

**NOW RUDE THAN BEFORE**

THE TOTALLY REVISED AND UPDATED NATIONAL BESTSELLER



**SHWETABH GANGWAR**



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RUDEST  
BOOK EVER**

**POWERFUL PERSPECTIVES TO FREE YOUR MIND**

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# The Rudest Book Ever

Powerful Perspectives to  
Free Your Mind

Shwetabh Gangwar





*I dedicate this book to the two people I admire the most in my life – my mom and my wife. I thank my mom for her strength that protected the child I was. That protection allowed me to shape the individual in me. I thank my wife for her strong determination and values in life, which influence that individual to become better.*

# Introduction

A small yet important introduction:

This book is a collection of ideas, principles and perspectives.

It is written out of love for humans to be able to avoid humans.

This book does not mean to teach but teaches all the time nonetheless, which is an ode to how humans function.

I dare you to be offended by this book.

It is not ‘the rudest book ever’ but nobody had claimed that prior to this. Superlatives are stupid. Rudeness that is intended and forced is childlike and childish. Rudeness is spicy and delectable only when it is interpreted from indifference, not intended.

The ideas in this book can completely change your life or not change anything at all.

You are an anime character. I have talked more about it in the book. Read it.

If you start this book, finish it. Even if it takes twenty years. Even if whosoever gifted you this book is long gone from your life, has crossed the river Styx and into the gates of hell, please, finish it.

Here is a cool quote in case you need to be convinced of this book’s depth: ‘I think, therefore I am, but if I think *well*, then who am I?’

This is not going to be a very deep book; after all it is about practical learnings. About making slight changes in the way you see things, which may help you avoid a lot of headache. Deep thoughts require understanding, practical thoughts require application. This book is about the latter, which is not to say that it won’t have anything deep in it, but that is not the objective of this book.

I might be lying about the above.

Enjoy the book.

## Products and Persons

Hey, buddy, how are you doing? Aren't you glad that you bought this book? Well, we are going to go on a journey together. As long as you are reading this book, I will be your friend. The only case in which this doesn't apply is if you have illegally downloaded this book, in which case, go fuck yourself.

Let me give you an introduction of the world you have been brought into: this world doesn't care about you, not because it has an attitude problem but because of the rules by which it works. Those rules are not geared towards making you happy nor any of the billions of homo sapiens in it. Also, it is filled with people who will come in the form of friends, lovers, well-wishers, emotional parasites, attractively packaged dreams, aspirational lollipops and as saviours, fixers and salespersons. At the desired moment, a lot of them will take advantage of you – emotionally, financially, physically or in other ways possible.

Such experiences in those moments will turn your world upside down. This will most definitely happen; history tells you that, no matter who you are or what you do – rich, talented, genius, pretty, strong, powerful, polite, kind and careful. It doesn't matter. By the way, not all people are going to be like that. Some are going to be kind to you, most of whom you are going to ignore, probably – depends on you.

Do you feel prepared?

Let's start with *you*: in this world, you are a product with hope attached to it. That means it is expected of you that one day you will transform into a smart, able unit capable of choosing jobs, careers, relationships and environments for yourself. The better those choices, the better a product you are – that is how, in general, homo sapiens judge the social worth of an individual. Not very bright, I know. In short, when you grow up, it is expected that you would become great at decision-making.

Here are a few things about people:

- **A person is not born ready.**
- **A person has to be made ready.**
- **A person is emotional by nature.**

- **A person does not know how to learn in the beginning** (as a child).

It knows how to absorb, copy and mirror behaviours, language, speech, accent, inflections, ideologies, attitudes, and things that it comes across. It learns by absorbing from its surroundings. This applied to you too when you were a kid.

- **Every person has to learn HOW TO LEARN.**

Absorbing is not a great method for the long-term development of decision-making abilities, but it is useful at the very beginning (when thou art a kid). As a tiny kid, our brain has superhuman learning abilities – one can learn several languages – but also the reasoning abilities of a puppy or a cow. So learning is great, but ‘understanding’ is a problem area. That is why one has to learn HOW TO LEARN. Otherwise, kids who learn toxic behavioural patterns, ideologies and harmful ways of looking at certain things (or people) from their environments won’t ever be able to unlearn them.

The more a person holds on to what they have learnt in their childhood – the old ways – the harder it becomes for them to develop HOW TO LEARN. The new and unfamiliar is harder to accept out of fear, prejudice and lack of openness.

HOW TO LEARN can be brokered into three things: a) being open to learning new things, thinking in new ways and experiencing new environments (openness); b) throwing away the old ways when needed (detachment and unlearning); and c) figuring out new and more efficient ways to solving things (problem solving and ingenuity).

A lot of people fail to let go of their biases and prejudices. Perhaps you have seen this in your parents or relatives (grown-ups) with regard to their strict black-and-white approach to things like career, jobs, business, race, religion, relationships, marriage, sexuality, etc. You might think that they don’t want to change, that they are ignorant or prejudiced. The truth is, they weren’t taught HOW TO LEARN in their childhoods just like, I am assuming, you weren’t either. And also, they never cared to learn it because there is a high chance that they have no idea what it is. Most people don’t.

- **A person can think but does not know HOW TO THINK.**

How to think basically means you have a habit of analysing information in an objective manner. Not all information. It's humanly not possible to analyse all information that enters your brain. But the information that matters, that engages in opinions about some human being, about society, about some system. Before accepting the claims made by people about themselves or x y z, you like to think about them first by looking at them objectively. Like a car mechanic would. To verify the claims made about a car.

Some basic tenets of HOW TO THINK are: a) you don't blindly rely on some friend or a group of humans to tell you what to think; b) you don't blindly rely on the group norms from where you come or currently stay to tell you what to think; c) you don't excessively rely on some bearded or non-bearded online replacement of your parents to tell you the same either. Some of you may think, 'I don't listen to my friends, society or what the internet tells me either. I am an InDePenDeNt cRiTicAl tHiNkEr.'

No. That's why I said a car mechanic. A decent car mechanic is knowledgeable, skilful and experienced. That helps them to a) accurately judge the state of the parts or claims in terms of durability and long-term use; b) make assessments about car parts by considering multiple scenarios, for example, different terrains, weather, climate, temperature – hence, using multiple perspectives; and c) recognize patterns from previous problems on which they have worked. Serious stuff, I know. Before you call yourself a critical thinker, compare yourself to a good car mechanic. You have to be in thinking what they are with cars.

An actual critical thinker is never fully sure, has doubts and knows no matter how many patterns they can recognize, the correlations may turn out to prove nothing, and they can be wrong. A critical thinker would be much closer to a self-aware scientist than an ignorant, highly confident person lacking knowledge to even qualify to have a reasonable opinion on that subject. In psychology, this is called the Dunning–Kruger effect (the less a person knows, the more confident they are, hence, we are confident idiots). Thinkers always start from the point of 'I don't know', whereas idiots start from 'I know'. That's an important difference.

A majority of homo sapiens make decisions about their lives using 'what to think'. Two reasons: one, humans don't like to think very much, and two, they like things that are simple to understand and FEEL right. Remember: *FEEL*. At times they don't even have to comply with common sense, logic,

data or nuance. In psychology, how people think is explained by heuristics (mental shortcuts we use to understand things), schemas (subjective frameworks people create in their minds to understand things) and an array of cognitive biases and fallacies (mental boo-boos we make in thinking).

What is simple and *FEELS* right makes sense to us on an emotional level. Because it fits like 2+2, whereas life is like: ‘why is 2? for what reasons did you pick 2? and 2 is not what you perceive it is.’ What *feels right* satisfies us emotionally; therefore, the need to question it logically does not usually arise in our minds. It *feels* like the right answer. ‘What to think’ is what we are taught in our childhood and what *FEELS* right can be taught to you anytime in your life.

‘What to think’ taught to us during our childhoods is: our parents (inspired by what they were taught, their experiences and fears) and our environment (what the society you belong to thinks, what your group thinks; economic conditions of your geographic location; religious influences; historical experiences your society had; historical experiences of your group; what the government tells you; what the TV shows, movies, etc., tell you; and the prevalence of freedom of art and speech in your culture).

By the way, your group can be a race, religion, sect, caste, nationality, region-based, political ideology, philosophical, sports, superheroes, anime, or any goddamn thing. Humans love groups. Humans create groups out of food and make that their prime identity. If a stream of water divides a land into two parts, humans on either side will form a group based on that, name their groups, and at some point, go to war over real estate or apples, or because of some young insecure psychopath wanting to prove himself by mass murdering, whom history would, thenceforth, refer to as a great commander and leader.

‘How to think’ becomes a serious problem with groups. Individual thinking often has problems with groupthink, challenges groupthink and heavily disagrees with groupthink.

- **A person’s emotional responses are one of the first ways of how they learn about things.**

Your emotional responses to different experiences create interpretations of those experiences. Those interpretations become your opinions and information about those things. Children learn about things mostly by how

those things make them feel. Whatever those learnings are, they believe them to be true. Therefore, emotional responses become one of the first teachers of the person.

- **Emotional response is a garbage teacher.**

Children are socially, mentally and emotionally undeveloped. Their emotional responses to things can be highly overwhelming, misleading and can lead to permanent changes in their behaviour, for example, experiencing toxic stress during childhood.

- **Because a person learns by absorption, parents and environment become the other teachers.**

Instead of trying to teach the person how to think, (most) parents and surroundings enforce ‘what to think’, thereby becoming terrible teachers themselves.

- **Teaching ‘what to think’ restricts the person from learning ‘how to think’.**

Devoid of how to think, people view what they have learnt from their parents, environment and emotional responses as the truths of life – drawing large conclusions from limited data.

In conclusion, the product is very likely to be screwed. The product is you.

## **Familiarity and Unfamiliarity**

Imagine growing up in a place where you only interacted with people of one group, were fed a single belief system that dictated how to live your life, and were told what is acceptable and what is not. Also imagine that they had unkind notions about women or people from other groups, cultures, belief systems or countries. When you teach that to children, it would be an example of teaching somebody ‘what to think’.

At some point, you will face problems, be in environments or situations which are not covered by what you were taught. ‘How to think’ is not only critical thinking but also creative thinking. One who is used to thinking

critically and creatively can find ways to adapt in unfamiliar situations and environments. Those who don't will fall back twice as hard on what they were taught and may isolate themselves into loneliness. *What to think* is making someone memorize the answers, *how to think* is giving them the ability to create answers.

In social psychology, there is something called belief perseverance or backfire effect. Backfire effect takes place when somebody's beliefs are challenged, attacked or even factually addressed in a manner that is meant to correct them. You would think that in the presence of facts and evidence a person would abandon what they believe, right? Well, some do but a lot of people don't. On the contrary, their belief becomes stronger. One who has only ever relied on 'what to think' has not been taught the importance of unlearning.

Their beliefs can become unchangeable ideas, biases, prejudices and practices that the individual no longer wants to abandon or frankly cannot abandon because the bias has taken such deep roots in their mind. You also join groups which further cement those ideas because the point of the group is that you all think the same, which means if you change or doubt those beliefs, you risk losing all benefits of the group, risk losing your best friends, risk becoming ostracized, lonely, friendless and probably disliked by them. The social benefits one receives from being in tight groups is called social capital – humans need this for various profitable reasons. Believe it or not, groups come with a LOT of social benefits. Why do you think humans are social animals!

Based on people who are either taught how to think or what to think, these are the results:

- An adult brought up on 'what to think' tends to follow ideas, ideologies and ways of living that have a relationship with familiarity. Familiarity is 'what to think' – what they were taught. Familiarity is safe and comfortable to homo sapiens.

(Note: The above is a general definition of familiarity. One can find comfort in climbing steep hills without any ropes but that is not the general case.)

- An adult brought up on 'how to think' tends to question and is open to abandon ideologies and ways of living that have a relationship with familiarity. Familiarity, although safe and warm, does not guarantee

soundness. By the way, I am not saying familiarity is bad. Familiarity is also happiness, nostalgia, family and a choice. But then unfamiliarity isn't bad either; on the contrary, it is good; one must explore the unfamiliar territories as much as one can before making the return to the familiar if one chooses to do so.

- An adult brought up on ‘what to think’ tends to feel threatened by new ideas, changes or people, which may push them more towards what they are familiar with.
- An adult brought up on ‘how to think’ when confronted by new ideas or alien people takes an interest in understanding them. They neglect the first reactions, stereotypes and general pushback their mind creates. They are not threatened. Practising ‘how to think’ over the years maintains curiosity and an investigative attitude. Whatever is new or alien becomes food for thought.
- An adult brought up on ‘what to think’ leans heavily towards asking others for help for their problems rather than relying on their own thinking. This explains the insatiable demand for self-help books, the lack of self-reliance in people and the rise of ‘clever’ people online teaching how to be successful – a man, a millionaire, a strong woman, smart, clever, slick, handsome and beautiful, all at once.
- The person practising ‘how to think’ will try to find solutions by giving equal consideration to thinking on their own as well as asking for help. To expand the scope of their knowledge, they will read books, watch videos, gather information or seek therapy. Knowledge contains perspectives and information, and the cultivation of critical thinking requires collecting as many perspectives as one can.
- Lastly, one can be deprived of parents, but they are only one of the teachers. The various factors that come under environment can still teach us ‘what to think’.

Basically, ‘how to think’ cannot be self-taught during the developmental years of a person. You may cite a few exceptions, but this book isn’t about exceptional people, it is about people.

## **The Role of Parenting**

Why are parents largely producing products that are unprepared to face the challenges of this world? It is an extremely important question and a fantastic one because it sits on the assumptions that:

- All parents wanted to be parents in the first place. (Well!)
- People who became parents were mentally prepared to be parents. (Yikes)
- People who became parents were mentally fit to be parents. (You tell me.)

We take the above assumptions for granted. Take them away and you'd probably want to take children away from a lot of parents. How many of your friends who are parents are brutally honest with you about how they actually feel? How many of them are reading child psychology, parenting, how to parent and how many are simply winging it out of overconfidence?

We feel unworried because of the assuring feeling the word 'parent' contains. Makes you think of responsible grown-ups with accountability. It's just a silly word association. The same people could be highly abusive, controlling, careless, unavailable, inappropriate and disturbingly unprepared.

Do you know how many reasons there are for having a child? One can become a parent because the guy forgot to pull out, or the girl, out of some ancient, primitive urge, commanded the guy to not pull out, or because he believed he had pulled out, but the result said otherwise. People have babies because they like the idea of having babies or because lately they have been feeling incomplete, or because they are hoping it will make their lives purposeful again. People have babies because it is the right age or the right time according to society, religion or culture. People have babies as a strategy to save their marriage or because one of the partners wanted and the other complied. People have babies so the baby can elevate their status or fulfil the unfulfilled dreams of either of the parents. People have babies because they are bored. There is a great chance that you were born from one of those reasons.

You are bringing life into this world; that person is going to grow and contribute in so many ways to this world. They are going to vote, follow ideologies, make money, find love, marry and do a lot of other things, like write horrible poetry in their teens. In case they are not a responsible

person, they might hurt a lot of people too. And if they grow up to be a douchebag, parents, in some ways, are responsible for hurting all the people that douche is going to hurt. If they grow up to be a follower of ideologies that talk about hurting humans, then parents too are responsible for creating one more follower (not in all cases, relax).

The question is: how much forethought goes in the minds of parents about the baby before having a baby? If the prime motivation is: ‘A baby is a cute little thing that will change our lives,’ well, that is grossly insufficient motivation.

Sufficient motivation ought to create panic and shall sound something like: ‘WE ARE CREATING A HUMAN, ARE WE MENTALLY FIT AND PREPARED TO BE SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR A PERSON? IF NOT, SHALL WE NOW START TO UPGRADE OUR THOUGHTS, LIFESTYLE, PERSPECTIVES AND KNOWLEDGE BY READING AND LEARNING FOR THE SAKE OF THE YOUNG PERSON’S OVERALL DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR PERSONALITY?’

Yes, you are supposed to read the above screaming.

Parents have one of the strongest influences on the foundation of the personality of the child. To prepare the child, parents should prepare themselves first. Unfortunately, homo sapiens in general aren’t so big on this one. Why? Because parents have jobs, relationships, responsibilities, dreams, aspirations, bills to pay and reality. Dreams like a bigger house, material possessions and secrets to de-ageing. At the same time, they have to deal with their dreams and aspirations dying – dreams like the career and job they could not have and aspirations that came out of jealousy and envy. Additionally, they have to watch television or whatever content the newest addictive streaming service is offering. The shows are good. They can’t miss them. Now these shows do take a lot of the free time in which they could have educated themselves, maybe? Then there is also YouTube, livestreaming, metaverse and the newer fantastic soul-sucking renditions of these. In the future, lack of self-educating will be declared an epidemic by the governments. To finish reading a book will be considered a great achievement. There will be public service ads on these streaming and gaming services illustrating the benefits of reading. I am joking! They don’t want you to read! In the list of other things taken more importantly are politics; choosing left wing or right wing; battling ageing; hair falling out; noticing deepening wrinkle cracks below the eyes in front of the mirror for

hours; dealing with their own parents, bosses and gradually accepting your existential insignificance. Parents, nay, humans have it hard.

The ‘perfect parents’ would be very wise and exist mostly in movies. Bad parents, however, exist in great numbers. For example, parents who believe they do not need to learn anything because they already know everything – a dangerous assumption that comes from a frightening lack of self-awareness. And then there are really bad parents.

## Success, Status and Sensibility

The style of parenting we usually get is: a) protect the child from accidentally killing themselves or hurting themselves; b) keep them fed; c) try to discipline them; d) get them an education; e) teach them right and wrong by means of distributing punishment that depends on the culture you and your parents are from; f) blindly hope that one day the kids will become capable of taking care of themselves.

Education is a big one. Parents choose and focus on education as the tool that will make the child capable of taking care of themselves one day. But what does that really mean though, getting educated? For what purposes are we getting educated – getting a job, the cultivation of the mind or both? Did you ever have this conversation with your parents?

Parent: ‘You need to study. You have to get into this x y z college or university. It is extremely hard to get into. You need to get serious and start studying very hard every day.’

Kid: ‘Why?’

Parent: ‘I just explained to you why.’

Kid: ‘I mean, what am I studying for? What am I studying towards? Why do I want to go to this x y z university?’

Parent: ‘Because that place is the best. Your uncle or a b c person went to this place and look how well their life turned out. They are doing great. Big house, lots of money, happy family, expensive cars. You will have the best future there. The best jobs. You will earn great money.’

Kid: ‘Is that what an education is for? To become employable?’

Parent: “Employa – I am talking about your future, son. I am talking about life. How will you take care of yourself? Your mom and I will not be there to put food on your table forever!”

Kid: ‘Well, I am talking about education. Is that the purpose of education? To earn *money*? The word education doesn’t sound like it meant

*moneymaking lessons.* Being educated sounded like I would learn something, grow as a person because of it and become someone who knows about life and things. That an educated person would be someone whom people would approach seeking advice; they would expect some sense out of their mouth. Isn't that what education is for?’

Parent: ‘You get an education to become somebody. Good education will get you a good job. It's a tough world out there, kid. People are working hard day and night; if you don't, you will be left behind. Do you understand that or not?’

Kid: ‘I guess I do. What you are saying is that I should get an education so that I can get a good job which will automatically make me capable of handling all types of problems no matter how complex or nuanced, right Dad?’

Parent: ‘High ho thunder, my son.’

Kid: ‘Don't know what that means, so I am going to ask once again: even matters concerning complex emotions, long-term happiness, purpose and meaning of life beyond the material? All of this would be easy to answer once I have a good job?’

Parent: ‘Yabba dabba doo. Just like a magnet is attracted to a pole, once you have a good job, you won't need to worry about anything else. Look at me! Would I be telling you this if I didn't know myself? Just trust me, son.’

Kid: ‘Okay, Dad. Since I am 14 and have no actual data about your intelligence and nor do I know any means of finding it out, and since I am not comparing your advice to what the empirical sciences say on this subject, I am going to assume you are the poster man for ideal parental advice and take everything you are saying as the word of the wise. A good job for me it is, high ho thunder!’

The above is not a real conversation. But it asks something real: the objective of education in the minds of humans should mean developing into a person capable of thinking about their own good (self-preservation), the social good (ethics) and the moral good (morality). It can't be getting skilled or knowledgeable at a b c d to get paid and acquire status. If it were that, why not call it training? Education infers intellectual development. Training doesn't. We should remove the word education and replace it with training. Not India's education system, but India's training system, America's training system, Japan's training system, Korea's training system; China already has one. Lol.

Parents want their kids to get ‘educated’. In reality, they want them to be trained at something to become successful, earn money, achieve status and marry and procreate. That’s the actual dream of most parents for their children. As humans, when we say a capable person, apart from successful, it should also mean a sensible being. But homo sapiens largely associate sensibility with status. Once a fellow human achieves status, we tend to assign all sorts of superhero-like qualities to them without evidence. Heck, we even worship humans like that. If one has achieved status in human society, it is collectively presumed that they have achieved sensibility too.

What is status? It is a mental process of separating homo sapiens on the basis of who owns more expensive things despite remaining the exact same amount of human. Status also includes achievements (society’s narrow way of differentiating winner and loser), looks (our biological need to look at pleasant things for sexual or aesthetic reasons) and power (a form of safety and feeling nice about having control over other humans).

Humans assume that one who has achieved status is sensible, intelligent, virtuous and superior. This gives way to arrogance, a whole lot of lying and lots of stupid people in positions of power pretending to be intelligent. The positions of status are big and powerful. Clearly, such a position holder must be sensible or otherwise they would have failed. DUH! Humans generally think like this: *stupid people* hold dumb and ordinary positions, and *sensible, smart people* hold big positions. Black and white.

People with status can be fools, thoroughly incompetent in decision-making, obscenely corrupt or even insane. But in public, if they ‘appear’ sensible, most humans are satisfied. How do they appear sensible? It’s not like we have a test for them. Anyone can pull it off. They simply have to follow the social cues humans associate with sensibility. That can be achieved easily by rehearsing, scripting, preplanning and being coached. At least that’s what most of your favourite politicians, celebrities, public and religious figures do. Acting in public.

The point is: status has very little to do with sensibility. Someone can become enormously successful and famous at what they do but that doesn’t guarantee sensibility, moral aptitude or decision-making abilities outside their work. Try to understand the difference here. I am not saying scientists are not sensible, but there is no guarantee that they are, either. You don’t know. Depends on the individual entirely. One can be hugely successful, skilled, smart, clever, creative at what they do and at the same time be

equally corrupt, socially inept, indecisive, gullible, immoral, petty, selfish, abusive, controlling, possessive, manipulative as the worst person you know. The question is: compared to successful, how much do humans care about teaching their kids to be sensible and moral?

What most parents attempt to do is prepare the kid technically, academically and skill-wise to be the best product. Like a car for a race. By the way, these are considered good parents in society; you don't have to ask them, they will tell you how great they are (a Don Rickles joke). What's scary is that they automatically assume that with success, they have prepared the kid to deal with the world emotionally and practically as well.

## **Age Does Not Mean Intelligence**

Suppose a style of parenting = x.

If you learn x without verifying its claims, without comparing it to scientific findings and learning the long-term results of x, then x would never grow, change or evolve. Who knows where x comes from, and who knows whether x is even a good thing to copy!

When parents copy x, they basically learn to play a character of a parent from that style of parenting. When a majority of people in a society are copying x, then most parents – even though they are different people – behave similarly. For example, jokes on Indian parenting are relatable to millions of Indians as though they all had the same parents. Similar stereotypes would apply to China or Nigeria or any other culture. When parents adopt sociocultural parenting styles or x, they broadly become the same character. At the end, it all boils down to 'how to think' and 'what to think'.

x teaches them that they can be perfect role models to their kids; that is until the child grows up and realizes that their parents too are confused just like everybody. We must understand this: because somebody is older does not mean that they have achieved wisdom. Most older people are children who have aged.

One of the stupidest things humans instinctively do is associate wisdom or intellect with ageing. Whether people choose to or not, they age. Nothing in the process of ageing ensures the development of intellectual capacity. You will remain ignorant if you don't actively work to develop sensibility. It is very hard work. You have to read, then unlearn, then learn how to learn, then question what you are learning, then develop theories, then challenge

those theories in the face of existing theories by the means of debates and reviews, then get humbled repeatedly and realize there are mountains of information that you will never be able to read on every subject, and much more is still unexplored, and the brain's power to compute information is very limited and so is time, and so many theories and information which you believed turn out to be wrong or lead nowhere. Oh my god!

What people achieve from ageing is experiential knowledge. Experiential knowledge is subjective and can be highly inaccurate for that very reason. Different people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, races, genders, religions, nationalities (and more variables) can have very different experiences of the same event. In other words, different people – based on what they believe, what they represent and what they look like – can have very different experiences, leading them to learn quite different things from the same events.

Through this book, I will gradually try to make you think and see things differently than you currently do. In all honesty, this is not going to be a deep book; it is about practical learnings. It is about making slight changes in the way you see things, which may help you avoid a lot of stress and negative thinking.

So, without wasting time, let us concern ourselves with better methods and mechanisms of dealing with situations that have happened to you, are happening to you and will happen to you.

## Specialness and Enlightenment

The idea of being special excites almost all of us. The degrees may vary from person to person, but we all get excited by the thought of receiving this box of love, value and attention. Why wouldn't somebody like that? You give them this box and they feel all great about themselves for a long time, like an evening or so. I mean wow. Imagine how great it must feel being told you are special by complete strangers or humans you have wanted to impress for a painfully long time. I imagine it must feel great. It is probably your parents whose approval you have longed for the majority of your life or your superiors and peers at work whom you may have felt overlooked your genius. Finally, after getting this box, one must begin to feel all is about to change, and it does change for a while but then everything goes back to how it used to be. It might create a strong possibility that you'd want it to happen again and again.

This might be a dangerous pattern of behaviour in which you rely on other people to gain any smidge of self-worth. When they don't give it to you, you feel terrible about yourself, doubt yourself at every step and even hate yourself. This could be certain authority figures, a group of people, a large group of strangers or fans or people you love. Because of this, you even allow certain people to emotionally abuse you, take advantage of you, repeatedly use you for their selfish wants and get away with it. BUT at least in that moment of getting the box of specialness from them, it feels great, right? I hope so.

### **Why We Need the Box of Specialness**

In very simple terms, this is how humans normally operate:

We are insecure, confused, empty and conflicted inside → we don't want to be → we become secure by changing, working on and accepting (ourselves) things that make us insecure → OR → we rely on *people* to tell us we are secure by changing and working on things that *they* will approve.

The above but in a slightly complex way:

We are insecure, confused and conflicted inside → we don't want to be →

we want to be strong, cool and in control → we pretend by copying and acting strong → by acting for strangers, we give strangers the power → for a very long time, we rely on strangers to tell us great things about ourselves so we can stop feeling insecure.

Slightly more complex:

We are insecure → a lot of times our parents make it worse → our limited understanding of who we are and lack of any potential self-discovery makes it harder → everybody pretends to be very sure about who they are and what they want → we believe them, so we pretend, too → the truth is we don't know, nor do they → we copy whatever is popular, and do what others are doing at the time → we become followers → we suppress our real emotions, do not say no as often as we should to certain activities and people, → saying no comes at the cost of disappointing others, being isolated, or cut off from the privileges → saying no comes with the fear of exposing that you were pretending → comes the option of self-improvement → calling it self-improvement but doing things to be accepted by others → OR breaking away from the pattern of pretending and pleasing people by accepting yourself, and improving in areas that require work.

And more:

We are insecure → we learn that solutions to insecurity are: be rich, have status, be attractive, have a gang, be a leader, an alpha dawg, have sex with random people and think that as achievement, look attractive, do things under the definition of cool, do things that the group you follow is telling you, not what the individual wants → we learn that secure people are ones with power, powerful jobs, political connections, at higher positions in organizational hierarchies → the things we learn have very little to do with what is inside of you and everything to do with outside; therefore, they somehow end up at status, power, money, women, looks, followers → later you find out people with status, power, money, women, looks, followers are highly insecure too → during our youth, we get into relationships with similarly-confused-but-pretending-not-to-be people and they amplify our insecurities → we get rejected and that too amplifies insecurities → your genetic composition, parenting, environment, self-belief and self-reliance matters a lot in how you deal with your insecurities → we become secure by changing, working on, and accepting (ourselves) things that make us insecure.

## **What Is Specialness?**

Some people are told they are special, some are told they are not, most tell themselves and some either do not care or don't have the luxury to – large parts of this world have either an enemy on their borders, or bombs dropping from the sky, poverty, dictatorship, unstable government, civil war, little to very small freedoms and so on. ‘Are we feeling special today?’ may not be their foremost agenda.

All perspectives considered, the word ‘special’ is not worth the time it takes to say it. But humans being humans, you want to feel special because you exist. Self-interest. Specialness exists only because the idea of self exists. And that causes major problems. The idea of self, in most cases, is controlled by *other* people’s opinions or standards. Let’s simplify it into a spectrum which ranges between three states of being:

### **1. Well-regulated self**

A well-regulated self is one that feels special without the need of relying on other people (except your children or loved ones). With time, you have learnt who you are and trust who you are. That means there is a very strong bond between you and yourself, which is far more important to you than the bond between you and the outer world. Because of that, you get the choice to distance yourself from seeking validation from the world. However, that does not mean you stop playing the games or have retired from the world. You care about your place in the game, in the hierarchy. You do have your eyes on the prize, but you have checked yourself out of the game of seeking or caring about what others think. You have achieved a level of self-control, which provides you freedom from human judgment.

The secret to achieving that is to first stop caring about all human praise. Once you are able to successfully see praise as equivalent to napkins at a restaurant or pubic hair at a urinal, you’d treat judgment the same way. In your dealings with the outer world, you place very low importance to their judgments and high importance to your original motivations to do those things.

