

Pure Experiences

Selected Articles

Volume - 2



Tarun Pradhaan

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Preface

This book contains some selected articles from my blog. The articles are on spiritual topics, mostly related to the path of knowledge.

This volume has articles that have in depth discussion on the topic of mind, ego and the body.

I gain from many teachers and I am grateful to them for the teachings. This is my humble effort to convey the very same teachings in a more modern and accessible form.

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Pune, India
May 2018

The Extraordinary Gift of the Mind : Part-1

Presence in its activity of Experiencing gets bound by the Fundamental Process which results in organizing of the experiences, which we call knowledge. The Fundamental Process shapes this activity in many ways, like running water shapes the land. It takes the form of an entity where we can lump together activities of organizing. This entity has already been introduced as the Mind. It feeds on itself creating more organization, more structure, more meaning and more activity. This is by necessity, because an entity which does not do this will surely not be there to be experienced as a structure, given the force of impermanence. If you are wondering what these sentences mean, then probably you jumped into the middle of it all, so please read previous entries to make a head and tail out of this text.

The self sustaining mega structure, the Mind is truly an extraordinary thing. I think the Presence is proud of it, it is the beloved child of the Presence. The love is so deep that in the form of the Self, Presence thinks it is one with the Mind. It is all good, until the suffering begins. Well, how come suffering just appeared here out of nowhere in this pure love of the mother and the child? Did Mind come with a built in suffering generator? Did the Fundamental Process left it there as a bug, while calling it a feature ;-)?

Suffering as Ignorance

Here we arrive at the answer to an age old question – why is there suffering? The short version of the answer is – there is no suffering fundamentally speaking, its only a temporary occurrence. Suffering is an illusion, but a realistic one.

Being an experience, and being a result of the Fundamental Process, the Mind is very much impermanent, it doesn't last. Identification of the Self with the Mind causes an uneasy feeling to the Self, of it being slowly trapped, deprived of the freedom, and being destroyed [1]. It is just ignorance, as a partial knowledge that the Self is the Mind, or even human mind, which it is, but only for a while, it is just going through the process of the Mind. This process matures sooner or later and the knowledge is completed. As soon as the Self realizes that it was not the

Mind, and it is not being destroyed or changed or becoming any less, a light bulb goes on. The Self breaks the identification with the Mind, it lets it happen, the attachment turns into unconditional love, and the suffering disappears. It was not there to start with, it was just the ignorance.

Here we see the importance of the suffering, it means that the Self with its Mind is nearing the end of the ignorance, the knowledge is on the threshold of being complete. Very soon the Self will see the Mind as a structure, a beautiful one, instead of a confusing labyrinth full of pain, pleasure and suffering. If one is not even suffering, then one is deep into the ignorance, blissfully so. Suffering makes one question the existence, which leads him to the questions like - who am I and why am I suffering, and soon the answers come. Suffering is a door to knowing.

So growing out of suffering is an important phase of the Mind, and it has that capability. It is available to all of us.

Often, the Self will not stop at the Mind, it descends deeper and identifies itself with other structures that the Fundamental Process conjures up, such as the survival processes, bodies, biological organs, and even the surrounding physical environment [2]. This makes the path of knowledge very twisty, rocky and full of pits. More about that later, right now we want to explore this incredible thing – the Mind !

Capabilities of the Mind

The structure of the Mind, endows the Self with certain fine capabilities. The Self itself has no capabilities/qualities, except of being conscious, being the witness. It is pure, almost pure strictly speaking because it's a product of the Presence, the purest of all. Mind gives it certain abilities, tools, novel experiences, toys and weapons to play with. Self likes this play. Self knows its other aspects through the use of the Mind. This is what Mind is for – for the pleasure of the Self. Not to be taken very seriously, as it comes and goes. It is impermanent.

The Mind puts the Self right in the middle of dualities. So every quality comes with a price of an associated affliction. As we discussed before, the Mind as a knowledge creator puts limitations on the Self, providing it a temporary VR like view and making it forget what it is. We will go through a list [3] of these qualities and study what they are and also try to find some solution for the various afflictions to make the play more pleasurable.

1. Perception

Perception is a process by which the Mind presents the Experiencing to the Self in an organized form. For example, the Presence can be experienced as a physical world via the percepts of vision, hearing, taste, touch and smell etc. These are nothing but patterns in the Experiencing. A collection of patterns is an **Object**. Human mind has this extraordinary ability to assign a location to an object. It does that by organizing the experience of an object with another useful structure called the **Space**. It is most obvious in case of vision, less in case of hearing and almost non-existent in case of touch (blind people may disagree here, but lets not go into that for now). So is there a space (empty “nothing”) where objects are placed and we simply see the space and objects as they are? The short answer is – No. Space is a result of Mind’s attempt to organize sensory information. No objects, no space. (More on space, time, spacetime and motion... later).

