distrust contemporary medicine. Unfortunately, with the media's effort to protect Big Pharma, many of these practices are given bad press coverage, or none at all. In the 1950s and '60s, Drs. Linus Pauling and Carl Pfeiffer and their fellow researchers explored vitamin, enzyme, and mineral supplementation and their effects on human biochemistry, discovering, among other things, the benefits of vitamin C.

Many amazing books were written in that era. When I studied clinical nutrition, it was those books that I used as references. Yet some time in the '70s, vitamin research came to a halt. I guess it was then that pharmaceutical companies got complete rule over the health business. Natural medicine was forced to take a seat way in the back once more, just like in the 1600s, and was deemed something more like witchcraft once again.

However, up until now natural medicine has been able to survive the “new” medieval attacks on it, and has become more popular than ever. Chinese medicine, clinical nutrition, Ayurveda, homeopathy, kinesiology—it’s all out there. At first, the search for a quality practitioner may seem overwhelming, but once you gain some basic knowledge of a particular type of therapy, your intuition and curiosity will eventually lead you to the right healing technique for you. Talk to people you encounter in your search for health and spirituality; the more you investigate and network with people who are on the same path, the more knowledge, and perhaps referrals, you will obtain.

Your intuition can also help in this quest. Your *self*, your *being*, your inner core doesn't have to think about anything as it encounters life's events. The sacred self observes and then speaks the truth of the moment. That is why the best course of action is usually to follow your gut feeling or your intuitive thought. The first thought that pops in your head as your recognition of what is true for you leads to the best course of action. This thought or voice is often overshadowed by the “outward me” type of thinking, but the true self is always there. Spending time away from the buzz, away from the chatter can connect you to that voice, that voice that is you, again. You have to learn to trust and pay attention to you.

Some accredited resources for starting your search are [www.lef.org](http://www.lef.org), for supplements and independent natural medicine research; *A Bag of Pearls*, found at



<http://www.itmonline.org/bop.htm>, for Chinese medicine;  
[www.nationalcenterforhomeopathy.org](http://www.nationalcenterforhomeopathy.org), for homeopathy; and my own site,  
[www.lifestyleblends.com](http://www.lifestyleblends.com), if you want to do a hair analysis and get proper supplement  
recommendations.

In my practice, I usually start off with exactly that—a hair analysis. Such a test entails having a hair sample analyzed by a reputable lab. The resulting report details a mineral blueprint of a person’s biochemistry. A hair tissue mineral analysis can provide pertinent information about their metabolic rate, energy levels, sugar and carbohydrate tolerance, state of stress, immune system, and glandular activity. The report provides an overall picture of the patient’s health. A patient can then choose to follow the lab’s advice regarding supplementation, or attempt to correct the imbalances with nutrition.

I have seen great results when patients supplement with the right remedies instead of randomly popping supplements without knowing how to balance their bodies. Taking vitamins and minerals without having a picture of the body’s state of health may do more harm than good in some instances. For example, if calcium can’t be adequately absorbed and processed, adding more calcium to the mix can lead to tissue deposits. The good intentions behind the addition of calcium may actually cause a person’s biochemical balance to deteriorate.

However, asking your physician which natural alternatives he or she recommends is not the best strategy. Physicians can’t advise the use of “witchcraft”; that goes against their teachings, and against the law. A chuckle and a condescending attitude towards the use of such “unproven” medicine may be all you get.

In Europe, it’s a bit easier. Swiss doctors can recommend natural supplements. My Swiss gynecologist recommended chaste berry instead of drugs to regulate my hormones and

ease PMS. Another Swiss physician suggested arnica, a homeopathic remedy, for sore muscles and back pain.

Give the body a chance to heal itself and detox before bombarding it with chemicals. The body is crying out for help; often the response is a slap in the face—adding drugs without knowing the root cause—and true healing is postponed. No body is deficient in medication; it may be deficient in proper nutrients.

Pharmaceutical companies have successfully lobbied Washington against allowing the sale of vitamins. Promoters of Codex Alimentarius, a collection of international food standards, want to prohibit the sale of vitamins in the US. A proposal has been circulating in Congress for years. It has never passed, but it keeps being tabled. If it ever becomes law, vitamins would only be available by prescription and sold by pharmaceutical companies. A single stroke of a pen could have Americans running abroad to get their vitamin fix.

Such a regulation would return us to the 1600s; we shouldn't be surprised when history repeats itself. As greed increases among public figures and their cronies, the bill is more likely to pass. Powerful drug companies appear to have a lot more sway in DC than the vitamin industry.

### **Natural Applications for the Stressed Psyche**

Treating depression with antidepressant prescriptions, and without the addition of therapy, rarely cures the underlying issue. The root cause can surface again once the medication has been suspended.

Greg\*, a friend and native of Phoenix, Arizona, stopped the combo of antidepressant drugs he was taking cold turkey after two years. Despite the drug megadose he'd been taking,

he still felt depressed. He seriously questioned whether the medication had done anything beyond lowering his sex drive and making him feel numb. So, he got himself off the medication unaided. To support his new drug-free life, he started attending Buddhist meditation sessions. His general well-being and outlook slowly improved. Now, five years off the drugs, he is still fine.

I personally suffered from a severe case of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after having been involved in an act of war in Sri Lanka. I was there for one year to manage a post-tsunami rehabilitation project in 2006. In my last week on that beautiful island, I happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time when a claymore mine detonated and killed twelve Sri Lankan soldiers right in front of my eyes. I escaped death by a hair. Just one second, or one yard, divided us from the soldiers' fate.

The incident occurred while we were driving to meet with a government official in Jaffna. Not only did a mine detonate, but the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan soldiers shot over our heads for about one and a half hours, until finally the army and the head of our office got us out. I felt somewhat normal after the incident. I guess my adrenaline did a lot of work to protect me for the first couple of weeks. But once back in the First World, on my first attempt to drive on the freeway, the effects undeniably surfaced. An intense panic gripped me. My heart pounded like mad, and all I wanted was to flee. I pulled over and tried to catch my breath. This was the first of many such incidents.

What followed were trips to the psychiatrist, psychologist, kinesiologist, homeopath—you name it. Nothing helped. The psychiatrist heavily promoted Paxil, but I refused. I intended to get rid of the crippling anxiety the natural way. I searched for solutions. But after months without any relief, I surrendered to Paxil—and made my shrink happy.

I swallowed those pills for a week and watched my anxiety go from bad to horrific. The shrink insisted I stick it out, but it was unbearable. The sheer sight of a car now sent ice-cold shivers down my back. I quit the drugs and started treatment with a spiritual psychologist in Long Beach, California. She was a godsend. Between her and the somatic experience therapy I discovered shortly thereafter, I made improvements. Somatic Experiencing is a treatment for people with nervous systems that are “full,” or overwhelmed with excess trauma. This trauma is energy stuck in the body. It is trapped. During a panic attack, it floods the system, almost as if it is searching for a drain.

Dr. Peter Levine, author of *Waking the Tiger* and creator of Somatic Experiencing, studied trauma in humans for over thirty years and concluded that trauma sits in the body’s nervous system in the form of excessive unreleased energy. Dr. Levine discovered that animals in the wild do not suffer from trauma. If an impala chased by a lion manages to escape the lion’s molars, it will either run, or stand and shake off the trauma, the excess energy. The shaking may last for up to ten minutes to completely rid the body of trauma. Any anxiety will have then completely left the body.

Humans do not follow this part of the fight-or-flight instinct anymore. Our reptilian brain has been overshadowed by the more sophisticated, rational neocortex part of the brain. Yet the reptilian brain is very much alive and harboring life’s traumas. Our neocortex is not the master over trauma. The neocortex immediately starts rationalizing after a traumatic incident. Get up, go on, and act as if nothing has happened. Function! If we were to take a moment to deal with a car accident, for example, to handle it the right way by allowing ourselves to feel and release the energy, the traumatic effects might be greatly reduced. Dr.

Levine developed twelve exercises to release trauma and discharge excessive energy. Some of them can be found in his marvelous book.

I got rid of my anxiety in a natural way. It took a while, but I succeeded. I am grateful that I discovered this incredible healing technique. Through it all, I never lost faith that I could heal my body and mind from the inside out. Just like a 401K, health is our responsibility.

I have always believed that treating the body as a foreign entity and stuffing it with medication will cause a backlash. Chemicals treat the symptom, not the root cause. The body sends signals when things are not in order, but humans have become masters at ignoring or deadening ills with pills. Sticking to natural therapies, practicing meditation and changing bad habits take longer to show effects and require more patience than a quick-fix pill, but they can potentially heal an underlying disease pattern. What has taken years to destroy can generally not be fixed overnight. It took us years to get sick. It will take some time to achieve good health again.

### **What Can You Do?**

There is much that can be done.

1. Investigate what's in your food, and use supplements.

I think you owe it to yourself to find out what you are ingesting. Who else can do the research for you? Nobody! By no means should you put poison in your body temple. You are worth much more than that. Your body and soul are worth getting only the best.

Food is greatly depleted of nutrients today. To get the nourishment you need to stay healthy, I would suggest you use supplements. Find a clinical nutritionist or naturopath near you for analysis and recommendations. If you can't afford this, use the Life Extension website

([www.lef.org](http://www.lef.org)); it is an excellent source of information. Life Extension provides outstanding research and quality supplements, and is not sponsored by interest groups.

Healthy, non-toxic food will help you greatly on your path to spirituality, enlightenment, or simply finding yourself.

## 2. Take self-responsibility.

You can't outsource the responsibility for your health. You must assume it, because no one else will. Doctors will give you prescriptions. Supermarkets and fast food restaurants will market their concoctions relentlessly. The media pushes the likes of light and low-fat food as miracle cures. This is where you come in. Don't believe all this nonsense. Good sources for food enlightenment include the following: *Skinny Bitch* by Rory Freedman and Kim Barnouin, and the movie *Food, Inc.* Also, review [www.fastfoodfacts.info](http://www.fastfoodfacts.info) for nutritional info on fast food.

It is your task to weigh the risks of each food and each medication. Yes, sometimes you will get lazy and reach for McD's French fries. Yes, there will be downfalls, times when you must reach for the pharmaceuticals. But keep it all in balance. Know the downsides of a lifelong dependence on Prozac, Ambien, or the like. You are in charge of your vehicle. If you take good care of it, it will have a higher resale value. If not, you may need to drop it off early at the junk yard.

## 3. Change where you shop and eat.

Support a local farm or CSA. Get your fruits and veggies there. Go to the farmer's market. Shop at Whole Foods or Trader Joe's (the food at these stores may be more expensive, but quality food is also more filling).

Read the labels. If you can't pronounce an ingredient it's most likely not natural. If you can't pronounce over half of the listed ingredients—run!

Seek out raw, vegan, vegetarian, or organic food restaurants instead of the traditional chains if you need to eat out. Those restaurants are abundantly available in any city.

I seek unaltered, pure foods in markets and restaurants. And yes, non-enhanced butter is a natural food. If I was into butter, I'd much prefer this to the mostly artificial Philadelphia cream cheese. Butter is just butter. I focus on foods left in their original state. I can't even identify the original state of a Ritz whole wheat cracker or the famous Oreo cookie. I don't touch those.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Dumbed Down—Deliberately**

According to Plato, the price of apathy is to be ruled by evil men. What a visionary he was. That statement was made thousands of years ago, but the truth of this principle hasn't changed. It still applies perfectly to the situation in America today. Look at who rules us. Evil men. What are we? Apathetic.

The Americans—and the Europeans for that matter—who cannot answer the most basic questions about politics, geography, or international and domestic events are not mere stereotypes. They're ubiquitous. In reality, many undergo a second-rate education and succumb to non-stop doing and buzz. Their intellects have been dumbed down. Worst of all, this dumbing down of American citizens is done by design, courtesy of corporations and the government.

A recent caller on Michael Savage's radio show *The Savage Nation* proclaimed the population of the US stood at six hundred million, and that President Obama and the illegal aliens had supplied the money for her welfare check. This is not a joke. While this may be an extreme example from a person with little education, there are many ignorants out there.

Helen\*, a senior manager at a major US airline, once held a meeting to discuss logistics concerning a new city the airline would soon fly to—Geneva, Switzerland. During the meeting, she asked for the name of the Swiss queen. The rest of us were startled. "There is no queen in Switzerland," we said unanimously. "Helen, are you confusing Switzerland with



Sweden again?” But no, Helen insisted there was a Swiss queen. Then it got worse. She blurted out, “Oh, Switzerland is that country bordering Holland, no?” I am not making this up.

Here we were, discussing Swiss route details, and the person in charge had no clue about the most basic details of the new destination. Helen had been with the airline for twenty years, flown to numerous international destinations, including Switzerland, and read probably all of the airline’s monthly magazines, which include maps. I jokingly offered to charge her for Geography 101 lessons. She refused.

Helen is not alone. Millions of Americans can’t even name the fifty States, let alone find other countries on the globe. According to a Gallup poll done in 2008, the percentage of Americans who could not locate the US on a map was somewhere around 36.

When I was fourteen and in Swiss high school, our teacher gave us a blank map of the world with only outlines of the continents and oceans. On that plain map we had to mark rivers, countries, mountain ranges, oceans, and cities. The error tolerance was, at maximum, one quarter of an inch. It was tough, but we did learn to appreciate the planet we reside on.

I have encountered the tedious Swiss/Swedish phenomenon often. I have heard numerous versions of, “Oh, you are Swiss; you must speak Swedish.” I used to find it somewhat amusing. Now I think it’s bothersome. Switzerland and Sweden are two separate countries with about one thousand miles in between them. Swiss people don’t speak Swedish. Swedish people don’t speak Swiss. In Switzerland, four languages are spoken: Swiss German (Swiss), French, Italian, and Romansh, which is a Rhaeto-Romance language spoken in southern Switzerland. When I do end up deciding to explain the Swiss/Swedish differences to people, I get bewildered looks.

My brother and I used to play geography games while picking cherries. The cherry tree came alive with the sounds of us asking each other, “Name a river that starts with Y,” or “What is the name of the country between Niger and Sudan?” or “What’s the one between India and Iran?” We covered the whole world in one afternoon.

Not so long ago, people felt embarrassed when they uttered stupid remarks or asked dumb questions. We felt bad about being perceived as oafs. But now, stupidity is widely accepted and even thought to be cool. Being heard, piping up, and getting airtime are more important than worrying about the accuracy of what is being said. And since our listening skills have all but disappeared, we either don’t even notice the hogwash, or choose to ignore it. Occasionally, an uninformed person will mutter a simple sorry as if that rectifies their ignorance. Perhaps, the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policies protect such behavior as well? Are we afraid to point out bunk because that may be interpreted as being insensitive or not politically correct? In numerous projects, I have had to painstakingly spoon-feed inept and overpaid project team members because management retained them in the name of affirmative action. For me, that meant more work, babysitting, pampering, and educating.

Years ago, people who couldn’t do their job were fired. Now, we have to accept idiocy to avoid lawsuits, and accusations of sexual harassment or racial discrimination. Dead weight survives, and the brightest may never make it to places that rightfully belong to them. It may sound brutal, but it’s prevalent.

Outside of work, dopiness is everywhere. Just yesterday, my friend Jane asked a hotel receptionist in Maui for directions to the airport and got a blank stare. The receptionist inquired, “You mean, as in road?” Jane responded that yes, since she would not be flying a plane, she would appreciate being told the name of the street to the airport. The receptionist

was unable to help. The one road that leads to Kahului Airport from Lahaina eventually splits, so there are two routes to the airport, but the Maui local was clueless about both. His attitude suggested that he viewed himself as being too important to deal with such trivialities. Is being ignorant the new cool? We certainly seem to celebrate it, judging by the stardom attained by certain Hollywood glamour girls. Yet such generalized ignorance is not entirely the fault of the individual. The US government has contributed significantly to it by overhauling the best school system in the world and reducing it to a low performer.

### **Education Deform—A Tarnished System**

The US public education system is weak and mushy, lacking in intellectual substance. Its main purpose is to entertain and socialize, not to teach and encourage critical and creative thinking. At the heart of the deformation of the system is the change from achievement-based to outcome-based education (OBE). OBE is an affective (feeling-centered), not cognitive, teaching method.

The transformation to this lesser value teaching system was gradual but deliberate. What is the difference between before and after? Achievement-based education sought to produce innovative, creative, intelligent children with a broad but intensive liberal arts background that he or she could use widely. Outcome-based education seeks to prepare children to meet the needs of the global economy of the twenty-first century, and to produce world-class workers with the attitudes, values, and beliefs wanted by big business. The effort is 100 percent financed by American taxpayers, most of whom don't realize a change in purpose has occurred.

We need to recognize the dangerous effects of OBE because this type of conditioning is at work not only in our schools but also throughout society every day of the year.

### **What Are the Problems with OBE?**

Outcome-based education, also known as operant conditioning, shapes people's behavior just as children shape clay. The new system is not only being used in schools, but also in television, radio, music, video game and software development, and in the plain old print media.

This is a model of education that rejects the traditional focus—one in which schools must provide certain things to their students—in favor of a newer focus, in which students must demonstrate that they “know and are able to do” whatever the required outcomes are. Within this structure, students are allowed to take as much time as necessary to learn a given subject, and no penalties apply if their homework isn't done. No student ever fails; even sloppy, incomplete, or poorly done assignments can be handed in. Teachers in outcome-based classrooms do not move on to new subjects until every last student is done with the old ones (as in the No Child Left Behind Act, implemented under former President Bush). The pace is set by the students, not the teacher. First graders, for example, are told that explaining how to solve a problem is more important than getting the correct answer. Conventional grades, grade levels, achievement testing, student records, and Carnegie units of credit have been eliminated or significantly altered.

Like many education issues, OBE is difficult to describe or define. There is no generally accepted, comprehensive definition. There is no typical model to examine. Some of the terms commonly given to programs of education associated with this system are Exit

Outcomes, Lifelong Learning, Mastery Learning Restructuring, Results-Based Education, and Turning Points Curriculum. Why so many different names for what are all essentially the same thing? One might ask whether the object is to confuse the public. All, or nearly all of them can be found in former President Bush's America 2000 and President Clinton's Goals 2000 programs.

High schools and universities have adapted to the outcome-based educational model. The traditional concept of thinking has been challenged by the implementation of OBE, resulting in the unadulterated destruction of absolute values of right and wrong—the very foundation that is essential for stable, free societies. A primary supposition of outcome-based education is that, given enough time, all children can learn. This is absurd. While all children may be able to learn something, not all children can or should learn everything, nor even the same things as each other.

The influencing and rating of students' personal traits is something that has been practiced for years. Communist countries successfully use this strategy. They condition children to buy into a political agenda rather than provoke original thought. Children are like sponges; they soak up information and they can be heavily influenced, especially at an early age. The government knows this well and wastes no time starting the indoctrination.

It is clear that the leftist agenda has gained a stronghold in the mainstream media, schools, and universities; it is equally clear that teachers and parents who do not agree with that agenda may be punished for airing different or conservative views. Professors must be castrated, neutered, and spayed all at the same time. They must comply with the agenda, or they will not be allowed to teach. This attitude conflicts with another basic tenet of democracy—the need for critical thinking skills, which encourage free decision making.

Education in the US appears to be targeted for cooperative learning just like it is in China, Cuba, and Russia. The government has deliberately adapted and deteriorated the methods for teaching children to learn. Thanks to this new system, we have changed from the way it was in the 1950s, when a student in eighth grade was able to identify members of Congress and the president's cabinet, to today, when the average high school graduate can't find the US on a map.

As stated by President John F. Kennedy, "our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education." The human mind is our fundamental resource, but we are deliberately failing to educate it and develop its potential.

Yet for a prosperous future, we need intelligent, highly educated, thinking humans. According to the National Council of Teachers of English Standards and the International Reading Association's jointly produced *The Standards for the English Language Arts*, by 2020 citizens will need powerful literacy abilities to participate fully in society and the workplace. Yet in the current year, only a small percentage of the population has achieved those abilities. Our dumbed-down education system is not producing humans with the capabilities they need to live and work in the complex world we have created.

### **Why the Push for OBE?**

Why would anyone, particularly the government, push for a system of education that produces ignorance instead of knowledge? Why would anyone want the masses to know less, think less, and understand less about how to live and govern productively and creatively? The answer is simple: Highly intelligent, well-educated thinking people who live healthy, active lives are tough to rule; they question political rhetoric and hold elected officials accountable for their

actions. Sheeple, on the other hand, ask no questions and blindly trust whatever the current governmental administration decrees is best for the nation. Outcome-based education produces sheeple, making it easier for those in power to control the masses.

Let's look at comments made by Thomas B. Sticht, someone who is in a position to analyze and promote OBE for the purpose discussed above. Sticht is the president and senior scientist of Applied Behavioral & Cognitive Sciences, Inc. in San Diego County, California. He also served on the US Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, which influences our educational system. Sticht's belief is that a dependability of a labor force and how well it can be trained and managed is essential, and not the general educational level. He envisioned this workforce to be managed by a small cadre of highly educated, creative people who would ensure innovation and growth. Sticht appears to think we need an army of low-wage laborers in the States.

The way to accomplish this is to provide a second-class education, like OBE. As long as the masses are poor and uneducated, a small cadre of highly educated, creative people can act as kings and control the peasants. Sticht is calling for the preparation of a workforce with limited knowledge ready to endure life-long labor.