You do care about building relationships, constructive criticism and bettering your strategy, but on terms that place you equally with others, not below or above them in existence. Nobody is your daddy or mommy whose approval would either make you complete or nothing. No audience,

spectators or numbers of likes, dislikes, comments decide who you are today. No classmates, group or work colleagues are the reason for the fire in your belly or why you push yourself. No ex-girlfriend or ex-boyfriend or that person is your ‘why’. You don’t care. You don’t even care enough to say ‘screw them’. If this is you, then what you have is a well-regulated self. Although, there is a high possibility that you think you are this person, but most likely you are not. It’s incredibly hard to detach ourselves even partially from what people think of us. A lot of people think they are detached, but they are either running away, emotionally suppressing or lying to themselves and feel every bit of negative emotions.

A well-regulated self could be a result of having very low neuroticism in personality traits. This can also be achieved by cognitive exercises like cognitive reappraisal (looking at your problems from different points of view and finding out that things may not be as bad as you were assuming), self-distancing (looking at your problems as if they aren’t happening to you but to someone called x, what advice would you give to x and then applying that advice in your own situation), introspection, emotion work, therapy and then placing filters, checks and mental exercises to stop you from instinctively seeking validation.

## **2. Trapped self**

This is where most of us are. Till we die. Or until the very end. As we move closer to our mortality, most humans begin to stop caring about what others think. It happens because, well, for one, when we get old most of those whose approval mattered to us in our youth are dead. Two, those approval chases turn out to have disappointing endings. Three, approaching death sets your perspectives right. It shows you that the majority of missions you had undertaken didn’t pan out as you had hoped, didn’t give you the satisfaction you were sold and didn’t matter at the end. What matters by the end is, what do your children think of you? Did you live a good life? Did you do good things for people? Are you satisfied with the state of relationship with your loved ones – your parents, children, brother, sister, old friends; you get the idea! You should read Socioemotional Selectivity Theory. It basically says that as humans get older, their perception of life changes substantially from chasing ambitions, money and desires to getting closer to family, friends, religion and mending relationships. You go from caring about superhero movies to

preferring movies about existence and meaning.

For the longest period, what we have is a trapped self. It's trapped because it is controlled majorly by what *others* think of you. The image they create is how you see yourself. Specialness or feeling special becomes satisfying the demands of either one person, a few people or groups of people. Are you doing things because you want to do them? Or do you do them because that is what others would like you to do and it would make them happy? *A trapped self* lives for others in so many ways. One can be highly individualistic, strong-willed at certain things, for example, decision-making in career, but at the same time highly dependent on others in how one sees and rates oneself. One must not forget that humans are complex.

### **3. Free self**

Free self is a state in which the concept of 'I' is simply dissolved like a company or a department that has been making nothing but losses. With the dissolution of 'I' goes away the need to look outside for anything. The focus is directed inwards. Wealth, love, kindness and happiness is received from inside. This is not the same as you being in touch with yourself or having a strong relationship between you and yourself. Both those things are good for you, but this is very different.

Free self is a state of you without an 'I'. You exist, of course. You can hear yourself in your mind, you can feel the emotions, you have a body that needs to eat, sleep, poop, pee and experience sexual arousal just like everybody. You feel love for your children, parents, friends and all beings. But your relationship with desires completely changes. The free self is achieved only by heightened intellectual and emotional work. The thoughts and emotions inside feel like a calm ecosystem existing in a peaceful symbiotic harmony. Imagine having great peace in you achieved through intense intellectual realizations and developing emotional maturity that can handle those intellectual realizations. Free self does not mean you don't need anybody, it means that you have become free of the desire of needing things to be complete. You can still have company, love people, have close friends, students, teachers, have a job you like, do charity. A free self in popular fantasy is understood as a lone enlightened samurai warrior who doesn't need anybody. We fictionalize things that appear cool in theory but aren't understood by us. Because humans need people so much, the fantasy becomes not needing anybody. Freedom from

something does not mean never having it again, it means being free from its control.

When you distance yourself from the ‘I’, the desire to occupy, own, achieve, seduce, dominate, judge, rule, control, be liked, loved, celebrated become like floating tabs on the screen of your phone. When you have a free self, you can objectively look at all these tabs that came with the operating system of ‘I’. What changes is, with the free self, accessing them is a choice. Before that, it was a mode of living. The free self does not have to be pure, sacred and saintly. You are free, that is all. One can still choose to be a multimillionaire for a joke or joy or comfort and not find any attachment to any of the wealth. Becoming free does not mean becoming anti-desire, becoming incapable of experiencing desire or becoming scared or hateful toward desires. Becoming free is having the ability to do whatever the mind chooses without any attachment and dependence to the outcomes. The outcomes don’t control and charm you any more. But you can still play whichever game you choose to. Pleasures are still pleasures, only except they don’t have the same hold on you as they did before. You are not defined by anything because ‘I’ does not exist. Desires in the face of that seem small, worthless and disappointingly limiting. With the death of ‘I’, your need to prove yourself to others dies too. Even then, a person still remains a person. Even with a free self, what a person chooses to do with that freedom depends on that individual.

The goal of this book is to give you perspectives which may help you go from a trapped self to a well-regulated self. Wanting to be special pushes you more towards the trapped self. You shouldn’t have yourself relying and depending on the outer world to feel worthy. It may feel great when that happens, but it will also crush you when it doesn’t. To move towards a well-regulated self, your mental goal is to develop indifference to both the word and emotion of feeling special. Having said that, one must also not forget that extremes are extremely stupid. As you distance yourself from this sweet, addictive substance called specialness, you can still enjoy certain aspects of it, which have very less to do with the outside world. Let us talk about them.

## **The Standards You Have**

Specialness can be a party just between you and yourself. For that to

happen, you need to create your own standards that indicate it is time to party.

This is how you currently value yourself: you look at the world, you see a definition of cool or competent, and then you compare yourself to it in order to see where you stand. The problem with this method is: the world can fool you. It can create nonsense standards, fake standards, exaggerated standards, toxic and unhealthy standards, unrealistic and dumb standards and then create completely new standards that crap on the last ones you worked so hard to achieve. After that, you sit wondering ‘What a nightmare! Who am I, what am I even running after and why? Because this crap is endless!’

At some point, a lot of humans living in safe and rich parts of the world feel this way because the standards that they have been comparing themselves to up until now were created by people back in the day in accordance with the needs of those times (economics and evolution) OR because of long continuing practices in large-scale societies (sociocultural traditions) OR because a few smart humans in advertising agencies made them up to sell you something.

You can almost never be enough, great, amazing, happy, satisfied or whatever as long as you are comparing yourself to standards of this world because people largely do not question them either. So, what we have is this:

1. You are living your life based on standards you have never really questioned but sort of accepted because everybody around you accepted them.
2. You have no idea where these standards have originated from.
3. Even if you have an idea about the origin, you don't know the history or conditions in which these standards were created.
4. Even if you learn the conditions in which they were created, you probably don't have the data from empirical sciences and critical thinking to cross-check, analyse and question whether these practices and standards are commonsensically good for humans or terribly moronic in terms of mental health and long-term satisfaction.
5. Even if you learn the negative effects of such standards, ultimately you may not have the balls to not participate because if you won't follow these standards, what are you going to follow? What is the alternative?

## The Standards You Create

You create your own standards based on three things:

1. What is considered good enough in this world in anything? Anything = skill, studies, achievements, job, money.
2. What makes you feel peaceful and happy in life?
3. What makes you feel peaceful and happy that has nothing to do with pleasing people, strangers, groups of strangers or people or friends?

A combination of these three are your doses of specialness. This is the standard you create for yourself.

The first point: the need to find what is considered *good enough* at what you do – why do you need this? Because you live in this world and want to avoid becoming delusional. So, you take that data to create your own standard. For example, let's say you are a painter; what would you consider good enough in the world of painting? I would imagine something that falls between the levels 6 to 8. By the way, when we talk of levels, we are talking about the *world* of painting, not your neighbourhood painting or the painting standards in your classroom. Level 6–8 in global standards. Data with regard to what levels 6 to 8 contain is available for anything you are doing. Aim for that. If you are between 6 to 8, you are good enough. You will make bread, dough, bank, cash, grub, coins, green and all sorts of money. On top of that, if you have natural talent, creativity, high IQ, grit, high socio-economic status, high trait consciousness, then depending on whatever you are doing, you may achieve level 8 easily. The important thing is instead of focusing on some person or the outside world, you focus on *self-assigned standards* created out of data from the outside world itself.

The moment comparisons and outside standards start overtaking, the control shifts back to the external world telling you how and when you will be complete. That control shall be yours. You define completeness for yourself.

A simple example of specialness is: 'I felt it when I *achieved* that.' 'That' can be anything which created confidence in you and made you believe that you are capable. If it came from outside praise, then please disregard it, omit it from your memory; we have to restart. Focus on achievements because achievements are great for your mind. There is plenty of psychological literature on that. It is also common sense. The awards, rewards, trophies, money and titles that come with achievements are

temporary, human-made and will be transferred to somebody else just as they were given to you. You deserve to feel special about your achievements because they are a realization that for a while in your life, not only did you control the demons inside you, but you made them work for you, you were the leader of your consciousness, and look what that produced – an achievement. Achievements are the evidence that convince you that you are capable, and it can be repeated whenever you set your mind and create the right settings. Very powerful. This thinking can change the course of your life – ‘I can do it because I control myself. No demon is above my rule.’ It goes without saying that achievements open new doors to opportunities, increase your socio-economic status and provide better care for those you love. Achievements can also be learning a new language, learning how to cook, how to sketch, how to paint – things done as a hobby or purely out of joy. Any achievement – personal or public – is a thing of uniqueness.

Another dose of specialness is the ability to find and maintain good relationships in your life. That is the prime ingredient for peace and long-term happiness in life. Achievements are great for the fighting spirit, but for the health of your emotions, you need to secure good, loving people around you. If you are a person who hasn’t achieved much in the material sense but has managed to secure a group of people who cherish you as much as you cherish them, then you have achieved a great deal too. In the market of life, there are multiple currencies one has to earn to be truly wealthy. Abundance in achievements but a deficiency in relationships is like owning expensive frames but no pictures or paintings. Good relationships don’t come by easily, they require a person to uphold certain moral codes, it takes admirable qualities such as kindness, loyalty, empathy and compassion for one to earn good friends. Money can buy company, not friendships. Company leaves as soon as the money dries up. A person’s character is what buys them friends. Good character is rewarded by trust, loyalty and support till the end. Achievements alone are a sign of a smart person, achievements with respect are a sign of a great person. Knowing that you have earned good friends and loving relationships and valuing them to not lose them, even when you are busy in life, must be celebrated. They are the source to peace and happiness. Allow yourself to feel special for earning them and keeping them well.

Lastly, consider yourself special in case you prioritize being kind over

being a douchebag to another human being. Some people may be naturally kind, but kindness does not come naturally to all of us. You have to entertain that if you don't practise kindness consciously, there is a strong chance that you are unknowingly unkind. Have you ever considered that you are probably unpleasant, rude, selfish, manipulative, or an annoyingly stupid person who thinks that they are very cool? Humans are social mammals. We cannot survive without a group, we develop psychological and physical illnesses, pretty serious fatal ones. We die without people. Therefore, it is accurate to presume stupidity about a person who thinks screwing others over or being mean and selfish is cool. They are killing themselves sooner without realizing it.

We think a lot of people around us are jerks. I bet you can easily name five right now, but have you ever thought whether five other people are putting you in their list too? The point is, we are very poor judges of who we are in reality. Of course, we would think our actions are justified or in case somebody is pissed off at us, there is a clear explanation for that. The awareness of knowing what impact you leave in other people's lives is very important for your soul. In this context, by soul I mean your moral being. It may not be developed, it may never develop fully, but it exists, and it collects, and it does impact you when you spend time with yourself. If not now, then someday it will visit you. The only way to find out that you are kind is when others tell you that – that is the simple tell-tale sign of it. If you call yourself a kind person but have rarely been identified so by others, then you are delusional and love yourself more than you should. Of course, kindness has nothing to do with pleasing others or being nice to gain selfish favours. Kindness is selfless. It is good behaviour. It is keeping your conscience clean. However, it does not teach you to bow, to be servile, to take abuse, to suffer bullying, or to not stand up for yourself, your family, your territory or your possessions. Kindness is a boundary one draws consciously out of care for all humans; if a certain someone does not respect that boundary, then beyond that lies warfare. Warfare does not mean violence but recognizing conflict and acting on that conflict based on your honour. Our closest cousins are chimpanzees with whom we share 96% of our DNA. You can learn many meanings of what human is but never forget that we are bi-pedal primates at the end. Kindness is a prayer for peace which one spreads to others, but it is not a prayer for others, it is for you. Understand that and you will remain calm and unbothered in the presence

of unreasonable chimpanzees in human forms too. And if you are able to fuse your kindness with inner peace, you might develop the ability of converting such chimps back to humans too. It's very powerful. And about that, you must feel a little special.

## This Is How You Don't Become Special

Others recognizing you, giving you attention, treating you differently out of personal motive or common backgrounds such as race, religion, caste, nationality, gender or whatever community you share does not make you special. Others should not make you special. Tell them to put all that energy and time to make themselves feel that way. You do you. If you can't, then you haven't consciously devised a way to make yourself feel better as of yet.

Humans in attempts to secure a romantic or sexual mate immediately, not only label the other person 'special' but do so without any evidence other than attraction. Men trying to get laid decide the other person is special because that would expedite the process. In this case, specialness = a) how attractive you are, b) emotional short-term bribery to achieve selfish motives. This is just an example. If you think about it objectively, the usage of this term goes all the way from achieving highly selfish things, incredibly stupid short-lived reasons, to showing admiration and love. Humans call you special to convince you of something, or to sell you something to get a favour, to manipulate or to genuinely express love and gratitude. In case someone is calling you special out of genuine admiration coming from selflessness, appreciate the sentiment in that moment and move on. Move on means forget it the very next second. It shouldn't belong to others because:

- a huge part of reasons behind somebody doing that could be highly selfish and manipulative. To them, you are not a person but a pawn to their goals.
- if you become dependent or assume they would always be this way to you, you might set yourself up for disappointment resulting in hurt. For example, *love bombing* in relationships where one partner in the beginning of the relationship creates a pattern of bombing the other partner with too much constant love, which later in the relationship

they take away.

- if you care about wanting someone to treat you special, then to get that specialness, there is a chance you are doing a majority of things that *they* like, which they approve of, not what you want to do. A lot of people are in relationships in which most of the things they do are what would make the other person happy, even though emotionally they feel drained and unhappy in doing those things. People sacrifice major life choices and dreams so they can get that specialness from someone.

The right to feel special must be earned and exclusively yours to give. There are people in this world who, despite having achieved and progressed a lot in their lives, receive no sense of specialness from themselves. They did it all to prove something to their parents, society, teachers or some confused homo sapiens who rejected them some time ago. Their achievements were fuelled by pressure of competition, culture and everything else but their own selves. Their lives, to this day, function on the principle that achievements and good performances are means to please those whom they have deemed gods: ‘If they are pleased by me, only then I am special.’

This is how their lives work:

- *Whatever I do, I do to prove to others that I can do it.*
- Soon afterwards, others are replaced by people they want to impress and look up to. *Whatever I do, I do to impress them.*
- You become a follower of such people and do everything to become like them. Think of your role models right now. Those professors, certain bosses or those high achievers in your family. The same applies.

A person who receives specialness from within believes in the following:

- *Whatever I do, I do to prove to myself that I can do it.*
- *Whatever I do impacts the world either in a small or big way; therefore, I shall do it well to impact the world for the better.*
- *Those who have power and achievements are sources of learning and*

*nothing else. They are not role models but humans. I know nothing about their lives except that they have learnt x y z well.* Admire the fact that they have learnt it, expect to learn the same from them and don't be a follower.

Don't label attention from anybody as something special. Stay with this rule. If you don't, then you risk becoming dependent on their words of admiration to feel good about yourself. Remember to treat praise from others as you would treat pubic hair at a public urinal. Enjoying praise is the start of the addiction of relying on praise. Resist relishing it by equating it to pubic hair immediately, time and time again, whenever needed. Give praise to yourself when you have earned it from within. Specialness, as an emotion, is not worth the seconds it takes to say it. Don't pay too much heed to it. That is your first lesson. If you can implement it by reminding yourself of this rule again and again, then you wouldn't be hurt the day you hear a backhanded comment, an unpleasant remark, not a word of admiration but a rejection of your performance. You'd focus on facts and data on the matter with emotions lurking as mere spectators in the background.

Lastly, the truth about people who have achieved a lot but depend on others to feel special is *you are special*. You just need to understand that specialness is exclusively an intrapersonal concept (you with yourself). It becomes immediately corrupt with the involvement of anyone other than you. Kindness, building your own standards and achievements is a good way to go about it. Start there. You can go deeper later, and these definitions will evolve and change and take you to much deeper realizations with time. But for now, start with these three, and try to distance yourself from 'I want to feel special' as much as you can. We look for specialness through love, appreciative comments or attention through social media because we think it is important. It is not. And whatever tiny amount of it which you may feel you need, just look inwards and ask for it; if it doesn't come, create it. Earn it.

## You Are a Nation

If you were to see yourself as a nation, then who is in charge of that nation? Are you? If not, then who is? If you are in charge of your nation then are you in control of your moods, emotions, habits, routine or not? If not, then are you truly in charge or are you fooling yourself? Do you think nobody is in charge, and it is basically chaos governed by moods, desires, urges, habits, outside influences and pleasure-seeking? Most people would relate. If you are a nation, but you are not in charge of your own nation, how do you feel about it? And what does it truly mean to be in charge of yourself?

### **Why You Are a Nation**

Why do you need to see yourself as a nation? Humans are terrible at managing themselves, that is why so much advice exists in psychology, philosophy, self-help, old wisdom, old adages, but despite all that, we find it very hard to navigate ourselves in the direction we want to. At the same time, humans are very good at giving advice to *others*. Simply finger-licking fantastic. This is called Solomon's Paradox. Solomon was a wise king from thousands of years ago who gave very wise pieces of advice to everybody, but his own life was a dumpster fire. Didn't apply the same advice to himself. Sounds familiar? It is all humans.

Anyhow, the brilliant point in Solomon's Paradox is: you are great at giving practical advice to other people. Let's use that. Here are the brass tacks: you have to become stronger; in fact, you are trying to. When given the task to make yourself stronger, you find it very hard and often fail, but what you haven't realized is, you are great at making other people stronger. Solution: see yourself as the other person. See yourself as a nation of which you are the leader. You are in charge of building, growing and maintaining peace. If I were to ask you, 'Explain to me the life you are living; what is wrong with it?' You probably won't be able to answer in a very coherent manner. You really haven't broken it down in your own mind. But if I asked you, 'You are a nation named x, what is going wrong with it?' You might be able to break it down point by point in a chronological order. Why? We

look at ourselves emotionally. We look at others logically. When you look inside of yourself emotionally, what you basically have is emotions looking at emotions, which produce bad, disgusting reactions that make us stop. Logically looking inside of us is a doctor, scientist, mechanic, manager, accountant. Looking inside the emotional contents objectively and logging them for record-keeping and data collection for diagnosis. When you look at yourself emotionally, then without thinking you end up judging yourself, disliking yourself, getting overwhelmed and quitting. The lifestyle of unsolved problems continues.

Let's also talk about the practice of problem-solving which is crucial for peaceful living. How much do you practice it? Probably not much? You may be doing it a lot at work. But in your life, how much do you 'problem solve'? Back to Solomon's Paradox, we don't because our problems look like an emotional mess to us. But solving problems of others is actually good because, one, your brain gets practice, two, if you do a good amount of it, you may come up with solutions or perspectives which ultimately you might apply on yourself too, and three, in problems of others, you may see reflections of your own problems, your own struggles, and an outside perspective on how you dealt with them. The point is, just because Solomon's Paradox exists doesn't mean humans should quit solving problems because 'Hehe ... your own life is still a mess, ya hypocrite.' Life will never cease being a mess; it is how much you clean the mess, how often, and how efficient you are at cleaning that makes it pleasant to live.

In psychology, what we are talking about is called self-distancing. You distance from yourself in your mind and look at your problems like you would of others. The fact that you solve problems of others better than your own, it is not only highly practical but clever to start seeing yourself objectively too, as a nation.

## **What Is a Nation**

Let us device how you practically see yourself as a nation. In theory, the objective is to be able to look at the most important aspects of you objectively, divide them categorically, so their assessment becomes easier and clear from emotional mess.

Here is how you do it:

1st step: START SEEING YOURSELF AS A NATION.

2nd step: Appoint yourself as the leader of your nation. You are the inheritor of the body and mind. President, prime minister, leader, whatever you would like to call yourself. Look at this body and mind as yours to fix.

3rd step: You have to write a constitution. A nation is supposed to have some rules, guidelines, boundaries, where it stands on what. You need to have character. Every country has its stands on various issues. Since we are talking about ruling a one-human nation, you need to have clear boundaries and ideas about what this person's boundaries are, what their rules are and what their morals are. It may feel like a lot of thinking. You don't need to do it all at once. This can take time. But you have to start with a basic constitution. You can start with: what are your moral codes in life that you are ready to apply to this nation in practice? For example, loyalty, not cheating, never saying bad things about a friend (friendly nation) behind their backs to others, lines you will never cross, etc.

4th step: As a nation, even a one-human nation, you need police, protective forces, a small but well-trained effective army to maintain and preserve inner peace and uphold the rules defined in the constitution. That is called self-control. You have heard of self-control several times in your life, but have you ever practised it? Have you ever punched an unruly drunken boorish urge in you that is causing destruction in you and told it to sit the hell down? It feels nice. If you haven't, that's what self-control is there for. Each time you feel some desire pushing you to do things you don't want to, some urge that you haven't consciously said no to, some habit that has taken such strong presence in your mind that it distracts you continually, you call your police force called self-control. You can tell it to break its legs, put them in a lock up or make them disappear. The more you enforce self-control, the stronger it becomes. Training. As the leader, your goal is to ensure the smooth functioning of tasks that will bring money, happiness, joy, love, wisdom and prosperity. In short, tasks that will make your nation stronger.

5th step: When you apply self-control, peace occurs as an outcome, and national respect for your leadership increases. This is called self-respect. People confuse self-respect with pride. Pride is not self-respect. Pride is assumed respect demanded by the ego. Pride is wanting respect from others, whereas self-respect is earning respect from yourself. If you have self-respect, pride will not matter because self-respect, unlike pride, is much

harder to earn, whereas one can have immense pride without having done a thing. When self-respect is earned, the happiness index of the nation goes up. Self-respect makes the nation love the leader. Your confidence in your own authority increases. You feel confident to have you in charge.

6th step: You have certain desires, wants, urges and patterns of behaviours that damage the nation and prevent it from functioning well. These are the terrorist organizations and groups that self-control is in place to contain and imprison. They are your nation's enemy. You might call them self-destructive tendencies. The deal with them is simple, you either lock them in a prison or they have you in captivity.

7th step: Self-control begets self-respect begets prosperity. Economic prosperity. Cultural prosperity. Artistic prosperity. With strong self-control comes self-respect, which makes you more confident and content in general. You are able to get stuff done because the police force is doing its job. You feel positive, confident about yourself and have more time because the terrorists aren't able to disrupt the calm state of your nation as much as before. There is less trouble in you. You can also define in your constitution cultural paths you want to take. For example, you will read x y z type of books or you will watch certain type of movies. You can add artistic paths. With success, your GDP rises. With consumption of books, novels, movies, art, music, exploration, an overall cultivation of the nation happens, making it rich in ideas and critical thinking, which increases your soft power. You tend to become a nation that other nations are attracted to, want relationships with and want to meet often. All of this is a direct consequence of you assuming leadership of yourself.

8th step: Ego is the opposition party. It stands for Emotional Grandpas On-crack. Ego is highly nationalistic which is why the nation loves to hear them, but they rarely have any plans, defined boundaries or good diplomacy. They claim to be better than other nations; they take offence very easily at the slightest provocation and then obsessively ruminate over them; they have a compulsive need to show off to others; they assume pride first and then live to justify that pride; they spend most of their time proving their superiority to others and, at times, abusing them if they disagree; they are highly insecure about themselves and can resort to aggression and violence when faced with truth about themselves. In many nations, the leader is the ego. In human terms, we call them narcissists. At times they may push the nation toward success, but it is for obsessive, unhealthy and

destructive motivations which may earn wealth but destroy close relationships, happiness index and inner peace.

9th step: Good leadership, self-respect from strong self-control, actions that make the nation wealthy, culturally and intellectually rich, and lastly, maintaining great relationships ensures increased life satisfaction.

10th step: You need to have a strong foreign policy that ensures your leadership does not get minimized, abused or undermined by foreign powers.

## Foreign Policy

What is your diplomacy? It should centre around a few basic principles:

1. **Self-protection:** You protect yourself no matter what it takes. If you have to distance yourself from x y z to protect your mental health, physical body and future prospects, then you do it. You take hard decisions to preserve mental peace not only in the present but also for the future. If your nation is being armed by a hostile neighbouring nation (your family, friends), then under no circumstance do you simply become a vassal of abuse. You plan. You plan how to get out, become free, become stronger again. In the future, once you have regained your honour, strength and possess financial power, you can come back and give chances to mend your relationships with neighbouring nations.
2. **Alliances:** In psychology and sociology, alliance is called social capital. Social capital basically means reaping the benefits of being in social groups. From access to resources, advice, care, opportunities, support, networking and strong relationships, you profit in multiple ways. As a nation, it should be your diplomatic plan to build relationships with people not just for the sake of social benefits, but also your mental well-being. Make sure to make time for building good relations; more importantly, make sure you make time to maintain the friendships.
3. **Self-autonomy:** Don't lose your leadership to anybody. Don't hand your nation to somebody else. You will fall in love and have relationships that you might cherish more than you love yourself. It could be parents, lover, spouse, sibling, friend or your own child. Even where you love somebody more than yourself, boundaries are important. You cannot let anybody – no matter how important they are to you – walk over you, or treat you like you are always freely available for them, or think they have control over your life decisions more than you. You are a nation. Things aren't black

and white in close relationships, but even in grey, you shouldn't lose the visibility of your boundaries. Make others respect them and never lose sight of what is comfortable and uncomfortable based on how you feel with others – according to that, draw new boundaries. Boundaries actually give you clarity, the space for you to think logically and reasonably, and an understanding of the lines across which the other person has stopped respecting.

**4. Accept humans as they are:** You can't control humans or change them. You can only adjust your strategy in accordance with who they are. If you pride yourself as some master manipulator, wait until you fall flat on your face as your manipulation backfires or runs out. In case you are living in denial, then wait until you are tired of falling flat on your face because of your unwillingness to accept people for who they are to you. If you are an idealist who believes the best in humans, continue accepting that falling flat on your face is justified and hoping that one day your sorry state might evoke empathy in them and they will change. Put all of this energy, time and focus into your nation, please. It is simply poor diplomacy to not accept humans as they present themselves. In the face of evidence, if you wish to fool yourself, then your nation in the game of diplomacy will be taken advantage of. Hoping that one day they will get tired and stop does not help either. If one stops, somebody else will be there to replace them. People won't change or even if they do, it is not in *your* control. What you control is the strategy you build in defence of yourself by accepting their actions. Humans won't change. Say this to yourself: 'They won't change, so I better start dealing with them differently and diplomatically by accepting the facts of the matter.'

**5. Love is not an exception:** We have already talked about boundaries. A clean way of seeing romantic relationships is to see them unromantically in the mind. You are already beyond ecstatic in emotions. Be that in emotions. Be generous, loving and rewarding. But in the mind, you draw boundaries and focus on data. Not for yourself but for the sake of this relationship lasting in the long run. Having said that, partnerships rarely go as planned on paper. After all, we are talking about people. In psychology, not understanding or clearly defining boundaries is called enmeshment. When you are emotionally overjoyed in a fresh new relationship, the need to think such things may feel unnecessary because things feel so amazing and perfect and right. But you also know for a fact

from reliable sources that this is temporary. For things to last, you need to see this very differently: a) you need to define what that relationship needs to become; b) you need to know how to make that possible between the two nations involved; c) what are the personalities and lifestyles of those nations? d) what are the priorities of the respective nations? e) how do both these nations like to resolve arguments and disagreements? f) are those styles of conflict resolution compatible between the two? g) when there are disagreements, and a need arises to change something about one nation for the well-being of the relationship, are the nations willing to rise up without moping or holding grudges and make those changes in their lives?

Yes, relationships are complex because humans are complex. Therefore, for the security of your nation, let your emotions be wild but only as wild as the mind can control. When the leaders go mad out of emotions, it's usually a Shakespearean tragedy or dictatorship. And we know those don't end well. So, don't become either.

**6. Surveillance:** As a leader, you should always keep a close eye on what your emotions are saying. We hear our thoughts often but rarely hear them with scepticism. Introduce that scepticism. Hear your thoughts but not always as your own thoughts. Yes, weird to read but it can be done. As a nation, think like this: what if those thoughts are coming from your EGO (emotional grandpas on-crack)! What if they are coming from terrorists, those urges, patterns of behaviour that cause destruction of the nation! Try to understand one thing: even though we have an opposition party, this is not a democracy. This is a monarchy. You are either the king of your nation until the end of your life or you are invaded by some other nation, and they rule you or your ego rules you until you take back the throne. To keep your power and control over the nation, this has to be a full-blown surveillance state. But you are not a dictator, a mad king or some tyrant. You love this nation. You are building it for the better. You have to listen to your thoughts to recognize which of them can cause your nation harm or somebody else harm. There are a lot of stupid thoughts. Impulsive thoughts. Judgmental thoughts. Emotionally charged thoughts. Hate-filled thoughts. Misleading thoughts. The problem is when these thoughts are not regulated, they may become actions. The growth of your nation, not just financially but also intellectually, requires that you monitor which thoughts of yours inspire what nature of actions. The more you study your

thoughts, the more power you will have over your actions. The more you listen to your thoughts as a detective instead of following them as instructions, the more you are able to change them and influence your personality. That is the secret of intellectual growth. Sitting with yourself and not becoming a puppet to the instructions of your own thoughts but to find out from where they are coming, why did you think that way, what impact has this caused in your life and what kind of a person you are because these thoughts turned into action. By doing this, you reduce impulsive behaviour and actions out of having exposed how stupid some of the sources of your thoughts are. This is crucial for diplomacy. Once you develop the habit of listening to your own thoughts as a spectator, you are also able to listen and understand the thoughts of others patiently. This increases interpersonal intelligence.