Are you really sure that a floor can't also be a ceiling?
- M.C. Escher

The Mind is capable of objectifying non-sensory activities too and present them as percepts. For example, thoughts and imagination, although it makes no attempts to arrange them in space, so these are objects but not strictly objects. The bodily sensations like pain, hunger etc also are presented as percepts.

Traditionally, the perception is understood as sensation via external senses. But we are going to extend the definition of the perception to include more entities, some not external. Ultimately, the distinction of “external” or “internal” makes no sense because there is just perception - an experience which takes place nowhere and everywhere.

Exteroception: Sight (ophthalmoception, visual), hearing (audioception, auditory), taste (gustaoception, gustatory), smell (olfacoception, olfactory), and touch (tactioception, tactile), these are the traditional five senses corresponding to the five external sense organs. These describe the phenomenal world, there is no other way to experience the phenomenal world directly. To the Mind these structures themselves appear as an extension of the central nervous system – the sense organs with specialized neurons.

Proprioception: These are structures through which we are made conscious of the body. The kinaesthetic senses like ones own movements (joints/muscles), balance (internal ear) and relative positions of the limbs (when they are not touching anything or are not seen), are the senses to convey what the body is doing. Without them one cannot learn to walk, stand or dance. You will see them clearly if you climb a tree.

Interoception: Body temperature (thermoception), pain (nociception), hunger, thirst etc are the internal senses conveying the status of the body to the Mind. The heat or cold of the external objects is also perceived, but not as a quality of the objects themselves, but as our “feeling” of it.

It is debatable whether there are other kinds of senses, like the sense of the gravity (heaviness) or floating sensations because they can be easily lumped into feelings and not as distinct senses. It is also debatable if there are extrasensory perceptions (information received via non-sensory means) or whether remote sensing capabilities exists. If they are in your experience, they exist, nothing in the Mind or the Fundamental Process inhibits them, however you will find it hard to provide much evidence for them to others who have no experience of them. There are other senses which we are not capable of such as sensing magnetic fields or ultrasonic sounds, but other life forms can do that. So there is always a possibility that new kinds of perceptions become available to the Self as it evolves via the Fundamental Process. Without the perception, the body does not survive for long. So we are thankful to them, they are important for our experience as a human being. However, Perception, being partial knowledge, is just ignorance and does an effective job of hiding the nature of the Presence from itself.

It is the commonest of mistakes to consider that the limit of our power of perception is also the limit of all there is to perceive.

- C.W. Leadbeater

2. Feelings

A collection of sensory perceptions can be lumped together as a distinct pattern, which is perceived as a feeling. For example the feeling of heaviness, which is not a sensation of gravity, it is just the amount of effort the muscles are doing, a proprioception. If you are in an orbit around the earth in a spacecraft, the gravity is still there, but now the muscles are doing no effort and the body feels weightless, so do the objects you lift. There can be feelings of a full bladder, full rectum or full stomach. All these are on the “objective” end of the feelings. Feelings are perceived "inside the body".

There can be more “subjective” kind of feelings, like, fear produces a sensation of shivering (tiny vibrations of muscles) and palpitation (heart movements) that are mixed with thoughts of urgency, anxiety and vulnerability. Love produces “warm” sensations and relaxed feelings or tingles. Feelings are accompanied by particular thoughts, memories etc. There can be complex feelings, for example the feeling of rain falling on the body (or showering) involving the senses of heat/cold, touch, sound, vision all in one. The feelings that come when one is

with a particular person are even more complex. These can become really creative and poetic when combined, such as the distinct feeling of meeting your lover in falling rain with emotions of love or happiness and perception of beauty etc.

When does the perception stop being objective and blend into subjective? Feelings show that there might be no sharp boundary between the two. There is no sharp division of “me” and “not me”.

3. Knowledge store

The Mind acts as a store house of the knowledge. It's a structure which defines knowledge. Knowledge is often stored as patterns of experiences and patterns of patterns and so on. There can be basic skills, that are learned via the senses, like walking, eating etc or can be **Recognition** of objects/events, which is just a comparison of memorized patterns and perceived ones. There can be intricate sequences of patterns (how to dance or play a sport) or some very complex combinations of sensory-motor abilities (how to draw or paint). There can be dynamic patterns like your mother as a collection of experiences of a lifetime, or a **Class**, e.g. a dog as a generalization of various dogs you have experienced. There can be higher **Abstractions**, like various ideas, concepts, mathematical objects and physical models.