The Obama administration is in lockstep with Sticht and those of like mind, but Obama's policy is not new. Social and behavioral engineers are destroying the intellect of millions of our children. The process is at work in your backyard and even in your living room. What is the purpose? Do we really need to return to a king-and-peasants system, where the highly educated elite manage the uneducated and degraded workforce?

The entire hijacking of the school system hasn't gone entirely unnoticed. In some communities such as Littleton, Colorado, organized opposition groups have forced educational

agencies to repeal reform. In Littleton, community members felt that hazy, non-academic outcomes were replacing content, and that technically unsound assessments would be used to determine something as important as high school graduation.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has been involved in the development of OBE [Outcome-Based Education] over the longest period of time and seems to have achieved the highest level of development to date. . . . Public outcry in Pennsylvania has been so loud that as many as seven revisions to the program have been necessary since it was originally announced. These changes have largely been the direct result of resistance organized by the Pennsylvania Parents Commission. Grassroots opposition to OBE has probably defeated efforts to implement it there or at the least will have resulted in major modifications to the original proposal. The experiences of parents in Pennsylvania can be of valuable assistance to parents opposing OBE in other states.<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, the Western Australian Government abandoned most of its outcome-based education system in response to massive opposition from teachers and parents.

They may have realized that Aristotle was correct when he stated that educated men are as much superior to uneducated men as the living are to the dead.

### **Paying Dearly for a Second-class School System**

One of the biggest objections to OBE is the cost. Not only do we get a lousy education system, we get to pay for it dearly. Taxes finance the implementation of operant conditioning even as colleges and universities become more expensive every year.

The obtainment of a college degree poses a financial challenge to many families and students. At private four-year non-profit institutions, tuition and fees average \$23,712. Average total

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<sup>1</sup> "Outcome-Based Education" by James W. Deuink, Ed.D. Copyright by BJU Press. Used with permission.



charges (including room and board and tuition and fees) were \$32,307 in 2007–08. The average full-time student attending a private college receives about \$9,300 in grants and tax benefits, which reduces the average tuition and fees to a net price of about \$14,400.

High college tuition fees put a serious strain on family budgets, as many of them struggle to put food on the table. This often results in students having to apply for federal and private loans. By graduation, the average student has accumulated huge personal debt that will take years to repay. Imagine already owing thousands of dollars before you even get a job, get married, or buy a house. Yet education debt is rapidly becoming the norm, indoctrinating young adults into a debt-ridden society even before they enter the workforce.

### **What's Going on in Europe?**

European educators have not adopted OBE yet on a large scale; most schools still teach traditionally. There have been trials at certain European universities, but the system, so far, is used mostly in the US and other Anglo-Saxon countries, such as Australia and South Africa.

Until recently, the European university system did not adhere to the three-tiered degree system (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral) but will merge into it slowly over the coming years. A key difference between the European model and its US counterpart is that a degree in Europe is not necessarily a must for making decent money. Various other professional opportunities are available to young people who are not accepted into, or who simply do not want to go to, college. There are plenty of alternative ways to make a good living. Apprenticeships, universities of applied science, and technical and trade schools are viable choices for those who don't want a traditional university degree.

Plumbers, mechanics, welders, secretaries, carpenters, gardeners, farmers, and retail assistants are all in professions that can be learned by an apprenticeship. Depending on the profession, the length of such training required is anywhere from two to four years, with most around three years. By comparison, in the States, many of these same professions have no standard educational requirements. A US hairdresser-to-be can take a quick six-month course to become certified. To become a hairdresser in Europe, it takes three to four years.

Those who successfully complete an apprenticeship can make adequate salaries in their respective fields and have opportunities for advancement. A carpenter can take training to become a master carpenter, train others, or teach classes. A graduate from a trade school can become a CEO, just like Oswald Gruebel (UBS Group CEO and former Credit Suisse CEO), who never attended a university but trained at the bank instead.

While the European educational model has not yet fallen into the OBE trap, it is far from perfect. In Switzerland, for example, the separation of the gifted and not gifted happens at only twelve years old. This weeding out makes is extremely difficult for a late bloomer who later wants to go to university. At twelve, low performers are separated into two different schools, namely high school and Realschule, which is designed for less-intelligent students. Once sorted, it's hard to reverse trends. Luckily, this separation doesn't exist in the US.

Traditionally, the Realschule-level graduates are the future hairdressers, plumbers, carpenters, and secretaries of the world. They pursue an apprenticeship, not university. Swiss Realschule graduates, however, can attend trade schools and other non-traditional colleges, just not the state universities.

I believe the system is in dire need of an upgrade to accommodate late bloomers whose abilities may not be evident at age twelve. Students are given a decent education according to

their assumed capacity. The average sixteen-year-old in Europe seems to have a more worldly, and in many ways broader, knowledge than their American counterpart.

The US traditionally ranks fairly low in reading, math, and scientific literacy. Scandinavian countries rank the highest. Asian countries ace IQ tests.

A European education is generally more affordable than a US education. In Switzerland, education is viewed as a basic right, and universities are state-sponsored.

Let's continue to look at other areas that are attacking the intellects of the nation.

### ***Panem et Circenses***

We are being fed a new version of the Roman *panem et circenses* (bread and games) line of attack. Ancient Rome used the *panem et circenses* method to maintain power and control over people. This practice kept the sheep fat, apathetic, and happy, even as they were conned and sent off to rob the free world—much like today.

There are no more gruesome gladiator fights in public. A sophisticated bunch we are; we have “clean” entertainment. The “circus” changed from bloody fights in the coliseum to football, baseball, the Xbox, Internet, and movies, not to mention the war scenes broadcast live on TV by embedded journalists, seen right there in the comfort of your own home. The games are always on to keep us entertained, satisfied, and in a trance.

And oh, do we love “bread,” too. Food and alcohol are high on our list of priorities. Back in ancient Rome, wine was cheap, but it wasn't only easy access to alcohol that killed people's brain cells. Their food and wine were laced with lead, because the Romans used the metal to make cooking utensils, storage vessels, water pipes and tanks. Wine was particularly contaminated with lead because the lead came from as many as fourteen sources during the

wine's preparation. Things are not so different now. Our food is being poisoned with nitrites, MSG, aspartame, artificial colorings, sulfites, potassium bromate, and a gazillion other chemicals. The end result of all that poisoning is somewhat the same now as it was then: apathy and gluttony led to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. And just as the Romans were, we are all mad hatters.

Also like the Romans, we—the sheep—are more interested in bread and circuses than personal rights and liberties. In these modern times, a football or basketball game draws more attention than a protest against an illegal war, or even a presidential election. We are indifferent to reality as long as our own little life is in order.

The media is partially to blame for our national ignorance, because it is infested with sheep, too. Journalists are slaves to media owners and the government, and are limited in what can be reported in the papers and on TV. Nevertheless, this has never stopped us from watching TV. We love content that is easy to digest and requires zero active brain cells.

### **Idiot box Asphyxia**

The average American watches four to five hours of television every single day. TV is an excellent tool to stop thinking, to numb the mind, and to keep you entertained, so you don't attempt to ruminate.

TV requires less concentration than reading. If kids watch a lot of TV, their ability to focus will be reduced and concentration at school will diminish. Kids who have a TV in their room are distracted and unable to focus on homework. In the US, sixty-eight percent of eight- to eighteen-year-olds have a TV in the bedroom. Daytime sleepiness and lack of concentration in school are often caused by late-night television watching.

A person hypnotized by TV for more than three hours every day is twice as likely to be obese as a person who watches only an hour per day. A person watching TV is a person not moving, unless, perhaps, exercise equipment is used in front of the box.

Just once, why not detach, sit back, and consciously observe the rapidly flickering pictures on TV. You may realize the sheer insanity of it all. Images, intros, different scenes, and story leads flash wildly on the screen. What does such insanity do to a sensitive and alert mind? Neutral observation of the flickering lunacy on the screen drives me insane. Be the observer and observe what you succumb yourself to. Not during a movie, during the news! The constant switching from commercials, teasers, story intros, and short stories hammer the brain into submission. It is exasperating. The brain is literally overloaded with cluttered bytes of information and hundreds of different topics and sounds.

By age eighteen, children will have witnessed an average of sixteen thousand murders and two hundred thousand violent acts on TV. Long-term studies show that viewing TV violence causes aggression later in life. Perhaps after watching sixteen thousand murders, an unstable teenager feels the urge to act out movie scenes in real life. Despite studies that suggest TV violence influences children, experts disagree about whether there are direct links between crime and movies or TV shows.

According to the late Sir Richard Attenborough, violence in film and television is to blame for the apparent increase in the use of guns and knives. The veteran actor, producer and director said people have become desensitized to real-life crime because are so used to seeing graphic images of violence on screen.

Common sense tells me that too much violence on TV is bad for the psyche and may potentially create bad ideas, especially in an unstable brain. How could it be healthy to watch

death, destruction, blood, suffering, war, fights, monsters, shootouts, and stabbings? How could the constant exposure to all of this not have an effect on the psyche? Even before my stay in war-torn Sri Lanka, I often had trouble sleeping after watching a thriller or war movie. It bothered my psyche. Is this just because I have not been desensitized yet?

Watching TV puts the mind into a hypnotic state, switching function from the left side to the right side of the brain. The right side doesn't analyze incoming content; instead, it uses an emotional response, reduces higher brain activity, and promotes lower region activity (in other words, it makes you less intelligent). We have no control over what is entering the mind. Subliminal messages, which are words and images crafted to influence our subconscious, may be hidden within the entertainment.

TV is a perfect tool for programming the mind. It provides easy access to the subconscious, reduces the ability to analyze, and delivers content to be absorbed unfiltered. The mind cannot distinguish between TV and reality. That is why our hearts beat faster when we watch horror movies. The brain thinks the threat is real.

After World War II, the military decided to create a better war machine. Before soldiers were sent into battle, they were shown violent video images to desensitize and make them more willing to kill. It was a successful program. And still, many voices claim there is no correlation between crime and movies. The military appears to disagree.

People on the other side of the pond prefer sex on TV to violence. Sex is something we will all experience one day; murder, hopefully not. What could be healthier to watch? Sex, or blood? What pollutes the mind more? Sex, or violence? A natural act, or a heinous one?

No matter what your choice, watching any kind of TV is addictive. Like any routine, or even any addiction, it is a hard habit to break. But gosh, isn't watching TV a dull hobby? To

sit and stare at the tube all night long—is that why we’re here on Earth? To be in solitude and be amused by some rapidly flickering images?

The best New Year’s resolution you could ever make would be to rise from the couch and go and smell some flowers. Leave the idiot box behind and get out there—into the wild. Talk to a neighbor. Learn something. Dance. Socialize. Volunteer. Listen to Hemi-Sync CDs ([www.monroeinstitute.org](http://www.monroeinstitute.org)). Practice yoga. All this is much healthier and enlightening than eating chips and ice cream while watching some senseless reality show. You are a being with consciousness. Consciousness gains nothing from watching pictures on an oversized, super flat, wide-screen TV.

### **Infotainment**

The evening news on TV is supposed to draw good ratings. Unfortunately, a Britney Spears divorce or the death of someone like Anna Nicole Smith brings in more viewers than the near bankruptcy of the State of California, the PATRIOT Act, or the Cap and Trade Act. We prefer material that is easy to digest to topics that should be of more concern to us, and which actually affect us.

Apart from the touchy-feeliness of news, the form in which it is presented is unnerving. Focus is on entertainment. Each news piece is accompanied by a big splash, surrounded by commercials, story leads, teasers, and other interruptions. The TV screen is flashing with hundreds of pictures per second. Beautiful, creaseless, Botoxed, and lifted faces deliver bland messages.

The main news channels water down important, inconvenient news and complex details to a bulleted list. Topics or opinions that do not serve the political ideology of a

particular station or newspaper are left out. Evening news stories may include a moose rescued from an Alaskan river instead of details of that ominous PATRIOT Act. The moose story is easier to digest, and sells better.

But deciding to air the moose tale instead of real news is an insult to our intellect. It borders on betrayal, as a free society has the right to be informed adequately with in-depth domestic and world news. News Lite, delivered at seventh-grader linguistic levels, doesn't inform or educate.

Society and the school system have put aside the importance of language, reasoning, and critical thought. The language we use to express thoughts has deteriorated greatly. Few still bother to master the world of linguistics. *The Oxford English Dictionary* contains around 616,500 words, yet the average English speaker only possesses a vocabulary of between ten and twenty thousand words, and uses only a fraction thereof, the rest being in recall or recognition vocabulary.

Newscasters seldom use big words, because only a minority of viewers would be able to comprehend their meaning. Or is it the other way around? Is TV not using big words to dumb us down? Either the media changed to “baby English,” or the nation was encouraged to speak “baby English” by the media. I am not sure which one came first—the chicken or the egg.

A language monitoring service analyzed the 2008 vice-presidential candidate debate between Senator Joe Biden and Governor Sarah Palin. The results showed that Biden spoke at an eighth-grade level or lower, while Palin spoke at a ninth-grade level. The question is: Were they not able to speak more eloquently, or did they think they needed to stoop down to lowest



common denominator linguistic levels? Which was it? If the nation's leaders speak at a teenage level, where does that leave the rest of us?

News is now supposed to slither down our throats like a Jell-O shot. Who wants to listen to the tedious details of the Health Care Reform Bill? It's a document that contains approximately two thousand pages. Who has time to read that? Who wants to focus on coffins arriving from Afghanistan and Iraq? Or the very real problems that illegal aliens create for the US? Or the details behind the demise of the US school system? What about the facts related to Chinese food production practices? Who cares what the PATRIOT Act really means? Who knows the truth about the allocation of TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program) funds? No details, please. We are a high-level "bullet point" society. Why get messy when it's not necessary?

A quick glance at Yahoo's daily front page confirms this state of affairs. The headlines hardly challenge us to think: "Ten Reasons Why Your Boyfriend Leaves You." "Twenty Least-Polluted US Cities." "Fattiest Foods Ever." "Obama's Fly Incident." Yet concurrent with the release of these easy-to-digest stories are more important ones: another freedom-infringing law is being passed, or an American talk show host is being added to the non-immigration list in the UK. I get to this fascinating story later.

In Europe, TV delivers thirty minutes of uninterrupted evening news—no commercials, no teasers. In that time frame, Europeans are given some insight into world events. Of course, this type of reporting is still not in-depth and the views presented depend on the political affiliation of the TV channel as well. But at least the news is compact, and covers the world. It is not one clip here, then commercials, blitz, and buzz, and another clip there. It is

not a jungle of information intended to confuse rather than elucidate, as it is on CNN and NBC, for example.

The situation I love most, however, is when a major event paralyzes hive minds for days, or even weeks, on end. Take the Michael Jackson death, for example; all the other news was completely swept under the carpet. In such cases, the world stage suffers from a type of psychosis, and the media doesn't stop until we know the bathroom schedule of the deceased VIP. On and on it goes, until everyone is beat into submission by the sheer volume of reports. Journalists jump on any new bait like piranhas. They gotta suck the most life and ratings out of that one story. Be the first to see MJ's toothbrush color, or his leg-waxing device. Or hear the latest from Jackson's plastic surgeon on Michael's alien nose. Who cares? It seems we do. Why? Are we that bored with ourselves that we need to feed on useless information about people we have never met and never will meet? Celebrity obsession borders on addiction. And such addictions are a pandemic that the majority of the nation is affected by. Just talk to your friends. Who or what do they care more about? Paris Hilton, Brangelina (Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt), or the new health care bill?

Whenever we have a superstar situation that keeps the news anchors prattling on incessantly, the government knows the time is right to pass new controls and restrictions without getting a collective slap on the wrist. When the nation has become preoccupied with something like Paris Hilton's jail sentence, any new policy can be instated. The nation's brains are on vacation. Politicians have free reign to pass what we otherwise might reject. An extreme example is 9/11 and the PATRIOT Act. Would anyone in their right mind have signed up for such a debilitating policy without there having been the tragedy that preceded it?

Abusing people's helplessness and despair during a time of vigilance is downright evil. It is using people's vulnerability.

### **Print Media Buzz**

News is not the only source of buzz; buzz is rampant in every magazine and newspaper.

Funnily enough, we fork out tons of money for glossy magazines only to skim from ad to ad.

In trendy publications, dizzying, mind-cluttering ads take up nearly half of the pages. Based on personal observation, I would say that at least seventy pages of *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *Cosmo*, and the like are used for advertising. Half the magazine is trash. Do we notice?

Long ago, I stopped buying women's magazines not only because of the ads galore, but also because their content is recycled year after year. Every year we have one season for weight loss strategies, yet another for combating that persistent belly flab or cellulite, and another for trying out the latest eye shadow hue. In essence, not much ever changes. Why do men get *GQ*, *Maxim*, and *FHM*, which are full of witty, funny, interesting, off-the-wall reports? Lately, I have resorted to reading my boyfriend's fun literature. It is far more thrilling than the chick magazines I am supposed to buy.

Amidst the buzz and propaganda, we have all the fight headlines. The media and government are obsessed with labeling a new project a fight. We fight terrorism, fight violence, fight stress, fight hunger, fight crime, fight corruption, fight cancer, and fight drugs. Fight, fight, fight. Fighting is the name of the game.

But what we create when we fight is even more fighting. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. When we focus on fighting drugs, we get more drugs. The war on drugs that's been raging over the past decades has been nothing but counter-productive. More drugs than ever before

are being smuggled into the country, but we keep *fighting* narcotics. The strategy is inherently flawed. The headlines about fighting this or that have the whole nation focused on fighting instead of resolving issues.

Going on an anti-war rally supports the negative. Joining a peace rally is the better approach. Mother Teresa knew this. She was aware. Focusing on the positive aspect of an issue creates more positive. Yet fighting is what we are trained to do. How else can we face a challenge? Fighting against stress immediately has us turning upstream instead of downstream. It invites more stress into our lives, because the focus is on stress, not relaxation. For good health, we should focus on exactly that—good health—not disease. This shifts power to health, so disease will have less muscle. Instead of fighting terrorism, we and the media should focus on the positive. The polar opposite—abundance, peace, love, and trust. Such a concept may be foreign to us, but if we take a look at our history, we'll see that fighting has never been productive. Fighting feeds the fight.

A shift and boost in energy would arise if the spotlight were to shift. Perhaps then, we could rid our minds of the pessimistic pollution. Yet since the media will not change its approach, it is up to us to construct positive headlines in our mind. Resist the doomsday movement and focus on the positive side of each headline. A tough job, but well worth it.

### **Where Can You Get Information?**

Truthful news is hard to find. You need to know more than what CNN, FOX and cohorts are willing to share with us. You need details. Thank goodness for the Internet, talk radio, and international TV channels. What is reported abroad is often different from what we hear at home. It helps to research and compare. This is a good antidote for boredom.

Take the Obama campaign, for example. With such overwhelming, non-critical media support, how could he not have won? The media took his persona and “Yes, We Can” slogan and infiltrated every last corner of people’s brains for months on end. The average person couldn’t possibly have avoided the sway of such propaganda. Amid the smokescreens of buzz, it takes a strong person to resist and form an independent opinion. But with the TV turned off, and by being tuned into serious news sources, and by doing research, that can be accomplished easily.

I remember the US version of a report on Obama that supposedly attracted something like a million Europeans to his campaign speech in Berlin. Nobody could believe how many spectators showed up to see the new Messiah. It was the German and British news reports that ended up shedding light on the real reason for the size of that event. The US media proclaimed the spectators had showed up to hear Barack. What they failed to mention was that the event was in reality a concert. Two wildly popular acts, reggae artist Patrice and rock band Reamonn, are the artists who attracted most of the crowd. Obama played only a minute role in the event. Rumor has it that free bratwurst and pizza—and even beer—were provided for about three hours—courtesy of the Obama campaign. *Panem et circenses* did a good job luring folks to Berlin.

With so many ads and so much entertainment intermingled with what is supposed to be news, how can we possibly discern the truth?

According to Buddha, a person should never believe anything, regardless of the source, unless it agrees with his or her own reason and common sense. Unfortunately, though, many people I know have little common sense left. Some could not survive a night out in the woods. If they were abandoned in the midst of the prairie, wolves would have a feast. Common sense

is a thing that is acquired through living a full life, which includes understanding nature and its laws. We don't understand nature anymore.

Constant distractions do not necessarily contribute to the development of inner guidance. Common sense is not available on any techno device. It is acquired in real life, and taught by real parents.

You owe it to yourself to find accurate information, because virtually all of the nation's news stations are parroting the same lines – hence in bed with the government. Few lone rangers dare to grab the bull by its horns, look and analyze from different angles, and assess the true cost and repercussions of yet another stimulus package. That would be too unsettling and could cost them their job to boot.

Free expression and independent reporting died with the merging of the major news companies. The bulk of the media is owned by five companies—GE, News Corp., Viacom, Disney, and Time Warner. Independent voices such as Michael Moore have to go to Canada to get movies released.

The voices of reason, the ones who question governmental decisions and refuse to drink the Kool-Aid, the people who actually understand history, economics, business, and politics, are accused of being conspiracy theorists. Simple disagreement with the popular agenda can result in having a person blacklisted. The media will ridicule their “misbehavior” and perhaps prevent even that person from ever working again. At one time, journalists were obliged to provide neutral, truthful reporting, and to cover all sides of a story. What happened to that? Have we all simply bowed down and been beaten into submission, including the reporters who are supposed to be the messengers?

As long as we walk in the middle of the road, the risks are low. But if we dare to veer off track, there lurk the goblins. But this is what we are supposed to do as humans, to find our individuality, our creativity, our unique self and live it! Cookie-cutter people cannot accomplish their soul's goal. A soul is about fulfillment of its own unique mission.