## **How Do You Practically Become a Nation?**

You have just read this chapter and might feel great about this idea. What about three months later? You think you'd still be thinking of yourself as a nation? I don't think so. This is what you do to practically convert it into a long-term practice. For the rest of your life, have two types of journals or notebooks. It could also be online, no need to have a physical copy of it.

One is called LEARNINGS. Second is called RULES.

The objective of learnings is: how to fix this nation? Rules is basically your constitution. You can start right now. Take a notebook and ask yourself: how do you fix this nation named \_\_\_\_? Look at yourself objectively: a) what are the goals? b) What is it doing wrong? c) why is it doing them?

Just like that, you have your first learnings. Everything that you learn about yourself which you need to fix, start writing down or typing them neatly, point by point, in the easiest to understand, straightforward way you can. You don't have to be mean or personal. You don't need to write any judgments. Think of it as a classified, official document about you. If you make it personal and write stupid comments in it, it is again emotions meeting emotions. The next time, you will not even want to open it because it will trigger you emotionally. Whenever you open it, it should feel like reading objectively written truths about yourself. Those learnings become the things that require solving. The more you look at yourself as a nation, the more you ask and find things to fix, the more learnings will come about

in the notebook. You may solve some quickly, some may take time, some may evolve, some may turn out to be falsely identified and some much deeper than what you had initially perceived them to be.

Based on learnings come rules. Rules are created and set directly based on things that need to be fixed. Rules are actions, guidelines and boundaries which you need to place in your place. There can be subcategories in both learnings and rules. For example, rules about business if you have a business, rules about relationships, rules about workplace, etc.

A growing nation is one in which rules evolve and learnings decline. Funny thing to hear, but learnings here are things you need to fix. When they decline, you have done a good job and have to continue doing a good job of maintaining that.

Takeaway from this chapter: do what it says, really. At least give it a try.

# How Much Do You Know Yourself?

## Which Path Do You Walk?

Imagine at the age of 13, on one random day or night, your parent, grandparent or anybody whom you trust sat you down and had a serious talk with you regarding something people do, that you are going to do as well, and why you need to become aware about it so you can avoid it. No, not smoking or drugs. This:

‘Listen up kid, as you grow into an adult, you’re going to meet a lot of people you will take a liking to. In return, you will want to be liked by them. Which is fine. It’s natural to want to be liked by people who you think are great. However, when you like somebody, there is a thing called approval-seeking that sneaks itself into your mind almost silently. And we don’t really think about it much either. It is a very dangerous thing.’

They continue, ‘To be fair, in the beginning approval isn’t a completely bad thing. For a long time, that’s how we find out how capable we are. When we are kids, some grown people whom we trust tell us whether we are capable of something or not. As a kid, you don’t get much satisfaction from simply knowing it yourself. You need adults. But there is a difference between being told as a kid how good your work is and being told as an adult what you need to do to win some asshole’s approval. Pardon my French. As a child when somebody tells you that you are doing great, it motivates you. It is called positive reinforcement.

‘The problem starts when even as an adult you rely on some replacement of that teacher – a boss, parent, colleagues, anybody. By doing that you give them power over aspects of your life such as relationships and career, to very personal life choices. Such a relationship can take a vicious form. Only when they approve, do you feel worthy; otherwise, you keep doubting your own choices. You are stuck in a loop of whether they will approve or not. Being capable becomes when *they* tell you that you are capable. So, you do whatever they will like. Such relationship dynamics can be very toxic. Because you become secondary; their word becomes everything. You are afraid that if you took your own actions, they will be disappointed. In case

you do take decisions by yourself, they tend to get angry and manipulative, not because it is a bad decision, but because they weren't consulted or involved.

'In such dynamics, I wouldn't even call these relationships, these people force you to follow their own footsteps. They want you to follow the same careers, do the exact things that they are doing or do what they advise. This isn't the path of an independent person, a wise person or a person who wants peace in their life. Such paths are travelled by those who have become a stranger to themselves. A lot of time, energy and choices are wasted on such paths. A lot of life is wasted on paths that are chosen for you by others or chosen by you for someone else. Whether it is romantic love, parental respect, cultural obedience or personal admiration, do not ever get trapped to work for anybody's approval in your life.'

There could be multiple reasons why people do this:

- Sociocultural norms in large collectivist societies that discourage individual self-autonomous thinking and emphasize on following and repeating the norms and traditions that define what is capable or not. For example, in a society, becoming a doctor could be a set standard of 'being capable' and failing to do so or choosing something else might be looked down upon. Like doctor, only certain professions may have implicit 'capability quotient' attached to them. In such societies, that becomes the only condition which applies to *millions* of kids to get any approval of being capable. What happens as a result is that most adults in these societies refuse to even think differently about defining capability or careers until they are proven wrong. But until that time, kids and people who want to do something different feel very discouraged; are often bullied by teachers, parents and society; and are forced to conform in every step of the way. There are people in such societies who do practise critical thinking and do think differently. But in general, such are the norms and practices.

Societal approval in such societies leads to very dark alleys existentially and psychologically. People join careers they never wanted to. People abandon careers which they wanted. People lose decision-making to elders, adults, bosses, teachers, professors, parents for long portions of their lives because if you don't, you are

breaking societal norms. These societies breed the tradition of thrusting approval by a system made by the group with zero consent of the individual. Such systems further overpower the habit of approval-seeking by ingraining it into the minds of people from those societies. Once you are trained to do something, it is very likely you are going to be doing that for the rest of your life in multiple areas of your life without realizing it. It becomes a norm.

- Narcissism: This is another factor that makes people do whatever it takes to get approval from others. Narcissism, in short, is a person who loves themselves way too much to be healthy. And they are highly insecure about themselves which is why they cannot stop proving or convincing the world that they are great. So, to prove to themselves, that they are great, they want the approval of whomever they think is either great or popular or capable. If that popular, great or capable person tells them that they are great, a narcissist is happy for a while. But they will never stop with that person. A narcissist wants that confirmation from every capable person they come across. So, they will continue cheating in their relationships. They will have relationships with capable people regardless of their age, position, marital status or the cost of damage. They will seek approval desperately by showing off their wealth, attractiveness, intellect or offering sexual favours – whatever it takes for them to get it. Narcissism is a high motivator for a lot of individuals seeking and willing to do anything for fame too. Seeking fame is after all seeking mass approval.
- People pleasing: This can come from very low self-esteem, childhood experiences, abandonment, terrible parenting and personality traits.
- Lack of independent critical thinking: This basically promotes groupthink. ‘If the group is acting like x y z, then I will act the same way too without thinking much about it.’ ‘If the group is doing that then I too must agree with it to get the approval of the group.’

## **Youself and People Are a Lie**

One of the major reasons – outside of personality traits, childhood experiences, societal norms, high narcissism, low self-esteem – why people

cannot let go of approval-seeking is lack of introspection and connection with themselves. If you don't know yourself, you will have to rely on the word of others to define who you are.

Once you know yourself, you find out how untrustworthy your own word is, thereby, realizing the cluelessness behind the words of others too. This realization calms you down and changes your perspective entirely toward humans in general. For a large portion of our lives, humans have no idea what they are talking about. But if you don't make attempts to know yourself, you will never realize how full of shit the process of thinking governed by your brain is. In this case, shit = the nonsense, unfounded claims that you have taken for granted about yourself without verifying them at all. If you don't discover that, then you don't realize that the same applies to all humans. As long as you don't realize that the very process of thinking in all people is dubious, you continue believing that people make sense and, therefore, their approval makes sense. Have you actually ever questioned whether people make sense? No, you believe it. Because they have achieved hard things. They have positions and titles. They must be intelligent – intelligence here is assumed, not verified.

It would take a lot of cognitive effort to re-question the way humans work. Therefore, we sort of take it for granted. I will give you an example: I am sure you take for granted the following supposition: *when people sit and introspect for hours and days and years, they find themselves or meet themselves through spirituality, and something profound, positive and amazing happens.*

Horseshit. You just defined narcissism. This is how a narcissist would define to show off that they are in touch with themselves by the means of spirituality or introspection. The reality of meeting yourself is this: you find out how full of shit you are. You are filled with lies. It is devastating and freeing at the same time. It frees you from all the burdens of claims and proofs you were collecting to show off who you are. Your assumptions, ideas of self, images of self, images of others, ideas about others, ideas you had adopted without thinking, all burn down slowly. You might find out that actually you don't even need to have a self. The self is a creation of this place – this place full of people, wants, desires, biology, competition, winning, ego, possessions, money, prizes, titles and awards. None of it is linked with peace and love. Not talking about romantic love. Romantic love is an idea created by the self too.

You don't need to question the entire system of how humans work, but can you question the confident assumption that the system works? Maybe all of us take that assumption for granted. A giant groupthink. We look at each other and see all humans around us following the same societal systems, so our brain thinks, 'If such a great number of people are following it, then there is nothing to question!'

It does two things: a) saves the cognitive task of figuring it out, and b) places an unverified, unfounded trust in humans. We assume humans are capable because we have accepted the systems placed by humans that define what capabilities are. Let us question the system by using only one marker: different types of intelligence. Once you put different types of intelligence in the equation, you realize how silly the definitions of capability are as defined by the system. Markers such as the philosophical, existential, long term, life satisfaction don't even need to be mentioned. We assume people are capable only because they are defined capable by the systems in which we trust blindly. Question that and you question humanity. And the question of seeking approval from humans flies out of the window, from now on until forever.

## Duties

A wise person never forgets duties. Even if you know yourself and have found out certain truths that may distance you from admiring and following people blindly, you shall not distance yourself from your duties. That is another side of human ignorance – the arrogance of strong realizations. A lot of people who find out the lies within themselves start to think superiorly of themselves and lowly of others. The normal self that once participated along with humans is replaced by an arrogant self that now looks down at humans. This happens because of anger. They are angry at themselves because they were once just like everybody else, but because they love themselves so much, they choose to divert their anger at humans. The idea of self still exists. Such people are filled with pride of having achieved self-knowledge. They are so filled with arrogance that they know that the self is a lie. They take great pride in telling others how all creation and self and systems are a lie. They promote themselves as all-knowing, enlightened and great spiritual intellectuals. Narcissists, still, but in a new form.

Finding out that the human-created systems aren't that great, therefore,

humans are very possibly not that great, means that you are not great either. It does not mean you are better, superior or all-knowing. It means that you still have a lot of work to do to arrive from ‘not that great’ to nothing. At nothing, you will find peace. Intellectual nothingness is different from what people think of nothing which is possessing nothing or not starting. Nothingness is the destination in thinking where all intellect rests peacefully and meaning thrives by taking the shape of joy.

Duties are what make you human despite the realizations of biblical proportions. Perform your responsibilities and duties without linking them to either approval, acceptance, admiration, pleasure, ranks, competition, arrogance, superiority, domination. If you want to enjoy competition, nothing wrong with that either. Only when you are able to detach yourself from the selfishness of winning, does competition have the utility to make you better as a player, without making you worse as a person. Competition should be held in the arena of a game, in the spirit of fun, out of testing your skills or upping your levels. Then you are not emotionally involved, just skilfully.

## **The Dangers of Self-Autonomy**

Then comes individualism. Which is reliance on self. Too much reliance on self. This is very dangerous too. What is the self? A free self, as discussed earlier, is a mind that is distant from itself. That’s not what self-autonomy means. Self-autonomy means making your decisions based on your own reasons and having the freedom to do so. A simple question: on what basis do you trust your own self? How is yourself not a product of external influences, emotional scars, your backgrounds and genetic predispositions? For a mind to be free of external influences, it will have to be strongly aware of each one of them. A mind not only has to be aware but strong enough to detach from them. Which is impossibly hard to do. The mind has to then distance from the ideas of yourself that you have created and problems in your personality that cause you harm. Are you doing that? Because that would be self-autonomy.

Self-autonomy to function even decently would require incredible self-awareness. Do you have that? And yet, we celebrate individualism without realizing that individualism without self-awareness is only an illusion of freedom. You live in the illusion that you are free, but your choices are controlled and fed to you by your environment and the time you belong to.

You are only doing what the next person or cool person or the cool group or your group is doing. What do you want to do – you haven't figured that out yet. You actually have no idea. Maybe you do, but most don't. Individualism requires a seriously thinking person because without thinking a person isn't any different from millions of persons. An individual is different from people because they have started to find and peel the layers of who they are, thereby, discovering with each layer, how they betray themselves.

Who you are contains multiple layers. When people talk about self-autonomy, they mostly refer to careers, jobs and choices like these. That is a person addressing the first layer of their self: what they want to do in life – self-knowledge indeed, but very shallow. But at the same time, very important too because one performs one's duty (your job) for a large part of one's life. Go one layer deeper, and what we have is a dense fog. The blurriness about the origins of all your choices. You don't know where these choices are coming from. You can say a good amount are coming from desires from your biology from evolution. In that case, you don't have self-autonomy. You are a primate performing genetically passed down duties and actions from your ancestors. Your thoughts and actions are a result of experiences that happened millions of years ago. Where is the autonomy in performing actions that do not come from your reasoning but encoded instructions in your genes? But at the same time, you also have a mind that can think this very thought. A mind that has figured this out. A mind that figured out what a gene is, evolution, molecules, a mind that can reason, meditate, detach itself from desires, affect the compositions of its brain by meditation, can create algorithms that calculate, arrange and compute data on gigantic scales and create artificial brains. The human brain.

Gaining awareness beyond the first layer of who you are is gaining self-autonomy. But humans rarely go within. We love the outside. We gain almost all our ideologies, influences and ideas of what to do with our desires from outside. If you are in Manila, you are probably seeing what to do with an x y z desire you have very differently from a person in New York. The outside environments are actually much more in charge of shaping your decisions and ideas with regard to your own desires. Because you grew up in those places, you adopt the socially accepted ways of what to do with a desire from those places. The same happens on the internet. Take a few of the strongest desires – lust or greed – and take the place you

belong to. The way people from that place, in general, see and deal with lust and greed would be very similar to your way of dealing with them too. The concept of shame, which humans universally share, changes geographically based on socially set behaviour paradigms which we learn since childhood. A person in Saudi Arabia will define shame in very different ways than a person born in Germany or Switzerland. Having said that, humans are complex. It's not black and white or 100% anything. One can be excessively greedy in environments that promote non-materialistic approaches and sexually conservative in sexually liberal non-judgmental societies too.

The education that shapes our choices, what we call 'independent thinking', to a large degree does not come from your own reasoning or self-knowledge. It has nothing or very little to do with the universe within you. You hardly know who you are beyond a surface layer. So, human systems or our culture become our teachers. And we are back. From the point of view of social psychology, if you belong to a highly individualistic culture then your actions and thoughts will have markers of an individualist culture. Similarly, if you come from a collectivist culture then your actions, personality and thinking may reflect that.

Humans have amassed great awareness of things outside of them. We call control of other things self-autonomy. Humans confuse controlling things with freedom. Therefore, controlling your own life is confused with having autonomy and being independent. Control is of zero importance in case you don't know what you are controlling and why. Without that knowledge, control or no control, you have no idea what you are doing. In that case, the power of having control over your choices is only a front for your ego. It is the highly stupid human ego believing that you control things. Humans think the power of making choices is called autonomy. What choices when they are not even yours? For you to know your choices, you would need deep self-knowledge that is removed from the grip of external influences and desires. No wonder humans cannot control power. They abuse it.

Self-autonomy can only exist with self-knowledge. Without self-knowledge, what you have is not yourself, but your desires, cluelessness and the need to be accepted controlling the decisions of your life. So, you swing between pleasure and pain. Pleasure from activities that give you instant happiness and pain from the lack of satisfaction in life, disappointment from the shortness of pleasures, not getting accepted by

people and the confusion from not clearly knowing what you want and what to do.

You are the body that experiences pleasure and, therefore, the mind thinks the point of life is pleasure and happiness. The purpose of life becomes hedonism. The decision-maker of your being is actually desires, not your own mind. The mind simply watches until an existential calamity occurs, then it is thrown into confusion because pleasures are unable to solve it. By the way, pleasure is not simply fun, joy, happiness and sexual pleasure, it is also growth, victories, success, working out, fulfilling your interests and hobbies. Hedonism may seem very nice. It involves hard work and sacrifices and living healthily by discipline. But hedonism lies between the relationship of yourself and the world; you are doing things that increase your happiness in this world. It has nothing to do with your mind and yourself.

The relationship between your mind and yourself has nothing to do with pleasure or happiness; it is about freedom from yourself. Hedonism comes from the desire to be happy, whereas nothingness does not come from any desire. Seeking nothingness, in the form of desire, will produce either laziness or is a symptom of depression. Only nothing comes from nothing. Nothingness is far away from desire. It is the ability to distance yourself from pleasure, desire, growth, success, money, sex. Once again, distancing, not cutting off. You are not running away frightened like a coward. You can enjoy them whenever you want to, if you feel like. But your mind is free from their control. That is true self-autonomy – having a choice with the wisdom of knowing what comes from it and what you want.

Having said all this, one thing you cannot run away from is pain. Pain from the loss of your child, parent, loved ones, humans, suffering of somebody, can still be felt deeply, no matter how much your mind can distance itself from desires and the constructs of self. Pain is necessary. It humbles us. Pain is the only one true gift humans receive; it not only crushes the ego by showing how small, ordinary and vulnerable you are, but it is also the common factor that puts all humans in the same boat. I don't think anybody can escape pain in their lives, no matter how many realizations or how much self-knowledge they acquire. With self-knowledge, certain kinds of pain can be minimized and eliminated for sure. A lot of pain is self-inflicted; that goes away. There is peace inside. That helps. Peace is very different from pleasure or happiness by the way. Peace

means calmness, absence of chaos, order in disorder. But the pain of humanity stays with humans.

Individualism supposes that the person will make choices and learn. One, you are not free; that freedom is an illusion. Two, that is a giant supposition to make that they will learn. What if they don't? What if the pain felt from their sufferings and mistakes is dealt with more mistakes of a different nature? What if there is no introspection or self-analysis? What if the society they belong to does not teach them the importance of gaining self-knowledge? Of breaking into the layers of who you are and figuring out what lies, demands and desires rule your current self! What if the society believes in medicating sufferings with addictive substances that create further problems? What if the society in general is completely clueless about the processes of self-exploration and instead pushes people who have existential problems, practical problems and confusions to religious books, into religious buildings or therapy which deals with emotions, cause and effect and acceptance of their vices? Therapy is not about the disintegration of the ideas of yourself and personality; it is about repairing them.

## **Is Self-Control a Lie?**

Self-control is yourself limiting desires and urges that harm your goals in the process of building stability. In the chapter 'you are a nation', we talked about the need of self-control for a stable, strong nation. But what if one wishes to go beyond stability and power. In that case, self-control is a form of personal choice employed to limit the freedom of choice. Until you develop the intelligence to make smart decisions for yourself or the wisdom to know where you truly want to go beyond the human games, you need the tools of self-control in gaining self-knowledge, too. It is the first step you have to take to go on a different journey than stability and mental strength.

Having said that, mental strength, stability and self-respect are enough to live a good life. You don't need to find nothingness at all. The reason why we have spoken of it in this chapter is to illustrate the triviality and limitations of self-autonomy and human systems (different societies we have created and how they define capabilities, and based on those definitions how we seek approval from those capable people).

## **You Are Not Your Job**

Think of the time you loved doing something. Once you showed it to somebody else – a teacher, boss, mentor, parents or partner – but got a terrible response. That work immediately became something you disliked. What once made you proud and excited suddenly became something that felt unpleasant. This is the power of *others*. This is also the power you give to others for their approval. This power can shift the directions of your life, influence major life decisions, discourage you to pursue something or outright force you to stop.

What matters is how you see what you want to do. It concerns job, career, vocations, interests, hobbies. And these are major areas in which people seek approval of others. Since most people are only able to know the first layer about themselves, they think their work, job, vocation is their life. You don't know who you are beyond that, so why would you think that! Other than that, desires, pleasures, impulses, habits and self-preservation (the want to live longer and safely) rule you.

Life goals of most people nowadays look like this: good job, exercise, eating healthy, having fun, owning material things like technology in every aspect of living, having good relationships. If you can achieve this combination, good for you. If you can reduce stress on top of that, enjoy nature and add a little Western meditation to it, amazing. However, this combination concerns only the first layer of who you are. If you are nailing this combination, it will give you increased general happiness or subjective well-being. However, it won't help you with thoughts like these: 'Who am I as a being? What is the meaning of everything I am doing? Is there more to what I am doing? How am I different from everybody else? How am I not engaged in the same rat race?'

'Buying objects, gadgets, cars and technology doesn't give me any pleasure any more! I already have everything! How do I go deeper? I feel unexplored.'

'Sex has started to feel disappointing now. Am I bored of sex? Do I need more thrill in life? I want to feel alive in life. Life is boring. Money actually doesn't give me any happiness.'

Imagine thinking that at 40. People do. Especially those who have achieved their goals. Almost all of us buy into arrival fallacy – 'these ABC goals are what life is, you need to work hard and achieve them, and then life is complete.' The problem with arrival fallacy is that it addresses only the first layer of who you are. Therefore, the idea of life becomes the first layer

of who you are. When that is your entire idea of life then approval-seeking would feel highly important. Whether it is acceptance in a group, approval for good work, approval for your personality, approval for your attractiveness, you want it because you think it would make you happier. There are more reasons, of course, but seeking happiness is right up there. It is arrival fallacy multiplied. If you do what these people approve of, you will be happier – that is why you are doing it. Why else would you want to make anybody happy, you selfish mammal? They are giving you answers to more happiness.

So, what is the truth? Your idea of who you are is incredibly short-sighted, dumb, self-harming and not well-thought-out at all. You have been running with this idea because everybody else is. Here is a new idea. Life – beyond career, job, pleasures, desires – has nothing to do with the people outside. There are at least 40 layers of *who you are* which you haven't explored underneath the first one. As you explore deeper, they will have less and less to do with external influences and people. It's beyond the material, beyond money, beyond pleasures of orgasms, beyond gadgets and technology and beyond your relationships with people around you. Of course, there are exceptions. Your relationship with your child, spouse, siblings, friends and parents will matter to you. This is not a movie nor a novel. The first layer of who you are is important, of course. ALL the layers are important. But being stuck at the first layer is highly problematic because you are stuck within human-built systems and human-created reality, and in such systems, you start to worship humans and groups.

I don't know whose approval *you* repeatedly go after – if that is different people, some title, colleagues, parents, cool people, whoever they are. Please start with accepting that whatever you see in front of you concerns only the first layer of who you are. There are more layers which have nothing to do with them. Entering those layers and meeting the realizations those layers contain will change who you are entirely and how you see the world. This is a journey. This journey is beautiful and amazing. I don't know if that is the point of life or if there is no point of life, but within the span of your life, this journey is worth taking. It doesn't need drugs or stimulants or morons with beads and tattoos. Nobody knows your journey, not even you. That is why nobody can define that journey either. It may take years. There may be no destination because it is outside the conception of how we perceive reality. A person may not be lonely socially or

emotionally, but what should terrify us most is to be lonely within. This journey will remove that loneliness and replace it with a strong connection with your being. The need for approval goes away. People seem people to you regardless of what they have achieved or how popular they are. You have moved beyond the first layer of existence, which gives you multiple points of view of looking at the world now.

# 5

## People Are Weird

What do you think of people?

What is your perception of humans in general?

Whatever perception you have of x y z creates expectations and reactions to x y z respectively. So, being aware of what your perception of anything is, matters. So, what is your perception of humans? If you don't know in concrete or even loose terms, you are still expecting something from the people you meet. The difference is that you aren't consciously aware of those expectations.

You have strong perceptions about animals – a lion is dangerous, so is a crocodile. And this perception influences your expectations of them. You expect dangerous creatures to attack you, therefore, you act accordingly. A domestic dog or cat or cow or mule is perceived differently by you, hence, your expectations are safety, friendliness and playfulness from that animal. Now come humans: What is your perception of them? A few adjectives you may have heard or used for people are: 'They are stupid, idiots, selfish, untrustworthy, unreliable, calculative, a-holes, trash, great, good, kind, compassionate.' The list goes on.

Two things: one, these are too specific; two, because they are too specific, you don't really believe them. You have seen people perform acts of selflessness, kindness, honour, respect, self-sacrifice, charity, altruism, empathy and such. You have seen at professional fighting events two fighters beat the hell out of each other, and then embrace and show respect for each other after the fight. The theory that humans are plainly garbage or uni-directional flies right out of the window after witnessing moments of contradictions, mutual respect, self-humbling and raw self-effacing honesty. But you don't believe people are amazing creatures either. You have been hurt, mistreated, wronged, judged and cheated by people. You have seen other people get hurt, robbed, cheated, discarded by their loved ones multiple times. And you have seen incredibly selfish, self-centred, narcissistic, inhumane, vulture-like people who will take advantage of anybody without any empathy or sympathy. You have also been warned to always look out for yourself from people and not believe them blindly.

In the midst of all of this, what to really think? Are people too complicated? For convenience, one could just leave it at that. Is that what you believe? The truth is, you have never really thought about it. You may say, ‘people are complicated’ or agree with that because it seems logical. There are a lot of things in your life that are understood by you in theory but remain unapplied in practice. That’s the difference between understanding and realizing. You understand a lot of sensible things. A realization, however, is when an idea enters like a virus and changes the entire affected system. You can’t go back anymore, your actions in that area change from that point on, you can’t ever see things how you used to before – that’s realization. Knowledge can be borrowed, adopted and understood, but you can’t borrow realizations. Once you realize something, your perception changes about it once and for all. And that perception remains locked until another realization affects it. The process of growing is a series of realizations.

## You Are Confused

As long as your realizations with regard to people, in general, remain theoretical, idealistic, sceptical or unrealized, the right answer ought to be: ‘I don’t know’. You are confused – take pride in that. Fools hide their confusion from everybody, whereas the wise flash it around like expensive jewellery. In order to hide your confusion and fake competence, you would come up with something even stupider than before, thereby, confidently climbing another step of foolishness. The wise are relaxed in knowing that they don’t know or they are yet to know. There is too much to know in this world and too much unknown. It is beautiful when an individual embodies the state of collective human intelligence: we don’t know much. So, ‘I don’t know’ is one of the most self-aware answers, given that it is coming from a person who wants to know.

Humans define people all the time. For example: when giving advice to someone you love, you may see humans as doubtful creatures from whom they need to protect themselves. In discussing how humans think or behave, you may become highly judgmental. When discussing geopolitics, you might divide humans in two groups or many and paint one as good and the other bad. These definitions change regularly depending on the context, mood and biases of the individual. It is understandable why it is hard to pick one perception of people and have that guide you in your interactions

with people in general.

Let's start with: 'people are complicated'. Although it is sensible, it is highly impersonal, alienating and sounds like we are defining machinery we don't know much about. It removes the humanness out of people. It is the opposite of something you can solve or figure out, which is not a helpful perception. Your perception should be vague enough to allow the complexity yet human enough to allow the unexpected. Therefore, 'people are weird'. This retains the caution in the advice given to you by the people who love you. 'Watch out for people. You never know who somebody is. Don't trust people too easily.'

At the same time, 'people are weird' retains the intrigue and surprise of being human too. 'I don't know who you are, and you can turn out to be a mean person, selfish, anything. I am still open to learning about you but with caution.'

Weird is one of the most interesting words humans have come up with. It is neither fully positive nor negative. It brings multiple meanings and ideas in the mind such as mystery, fun, different, breaking rules, confusing, and in some cases, self-aware. The word describes humans in language almost as a mirror. People call themselves weird proudly, as a compliment, which shows it has social acceptance, connotations of positivity and self-acceptance. It has the property of strangeness and diversion from norms, which gives space for people to act oddly at times, 'let's be weird'. It also allows people to act silly up to a point without judgement. Lastly, 'weird' has the same quality of lack of information that 'complicated' does, but without that feeling of impossibility. Weird feels approachable and solvable, whereas complicated feels hard to solve and requires complex thinking.

## **Let Us Test the Word Weird**

### **Examples**

Sentence 1: 'They don't want to be friends with me. I guess people are stupid.'

Sentence 2: 'They don't want to be friends with me because they are amazing.'

Sentence 3: 'They don't want to be my friends because people are complicated.'

Sentence 4: 'They don't want to be my friends because, well, people are weird.'

The first one sounds like a narcissist.

I am genuinely nervous about the second one.

The third sentence doesn't really help on an emotional level. The two parts of the sentence feel completely unrelated to each other. First part sounds like something that affects you, the latter an unemotional fact.

The fourth sentence leaves room for an actual reason to exist which, perhaps, is currently unknown to you. It allows for doubt to fill the space instead of assumptions from either ego or low self-worth. Remember what we talked about – 'I don't know'. By saying people are weird, you don't read too much into the experience and refrain from assuming worse things about yourself. Even if you find out that you are rejected because of reasons that are hurtful such as looks, money, language, materialism, you remind yourself, 'Let it go, people are weird.' You don't have to understand them, nor blame them. You don't have the slightest idea what's going on in their lives, what kind of a person they are, why they are the way they are and what kind of persons they will become. You don't know. Also, too much pointless overthinking. You tried and that's great. Always remember: your job is to understand and take care of *yourself*.