It is clear that only an experience can form a pattern or a structure on which the subsequent patterns are based. I'm not even trying here to be thorough about what constitutes knowledge, it is a vast subject in itself. I recommend books, old and new. There is a recent revival in Epistemology because of the progress in artificial intelligence or machine intelligence. This is of immense help in understanding how the Mind organizes knowledge and experience. The process does seem to be evolutionary and/or algorithmic, which is not a surprise, as the Mind is a result of the Fundamental Process, the mother of all such auto-processes.

Depending on the environments and substrates, and the ways in which knowledge is stored and utilized, there can be numerous kinds of minds. Our human mind is just one kind. A bacterium also organizes its experiences and uses them, and so does a robot, which are examples of different kinds of mind [4]. There can be disembodied minds which lack any kind of phenomenal knowledge or are no longer connected to the senses [5].

Although my own experience is limited in this regard, but it is possible to infer that all the knowledge of all minds resides in the universal Mind. So whatever we

as individuals learn, is never destroyed. Individual minds and bodies are destroyed, but the knowledge they organize in their lifetime is preserved. To be honest, I cannot say this from my personal experience.

4. Memory

A memory is an impression, just as footprints are impressed on wet soil, experiences get impressed on the Mind. Often human memory is generally thought of as a sequence of connected experiences. Such as, the various cool events that happened in your last vacation, including audio-visual and other sensory contents in addition to the knowledge they imparted. This is how we generally experience memory (and you can have a memory of remembering something), but in its basic form it is just stored patterns. So the line between knowledge and memory blurs here. Your knowledge of mathematics is also a memory of all the experiences you had with that subject. In brain, we do not find any specific structures devoted to memory. The structures that store knowledge also store memories. However there are probably structures that control the recall of memories. It is often irritating to find that we cannot recall something important when it is really needed, such as this girl's name when you are dating her. So it is unreliable, unlike knowledge. I won't attempt to do a comparative study of both here, but memory enables knowledge and vice versa.

There can be non-human memories (like those corresponding to the non-human minds), such as patterns impressed on papers (books or pictures), magnetic fields on tape or electronic memories or the DNA. What is the difference? I see no difference when compared to the brain memories, because if you could interface your brain with patterns impressed on other substrates, you could recall those as easily as you recall your own memories. As I said, there is hardly any distinction between physical and mental worlds, essentially.

"It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards," says the White Queen to Alice.
— Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*

Memories are always of the past, it seems. Why can't we have a memory that stores the future? What a silly question, you may say, and that's right it's silly, but then the idea of memory storing the past is silly too. In my experience, a memory is always seen in the present. Now that's a real shock, but that's how it is. What we call a recall/remembering is an experience happening *now*, it is exactly that, a memory.

"Time is an illusion. Lunchtime doubly so."
- Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*

So why do memories look like they are of the past, while they are happening now? The Mind does a tricky thing. Mind creates **Time**, as a structure to organize our experiences. Memory is time, no memory, no time, no past. Mind simply classifies an experience as “past experience” by using some basic rules. If the experience is originating from impressions and the knowledge structures related to it are already there, then that experience gets a tag of “past”. This creates time. When the Mind is not doing that, such as in deep sleep, there is no time. The time of your waking up is the same as the time of your falling asleep [6]. When the Mind operates in unusual modes, such as when you are drunk or are dreaming, the time becomes very fuzzy and random. So the question is, doesn't Memory store the past events and isn't that its primary function and definition? No, it doesn't. It only stores the experiences, which happen in no time. Its all eternal now for the Self. One can experience the “no-time” state of the Self when one is not too absorbed in the mental activities, there are some good meditations to experience this directly [7] [8].

In some philosophies, the concept of Memory is extended further to include the memories and knowledge stored in disembodied minds. The body is impermanent and usually fades very quickly compared to the mind. The impressions and other structures may remain intact to some extent and a new body may form based on them. Such impressions are called **Samskaras**. Also known as *Karmic* impressions or *Vasanas (tendencies)*, they dictate the personality of the owner of the body. I cannot say much about these concepts, I have only a faint experience of being born with some unexplained tendencies. Universal Mind never forgets, it holds all memories of all individuals, almost infinite amount of memorized information. Like knowledge, our memories of experiences are never lost. Again, I won't be able to confirm that with my own experience, but many advanced seekers can do so. The point here is to open up your mind, so that you get busy seeking the answers and verifying what's said here. I don't intend to sell you yet another belief.

5. Understanding

The pieces of knowledge can be linked together in relevant ways which makes them more useful. I will define such super-structures as **Understanding** (to avoid the confusion caused by multiple meanings of this term). Understanding comes with prolonged experience with the Contents that are related. For example, when one sees that the water always flows in a certain direction, one relates the experiences of water, flow, slope, terrain etc together and forms a logical chain of experiences, resulting in an understanding that water flows downwards. There can be more complex forms of understandings, such as

understanding a complex phenomenon like Electromagnetism or a person and his behaviours, or a culture and so on.