Where should we turn for better information? Talk radio presents an interesting spectrum of information, such as independent opinions and the voice of the people. Although the government has been trying to silence the right wingers of the radio and Internet world, their messages are still widely available as I write this. The information on AM stations on the way home can be infuriating, but also eye opening. Why not turn off Snow Patrol, Hoobastank, and 50 Cent, and listen to some of your fellow citizens' opinions?

Try Michael Savage, an independent who criticizes the administration for the prevalent corruption and destruction of American values. He can be found raging refreshingly on numerous radio stations coast to coast. Michael is witty and intelligent, cutting right through the BS offered by the mass media. Or listen to Alex Jones, who will serve you the news straight up on [www.infowars.com](http://www.infowars.com), so will [rense.com](http://www.rense.com) and [davidicke.com](http://www.davidicke.com). Branch out and away from infotainment. Try *The Wall Street Journal*. The *Financial Times*. Not only will they expand your horizons, they will expand your vocabulary, too! Go overseas. With Google Translate, you can translate even the Russian news in a heartbeat. Access international news on BBC, or Al Jazeera (yes, they are just a news channel, and provide news in English). Or what about the Drudge Report, an excellent source of world news ([www.drudgereport.com](http://www.drudgereport.com))? Alternatively, expose yourself to some [www.sovereignsociety.com](http://www.sovereignsociety.com) or [www.escapeartist.com](http://www.escapeartist.com). These are just some ideas.

Regardless of whether you claim to be a Liberal or a Conservative, a Democrat or a Republican, expand your horizons. Look over the fence. Get unfiltered information. Attempt to go past the lip-synching provided by the popular television channels.

According to George Orwell, legendary author of *1984*, in a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act. If you want to know the truth, you have to work for it. The truth is not served up on a silver platter. The truth wants you to hunt for it.

### **Traveling Is an Eye Opener**

A definite antidote for ignorance, and a boost to common sense, is traveling. Traveling to foreign nations is important to understand other traditions, beliefs, cultures, and lifestyles. Traveling is a precious gift that expands the mind and the consciousness. You will discover humans who are still human. Memories, impressions, and stories collected on trips to remote and exotic destinations last a lifetime.

The world consists of 194 independent countries, and 192 are members of the UN. (Vatican City and Kosovo are independent, but not members.) Taiwan could have been the 195<sup>th</sup> nation, but political reasons prevent the international community from recognizing it as an independent country. With so many countries, life beyond the shores of the United States should not be ignored. According to St. Augustine, “The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only one page.”

If more people traveled, more would understand the difference between the Swiss and the Swedes, for example, and they would know Switzerland is not south of Holland and has never had a queen. These points, while important to me, are minor compared to the wealth of knowledge and understanding to be gained by traveling to different nations.



Inexpensive flights to Europe and South America mean that vacations to foreign lands can be cheaper than a trip to Puerto Rico or Key West. Are you too lazy to get a passport? Are you afraid nobody will speak English abroad? Forget it. People speak English around the world and are happy to do so. As mentioned, only 20 percent of Americans hold a passport. In contrast, about 54 percent of Canadians hold a valid passport.

### **What Freedom of Speech?**

You may have noticed that our freedom to express opinions and beliefs is becoming more and more restricted. Political correctness (PC) is the new standard, not free speech. In the workplace, the likelihood of facing a sexual harassment or discrimination lawsuit puts a damper on interaction. What we are willing to share in discussions undergoes a mental pre-screening, courtesy of our correctness filters.

Thus, we dilute jokes and stories to blend in. While racial and sexual slurs are always inappropriate, our new version of political correctness is mad. At the slightest insinuation that we've not been sensible, we become targets for reprimands and sensitivity training, and even face the possibility of losing our jobs. Uttering the wrong words can be costly. Care must be taken. The police are watching.

But just how and where did political correctness originate? Turns out it can be traced back to the world of 1923 Germany, when Communist academics sought to impose their Marxist views on students. Political correctness is a Marxist tool. The Germans knew that controlling beliefs, opinions, and ideas would disable free expression and help reshape society. At the root of communism was the theory that all valid ideas come from the effect of the social group of the masses. The individual is nothing. And they believed that the only way for

communism to advance was to help western civilization destroy itself by undermining its foundations, by chipping away at the rights of those annoying individuals. One way to do that? Change their speech and thought patterns by spreading the idea that vocalizing their beliefs is disrespectful to others and must be avoided to make up for past inequities and injustices. Then use this idea to stifle any discussion which might reveal the lack of common sense in their ideology. And call it something that sounds positive: Political correctness.

That is how political correctness came about, and why it is the tool of the far left in politics. When Hitler took over Germany in 1933, PC moved to the U.S.A. (as most of the PC thinkers were Jewish).

It took root. Americans are now forced to comply with the rules of PC. If they don't, something like 1.2 million attorneys would be happy to help someone sue. The average person with something to lose is greatly afraid to cross communication boundaries. Sharing, and allowing others access into our private lives and thoughts, especially at work, is risky. You never know whether that other person will use the information against you. Instead of engaging in dialogue, we threaten each other with lawsuits over the "ridiculous" statements someone may or may not have made.

PC destroyed far more than just "speech". It, combined with fear, helped spread general distrust, doubt, and suspicion. The man glancing at your daughter is a child molester; the dude who hangs out in the back alley is a thief; the man living in the neighbor's basement is a terrorist. We have been conditioned to always be suspicious and expect the worst of others.

Janet\* had recently transferred to Denver from her Los Angeles office, but the environment in her new workplace was not as relaxed as she expected. In fact, it reminded her

of a morgue. None of her workmates seemed to want to go beyond idle corporate chitchat or small talk. Sure, everyone was busy, but she knew that a little fun could brighten up the long days at work. After only a few days on the new job, she already missed her old mates in Los Angeles and wondered if she'd made a mistake. Back in L.A., she had always looked forward to going to work.

A few weeks later she learned that there had been a lawsuit. A young homosexual employee sued because a female co-worker had imitated his gay gesticulations. The male won the lawsuit and remained employed with the company. Janet had met him. The female had been fired. Since that event, the office resembled a political correctness headquarters. People had received warnings about, and education on, ethics, gender, race... you name it. The result: everyone had given up having real conversations and the place turned into a freezer. Janet was bored in the ice house. In many ways, the place reminded her of a forced labor camp.

When I returned from Europe to work again in Los Angeles, I found myself bored with the workplace discussions. They seemed trivial and carefully crafted. The spotlight was on TV shows, sports, food, and kids—safe topics. Conversations about *American Idol* went on for hours. I never quite grasped the fascination with TV shows. But in order to make conversation, it appeared to be almost a prerequisite for me to be up to speed on such things. I don't recall many conversations in which references to TV series and movies lacked.

As a non-TV watcher (and this in L.A.!), I was a total outcast. I told my workmates that I thought the idiot box was a waste of time. They thought I was nuts. How could I survive without at least one television? Not owning a TV rendered me literally unable to participate in the relentless soap opera chats. I was an oddity because I couldn't parrot movie lines. My colleagues' perfect, detailed recollection of movie lines never ceased to astound me. "Why not

use such amazing memory for something useful?" I wondered. I yawned through the canned conversations, anxiously hoping the next topic would not involve anything quite so theatrical. I determined that listening to grown men talk about the latest reality show episode was simply *eerie*. What the hell happened to these guys?

But since watching television is America's main occupation at night, what else could we possibly talk about?

The problem is, language, as a simple tool of expression, forces us to choose: right or left, yes or no. And this is precisely what we try to avoid. Possibilities to express oneself are limited and when a defining statement isn't made, language loses its power. Listening to people frantically trying to avoid yes or no, left or right, in their speech, adhering closely to the political correctness scheme, is monotonous at best. At worst, it relegates the concept of free speech to the history books and produces greater apathy.

When nothing definite is said during speech, minds wander. A vital statement, a personal experience, or an opinion can turn idle dialogue into interesting conversation. This is what politicians and lawyers avoid. That's why we fall asleep when forced to listen to rehearsed teleprompter yak.

I found the scenes of lunching at work another striking difference between Europe and America. I was used to going to lunch with my co-workers in London on a daily basis, but in L.A., everyone drove off alone to grab a quick bite and devour it in their car or cube. Going to lunch together? An oddity!

There was Don\*, in the east corner of the parking lot, sitting in his fat truck eating a fat burger. Greg\* was usually a few cars down, quietly eating a salad in his BMW, listening to Zen music, and reveling in the thought of how nice it would be to work from home. Then

Jason\*, speed walking around the parking lot in clockwise fashion. Trish\*, walking anti-clockwise, looking stressed out and marching fast. They smiled as they passed each other, but rarely stopped for a chat. Eric\* habitually passed all the parked eaters and drove off to Taco Bell to lunch on some “healthy” bean burritos. This was the common lunch sight outside the company. Inside, “bees” gulped down a quick bite while surfing the Net or talking on the phone before switching the screen back to work mode.

Even the annual Christmas party has become a lackluster event. Companies might now substitute a mini-celebration in the office for what they used to offer—a fun outing to a hip restaurant—the official line is always cost-cutting measures or concerns over employee safety. Of course, this way, they also avoid possible lawsuits over drunk driving and other such annoyances. A Long Beach IT company now simply buys pizza and hosts a gift exchange, all financed by the employees. Hence that company’s annual Christmas party expenses have been reduced—from several thousand dollars, to about sixty dollars for cheap pizza. I was honestly glad the event only lasted for about an hour. It was embarrassing as nobody knew what to talk about. This is what alcohol is for at a Christmas party—to help people relax, converse, and relate. It helps to break down rigid walls.

But let’s get back to free speech...

### **The Fairness Doctrine Revived**

A more official way to clamp down on free speech is to call upon called the Fairness Doctrine. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) put the Fairness Doctrine, enacted in 1949, in place in order to “afford reasonable opportunity for the discussion of conflicting views of public importance.” In 1974, the US Supreme Court determined the doctrine “inescapably

dampens the vigor and limits the variety of public debate.” In 1984 the court again concluded that the doctrine was blemished and that the rule limited public debate. Hence, in 1987, the FCC abolished the doctrine, insisting that it had grown to restrain rather than improve debate and recommended that due to the many media voices in the marketplace at the time the policy be ruled unconstitutional.

Yet twenty years after its demise, the Fairness Doctrine has been revived. Senator Diane Feinstein said she’s “looking at” bringing it back, and Senator John Kerry insisted it was needed to correct the “imbalance” in the media. Lobbyist and former Senator Trent Lott, meanwhile, dismayed his Conservative friends when he said we had to “do something” about talk radio because of the criticism of the immigration bill from the likes of Rush Limbaugh and Laura Ingraham.

This doctrine would silence talk radio, the last independent news source besides the Internet, or turn it into just another infotainment outlet. The rest of the media are already subservient to the government. Talk radio is the voice of the citizens, and if shushed, we would dangerously resemble Venezuela, China, and Cuba. No matter which political side you favor, monopolies and excessive power never warrant denial of access to unbiased information. A free society should not fear the open discussion of opposing views.

## **Victims**

With US talk show host Michael Savage banned from entering the UK for supposedly provoking violence on his show, you know, free speech is on the verge of extinction. Savage has been in the radio business for fifteen years and expresses his opinions with spice, but he does not advocate bloodshed. He is one of the few who has not succumbed to media

brainwashing. His show is ever so popular, with ten million listeners tuning in regularly. Savage criticizes the left and the right. Doing so is a basic right in this country. So why did Britain ban him from entering the country? Why was his name listed alongside mass murderers and terrorists?

The program he hosts, *The Savage Nation*, does not even air in the UK. And if well-rounded opinions can no longer be expressed, we are in trouble. How did the Brits even know about *The Savage Nation*? Why did they care? Did someone tap the now ex-British Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith? Why a talk show host from the States? His message must ring true if they want him silenced.

So what happened after his listing on the terrorist watch list? As expected, Savage became obsessed with having his name removed from the record. He spent his money and time hiring lawyers to fight an international battle, and considered resigning from his post. The stress seriously got to him. Even though he pleaded with Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, to intervene, he got no support. Not from anyone. He had no representation. Left alone, he was thrown to the wolves.

As a result, Bush's saying, "You're either with us or against us," applied again. It is safer to stick one's head in the sand, act ignorant, and focus on entertainment or sports for discussion topics. Otherwise, the alternative might be something like Savage's destiny.

Tim Latham is another example of how tight the noose around our necks really is. A Kansas teacher, he did not get his teaching contract renewed after he was criticized for hosting a school-affiliated website that was "too patriotic" (he mentioned his love for our country). He also supposedly questioned Obama's experience. According to Latham, he was called into the principal's office and reprimanded for picking on Obama during class. The principal further

questioned the “McCain-Palin” bumper sticker on his car. Latham was convinced the school had tried to get rid of him because of his political beliefs. After a legal battle, his reinstatement was confirmed and the principal was prohibited from conducting evaluations in the future.

Latham got lucky.

Trouble awaits those who don't succumb, to those who don't become opinionless slaves. The more we adopt identities similar to each other's, the more accepted we are. Can we no longer be individuals with different beliefs and characters? Is this really the time to lose our individuality and turn into androids?

Political correctness has become the standard for measuring good and bad. Tolerance has replaced truth as the virtue all must seek. Truth might offend, so it is bad. Many statements not in accordance with PC are rendered untruthful and a lie and poses a great risk for someone with something to lose. We must hide our real feelings and beliefs at all times.

An interesting solution has surfaced. Told for years that we must never offend, we turned to preoccupying and worshipping Hollywood celebs and sports heroes. These are safe, non-political subjects that don't offend anyone when discussed in the office. We relish Hollywood's excesses—sex, slander, gossip, alcohol, drugs, murder—in order for us to focus some of the unused energy that's inside us or to revel about things off-limits for us. Frustrated in our attempts to achieve a false goodness (political correctness), we are instead indulging ourselves by worshipping false heroes?

### **Sham Heroes**

Somewhere in the '60s, movie heroes changed from good to bad and ugly. Thugs took over as idols for the youngsters. The good human living, a decent life, was deemed a bore. In the '90s,



it became even worse. Drug addicts, gangsters, pimps, hookers, and evildoers were celebrated like King Elvis was. Rappers with lyrics I would not repeat to my most-hated ex-boyfriend made headlines. Murderers and rapists were not even indicted, much less convicted. Crime seemed cool and no longer hurt a celebrity's stardom. And a bad reputation wouldn't hurt a star's booking rate.

She shaved her head, flashed her crotch, did drugs, partied like a wild animal, and lost custody of her children, but Britney Spears went on tour as soon as the headlines died down; everyone celebrated.

Snoop Dogg, the Long Beach, California rapper, gained "gangsta" credibility by being an ex-Crips gang member and drug dealer and with his admissions of street crimes and acquittal on a murder charge. Sporadically slapped for his frequent run-ins with police, sexist lyrics, and success as a producer of pornography, Snoop Dogg remains a mainstream celebrity. Young people, black and white, idolize him.

Dennis Hopper, the famous actor, was charged with careless driving, fleeing the scene of an accident, and not informing police about the accident. His sentence was a \$250 fine and twenty minutes in prison. Robert Downey Jr. was first arrested in 1996 for driving drunk and possession of cocaine, heroin, crack, and a Magnum revolver. He was sentenced to three years' probation, but the year after, he violated parole and was sentenced to six months in prison. In 2000, he was arrested for possession of cocaine, and in 2001, he was arrested again for being under the influence of drugs, but wasn't charged.

Don't forget Kobe Bryant. He was charged with rape in 2003, but after much fuss the allegation was dropped. However, Bryant apologized to the victim and offered financial compensation. Details were never made public. The line was drawn with O.J. Simpson. At

least he wasn't bookable anymore after his infamous trial, even without the desired guilty verdict.

Death evaporated all questions about Michael Jackson's child molestation accusations. He literally went from devil to angel—by dying.

Some careers have been enhanced by a bad boy or bad girl status. Martha Stewart, though she served a few months in federal prison and reportedly lost a billion dollars, soon regained her status as rich, powerful, and famous. The jailbird made no groveling apologies or pleas for forgiveness. Even Paris Hilton, after forty-five days in jail, re-emerged as if nothing had happened. Though she apparently felt mistreated because her cell wasn't pink and padded, her sentence evaporated like drop of water on a hot stone. A Joe Shmo would have a major struggle fitting back into society and ensuring employment after such a stint.

Looking beyond celebrities... the criminals of Wall Street, Enron, Tyco, and, most recently, even tax-evading administration members have not only escaped punishment but also reaped rewards. A prime example is Tim Geithner, the US Secretary of Treasury.

He failed to pay taxes in 2003 and 2004. He stated that he incorrectly believed they were deducted at source by the International Monetary Fund, where he had moved after serving the Treasury in the Clinton administration. He duly paid about \$17,230 in back taxes and interest. After he was selected to lead the Treasury in November 2008, his vetting revealed that he owed a further \$25,970 for 2001 and 2002 as well. At that point, Obama should have dropped Geithner; instead, he kept championing him as the only man fit for this major job in such dire times. *Mad Money* host Jim Cramer told viewers on CNBC's January 22, 2009 program *Street Signs* that had he been in Geithner's shoes, he would have faced criminal prosecution.

When a situation becomes too sticky, some “gangsters” go underground for a while, only to emerge again a few months or years later with a clean slate. The general public, suffering from the moral equivalent of ADD, has no recollection of nasty deeds done, and the media neglects to uncover the truth. This is why and how Wall Street criminals can become members of the president’s cabinet.

The tragedy is that we don’t know when to stop celebrating and supporting wrongdoings and negativity. Ordinary people leading good, ordinary lives seem dull. But it is these people who are the silent heroes, surfing through life without disasters or crimes, doing good deeds, and enjoying a wholesome existence. These silent heroes need to be idols for our children. Violent gangbangers, Wall Street hoodlums, and drug dealers should be punished for their behavior; otherwise, the public assumes permission to emulate their bad behavior.

The rulings given to kings and peasants are far from equal. The average Joe gets a dreadful sentence for smoking a joint, while the elite get away with murder.

Chris\*, a neighbor of mine and longtime Long Beach resident, was in the midst of a divorce when his soon-to-be ex-wife charged him with slander, the attempted burglary of his own house, and threatening to kill her. She made these claims without proof and pressed charges. The police arrested Chris and kept him in custody for two months. Bail was set at \$300,000. He lost his apartment, Porsche, and savings in an effort to prove his innocence. In comparison, Governor Blagojevich’s bail was set at \$4,500 after his arrest on corruption charges.

Chris’s first lawyer was worthless, but during his time in detention, Chris got to know some people who put him in touch with an honest and down-to-earth attorney. This person, although expensive, was motivated to help Chris out of his misery. Slowly, that guy brought

the truth to light. It turned out Chris's wife was sleeping with the main instigator and accuser, a local police officer. The discovery of an email string between him and Chris's ex-wife, and other facts presented during trial, resulted in all charges being cleared. The entire charade took almost one year and wiped out Chris's life savings. His devious ex, who never held down a job, did not get a dime since Chris had to file for bankruptcy. This is what happens in the real world. While the influential get ultra-special, light treatment, the average folk without special ties get it hardcore. This is true now more than ever as corruption is at an all time high.

Universal laws don't change. Good is good. Bad is bad. It is the Mother Teresas of the world who need to be encouraged and celebrated. Supporting and honoring bad behavior only creates one thing—more bad behavior. Commemorating good behavior creates more goodness, and that's precisely what we need in today's world. Being informed about people and events is one thing; being inundated with their despicable actions is another. The media will sensationalize bad stories because people want to see them. The choice is ours. We decide what to watch and read. We can focus on clean information, good people, and keeping our minds unsoiled, or we can pollute our synapses with fizz.

### **What Can You Do?**

1. Now Showing: *You*.

What can we do about our dumbed-down, heavily entertained world? About our new and much deteriorated school system? The loss of freedom of speech? The misinformation?

Get informed! Turn off the TV! Turn the spotlight on *you*. Listen within, instead of without. Be in silence. Avoid noise. Noise is distraction. In fact, noise is a weapon of mass distraction.

Follow the principles that I keep mentioning throughout the book. If we rely less on outer input, and turn our attention inward, to nature and animals, we win the game of life. If we focus on sham heroes, celebrity dramas, TV, video games, and so forth, we may have excitement, but not fulfillment. Blitz creates brain fluff. Silence is brain food. It's inspiration. I repeat this because it is of the utmost importance. What do you really gain by finding out that Lindsay Lohan is suffering in jail because her favorite bronzer is not on the list of items allowed in her cell? How does that knowledge enhance your life? And how would climbing the nearest mountain, having a meditation day, or taking a cruise on the lake affect you? Why not trade watching *The Manchurian Candidate* for studying a flower in the wild? Sounds ridiculous? Well, it's not. Yet most feel the need to be up to speed on movies, on Hollywood, when we should instead know what slick goo the evildoers in DC are brewing up again.

It's the innocent, delicate side of life that is the most fulfilling. Not the murder sprees, the special effects, or the hard-core porn that we subject ourselves to.

In theory, it's easy to do. Refuse the temptation of the remote control and the on switch, and turn on *you* instead.

## 2. Build a community.

Now that you are informed, inform your neighbor. You would be surprised how many people are open to hearing these things today. Share good sources of information. Change starts in the community. Be an organizer. Collect signatures for petitions in your city. Make sure your voice is heard. It's high time.

Speak out against the outcome-based education system that has taken your local school hostage. Question the principal. Educate other parents. Demand a decent education for your child.