Having a perception to fall back on is better than having no perception at all and much better than having misleading perceptions.

We get hurt by rejections all the time from people we have *no real data* about. What you have is an idea of them or first impressions to be precise, which is highly unreliable data. This is what usually occurs:

1. You notice someone. They are physically attractive, appear warm, friendly, fatherly, motherly, trustful, kind, intelligent, wild, crazy or awesome in the beginning.
2. These first impressions create attraction towards them. Could be friendly, romantic or purely attention and approval-seeking.
3. Expectations emerge: 'I would like to be friends with them. I would like them to take me under their wings. I want them to notice me and like me. I want them to think I am cool. I want them to be mine. I want them to assure me I am capable.'
4. Expectations meet personal biases. So, now this person without data becomes the coolest person in your eyes.

There is no actual data to support that, just first impressions. Then that lack of data is filled by your assumptions out of bias. Your response should be: 'They seem cool and can do this x y z thing well; beyond that, I don't

know.' But people fall in love; create dumb expectations; trust overly; allow themselves to be exploited and used in the name of friendship, 'true love', mentorship or denial of who they really are. Many people realize after years that they are completely different from what you had initially believed them to be. Then the same process repeats with new people.

Here are four concrete points you need to remember very clearly to avoid the above:

## **1. Data is king**

Knowledge comes from data – remind yourself of this. 'I am not going to expect anything; I know practically nothing about their life, so I am going to observe and wait for real data to show up.' Waiting means that you allow the initial excitement to calm down. This also means that 'I am not going to judge them based on rumours, nor buy into the hype around them.' Real data is ideologies and thoughts that back a person's actions. People say an incredible number of things to sound amazing. People can write books about self-delusions titled *Who I Think I Am*. The problem with that is, they really believe it. They are going to tell you like they believe it too because they do. If you do not specifically look at the relationship between their words and actions then you are confusing fiction with reality. Sentiments matter when they are converted to actions and choices; otherwise, sentimentality is one more form of self-pleasuring. What people say and what they do are often two separate things. Don't buy their words at face value. Data exists in the choices a person makes, not what they say they would like to make. To hell with what they would like to do. Who people are is very different from who they think they are.

## **2. First impressions are horse manure**

Please make a conscious effort to delete and ignore the first impressions about people created in your mind. First impressions come from how you currently perceive the world. If you relied on data, first impressions would be tossed in the recycle bin in 10 to 20 seconds after they are created. It is entirely possible that you are either very optimistic, naïve, believe in the best and in goodness of people or look for the worst in people. The real answer is? No data. Even then many people claim that they can 'read people accurately within minutes or in the first meeting'. Horse manure. To be fair, what they are referring to is recognizing similar patterns that

they have seen in other humans before. Still, unreliable data.

Do you tend to trust people too soon? Have you formed strong perceptions about people before which you realized later were the opposite of the truth? Forming opinions based on first impressions is the problem. Sorry for repeating again: first impressions are horse manure. Secondly, do not believe that if you are nice to people, they are going to be nice to you. There is no such written law, rule or how humans function in general. People are weird. Therefore, you don't know which is the most intellectual place to be in, regarding all matters of life.

### **3. People are weird**

Stop seeing humans as impressive, perfect, special beings. They are not. NOBODY IS. We are biological, habitually bipedal primates. Invite a healthy level of scepticism. Keep your trust safely in the inside chest-pocket of your jacket, but do not be judgemental, negative or dismissive of people either. Don't be a \_\_\_\_\_ (please fill your choice of expletive based on the geographical area you belong). As mentioned several times before, 'I don't know.'

### **4. We live in a world of marketing, advertising and sales**

Lack of real data creates opportunities for people who want to take advantage of you. Since you believe strongly in first impressions, they just have to sell you great first impressions. Apparently, it's also incredibly easy to do so. This is how dumb humans tend to be: a person wearing a lab coat looks trustworthy to us in matters of taking advice about health. That could just be an actor who failed high school. Avoid making opinions based on what feels right or makes you FEEL good. Realize one simple fact: people who are going to be good or bad to you will both present themselves as good since that is the only one way to gaining your trust.

The next time you meet someone who forms a great first impression, do not forget: people are weird. Screw the first impression. No matter what they do professionally. Doctor. Professor. CEO. Famous person. Motivational speaker. Spiritual guru. President. Quirky actress. Confident stand-up comedian. Accept that we live in a world of marketing. If they are spreading knowledge about their expertise, take it. Great. But does that knowledge say anything about who they are? No. Do you know them

personally? No. Then don't make the assumptions you were going to make in your mind. No real data about who they are as a person. This will help you.

# Happiness, Satisfaction and Peacefulness

You want happiness. That is what we think we want in general. It could be something you really haven't sat and pondered over in an analytical way. Just instinctively, you feel and have accepted happiness as a reasonable answer – 'I want to be happy in life.'

What does that really mean? You are going to throw arrival fallacy at me – money, job, wife, wealth, husband, hot girlfriend, popularity, kids, relationships, status, power, possessions, materialism or whatever. This is the sum total of our attempts to solve the 'happiness in life' problem regardless of the philosophical stuff we say to people. In actions, that is what you are doing.

Happiness is a feel-good, silly, unthought-out answer that doesn't even begin to cover the complexities and contradictions of living. It is too simple. The emotion happiness is fine, but when assigned as the default and de facto purpose of life, crisis awaits. First, happiness and satisfaction are different things. Second, happiness and satisfaction and peacefulness are different things too.

## **What Is Happiness?**

Happiness is a new car, new phone, new movie, new relationship, new achievement, more money, more objects, more clothes, more shoes, bigger house, more rooms, bigger vacation, better hotel, beautiful locations, more sex, more gaming, new games, new console, better technology, better comfort, more friends, more socializing, more parties, more TV shows, new TV series, new trailers, new job, promotion, new videos, new milestones, new experiences, doing new things.

Happiness is **LARGELY additions**. The thought of adding new things feels great to humans. Not just material objects, additions contain a promotion at job, a happier environment for your family, more opportunities for yourself and your family.

If people were to answer 'What would make you happy in life?', the most popular answer would be adding money, house, job, sex, love, looks, longer

life and health of loved ones. Basically, additions: either new ones or repairs or better replacements. Even if somebody wanted all the knowledge, intellect, creativity, even superpowers. Still additions.

So, instinctively, how humans see a happy life is: by adding things we desire + things that make us socially cool + things which give us a safety net = we would be happy forever.

Take a deep breath and really think about your life right now. At this very moment, you are confused about a lot of things in life. A lot of your strong opinions have not come from days and nights of strenuous thinking but from copying popular, accepted opinions. Your own actions often betray what you want to do. A lot of activities that give you great pleasure also give you guilt, regret, pain and shame. There are a lot of conflicts in the simplest a b c d level activities which you do. From career to work to sex to love, relationships, parents, friends to even parasocial relationships online, you experience rollercoasters of contradicting emotions and, even after learning the lessons, you repeat the same patterns again. The point is the answer to a long-term stretched happiness is not a simple one. This is why people in rich high-income countries aren't spared depression, negative thinking, lack of life satisfaction, lack of meaning, broken relationships, loneliness, mid-life crisis, existential crisis and lack of purpose in their work.

If I told you, 'I am going to transfer fifty thousand dollars into your account right now,' the feeling you would get is, 'Oh! That would make me very happy,' because your brain immediately thinks of all the things you can buy and do with that money. In the first week, you'd probably be very happy from buying and doing things. Second week, about the same amount of happiness. Third, lower than before. Fourth week, very close to where you were before receiving the money because you are now adjusted to it. A month later, you would be back to where you were or frustrated because your loved ones are complaining you did not spend the money how they wanted you to, or your relationships are affected negatively because of the money, or new relationships were built solely because of the money. Lottery winners aren't happy. There is a lot of data on lottery winners that says that in a few years, most of them become broke, depressed and wish they had never gotten the money. Some even ended their lives, some lost their kids to habits that new money brought. This is not all of them but a lot of them. Things aren't as simple as your brain thinks when you hear, 'You will get

money.' What happens in reality is very different from how your brain imagines it.

The simple formula of *adding things will make you happy forever* is your brain imagining happiness, which has very little to do with data, thinking or the simple consideration that life is complex, and a lot of our needs swing between pleasure and pain. What that means is, a lot of things that give us intense happiness or pleasure actually cause great pain and suffering too. Contentment in life requires saying 'no' to a lot of things that your brain thinks will make you happy. This goes from certain relationships, substances, food, to habits and activities. The idea of *long-term happiness* in your brain is actually a *fantasy* based entirely on perceived value of material pleasures and possessions. Meanwhile, rich people keep telling you that these material pleasures and possessions have no long-term value, and yet we can't let go of the fantasy.

*Note:* Because happiness is largely additive doesn't mean adding new things in your life is bad. Things aren't black or white. Addition of certain things are very important. You need money. A good job with a good income ensures opportunities for your children and yourself. Higher socio-economic status is linked to higher reported happiness in people. Which means when rich and poor people are asked whether they are happy in their lives, far more rich people answer they are happy than poor people. Pretty commonsensical. Money solves a lot of basic necessity-driven problems which otherwise create high levels of stress. People with higher socio-economic status are associated with better health. I am assuming not being able to afford the best healthcare options for your family because of lack of money would be highly stressful. Same goes for affording opportunities, the best available resources and options for your children's education. And such other things. Knowing you can provide for your family, children and yourself removes a lot of baseline stress. Then come individual and situational problems which differ from person to person.

The point is, addition of things that remove baseline stress such as money, safe environment, family and good friends is important and will factor into your emotional well-being. But adding things blindly into your life as a strategy for being happy is not a well-thought-out plan. Because life is largely subtraction. Life is losing things as you age. At a cellular level, you are degenerating as you grow older. From your physical health, cognitive decline to hair, attractiveness, eyesight, agility, youth, opportunities, focus

of attention, your sexual drive, energy, strength, muscles and IQ, things go down as you grow older. After a certain age, you also start losing a lot of people around you. Our bodies are time-bound. From pregnancy to neuroplasticity, they have their golden years. As you age, things with regard to mind and body become harder. Any older person will attest to that.

Take pleasure, for example: With time, repeating the pleasures starts to yield lower returns, they become less enjoyable or less pleasurable. This is why people have to keep increasing the intensity or dosage of pleasures. New things also become boring to humans very quickly. May not be *all* new things, but most new things do. The moment the new thing becomes not new – you have become used to or is owned by you for a week – it starts to lose its happy-making value to you. Then your happiness becomes adding *another* new thing. Most objects, for most people, lose the happy-making value with time. Most lose this value very quickly. After a while, the new thing may not even be as important compared to the habit of always wanting a new thing.

## **Life Is Subtractive**

As you age, you lose more and more things. Maybe that is why adding things intuitively feels like the answer to being happy. Life is subtraction, so we keep adding things to delude ourselves it is not. Doesn't work. Solutions such as: 'money will make me happy, sex will make me happy, popularity will make me happy, being loved will make me happy, being loved by x y z will make me happy,' have nothing to do with satisfaction or peace. This is childishness. Despite hoarding or adding more money, sex or whatever new flashy things, life will continue to be subtractive.

Think about the word 'happiness', and you would know how much your description of it is linked with fulfilment of your desires. 'I wish. I would be so happy if this happened. If my team won. If I were two inches taller. If my body looked like this.' The word is useless in case you are looking for peacefulness, contentment or satisfaction in life.

In all honesty, to be actually happy in life in the long term, you have to abandon the word happiness, and abandon seeking happiness. Let go of it. It is too simple and too stupid. You should aim for satisfaction in life instead. Life satisfaction carries a different weight in your mind. It does not sound frivolous, short term or pleasure-filled. You haven't really thought about it either, which gives you an opportunity to think about your life in terms of

satisfaction. Life satisfaction automatically feels long term and serious.

## **What Is Life Satisfaction?**

Life satisfaction is minimizing the pains from the subtraction of life. It means achieving and maintaining stability in your life for the most part of it – financial, physical and, most importantly, emotional. It means having a grip on reality and recognizing that blindly adding things cannot be the answer. The answer to gradual subtraction cannot be continuous addition as it creates a loop in which you eventually lose because your time on this planet is limited. And at the end you wonder, why were you even collecting all these things that don't mean anything to you any more. The answer to life's slow subtraction is figuring out what is important to you and then adding, maintaining and respecting that. That is what brings you life satisfaction.

Life satisfaction comes from understanding that you have to be carefully studied as a human in order to understand how to make yourself satisfied in the long run. Humans are mammals who, in seeking what will make them happy, will demand a thousand things, will discard a thousand things and will destroy themselves a thousand times.

Life satisfaction does not concern itself with being happy or unhappy at all. It concerns itself entirely with attaining a state of continued pleasantness. You can have a happy mood or unhappy mood, you can be bored, you can be curious, you can be thinking about outer space, you can be thinking about gene editing, you can be thinking about cooking, you can be disappointed because of x y z. Happiness is not a priority, happy moods come and go. Your overall state of being is the priority. You are not unhappy in life – that's more important. As long as you feel satisfied and pleasant with your life in the long run, your overall mental well-being stays healthy. In order to attain life satisfaction, choosing consciously what you need to add and what you don't is more important than anything else.

## **What Is Peacefulness?**

Peacefulness is different from happiness and satisfaction. Figuring out and cherishing what is beyond additions and subtractions gives you peace. It has nothing to do with adding pleasures and new things into your life. Peacefulness comes from total acceptance of the subtractive nature of life

without any fight.

Peacefulness has nothing to do with the number of zeroes in your bank balance. Add more – it doesn't matter. Add material objects to your life – nothing to do with inner core. Have sex – inner peace remains unaffected. You can sit with friends, family, partner, children – your inner core remains unchanged. On the contrary, the state of your inner core has a strong effect on how you are with your friends and family. If your inner core is disturbed, they will feel it. Your inner core is not on planet Earth, so there is nothing the endless money can buy on the planet that can even touch that inner core. You can achieve the most a human can, you can be worshipped by humans, but your inner core will have nothing to do with that; your ego on the other hand will be blowing you flying kisses. You can be the most famous person on the planet – your inner core will still not notice you.

From a technical point of view, your inner core is not connected directly to the external world. Whatever you do in the outer world has zero direct effect on your inner core. However, your inner core is connected to your mind. So, if you are poor or sick or bullied or starving, it will affect your inner core too. Things are not black and white, not 100% or 0%. Your inner peace will give you a lot of strength and clarity to solve your problems, but problems that shake your physical and emotional existence will also affect the inner core.

All things in life have their place. Discarding the role of the external world entirely means indulging in extremes too. At the end of the day, you are still a biological mammal. Your mind too has limits. What you can do with your mind also has limits. A tumour growing in your brain pressing the amygdala can rapidly affect your behaviour and thoughts unbeknownst to you; it can make you highly impulsive and aggressive out of nowhere, completely changing your personality and how you used to behave and think before. A tumour growing into the orbitofrontal cortex can change a person's sexual appetite on levels that will shock you. One may start fancying things one had never imagined before, taking actions that may land one in prison. Let's take depression. A few decades ago, we had the monoamine hypothesis, which meant that a problem with monoamine neurotransmitters, for example, serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine, were the biological root cause of depression. Then came the theory: depression is caused because of decreased levels of selective monoamines such as serotonin in the brain. Serotonin uptake medicine called fluoxetine,

commonly known as Prozac, worked well too. But then they found out that about 30%–50% of the patients did not respond at all to serotonin uptake antidepressant treatments. Now there is a theory that it is slow or fewer neural connections in certain brain areas that cause depression; at least that is what they found in the brains of rodents with depression. When treated with small doses of ketamine, it triggered the release of a neurotransmitter called glutamate that strengthened the connections in the right areas of the brain, such as emotions, making the person feel better and happier again. Slow, weak neural transmission. That's why exercising in depression helps too, it helps strengthen connections of neurons. The above is dangerous oversimplification and certainly not medical advice. The point is, humans still hardly know anything about depression, which is something that is so commonly known and talked about amongst humans.

The human brain is highly, highly, incredibly, crazily complex. Slight changes in your neural activity or grey matter can change your behaviour, desires, urges and actions. A lot of your personality was formed in your mother's womb, depending on what she ate, what she was exposed to, did somebody smoke around her, the pollution, was she under stress, was she alone, was she happy, her personality, your father's personality, your ancestors! Childhood exposure to lead from lead paint or leaded gasoline or other sources changes your entire personality in ways you cannot imagine. It reduces intelligence, increases lower impulse control, aggressiveness and neuroticism. Even low-level lead exposure reduces the IQ of children for the rest of their lives, regardless of how rich they are. It increases criminal behaviour. Several widespread studies have shown the same results. They have found that the reason behind the rise of crimes between the late 1960s and 1990s in the industrialized world was because of lead exposure from leaded gasoline. Crime drastically reduced afterwards. An entire generation's (Gen X's) personalities were affected. By the way, these studies were limited to the US and Europe. Researchers say the problem may be much bigger in Asia, South America, Africa and the Middle East. The exposures are much higher there.

This is your biology telling you how little you are in control of how your brain works. Lead exposure. Grey matter. Synaptic transmission. Before talking about peacefulness inside, we have to see and give all domains their respective place. We cannot discard them, which is what a lot of gurus, motivational speakers and self-help people who love to abuse the term

‘spirituality’ do. There is no *one* thing. To discard everything else and uphold *one* thing as the solution or answer is incredibly short-sighted and reveals our intellectual ignorance towards multiple data points. Even in answering complex questions, we cannot handle a complex answer. ‘Give us one *true* answer, please.’ I am out.

Peacefulness is a state of being inside of you which is achieved when you do two things: a) you have freed yourself from the ideas of yourself; b) you have realized some things that have fundamentally changed the way you see humans, humanity, societies, human ideas and the limits and delusions of human thinking. Peacefulness has almost everything to do with your inner core.

Inner core is fighting aliens. External world is fighting humans. These are two different types of battles. The enemy is completely different. The tools are different. The methods of fighting are different. Humans largely attach their self-worth to money, achievements and fame. The concept of self-worth is utterly meaningless in the battle within. Self-worth exists in the external battles with other humans and human-developed systems, i.e., societies, society - defined capabilities, society-defined achievements, etc. These metrics of determining self-worth – money, achievements, fame – are not only incredibly shallow but also spiritually harmful. They prevent an individual from even accidentally reaching self-discovery because they push so much towards determining your self-worth via fame, approval, achievements, material objects and power.

That is why meditation is suggested very heavily. But meditation has also lost its meaning in the modern world. Apparently, meditation now is an *exercise* or a *skill* according to a documentary about meditation by the famous app Headspace. In three seconds, they got everything about meditation wrong. It is not a skill. It is not an exercise. This American insistence of putting all things into categories that convert them into *exercises, skills and goals*, as if every human endeavour is geared towards achieving something is unbelievably self-limiting. According to this model, life almost becomes about either winning or losing. The entire point of meditation is lost the second you see it within these dumb limitations.

Meditation comes from Hindu philosophy. Hindu philosophy does not see life as *achieving, building skills, finishing goals, winning or losing*. It finds these pursuits laughably moronic and restricts actions (*karma*) to fulfilling one’s duties (*dharma*) without attachment to its fruits. It emphatically

teaches one how to move beyond and find moksha (freedom from delusions) from these ways of thinking. Achieving, building skills and finishing goals is antithetical to meditation. Different realms. Different experiences altogether. One is going east, the other west. If you want to stay within the realm of achievements and compete and feel proud because you beat some x y z homo sapiens, and you want to beat everybody or else you are a loser, then, my friend, you will lose to time, technology and a younger primate, and eventually realize that the entire thing is a repeating cyclical worthless loop which you should have quit a long time ago. But like millions of humans before you, you won't.

Devote your life to thinking that making millions or billions will make you whole or complete or content one day, and keep chasing. Good luck! OR you enter a different realm where you retire from this external competition after you have won and you have it good and begin to focus on the relationship between you and whatever is beyond humans, society and human-built social systems. In the atmosphere reside all your stresses, problems, desires, urges and complexities, so close your eyes and take your mind to the stratosphere and relax there for a while. No worries exist. No sexual plays. Think that you belong and reside in the stratosphere from now on, not physically, but existentially. Look at humans from that point of view. Look at their worries. Take a peek into their achievements, trophies, pride and ideologies from the stratosphere. You will begin to realize all of it begins and ends within the atmosphere.

Meditation, in very simply terms, is not thinking. Throughout our lives, either consciously or unconsciously, knowingly or unwittingly, purposely or without motivation, we are thinking. Our brain is always thinking of one thing or the other, processing some information or reviewing an experience. Not thinking becomes very hard to do because all we do is think. You don't have to follow the instructions to sit, cross legs, close eyes and place your palms on your knees to meditate. You don't have to sit and assume a position in order to meditate. You can be cooking food and not think. You can be in the middle of a thousand people in the busiest streets of the world and be meditating. If you can *not think*, then you are meditating. Regardless of your body position, your breathing or surroundings.

One of the practical ways peacefulness comes is from being consciously alive. Peace begins when you can comfortably sit with yourself and enjoy the company of yourself for a while every day. What is being *consciously*

alive? You are alive and you are conscious. But you are always thinking of x, y or z. It could be work, money, politics, your girlfriend, boyfriend or the state of your relationship, why they aren't doing this or that. Your brain is always busy. Either thinking about the future, your plans, work you need to get done, money you need to earn, the vacations you need to take, these a b c goals you need to achieve. Basically, you are alive and you are conscious, but in terms of linear time, in your mind, you are either in the past or future. Being consciously alive is consciously acknowledging that you are alive right now by spending some time with yourself without any thoughts, just your company. You consciously enjoy your company for a while every day *because* you are alive. We sort of live unconsciously, almost never acknowledging out loud that we are alive in our heads. It happens rarely when you drift away from your mechanically run life. It does not have to. You can do it every day. In the middle of stress and worries, sit with yourself and do not think. Become consciously alive and breathe. Spend 15 minutes with yourself. Every other action is either your genetics, patterns you are repeating without thinking, mimicking what society or groups do and your personality traits. *This* is free will.

By the way, consciously alive has nothing to do with being present in the moment. This is another misleading interpretation. It has nothing to do with time. Being in the present is a consequence, not a goal, and certainly not a thing you need to think about. It shouldn't be in your mind. Telling yourself 'to be in the moment' is a thought. You don't need thoughts. Thoughts distract you from spending time with yourself. Be thoughtless and just enjoy your company. You are conscious and alive all the time but rarely consciously alive at the same time. So, do that.

However, poverty will not help you achieve inner peace because the outer world can give you toxic stress. And this is not a movie. The inner world is important, but the outer world is where you live. Climb towards achieving life satisfaction simultaneously with peacefulness.

Money, sex, friendship, relationships, materialism, objects, technology, pleasures are not useless. They have their value in other purposes but not for inner peace. To say all other purposes are useless is to say life is only one thing. That is reductive and dumb. Life is many things. If tyranny is upon you, refusing to fight an enemy outside is not choosing inner peace, it is cowardice. Refusing to perform your duties towards your family or your obligations is not choosing inner peace, but an excuse to escape. Any

human being who tells you that life is *one* thing, and that there is *one* ultimate truth, and everything else does not matter, is a parody of an intellectual. This is intellectual laziness at best. This is a person who hasn't debated with himself, let alone debating with actual thinkers. This is a person who hasn't touched or even entertained the complex ideas and complexities concerning the topics they talk about. Complex concepts and topics told in the forms of finalities, absolutes, black and white, 100% this and 0% that, are ripe with errors, and anybody telling you this is a first-grade moron and a third-grade actor at best.

People who have peacefulness in them can enjoy sex, gaming, gambling, reading, cycling, watching sports, climbing stuff, making stuff, creating stuff, parenthood, family, earning money, spending money, buying clothes, getting cool haircuts, buying cool shoes or whatever. The difference is that they will *continue* to be entirely peaceful in case they chose not to do any of it. They are peaceful within. Not much from the outside world affects their internal emotional constitution with the exception of extreme events and empathetically feeling human pain and suffering. A person at peace within themselves are never alone in this world. They have a great companion in themselves. That doesn't mean they do not need friends; no, they are peaceful both alone and with friends and family. But yes, everybody needs friends because humans are social mammals.

Lastly and once more, this is not a movie. You do not become some superhero or superior being by achieving inner peace or through meditation. One who acts like they are superior is either a narcissist or a clever marketing genius. Plain and simple. You just become peaceful and free from a lot of self-inflicted pain and suffering from human-created systems. At the end of the day, you remain a habitual bipedal primate with base desires and urges that will create trouble for you with a body and mind that deteriorates with time.

## **Humans Are Happiness Junkies**

Happiness feels good. It is the best emotion. So, naturally, our answer becomes: 'I want to feel good forever.' And we chase after this feel-good happiness as the purpose of our lives. It consists of pleasure, joy, fun, excitement and an emotional high. Therefore, our choices in life are guided by feel good. This is dangerous. Feel good could be excitement, thrill, fun, impulsivity, spontaneity, breaking or bending the norms and rules, choosing

fun or pleasure in the present. Feel good has a strong association with the present. The option of feel-good happiness is about *now*. Feeling it now. Having it now. Having it for a week or a month. ‘Who cares about the future!’

Life satisfaction is very much future oriented. Life satisfaction contains fun and joy too. But majorly, it is about the future and calculated choices. You are not thinking about adding fun and happy moments in your life as much as you are focused on building a foundation of pleasantness for a very long time in your life. Prioritizing comes into the picture. You are not discounting the future for pleasant pleasures. In psychology, this is called present bias or hyperbolic discounting. Humans are willing to let go of solid long-term future returns for short-term pleasures in the present. This is not a small thing. This is what politicians consider when they make budgets, when they talk about action related to climate change, when they are thinking of major issues that affect entire humanity. Present bias, hyperbolic discounting, social discounting rates come into play.

I am sure you have wondered, ‘Why don’t the politicians all around the world take action against big issues and just solve them, for example, climate change?’ The answers in your mind to this very valid question could be:

- a) ‘They are idiots, haha!’ No, they actually aren’t. They are smart enough to get millions of people to vote for them. They could be vile, highly narcissistic, clever, Machiavellian, manipulative, psychopathic, but not idiots.
- b) ‘They are boomers. So, they don’t understand science very well, therefore, don’t understand the urgency.’ Nope. Old age does not mean they don’t understand science. They have access to the best scientists on these matters. They certainly are privy to more information than you, unless you are an expert in that field. They have to know because climate change affects almost everything from mass migration to food production; agriculture to jobs; to extreme weather events; to forests, oceans, seas, to pollution, economy, energy to ... you can fill the rest. Whatever sectors their political interests are focused on, it is affected. Hence, they know.

One of the biggest reasons is present bias. The large-scale changes needed to fight climate change will not bring any feel-good results for the people living *right now*. On the contrary, those measures will upset a lot of ways the world is working currently. This means upsetting a lot of people and

forcing them to change their ways. People want to feel good in the present. You want to feel good in the present. Get it? Even an elected politician who is highly motivated and concerned for the future generations knows that.

The choice is: upsetting people in the present but doing good for the future generations 25+ years later vs keeping people happy in the present and getting elected again. These politicians will do anything that gets them elected and gives them power. So, the majority of work is done for the present, and some work + lots of promises for the future. That is why what you see are the promises made decades ago by rich income countries, the goals and deadlines that were set a decade ago or five years ago, are nowhere close to completion.

These are a highly clever, shameless, psychopathic, manipulative, narcissistic bunch of people whose main aim is to secure power – our leaders. But what about your actions? You think you are any better? Humans are happiness junkies. Present bias. Hyperbolic discounting. We chase the happiness we can see *in front* of us. How many times in the last week did you choose instant fun and pleasure over doing something that would reward you in the long run? Feel-good happiness is too great. We can't get enough of it. People cheat on their long-term partners in stable relationships, risk their families, risk the emotional well-being of their children, out of seeking some thrill or excitement which they miss from their youth.

You are wired to be a happiness junkie. It is not something you can easily control or change. The urge towards feel-good happiness is too strong. You will always be attracted to it. Mesmerized by it. And lured. What you can change is, for the first time, you can be aware of it. You can accept the fact that you are a feel-good happiness junkie in your mind. Knowing this about yourself gives you the power to look at your life and decisions differently. Maybe a lot of your actions are guided by the happiness junkie in you. You never questioned it because you didn't know there could be alternatives. The only way most humans know to be happy in the long term is by repeating feel-good happiness. Tragic but true. They don't know of life satisfaction or peacefulness. They certainly haven't experienced either of them but have experienced feel-good happiness more times than they can count. Happiness junkies prioritizing feel-good happiness – that's most humans in different phases of their lives.

Instead of saying, 'I want happiness in life,' say, 'I want life satisfaction.'

Something changes. The feel good isn't there. Life satisfaction still feels safe, promising and desirable. We need to change our language. Our mind follows the language we use. The intention behind saying, *I want happiness in life*, is the same as wanting life satisfaction, but the meanings of the words are very different, therefore, they give very different directions to the mind.

1. Life satisfaction is built from saying 'no' to the happiness junkie in you.
2. Life satisfaction is created by uniquely selecting what your personality and mind will enjoy. The happiness junkie will chase after pleasures that almost all homo sapiens enjoy.
3. Life satisfaction is maintained by adjusting joys to create a long-term pleasant environment in your life. A happiness junkie does not care about limits, stress, destruction, relationships, responsibilities in their life. All they want is to feel good. When reality becomes stressful, they want to feel good even more to escape reality.
4. Life satisfaction requires understanding that because something makes you feel good does not mean it is good for you. It may feel good for now, but what is it setting you up for? Where are you going with this? Is there any end to it? Thinking such questions before decision-making is important.
5. It is okay to experience pleasures, but it is not okay to forget that your life is not short term, that your actions have consequences, and that you are a happiness junkie. Keep that in your mind.

## Happiness Hurts

These are statements I am assuming you may have heard from people. They are common:

### **'Why am I not happy even though I have a great life?'**

Because the knowledge of what makes you happy came from childish ideas of long-term happiness, which was arrival fallacy + fulfilment of your base desires and goals. They focused on making a lot of money, finding a very attractive partner from the same status, and buying a lot of material objects and technologies and machines to complete that perfect life. You did very little to no philosophical inquiry to see existence differently, little to no emotional work on yourself to develop emotional maturity, didn't question the needs and wants of your personality, like you would question a stranger.

The result now is you have mastered *how to be happy temporarily*. You can party, take vacations, go to any fancy well-lit place you want, hang out with friends, play video games, have sex, make money, make deals, get likes, subscribers or followers. But anything beyond that is a problem. You are away from contentment and peace. You can't sit alone with yourself because you are afraid to find out that you might be very lonely. You always feel like doing something to make yourself happy temporarily. Therefore, the question: 'Why am I not happy even though I have a great life?'

**'I know I shouldn't be with them, yet I can't move on from that person.' (This example excludes abusive relationships)**

You can't because the happiness junkie in you is strongly convinced that they bring to you the best pleasure-filled happiness. Because the goal in life is to be happy, and you currently know of no other happiness better than what you felt with them, you obsess over them even though it is brutalizing you with pain. The truth is: you don't really miss that person; you miss that particular brand of happiness + pleasure. Sadly, you haven't found that replacement yet. You will disregard their existence the moment you find it with another person. Because you are a happiness junkie, and this is the best happiness known to you, it becomes the highlight of your wants, and you can't seem to move on, no matter what other feel-good activities you try. Look at your life from different metrics than happiness and pleasure, for example, stability, children, family, marriage, your ambitions, non-sexual compatibility, their personality, and you might get a very different picture of that person.

**'I know I should be working hard, but I waste my day on my phone, being lazy. I am filled with regret.'**

The happiness junkie is looking to feel good. Work doesn't make you feel good. So, you are doing exactly what your need in life is. Work should be done as your duty. If you will see your life from the point of view of stability, you might see work differently. It may become something you are doing to bring safety, financial security and resources into your life. But as long as feel-good happiness is the top priority, whether consciously chosen or otherwise, you are going to deprioritize long-term gains for short-term pleasures.

Life, for most people, is broadly a combination of four things: Making yourself happy. Making others happy to make yourself happy. Feeling sad

because others are happy. Feeling sad because you used to be happy.

Feel-good happiness has much to do with the external, and you cannot control the external.

Because the happiness we want comes in a thousand forms, we are never really sure of what we precisely want. We are busy adding more and more, hoping that we will meet a completion point where we will be happy forever. This completion point is imagined. It is a fallacy. What continues instead is the process of adding more. Objectively speaking, that is the whole deal. You buy a short-term pleasure; it ends shortly. You can buy, achieve, occupy a thousand of them; all thousands of them will end soon. But humans love that feel good so much that they cannot accept that it can't be stretched into the long term. This is our delusion. A grand delusion that billions of us collectively share and spread all the time. It's rampant on social media, TV shows, movies and media. The insecure urge to show off fictional long-term happiness by the means of big houses, cars or attractive homo sapiens in a ten-second clip, the collective happiness from which will last about three days in total.

That final happiness will not come because it isn't there. There is no long-term feel-good pleasure. The feeling of any such pleasure is riveting because it is short term. If it were for a month, then you would get bored of it. It would be a regular nice feeling which you have been feeling for a month now. The temporal quality of being short term is what makes it so good. You can repeat it or add a thousand more, and all those pleasures will expire soon too, and you will be back to square one.

As long as the setting in your mind is stuck at *happiness junkie seeking feel-good happiness* as the meaning of your life, you will be stuck in loops. Change the setting. Be clever. Don't be a chicken playing in dumb human-created systems for the cosmic amusement of some alien species.

## How to Achieve Life Satisfaction

As already discussed, the answer to 'what would you need to add into your life to make you happy?' is going to be endless. That's the cruel joke of arrival fallacy, greed and materialism. Also, every six months, humans come up with a thousand more new things. But what if you had to pick five?

Consciously choosing five things that give you something to live for is life satisfaction. Five joys that give you meaning, satisfaction and are uniquely

*yours.* They can be an interest, skill, art and intellect-based pleasures. Art not for materialism, showing off or status building, but art for pleasure's sake. Skills that consume your mind completely, get you in a state of flow and give you incredible satisfaction. It could be playing the piano or cycling or anything. Intellectual pleasures such as reading, learning, discussing, writing and thinking.

Life satisfaction is choosing wants that are personal to you instead of blindly adding feel-good pleasures without thinking at all. Choosing five pleasures or joys that are personality driven, not materialism driven.

## The Relation Between Good Decision-Making and Time

Let us look at decision-making from the point of view of age. Young people, in general, are more risk-taking, impulsive, pleasure-driven in their decisions than older people. It is not because older people are wiser but because life is subtractive. Getting older means fewer chances at getting it right than before.

At 20, time looks like an ocean. Vast, depicting immortality, no end to it. At 35, the ocean is reduced to a giant pond. Still vast, glorious, but some ends are visible. At 50, it looks like a small pond. You can see where it all ends. Our decision-making is affected by how we perceive time. This is called Socioemotional Selectivity Theory. According to this theory, when life looks like an ocean, things like materialism, achievements, pleasures, adding feel-good happiness make sense because the end is not visible to a young person. When life looks like a pond, focus on personality-driven, meaningful and purpose-driven pleasures take priority. One focuses more on family, relationships, friendships, children and social groups. Because you can see how small life is.

Even at 30, some urgency and weight are introduced to the same decisions which you didn't care much about before. One doesn't want to repeat another two or three years doing the same thing. Our perspective changes with time because of time *running out*. You are forced to think in the long term. You are forced to become good at decision-making, which, by the way, is not an indication that you actually become good at decision-making. Good decision-making requires managing troublesome personality traits, gaining self-control, rationally deciding what you want in the long term, thinking practically about the long term, considering your mental health and so on. Life satisfaction is good decision-making instead of blind decision-

making – which is seeking happiness.

You become aware of the simple fact that going from 20 to 30 is a drop of water in the ocean of geological time. It will happen very quickly. Life satisfaction is long and pleasant because you act with the awareness that life is short and subtractive.

**First change:** Life satisfaction takes first priority and seeking happiness, being a happiness junkie, feel-good happiness gets deprioritized. They exist, but in the background of life satisfaction. The arrangement in your brain with regard to decision-making and accessing reality should feel like this. Life satisfaction, I repeat, is at the top and front. Other things don't go away, they just aren't as dominating and important as before. You have consciously decided and placed what is going to be dominant and important – a sign of self-control.

**Second change:** Financial stability is a must for long-term pleasantness to exist. Whatever your current life situation is, financial stability must get to the top in priority and importance. Financial stability is enough money that removes the worry about money. Money-related worries are the most fundamental stressors of life. For life to be pleasant, those stressors have to be removed. Make that your long-term goal now. Your actions and decisions must be guided or adjusted in accordance with it. Mental peace in poverty is a healthy animal with an open gash. If you cannot provide for your family and yourself, your life will hardly be pleasant.

Stability and greed are not the same. Stability and materialism are not the same either. Greed is lusting for money; materialism is lusting for what money can buy. And I know that you know a lot about lust and where it takes you. Know the distinction. Aim for stability.

**Third change:** Nominate five joys based on enjoyment, satisfaction, meaning, purpose and long-term value. Handpick them on the basis of self-knowledge.

## Joys

What is that one thing you do which makes you feel ‘today was a good day’? Your needs seem fulfilled. The joy isn’t just about feel good, but much more. It gives you satisfaction in that very day as opposed to the 25 things which give you pleasure and fun, but you forget right after. Once the

day is over, you can barely remember what you did today.

Take the above question and put it in simple categories: physical joy, intellectual joy and artistic joy. This will not come to you immediately. This is a question that concerns how much you have explored yourself and how much do you know about yourself! If you have a good amount of self-knowledge, you will answer this easily and pick one or two activities in most categories.

To live life on your own terms, you will have to limit yourself from endless options that are available in the human world. These endless options are there to feed the happiness junkie in you. You want life satisfaction.

Physical joys: These experiences make you forget the world, fill you with immense joy, give you a strong sense of fulfilment and connectedness and may also bring you a state of flow. This could be riding a bicycle, running, going out for long walks, lifting weights, hiking, CrossFit, playing tennis, basketball, doing yoga – you get the idea. You can do them for hours. The more you repeat them, the more charged, joyful and satisfied you feel. You feel that they are uncommonly and truly *yours*. What is your physical joy(s)? In case you live a sedentary life and have none, explore. Because you haven't found something does not mean it doesn't exist for you, it means that you haven't looked. In what way would you like to move your body that your body agrees with and your mind loves? Find the answer to that question.

Intellectual joys: I downloaded a multiplayer game on my phone yesterday. Played it till 3.00 am in the night, then after sleep, went back to playing at 9.00 am in the morning. At about 2.00 pm, I removed the game and read an article from the *New York Times* about marriage and divorce. Just a random article from their homepage. I noticed the following: I had slept less. I enjoyed the game while I was playing it but at the same time, I was angry at myself that I didn't want to put it down. Once I uninstalled it, the pleasure from playing the game immediately went away too and all the hours felt like a waste of time. That single article gave me more pleasantness than all those hours spent playing the game. From that one article, I felt that the day had some meaning, that I had done something good with my time, the knowledge I acquired made me think, and I regarded that as a much better form of relaxation.

Choose any activity which makes you learn something. The subject can be

of your choosing. The format can be of your choosing. It can be a podcast, online magazine, books, anything. Learning about which subjects tickle your curiosity and interest the best? Do not get forced into choosing your intellectual joy because of your religious, social or ideological groups. Intellectual joy concerns only the individual in you, not the group you are associated with. Imagine that you have no name, no identity, no body, no shape or form, but only a mind that can think; what does that mind want to learn more than anything? Which study? About which subject? Is it cells, microorganisms, deep-sea creatures, microplastics, the oceans, viruses, robots, aliens, artificial intelligence, technology, movie-making, paintings, designing, behaviour economics, finance, human behaviour, group behaviour, human brain, human body, marriage, dating, parenting, human evolution, animals, time, food, gravity, human ideologies, climate, war, colonization, world wars, cold war, slavery, morality, divorce, chemistry, ethics, quantum physics, space, religions, language, philology, trees, plants, tribes, cultures?

Find three or four based on self-knowledge; they will serve you for the rest of your life by occupying a good amount of your free time and giving you immense satisfaction in return. This is intrapersonal business. If an answer doesn't come, time to start reading at random – anything and everything. In about three weeks of massive reading, you will have a good understanding of what you hate to read and what you enjoy reading more. If you don't know from where to read, download a decent newspaper app or an online magazine which has a cheap subscription; they have multiple categories covering almost everything. Start reading one article from each category every day for at least three weeks. This will make you comfortable with reading, you might even fall in love with reading, and it will help you think more in general. As a habit, you may become more reading-reliant than reliant on other people to give you information about things. Reading is intellectual development that empowers you in your own eyes. Learning what excites you lifts your mood up, gives you perspectives and meaningfulness because you are engaging with information that stirs something deep in your soul. It may give you another purpose to live – acquiring knowledge that you love.

Artistic joys: Art can reveal parts of you that you did not know existed. One must most definitely give oneself to one or a few or some forms of art. One of the best ways to receive self-knowledge and develop intellectually is

through art. It could be the written word, moving pictures, music or paintings. Artistic joy means both creation and consumption. From learning to play an instrument, sketching to designing, editing, filming, acting, to watching films, listening to good music, etc. Devoting yourself to art does not mean watching a popular movie in the theatres every weekend or listening to a new popular song. It is finding which art form specifically draws you in completely, be it music or movies or anything. Which art form serves as a device for self-exploration or food for thought and opens a door to some place new away from reality or opens doors to rooms and chambers within you? Reading a novel can do this to you. Music can make you meet yourself. A painting can cause an eruption of thoughts. Good art leads you to thinking better by showing you the same thing from a different perspective. Good art is the introduction of ideas, values, perspectives that can elevate the quality of who you are. Art is ideas without judgments. And you get to date those ideas when you engage with art for a while. Try to find out what would your artistic joys be. What fascinates you? Which art form makes you want to take a deep dive into it?

Artistic joys will take your time. Intellectual joys too. Add physical joys on top of that. Your days are full. You are not running out of things to do. Also, doing things sincerely is opening up and exploring the universes they contain. The more you explore them, the more things you find out in them.

Life satisfaction = financial stability + self-chosen joys (physical, artistic, intellectual) with high long-term value, meaningfulness, purposefulness being the top priorities. For every person, life satisfaction will consist of different choices.

Happiness = endless joys with short-term, feel-good value. Every human will enjoy things that give them happiness. Like a meme or a funny video.

Life satisfaction in this chapter is not fully explained. There is much more, such as decision-making ability, your personality traits, your intrapersonal intelligence, the emotion work you do with yourself, interpersonal intelligence and more. Also, you will have to focus on maintaining good relationships with the people you love and people who are good for you (not because they are attractive but because they have good values and are trustworthy). In this chapter, life satisfaction is covered to the extent that it can be a better alternative to seeking happiness for you.

## Rejections and Failures

Two things: One, rejections are a part of life, so you are going to get rejected a lot. Two, life is not fair, so you would rarely get a fair shot.

‘Why are rejections a part of life?’ you ask the great philosopher.

‘In your mind you may be an intergalactic superstar, but in the real world, you are one among billions of people on this planet, and almost all those people want the same things as you do. Also, you cannot control humans, not like Professor X from X-Men – you can see how they got that name,’ answered the intergalactic superstar philosopher. What I am saying is, a lot of rejections will have nothing to do with you.

So, a simple lesson of life: rejections are normal. You may think, ‘How stupid! I know this, everyone knows this! I can’t believe I am reading baby-formula-level philosophy!’

Motherlover, REJECTIONS ARE NORMAL! SAY IT. KEEP SAYING IT. Not out loud. In your mind. It may be commonsensical but humans are a too self-important, self-loving sons of motherlovers who think way too much from their ego instead of their rational minds.

### Romantic Rejections

Being rejected by someone romantically is not a statement on who you are. Although we take it most personally because romantic desire is emotional and sexual. We are technically assessing our own social and sexual ranking from the eyes of a stranger. Have you ever rejected someone romantically? Even if it required as little effort as swiping your finger on an app, think of how much thought and time went behind it. What were the factors that you considered behind accepting or rejecting? How stupid, impersonal and shallow are those factors? That’s how much thought that goes behind rejecting someone. How can you take a rejection personally when it doesn’t take more than a few seconds to happen?

However, it does not mean that being attractive or wanting to put effort on yourself is not required. Attractiveness is important, and one must understand that there are more types than just physical attractiveness. We

are biological primates and, evolutionarily speaking, when engaged in seeking a mate, physical characteristics are of importance. But we are also primates with complex emotional frameworks and intellectual needs, so just the physical alone is a terrible marker for a relationship. Try to understand, *all* things have their respective importance. Different people seek different mixtures of emotional, intellectual and physical. You can add even more into that mix: success, spiritual, creative, lifestyle. You have to find the one who is looking for the mixture that is you. That does not mean a terrible mix has somebody looking for them too. We are still primates at the end of the day. The rules of natural selection still apply. Humans are choosy. Focus on becoming a good mixture of emotional, intellectual, physical, success, spiritual, creative, social, lifestyle and more. In life, once you feel good about yourself, you will not feel so bad about rejections from x y z. As a good mixture, you will be assured that you will find someone. But if you are basing it on tricks, lying, trapping someone based on manipulation and luck, and are hoping that they will stick with you even after finding out the truth, then my friend, stop hoping and smoking. Work on yourself to become deserving for someone, and you will expect the same from them too.

## A Very Short of History of Rejections

The first rejection happens at school or at home or both. The sensation felt from that is: ‘Am I invisible to them?’ Your mind is unable to come up with any rational explanation for such behaviour since at that age, you require assistance in crossing streets. In the absence of a sensible explanation for what is happening, you feel: ‘Something is wrong with me. I am not special. I don’t deserve love.’ From this, some children – who are ignored by their primary caregivers – may unconsciously start building themselves to be self-reliant in a way that they don’t ever have to depend on anybody else for love and care. This is a very sad thought. It is the brain of a tiny kid that is doing this because they are not loved back.

What you experience in your childhood years with regard to parental love, attention and care shapes the way you perceive rejections and relationships in your adulthood. This is called attachment styles. Different people with different experiences grow up to have different attachment styles which they then bring into their relationships or the lack of it. From divorce of parents to how much time the parents spent with you to what activities they

did with you to what style of parenting you experienced to what kind of relationship did the parents have with each other, all of it matters greatly in the formation of how you will see and form relationships in your life.

How much do parents love each other their children and the state of the home, affect the children's jobs, relationships, marriages, the possibilities of divorce, personalities and how they are going to raise their own children in the future. I am not saying it is black or white. People can fix themselves through philosophy, introspection and therapy in case they realize that they have some unhealthy patterns which they repeat or bring into all their relationships. Those patterns could very well be stemming from the childhood love and care received from their caregivers or the lack of it.

If you are terrified of commitments, think you have trust issues with people, or you are too doubting of your partners because you live in the fear that they are going to cheat on you or leave you without any evidence to support those fears, then maybe check out therapy. If you tell yourself that you don't need anybody, you are complete by yourself, but at times find yourself liking somebody, wanting to have somebody in your life, have the want to not be lonely, then please seek help instead of relying on voices in your brain that are divorced from how you actually feel and what you really want. If you quickly become dependent on your relationships to be happy in life, or you are willing to do anything to keep them in your life even if it involves taking emotional abuse or self-destruction, then maybe talk to a professional. Don't assume that they won't be able to help you or that you have it all figured out. Take that step. Allow moments in your life which prove to you that real smartness begins with accepting that you are not the smartest. In those moments, give others a chance too, they might surprise you.

Other than that, start a journey of knowing yourself. If you do what is mentioned in Chapter 3: you are a nation, then you have already started. It may be hard but there is a possibility that you may honestly identify hidden feelings which you deny admitting to yourself currently. Humans lie to themselves a lot. Once the feelings that you hide or are ashamed to self-admit are out in the open, you can begin to change them, fix them and from that make conscious efforts to change the course of your relationships too. You can get more involved, more emotionally available and set boundaries too.

You can't control some rejections from hurting you, some you can. Stop

the ones you can by accepting that you are one among the billions of people who are all opting for the same things. At multiple points, you are going to lose out on things. It is okay. We all do, the billions of us, which makes rejections a highly normal regular occurrence. Try to keep this perspective close to your chest. This is not only happening to you. Rejections are normal.

## **Failures**

Stop beating yourself over failures. Smart people who do well in life treat failures with immense respect. They don't get bullied by them. They see them as a frequently occurring familiar phenomenon. Know why? Because people who destroy in life, actually work a lot. The more you work, the higher the number of both losses and wins will be. They see many more losses than you. So, they realize a few things: a) no loss is final; b) no win is final; c) you win by losing; d) everybody loses in something or the other.

People who say, 'I am an idiot, I am nothing, I am a loser, I don't deserve anything, I deserve to die,' either don't compete as much or are echoing what their society has taught them. That's how the society they are brought up in views losing. Such societies rarely produce creative people or critical thinkers. Not that such people aren't born in them, but creativity and critical thinking is actively murdered on a daily basis in such societies. What matters is winning or losing. Only in their later years, people who are naturally driven start exploring their creativity or critical thinking. The overarching conformity, in such societies, punishes them at every step and pushes them to think against it.

## **Winning**

What winning in life needs is = high conscientiousness trait; high IQ; recognizing what you want to do early on; consistency; building efficient studying methods which work best for you; optimizing time based on what works for you; planning smartly; scheduling; following the schedule; taking breaks; resting properly; scheduled good amount of sleep; eating healthy brain foods that affect focus and concentration; exercising; natural talent in creativity; interpersonal intelligence and skills that help build networks and connections; working more hours than others and an environment free of toxic stress, abuse, deprivation of food, chaos and violence at home. That is

the secret.

People who are rich are able to provide a lot of those things from money, which is why a lot of success is linked to high socio-economic status. Rich people can hire highly experienced teachers and coaches for their kids who train them in maintaining the most optimal studying schedules, methods and tactics without the kids having to figure them out all by themselves. They get better guidance, direct exposure from successful people in those fields, get access to information from those successful people regarding which steps to take or avoid the common mistakes. The connections, social capital and money makes them more relaxed, confident and opens more options for them globally, which kids from low-income households can't afford.

What you need is: pick a thing. How many things does that thing have? Divide them over a week. For example, take two or three things a day. Not more than that, please. Make a schedule for a week. Since you have only two things to do each day, assign them time and hours. For example, on Monday, Task I starts at 10.00 am and goes on till 1.00 pm; Task II starts from 3.00 pm and goes on till 6.00 pm. Plan that for every day of the week. That's your schedule. Six hours of work a day. Neither good nor bad. Decent for now. Set an alarm clock 15 minutes before the timings. Eat well and healthy. Exercise for about 20 to 30 minutes every day. Just walk for 30 minutes outside or on the terrace if you don't like to exercise. Sleep at a fixed time, so your schedule does not get disrupted. When the alarm rings, no matter what you are doing, drop it, and do the task that you assigned, please. If you assigned a subject, study it. If it's practising a skill, do it uninterrupted by anything. Once the three hours are over, enjoy your time. Take a day off every week if you can afford to. If you can't, then work only for three to four hours for the seventh day and take rest for the remaining day. Sleep. Watch a movie. Go out with friends. Do this every week for a year. By the end of it, you will figure out how to work most efficiently. It will take you a few hours to finish a task which used to take you several hours or days before. You will become a master at planning and scheduling, which means you will be the master of your day and time.

In short, you will figure out how to be successful. Success is about mental tools.

A few simple things, please:

1. Winning is a journey and ultimately a dumb illusion.
2. Failures shall be your humble acquaintances, which you want to have a

relationship with but at a safe distance. They teach you what not to do.

3. There is a huge possibility that you're going to fail a lot. It is fine.
4. Arrival fallacy is a dumb concept shoved down the throats of many poor children all over the world. It is either parents or society telling them, 'If you do this, you win.' No. 'If you clear this competition, you win.' No, you don't. Clearing a competition only gets you into a university. Then you have to study for semesters, maintain a high GPA, learn a thousand things, compete and then the same thing repeats in jobs or a business. You keep learning, competing, failing and winning at the same time – that's how anybody on the planet makes a living.
5. Nothing is final in life except death. As long as you are alive, the person you think has bested you can be bested, and vice versa. The same applies to opportunities, money and whatever you are after. Don't take failures or losses or marks or salary or money or scale of business or success as anything but a dumb marker that represents the smallness of human thinking in the grand scope of life.
6. Focus on learning, learn what you enjoy, enjoy what you are learning, capitalize on what you are learning, but most of all, enjoy the life that you are living.
7. As long as you're alive, free and functioning well, if you want to climb to the top, the chance exists.
8. If you are an introvert, shy and lack interpersonal skills, become too skilled and knowledgeable to be ignored.
9. You don't need to be emotionally or socially lonely to become successful. That's a dumb self-help motivational myth. You need only to be alone when it is required according to your schedule. Those who love you understand what you are doing and will allow you to work. This is real life; you are not in a movie.
10. Things don't always have to have ten points.

# Sex Education for Young People

## Rejections from Girls

The first romantic rejection happens at a fairly young age. It may be way before sexual deviant thoughts enter virgin minds. But as you grow older, rejections become more hurtful, which puts a greater emphasis on the question: ‘Why did they reject me?’ Your brain answers: ‘They want something I don’t have,’ which opens the gates to theories about inadequacies of the self.

Straight teenage boys receive information such as: ‘Girls like a big-ass wallet, partying, clubbing, cool cars, cool guys, expensive dates, gifts, excitement, muscles, height, sex, attractiveness, popularity, rude behaviour, lies, jerks, big penises, and guys who can have sex for 18 hours non-stop.’ This is what the mind of a teenager gets exposed to when trying to understand and find out why girls are not dating him!

The sources of young, straight men’s incredibly moronic ‘knowledge’ are:

- The debilitating insecurity surrounded by insecurities of almost all guys that age.
- Porn, porn-influenced forums, subreddits, websites, groups, servers, where young guys take theories and learnings from porn narratives and transmit them as real-life stories and information.
- Friends of the same age who too are getting the same information from the same sources.
- Guys with low self-esteem, high narcissism or heavy trust issues whose identities are built around showing off that they have sex with multiple women and then abandon them. It is their identity. It cannot happen that they meet you and not mention it.
- Older guys who too are kids in their 20s. So, confused brain meets little self-introspection meets almost no self-discovery meets raging sexual hormones meets limited life perspectives meets insecurities. That’s young people in general. Now imagine what this person will

say to pretend that they have everything figured out? Dumb things.

- Anecdotal evidence from guys who were cheated on. The human brain focuses more on negative information and processes it more. It's called negativity bias. That doesn't mean these kids think everything is going to be negative in their future with regard to dating. They just focus more on information that tells them it is not their fault that they are single, but that of the women's. On the one hand, they will claim that in front of other guys, on the other hand, they will still be optimistic about finding a girlfriend for themselves to be in a relationship. Meet optimism bias.
- From girls with low self-esteem, high narcissism or trust issues stemming from their childhood who do cheat. Also, from girls who date only popular guys or rich guys.
- From selection bias. Focusing only on certain types of girls to form opinions and making large generalizations about all girls and women based on them.
- From opportunistic people on the internet who capitalize on the insecurities, frustration and lack of information of young guys who have faced rejections, are confused and hormonally raging. Their business model runs on their customers feeling frustrated, so they make sure it doesn't go away. On the contrary, they make sure to make this insecurity the centre of their lives. Listening to such people will make women, hot women, sex, masturbation, the only battles you have. They will make lust the biggest enemy in your mind. They will divide the narrative between victimhood or manhood. Either you are a loser or a winner. Binaries. Then they might sell courses or books on how to become a man, a jerk, a bad boy, a complete man, a strong man, an alpha chimpanzee, a bonobo seducer, a silverback gorilla. Whatever they are talking about will have very little to do with empirical sciences regarding human behaviour, group behaviour, primate behaviour or how women behave in different group settings, in different conditions, in different roles, from a scientific point of view. If they ever choose to use group data of any kind, it will be oversimplified confirmation bias and motivated-reasoning-based information. Basically, using any information that fits their narrative. Such influencers or content creators are mostly talking what you want

to hear – highly stupid anecdotal generalizations taken selectively from women who are narcissistic, exploitative, loud, attractive or sound stupid.

The scientific route, the proper route which is based on research and studies over the years, is not black and white, heroes and villains based. It is not sensational enough for YouTube videos on advice to young men. It is nuanced, complex and may feel boring. To be honest, data is boring. It has a lot of debate. It lacks large generalizations unless such findings have been repeated over the time in studies. By the way, I am not saying you can't give advice to young men based on empirical sciences, what I am saying is that advice won't make you angry and won't target your insecurities. It will try to explain things in an objective manner. A lot of influencers target your feeling of being wronged, invoke victimhood in you, instead of telling you a simple fact about life: A LOT of people you are going to meet are going to be selfish, uncaring and unkind to you. Selfishness, narcissism, sadism, manipulation, bullying, lack of empathy, abuse have nothing to do with gender. Men do it to men. Men do it to women. Women do it to women. Women do it to men. People do it to people. Homo sapiens do it to homo sapiens. Beware of such people in your life. Work on making yourself emotionally strong and capable to get away from the holds of such people. The more you complain, the more it shows that it is unresolved in your mind. Complaining, negative talk and resentment are signs of emotional investment, not self-control or emotional strength.

## **Advice on Sex**

In your teenage years, the brain is developing. You are gathering information about love and romance largely from the internet (TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, #couplegoals, influencers), movies, TV shows, all of which are selling what you want to see. Movies that show you a realistic take on marriage and relationships are probably not the ones you are watching. They are boring and serious and have drama regarding issues that you can't relate to. They feature actors in their 40s playing characters in their 30s whose lives are collapsing because they don't know who they are, what they have become, what they want to be or what they should let go of. You as a kid can't relate to that at all, that's not your cup of tea. The movies you are largely watching are fantasies about relationships. Very simply

fantasies in which the main characters look very pretty.

You are shielded from real information and the complexities of real relationships and humans. At the same time, you think of yourself as an adult who not only has an idea what a relationship is but is fully ready to be in one too. A relationship to most young people is having a boyfriend, girlfriend, somebody to hang out with, talk for hours on end, have monkey sex with and make exaggerated promises to, while not considering that your thoughts and feelings are not only changing rapidly but are hardly in your control. There are very, very high chances that none of these relationships will survive. You are kids pretending to be adults in a world where human adults are still mentally children.

Entertain a simple fact: 'I am not that bright at this age to know things for sure, and this may continue well up to mid-20s. My feelings and thoughts are going to be highly chaotic. Maybe, I should focus on controlling the things I can and punish myself less over what I can't.' This advice evenly applies to every single domain of your life at that age.

You might think, 'Oh, we are only kids with raging hormones who cannot understand the complexities of relationships as of now, so why not just have sex and enjoy, yeah?'