Communities and villages used to be highly organized. Denizens met, conversed and socialized on a regular basis. With the introduction of the Internet, the community died. What would you do without the Internet as a source for information? How would you contact your friends without a cell phone or Internet connection? Would you even remember their phone numbers? Do you even have them written down anywhere? Where would you get news? Build a community. It can be a savior.

## CHAPTER 6

### Focused on Façades

The root of many problems is misplaced focus. We grab the first shiny bauble we see, and when we discover it is tinfoil instead of silver, we move on to the next attractive toy. We focus on façades instead of substance. Why? What makes us prefer trinkets to valuables?

#### The Need for Identity

Everyone craves love and acceptance, yet you may never have been accepted by anyone just as you are. Constant conditioning has created in you the idea that you are not enough. Something is missing. You are not whole. You want to be somewhere else, not here. This isn't where you are supposed to be. You think you should be more powerful, dominant, valued, and respected. If people knew how to be parents and teachers, they would not interfere with a child's exploration of acceptance of self.

More is translated as more fame, power, greed, and wealth. More you should be, as you are born as a seed and need to grow *internally*. However, true growth and flowering is different from power and money. It simply has to do with you; it is individual progress. The seed has to travel far to become a flower.

Unfortunately, our cunning society has turned the desire to be *more* into a social condition, stressing that *more* equals more satisfaction for *ego*. Yet, a beggar can be rich and an emperor can be poor. Richness is in the quality of being. The most important form of *more* is inner growth, but this type of growth is neglected.

We endure a rigid school system that does not teach us how to feel, or how to listen to our instincts, gut feelings and intuition. Parents compound the problem by criticizing, correcting, and pushing us to achieve materialistic goals, and corporations advocate survival of the fittest. We break out and swear to be different and better at an early age, to be powerful, wealthy, and independent, running from the madness but headed straight into madness at another level. Some of the most power-hungry go into politics, where greed, power, and money are abundantly available. Instead of seeking internal growth, we pursue wealth and power, looking for more in the wrong places and neglecting our state of *being*.

There isn't enough room in the world for all the entitled folks; for all that ego. In fact, all that entitlement has created huge issues in today's culture. Too many imaginary rock stars take up too much space. With everyone behaving as if they are the center of the universe, disengaged from the world, with egos screaming "feed me," society looks a lot like a soap opera. People behave like the spoiled brats on yet another LA TV series.

Because of this entitlement illusion, we have a student who sued her college because she had spent \$70,000 in tuition and could not find a job after graduation. We have families out there who insist they deserve government benefits, simply because, well, they are special. The world owes them because of who they are, or what social group they belong to, not because they earned it. Self-responsibility is a word foreign to many freeloaders. But, oh, sorry, I can't voice that here. I may be in violation of political correctness rules.

I have the medicine for disillusionment. It's called total self-responsibility. This prescription works magic. It's almost a cure-all.

But humility is boring. The obsession with materialism and prominence creates a desire for the life of a movie star or billionaire. We want to be special and unique and have the world



worship the ground we walk on, without us having to work for it. Humility has no place anywhere. We crave instant respect from others without earning it. We deserve it; mommy said we rock.

Or we take the easy way out and hide behind corporate, religious, or political party labels. Because we do not know who we are, we claim a proven identity that is accepted by the mainstream. Such labels prevent original thought. Just because you parrot a political party's mantra does not mean you can't venture outside of the given boundaries. Adopting a label such as "I am a Democrat and comply with everything the Party states" or "I am a Born Again" is just a cop out. The question remains—who are *you*? The ability to *be* and think is more important than any label. Why permit the institution to provide life's answers for you?

I remember Jorge\*, an older gentleman and devout Republican who never veered from the GOP screenplay. Answers to questions in regards to *his* opinion on stuff always started with "Well, you know I am a Republican, a Patriot, and therefore I believe in the official 9/11 report/the goodness of my representatives/the negative effects of abortion..."—you fill in the blanks. He adopted the GOP lines as his own. But ... who is Jorge?

We frantically search for groups we can belong to and believe in, and ignore the fact that the real answers already reside within us. Individuality is bliss, but it is also hard work. Belonging to a group, adopting values, mantras, and rules, and living for another person's dream may be stimulating, but it's not gratifying.

Remember "Debbie," our example from Chapter 1? Her M.B.A. and the job at Citibank provided Debbie with the identity she lacked from within herself. It made her not just Debbie, but Debbie with Citibank. When introducing herself to strangers, she *was* Citibank. Debbie disappeared behind the bank's image. Her true being remained hidden. She banked on the bank

buying her immediate acceptance and respect from others. Bearing this label, she thought, opened doors to the world.

Like all other corporations, the bank exists as an institution because of legal contracts. Humans who work for this legal framework provide the company with its identity. Humans such as herself. Humans are the ones who market brands, issue stock, calculate inventory levels and budgets, do accounting, and transport goods. Humans and not a corporation. A corporation equals humans. Humans make decisions to cook the books, to drop toxic waste in areas where people live, or to not do their utmost to prevent an oil spill and so forth. A corporation as such can do nothing. A corporation is plain paper. Humans, however do. So, in essence, Debbie is hiding behind an image created by humans for humans.

Labels sneak into conversations because we want to classify, or be classified by, society. It is easier to belong when the label communicates for us: the Dodger fan, the activist, the Liberal, the Centrist, the Christian, or the Jew. Labels are supposed to validate us as being decent people. The D.A.R.E sticker or the honor student sticker on a vehicle, while greatly annoying, suggests the owner has a squeaky-clean image. It's OK to belong to a group, but it's not OK to give up our own identity for it.

Why do we feel so compelled to tell the world of our accomplishments, even while in traffic? What do we prove to the world with an honor student bumper sticker? Why does the indifferent driver behind me need to know?

Elsewhere in the world, labels have less weight. How many honor student stickers can you catch a glimpse of in the rest of the world? Are there no honor students in Europe? Labels are important there, but to a lesser degree, I would argue. When conversing with people in continental Europe, I don't learn the name of their school or political or soccer team affiliation

within the first couple of sentences. It may show up eventually, but it would never bear the same weight as it does in Label Nation. It is the human that is of utmost interest to Europeans. People want to know *you*, the being. They want to learn about your own thoughts, your character, and your individuality. It would be frustrating for a European to hear a list of labels instead of learning about the true person.

When we identify with persons and things we create misery for ourselves. We become dejected whenever that thing or person is missing. Identification is a root cause of misery. We identify with either the mind or the body, but not with *self*. Step aside; let the mind pass.

We think we are *mind*, and only *mind*. The reality is that we are something beyond *mind*; therefore, it is absolutely necessary to get our minds to stop so that for the first time we can know that we are not *mind*. Because when *mind* is off, we are what is left over. *Mind* is gone, but we are still there, and we have greater joy, greater glory, greater light, greater consciousness, and greater being.

How do we move beyond *mind*, beyond *ego*? Simply by being in the present moment. No thought. No past or future. By going within. By looking at the world, the trees, and nature. The present moment is there for you. Creation is waiting for you to find it. It's always been there, but you just haven't seen it. The universe is a miracle that *ego* cannot comprehend. The part of you that is greater than *ego* sees and understands. There is no need to sit down in a dark room and meditate; you can be in the present moment while dancing, cooking, or walking in nature. All you need is to be present and aware of *you*, and this very moment, because the present moment is all you will ever have. The past is gone. The future will be unveiled in, yes, the future. But how often are you present in the present moment? Being *here* is precisely how Buddha reached enlightenment.

## **Buy, Baby, Buy!**

Our culture is structured around having the consumer purchase and pile up more and more stuff. The sheer maze of commercials, ads, bargain offers, specials, billboards, two-for-one deals, super-size food deals, and of course e-Bay and its equivalents, all scream, “Buy, buy, buy!”

We must either be deluded, suffer from uncontrollable shopping urges, believe in Santa Claus, or love to be in debt. Why else would we spend money we don't have? The most basic budget principle goes ignored: Expenses must not exceed income. A salary of forty thousand bucks per year cannot and will not buy a luxury home. It's impossible. Even if you stretch every last dollar and eat canned beans, it won't work.

Common sense will help you make smart purchases. A bit of common sense will help you refrain from overspending. Common sense is what we need more of in the future to avoid us being suckered into a bubble, such as the ‘everyone needs a house’ crash. Nobody will magically pick up the tab for you and pay off the toys that are stacked in your garage.

Consumer debt in America in 2009 stood at nearly \$2.5 trillion dollars—and based on the latest census statistics, that works out to be nearly \$8,100 in debt for every man, woman and child that lives in the US.

Being heavily in debt is the norm. When the average US debt family worries about their their negative bank balances, they can take comfort in knowing that most others are under water too. Right there, we can identify again. If our worries deepen, we can go one step further and claim we can't be held responsible for our liabilities: we were tricked and cheated.

*Someone* forced us to sign the mortgage, the credit card application, or whatever. Now can't the government step in to help? Can't they make it go away?

Yet it was the government that relaxed the regulations and enabled folks to overextend their credit. It was the people, however, who did not read the small print. The smart and skeptical resisted the call to sign up for a mirage mortgage. Anyone with any basic math skills and some intellect should have been able to reason out what the final result would look like—disaster.

Busy, preoccupied, confused minds never read the fine print or considered what their lives would be like in the not so distant future. The debt we signed up for is our responsibility. We are adults and can't blame our demise on anyone but ourselves. Becoming human again means taking responsibility for our actions, without lawsuits or finger pointing. It also means consuming within our limits, not overspending.

Don't use the government as an example here. They failed to set any benchmark. No other administration has spent taxpayers' dollars the way the Obama and Bush administrations have. It's as if money is worthless paper to them. One billion used to be an incomprehensible figure. Now, we're throwing trillions of dollars around as if they were millions.

The bubbles created by Wall Street, and the ensuing bailouts, nearly bankrupted the middle class and funneled even more money to the richest of the rich. The administration saved what was dearest to them, Wall Street, not the average citizen or small business owner who pays taxes but now has no home.

The only remedy for the future is personal fiscal conservatism and self-responsibility. You know what that means, but you don't want to do it: spend only what you have, save 10 to 20 percent of your income, and don't abuse or rely on credit. Those are the basics. The math is

simple. No magic wand is scheduled to hit your bank account and add zeros to the balance. Yet, even knowing this deep down, the dream of the miracle bank account cure lingers.

Debt can be incurred due to an illness or death in the family. That happens, and is understandable. But most personal debt exists because people bought things they didn't need. I am talking about those who simply can't resist the purchase of those shiny Blahnik pumps, that new mineral makeup, or the latest anti-aging pill, even when their credit cards are maxed out.

Rick\*, a retired naval officer with a back problem, spends many nights sitting in his cozy chair in front of the TV. Late-night commercials compel him to buy. Rick's wife is on the verge of going insane over it. He spends money they don't have. Boxes and boxes of stuff are shipped to the couple's home every week. A new computer, a mini air conditioner, or testosterone drugs—you name it, he orders it. A PC and an A/C were left in the hallway, in their boxes, unopened and untouched for over a year. Rick is a shopaholic. For him, it's not about using the new gadgets; it's about making the purchase.

As a reality check, it may help to keep your latest bank statement in plain view when tempted to shop.

The whole concept of "Buy, baby, buy!" should be replaced with "Save, baby, save!" Ironically, humans don't need all that stuff to feel good. The less clutter we have, the clearer the mind. So say the laws of Feng shui. Feng shui is a over three-thousand-year-old Chinese art and science, a complex body of knowledge that reveals how to balance the energies of any given space to assure the health and good fortune of the people inhabiting it. One Feng shui quick fix is the decluttering of a messy wardrobe. With a cleaned up closet, your mind will feel lighter and freer. Clutter is suffocating.

Nevertheless, we feel compelled to participate in the race to bigger and better. New cars, bigger homes, fatter boats—we pile it all up. We ignore the fact that leasing a new car can mean a lifetime of payments. I never met anyone who shelled out a substantial payment at the end of a lease term to keep a car. But unless that step is taken, monthly installments are yours.

Peer pressure tells us we should blend in by having the right status symbol in the garage and by sending our kids to the proper school. It is embarrassing to have an old car in the driveway in a posh neighborhood. But who cares? Let your neighbors wrinkle their noses. It's better to be debt free than envied by a neighbor.

Buying a house in an area with decent schools makes sense, but if it means incurring unreasonable debt, it is wrong. My friend Suzette\* and her husband moved to Palos Verdes from Los Feliz, California after their first child was born, and signed up for a \$5,000-a-month mortgage. The monthly expense was a huge stretch for the cartoonist and the junior lawyer.

Renting is always an option, even if only for a short term. It is not a crime to rent until sufficient funds are available for a down payment. Owning a house might be more possible later in life when more dollars are available. It is not the law that you have to become a homeowner right out of school.

Nobody puts a gun to your head. You are the negotiator of all deals. You are 100 percent responsible. Think before you sign a contract or make a large purchase. Consult experts. Go for a walk. Don't let the purchase pressure get to you. Walk away. Resist the temptation. Just a few days after the purchase, the thrill will be gone. It's only a temporary high.

Is there a rule that states if you make a couple of hundred more dollars a month, you automatically must spend more, move into a bigger house, upgrade your cable TV, or get a fancier cell phone? Without regret, you could put that money away in an emergency fund, pay off your mortgage, or increase your contributions to your 401K. Or do nothing at all, just enjoy having more money in the bank or under the pillow.

In the '60s, a far-reaching critique of consumer culture was a part of the political discourse. Back then, the Left argued that Americans had been manipulated into participating in a dumbed down, artificial consumer culture that generated few genuine human satisfactions. Today, we hear little critique about the country's shopping mania. Everyone succumbed to it.

The result of such consumption habits is that you will always live paycheck to paycheck. You will never have a stash for a rainy day. You will panic if laid off from your job and perhaps even knock on your parents' door again. Why live strapped for cash if you can simply downgrade your lifestyle a couple of notches and have more peace of mind? Anything else is pleasing the ego.

According to an old saying, there are two ways to get rich: save a lot of money, or make a lot of money. Are you making a lot of money? If not, then I suggest you start saving a lot of money. What other way is there to get ahead? Not everyone can hook up with a sugar daddy (or mommy) and spend their millions by "working" as arm candy.

Besides, the consumption patterns are wreaking havoc on the planetary ecology. The huge homes we must own use too much energy and building resources, destroy open space previously inhabited by animals, and increase the use of toxic chemicals. All those marble countertops in our kitchens were carved out of mountains around the world, leaving behind devastated landscapes. Our daily newspapers and coffee contribute to deforestation and loss of



species diversity. We know very little about the environmental impacts of our daily consumption routines. There is no need for elaborate studies. Fact is, Earth's resources are finite and we should consume them wisely.

We can live with less. Painlessly.

This doesn't mean you have to go from abundance to living with nothing. But there are concepts, such as the creation of a permaculture garden, the acquisition of hybrid seeds, and having a stack of food in the basement, that need to be thought about. Why not contemplate some of these concepts, and practice what you can? Why not simply become an aware and careful shopper? We tend to go from one extreme to another, but I don't think we need to move from mass consumerism to a caveman existence. That's just my take on it, though.

But we do need to change our focus. We need to scale down. The world cannot handle another 1.3 billion consumers behaving the way we do now. Unfortunately, it seems that the Chinese are gearing up to outspend even the Americans. I believe that our resources are finite. Unless we become more aware and focus on substance and need, rather than excess, the world will disappear under the trash and pollution, and starvation will result.

## **Simplicity**

During my humanitarian aid tenure in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, in 2005, I led a simple life in a town without a supermarket. I was sent there to lead a post-tsunami rehabilitation program. I bought fruits and veggies in outdoor markets. Hot water and electricity weren't always available. I almost never watched TV; instead, I interacted a lot with fellow aid workers and locals. Life in general seemed more precious and real.

My job in Trincomalee, on the northeast part of the island, was to provide grants to rebuild homes to about six thousand victims. The area had been severely affected by the war that had been fought over the island, and by the religious issues between the Tamil Tigers (Hindu) and the Sinhalese majority (Buddhist). Trincomalee was a city that was equal parts Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim. War had broken out there three times because of its considerable ethnic diversity.

It goes without saying; it was a challenging, yet fascinating assignment. My living situation was anything but luxurious, but the quarters were right on the beach. In my first couple of weeks on this exotic but destroyed paradise, I missed the many Western comforts. Not having Starbucks in the morning was awful, but I got over it quickly. And really, there weren't that many things that I had to have. Everything I needed was there—fresh, healthy food, good people, a bed to sleep in, and a beautiful beach. Life was simple and good. All I needed was in my two suitcases. I often wondered why I couldn't just continue to live with only the items in those two suitcases. It was so much easier than having a house full of furniture and things that we supposedly need.

I started to embrace this new life. In essence, I had fewer hassles than in the Western world of hysteria. Instead of talking to single-serving friends, I was able to connect with caring, beautiful human souls who live with a lot less, but are grateful for what they have. I guess the hellish war they'd been through taught them about the importance of community, trust, and appreciation of others. Or, did they learn that life is a gift that can be taken away in a second, especially during the war?

The Sri Lankan government had signed a cease-fire agreement in 2003 but the country was still reeling from its twenty-five-year civil war. On Boxing Day, 2004 (December 26<sup>th</sup>),

the many displaced conflict victims were pummeled again—by the tsunami. The catastrophe killed 44,000 Sri Lankans.

Along with money comes *ego*, isolation, and fast food. Without it, we appear to remain human. With it, we turn into materialistic monsters who sue and compete against one another. We don't need our neighbor; we don't need anyone. We fight alone. People in poorer nations, in contrast, live in communities with large families, helping and supporting one another, instead of living alone. Once money floods in though, the feeling of community disintegrates and spoils. *Ego* arrives. They see on TV what the West has, and they want it, too. Money and power corrupt only those who aren't strong enough to stay human. Money eats its way into the head. Money can make people selfish, disrespectful, afraid, condescending, and conceited.

Yet, we can choose to either become a demon or stay human in any society. If one is connected to nature, to spirituality, it is not possible to turn into an egotistical monster. The universe will keep that person in check. But with separation from the world around us, it happens.

### **Drowning in Junk**

The US has roughly 5 percent of the world's population but consumes 24 percent of its resources. You've probably heard this before, but I want to revisit it because it is astounding. On average, one of us consumes as much energy as two Japanese, six Mexicans, thirteen Chinese, thirty-one Indians, 128 Bangladeshis, 307 Tanzanians, or 370 Ethiopians. Pictures of starving children in some remote, faraway land no longer faze us. When we are able to throw out 200,000 tons of edible food daily, such impressions fade into the background.

Many foreigners visiting the States are shocked at the out-of-control consumption and the mindless waste. No other country uses as much plastic as this one; in fast food joints, restaurants, grocery stores, shopping malls, and coffee shops, plastic is prevalent. With all those plastic bags, containers, forks, cups, and more plastic bags, we've become a plastic nation! In no other nation is plastic thrown after people as it is here. One could be lead to think it grows on trees and is 100 percent biodegradable.

But the opposite is the case. If not recycled, the 83 billion plastic bottles we consume annually end up in the over three thousand landfills around the country. Only about 10 percent of those bottles are properly recycled, and it takes about 250 years for a single bottle to decompose.

On top of all those bottles, we go through about 65 billion aluminum soda cans each year. That's 1,500 cans for each person! We recycle only about 50 percent of that. That's 750 cans per person, per year that end up in a landfill!

Just one person's changed behavior can have a tremendous effect on waste. My friend Ashton\* somehow hates to drink water. He prefers to drink vitamin water—up to five bottles per day. That's 1,825 bottles per year. Ashton could almost sustain his own little landfill. Assuming Ashton will make it to seventy-five, and his habit began around age twenty-five, his vitamin water passion will have added 91,250 bottles to the nation's landfills.

There are plenty of alternatives to Ashton's consumption practices. He could add Emergen-C to his water and reuse the same bottle for many days. It would taste identical. He refuses to make such changes. He loves his routine and hates to be pestered with environmental facts. He pretends waste and recycling efforts should be practiced by others, but

not by him. Ashton is the exception. Everyone else should stop consuming, but him. He's special.

Sadly, many of us are versions of Ashton, and the impact our careless behavior has on the environment is dreadful.

The main culprit for the plastic mountain, however, is the corporate world. Change needs to originate there. Take Baja Fresh, for example. The place serves great Mexican food. But couldn't we use paper cups, instead of plastic cups, to load up on condiments at the salsa bar? Patrons mindlessly fill gazillions of little plastic cups with delicious salsas, cilantro, and jalapenos.

I frequently eat at Baja Fresh. I pour the salsa directly onto my food. What's the difference? The salsa ends up there anyway. Why do we need an intermediary cup? If cups are an option, people will use them. It is appalling to see the sheer numbers of cups used only once, and unnecessarily at that, floating around in the trash can headed for a landfill. Plastic is a crude oil product. Are there sincerely no alternatives? Or is it simply laziness on the company's behalf? Could we use cups made from elephant dung, even? Or what about rice? There are millions of raw materials out there to make cups with.

Baja Fresh is just one of many such examples. Another that stands out for me is a company that I very much like—Starbucks. While I love their cappuccinos, I stopped asking for a glass of water. I became so irritated when they handed me that sturdy plastic cup. With Starbucks wanting to be a fair trade company, couldn't they serve that water in an "eco-cup"?