No, because that is incredibly dumb too. Nothing is simple in life, including sex. You are in a battle of figuring yourself out while your brain is being dominated by desires and excitement from bodily urges, fun-seeking and short-term pleasures. The choices you make are the outputs your brain receives. They impact not only your current thinking but your entire concept of life that you are building in your mind. You impact your entire subjective reality by the actions you choose to undertake. So, the information you fill your mind with, the choices you make, the emotional games you play, the sexual games you play that are intermingled with emotional health and your self-esteem, all of them build the nature of your reality. Think like this, please. That is why the sources that teach you how to deal with rejections are important. How to see a group of people is important. People who teach you how to see women, dating, sex, hook ups, your self-esteem, what they are linking your self-esteem to – all of these are very important because they can link those to *very bad ideas*. Especially when these ideas are not coming from wisdom or large-scale research. For example, if a study finds that 15,000 men felt much better in the long term about their emotional well-being by making x y z choice or changes in their

dating, then following that advice makes sense. There is data pointing you toward long-term well-being or life satisfaction. Where is the advice you are currently listening to pointing you to? Is it short term? What are the long-term results? How are choices made from those ideas shaping how you see life as a whole? Bad ideas can lead you to dark paths which you may realize at a very late stage of your life.

A few simple lessons you can take from this are:

- Don't form oversimplistic judgments on groups of people because you want a quick answer that will make you feel good by debasing others. The difference between confusion and bad ideas is: confusion tends to solve itself with knowledge, whereas bad ideas can take root and get emboldened. Do not replace confusion with bad ideas. Hold your dumb large-scale judgments.
- Pause and think in life.

Currently, the way you act may be: feeling something → then acting instantly. Basically, feeling and reacting immediately. Change it to feeling something → then pausing and breathing until you find the right course of action based on your moral code, ethics and the impact of your action. The above is very hard, to be honest. For one, nobody tells us this. Second, you are hurt when you are rejected, ignored, not liked by people you desire. It feels reasonable to dislike them and dislike yourself. It is anger which talks to you, not calm reasoning. Calm reasoning is rarely a quality one attributes to young people. Hell! we rarely get calm reasoning from adults. It is highly unlikely that it will come naturally from within or from your surroundings. You will have to consciously bring it. You will have to consciously pause yourself between feelings and reacting to those feelings. Pause and breathe, please. The entire course of your life can change if you can introduce just that between your feelings and actions.

- Maturity is not a gift of age but constant thinking.

It is a black belt earned by constant work. You are not going to grow into a mature, thinking person unless you participate in earning your belts in critical thinking, doing emotion work and developing

patience in yourself. Your choices in life are not automatically going to become better or change – as most people imagine what happens when they grow up. Sure, you will collect more experiences, and you are expected to learn from those experiences. But what if your learning curve isn't that great? What if your biases, desires, urges are stronger than the lessons that are screaming in your face? People consciously repeat the same actions which they call mistakes. At times, it is simply lack of control and self-awareness in a person regardless of their age. Maturity is a sign that the mind has met the person, consciousness has observed the personality, and work is being done to ensure peace in life. This won't happen naturally. Ignorance is not bliss. Filling yourself with knowledge is not bliss. Only self-work which uses the right knowledge combined with the knowledge of yourself leads to a blissful, strong state inside.

## **How to Look for Good Solutions**

How can one solve one's problems correctly? By recognizing how hard problem solving actually is. If you can understand the weight of it, you would stay away from a lot of bad advice. To accurately give you solutions for your problems, one would have to:

a) have the needed amount of data about your problem; b) have a lot of data about your personality; c) have knowledge about the problem in general, what it concerns, what are its origins, how it affects people, what remedies work; d) tell you solutions that you can practically apply in action instead of emotional feel-good nonsense that will wash away in two days from your mind; e) understand that solutions should concern the mental health of the person and have long-term results. They cannot be temporary solutions; f) recognize the roots and patterns which created this problem in the person's life; g) question the existence of the problem from different perspectives.

Even though we talked about Solomon's Paradox, we must get serious here and question that as well. Sure, people give better advice to others which they don't apply to themselves. But do you really think even that advice is great? Great advice implies that the person is either very wise, or an expert in that field or possesses great problem-solving acumen. How many of such people just happen to be in your lives? And how many of

those have the time to carefully listen and give their take on your problem?

What you are surrounded with is heavily generalized, not very practical, feel good, half-assed advice which you have heard several times. That is why therapy exists. For someone to listen to your problem patiently, understand the different aspects of it and be willing to listen to all of it? – yeah, that costs money. That doesn't mean that nobody will listen to your problem or that good people don't exist. **GOOD SOLUTIONS ARE HARD TO COME BY** – that's the point.

A practical, unbiased, long-term solution is not easy to come up with. I am not saying that you cannot get those for free or can't come up with yourself. You can. But those are hard and require a lot of patiently done clever thinking. People kind of take this for granted. We assume solutions are everywhere. We say that without even thinking. The truth is, we prefer two things: 1) simple short-term solutions, 2) someone else to solve our problems.

Thinking is highly taxing to the human brain. So, we don't like to think for very long and hard. We tend to quit or want to quit the moment a solution that seems practical and simple enough arrives. Those are mostly short term. The reason why we rely on influencers and creators is because our brain prefers that somebody else takes that cognitive load from us. If somebody else can do that mental work, then you don't have to. This is smart but only when the solutions don't send you off to dark paths or turn you into a follower or lure you into some ideology. When you open yourself to relying on others, be very, very wary.

There is a simple solution for this: listen to influencers who keep the solutions scientifically based or scientifically balanced. Listen to creators who are psychiatrists, psychologists, neuroscientists, philosophers who are scientifically inclined and balance their teachings with empirical data. Develop a leaning towards what scientific literature says on your problem, *please*. It is okay to listen to everybody but look for these signs. People who are solving problems without understanding the extent of the problem will only give feel-good non-solutions. A lot of self-help content is passionately saying stupidly simple things. Aristotle defined the Dunning-Kruger effect way before Dunning and Kruger developed it empirically. He summarized it as: 'The more you know, the more you realize you don't know.' A lot of self-help content is the Dunning-Kruger effect summed up by this saying of Aristotle. People give stupid advice very confidently because they haven't

at all studied what they are saying. If they did, they would realize how complex the problem is, how many groups it affects differently, how many markers exist that affect it separately, that different personality types and traits matter which is human complexity, and more and more. The less you study, the more confident you are about your dumb solutions because of lack of knowledge. By the way, even science recognizes its own limitations, biases and areas of problems. For example, a lot of empirical research on humans has actually focused majorly on people who are western educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD). And they are trying to solve that problem too.

## **The Bullshit: Real Ratio**

Culturally speaking, who do we collectively look at knowingly or unknowingly as drivers and examples of social responsibility? Celebrities. That's why we get mad at them so much. But not just celebrities. It's complicated now. It is celebrities, TikTokers, models, vloggers, YouTubers, streamers, gamers, artists, podcasters and more. Most of them are entertainers. They become famous because they can entertain very well. Their objective isn't and never was to teach people the harsh realities of life. But we appoint them as representatives of social responsibility because we equate fame with responsibility. Fame should not be equated with responsibility. Wanting fame is thinking entirely about yourself and how to make others notice you, whereas responsibility is thinking entirely about others and very little about yourself. They are almost contradictory. And yet, humans expect famous people to teach them and lead social changes. By famous people, I mean people whose focus is to be famous or talented artists such as actors or musicians. Also, I exclude people who are famous for sharing knowledge, lectures, information, discussing ideas and such – as long as they are subjected to criticism. Anybody who suppresses criticism is intellectually a narcissist child in a grown person's body.

We are living in the age of modern advertising in which humans sell personas of themselves online. When you buy or follow somebody, you are buying an idea of who they are, how they live, who they date, their friends, their dress sense and their lifestyle. No wonder young people want to be influencers the most out of all the career options available. You want a relationship like they have. You want a girlfriend who looks like an Instagram model. You want their friend groups, houses they live in, and

post pictures on Instagram like they do, which you cannot seem to click off yourself. On the other hand, you tell others all the time that ‘people on social media are fake, their lifestyles are fake’. Even though you know for a fact that it is bullshit, you still want it. You have watched the drama in which they expose the lies about each other and even then, you want that. You still want it because you have bought it.

See, the human brain sees things on a spectrum. So, when you hear it is fake, what you are really hearing is, 20% is fake, or 30% or even 50%, but your brain still believes that the rest must be true because you have been shown enough pictures and videos and stories. What we have in our minds is a ratio called bullshit:real. And this changes from time to time. For example, when an influencer you like is exposed about their lies, you are shocked as a fan, but in a few weeks, there is a high chance you are back to believing whatever you initially did. At the height of the drama, that ratio in your mind became: ‘70% of their persona is bullshit:30% of what they show is real.’ But after a week, by making apology videos, explanation videos or whatever works, they can shift it to 30% bullshit:70% real. You want the fantasy to be true, and they know that. They know what you like. They know what you want to hear. And they know most people are empathetic, forgiving and have incredibly short attention spans. That is why they have millions of people following them. They are clever.

BUT, and this is important: you are not being fooled by them. Because you know for a fact that a lot of what they show is made-up, false, manufactured, fictitious, for entertainment purposes. You know that, my dear fellow homo sapiens. And yet, you still believe it. You do because you have a strong bias towards believing that the fantasy they are selling is real. Even after being told repeatedly, after so much evidence and proofs, people secretly want all of what they see on social media to be true because if it is true then they can have it too. This is confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, in-group bias, groupthink, positivity bias, selective bias and many more, when it comes to why we blindly continue following people despite so much evidence to the contrary. There is a dangerous cognitive dissonance that we have simply become used to. On the one hand, you know those Instagram pictures are fake; on the other hand, you follow them and feel bad. The spectrum is 30% bullshit not because they are very good, it is the bias in you that wants it to be real which makes it 70% real for you. This spectrum will be different for different people. For some people, it will

be 90% bullshit:10% real. They are perfectly capable of accepting that a lot of it is nonsense and probably don't follow such people at all. But for most, they want it to be real so they too can have a shot at it one day, and if they don't have a shot, then at least they can enjoy the fantasy.

Our own bias of wanting the fantasy to be real pushes these unrealistic standards on our own lives. They don't stay limited to fantasies. You start chasing fantasies in relationships, friendships, money-making, ambitions, appearance and create disappointment, negative feelings and low self-esteem.

## Fantasies in Relationships

Reality is not that great. So, we have millions of people who are looking for fantasy characters in real life. Straight men's fantasy is equal parts porn, recreations of movie scenes, of dates and social activities and unbinding loyalty. Women's fantasy is equal parts clever, sophisticated male protagonist from movies, relationship dynamics from movies and unbinding loyalty.

The fool chooses fantasy, whereas the clever accepts reality. Once the fantasy betrays, the fool is forced to *settle* with reality which feels disappointing to him, whereas the clever focuses on acquiring the best within reality and is, therefore, content. It is very important for the mind to separate fantasies from reality. That starts with recognizing your own limitations and understanding that life is each day a step towards atrophy. Humans are a walking atrophy. Pragmatism requires you to quickly find out how to acquire good conditions of living according to reality. Unless they are transmitting information on how to acquire good conditions for a short, peaceful life, learn the distinction between distraction and entertainment. Identify what is leading you into the fantasy land and making you emotionally worse, and what is merely enjoyment that you watch to pass time or to consume art.

The onus of figuring out the conditions in which you want to live your life relies solely on you. You cannot borrow them. You should not copy them. It cannot be a lifestyle that somebody is selling you through pictures by the means of beauty and smiles. Somebody else's smile without a shared experience is an attempt to look pleasant to you for your attention. Maybe, focus more on experiences that make you smile instead of borrowing smiles from their fantasies. Beauty is a highly intrapersonal experience. Beauty

from pictures and videos of others has nothing in comparison to beauty that comes from the inside. But to find that beauty, you are required to wage a war within you for answers. In those battles, you find yourself little by little and peace is earned. Once peace is found, not complete peace but even some peace, beauty is felt. The more peace you create inside, the more beauty lives inside you. The physical beauty that you love looking at right now becomes pale and boring in comparison to that beauty inside.

The fantasies being sold – the perfect clothes, hair, lips, nose, eyes, skin, shape of the body, the fashion, the friendships, the muscles, the attitude, the nature, the cars, the houses – they are all mere matter. They hold no true value. Not in terms of peace and beauty. It is not what you shall be looking for even though your current consciousness will tell you otherwise because that is what you desire right now. However, your current consciousness cannot meet with your future consciousness to confirm the same. The future you is not who you are right now. So, the very least you can do is, invite doubt over your current choices. Be clever. Start doubting your own desires. Question the reality of your fantasies. Question why you want what you are looking for. Where does it come from? And look for the evidence of long-term peace in it. ‘In all these fantasies, is there even a tiny part that guarantees peace in my life?’

## The Three Worlds: Outside, Inside and Nature

According to Social Comparison Theory, self-worth is estimated by measuring ourselves to other people. The humans you compare yourself to are chosen by you. You can be selectively biased in your process. The parameters, metrics and factors are also chosen by you. You choose with whom you are going to compare yourself, and based on *that* comparison decide what your worth is.

How do you confirm that you are better or worthy? a) By beating them in competition-driven scenarios; b) by approval and acceptance; c) by assuming you are better than them or more intelligent than them based on delusions or past victories or narcissism. In simple terms, either by beating others, being approved by others or assuming superiority over others. This simply means others, on any day, are more important than you in your own eyes. It happens because you are born and brought up in the human world. This is how you perceive your entire existence. What if you realize that instead of one, life constitutes of three worlds: human-created world, a world inside you and the natural world. Therefore, in terms of defining self-worth, instead of only comparing yourself to people, you will have three ways:

- How you see yourself in relation to people in the human world (how you currently define your self-worth)
- How you see yourself in the world inside you (self-defined, self-created, autonomous worth)
- What your relationship with the natural world is (your worth in a universal context)

The way you currently calculate self-worth has nothing to do with the world inside you. How you see yourself is mostly how you think people see you! Therefore, most of the self-work becomes changing yourself to how people would like you to be. When there are three worlds, and two of those

are not human-made – one comprises biology and sentient intelligence and the other geological processes, climate patterns, tectonic shifts and atmospheric ecological balances – you start to see life as something greater than the human-created world, and you see yourself as part of that life too.

Let us take two pleasures:

- a. getting a bonus at work,
- b. sitting on a rock covered by tall verdant trees and greenery with grass-covered earth under your feet, and the sounds of streams of water and birds and quietness filling the pauses.

I think both will make you feel very different types of pleasures. The first is related to income shock in the human world, and the second which has nothing to do with the human world and yet feels very personal. For example, there are studies which link mood upliftment, improved well-being, stress reduction and better health to birdwatching. People who watch birds for 15 to 30 minutes a day report a surge of subjective well-being. They are happier in general. Why? One, because at the very minimum, you go close to nature. Second, humans share a kinship with other animals and birds, and looking at them takes us mentally out from the human world and provides meditative relaxation to us, i.e., it makes you look without thinking.

## The Human Condition

Most of us are trapped in the belief that human world is everything. So, we look at the best that the human world can provide – money, success, looks, appearance and possessions. Then we find something called emotional well-being and realize money, success, looks, appearance and possessions affect it only to a certain extent. Most things that affect us emotionally are out of our reach to control. Most things that emotionally affect us are ill results of our own poor choices born out of short-term thinking or pleasure-chasing. Most of these things are unsolved issues from childhood, destructive patterns learnt from environments, lack of functional communication skills to resolve conflicts in relationships or lack of knowledge and tools to figure out what we truly want from life.

What we have as a result is billions of homo sapiens who are very well-dressed; know how to confidently present themselves socially; are great at

short conversations; have success, degrees and relationships too, but inside are filled with ignored and unresolved issues, are motivated by their fears that do not let them calm down and appreciate life in its quietness, and have foundations that need to be reworked completely from top to bottom. Internally and emotionally, almost all humans, in general, are stuck in the same boat as you. This is the human condition. Humans by and large are confidently clueless, contradictory, great liars. That includes you. A lot of our actions are gambles. A lot of our actions are selfish, short-term wants which hurt us. A lot of them are *meant* to hurt us. A lot of our actions are the opposite of what we rationally want to do. And lastly, most of your thoughts and actions are copying what others are thinking and doing. The majority of humans are not even original.

The next time you see a person who appears incredibly impressive to you, whose life seems incredibly amazing, whose existence shatters the kneecaps of your self-worth, put them in the same boat called the human condition. Apply all of the above to them. Please extend equally to them the process of experiencing human suffering, cluelessness and misfortunes that are out of their control, which all humans go through. Humanize them in your mind, please. Internally and emotionally, we are all together. No class systems, status or hierarchies impact the human condition. Inside we are homo sapiens, naked and without knowledge of anything outside of the human world.

Your self is a highly complex place. You can either compare it to someone in a very simple manner and ignore its entire complexity or look inwards at the complexity and figure out the whys and hows of how your self works. Nobody knows what has been cooking inside your brain. Only when you shut down the outside world, look at the feelings and wants, ask questions like ‘Why do I do this?’, ‘Why do I want this?’, and give yourself reasons, do you start, yes, merely start the process of scratching the surface of yourself – all of this gets thrown away in a second when you compare yourself to a complete stranger.

You may argue that the person is not a stranger because you know them. Well, you know them without their complexities. You know the simplest definition of who they are. Deriving self-worth by comparing is an incredibly simple idea. Therefore, also a disastrous one. You are x, they are y. In complexity, two completely different models. Commonsensically speaking, to define x, one would need to understand x. The more you

understand something, the better you can define it, right?

This is how humans define x: ‘x is better than y in this thing.’ Definition of x is not understanding x, but what x is in relation to others. That is defining self-worth through comparisons. This is also how you have been defining yourself so far in your life, my friend.

To step out of the boat of human condition, focus on understanding your own nature, the nature of your mind, the nature and causes of your urges, feelings and actions. Why do you do what you do? The focus has to go inward and towards nature. Going inward is self-work, going to nature is meditation. Going inward develops intrapersonal skills, emotional intelligence (trait EI), self-autonomy, strength and independence from the human world. Going to nature is going inward vicariously – you are using your physical body to experience something as strangely familiar yet obscure as the inner world. There are different ways of experiencing and exploring the inner world. However, nature is not just an expression or metaphor of your inner reality. Nature is so removed from the human world that merely by entering nature you lose connection to more than half of your thoughts. You unwittingly enter a new relationship between thoughts and new surroundings which numbs you intellectually. That is why a lot of people experience thoughtlessness in the midst of nature. The quietness of nature allows those ignored thoughts to come out and be heard.

Going to nature and doing a nature-related activity are two different things. Going to nature means to not have objectives, destinations and planned activities. Going to nature is lying down and looking up through the flower-like tree leaves covering the sky or sitting and staring at a majestic tree and doing nothing. Just letting life be. You can do that several times during a vacation, hike or a planned activity. Going to nature means being one with nature, being in tune with the consistency of nature and watching nature. From trees, birds, animals, water, leaves, plants, rocks, stones, to whatever nature shows you.

All three worlds are important but dependence on the human world is the definition of being stuck in the human condition. This dependence has to be reduced. The stress and pressure of performing in the human world or otherwise you will be branded a loser, has to be reduced. You have three worlds instead of one. Self-worth does not have to come from social comparison. It can come from self-knowledge and your relationship with nature. The emotions and pleasantness received from your relationship with

nature will give you a broader perspective on your reliance on human-centric desires, the narrow way you see happiness and reduce your dependence on meaning received from the human world.

## Spotlight Effect

In psychology, spotlight effect means thinking that you have a spotlight on yourself in social situations. You are being watched by people, they are analysing your words, the way you move, the way you say things, the way you do things. Spotlight effect is you overthinking what others may have thought of your behaviour, words and actions as if you are the centre of everyone's universe. They have nothing to do but to sit and think about you for hours on end. You are amazing, actually. To be honest, even I am thinking about you now.

I am not, and neither are they. They are the centre of their own universes. You are of yours. We all suffer from spotlight effect in varying degrees. Similar to how you are worried that people are thinking about you, people are worried about what other people are thinking about them. You are at the centre of how you perceive reality. So, of course, you are going to be self-interested the most. Similarly for other people, their reality is seen by keeping themselves at the centre. You are a side character in their reality. To realize that is sort of freeing. Nobody cares about you as much as they care about themselves.

The most time people will spend on you is gossiping + how shocking the gossip story involving you is. If what you are doing is unshocking, boring, mildly annoying, then you are going to live in the background of their reality for the rest of their lives. If you do something that is mildly shocking, then you may take 30 minutes of their attention and gossip. After that, for the rest of their day, they will continue to think about things that affect them, matter to them and bother them. Just like you do when you hear some hot gossip. You react, stare, joke, roast, judge and then quickly shift the attention back to yourself. The majority of your day is spent on self-gossiping about your own issues.

Even if you do something admirable, you will receive about 30 minutes of their attention + positive gossip. After that, the rest of their day will be spent on issues that bother them. That is humans. We are all locked in our own narratives. This includes you too. If you want to be the centre of attention, then what you are indirectly saying is, you want to push your

narrative into other people's reality. No matter how famous you get, the most famous person in people's eyes is themselves. You will always be secondary to them at the end of the day. Even the most famous people get cheated on, divorced, abused, manipulated, hated and abandoned. People will keep themselves at the centre of their reality, no matter how famous, powerful or wealthy you are. So, the attempt is futile and, frankly, delusional.

Only you, your family, parents and closest friends truly care about you at the end of the day. Focus on them. Cherish them. Care about them. Maintain your relationship with them. Care about what *they* think instead of what people you work with, colleagues or strangers think. Pick people who matter to you in your life. Pick your friends. Handpick humans and grant *only them* the special status of having importance and influence over you. Whenever you are bothered by spotlight effect, remind yourself of those people.

Put yourself and everyone else in the background in social situations. No one has the spotlight. You will forget about them very soon. They too will forget about you in a matter of minutes. Time to self-obsess. Kidding. Time to selectively grant importance to those who know you well, genuinely care about you and actually deserve your attention.

## **Gossiping Is Not All Bad**

I didn't know that I will be talking about gossiping, my favourite thing to do of all. Gossiping is not all bad. It is a cocktail representing many things, from good to bad. Gossiping represents trusting somebody, receiving pleasure by schadenfreude, steps to building an alliance or friendship, making light of something serious by injecting humour, discussion of invisible group rules that somebody has broken or upset, remaining updated on information and entertainment.

The point is, gossiping is human behaviour which we all do mostly as a fun, harmless, relationship-building activity unless one does it to bully, in which case, they are not your friends, and you should cut them off from your life for the sake of your mental health and honour. All conversations at some point involve gossip. Gossip is either conjecturing or sharing non-conforming information. Gossiping is also an acceptable framework by which humans allow themselves to discuss socially unacceptable or taboo topics. Mostly, gossip is entertainment and humour at the expense of others

without letting them know. Humans are social mammals, and gossiping is one of our strongest social conventions.

However, it is important to note that humans have very different responses when they think about something with seriousness as opposed to entertainment + humour. For example, let us say you suffered a financial loss. When your friend sees that you are negatively affected by this, they will extend compassion, good advice, support and kindness – that will be them reacting to your situation with seriousness. At the same time, behind you, they might crack jokes about your loss, bad investment patterns to their spouse or your friends – that is them addressing the entertainment and humour aspect of it. The jokes do not necessarily mean that they don't care about your situation. It means that humans don't share all the thoughts they have. And one such category of thoughts is jokes, funny observations and humorous critiques. Similarly, another category is passing judgments, light or harsh. By gossiping people test their ideas, they test what others are thinking, and they test if a relationship can be built with a new person out of similarity of opinions. Gossiping serves many functions in social behaviour.

However, similar to spotlight effect, gossip too is a background activity at the most. At the forefront remains your own life story. People gossip because it has a strong entertainment + informational value, but people in general also do not take gossip as authentic information. In seriousness, people can have a very different approach from what they did during gossip. And because of these various intersectional functions of gossip in social and interpersonal behaviour, people will always gossip, forget and replace it with new gossip. That will happen as long as humans live. Therefore, the same treatment applies which applies to spotlight effect. Keep a background activity in the background. Recognize its place.

People tend to give too much weight to gossiping as if it can decide your rise and fall. The real course of your life is paved by shows of strength. Different humans may value different emotions, all humans recognize strength. By strength I do not mean muscles or the ability to lift heavy objects. I am talking about the implicit strength in possessing superior skills, mastery of something, vast knowledge or expertise. Humans have about five or six things they unthinkingly admire – most of them intuitively revolve around hard work. Strength by show of impressive skills paves your path to material and social success in the human world. Gossip becomes a joke in the face of that. So, if gossip bothers you, aim to become

impressively strong in terms of performance. That will solidify your position.

Introduce the concept of three worlds instead of scarily focusing on one as reality, and try to find meanings and pleasures in those. Consciously handpick humans and recognize that it is these people that matter to me, not the hundreds of faces I see because I share physical space with them.

# Why Is Heroes, Role Models and Perfect People

1. There are no heroes, only people.
2. There are no heroes, only heroic acts.
3. Role models are little reality and massive assumptions.

## Why Is a Hero?

I

Humans choose a simplified version of reality over a complex version. A simplified version has easy-to-follow narratives. A complex narrative is hard to follow. So, humans prefer good *or* bad instead of good *and* bad. We don't look at humans as good and bad both, because that would be slightly more complex than trying to fit them into categories of them being simply good or bad!

II

Humans have a self-centred need to create heroes, so either they can become heroes one day or be approved by one or they can fill the shoes of what defines a hero. Heroes need to exist for humans in general, so they can indirectly feel special about themselves. Humans create heroes for their fantasies because that is how they like to see themselves delusionally.

III

Humans have a need to look up to somebody for answers and guidance. This gives birth to intellectual, spiritual, moral, religious and scientific heroes.

IV

Most humans are followers by nature. They need a leader to follow, ergo, a hero.

## The Simplified Version

Role models in our perception are either perfect people or those closest to

perfect people. Heroes and role models to us mean people who are above normal humans. When you call somebody your hero or role model, they instantly became glorious, pure and godly to you. It happens because those words are absolutes. Entirely too simplistic and paint a single-colour picture. When your friend introduces a person to you as a hero, you immediately elevate that person's existence in your mind. Language. The words 'hero' and 'role model' carry very strong and simple associations that your brain makes almost without thinking.

The idea of a hero and villain is very simple. Intellectually, these ideas contain the complexity required for four-year-olds to grasp basic fundamentals of morality. But apparently, we don't break out of this model which is meant for four-year-olds. We continue to think in terms of binaries, such as good or bad, winner and losers, heroes and villains. Oscar Wilde wrote, 'The truth is rarely pure and never simple.' These binaries are incredibly simple. So, clearly, they have very little to do with the *truth*.

These binaries are present in major group decision-making:

### **1. Democracy**

'They are the bad guys, we are the good guys, vote for us and we will keep you safe from the bad guys,' narrative is strongly present and pushed during election campaigning in almost every country.

### **2. Relationships**

The impressions you form of humans in your interactions are entirely about determining whether they are good or bad. You judge with the least amount of data and your metrics are good or bad.

### **3. Intellect**

In intellectualizing and forming opinions about structures, government, hierarchies, power, control, corporations – all of which are highly complex because of the number of layers, factors, players and decision-making processes involved – people want their opinions to end at: government is bad, corporations suck, scientists are either bad or good, doctors are working for big pharma so they are bad or doctors are good because of x y z reason.

## **Binaries**

We stick to binaries for a number of reasons.

## **1. Humans are not the complex thinkers we think ourselves to be.**

We think in shortcuts. We like to find the answers quickly. We like it when somebody can give answers to us directly instead of making us work for them. Shortcuts are very necessary in most of the mundane, simple decisions of our lives, but highly harmful when we really need to use our heads. For example, solving problems in your life, conflict resolutions with people you care about, diplomacy in situations where losing is costly, judging other humans which can lead to bullying or perpetuate a culture of bullying, better decision-making that involves mental health and long-term perspective, and to have an open dialogue with yourself with regard to your prejudices, biases and knee-jerk impulsive reactions. You will need to be able to think with complexity to do any of those.

A common misconception that humans have is our ancestors, forefathers, grandparents were very smart or wise and gave us amazing advice. The truth is, they were no different from humans now. But humans now have far more access to psychology, philosophy, information about the mind, how the brain works, about disorders, illnesses, different perspectives, debates, ideas and different schools of thoughts that your grandparents or ancestors did not have unless they were highly privileged and educated. Also, people back then didn't know what we know now because we are discovering things as we go. The chances that they functioned more on binaries than people now are much higher. Humans love to have this idea that older things, older times and older people were somehow better because of the property of being old. This kind of thinking is only a result of poor or lack of any education.

Simple ideas, wrapped in special paper, being sold to people who don't want to check the statistics of education, poverty, disease, mortality rates, racism, class system, feudalism, colonialism, casteism, monarchical justice systems, healthcare, war, partition, invasions, religions, riots, civil wars, segregation, slavery, racist laws, women's rights, surgery, fiefdom, wages, work hours, the state of education in different class systems, oppression in lower class systems, the state of the middle class, infant mortalities, the state of mental health, crimes, women's health during pregnancy, living standards, sleeping patterns, opportunities for different classes, common societal prejudices, limitations of careers and more.

Checking *that* is complex. Thinking by taking into account these very real factors is actually thinking by applying reasoning and data to

determine what reality might have actually been like.

## **2. Nobody teaches humans to think in complex ways.**

We didn't learn critical thinking at school. They didn't teach us problem-solving skills. I don't think they would want to, either. To teach people since childhood the mechanisms and frameworks of solving problems without being worried by the complex data and points of view, would create a much more able, thinking population than now. And that thinking population, which has no problem in applying reasoning and thinking on issues objectively, would choose much better leaders for themselves. I don't think that is good for swindling politicians who want an emotionally thinking population that is crippled in rational thinking and has no mechanisms to apply reasoning whatsoever in day-to-day decision-making.

I firmly believe that all humans, yes, all humans can become reasonably good thinkers. But that would require training since childhood. Not of mathematics or mathematical reasoning, no. Of critical thinking. Decision-making ability. Problem-solving acumen. Training kids in a class by giving them real-life scenarios and having them come up with solutions with objectives such as long-run feasibility and better mental health. There are no correct answers, no marks, no grades, just training their minds to use reasoning methods and tools. Like teaching them to first look at the data objectively, to be data-reliant, exercises to step out of emotions and think logically, calmly consider the points of view involved, then consider the objectives involved, then consider the costs of the decision-making involved. All of this can be taught if one were motivated enough to put it in the curriculum. The education system can literally start this with children by giving them problems they face at their age and let them solve those problems. An 8-year-old will solve problems an 8-year-old experiences. As they grow older, the problems become complex too.

When nobody teaches humans in general to think in complex ways, biology applies. Which means people with higher IQ are able to, people who have higher intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence are able to, and people with high problem-solving acumen are able to. The rest run in circles around simple thoughts like good guys and bad guys, heroes and villains, and more binaries. That is a lot of the human population.

## **3. Humans rely on other humans for opinions and information.**

That's a scary truth about how a large number of people form their opinions. Not every person is sitting and accessing facts and data and coming up with an opinion. A lot of people copy the majority popular opinion that is the closest to their groupthink. For example, a crazy number of people believe Mozart was one of the greatest composers without actually having listened to any of his compositions. They believe it because it is the majority opinion. They actually wouldn't even be able to tell what's so great about Mozart's music or what good music even is, if they had no help. This applies to personal, political and intellectual opinions too. A lot of people blindly copy popularly accepted ideas of their group to stay in their group. They look to their selected group thinkers and thought leaders whom they watch on YouTube or elsewhere, to come up with what to think on their behalf. Not a shred of reasoning or original thought of their own is involved. If you ask such people why, they wouldn't be able to explain. They might send you a link to a YouTube video or article from where their opinions were formed.

Here is another unappetizing truth about people: for a lot of people, to be able to review or analyse something is very hard. They lack the mechanisms to break a thing down, they don't know what to break it down to, they lack a formula or models to apply, and lack standards to which they can compare. They enjoy things that are easy, emotional and simple. Ever wondered why short videos with black and white moral messages accompanied with loud emotional music have hundreds of millions of views? Because they are dumb, simple videos that *everyone* can follow and feel. Nuance is the opposite.

## Group that Accepts Binaries

### 1. Good and bad become black and white.

When a society says being good is the supreme thing, more than half of the group blindly agrees to whatever that means, the clever seek to capitalize on that, the privileged quietly break those rules, and the thinkers become very dubious and challenge that. Because humans are self-important, you presume that you are good too. When we all agree to definitions of *being good*, we tend to judge anything that doesn't qualify as good. We are threatened by discussions that challenge the good, portrayals that challenge the good, and may even punish what is considered *being bad* – outrage culture, cancel culture and any other kinds

of cultures that have binary definitions of good and bad function as such. They have problems with reconciling with nuance, different perspectives and data that challenge their black-and-white conceptions. Binary thinking produces two extremes. When a thing is both good and bad or right and wrong at the same time, it is unsettling to people because they cannot wrap their heads around contradicting concepts.

As I have said before, things are in a spectrum. Bad is a spectrum. Good is a spectrum. A thing can be both 20% bad and 20% good. Then add time to the equation. A thing can be 40% bad right now, but 60% good in the future and vice versa. Now let's talk about the definitions of good and bad. Bad is an attribute humans give to unpleasant things, harmful things and things they don't understand. So, murder is bad but murdering an enemy in war is acceptable. The definition of bad can go from meaningless things, to minutely harmful to straight up evil. There is a line within which bad and good both are visible. For example, bullying someone, harassing someone, sexual assault, stalking someone, betraying someone, scamming someone, threatening to harm someone, physically harming, murdering, selling drugs to children, child and women trafficking, etc. These get incorporated in how we make most laws, to protect people from people. After all, humans are primates at the end of the day.

Then comes the cultural definitions of bad that are outside the ambit of law and crime. Many such bad things are not hurtful to anybody. They are perceived bad because a group or culture agreed to call it bad. Homosexuality is considered bad in some large groups. Right to education and voting for women was considered bad until very recently. Rock and roll music was considered bad. So was violence in movies and video games. Plainly disagreeing with your elders is bad in some large cultures. Marijuana is bad in some cultures and good in others. Marijuana used to be predominantly bad a few decades in the same cultures where now it is considered to be good. Using cuss words is bad in some groups and cultures. Some see cuss words as a sign of admission of honest feelings. Eating meat is bad in some cultures. People call new things they don't understand bad, new experiences bad, things they are unfamiliar with bad. As you move geographically, a lot of definitions of *bad* change, not based on harm but customs and beliefs. From clothing, dating, lifestyle, food, sex, different definitions of being bad can be found in simple practices to

actual laws. Good and bad is also a cultural phenomenon that is continually shaped by information, education and the way a group thinks.

Bad is not one thing, it has a range of a hundred things on a spectrum. Good is not one thing either, it has a hundred things. When we forget this spectrum, we put the harmless bad and evil in the same pot and extend the same treatment. There is no nuance. There is no case-by-case scrutiny or judgment. There is no questioning of what is considered bad, to be proven bad by debate and discussion done rationally. A group that thinks like that repeatedly commits the fallacy of false equivalence. They equate two things that aren't equal because they share the same label *bad* and mete out extreme punishments to both.

## **2. *Being good* is used as a tool by brands and human brands for profit, power and following.**

It is very easy to sell anything to a group that functions on binary thinking. The framework has been set. Show them what they want to see and get their approval. It gives opportunities to clever people to manipulate people by creating an image that people have been trained to approve. The image of *being good*. Images can be manufactured. At that point, it becomes easy marketing. Such binaries also indirectly give monsters in human bodies the opportunity to hide their crimes because the society is so enamoured by their public image that they refuse to believe that they can do anything wrong. ‘How can he do anything bad, he does so much charity, he does so many good things!’ I am assuming you have heard statements like these. Charity, in such cases, is the act of building the public image, as charity is the hallmark of *being good*. When you think in binaries then one can either only be good *or* bad, not both. So, you hear charity and press on the good button. This person can be abusive to women behind closed doors, can be abusive to people they work with, can be a bully, can break laws, but you will keep rescuing them from any stories of being bad. Simply because you cannot exercise thinking in nuance or complexity. Please try to at least entertain this very simple notion: a person can be an utter human monster and still do good things.

## **3. Binary thinking hinders self-knowledge.**

Self-knowledge comes with accepting that you have a great capacity to cause damage to yourself and to others in many ways. You cannot accept this as long as you believe that you are good. So, people blame, rationalize

and live in denial to great extents to avoid telling ourselves that we are bad too. By doing so, we only push the path to self-knowledge farther away from ourselves because we cannot let go of the self-image of the morally good person. I am very sure even you certainly think of yourself as a *good person*. I am not saying you are not; I am only asking how much are you aware about the bad in you?

Since we judge others strongly based on the moronic good or bad oversimplifications, we shut the possibilities for humans to open up to one another easily as well. We are so afraid of judgment from the very people who we know are highly flawed too. But because we are playing the game of judging, what gets pushed is to lie, act, pretend, be fake in public, and hide, be ashamed and feel guilty in silence.

## The Halo Effect

Wholly good or entirely bad would be the characters that we saw in movies as children. You may have been told that winners are heroes and losers are people like your neighbours. Here is another way: we are all heroes, losers, judgmental, empathic, compassionate, crude, kind, cheap, generous, charitable, prejudiced, immoral, considerate, selfish, polite, self-centred, manipulative, accepting and loving, all at the same time in different proportions. That's what a personality is. A human personality is composed of many traits. The different proportions of those traits make you unique. Based on self-knowledge, you can influence and change those traits too.

We are fully capable of going from selfless to highly selfish in different situations, at different times, out of different motivations. In the words of the mighty philosopher, Mike Tyson, ‘We are animals trying to become humans.’

On the same day, you do two good things and two bad things; what does that make you? A human. Trust nobody to be special, trust everyone to be ordinary in ways you weren’t expecting. As long as they are homo sapiens, they are as small as you – if you take that personally, it might feel insulting, but if you take that universally, it is comforting.

A hero is an oversimplification of human nature. A human can do admirable things, have habits you admire, do moral acts that make you respect them, but in no way does that cover the entire spectrum of who they are. Unfortunately, words like ‘hero’ do exactly that. They give that power, that image, that plot armour to real people about whom you have only

limited data. When you realize there are no heroes, even the heroes become people in your eyes. The process of idealizing, idolizing or romanticizing them stops.

In psychology, there is a logical fallacy called the halo effect. When we find an impressive quality about someone, we tend to fill in the rest of the details about who they are with our own impressive assumptions that are imaginary in nature. For example, you may see a doctor and *assume* they are qualified to give you mature life advice too. No evidence. You see a famous, attractive person, and *assume* they are very happy in life too. No evidence. You see a millionaire and think they have the answer to the meaning of life. Nada; no evidence.

Heroes and role models most often are born out of the halo effect. They are as much human as you are, minus that impressive thing.

## The Curse of Being a Hero

Logically speaking, nobody in their right mind would want to be a hero, except narcissists – they would love it. The title ‘hero’ forces expectations onto a person of being near perfect, that all their actions, choices and behaviour in the past and present, in their private life and public, must reflect that title of a ‘hero’ and, therefore, be wholly good, honourable and bold.

In fiction, that makes sense because it is fiction. In reality, however, that can ruin a person’s life. Once you call a person a hero, they are disqualified from being human any more. A person may not realize it at the moment but living with the title comes with expectations of acting hero-like for the rest of your life. You have to be a living example for humans to follow. A living example of what they have imagined in their minds a perfect person should be. It has very less to do with reality and comes directly out of a movie. One has to be a perfect human from the day people anoint one a hero. Any sane person would avoid that. Except narcissists.

Once people find out that their *heroes* and *perfect humans* are as selfish, lustful, narcissistic, jealous, egotistic, insecure as humans can be, people display great disappointment and even throw hate at them. People become disappointed about the fact that their heroes turned out to be just like them. Well, they always were. Your expectation of a perfect person *forces* them to hide their humanness.

We should admire heroic actions, aspire towards extraordinary

achievements and traits, but leave people to be people. Make no assumptions. Consciously try to avoid the halo effect. Accept people as people.

## Admire, Never Follow

If you have the sense to see your heroes like this: ‘I love this person for x y z reason; other than that, they are not superior to me, they are not great humans, they are people just like the grocery shopkeeper or the air-conditioning repairman or the fruit salesperson or my parents or the cousin whom I never liked,’ then your view will become balanced.

But if your view is, ‘They are perfect, they are the best people, they are superior to all of us, they are better than everybody else,’ then, my friend, not only have you bought the illusion of *perfect people*, but you are also putting people above you. No human is above you. Humans can be above you in skills, knowledge, performance, talent, creativity, output, etc. Both are very different things. Admiring somebody for their skills and hard work is natural. Believing that somebody is above you in existence is nonsense.

It is not just your fault though; you are being sold superiority every day too. There is a high monetary value in making you believe that you are inferior as a human to them – a space filled by opportunists and narcissists.

### Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance happens when you are faced with two opposing truths, and you believe in one strongly. The newer truth causes dissonance in your mind. For example, let’s say you strongly believe in ‘My leader is a great moral human being.’ But then you hear a story that they have been accused of sexual harassment. The second fact will cause cognitive dissonance in your mind. That is not the interesting part though; the interesting part is how people deal with it regardless of how strong the evidence behind the contradicting truth may be.

A lot of times people don’t want to change their minds. So, they discard the second truth: ‘It never happened.’ Another thing they may do is attack the second truth: they can create entirely new theories, such as, ‘The person accusing them is a liar, greedy, working against them to destroy their career or working with the enemy.’ Another thing people can do is they trivialize the second truth: ‘It is not important even if it happened because of x y z

reason.' Also, people can justify or rationalize it: 'It happened because x y z.' Cognitive dissonance happens to us all the time when our idea of something meets reality. There are a series of cognitive biases at play here, such as backfire effect, motivated reasoning, confirmation bias. Just so your brain can preserve the original truth you believed in. The point is, when you believe in anything that strongly, it is very hard to rearrange that perception. It could be *anything*.

When you allow yourself to emotionally invest in a stranger at high levels, you become almost a zombie follower. At that point, any information that contradicts the perfect image of that human, information that humanizes them, humbles them or simply reveals that they have flaws, causes cognitive dissonance in the minds of their followers. Some followers may change their opinion. But zombie followers go to war, bully, abuse and threaten people's lives. Yes, for strangers they have never even seen in physical form. You have seen this happen on social media all the time, for politicians, motivational gurus, podcasters, influencers or celebrities.

Great poets, authors, scientists, inventors, philosophers, politicians, revolutionaries, who may have been portrayed as perfect people through movies or history books, had plenty of flaws. If you cared to read about their lives in detail and spare the historical retellings of their lives with heroic narratives, you would find multiple flaws, narcissism, addictions, serial cheating, bullying, to evils like slavery, racism, murder, etc. Humans care about heroism, the objective view of humanity does not. Do you want the narrative or the truth?

Albert Einstein cheated on his wife a lot. Charlie Chaplin was having sex with a 12-year-old. Picasso was a misogynist. Charles Dickens cheated on his wife with an actor. Caravaggio was a murderer. Virginia Woolf was an anti-Semite. So was Wagner. And Dostoevsky. Walt Whitman was racist. Roman Polansky had sex with a 13-year-old. Think of any person you hold in high esteem, and with enough digging you will find unsavoury truths that will contradict the black-and-white perfect image. Makers of great art, arguments, theories and ideas, remain as human as you.

## **Admiring vs Following**

'Don't follow anyone' is very practical advice, which for some reason seems off. We are wired to follow. There is a halo effect. We need leaders. We are part of ideological groups that dictate applying the halo effect on

humans who are on the top of the food chain. We are not taught to be data oriented, so we allow ourselves to become emotional fanbois and fangirls in extremes. We need someone else to think for us, so our intellectual reliance on them may make us their followers. Also, humans learn new behaviours by copying what we find impressive in other people – that may push us to become a follower of those people too.

1. Admiring someone and following someone are two different things.
2. You can limit your fanboism by consciously deciding to draw boundaries in general. This isn't a very hard thing to do. It is a simple thing you didn't know you could do.

Admiring someone means you are at a healthy distance from the person. When you say you admire x y z quality about somebody, you are pointing to precisely what attracts your mind, what inspires you and what you would like to learn. You are focused on the sources of your admiration – acts, advice, intellect, creativity, discipline, knowledge or whatever it is that amazes you more – much more than their personal life. You don't know the person personally. That also doesn't mean you become a robot. I used the words healthy distance. You can like them in case they are likeable or funny or seem genuine. You can respect them too for a variety of reasons. But beyond that, you don't know. At a point you will have to self-draw an intellectual boundary which restricts your affection from turning into blind following. It is a healthy distance where you can like, respect and admire someone, but don't represent them nor attack people on their behalf.

It is human nature to be attracted to humans and be interested in life stories of people. There is a reason why almost all motivational speakers' life stories share this formulaic format: a) extreme hardships during childhood, parents were poor, sister had no eyes; b) they worked hard; c) they became successful. Simple a b c formula. Neither real life nor success is a b c. Both are non-linear. It is because they know humans seek relatability, common grounds and love to eat up simple emotionally charged fictional narratives. This is why the same heroic, black-and-white storylines are given to leaders, politicians, billionaire philanthropists, motivational gurus, historical figures and modern influencers. This is where you have to learn to say the three magical words of wisdom: 'I. DON'T. KNOW.' And tap out.

Admire. Never follow. Real talk, my friend, you have absolutely no idea about the reality. What you know is what they have allowed to share with

you. If they are in control of the information flow, and they want followers, then naturally they will only share selective or manufactured information that keeps feeding the image that you are in love with. They will only do and share what makes them look great unless somebody else exposes them. This happens on social media too. Huge celebrities, influencers, motivational gurus get exposed for being the opposite of their public image.

When you are a follower, you join a team, you pay allegiance; it becomes something you have to intellectually defend now. When you are a follower, you indirectly assert that you know and trust them enough to be their follower. In doing so, you are chewing more than you can swallow, basically making claims about which you have no data. You defend them, represent them, which to the extent of their talents, creations and ideas is acceptable, but beyond that, is conjecture.

Admiration = appreciate, like, be inspired, learn, copy, form new behaviours and maintain a healthy distance knowing they are as human as you at the end of the day. In case you wish to represent humans, only represent yourself or become a lawyer.

Follower = represent, defend, attack, threaten people, bully and have an unhealthy emotional connection based on believing they are above you.

‘I don’t know’ does not mean that they are assholes behind the doors for certain, it means that they are as human as you are, therefore, you cannot know without data. The other side of this is you learn not to judge humans randomly either. It is accepting that you have no data about the environment a person comes from, what their life experiences might have been, what they are currently going through in life, what their current mental state is and their side of the story. Don’t judge people. You don’t know. Respect the fact that you lack data. Groom your theories based on data.

This will teach you to be patient and aware of how quickly people come up with judgments and theories about things we know very little of. This will also help you build better relationships with people because instead of assuming and reacting, you will prioritize focusing on information via communication and their actions. You don’t expect people to be better or worse, you don’t expect. You go where data takes you. That way, you make much better assessments and decisions with regard to people in your life. This applies to all homo sapiens on the planet – online or around you.

Lastly, be open to learning from everybody in life, even those you think are beneath you, you think are idiots or you think are your enemies. There

is not a single person on this planet from whom you cannot learn something new. You can learn something new from a baby. So, learn from everybody, everything, everywhere, by simply keeping your mind open. Admire, learn and leave the person. Screw following anyone. Represent only yourself from now on.

# 12

## How to Think, Critical Thinking and Creative Thinking

### How You Think Right Now

Humans like to be knowledgeable. To have knowledge, we collect packets. Yes, packets of information about things. If I asked you about gravity, you have a packet of information on gravity which you can tell me right now. Some person's packet is going to contain more information, some less, some wrong information, some no information. Think of topics in general: you think you have a general idea about what they are, what they constitute, what the issues surrounding them are. Then of course, there are a lot of topics you have no information about too, for example, gene editing, or epigenetics or how semiconductor chips are made. If you are working in these areas or around them, then you will know, but in general, people don't.

1. We have very few packets of information because, frankly, it is impossible to know everything, or much about everything or even a little about everything. Everything is endless and human memory is highly fragile.
2. The packets of information that we do have are rarely updated, filled with false information and nonsensical unproven beliefs and theories.
3. The packets of information come from our parents, environment and friends, what the group leaders of the group we belong to tell us and what we have learnt from reading books, watching documentaries, movies, TV shows, podcasts, reading online, etc.
4. The packets of information in your mind about things contain both knowledge and opinions.
5. The **updated** packets of information are the things we study professionally or religiously. For example, a criminal lawyer will have the most updated packet on criminal justice and legal system of their respective nation. Note: **updated** does not mean complete.

The way you think right now is, when you are talking to somebody, and

they bring up a topic, whatever packet of information you have on it, you throw that into the conversation.

**Question:** ‘How do you know the packets of information you have in your brain right now are accurate?’

**Answer:** ‘You don’t.’

**The real question:** ‘Do you care?’

**Scary answer:** ‘I don’t’ or ‘Never really thought it.’

Most people live believing in information that they have never verified. Most people care only about filling the packets. The packets of information may consist of half-assed factoids; ill-formed opinions, stolen opinions, rudimentary understanding of things; conclusions made from unreliable data, conclusions made from wrong data, conclusions made from biased selective data, selective conclusions made from statistics without the understanding of statistical theory; rumours, opinions coming from prejudices and stereotypes, opinions that re-enforce prejudices and biases; what you learnt from your sociocultural environment about society, women, men, other groups, religions, government, other races, etc.

Being aware of what you are filling your head with is a sign of critical thinking. Believing without verification is not. The information which you currently believe in about several things could be complete nonsense. I am not saying it is but believing that *it could be* is a start. Wondering from where a person who is giving you information, opinions and conclusions is getting their data, from which research or empirical evidence, and how much do they even understand the data they are citing, is a start.

Just today, in a conversation, I was confidently told by a person that in India, car accidents with infants in them don’t happen very much. In that very moment, I wondered, ‘This person is not a paediatric surgeon, doesn’t work at a trauma centre, is not a doctor, doesn’t have a paediatric surgeon, a trauma surgeon or any doctor as a friend, in fact, this person does not even own a car, nor does he know how to drive one. He isn’t citing data from some study on automobile accidents in India or accidents involving infants in cars.’ He is as far from the subject as one can be, and yet he just made something up and confidently presented it as a fact because *he felt like it* or thought so.

Each day, people give out strong opinions based on information they either don’t have at all or have never verified. How many times have you noticed somebody pass a strong judgment on somebody without any

concrete data or say things about topics they have no idea about? They can be motivated out of their biases or are confidently stupid or a mix of both. By the way, no need to feel high and mighty, we all do this. The only difference is that a good critical thinker does it less. But they too are confidently stupid at some point of time of the day about something.

The objective of critical thinking is not to stop making analytical errors, but to do it less. And when you do so, you are able to spot the biases, shortcuts or whatever it was that led you to make that error.

Next time, before blindly accepting information on a topic, just ask yourself: ‘Where are they getting this from?’ Putting a pause between receiving and accepting information is a game changer. Don’t immediately go to debating with them or proving them wrong, just put a pause before accepting something, and you will start to do the same with your own thoughts as well. Critical thinking is to be able to think better than today. By putting that pause, you activate reasoning which creates space for reliable data to enter your mind.

Reasoning becomes = is this person well studied on this topic? How educated are they? How scientifically inclined and fact-based are they? How well-read are they? How accurate in general are they about information they share? What is the connection between their opinion and data? Do they sound like they have any data on this or are they saying it because they feel so? Are they heavily biased?

Your brain thinks like this automatically when you voluntarily pause any information from entering your mind.

## **Thinking vs Thinking *Well***

When we are not scientifically inclined, which means when we are not a lover of accurate data, reasonably accurate data, research-based data, then we don’t know how to differentiate between nonsense and data, and far worse, we may not even care. When such is the case, one of the biggest metrics humans use to accept data from someone is confidence – how confident the person who is telling you something is. This gives space to a lot, I mean A LOT of nonsense being accepted as facts and data by people. This is the motherload that fuels the economy of content creation, sales, marketing, dating, motivational speakers. One common thing you will find in them is uber confidence. On the internet, a person can have the stupidest takes on any subject, be it dating, psychology, philosophy, relationships,

marriage, divorce, sex, finance, success, money, happiness or anything, but if they say them confidently, many people will believe them. Confidence makes us think they know what they are talking about. The day you take what they are saying and compare it to what scientific literature says on the same, is the day most of your internet intellectual heroes will become imbeciles to you.

Confidence is seen as competence – whether that confidence is coming from results, skill or expertise does not matter. A person who follows the path of critical thinking ignores confidence entirely and focuses on the words. Their interest is to see whether the words make sense. They run the same questions: ‘Where are they getting this from? Is this supported by empirical data? Are their opinions backed by research? Are they employing cognitive fallacies and biases? Are they generalizing? Are they repeating stereotypes? Are they building this theory from their own personal experience which is highly limited data?’ Confidence becomes an unnecessary occurrence in the eyes of a thinker.

Question: Why do we not verify the information?

We don't because in the world that we live in, having knowledge is perceived as competence. You are impressed by the person who has knowledge. Whether they have the right knowledge or knowledge wrapped in nonsense is another topic. We look at someone saying things on a subject that we have no idea about and immediately equate it with competence. Happens subconsciously. This is dangerous. It reveals that our relationship with knowledge is not with intellect but with ego. Think about it, what exactly is it inside of you that would want you to be competent in front of others? Your ego! When ego is the motivation to become knowledgeable, having as much information on things as one can becomes the goal. So, you are just collecting packets of information without verifying them. Verification is work. That would be done by somebody who is genuinely interested in the topic and wants to get deep into it. They want to learn it. Their motivation is intellectual stimulation. Ego is secondary to them, their thirst and hunger for learning accurate information, understanding it and doing something with it is primary. Now, all people cannot do that. There is too much information for a single human brain to fit into it. That is why we have to rely on experts on those subjects to do the work for us and give us accurate information. This is a tricky area. This is where the spin happens. We rely on other people intellectually to give us information, which opens

up opportunities for people to feed you nonsense for their agendas as well. Especially, since they know you are collecting information for your ego to show off or for the sake of your confirmation bias towards your group bias – neither of which are intellectual reasons.

A critical thinking person understands that even though we rely on other people, there still has to be *some* level of verifying information that you will *need* to do. You cannot rely on people blindly. How a thinker approaches this dilemma is by doing this: they put themselves in one of the two categories. First, regarding the topics they don't have verified information about, they simply stick to: a) I don't know; b) scepticism towards the packets of information available; c) what are the sources behind the claims that are being made by a particular packet of information; and d) what are the evidences? Simple. If I told you something about a nation's history that you clearly don't know, instead of blindly using it to fill a packet of information, a critical thinker will employ the four points mentioned above. The second category is the topics about which they have verified information and, therefore, they do know. A critical thinker almost never buys a packet based on face value. It either has to be coming from a consistently reliable source or it is met with strong scepticism.

The point is: you don't need to know everything but don't believe everything you are being told in the name of knowledge either. It may sound very simple to you, but a lot of people believe *anything* without verifying. Again, I am not saying you need to start verifying everything you are told, no, that is stupid time-taking work. But if you are interested in that information and want to add it to your memory, then you might as well do some research and add valuable, reliable information, not some propaganda or dumb binary nonsense.

Most people want information so they can be considered knowledgeable. The motivation is not to cultivate our thinking, but to be *competent* in front of others. People who practise critical thinking are motivated by the need to think better. Appearing competent is secondary. Critical thinking is intrapersonal, whereas being competent is interpersonal. One who has curiosity invests themselves intellectually in things for *themselves*. One who wants to be competent is focused on achieving that goal by using knowledge as a tool. The goal of knowledge becomes achieving social competence. There may be overlaps but critical thinking is an exercise you do with your mind.

When somebody asks a question seeking advice, humans are more focused on being able to provide a packet of information than verified, practical information. Every son of a mother on this planet has advice to give, but only a frighteningly small number of people have good advice. This happens because your intellectual focus is on, ‘Can I answer this question?’ and *not*, ‘Can I answer this question *well*?’ This tiny difference changes our entire motivation and style of learning. We become information fillers instead of information seekers.

How people normally think = knowing up to the point my ego feels good. Their motivation is to have *an* answer; once they have a few packets of information, they are satisfied and close the topics in their mind.

How critical thinkers think = this is the best I know so far + I have curiosity to know more + I don’t know a lot. Their motivation is to find better answers, and they keep the topics open in their minds for new data, new perspectives and the possibilities of being incorrect.

All humans think, only a few can think well. In the process of thinking well, knowledge is the fodder, not the objective; thinking *well* is the objective. How you think matters much more than how much you know. What you do with the knowledge you have matters much more than collecting more knowledge. Knowledge in the hands of a biased fool becomes ammunition to fight for their group. Knowledge in the hands of a clever businessperson becomes a tool for more profit. Knowledge in the hands of a stupid person creates the opportunity to convert them into a follower. When efforts to dissect and understand knowledge are not made, it is automatically redirected to what our biases make of it.

How much has the information, data and knowledge that you claim to have, been dissected and understood by you? And how much of it have you accepted without any questioning because it suited your biases? Some clever businessperson on the internet telling you unverified nonsense as facts which you love to hear because it is what you want to hear.

To be a critical thinker, your objective ought to be to intellectually go from thinking to thinking well. The ‘want to think well’ is the seed that develops intellect. One may feel that thinking and thinking well are closely related, but they aren’t. Relying on knowledge alone is a step towards worshipping yourself and wanting to be worshipped. Your focus has to shift from loving knowledge to loving thinking. Knowledge mustn’t impress you, the ability to dissect data well and come up with various findings should. Millions of

humans have knowledge on subjects which they have chosen to study, doesn't mean they can think well. Knowledge can be gained, thinking is developed. One who stops at admiring knowledge misses out on the wonders of thinking. That does not mean knowledge is valueless, if you are on the road to developing thinking, the knowledge of *how to think* can teach you the path. But to walk on that path, you would have to *apply* that knowledge. The goal remains how to think. The practice remains how to think.

If one asked you right now: 'How do I get a girlfriend?' In your mind, you will look for all the packets of information you have heard on what girls like, what girls want and what a guy should do, even though this knowledge has hardly ever been researched or compared to the existing empirical data from primatology to psychology. You have not thought of the long-term results of your advice, repercussions, morality, principles, life satisfaction, guilt, eliminating bad advice and whether this person is even ready for a relationship. Most people don't consider these things. The curiosity of finding out is replaced by the satisfaction from having any information – even if it is nonsense.

A few basic tenets of critical thinking can be compounded into these pointers:

- Novelty: Believing new ways always exist, believing that you don't know everything, believing that you know very little.
- Unlearning: Being open to ignoring or abandoning what you know and how you currently think.
- Empirical fallibilism: Considering that whatever you believe in could be partially or wholly wrong.
- Intellectual humility: Whatever you do know is miserably minuscule compared to what is there to know.
- Clarity: Don't assume, instead accept – 'I don't know.'
- Self-knowledge: Your brain thinks in shortcuts, doesn't want complex thinking, likes simple information, responds very well to binaries and is heavily biased. Therefore, don't rely too much on how your own brain currently thinks.
- Become data oriented: Your brain is more emotionally oriented than data oriented, which means it is in love with its biases and has created

frameworks to understand new information based on those biases. Your thinking starts not with ‘In how many ways can I interpret this data?’ but ‘How do I compute this data based on my biases?’