In addition to all that wasted plastic, a huge amount of food is being thrown away. With portions growing in size, we waste a ton of food because we can't, or shouldn't, finish overloaded plates. When I am back in Europe, my mom gives me a punishing look if I dare to

leave a crumb on my plate. She raised us to put only as much as we can eat on our plate. There is a drastic difference between portion sizes in Europe and in the U.S.

Which portion sizes are healthier? Those in the US, or the EU? A quick glance at the average waistline confirms that it's not those in the US.

Even a cow would feel pleasantly stuffed with the food portions served at Claim Jumper for example. A plate of food that nearly breaks from the sheer weight loaded can or should be shared with two or three people. At a Mexican restaurant in Chicago, my mother, sister, and I once shared a delicious *carnitas* plate intended for one person. All of us were pleasantly stuffed with just the food on that one gigantic plate. I had ordered it once before for myself and ended up with a doggie bag that fed me for three days. On average, a healthy stomach is the size of a fist. A gallon of ice cream should not fit inside it.

If you eat good, wholesome food and not fast food, you will be full for longer and experience fewer cravings. Preserved, treated foods will leave you feeling hungry again in only a few hours and craving more of the addictive additives.

The growing portion sizes are contributing to our ever-expanding waistlines. The Land of Plenty needs to rethink the plenty part. Plenty is poison for humans. Despite popular belief, any food left on a plate ends up in the trash, not at the local pig farm.

A popular weight loss program called the Weigh Down Workshop has three rules: Eat only when you are hungry. Stop eating when you are full. When you want to eat, but aren't hungry, you have a spiritual hunger, not a physical hunger, so seek spiritual help through Bible reading, prayer, or something similar. The program also says that if you clean your plate because you don't want to waste food, you are treating your body like a garbage disposal.

Not only is food wasted in restaurants, no, plenty of food is being wasted in US households too. According to official surveys, every year more than 350 billion pounds of edible food are available for human consumption in the United States. Of that total, nearly 100 billion pounds—including fresh vegetables, fruits, milk, and grain products—are lost to waste by retailers, restaurants, and consumers.

It is estimated that an average family of four currently trashes \$600 worth of edible food per year in meat, fruits, vegetables, and grain products alone. Nationwide, household food waste amounts to about \$43 billion. This is a serious economic problem.

Here are some more ways to be greener:

- Be conscious of how many kitchen towels you rip off the roll just to clean up a little spot on the floor. Use a sponge or rag instead.
- Don't let the water run endlessly while doing dishes. Turn it off.
- Do you have to run the dishwasher every day, or could you wash the dishes in the sink instead, to save water?
- Don't leave the refrigerator door open for too long. Every time it is opened, the fridge needs additional energy to cool down again.
- Don't use the garbage disposal excessively. Food particles carrying potentially dangerous bacteria to the municipal sewer system can corrupt it and poison ground water supplies. Environmentally speaking, garbage disposals use a lot of extra water to flush waste. The average household utilizes around seven hundred gallons of water a year just to push food down the drain.
- Walk instead of drive to nearby stores. Walk, don't drive, across the mall parking lot to get from one store to the other.

- Don't let your car run while waiting for someone. Turn it off.
- Do you really need a gas guzzler? Do you really need more than one car?
- Don't buy excessive plastic utensils for a party. Use your own dishes instead. Ensure the decorations aren't single-use plastic items.
- Don't give gifts that will end up in a landfill the next day.

This sounds trivial, and obvious, but who actually practices this stuff?

\*Ashley's daughter \*Tiffany got a massive Little Tikes Cozy Cottage Playhouse for her birthday. After a few months of playing with it, the plastic monstrosity bored the child. Mommy knew no better and put it right in the dumpster. In other nations, that playhouse would be valued as something special, not a simple throwaway item. Or the item wouldn't have been purchased at all, because disposal can be a complicated and costly. A European family might eventually give such a toy to the neighbor's kids, or sell it at a flea market. Anything that can be recycled will be recycled. Garbage disposal prices have taught Europeans to watch what they buy and, best of all, to recycle. Devoid of such measures, people without a conscience continue to waste. What will happen to that plastic playhouse after it is tossed? You guessed it - it will end up in a landfill and will probably take about a thousand years to decompose.

How long do you hang on to clothes, gadgets, or decorations? One season? Two seasons? If you were to shop less often, yet buy better-quality items, instead of cheap stuff made in China, you would have things that last longer... and look better too. Quality exudes a classier image. We look better in quality clothing than in Chinese polyester.

My sister owns a perfect wardrobe of quality classy items that accentuate her distinguished look. Many of her pieces can be combined easily and look just fantastic. She



takes care of her clothes, none of her blouses ever see a dryer. Instead, she hand washes stuff and hangs items to dry. Hence, a blouse keeps its color and shape and lasts a couple of years.

By wearing one of fifty pairs of cheap shoes, you end up portraying an image much worse than if you were to select from a few high-quality pairs. And what about all our coffee mugs, picture frames, candleholders, Christmas ornaments, and bathroom towels—how much of this stuff did we buy simply for the sake of buying? How much of all this stuff is just sitting there, waiting to make its way into the dumpster?

With the spreading of our consumption habits around the world—McDonald's style—the amount of waste we produce will soon reach enormous proportions. I believe it is evident that Earth cannot afford to have another large country such as China or India start consuming and wasting like the US. We are a ghastly role model for other societies, and our purchase practices should be anything but emulated. Europe somewhat portrays a better role model as far as consumerism, waste, and recycling are concerned.

The US government is trailing far behind European nations when it comes to recycling, cutting down on packaging, and using alternatives to plastic. Most Europeans were made aware of the impact of waste on the environment back in the '80s. The recycling habit has now become ingrained in the minds of most EU citizens. While US corporations happily continued developing the next glossy plastic power wrap, the next Hummer for city people who can't even spell off-road driving, and the next five hundred foot yacht that sucks gas like a 747, Europeans became conscious of waste impact. The alternative—drowning in junk—was no alternative.

European children are taught at an early age to conserve resources, have respect for the environment and animals, live within their means, invest wisely, and live decently, almost to

the point where this has become an obsession. Cars are becoming smaller and smaller and consume very little gas. Motorists even turn off their engines at red lights. Few people own a microwave. The amount of trash has been reduced tremendously over the past two decades. Everyone recycles like mad. “Less is more” is a common mantra.

In the US, few children are taught how to conserve or recycle. A child who hasn’t been educated about the earth’s dwindling resources is a handicap for Mother Nature. What we learn as children sticks with us for life. It’s more difficult to obtain such traits as an adult. But becoming a “clean” citizen creates a tidy conscience and may help you sleep at night. It is said that it takes twenty-one days for a new habit to become routine. Why not give it a shot?

### **The Trash Vortex**

Millions of plastic bags and other junk end up in the Pacific Ocean. The world’s largest trash island is located between California and Hawaii. The great Pacific garbage patch, or trash vortex, as Greenpeace calls it, is twice the size of Texas and is whirling clockwise. Due to ocean currents, trash eventually ends up on this plastic island. With the winds blowing in, and the currents in the gyre going in a circular motion, the area is the perfect environment for trapping garbage.

Bottles, toothbrushes, car tires, cans, clothing, and plastic bags all stay in the gyre, in astounding quantities. Although awful to look at, this wouldn’t be so much of a problem if the plastic didn’t have any ill effects on anything. However, larger pieces of trash are being consumed by seabirds and other animals, which confuse them for prey. Many birds have been found dead, their stomachs chock full of plastic items. It is estimated that over a million seabirds and one hundred thousand marine mammals and sea turtles are killed each year by

entrapment, or the ingestion of plastic. It is an inconvenient natural catastrophe the greater public does not want to address.

## **Recycling**

About twenty years ago, the Swiss government started charging about \$16 for twenty trash bags. Guess what happened? People started recycling. Regular trash simply became too expensive for the average Joe. Also, at the same time, companies were forced to change to greener packaging. People demanded it. Super-duper plastic packaging disappeared from the shelves.

People appear to have an aversion against stuffing the garage with things that can't easily be disposed of. There are fees for the disposing and recycling of electronics, and the local Salvation Army is picky about the quality of furniture it accepts. All of this has turned the Swiss into smart consumers.

Most Swiss drive a small- to mid-sized vehicle; rarely do I spot an SUV or pickup, though one would be handy in the Alps. People make it a priority to drive an economical, environmentally friendly vehicle. When possible, the Swiss will take the reliable public transportation system instead of the car.

Plastic bags, which are readily handed out in US supermarkets, are banned in other nations, including Brazil, as they take twenty years to decompose. In Switzerland, there is a charge for a plastic or paper bag at most food stores. Consumers become responsive when the size of the wallet is a target.

The resultant reduction in plastic means fewer bags floating in oceans and accumulating in back alleys. Trader Joe's sells cotton bags for a small fee, and offers paper

bags instead of plastic. We could even stop killing trees if people would become responsible and bring bags every time! My mom has been using the same grocery basket for about twenty years. She is a member of the silent generation, the war generation. She has lived with a lot less than most, and her prudent approach to life never changed. I don't think she's ever bought a plastic bag at the store. Imagine the contribution, the positive impact she has had on the environment.

My mom separates aluminum lids from yogurt containers, recycles the plastic cup and puts the aluminum lid in the recycling bin. She collects bottles and takes them to the city's bottle recycling center, where bottles are dumped into different chutes depending on color. All the bins are clearly marked; it's a quick trip. Aluminum, carton, and garden waste can be disposed of in the same collection area. Recycling sites are conveniently located in every Swiss town.

About once every two months, every city organizes a used clothing collection drive. Each household gets bags to stuff with clothing donations. The bags are placed on the curb and picked up, usually on a Saturday morning. Everyone receives a trash and recycling calendar with dates for the different pickups.

Cartons, newspapers, paper, and boxes are picked up twice a month. Dates for all pickups are listed on that same calendar. Mom bundles it all and places the collections curbside in perfect time for pickup. Compost and garden waste are handled in similar fashion with regular collection times.

The amount of household waste recycled in Switzerland is 60 percent. By comparison, the amount of household waste recycled in the US is 32 percent. All the recycling done in Switzerland prevents the relentless spreading of landfills there. At my mom's house, a trash

bag often lasts one week. Without recycling, the disposing of trash would be pricy. Traitors who do not recycle get the evil eye in Switzerland. And trust me; you don't want to get that look from a Swiss neighbor.

If people around the world had an environmentally friendly attitude similar to the Swiss's, Earth could better handle the masses of humanity.

Sustainability, recycling, protecting the environment, and fuel efficiency used to be hot topics twenty years ago. Changes in consumer behavior occurred during the green revolution of the '80s in Switzerland. Unfortunately, recycling in the States is now where Switzerland was about twenty years ago. It's late, but perhaps not too late. For a successful transformation, the government must initiate and back the necessary change. That would require a new recycling plant infrastructure in place of landfills, logistical organization for the pickup of recyclables, and the coordination—and dispersement of respective information to citizens. A completely new program is required.

If this is not done, we may drown in stinky, disgusting landfills the size of Los Angeles one day.

In 2007, Americans generated nearly 390 million tons of trash, and more than half was carted off for landfill burial. Almost one hundred landfills across the US closed last year because they were crammed to the brim. And within fifty years, the approximately three thousand landfills that exist today will reach full capacity. Landfills are just another ticking time bomb.

In addition, there are about ten thousand old municipal landfills and an estimated ten thousand private landfills in the US. It is estimated that 82 percent of these landfills have leaks, and 41 percent have leaks of one square foot. All landfills will eventually leak into

ground and surface waters. Plastics are not inert. Older landfills are typically located close to large water bodies, which makes cleanup difficult.

Is there a true interest from public and private groups to pursue a greener route? To step up recycling? To eliminate harmful ingredients and products instead of simply producing things cheaply? To truly make a difference, and not merely *talk* about “green shoots”? I haven’t seen any change in packaging. I haven’t seen any change in product offerings. I’ve heard a lot of talk, but seen no major improvements in recycling programs. In Chicago, I frequently observed the city waste management truck pick up and mix the contents of the blue recycling containers with the regular trash.

For true change to occur, governments need to force corporations to be greener. Yet in a world where big business rules, billions are spent lobbying for quite the opposite in DC. The green talk is lip sync. As long as the offender remains the sponsor of Washington, little change can be expected. The officials cannot bite the very hands that feed them.

Also, the changes needed for sustainable manufacturing require transformation that may be expensive and complex to implement. In other words—it’s too much hassle. Why should they bother if nobody forces it on them? Hence, corporations get away with murder. The world is theirs to turn into profits. There are no repercussions for polluting and destroying Earth, the very space we live in. The White House turns a blind eye, sits back, and appreciates the cash rolling in. Influential corporate sponsors and Washington are like peas and carrots—inseparable.

The Kyoto Protocol, signed and ratified by 187 states as of November 2009, was rejected by the US. The protocol called for an approximate five percent reduction of greenhouse gases by 2005. Why was it rejected? President Bush’s election was a clear-cut

capitalist scheme for the energy corporations. Energy companies are the power behind Bush; together, they donated over \$50 million to get him elected. As soon as he took his seat in the Oval Office, he declared the Kyoto Protocol entombed.

Or look at the example of methyl bromide, an agricultural pesticide with dangerous effects on the ozone layer. Despite the success that both underdeveloped and the most advanced countries have had in eliminating its use, the US wants to increase its own usage of it for commercial farming. Other developed nations have cut their use of the chemical by 70 percent. The US team at the Nairobi conference said its farmers needed methyl bromide, but other delegates disagreed. The message is clear—corporate interests go first, at all cost.

Corporations aren't forced to change the packaging of goods either. Waste is disproportionate. Eye creams are still triple-packaged; Lunchables, the kid's snack, is presented in a plastic tray with individual compartments for food items and wrapped again in plastic with a chipboard label. Items like sauce packets have three or four layers of wrappings. Dentyne Ice gum comes in a paperboard package and uses foil and plastic inside the paperboard. And the double-blister thermoform seal used for electronic items is pure insanity. I can't count how many times I have cut myself trying to open the thick, hard plastic. I find it annoying to have to deal with the shell of such a heavily guarded item. Packaging is trash; it's a single-use unit, completely useless. It is a gigantic squander, used to simply catch a buyer's attention for a split second and then be disposed of.

As greener regulations won't be put in place any time soon, consumers need to take action—again. Since the government isn't stepping up to the plate, humans need to become mindful shoppers and disposers.

## Permaculture

An interesting new trend is spreading rapidly, especially in California. It's called permaculture. Permaculture is a philosophy of working with, rather than against nature. This requires protracted and thoughtful observation rather than protracted and thoughtless labor. Permaculture looks at plants and animals in all their functions rather than treating any area as a single-product system. "Modern permaculture is a system design tool. It is a way of:

- Looking at a whole system or problem;
- Observing how the parts relate;
- Planning to mend sick systems by applying ideas learned from long-term sustainable working systems;
- Seeing connections between key parts.

In permaculture, practitioners learn from the working systems of nature to plan to fix the damaged landscapes of human agricultural and city systems. This thinking applies to the design of a kitchen tool as easily to the re-design of a farm." (Source: *Wikipedia*; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permaculture>.)

Backyards and gardens are being turned into food-producing permaculture havens in Sonoma County, California. "Permies" (permaculture experts) can be hired to transform backyards into pure, magic fountains of food. Check out [www.permie.net](http://www.permie.net) for more information.

Peter\*, sixty-four, a resident of Santa Rosa, California, motivated by the permie movement, decided to take action and turn his garden plot into a permie plot. Initially, the transformation was painful for him to watch. As he saw his plants uprooted, transferred and rearranged, he felt uncertainty. But the permies put him at ease. They were sure the result



would make him a happy man. A year later, no visitor could recognize his yard anymore. The soil had been conditioned and fertilized, earthworms had been added, a pond with ducks was recycling his grey water, and chickens kept insects at bay and freely fertilized the turf. Amidst the animals grew fruit and nut trees, veggies, berries, and salads in abundance. To Peter's delight, the garden was completely self-sustaining. It required neither watering nor pesticides. Permaculture achieved!

Imagine the power of permaculture. With such a garden, reliance on the food industry can be reduced to a minimum. Within two years, Peter grew so much food he not only supplied 100 percent of the food required by his family of four, he gave away and even sold some to his neighbors.

If this is possible in one backyard, think about what could be done in the manufacturing world with a permaculture system. It is said that up to 94 percent of the manufacturing process produces waste and only 6 percent of it creates the end product. One example is extraction of sugar from beets. Traditionally, companies extract sugar from the sugar beet and waste the rest of the product. This is core manufacturing. However, the rest of the root is full of proteins and minerals. Potassium can be used for fertilizers, glutamic acid can be used for flavorings, and the remaining mixture may serve to coat beet pellets for animal food. This is called total resource productivity. Nothing is wasted.

Similar sustainable manufacturing practices are finally being spread around the country by education programs such as the Zero Emissions Research and Initiatives (ZERI), a global association of creative minds searching for solutions to the increasing problems of the world. ZERI talks about air conditioning systems inspired by termite mound design, solar cells inspired by leaves, and glue-free adhesion adapted from gecko physiology.

In nature, nothing is separate; nothing is wasted. Everything is food for something else. In nature, everything is perfect and whole. Meddling with nature is generally not a great idea. The same applies to “human landscapes” – bodies – messing with it is generally not a great idea.

## **Modifying Other Landscapes**

### **Jana**

It wasn't just the discovery of yet another wrinkle around Jana's mouth, or the deepening of her crow's feet, or the loss of collagen. No, it was the fact that she was no longer young. She realized that her skin would never be supple again—a dreadful realization. She needed help. She could not accept the loss of youth. Gravity was deemed her worst enemy. Most women her age, she thought, looked younger than she did. Jana felt and looked fifty, especially after a sleepless night, but she was only thirty-eight. She grew increasingly self-conscious. Her friends' stares seemed to confirm her thoughts. “They all think I look like a two-year-old apple,” she thought. It felt like a conspiracy.

Perhaps this was all in her head, she thought, but the mirror confirmed her fears. Seeing youthful, smiley faces on the street, in magazines, and on TV irritated her. No longer was she greeted as Miss; she had become a Ma'am. How awful. She never wanted to be a Ma'am! Whenever she spotted a woman her age with slightly more wrinkles, she rejoiced. She nearly drove her boyfriend nuts with the wrinkle obsession. He constantly had to confirm that so and so looked older than Jana.

The camera used to love her, but now she escaped whenever someone wanted to snap her picture. Her youthful look had died. She realized that from here on out, she would fight a downhill battle. It dawned on her that some day soon she would be, and look, old.

Jana was bogged down by how much money she had spent on expensive lotions and treatments without success. None of this anti-aging stuff worked. She needed something *much* stronger.

### **Beauty Is Skin Deep**

As the body ages, the spirit grows wiser. However, as youth fades we become invisible to society. This is a painful process, especially for once attractive women. A shift from reliance on good looks to invisibility is problematic. Without substance on the inside, we turn to plastic surgery to extend our ability to be noticed by the general public. Plastic surgery is a quick fix. Not surprisingly, we prefer the fast results it provides to combat aging. Rejuvenating from within, although entirely feasible, is viewed as too time consuming. Yet eating right, detoxing, meditation, exercise, and finding our soul mate can revitalize the very source within.

Beauty stems from the inside. If you are a mess inside, if you are unhappy and out of tune with *self*, your façade reflects that. No plastic can fix that. The ugly inside will still shine through, even in a lifted face. I have observed that older people (with wrinkles) look better when they have peace within, instead of puffed up, ironed out faces that look altered from a mile away.

Jana had no time to pursue anything natural and called a plastic surgeon who came highly recommended by one of her Botox-loving friends. An initial visit with the nice gentleman affirmed what she already knew; her lips required Restylane fillers; her forehead

and crow's feet were deprived of Botox. The doctor's statements about her face requiring work depressed her. What she dreaded was true. She looked old. It had been affirmed by a professional, and, even worse, by an older man. Deep down she was hoping the surgeon would flatter her looks. But he recommended *work*. She quickly signed the waiver and hopped on the nice, cushy treatment chair. A couple of pricks with the Botox needle on her forehead and around the eyes, and a bigger poke for the Restylane injections—that was all that was needed to take years off her face.

The effects were nearly immediate, with almost no swelling. Jana was happy as a clam. She felt years younger—instantly. Although expensive, she would certainly repeat this exercise in a few months to avoid ever seeing her old face again. In many ways, she hated relying on such procedures to stay young. But on a planet obsessed with youth, it was necessary to be thought of as a vital, dynamic human in the professional world. Youth sells. Wrinkles are a crime.

Getting Botox and fillers will soon be like a visit to the hairdresser. It is expected that you flatten out that creased forehead. It is expected that you look youthful. Even men are required to have their chest and back hair waxed off, along with any other excess hair. Perfect humans are what the media demands! I don't think there is anything wrong with a little bit of Botox and the like, but the fact that we are shown role models of cookie cutter humans in the media 24/7 is downright wrong. We no longer tolerate the tiniest flaw. We go way overboard with the procedures.

Our bodies are perfect as they are. What will a faultless shell give to us? Inner peace? Happiness? How long will that last? It is a temporary fix – again. Renovating the facade is a often a desperate act, just like buying yet another pair of shoes.

Even men are infested by the wrinkle filler and plastic surgery bug. After visiting the waxing counter, where they are turned into hairless creatures, they can't stop. The rate at which men are signing up for plastic surgery is rapidly increasing.

Don't men wrinkle less than women? The answer is no. However, men do tend to get wrinkles later in life, compared to women. Their skin type is greasier and thicker, hair follicles provide some protection to the face, shaving acts as a rejuvenator, and they have higher levels of testosterone.