- Defamiliarization and objective thinking: When new information comes, separate everything you have learnt previously about that information and look at it objectively as a new thing you are not familiar with.

## Patience

It takes time to form an opinion on something. Most opinions are either borrowed or predictable, instinctive first reactions. In order to come up with an opinion by yourself, you have to look at it from different perspectives, you have to debate from different points of view, consider human behaviour, consider philosophies of life, employ empathy, employ boundaries and finally come up with a complex, nuanced take on a subject. This also depends on how much data you have on the subject. If I asked you why a woodpecker does not get a concussion or severe brain damage after repeatedly headbanging its beak into trees for its entire life, you would have no clue. To answer, one would require a basic knowledge of brain anatomy. Data is important.

To form opinions even with data, it can take from hours to days to weeks depending on how much you practise how to think. What it most certainly won’t take is a few seconds or minutes, which most people take. When it comes to sharing an opinion on anything, homo sapiens have to learn to become comfortable in saying, ‘I have no opinion right now, I am thinking about it. I don’t know.’ Instead, what we do is the opposite. As soon as anything happens, every person around you is an expert – that is a sign that the opposite of critical thinking is being practised.

## I Don’t Know

‘I don’t know’ is the mantra of human intelligence. Those who worship the philosophy of ‘I don’t know’ save themselves from knowing what they most certainly shouldn’t learn. To claim to know is a very dangerous position.

‘Into darkness they enter who follow after ignorance, into a greater darkness enter who devote themselves to knowledge alone.’ – Verse 9, Isa

## Upanishad

We are mostly worshippers of knowledge alone. You may think this is getting repetitive, but it needs to get drilled in your brain that you really don't know much about anything. We attach great pride to believing that 'I know'. Certainty is a human fallacy. Let's take history. We believe that we know history. For example, Indian Hindus believe that their religious, cultural, scientific and literary manuscripts are intact and known to them. Little do they know that around 40 million ancient Indian manuscripts from thousands of years ago, ranging across mathematics, poetry, literature, religion, astronomy, philosophy, etc., are untranslated and unknown to us. Little do we know that each passing day hundreds of those manuscripts are getting destroyed permanently, to be lost in time forever. There may be many more epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata that humans will never know of. Those scripts are written in such ancient languages and dialects that there isn't any translator alive who can translate them. They are currently working on an AI which can translate them. Who knows what will be left by the time they are able to! From the library of Alexandria to the ransacking of the library of Nalanda to the destruction of the House of Wisdom in Baghdad, the number of books that were burnt and destroyed took months. All those works on a range of subjects, gone forever, never to be touched by our knowledge.

By the hands of humans, fire, climate and the natural physical decay caused by time, we have permanently lost pages, the scale, size and impact of which we will never find out. The great works of literature, philosophy and history that are known to us are measly compared to what is unknown. The geniuses whose works have survived are the lucky ones, they are the 1 to 10%. In a study done by an international team which involved experts from Oxford, using statistical methods from ecology, it was found that about 90% of medieval European literature has been lost forever.

Then there are known historical accounts of groups of humans motivated by religion, colonization or plain narcissism that participated in destroying histories of entire cultures and civilizations. For example, the Spanish destroying the Maya codices, which eradicated most of the knowledge, history and literature of the Mayan civilization; the first Chinese Emperor, Qin Shi Huang, who ordered 'burning of the books' which involved destroying all poetry, history and philosophy that existed before his time.

Human ignorance is not knowing less, but not having a clue about how

much we don't know. Without that awareness, whatever is available to know is confused with everything one needs to know. This gives birth to arrogance. That's the darkness of which Verse 9 of the Isa Upanishad is talking about. An expert in any subject from a hundred years in the future will tell you how little you know today. The competence we gather from knowledge gained is, in fact, arrogance from knowing only a little. Admit that to yourself. From humans, viruses, cells, to history, literature and the universe, you know very little.

## **Conspiracy Theories, Narratives and What to Think**

You follow narratives. Narratives give you the frameworks of how to see things. What a thing is and what somebody tells you what that thing is, often are two different things. The former is reality, the latter is reality swallowed by a narrative. A narrative tells you *what to think* about a topic with the intention to make you or keep you as a follower.

How narratives are created = use selective data, manipulate it emotionally, exploit your lack of knowledge, use as many cognitive biases and fallacies as possible and, lastly, point to binary conclusions such as x is good and b is bad. Have a thing or person or group to malign. Invoke a fictional, ideal scenario which has nothing to do with economics, reality or research. Have an exaggerated interpretation of current reality that invokes fear and anger. Without fear and anger, people will either think logically or not be motivated enough. Have a convincing thought leader who does so by sounding scientific and logical.

The most common narrative is: 'Our thing – nation or religion or culture – is the best.' You have heard this. Somebody has tried to sell you this. Probably you have bought it too. Just remember the script: choose historical data selectively to build the narrative. Manipulate the selective data by removing context, perspectives and historical reality of that time. Create fear and anger in terms of how people think today. Always keep it emotional. It has to be shown emotionally, written or said. Data in its entirety is highly complex, very boring and never simple. Actual data is like a tree with several branches and leaves representing multiple minor and major theories with lots of overlaps in them. So, the data presented is oversimplified. The narrative has to have big final goals, ideal scenarios, which fit right into storytelling devices used in kids' movies – the good guys, the bad guys, bad groups, essentially *the others* who are bad. The

good guys are doing everything to save humanity like in a movie for children. There is no complexity. It is done by people with intellectual appearances, the thought leaders.

You may wonder, ‘How can this work?’ It works because we rely on others to tell us opinions on things happening around in the world. That’s what news media, explainer videos, commentary videos, even shorter clips in the form of reels, shorts or TikTok do. This opens huge opportunities for people to sell you narratives. Narratives replace reality. Reality = raw data left for you to parse, think and analyse. Reality rarely conforms to a story structure. Storylines are the work of humans, so reality can become easier to understand for ourselves. We understand stories easily. When given raw data, you would automatically try to put it in some story-driven framework in order to understand it. This is also indicative of the power of art. How art has been used throughout history, so frequently and potently, as propaganda to sell narratives.

Even movies made on historical events are somebody’s narrative, be it the director, writer or the production company. If one chooses to make it close to reality, they will have to break away from the standard storytelling devices which humans identify with. Those movies will be complex, with morality in question, good guy and bad guy will switch back and forth, and the ending may not conform to traditional social messages such as good triumphs over evil. A good example, of this is Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket*. I pick a war movie because war movies especially tend to be propagandist and heavily one-sided with good guys and bad guys laid out as black and white.

Reality is a 360-degree view of an incident recorded by cameras without human interpretation. It requires immense self-control and self-awareness to bring that objectivity in your thinking. Critical thinking is removing the human element and interpreting data as close to objectivity as one can. It does not mean becoming unemotional, but to even view emotions objectively.

We get highly influenced by the narratives we follow. It does not matter whether it is right wing, far right, conservative, neoliberal, centrist, progressive, liberal. Data and reasoning do not care about ideologies. Even scientists have ideological biases. Researchers can have ideological biases. Several studies are plagued by biases too. This is a human problem with regard to how the mind thinks.

Let us talk about the in-group bias that humans suffer from. A great part of you is the environment, culture and the society you come from. A great part of you is the beliefs and belief systems you follow. Unless you choose to place critical thinking right in between how you think and what you were taught, who you are remains largely what you inherited, not what you cultivated.

You believe in x, somebody believes in y, after a while what we get is about 37 groups, some overlapping, some against, some common and some neutral. That's what in-group bias is – favouring your group. When your thinking begins with the bias towards your group, narratives take precedence over reality. How group x is going to interpret that reality, the data they will pick selectively, the amount of emotionality they will add into the mix, creates a narrative which acts as confirmation bias and fuel for groupthink. Narratives are powerfully important tools in shaping how large sums of people in a group think.

A thinker is a pursuer of the truth about reality, they may not discover reality as it is, but they almost never mistake narratives for what they are not. A thinker can spot narratives almost as soon as they see one.

## Your Personal Experiences

A lot of people base their opinions and theories on personal experiences. ‘It happened to me.’ Your personal experience is unreliable data. Too many factors regarding *who you are* – from social, economic, racial to your personality – influence the nature of your experiences. When your personal experiences are shared by many, only then does your theory move from unreliable to reliable. But even then, there is the issue of who are these *many*? Are they randomly chosen from all the people who have had the same experience or selectively picked from among those who have had bad experiences? In case you specifically choose people with the same nature of experience, ignore the experiences of all the rest and count *that* as many, then that too is unreliable data. For example, a person who travels to a new country forms their perception about that country and its people based on their expectations + what they personally experienced. One whose experience was positive will usually have great reviews, one who had a bad trip may have negative reviews. Opinions based on personal experiences are mostly generalizations.

Bad experiences are often the best strategy to recruit you into some group.

A bad experience in your life may still be unresolved emotionally. Emotions like anger, betrayal and hurt are very hard to control in us, but relatively easy when they are someone else's. If you have joined a group or are following someone based on the *many* people in the group who have gone through the same bad experience, then beware of what they say and make you do. Beware of what they teach you and how they are helping you deal with those emotions. Beware of the paths they open and nudge you to walk toward. I am not saying 'don't'; I am saying 'beware'. They might just be capitalizing on your anger by keeping you angrier. They might be capitalizing on your hurt by turning you bitter. They might just be amplifying the betrayal you feel to recruit you into an *us vs them* ideological war.

Personal hurt loves generalizations that hurt others. Belittling others who have nothing to do with your anger. This might make you unkind. The goal of solving your hurt is not to become hurtful, but to return to balance. The goal of dealing with betrayal is not to become mean out of fear, but to become stronger as a result of moving on. You solve your own anger not by attacking, but by building defence against that anger. At the end of the day, you protect yourself so you can be peaceful again – that is why you resolve things. So, the question is, from all the groups you have joined, do you feel peaceful or angry?

## Creative Thinking

Creative thinking is the part in your thinking process that tells you: 'There is a new way.' Whether you are thinking about a topic or solving a personal problem, the belief that there is a new way opens up doors to new solutions, perspectives and ideas. People are often convinced that the known solutions are the only options they have. The available ways of doing something are the only paths. Most humans are closed to the idea that solutions that are unknown to them also exist. Innovation, creativity and novel solutions come to those who operate with 'there is a new way' as a setting in their minds.

If you are convinced that what you know is what there is to know, then why will you use your thinking? What you know was taught to you by someone else. By applying that, you will simply be repeating what almost everyone around you does in the same situation. You will have the same thoughts that the majority would in a situation.

But if you think, ‘there is a new way’ to look at this, to resolve this, then your brain starts the thinking process to find out that way. With a simple change in the setting of your thinking, you start on the journey of critical thinking.

‘I am not going to accept that which seems instantaneously obvious or rigidly morally simple. Certainly, there must be a different way to look at this. There may be alternative perspectives than the ones that are widely available. There may be more angles to this.’ When this is your setting, you actually pick up the data and start looking at it objectively. You are looking for something new and you don’t know what that is. And you have decided to look beyond what your biases have to say about it. You will find that you are in a new territory yourself.

When thinking on something, be a writer or a detective or a scientist ignoring the popular view held by the masses, look at the clues, data, signs and all sides of the situation, then bring in long-term perspectives – historic and future based. In thinking, don’t just look at the now, but also the long term. What patterns are we repeating, what moments of history are we recreating, what mistakes are we making *again*? Critical thinking moves beyond the obvious short term, the first door it opens is data and the last one is emotions. In between comes creative thinking.

In personal problem-solving, creative thinking teaches you diplomacy, strategy and pragmatism. When you remove limiting yourself only to a few available moves taught to everybody by society, you open yourself to a thousand new moves. In personal problem solving, critical thinking requires creative thinking during multiple occasions based on the *new* information being made available. There is no fixed solution to the problems of life, but rigorously creating new strategies every time the situation changes. The goals, however, of every new solution created are securing long-term peace, mental health and wealth – peace, sanity and gains. Any solution that destroys your mental health, long-term peace or gains is not a solution but a form of self-destruction.

A strategist seeks revenge by procuring power, whereas fools resort to violence and self-destruction. The strategist thinks in the long term always, whereas fools – overcome by emotions – cannot think beyond what lies in front of their eyes. To play the long-term game well in your life, you need to build your strategy creatively at each and every step of the way.

## Data Tree

We rarely know the efficacy of the data we have on things. But we are relaxed. That's a problem when you care about that information and are using it to build opinions and take actions. I need you to see data in a different way.

All the information that humans have in this world is like a dense Amazonian rainforest. Each data tree in that forest represents a topic. If you don't know anything about the Amazon rainforest, google it. Each of those trees that you see in that picture is a topic. That is how many topics, subjects and things to know are in this world.

A data tree in itself is highly complex. Each single tree consists of many branches and thousands of leaves. All those branches are different streams in that subject, and all those leaves are data points. You will see leaves and branches converging into one other, overlapping one another and pushing into each other. That is how complex and intermingled data points and streams are. Data trees keep growing bigger, keep growing more branches as more streams emerge and keep creating more leaves as more theories, conclusions and data points emerge. For a human to have an entire forest in their minds is impossible. For a human to even have a complete data tree is impossible because our memory cannot store *all* the data we have learnt on a single subject. Your brain keeps forgetting.

What we have in our minds is a tiny forest, and the information you have on different subjects become data trees in your mind. Whether those trees have several branches, several leaves, depends on the information acquired by the individual. An expert in gravity will have a much larger tree on gravity than a high school student. The more you learn, the better perspectives you have, the more overlapping information you find, the bigger and denser that tree becomes in your mind.

As said previously, reality is an Amazon rainforest, what you have in your mind are a few trees, some saplings, plants and a lot of free ground. Trees built on wrong information and binary opinions have weak roots and skinny branches with infected leaves. They need to be cut off upon realization immediately or else that infection spreads, corrupting other data trees.

Seeing the information that you have as data trees helps you objectively look at how much you truly know about a subject. Without a clear representation, we assume whatever we know is enough. Once you assess

how big your data tree is by checking out just how big that subject is, how huge that subject's tree is going to look like, you begin to see by comparison that you know very little, and that brings humility. The fact that your data trees on subjects are very tiny and have two or three branches at most without many leaves, humbles you.

To be able to grow intellectually, one needs to be humbled constantly – that's the only way.

## Defamiliarization

Defamiliarization is a common literature technique which has been employed famously by many novelists from Tolstoy, Nabokov, to Kazuo Ishiguro, Martin Amis and more. The famous Russian formalist, Viktor Shklovsky, named it 'ostranenie'. As the name suggests, it means defamiliarizing things that you know, basically relooking at the same things that you are already familiar with from a new set of eyes and in a new way.

How does this fit into critical thinking? Critical thinking is how you think about a thing. Do you apply critical thinking to think about a thing or accept what you were taught about that thing? How you see a thing matters a lot. To be able to think *well* about a thing, one needs to know what they have previously learnt about that thing and be able to unlearn it if needed.

This is how humans normally incorporate critical thinking in their lives: we have a thing. Then comes what we have learnt about that thing, which includes the biases, opinions and ways of seeing it. And then comes the attempt to think critically about it.

In a sequence, it would look like this: a thing → (what we have learnt about that thing) → how to think about it?

The above doesn't work very well. That is why people who try critical thinking find themselves confused and find critical thinking to be very hard. The problem is (what we have learnt about that thing). It is in brackets because we are unconscious of the fact that we have included that in the equation. It is *what to think*. How to think becomes very hard because your prior biases and interpretations are already there, unconsciously added by you.

This is how thinkers think:

A thing → (what we have learnt about that thing) → unlearn it → how to think about it?

Defamiliarization is a tool in critical thinking that helps with immediate

unlearning by stripping the thing of every interpretation you might have of it. A thing is a thing, what you make of that thing is not what that thing is, what you create is your interpretation of that thing. To be able to think about a thing in a new way, you have to go back to seeing it as a thing without the interpretations. Defamiliarization does that.

The human mind, after having lived for decades in societies, learns to see things the way society has chosen to see them. Things get corrupted by the human interpretations offered by the ways of thinking in human-created systems. The human, therefore, has to let go of that to be able to think of that thing, as a free-thinking person.

To understand it better, here is a practical example. A single, straight guy watches a YouTube video of a guy and a girl sitting in a café somewhere in Paris or New York having a casual conversation. What he interprets from this is the following:

- Perceived attractiveness: How pretty the girl is and how good-looking the guy is.
- Language: The language they speak, for example, English. How good their English is. How fluent they are. What accent they have. How well they communicate.
- Grooming: How personally well-groomed the individuals are, from the makeup of the girl to their haircuts, eyebrows, eye-makeup, nail colour, beard of the guy, etc.
- Clothes: How appealing their clothes are, how expensive they are, which brands the clothes are from, how expensive the shoes are and from which brand.
- Gadgets: How expensive their phones are. The same with other gadgets they are carrying.
- Social status value: How expensive the place is where they are sitting. How sophisticated it is. How cool the venue looks.

Based on these interpretations, the guy watching the video might feel strong jealousy, envy, desperation, unlucky, sad and hateful towards himself for not having that lifestyle or a girl like her in his life.

Apply defamiliarization on the same, and the reality becomes:

Two primates with tailored cloth on their bodies, exchanging words on the

ground, sitting on chairs made of trees at some geographical location on planet Earth.

A phone is a plastic or metal case with rare earth minerals in its battery and a semiconductor chip that lights a screen on which you can touch and see things. A phone becomes a thing of status when human interpretations of that phone come into the picture. Clothes become cool, expensive or stylish when humans add interpretations to them. A geographical location has value because humans agreed to it, otherwise all land and water exists on planet Earth, therefore, should not have different values. Humans give it different economic value based on their needs, for example, how close that land is to water supply or job opportunities.

Defamiliarization helps you to *re-think* what you are feeling by looking at it differently. A lot of what you currently feel comes from frameworks of thinking that you have learnt from human-created systems. No matter how much you apply critical thinking, if it is being applied on those existing frameworks, they will not help much. You have to see a thing exactly as it is or close to what it is by removing the interpretations you have *learnt* to see them with.

A thing → subjective interpretations learnt unconsciously from the society you belong to → big problems.

By defamiliarizing, those ways of seeing get exposed. What you are left with are good questions: ‘Why did I feel this? Why do I care about this? What really is important in my life? What do I like to do that gives me peace and contentment?’

# Weird Ending Because Predictability Is Boring and Novelty Is Discomforting

## The Habit of Problem Solving

Make a rule of solving the problems that exist in your life. Do not try to live with them. Do not try to half-think them. Do not tell yourself that *you are okay* with the problem/s. Do not acknowledge them every night before sleeping and then forget about them in the morning. Problems breed and multiply if not solved. Problems survive by eating up years from your life. The goal of problems is to end your life early or earlier than you had expected. Problems are deadly – do not take even the small ones lightly. Problem-solving should be a habit, not the course you take when you have no other option left.

A lot of problems are self-created. After several failed attempts to solve a problem, at some point, you will start looking at yourself as the source of it. But if you don't decide to engage in problem-solving, then you won't ever reach there. You will blame it on others.

Active, repeated problem-solving brings self-knowledge and self-awareness. For example, after practising problem-solving as a rule of habit, you may be able to define for yourself what a real problem is and what isn't. A lot of people *create* problems where there are none. After seeing a pattern of problem *creation*, you might ask yourself why you create problems that do not exist.

## Pain

Allow pain because pain is one of the children of life. See it as a real, certain possibility. Sure, pain is a pain in the ass, but one must never forget that it exists, and that it will touch your life multiple times. Running from pain is feeding the fear of pain. Efficient problem-solving in your life requires you to endure pain in order for stability and structure to return. Problem-solving is focusing on the problem despite the pain. If you are going to focus only on the pain and not the problem, then you will never

solve the problem but look only for ways to not feel that pain. Pain is real and unpleasant but okay. If you appreciate and love pleasures, then learn to appreciate or at least see pain with the same regard too. It is just as much a part of life as pleasures.

## You Are an Octopus and They Are a Walrus

All humans are different, therefore, comparisons are futile. Sure, one can come up with different ways to measure and compare the performances of an octopus and a walrus but forcing them into a comparison severely underplays their individual talents and traits of who they are.

Competing and following have the power to destroy your original motivation to do a thing. Only you know why you want to do something. Why *you* want to do something might be very different from why *they* want to do that thing. When you compare yourself, you are forced to compete with their *why*, which may force you to change your original *why*, which was what originally motivated you to do that thing. Changing your motivation to do a thing so you can win against someone in public is a loss to yourself in private. You may not want to go where they are going but in wanting to beat them, you may force yourself to. They are doing it for their own reasons. Let them. You do it for reasons that inspire you. There are billions of humans, how many are you going to beat and for how long? Comparing is a preposterously stupid short-sighted game that ends with realizing in old age how preposterously stupid it was.

Think of yourself as an anime character. All anime characters have distinct abilities that define who they are. For example, in a superhero world, we all cannot have the ability to destroy our enemies with superpowered super strength. Even though we all might want to be that superpowered superhero. The world needs all kinds of superpowers for different purposes. You need superheroes who can think well, who are strategists, who are teachers, who are the heart of the group, who are the mark of morality, who are primarily rescuers.

You are a different type of superhero. Instead of coveting the one with super strength, you just need to recognize your own superpower. Is it saving, protecting, healing, fixing, teaching, building, strategizing, leading, planning, guiding or helping? What do you do best – accept that superpower! You don't need to have fighting as your main thing, you can be a different type of warrior. We all have roles to play in society based on

what we choose to do with our personalities. A strong superhero is good at a few things, but most of the time the good of society may not even need those things. Instead of kicking yourself by comparing, hone what you can do better and become the best anime character you can be. That way, the viewers will like you for who you are and not care about who you are not.

Congratulations for having finished the book. Re-read it after some time has passed in your life. Try applying the things that were mentioned. And don't forget, in a very non-narcissistic way, you are awesome.

## Note on the Author

Shwetabh Gangwar has been solving problems sent by people on his YouTube videos for years. He teaches critical thinking, strategy, diplomacy, philosophy and uses concepts from many subjects. He has over 2.5 million fans and over 100 million people have listened to him.

JUGGERNAUT BOOKS  
C-I-128, First Floor, Sangam Vihar, Near Holi Chowk,  
New Delhi 110080, India

First published by Westland in 2019  
This updated edition first published by Juggernaut in 2022  
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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

P-ISBN: 9789393986047  
E-ISBN: 9789393986405

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Typeset in Adobe Caslon Pro by R. Ajith Kumar, Noida

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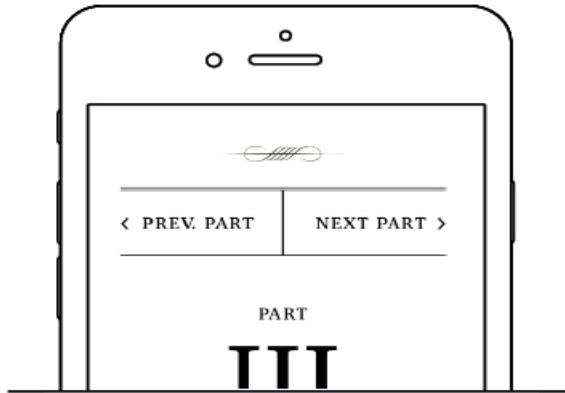


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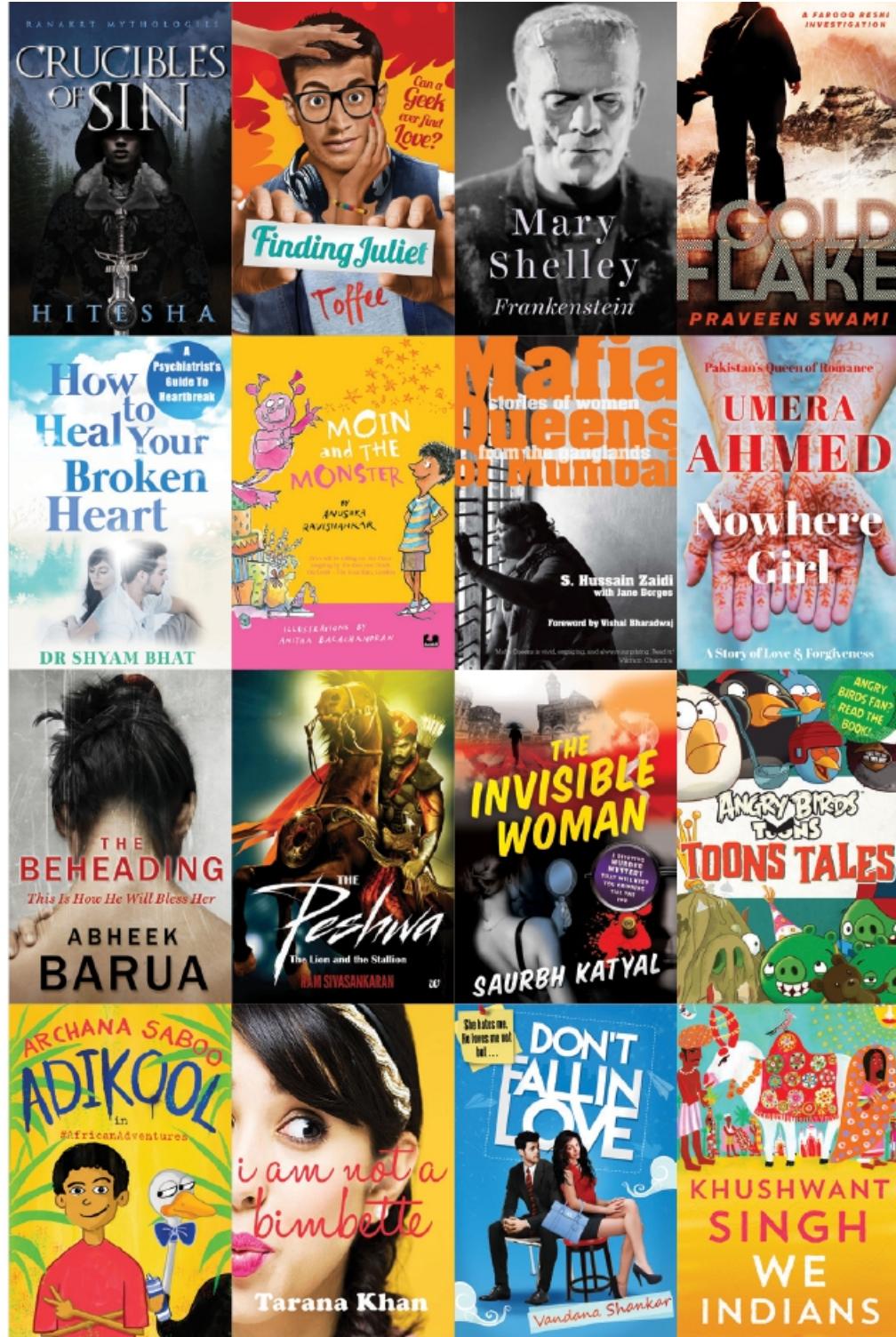
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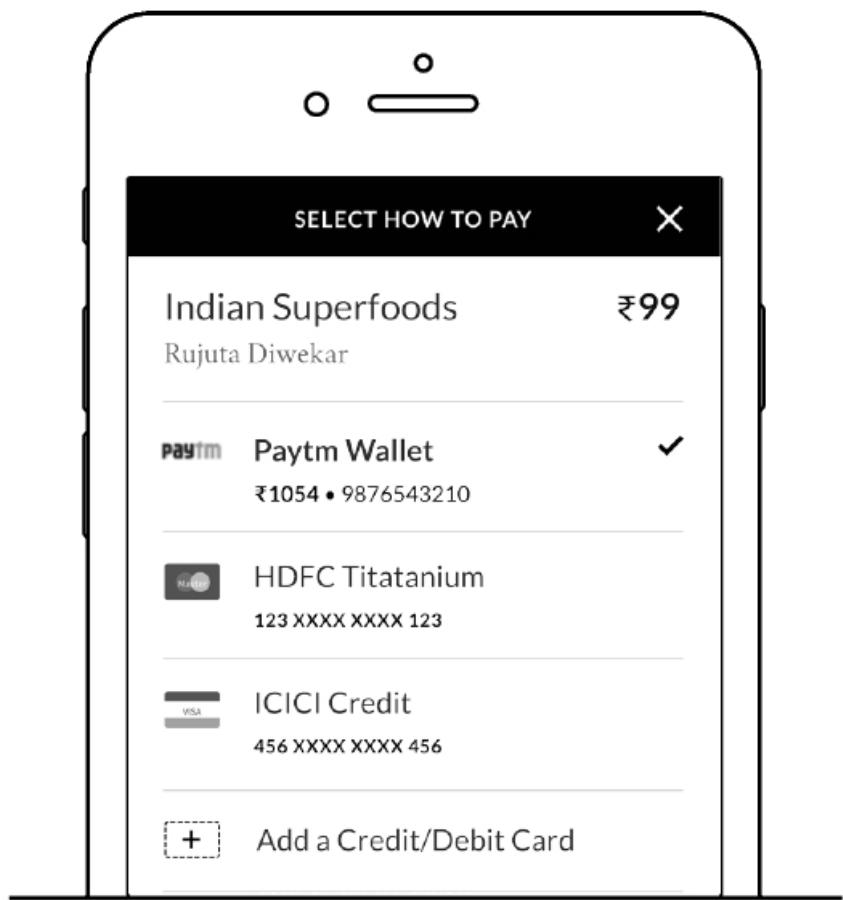
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