Women are obsessed with wrinkles, saggy skin, and small boobs, men are focused on hair transplantation and liposuction. Those are definitely the most obvious beauty challenges in a man's life. Look around; we have plenty of beer-bellied and bald men. Getting liposuction to get rid of years of beer, hot dogs and fudge is a cop-out. Why not eat healthy and work out? To go under the knife instead is cheating. Hair is a different story. Hair loss may be attributed to genes, stress, or bad eating habits. When men practice first aid on their disappearing manes, such as by dyeing their hair, or using hairpieces or foam, the result is always dreadful. Unfortunately, professional intervention isn't much better. Alert women can spot implants from miles away. They look funny. The follicles are bigger; the distribution, unnatural. It is not attractive. Of course, a guy could invest 50K to get a full head of fur the way Elton John did. Remember how bald he used to be? At least with a mop like that, the obvious is less obvious.

The effects of plastic surgery are easily spotted. A naked older woman in a European sauna once caught my attention. Perhaps she was a guinea pig—one of the first women to obtain a boob job back in the '80s. Her breasts stood up firmly while the rest of her body drooped way south. I had to chuckle. Nature can't be defeated. Nothing can stop the aging

process. Age will shine through all the lifts, augmentations, and fillers, one way or another, in both men and women.

Yet the number and types of treatments humans sign up for grows by the minute. Not only do we have access to Botox, facelifts, and breast implants, we have also expanded our repertoire to include neck liposuction, scalp reduction, male pectoral implants, vaginoplasty, and calf implants. I wonder if anyone even ponders that plastic surgery is invasive surgery. It hurts. It can result in major complications, long recovery times, and even death.

I have undergone surgery a few times, and now run far from any scalpel. Surgery is painful and debilitating. The scar from my appendix rupture in 2006 will always be visible. It was a traumatizing operation that involved a five-day hospital stay. I was in pain and agony for weeks due to an infection. I would not voluntarily be cut up and potentially suffer for weeks on end. Infections are a common side effect of surgeries. Even mere lip injections can cause an infection. It happened to Abbey\*, a friend of mine. Her lips became truly huge. Even Angelina Jolie would have been jealous. It was an infection that caused the swelling, not the restylane. Abbey swallowed antibiotics and stayed home for a few days with ice on her lips.

There were over 10 million surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures performed in the United States in 2008, as reported by the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS). Check out more interesting facts and figures on [www.cosmeticplasticsurgerystatistics.com](http://www.cosmeticplasticsurgerystatistics.com). Who looked better before vs. after? Look at Nicole Kidman, Melanie Griffith, or the extreme examples of Joan Rivers, Nancy Pelosi, and Michael Jackson. When a mug starts to resemble E.T., I would say the original, or the only slightly altered, face is the better alternative.

What do these alterations say about us? Obviously, we are not comfortable in our skin, or with the aging process. How sad to dislike and reject whom we are and what we have been given. If we knew who we are inside, the shell would be less important. Identification with body causes obsession with looks. Why not become identified with consciousness? With the ultimate observer? With who you truly are?

Though some people age more gracefully than others, nobody looks better when older, not even cats, horses, or dogs. Gravity affects us all. We can't stop it. According to Brigitte Bardot, every age can be enchanting, provided you live within it. But many of us refuse to do that. We all want to be twenty-five. We want to have a youthful, wrinkle-free body forever. But this is fiction.

For those with a bit of perseverance there may be some help. The most effective and rejuvenating process I have witnessed yet is the eating of raw food and meditation.

The accumulation of toxins in our bodies has a lot to do with aging, and we add more toxins every day with more bad food, environmental pollutants, stress, and negative thoughts. We tune up our cars, but what about our bodies? They need to get regular oiling too! Abundant detoxifying treatments are out there. But I never encountered one as powerful as the "raw detox," followed by a raw food diet.

The raw food diet (previously discussed), which is based on living, uncooked plant foods, is the ultimate rejuvenator. Karyn Calabrese, a Chicago native and owner of a restaurant called Karyn's Raw, has been eating raw food for thirty-eight years. She is now sixty-two but looks, at maximum, forty. She is in awesome shape. She is literally wrinkle free; her legs are tighter than those of a thirty year old. In addition to being a raw foodist, Karyn detoxifies her system two to three times per year. An avid promoter of the raw food lifestyle, she has helped

hundreds of sick people become healthy simply by getting them to change their diet to one that eliminates meat, dairy, and processed and cooked foods, and by encouraging them to do frequent detoxing.

Eating raw requires a huge effort and a change in your entire food philosophy. Instead of eating traditional cooked or processed food, you'll be munching on salads and veggie sticks. The rewards are amazing, though. This diet provides the nutrients and enzymes the body so craves, and which invigorate every cell. Not only will you look younger, you may also have more energy and sleep better.

How much is a young appearance and tons of energy worth to you?

As previously stated in the food chapter, the raw diet consists of fresh fruit and vegetables, sprouts, seeds, nuts, grains, beans, nuts, dried fruit, and seaweed. Heating food above 116 degrees Fahrenheit is believed to destroy enzymes in food that can assist in the digestion and absorption of it. Cooking is also thought to diminish the nutritional value and life force of food.

Raw foodies claim to have calm minds and peace in their bellies. With cleansed insides, it is easier to achieve meditation and a state of awareness. Karyn once asked me, "If you turn the letters of "No War" around, what do you get?" The answer is "On Raw."

Peer pressure, media, and society force us to try to look and feel young. Mask-like faces smile at us from magazines, billboards, and TV. TV faces are perfectly lifted and Botoxed. The faces are expressionless, embellished with pearly whites. It is our new, ironed-out society. Expressionless. Conformist. Bland. A façade that is polished, but hollow inside.



Our lust for the perfect image does not stop at our reflections in the mirror. Even our pets must play a role in this by adorning our images in just the right way. A customized face is often seen accompanied by a customized pet.

## **Modifying Pets**

Pets are now being tailored to meet our personal requirements. Pets are even eating processed foods and taking Prozac. Pets are becoming just like us.

It makes perfect sense to neuter or spay pets. Otherwise, our beloved kitties and doggies would multiply seven-fold each year, and the animal shelters would overflow. Although it's not fair, we have no choice but to take away an animal's sex drive.

When it comes to more extensive alterations, though, such as the declawing of a cat or the docking of a dog's tail, we cross the line and enter abuse territory. If upholstery is more important than the well-being of a cat, then you probably shouldn't own animals. Declawing is nothing but a selfish act. Claws are involved in almost everything a cat does while awake. Whether they are used for climbing up trees or the scratching post, grabbing toys and paper balls off the floor, catching mice or birds (yes, that's what cats do), tearing up the couch and other furniture, or grooming, claws are essential to a cat's life. In some circumstances, claws can even be lifesavers, by allowing a cat to climb to shelter or stop a provoker, such as a dog, by flashing their claws or letting the dog feel their sharpness.

A declawed cat is a mutilated cat. Claws are like fingers and knuckles combined. Many cat owners mistakenly believe the procedure is equal to pulling out fingernails, and while that's already horrific, the true procedure is much worse. The entire joint, including the claw, is removed. It is essentially not declawing but amputating the last bone of each of the ten front

toes of a cat's paw, including severing the tendons, nerves, and muscles that enable normal function and movement of the paw. Declawing a cat is equal to amputating the entire tip of every finger at the first knuckle in a human.

My cat nanny in Chicago estimated that about 30 percent of her clients' cats have been declawed. That means 30 percent of people who own cats are oblivious to a cat's pain. US statistics show 25 percent of all cats are declawed nationwide.

A friend who volunteered at a cat clinic confided that cats who have undergone the procedure and are in recovery from the surgery often bounce off the walls of the cage due to excruciating pain. Some cats huddle in the corner of the recovery cage, immobilized, in a state of defenselessness and weighed down by pain. Even though palliative drugs can be used post-surgery, they rarely are as the effects are limited and temporary anyway, so sooner or later the pain will materialize.

In many European countries, the declawing of cats is outlawed either under the terms of the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals or under local animal abuse laws. Unless there is a medical indication for the procedure, or a veterinarian considers it beneficial to the animal, declawing does not take place in Europe. In Finland, Estonia, the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland, declawing cats for non-medical reasons is always illegal under their laws against cruelty to animals.

If you can't accept an animal in its natural state then don't have one. Or get a fish. If you really need to protect that exclusive, but dead, couch, which apparently has more value than a cat, then try using nail caps, nail trimming, or water pistols to control your cat, or apply aluminum foil, citrus oil, or double-sided tape to commonly scratched areas. These are some other ways to keep a cat from scratching furniture that do not involve mutilation.

The owner of a declawed cat shared the following with me: “The claws seemed to be in the cat’s way, and bothersome; as he is a house cat, I thought declawing was doing him a favor.” If God had wanted declawed cats, he would have created them.

For dogs, there are also numerous cosmetic surgeries available to “enhance” the animal. The docking of tails and cropping of ears is one. That used to be done only for utilitarian reasons, but today, it is done simply for cosmetic reasons. De-barking—basically, the cutting of a dog’s vocal cords—is another. Depending on the breed, such surgeries are perceived by humans as normal.

Another way to torture a dog is to keep a large one, such as a Rottweiler or German shepherd, in a small apartment while you’re away at work for twelve hours. A dog needs some outdoor space to roam. A nice backyard in suburbia or the countryside is what it loves and needs. Perhaps a Chihuahua would be a more adequately sized dog for a small city apartment. Would you like being trapped in a small room and having to hold your pee until the master decides to show up? Yet in an apartment city like Chicago, almost everyone has a dog.

A trip to a local shelter is a heartbreaking experience. When I read the reasons why pets were being dumped at the shelter in, I nearly cried. Those reasons illustrate how careless and phony society is. Reasons ranged from “allergies” to “landlord won’t allow” to “not social enough” to “too old.” Why not think about these things before getting a pet? Why not get an apartment that allows pets to begin with? There are plenty. Pets have unique personalities, just like humans do. To get rid of a pet because it is not social enough is absurd. If a pet is a family member, which is how it should be viewed, those peculiarities should be accepted—blindly.

In essence, getting an animal is a many-year commitment. If you are not up for such a deal, then don’t do it. A pet is not a disposable item that can be traded and replaced as desired.

It is a living being that deserves a decent life. Some parrots may outlive you; cockatoos and macaws live up to seventy years. If you want to have a friend for a couple of months or years because you are feeling lonely, go to the animal shelter and help take care of the pets, but don't adopt one.

Pets depend on us. They are helpless and innocent, with nowhere to go. A good home is all they need and what they deserve.

The world does not belong to us. Animals don't belong to us. We are mere visitors on this planet. Why not treat our fellow inhabitants with respect?

### **What Can You Do?**

1. Façades are just that—façades.

Façades are superficial and do not show what is within. Peace inside shows on the outside. Without it, any plastic surgery treatment will essentially be ineffective. What needs work are the landscapes inside of you, rather than those on the surface. Don't rely on outer fixtures for happiness. Enable yourself to get it from the fountain within you by awakening your inner power via meditation.

The heavy, beautifully crafted, welded gates to a city can hide chaos, destruction, and despair within. If a city focuses on cleaning up the *within*, beautiful energy will exude beyond the gates and moats. Even mediocre gates will shine and sparkle far across the borders. The same applies to an artificially rejuvenated face. It's just a gate. If the interior is rotten, the gate stands on a weak foundation. Why not spend more time building a strong, supporting foundation for the gate? Review the info at [www.osho.com](http://www.osho.com) or [www.how-to-meditate.org](http://www.how-to-meditate.org) to get an overview of different types of meditation and how to practice them. The Osho website

focuses on active meditations. These types of meditations involve moving, shaking, and dancing before becoming still. Moving helps to shut off the thinking, worrying brain. Or sign up for a program at the Monroe Institute in Virginia. One week of deep Hemi-sync meditations at the institute will have a lasting impact on your consciousness – guaranteed.

[www.monroeinstitute.org](http://www.monroeinstitute.org)

## 2. Mindfulness, the new attitude

Contemplation of cause and effect is called for. Think as you go through your day. Think about the waste that you produce with your daily actions. Think about the final destination of a plastic bottle after you consume the contents. Consider how long it takes for a bottle to decompose. Make sure you take the extra steps and dump that bottle in the recycling bin. Be mindful and aware; that is a meditation in itself.

## 3. Self-sufficiency is way cool

Could you grow fruits and veggies in that empty space in your yard? Could you grow your own organic food? Could you place some solar panels on your roof to decrease grid dependency? What could you do to have a lesser impact on the environment? Do you need all that space you currently dwell in? Could you afford the heating bills if the price of oil were to double? Do you need to have the light on the entire night for the dog? Could you afford it if the price for electricity quadrupled?

These are questions that should be asked and taken into consideration during these uncertain times. We really don't know what the future looks like in regards to our utilities, food, water, and so forth. However, the likelihood of energy and commodities becoming cheaper and more available is very slim.

## CHAPTER 7

### **The Governmental Veil**

Clearly, our society is in dire need of a major upgrade. Perhaps even a complete reinstallation, with new hardware and software, and all the old programs wiped out. Ignorance, a decline in moral values, a lack of personal goals, and the increased power and wealth of the rich and influential have created a society in which shamelessness and ruthlessness rule. And apparently many have shut their eyes and ears to political affairs, and by doing so have handed over total control to the government. And this heavy-handed establishment, this massive apparatus, has been spreading its wings. Yet we pretend not to notice. With our heads buried deep in the sand, we mistakenly believe this land is still the good old, good old USA. We pretended not to realize how our freedoms and rights have been dumped right out the window. We acted as if we didn't perceive how the world was getting smaller and smaller as the bullies are controlling every step we make.

The demise of society occurred on the government's watch. This fact cannot be denied. Had our leaders desired a free, educated, healthy society, we would have one. But that is not on their agenda. Or do you see it anywhere on the horizon? I believe those in power have little interest in our well-being. When I look around, my belief is confirmed. Have they not nearly run us into the ground? Have they not made us poorer over the last forty years? Have we not experienced a colossal degradation of lifestyle and personal wealth? Middle-class incomes have been driven down and both parents in a family are now forced to work. Have we not gotten sicker and dumber? Yes. We have. In a uncorrupted world, those in charge would have been held 100 percent responsible. They are supposed to be our guardians, acting on our

behalf, implementing rules and regulations to the citizens' benefit. Yet the fat cats forgot about the citizens eons ago. It appears that we are a necessary evil that they have to deal with, a necessary evil that can be squeezed for more and more dollars to support their personal goals.

Apparently, the taxpaying population represents walking ATM machines to them. What else are we good for? Here's a little personal example... The US is the only country (other than North Korea) that charges global tax. What does that mean? If I live overseas, back in Switzerland, for example, and earn my income there, I am liable for US tax, even though I do not use any infrastructure, services, or anything else in the US. I've still gotta file and pay. Of course, I get approximately 90K for "free," meaning I am not US-taxed on that amount. But for any sum on top, I get to pay Swiss tax first, and then US tax. It is absolute insanity. I have to go out and hire a US CPA to file, which is ridiculously expensive, and then pay the global browbeater so the party can go on. The US tax bully requires access to all my worldwide assets, bank accounts. I have to file an extra document per end of every June, listing the highest balance per account, in addition to the tax return in April. Failure will land me in jail. I need to be 200 percent transparent, while they adhere to a zero transparency policy. They peruse me with a magnifying glass while losing trillions themselves. And I already have to deal with the Swiss tax authorities.

There really is zero benefit in living a lower-taxed country overseas. Whether living there or here, I am still a slave to the hungry, insatiable US tax monster. As I write this, the US is getting ready to announce its biggest tax hike in history. A whopping 3 to 5 percent will be added to each tax bracket. Death tax will climb to 55 percent starting in 2011. Child tax credits will be lowered, and so forth. The squeezing, or rather the choking, has only just begun. And oh, if you don't pay up... you could go to jail for ten years. Tax fraud is a federal crime. The

psychopathic tax tyrant known as the US government will hunt you down and devour the wealth you so eagerly worked for.

But who created the mess, the insane federal debt to begin with? Who created the out of control IOU burden? Yours truly – the US government!

The massive debt that prompted the dragon to ramp up for a total tax witch hunt came courtesy of Its Highness. The creator and destroyer are the same entity, and the victims are always the taxpayers. Wasn't it the government that so conveniently created the real estate bubble? If the watchdog hadn't been on vacation and the regulations weren't so senselessly lax, we wouldn't be where we are now. You have to ask why they are interested in driving everyone to the soup kitchen.

This is just my take, but brainwashed, dumbed down, indebted, strapped-for-cash, intimidated citizens are easier to govern. Debt is the tip of the iceberg. We are dumb, sick, ignorant, and now poor here in the West. The government must really relish this. Now they have free rule. They are the puppeteers; we are the puppets. Who will stop them? They have amassed so much wealth over the past decades that they could buy entire countries, or perhaps even the entire globe.

Remember the time they said that without that stimulus package we would go to the dogs? I leave it up to you to judge. The following are some beneficiaries of the stimulus program.

The amount of \$187,632 was assigned to protecting a Michigan insect collection from other insects. The Rhode Island police department received 92 BlackBerries for supervisors: \$95,000. California obtained \$259,000 worth of foreign bus wheel polishers. Illinois can now develop "machine-generated" humor due to a grant of \$712,883 for it. \$30,000 went o



Maryland to study the all-important female sex drive of a rat. North Carolina is now studying social networks, like Facebook at a tag of \$498,000. Iowa can replace and refurbish the picnic tables of the entire state with \$30,000. A story telling festival in Utah got \$15,000. Or how about a University in Indiana studying why young men do not like to wear condoms (\$221,355). Then there is a grant for one Massachusetts university for "robobees" (miniature flying robot bees) (\$2 million). The list goes on and on. How does it feel to know your taxes protect an insect collection from insects? Yeah, had we not rescued that collection, we all would have died. Excuse my sarcasm, but aren't you a bit suspicious? More interesting information can be found on this site [www.endwastefulgovernmentsspending.net](http://www.endwastefulgovernmentsspending.net). [Recovery.org](http://Recovery.org) is the official government site to track where the stimulus money went. Enjoy!

Obama and Bush's deregulations and rescue packages, and the numerous more trillions that disappeared, pushed the US over the edge. In addition to all the dollars spent on supposed stimulus, another two trillion dollars or more appear to have gone missing. Missing! "For what purpose?" you have to ask. There must be a reason behind the madness. Why else screw up the entire Western society? It is by design. It is with purpose.

In 2009, Rep. Alan Grayson (Democrat-Florida) asked Federal Reserve Inspector General Elizabeth Coleman if her agency had done any research into the decision not to save Lehman Brothers, which "led to shockwaves that went through the entire financial system." Coleman said it had not. "What about the \$1 trillion plus expansion of the Federal Reserve's balance sheet since last September?" Grayson asked. "We have different connotations," Coleman replied. "We're actually conducting a fairly high-level review of the various lending facilities collectively." "Do you know who received that \$1 trillion plus that the Fed extended

and put on its balance sheet since last September?” Grayson pressed. “I do not know. We have not looked at that specific area at this particular point on those reviews,” Coleman answered.

As Rep. Ron Paul (Republican-Texas) famously said, “Audit the Fed.” If I don’t pay my taxes, I go to jail. What happens to someone who loses two trillion or more of the taxpayers’ dollars? The answer is—nothing. Why should I pay my taxes if the powers in charge don’t even care to account for it properly? But the missing dollars will most likely simply be replaced by more tax dollars looted from the public. Welcome to the newest banana republic.

The situation seems hopeless. But we are not helpless. We outnumber the bullies in droves. Perhaps, in the end, this will be our only advantage. This super-controlled and super-taxed society must wake up and ask the necessary questions. We are not powerless sheeple. Amazing powers slumber covertly inside us, ready to be awakened. And I am by no means talking about violence. I am talking about awareness.

But for now, they got what they wanted. The US lies in a shambles. The strategy worked, for now we are their pawns. But let’s explore how they got so much power in what seems like so little time. How did we get here? What tools, other than those already discussed in this book (food, drugs, entertainment, gadgets), were used by the bullies to put us in our place?

### **Fear—the Biggest WMD**

Fear is a natural part of life. Fear is a mechanism that can keep us safe in dangerous situations, and enhance our common sense. But, unfortunately, fear is often manipulated, exploited, and even used to rationalize the irrational.

Fear has been used to control people for centuries. In the current-day America, it is one of the favorite tools used to keep the masses in check. Apathy and the shockingly compliant media make it easy for the government to spread fear fast and effectively.

The government loves fear. From the police force to IRS agents and customs, security, and TSA officials and so forth, they all employ fear and intimidation as an instrument. Fear can always be activated. It is fast and effective, kind of like Valium. The Cold War and the so-called war on terror were served to the public heavily spiced up with fear. Fear made the masses buy into the hunt for cave terrorists in far-off lands. Fear paralyzes brains and can get the masses to sign and do just about anything in the name of having more security. Along with shackles, the government lovingly provides artificial peace of mind. The ball and chain comes in the form of new restrictions and ever more control over us. All this is done to appease what they have created in us—FEAR.

We encounter fear at its lowest level in numerous daily situations. Cops are prevalent. We fear them. These guys have the power to destroy our lives, or cost us a lot of money (fines) or freedom (jail). Therefore, we make every attempt to look like goody two-shoes, and put Soccer Mom or D.A.R.E. stickers on our cars. This is supposed to identify us as good citizens and raise no red flags.

Cops are ubiquitous on freeways and in the cities. “To serve and protect” hardly fits their image. Their presence is largely an intimidating one, as everyone appears to be a suspect to them. Fear and bullying is how they deal with both the bloodstained thug and the purple-haired lady trying to cross the street. The fact that probably 99 percent of people aren’t on the no-fly list and not enemy combatants makes no difference. Relentlessly, intimidation treatment

is applied. Most of us are just average humans, trying to make ends meet and have a decent life. Does this sound exaggerated? I don't think it is.

Let's move on to another fear-instilling authority—the IRS. Have you ever had to deal with an IRS agent? Have you been audited? The initial contact is usually very, very threatening. Simply check the IRS website and explore the elaborate list of punishments that may be unleashed on you if you fail to pay your taxes. Everyone is a suspect and must prove their innocence. The pain felt during the auditing process is excruciating. The agents use their powers ruthlessly, because they can. You may never be the same person again after having survived an audit.

Customs officers apply the same strategies. To the customs officer, the pale German who can't wait to get a red lobster face on the beaches of Florida is as much a suspect as the illegal Paraguayan with Pakistani passport stamps. Trying to enter the US is not much like trying to break into Russia thirty years ago. I have to say that entering Russia today is more pleasant than enduring interrogations at IAD (Washington, DC International Airport). I doubt any of the excited tourists appreciate the cold fingerprinting and iris scanning involved in being welcomed to this country. And invasive questioning by customs officials is the next annoyance everyone must succumb to. In the past I have been asked the following questions:

- Whom do you work for?
- How long have you been outside the country?
- Why were you in Argentina?
- What did you do while on vacation?
- How long have you been working for your company? What exactly do you do for them?

- Where is your husband? How come he's not traveling with you?

It doesn't stop. They can easily view my recent travel history by scanning my passport. What exactly I did on the beaches of Tonga is none of their business. Or is it? They are supposed to keep terrorists out; why clamp down on citizens? But now, in the post-9/11 world, we succumb without question to Nazi-style interrogations, searches, and intrusions into our private lives. Any slight non-cooperation on our part raises a red flag that might prompt a cavity search and I don't want to know what else. We are forced to comply with this military-style treatment. In the US, a country where common law applies, everyone is now a suspect. Whatever happened to being innocent until proven guilty?

Daniel\*, an ex-coworker of mine, proclaims this is all required to preserve freedom and security. To use the words freedom and security in one sentence indicates an anomaly in itself. They are exact opposites. My friend dismisses my criticism and supports the government's control addiction. Deep down, Daniel is tremendously afraid of the ones in charge. He's afraid to say anything against his Democratic Party. After all, he's bought into their schemes for years, and admitting they may not have the best in store for him and his family is simply not an option. After all, they are working for the people. Daniel insists the change from freedom to total control was needed.

Some of this blind compliance borders on Stockholm Syndrome. Although aware that our captor's intentions are wicked, we support and identify with their script. Stockholm Syndrome is a psychological response usually witnessed in abducted hostages. The hostage shows signs of loyalty to the hostage taker, regardless of the danger or risk in which they have been placed.

And even more policing is coming our way. To further serve and protect, Obama is apparently planning to add a civilian national security force that answers directly to him. A force that is “just as powerful, just as strong” as our military. These are his words. He repeated them numerous times in front of cheering crowds during the last presidential election campaign. Nobody seemed to understand the meaning of this phrase, judging by the crowds’ cheering.

Fear is used by the administration to control, coerce, and manipulate society into buying their elaborately worked out schemes, such as pitches that allow the government to invade countries like Iraq for no apparent reason. The true reason why that country needed to be sacrificed will remain a mystery—although we do know it had nothing to do with 9/11. Panic stricken, with their heads in the sand, the population permitted the kings to do anything. No WMD in Iraq, but plenty of FWMD (Fear of WMDs) at home. The spread of fear and intimidation gave the government unlimited approval to fight wars overseas and approval for laws that literally nullified the US Constitution.

A calamity like 9/11—along with the mortgage crisis, and combined with fright and insecurity—is enough to turn people into brain-dead fools. Their judgment has been debilitated for good reason. Everyone is in shock. But to exploit such vulnerability should be downright illegal. That is precisely what was done with 9/11; as Tim Geithner said, in regards to the 2008 economic freefall, “Never let a good crisis go to waste.” The middle of a crisis is the easiest time to pass laws that otherwise would not get a single vote. Without blinking an eye, people side with the assumed protector—in this case the government—even though it is not acting in their favor. Crisis is a great opportunity for power-hungry beasts.

After 9/11, some people were so afraid, they forgot what they were afraid of. Cheney dusted off the Cold War fear agenda, embellished it with a different ribbon and called it the War on Terror, which became a household phrase. We were all fooled into believing that the biggest threat to the world—Osama bin Laden—lived in an Afghan cave, and that Iraq harbored weapons of mass destruction. The agenda was clear; we needed to invade Afghanistan and Iraq. Opinions about the reasons for the invasions vary. Some state that Afghanistan had to be invaded due the military needing to protect the building of an oil pipeline to transport oil all the way to the Indian Ocean. Others mention we needed to boost or protect the opium trade (the Taliban appears to be the only group that has ever been able to cut down the opium trade). Others state the US needed a presence in the Middle East to ensure OPEC would not change the oil currency from the US dollar to the Euro. Then, of course, there is the fact that Iraq and Afghanistan contain massive natural resources that the US publics and privates have tremendous interest in. We know that. But it's not only the oil in Iraq; it's the natural gas and vast mineral riches in Afghanistan. Numerous newspapers reported on the discovery of huge veins of iron, copper, cobalt, gold and critical industrial metals like lithium in the earlier part of 2010. The findings are so vast and include so many minerals vital to modern industry that Afghanistan may eventually transform into one of the most important mining centers in the world.

Then there is the theory that the publicizing of the terrorism that occurred during the Bush era created more extremists. Terrorism always existed, but little attention used to be paid to cases solved in secret by the CIA. The CIA resolved cases as they should—totally undercover. Nobody ever heard about it. Then under Bush, terrorism (the new enemy) went public. The terrorists' fame, some argue, then attracted more extremists to the caves of

Afghanistan to be trained. This would mean that the US created this new foe they now so diligently chase.

Will we hear the truth one day?

The nation's common sense remained on vacation after 9/11 for a long, long time. Fright put us in a coma. The world grew increasingly concerned over the prevalence of US lethargy. Abroad, people increasingly viewed Bush as a despot. Resistance and protests against the war emerged everywhere. Despite all of the international outrage, the American paralysis did not rescind, and the government used the state of the nation to its advantage.

### **The 9/11 Aftermath**

Oh, how the world has changed since 9/11. The catastrophe was milked to the max, all life was sucked out of it. What do I mean by this? The government did definitely not let this tragedy go to waste. It used it as best it could in the name of protection and security, to gain total control over the population.

The first blow to freedom came September 18, 2001 in a joint House-Senate resolution, the "Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists (AUMF)," which authorized "the use of United States Armed Forces against those responsible for the recent attacks launched against the United States." Then Bush issued the "Military Order of November 13, 2001," which one analyst called a coup d'état. This order let the president usurp authority to capture, kidnap, or otherwise arrest any non-US citizen (and later, US citizens as well) anywhere in the world if claimed that they were involved in international terrorism, and to hold them indefinitely without charge, evidence, or allowing them due process in a court of law. IF a trial were to be allowed, it would be held by special ad hoc military commission, in



secret and not at a civil court, with evidence obtained by torture allowed; those found guilty would be given no right of appeal, and could be secretly executed. No civil court has authority in these cases even if the victims are identified and legal counsel wishes to represent them. Few knew then on that November 13, 2001, US citizens lost their civil liberties.

Then, the PATRIOT Act. With the USA PATRIOT Act Titles I and II, we signed over total control to the government. The act permits searches without warrant, if anyone is suspected of being an enemy combatant. The FBI can make arrests, and we have no right to a lawyer. The PATRIOT Act is unconstitutional.

“USA PATRIOT Act” stands for **U**niting and **S**trengthening **A**merica by **P**roviding **A**ppropriate **T**ools **R**equired to **I**ntercept and **O**bstruct **T**errorism Act of 2001.

The act increases the ability of law enforcement agencies to search telephone and email communications, as well as medical, financial, and other personal records. It eases restrictions on foreign intelligence gathering within the United States; expands the Secretary of the Treasury’s authority to regulate financial transactions, particularly those involving foreign individuals and entities; and enhances the discretion of law enforcement and immigration authorities in detaining and deporting immigrants suspected of terrorism-related acts. Here are the details of what rights (indicated at left) have been infringed upon or removed (indicated at right):

US Constitution (Bill of Rights)

*Amendment IV:* The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and

USA PATRIOT Act

*Freedom from unreasonable searches:* The government may search and seize Americans’ papers and effects without probable cause to assist terror investigation.

particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

*Amendment VI:* In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the state and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the assistance of counsel for his defense.

*Amendment I:* Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

*Amendment VI:* . . . to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the assistance of counsel for his defense.

*Amendment I:* Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech . . .

*Amendment VI:* . . . to be confronted with the witnesses against him . . .

*Right to a speedy and public trial:* The government may jail Americans indefinitely without a trial.

*Freedom of association:* To assist terror investigation, the government may monitor religious and political institutions without suspecting criminal activity.

*Right to legal representation:* The government may monitor conversations between attorneys and clients in federal prisons and deny lawyers to Americans accused of crimes.

*Freedom of speech:* The government may prosecute librarians or keepers of any other records if they tell anyone the government subpoenaed information related to a terror investigation.

*Right to liberty:* Americans may be jailed without being charged or being able to confront witnesses against them. US citizens (labeled “unlawful combatants”) have been held incommunicado and refused attorneys.

Constitutional Source: Cornell Law School

PATRIOT Act Source: The Associated Press, Knight-Ridder Newspapers

Full PATRIOT Act Text: US Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services

The PATRIOT Act is a real poison pill. I wonder what Abe would have said to this creation. Is he turning in his grave?

## **Total Control**

What a triumph. The post-9/11 fright, combined with lethargy, preoccupation, and complacency, really turned the freedom tables.

The regime appears to have won—for now. While we were busy buying dot-com stock, mourning 9/11 victims, and signing up for subprime mortgages, those infatuated with greed and power corrupted and bankrupted this great nation. The last two presidents added more debt than all of the forty-two presidents before them combined.

The Constitution, the very system that was supposed to prevent groups from rising to power and exerting total control, is now ignored. There are so many holes blown into that document, it literally resembles Swiss cheese.

Some of us have been noticing how the liberties and rights are being pulled from underneath, how sovereignty has been chipped away. But it's been a lonely awakening. We need everyone to wake up and smell the coffee that's been brewing for decades. Yet, the mass media only drips honey down our gorge. They don't report the truth. They can't. They are part of the game as well. They sold their soul to the devil long ago. It is up to us to get decent information. The media and Washington work together like a happily married couple. There are very few journalists who drift from script, because straying is outright dangerous. That

could cost them their well-paying jobs and prevent them from ever finding another one. Yet we deserve to get coverage of the details of the stimulus bills, the PATRIOT Act, cap and trade, and health care reform. We deserve investigative journalism and unbiased news, not diluted, partial data. The media has neglected its job as mediator, analyzer, and critical inquirer.

Hence, most have no concept of how many liberties have been lost. That is not reported on the evening infotainment shows. But more and more people are being caught in situations in which they encounter these new laws. Thousands are added monthly to the “no fly” list, a list with at least a million names on it as of March 2009. The no fly list, also called the terrorist watch list, is a secret list created and maintained by the United States government of people who are not permitted to board a commercial aircraft for travel into or out of the United States. If your name matches one on the list, good luck getting on a plane. You will be forced to succumb to pointless hassling, cavity searches, and special investigations.

Even children’s names have been erroneously added to this blunder. The name of a five-year-old boy from Washington State once popped up at the check-in counter. The poor boy had to endure in-depth body searches until he was finally cleared to fly. Any attempt to remove a name mistakenly added to the list will be an endless battle.

The PATRIOT Act recently affected an acquaintance of mine, a man in his late fifties, who made his living by selling goods on eBay. One day, fourteen FBI agents forced their way into his home, turned everything upside down, and seized his two computers. He sat outside on the curb, shaking and suffering a silent panic attack. He had no idea what was going on. He had received no warning. He panicked. An ambulance took him to the ER. His wife feared a heart attack. For two days, the couple heard nothing from the FBI. Finally, they informed that

someone had been using his computers to send viruses. That was the reason for the fourteen uninvited guests. My friend is not up to speed on anti-virus and firewall protection, so it was probably easy for someone to infiltrate his system. But who in their right mind would expect a visit from fourteen FBI agents for refusing to purchase a copy of Norton? After this experience, he moved back to his country of origin—Portugal. The US had pushed him over the edge.

Welcome to the new post-9/11 America, where restrictions are prevalent and freedom is an illusion. All this mischief is sold as necessary to protect us from evil. Yet why spy on our own people if it is the supposed enemy called Al Qaeda we want to get rid of?

Most of us can't fathom the idea that we have a wicked government. We believe it only has good in store for us. Yet if we would only wipe the thick fog off our glasses, we could see how awfully controlled we are. We would realize that a police state surrounds us. According to Thomas Jefferson, if a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be. Ignorance mutilates freedom. And such changes are already apparent. The system now has control.

Mischief, mistrust, and fear have also spread amongst the population. Citizens have lost trust and faith in their fellow citizens. A neighbor is a suspect by default. Often, rather than discuss a problem, instead of seeking human dialogue, we choose to sue. A lack of community and trust, and a hunger for receiving money in exchange for doing nothing, have created such strange behaviors.

The following is an example of how out of touch we are as humans. My strapped-for-cash Chicago landlord and ex-friend decided to keep half my security deposit upon my move out. She invented bogus claims and pretended a non-existing attorney backed the farce. Nancy,

a very unhappy, loathsome person, didn't try very hard to be human. She threatened to sue me if I didn't pay up. She claimed the hallway was covered with invisible cat hair (my cat ventured out there one time) and needed professional deep cleaning, and the whole house needed new locks. My cat nanny had used my keys a few times, yet returned them. She threatened to summon witnesses who had seen my cat shed hair on the stairs. In one of her slanderous emails, she mentioned how her attorney would crush me and take every penny from me—all because of kitty hair. I had to laugh out loud.

I guess I should have called the cops when I surprised her in *my* apartment using *my* laptop a few months earlier. How could I have been so tolerant as to let her get away with that? It wasn't worth my time, that's why. It wasn't worth the bad energy, the negative stress to persecute her for it.

I advised her to think about the rule that what goes around, comes around. Ripping off tenants does not create good energy or happiness. The moral of the story is, however, that we, as citizens, have turned against each other. We suspect nothing but the worst of others and shamelessly extort where we can. Our churches are full, but we don't seem to hear them preaching, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

### **No Representation**

Elected officials are supposed to work on our behalf. They are put in office by the people for the people. At least that was the original intent. But our voices are ignored. Who cares if we don't want taxpayers' dollars spent on yet another bank bailout?

A government created for the people is supposed to serve and protect, not intimidate or spy on us. It should not degrade our food and water, put the nation on prescription drugs, or “narcotize” us with a dreadful school system and the all-pervasive noise.

Do you feel like you are the most important asset of the bullies in power? Or are you slowly realizing that the bureaucracy has spun out of control and Big Brother is now the biggest brother ever?

Who are your non-representing representatives, anyway?

Most members of the current Obama administration are ex-Wall Street executives. Is it any wonder that the bailout programs have benefited Wall Street? Wall Street is a holy cow that can never be sacrificed.

Despite the derivative crisis orchestrated by the global financial institutions, the party never stopped for bankers. Most banks were saved by the bell. A large number of banks received nearly unlimited funds and, of course, survived. Meanwhile, millions of small- and mid-sized companies folded, all due to mismanagement on the part of bankers.

Millions of homeowners lost their homes. Millions lost their jobs. Millions went bankrupt. The Wall Street party continues.

The banks knew full well their mischief would eventually bring the world’s economy to its knees. Selling worthless securities is, after all, not sustainable. Yet Wall Street loves to create bubbles out of nothing. I guess it is an addiction to luring the mesmerized masses into betting on limping hedge fund horses.

The motto behind the subprime bubble, that every toilet cleaner deserved to own a luxury home, worked like a charm. They spit in the face of party poopos who pointed out the dangers of worthless securities, as they did the dot-com non-participants in 2000. And just like

the dot-com bust, this one came to an abrupt halt, too. Every time such a fiesta ends, middle-class Americans pay the price. Every bust of a bubble makes their portfolios skinnier. Then the indebted, nearly bankrupt people have to bail out the richest of the rich sitting high up in the financial institutions while the foreclosure signs tower in citizens' front yards.

Disclosure about how many trillions exactly have been distributed to the banks does not exist. And will they pay it back? Nobody knows. Although it is the taxpayers' money, we are totally in the dark. It was a freebie; take it or leave it. Any attempts to dig deeper into former US Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson and his cohorts, to provide disclosure of, the destiny of an amount that is beyond two trillion dollars bore no fruit. He did not answer the questions. He doesn't have to. We have no representation.

The world economy consists of forty-two trillion dollars. A trillion in digits looks like this: 1,000,000,000,000. The country has not even existed for one trillion seconds. Western civilization has not been around for one trillion seconds. One trillion seconds ago—31,688 years—Neanderthals stalked the plains of Europe.

But because of our short-term memory loss, "TARP & Co." has been put on the back burner already. The effects, however, are expected to be devastating, at least according to the laws of economics. There will be higher taxes and inflation. But our minds keep wandering from media crisis to media crisis, from Michael Jackson's death to Obama's half-brother in China.

### **Freedom?**

What or who is behind the charades that keep repeating themselves in the West? Who has an interest in manipulating and cheating society out of its God-given rights?



Let's start with the president of this nation. Is he the most powerful man in the world? Can he rule freely according to his desires?

Rumor has it that the US president is the maximum puppet of the oligarchs who apparently run the world. He is a marionette who must deliver the message crafted by the power hungry to the public in a credible and appealing format. If he resists and ventures out on his own, he may experience the same destiny as President John F. Kennedy. Initially considered a submissive president, Kennedy strayed from the given script. It was a deadly endeavor.

The inhabitant of the White House seems to be fundamentally crippled and controlled by the omnipotent world strategists. Must he be a mere prostitute, serving the global barons for four or eight years until he is replaced by the next neophyte?

More and more, the public is becoming aware of the secret meetings the globalists, the elite, or the so-called Illuminati are having in undisclosed locations around the world to discuss... Well, to discuss what? Although the meetings are highly covert, their locations and the topics under discussion have been spilled to the public. They do discuss policy. Yet the American lapdog media pay no attention to these clandestine events. We would think a meeting of such high caliber deserves to be covered, but the media leave the elite undisturbed.

Aren't we entitled to know about elected officials who meet with private industry executives and other trillionaires? Don't we deserve to know the topics they discuss, especially since taxpayers' dollars are most likely paying for their luxury accommodations? The few daring journalists with the guts to get near such events are living dangerously. These meetings are guarded by Secret Service agents and the CIA (again, paid for by taxpayers' funds). The organization holding these meetings is called the Bilderberg Group, named after a hotel in the

Netherlands where the group was founded in 1954. The Bilderberg Group consists of the biggest and most important public and private kahunas. The cream of the crop apparently includes such names as Rothschild, Rockefeller, Cheney, and Bush, just to list a few.

According to some, the Bilderberg Group has but one goal—to establish a new world order. It would be world domination by Wall Street design. The Bilderberg Group itself states that its conferences are small, flexible, informal, off-the-record international forums at which different viewpoints can be expressed, and mutual understanding enhanced. If this is the truth, why the heavy security? Why the top-secret locations? Why not invite the press? Why not have the event covered?

The meetings of this exclusive supper club—to discuss important political and economic agendas—are being held against US law. The Logan Act makes it illegal for political leaders to attend such meetings without direct approval from Congress or the president. According to the Logan Act,

“Any citizen of the United States, wherever he may be, who, without authority of the United States, directly or indirectly commences or carries on any correspondence or intercourse with any foreign government or any officer or agent thereof, with intent to influence the measures or conduct of any foreign government or of any officer or agent thereof, in relation to any disputes or controversies with the United States, or to defeat the measures of the United States, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than three years, or both.”

The Logan Act was passed in 1799. For more details, please check out [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logan\\_Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logan_Act).

The illegal cloak-and-dagger meetings have been getting increased public attention in recent years, since individuals and independent media associates have begun picking up on the threat behind the group’s intent. A few protestors have been seen congregating in front of the luxury resorts where the Bilderberg Group meets. A few more have held protests in a place called Bohemian Grove, close to Santa Rosa, California, where the elite meets, usually in July,

to party, screw around, perform pagan rituals, and so on, for about two weeks. People like Alex Jones, a Texas-based radio talk show host, journalists Charlie Skelton and Jim Tucker have succeeded in infiltrating these secret gatherings and getting a hold of the agenda.

The Bilderberg Group spent years promoting its global agenda. It seems that gaining control of the world and destroying the sovereignty of individual nations are topics of high priority. Other issues listed on the agenda include depopulation, exploitation of workers, total control over citizens, and the setup of a global treasury and health department. Our well-being seems to be missing from their long list of priorities. Some sources report that we are viewed as being similar to animals, in need of being branded, controlled, and slowly reduced in number.

It has been reported that disasters such as the dot-com bubble and the subprime mortgage calamity were handcrafted by this group to remove wealth from citizens.

Bilderberg essentially appears to be a shadow government with unlimited funds and a seemingly evil agenda. Franklin Roosevelt stated almost a century ago that there is a financial element in the larger centers that has owned our government ever since the days of Andrew Jackson. That was then. The financial world has grown dramatically since then, and if you add two and two, you can only surmise the amount of authority that element represents today. Mainstream propaganda convincingly states that the idea of a shadow government, a new world order, and a secretive agenda is bollocks, or simply a conspiracy theory. Why not allow us into the parties, then? Since we are paying for the fiestas, shouldn't we be permitted to hear about their agendas?

Apparently not. The elite seem to view us, the population, as mere pawns who can be fed information with the help of the proper media outlets. The media has been assisting the

efforts to protect shadow government by libeling the inquisitive minds, the skeptics, and the advocates of the conspiracy theory.

Just because the concept is new to you—that such an interest group and agenda exists—don't discount it. The more information you possess, the more alert and aware you become of your surroundings. To realize the government may not have its citizens' best interests in mind is a shocker, but it can also be liberating. Members of Congress need to be turned into representatives again. It has been a while since the elected politicians assumed their intended role, which is to serve the people who put them in power.

The time has come for us to stop acting like sheep. We need to get involved, to do our own research, and discover the true state of the nation. Once armed with facts and figures, we can demand accountability from the government, starting with senators and members of Congress. It's not too late to restore representation and reconfirm the Constitution of the United States of America and the Bill of Rights.

### **The Way Things Ought to Be**

Have we forgotten the true purpose of government? Have we lost sight of the ideals upon which this nation was built? We proudly boast that we live in a democracy, and that we have rights and freedoms that no other nation has dared to establish. But before we boast, let's recall what a healthy, open, democratic nation DOES NOT do:

- Instill fear, deceive, or lie to and manipulate its citizens
- Permit food companies to sell chemicals instead of food
- Deliberately dumb down the nation via the public school system, or make universities unaffordable

- Peddle unaffordable medication to citizens
- Base the economy solely on the out-of-control, overspent American shopper
- Permit torture and abuse of farm and other animals for the sake of cheap food or comfort
- Consume and encourage waste as if natural resources are infinite
- Torture and detain citizens without giving them access to attorneys
- Allow corruption to get out of hand
- Disregard the constitutional rights of citizens

A healthy, open, democratic nation with good intentions for its citizens WILL DO the following:

- Act as a government by the people, for the people
- Protect its citizens without domestic spying or FBI profiling
- Strive to keep citizens healthy and educated
- Guarantee the infrastructure is safe and regularly updated
- Ensure citizens have access to clean, healthy food
- Practice health care with health in mind
- Respect animals as living beings
- Respect democracy and sovereignty of other nations
- Strive to keep the government corruption free
- Practice transparency and truth

Although doom and gloom is spreading, we have the power within us to prevent the Dark Ages from falling on us again. Our participation is required to nurture the nation back to health.

## **What Can You Do?**

The best way to thwart the corrupt ways of today's government is to really stay informed, to use the information sources listed here, to keep your neighbors and community informed, and to actively concern yourself with the country's important topics (which are *the* important topics). Tyranny (which is where we are headed) isn't what you or I want. Read *1984* by George Orwell, or ask someone from an ex-Communist country such as Russia, China, or Cuba what it means to live in such a controlled state. They know how it is to live without rights or freedom. That's why they left the countries they came from.

Make sure you know what constitutional rights you have. If you don't know your basic rights, how can you defend them? You must know what your rights are. They can be easily found on the Internet at <http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html>.

And you can do more. You can get off the grid, for example (at least partially). Build a permaculture paradise in your backyard that will provide you with your own food. Or buy non-hybrid seeds and plant your own sprouts, vegetables, and fruits. What about solar energy? What about having your own well, and geothermal heating? I know some of these recommendations don't come cheap, but they offer pure protection. You have to ask yourself what will happen if there is a food shortage, as has been predicted by numerous sources. What if there is a prolonged blackout? What if Marshall law is imposed? What will you do? Where will you go? Having your own food, electricity, and water will give you peace of mind.

Go spread your knowledge, and organize and protect yourself. You will be grateful one day.

## CHAPTER 8

### **Becoming Human Again**

How can we solve the dilemma in the West? Do we even have a shot at turning the world around? Sure we do. The power is in us. As within, so without. The world is in a shambles because we are in a shambles. Our inner being is rotten. If we heal, the world heals. If we become human inside again, the Earth's fury will settle down.

The East turned away from a focus on advancement in science and technology hundreds of years ago, as it was found to be of no benefit. It shifted its focus to the inner person and completely neglected scientific development and its accompanying wealth. The West has done exactly the opposite and concentrated on the *outer* only. However, some Western groups have developed a keen interest in exploring the *within* and have started to look to India for teachings.

The belief that a spiritual man must be a poor man focused solely on meditation, silence, and teachings drove India to poverty. To change course, the country's focus has switched to the studying of technology, and there has been a rapid shift from the *inner* to the *outer*. Perhaps India will have forgotten the *inner*, and the West will have given up its scientific edge, within a couple of generations.

The *inner* and the *outer* together make up the complete person. There is nothing wrong with wealth, if the *inner* is balanced. Only spiritual people can truly enjoy their accomplishments. The egos of outer-focused people will drive them to insanity. An ego's hunger can never be satisfied, as it is a false hunger. If it was a real hunger, it could be

satisfied, but a false hunger can never be fulfilled. A complete man needs both: the *inner* and the *outer*. A society of such people—a blend of East and West—has never before existed because of people’s misconception that the *inner* and *outer* can’t co-exist in one being. Wealth is looked down upon by spiritualists, while spiritual and New Age practices are shunned by the successful and wealthy.

If we can create a society that allows both—the *inner* and the *outer*, in balance—we will have succeeded. This would be a society that appreciates and supports both the spiritual and the rich person. This has is the key to creating a better version of human.

So, what are the steps to take to Become Human Again?

1. Learn to get to know thyself (meditation and some other tools mentioned in this book)
2. Expand human consciousness, be mindful (as within, so without)
3. Be informed (proper sources), but not inundated
4. Take responsibility for all your actions
5. Build a community, get organized outside the common channels
6. Be grateful for what you already have.
7. Have fun. Life is abundant, as it should be. Never forget to laugh.

### **Using the Mind to Create**

Animals are born with strong instincts that largely guide their lives on planet Earth. They can also learn, like humans, but it is their strong instincts that help their survival the most. Animals are not free; instincts determine their actions and behavior. But animals are happy. Pain is short-lived and not dwelled upon. No animal would ever contemplate suicide. We are the only



species that considers offing ourselves. A horse would never think of galloping headfirst off a cliff to end its misery, even if it was being whipped, abused, overworked, and starved. Only humans dive into complete hopelessness and despair, and end their lives. Why? Because incessant thoughts, patterns, unconsciousness is driving us mad. Animals, in their natural habitat, are not bored. Their instincts are always on. They have no choice.

Humans have gut feelings, instincts, a sixth sense and more. But since we don't trust any of it and we forgot how to live, we escape the dilemma via one of the many available escape devices, such as the TV.

As humans, we are born with instincts, but have to learn most everything. If a language isn't learned at an early age, we can't speak. If a mother isn't present to teach a child about love, that child will not know how to love.

We continue studying for decades, about subjects as science, the world, philosophy, and calculus. We are masters in academia, but sadly, but we are never taught how to live and make use of our inner gifts.

Then perhaps around mid-life, we get restless and wonder if this is all there is to life. The soul starts waving flags ever more violently, trying to get our attention. The true call usually goes ignored. The soul's request is not for a hot, young lover, but this is what we set out to do—change our outer circumstances. We get hair implants, a boob job, a Porsche, or some other toy. Our bodies are slowing. Youth disappears. Perhaps there is a divorce. We don't want to get old. We don't know what to do without an attractive appearance, because inside, we are hollow. And we shun putting spices and flowers into that void.

Keeping the mind occupied with blurbs works for a while, but really, this isn't a way out. Sooner or later, we will pay the price for not looking within. The self, the soul, the

subconscious, on the other hand, does not give up. Our core wants us to experience life at its fullest. But we will do anything in our power to avoid knowledge of *self*. It's too scary.

Instead, we take pills, drink, eat, shop, smoke, or seek entertainment.

Life should be a celebration, but many view life as a chore. Because we don't know our inner capabilities, we use and abuse substances to get a thrill.

Delving into the realm of possibilities and creating or exploring who we really are is pure bliss. We are much more than mere brain; we are beautiful, incredible beings with unbelievable powers and access to worlds of vast consciousness. We are pure consciousness. Pure vibrating energy, connected to everything on this planet. We are part of the universe, and it is part of us. The universe can accomplish amazing things for us if we let it. It wants us to have a blast. But to do that, we have to use the mind correctly, as the creative tool that it is, to visualize and create life.

See yourself in the life that you always wanted, with the right partner, the fulfilling job or business, the horse, the dog, and the yard. See it, feel it, really want it, visualize it, and it will be yours. Believe in the powers that were given to you. The power of using the mind as a tool, rather than a thought machine that drives you nuts.

You are not a slave to your mind. The mind is there to serve you. What you create in your *inner* will be reflected in the outer world. It is law. So, focus on those things you want, have unwavering faith that they will come to you, know that you deserve those gifts, expect them, and be ready to receive. Don't let negative or limiting thoughts creep in and destroy your desires. Be stronger than the ever-present ego shouting that you are not good enough and not deserving. Silence those restraining voices. Be the master of your mind and fill it with pictures of how you want your life to look.

Believe in the power of consciousness, the true you that has been waiting patiently for your activation.

*Luke 17:20-21 (King James Version)*

20: And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation:

21: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

The kingdom is you. It's in you. There is no difference between the world out there and the world inside. I realized this during the Gateway Voyage meditation retreat at the Monroe Institute in Virginia. As above, so below. As within, so without. It is all one. We are one with the universe and therefore – the kingdom of God or heaven is within *you*.

### **Being and Receiving**

Through yoga, meditation, chanting and visualization we can access more of the core waiting inside. This is not some freak concept only hippies in Birkenstock shoes can pursue. It's not ridiculous, as the media has taught us to believe. It is what humans should do in life. We have traveled to the moon, sent spacecraft to Mars, and gained great scientific knowledge, but the last frontier, our deep inner being, we have not explored. It remains untouched, feared, and, in many ways, ridiculed. We are supposed to believe that we are only bodies with a rational brain. Consciousness is supposed to be an illusion. I think we know better by now. It is time to activate all we have and stop living in the Middle Ages because really, as humans, as beings, we have not progressed an inch in a thousand years. We probably know less about our inner beings now than when the first witches were burnt at the stake.

Enlightenment is not reserved for just a few blessed ones. It is the epitome of human accomplishment, at least in the East. In India, becoming Buddha-like is considered a possible achievement. In the West, Christian and Jewish religions have no focus on average beings attaining enlightenment. To control the masses by instilling guilt is what is being pursued. People are believed to be inherent sinners, and they are, in the churches' eyes. When natural instincts are suppressed, it's logical that people become labeled sinners. Celibacy isn't natural. Being sexual is. Did Jesus, the enlightened being, intend to turn people into guilt-ridden victims? Did his original word say to abstain, to feel guilty? Jesus preached about light and love, acceptance and respect. Did Jesus really want the Catholic Church to kill eighty million people in the name of the cross? The cross that killed him?

I am not saying we should drop it all and attempt to become gurus, but enlightenment should be somewhere on our list of priorities. Perhaps the Egyptians, the Incas, and the Mayans were more evolved than we are. Perhaps they used powers we also possess but have forgotten about. We could access these powers if we went within, by meditating, reflecting, being still. Is buzz a mere strategy used to keep us from exploring what's within?

We only have this one life to live, and to live it right; as I said earlier, even if you believe in reincarnation you will never come back as the same person again.

Humans are using and abusing animals, the planet, other humans, jobs, food, our bodies, and our minds. The path away from *ego* will be the most amazing journey for us and the rest of the world. We have built an amazing system in the West, but at the cost of our sanity and spirituality. However, we are still amazing beings, and once spiced up with awareness, we can move mountains. The recipe for success is to be in the present moment as often as we can.

How can you access this consciousness? It's easy to explain, but difficult to accomplish. Stop your mind, and you are there. That's right, be in the present moment; set past and future aside; just reside in the present moment. Try it for a minute or so. You will notice your mind creeping in, not allowing you to focus on the flowers on the sidewalk, the pictures on your wall, or your sleeping cat. Your mind was designed to jump from A to B to C and back again, and such unruly minds have serious issues with shutting off. Thoughts drives us mad and they are a waste of time.

You simply *are*. The real you, the absolute truth, is beyond *mind* and beyond *body*. This pure consciousness is your biggest potential. Explore this infinite awareness. *Mind* is a great tool that helps rationalize and analyze, but it can be a foe when trying to meditate, sleep, focus, or rest, as your thoughts never stop racing.

You can remain alert doing whatever you are doing; you can go about your day and remain aware. Alertness is not something that you do; alertness is something that you create inside yourself. What you are doing is not important. Just do it in a luminous way. Do it consciously and aware, remembering that you are doing it. You can chat with friends, sit alone at the beach, go shopping, or go to a temple; it does not matter. What you do is not the point; the point is to do it consciously.

While walking your dog, become the walk. Observe the moment. Be the moment. Your mind will drift, perhaps, to work, or past conversations, or an argument. Bring it back when you catch it drifting, back to the moment. The current moment is all you will ever have. The past is gone. The future is yet to happen. But the present moment is right here for you to take and remember. It is then, when you are in a meditative, present state, that you can receive

creative input and guidance from the universe. Such information is from the Source and can be trusted. It is pure.

The ego does not live in the present moment and does not speak the truth of the moment. The ego can only be in control of what it knows. The ego's information is based on what it recalls from the past, or what it has planned for the future, based on the reproduction of past data, which means more of the same. The ego is *mind*, and *mind* is your worst enemy.

Most of us have had a glimpse of *no mind* in the past, whether consciously or unconsciously. People go to great lengths to have present-moment experiences. Jumping out of an airplane, doing a 360 on a snowboard, or going bungee jumping will force the mind to be present. The great adrenaline rush, with the accompanying few seconds of stillness of the mind, contributes to a great and memorable experience.

The moments in which you felt presence, love, or beauty may be the ones that flash through your mind on your deathbed. I sincerely doubt you will be counting money and toys in the last few moments in your body. What you do reflect on will most likely be the moments in which you felt deep joy and love. When you stand before God, the universe, all there is, it will matter whether you mostly screwed people over, or gave love.

The movie *Citizen Kane*, directed by and starring Orson Welles, presents a fictional account of the life of William Randolph Hearst, the successful newspaper magnate. On his deathbed, Kane utters the word "rosebud". Overzealous reporters begin a race to discover the meaning of the word rosebud, only to discover it was the nickname for his boyhood sled. That was the most profound memory he *felt* on his deathbed. None of the money, the planes, the cars, and the arm candy meant as much to him as did rosebud. He was most likely very much in the present moment when he sled down the hill on his beloved toy.

Dwelling in the present moment, meditating, and visualizing appear to be natural things to do, but few people master them. You could be sitting in a luscious tropical forest in Brazil, surrounded by the most amazing species, but you might miss it completely because your mind is recycling thoughts about the budget meeting that is booked for your first day back in the office. You may be able to say that you've been to Brazil, but you weren't really there. Then once in that budget meeting, the female vendor representative may turn your brain to mush and have you imagining all sorts of sexual fantasies. Again, the dreaded budget meeting happened, but you were not present. Chances are that if you ended up in bed with the hot vendor chick, you would again not be "there", because most likely you'd spend the entire time worrying about being caught or found out by your girlfriend.

Meditation can help you stay focused and calm, get to know *self*, stay with one thought, and eventually stay with no thought. Meditation does not mean sitting in a dark room in silence, staring at a candle flame. Anything done mindfully and with presence is meditation. Mastery of meditation, just like anything, is not achieved overnight. And visualization makes thoughts your servants; they are there to get you what you want. The combination is unbeatable.

You can always cancel membership in the self-induced stress camp. Even if you don't see the light at the end of the tunnel, a step in the right direction, the direction toward your inner self, can always be made. And this can help us all become human again.

The effects of meditation, measured in a study entitled "Effects of group practice of the Transcendental Meditation program on preventing violent crime in Washington DC," were shown to be significantly beneficial. Based on the results of the study, the long-term effect (steady state gain) associated with having a permanent group of four thousand participants in

Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi programs was determined to be a 48 percent reduction in homicide, rape, and assault crimes in the District of Columbia.

Once a critical mass of people turns away from buzz, and instead enters the real world and their own beings again, life on the planet is bound to improve. And if we focus on getting less government and more freedom with more peace, the outcome has got to be one that's in our favor. If the masses were to realize the shenanigans we have succumbed to, we would get the chance to create the world we are supposed to have. An enlightened mind, using the full potential of human *self*, can change the world rapidly.

### **Debbie and Johnny, Upgraded**

Remember “Debbie” and “Johnny”?

Just to illustrate what the introduction of a little meditation and mindfulness will do, check out how their lives changed in just a little bit under a year.

Debbie had become quite the connoisseur of meditation and visualization. She manifested more time, love, and money into her life and lived more mindfully. Even her husband participated, desperately seeking more meaning in his life. The couple joined a local yoga and meditation center and regularly listened to various Hemi-Sync CDs (see [www.monroeinstitute.org](http://www.monroeinstitute.org)) in order to go deeper and deeper within. Hemi-Sync relaxes the brain waves using a mix of binaural beats and music. Their friends were blown away by the changes they witnessed in the couple in just a few weeks. Constant reinforcement of new principles was necessary initially, until their new habits became routine. A slower pace and increased mindfulness manifested gradually. Instead of living in the fast lane, the couple slowed down to acceptable human speeds. They took what they learned to heart.



In place of roosting on the couch or madly staying connected to the office 24/7, the couple went into the wild for mindful walks, realizing another world existed out there. They rarely turned on the idiot box nowadays. Instead, the couple had carefully started to restructure their lives. They focused on positive, creative thinking, because thoughts become things. They kept visualizing mutual, wholesome goals. The couple made it a habit to live with an attitude of gratitude. They thanked the universe for the gifts they had already received, instead of bitching and complaining about lack. The effort created more clarity and peace of mind. When being more still and connected, and less cluttered, a being is ready for guidance, for divine input.

While out in nature, they took in the beauty. They stayed in the moment. They started seeing the trees, the lake, and the flowers, instead of simply running by them. Mother Earth is beautiful and has amazing powers. She is creation. Staying in the present moment was the name of their new game. Of course, their minds wandered, but practice makes perfect.

One day Debbie marveled at the sun reflecting off Lake Michigan, the amazing beauty of flowers, and the nearby squirrels running up and down the trees. “They look fat,” she thought. “Prepared for winter.” She reminded herself to simply observe. But then, after a while, her mind wandered back to her work, to Monday’s upcoming early morning conference call. She was supposed to prepare another presentation, but lacked the data; the VP was a moron for not providing the proper information to her. Once again, she wondered how that person had become the VP.

She startled, and brought her mind back to the present. This process of becoming distracted and then returning to the moment repeated itself again and again. She knew how

petty these thoughts and worries were, and how little they mattered. Meditation made her realize how pointless it was to burn up valuable time fixating on trivialities.

The meditations affected Debbie and Johnny's eating habits too. The more aware they became, the less junk they devoured. An awareness of their bodies and minds set in. Johnny realized his body was a temple, and that his daily drives to McDonald's were not contributing to his overall health. In the process of gaining awareness he lost weight simply by treating food as medicine. Before eating, he said "I love you" to his food and ate it with respect, slowly and mindfully. He now knew that what he had been putting in his body not only caused weight gain, but also affected his mind and soul.

He further grasped that alienating his workmates contributed nothing to his happiness, and that work was much more fun when colleagues were included and appreciated. Gradually, he started to spend time talking to his cubicle neighbors, instead of resenting everyone for reasons he didn't even know. His heart opened. Because he started giving to people and including them, he received gifts in return. Workmates opened up to him. Work actually became fun. The result was more positive, good energy all around. It is true that energy flows where attention goes.

What had seemed like a dead-end marriage headed for divorce was turned around 180 degrees. Just a few months back, Debbie was on the verge of calling it quits and filing for divorce. Back then, she had lost all hope of reconciliation, until one day the couple joined a meditation class. Little by little, as they started communicating, the love she thought was long lost slowly flowered again. Of course, that Tantra course the couple attended in Los Angeles pushed the healing process to even higher levels.

The two talked about issues and feelings buried under piles and piles of resentment. The conversations came from *heart*, not from the head. Love, tenderness, and intimacy returned to their overpriced condo. Arguments about money and their careers moved into the background. The focus shifted to more important, human topics. Suddenly, home life, their relationship, and their health moved to the foreground. A deep overall satisfaction and fulfillment set in. Work was less of a chore; Johnny treated it with lightheartedness. Debbie was more relaxed, yet effective and confident, applying her new ideology at work.

Just recently, the couple started discussing starting a vegan café in the neighborhood, and calling an end to their corporate lives. With the right energy flowing, the sky is the limit, literally. Surely, the plan will come to fruition. Love is the creator of all good things.

The human mind that can be a *prison planet*.

According to Lao Tzu, knowing others is wisdom; knowing yourself is Enlightenment.

## Endnotes

\*All names have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals.

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Wishing you the very best for your path to humanness!

Suzanne Meier