Understanding of a particular thing may differ from person to person because their experiences differ. Not only that, the way people structure their experiences together differ due to their different capabilities to organize experience or information. This has something to do with the intelligence (to be described later) and it is also a skill which can be developed. Understanding anything is often a lifelong process, especially if the subject is dynamic, such as a person. It is possible to understand better with more experience, practice and, if you are lucky, with the help of a good teacher or guide.

Most of the suffering we cause to ourselves and others can be avoided by understanding each other better. It is also very useful to know how another person understands a particular thing or idea, this avoids confusion, or as they call it - misunderstanding - the cause of a lot of suffering. In my experience, the first step towards understanding others is understanding of the one's own Self and one's own mind. If you understand yourself, it becomes easy to understand others.

[End of Part – 1]

Notes:

[1] The Self cannot “feel” any suffering. It has no such capability. The Mind generates the experience of the suffering which the Self merely witnesses. This does not mean that the experience of the suffering is not real. Clearly the Mind doesn't “like” it, doesn't matter if its unreal or real, it is not desirable. I'm only using some common words as metaphors to describe the situation of the Mind, the Self remains pure and unaffected by the drama of the Mind.

[2] Samkhya (Sankhya) philosophy provides a detailed (probably metaphorical) account of how the Self descends into the matter. See for a brief intro:
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samkhya>

[3] This list is probably non-exhaustive. I may keep updating it.

[4] For an interesting discussion see: <http://www.kurzweilai.net/kinds-of-minds>

[5] These have been reported by various explorers who explore the non-physical realms. My experience is limited here, so I recommend only one thing – explore and experiment yourself. Make your own knowledge.

[6] I'm thankful to Rupert Spira for explaining this clearly.

[7] The Mind creates more such entities - colours, tones, tastes, smells and like, that cannot be found in physical world nor can be measured, and are strictly considered "subjective" (I can't show you "my red colour" as I see it, directly to you, you never know what red looks like to me). These entities are just structures with peculiarities, in order to organize the knowledge in a meaningful way. Some are sub-structured in space and/or time some are not (where is smell located?).

[8] Will a different kind of memory create a different kind of time? I'm not sure. How does time feels like for a Goldfish? Or for an intelligence and conscious machine? Will some non-human minds evolve something better than time (or space) to structure knowledge? What can that be?

The Extraordinary Gift of the Mind : Part-2

We have explored some basic capabilities of the Mind in Part-1 of this topic. We continue onward and explore some more of the extraordinary abilities and peculiarities a Mind has.

6. Identity and Personality

Contents appear in the experience, they belong to no one, no one owns them. Yet the Mind has a feature that tags many contents as strongly relating with an entity called the **Identity** or a **Person** or an **Individual**. A person is the sum total of the experiences, a large collection of knowledge in the Mind, abstracted as a container (or owner) of those experiences and their structures. The Person or the individual is thus nothing but a Content, a structure in the Mind. It is also experienced.

Does a person has a Mind or does the Mind has a person? Very interesting question. There is no trace of any personality when a child is born, but the Mind is fully present. It takes some time to develop a personality, as the collection of experiences grows. Initially the child does not even own a name, he has to be told and reminded often, what he should answer when someone asks for “his name”. With more and more experiences, the Mind learns to separate the experiences into two – “I” and “not-I”, “mine” and “not mine” etc. Structures are formed which are strongly related to other structures depending on the importance of those structures for the sustenance of the Mind. More important a structure is for its sustenance, more is the “I-ness”. For example the knowledge of one’s name and one’s gender gets strongly related to his all other experiences, and is seen as “I – the name” or “I – the male” etc. This I is a container of the Contents, and the container is also a Content, since the container/I is also experienced.

Of what use is this function? One might ask. It’s a matter of convenience mostly. So instead of saying – “some huge collection of experiences caused a thought and the thought was converted to language and those words were converted by a body into sound”, one can simply say – “I said....”. The Identity is simply a higher level of abstraction. It makes it convenient to have conversations and to

deal with others. The “others” are another abstraction, a mere concept, an assumption, that there is another Mind out there which is similar to the one here, which is referred to as **You** [1]. The You appears as a part of the physical world, belonging mostly to the “not-I” group, probably because both others and the world are not very strongly related to or are not owned by other experiences, and they have a will of their own (the contents belonging to the physical world or other individuals do not seem to be under direct control of the Mind).

Where does the I end and the other start? It is all very arbitrary and changes often. When the Self is presented with this abstraction, it appears in many forms. As a Self, in its purest form, everything is disowned, and there is no I, just this Self which is witnessing. In the next level, it is presented as knowledge, where the I is now an abstract entity with such and such experiences. For example, when a thought appears it is seen as related to many past experiences, the sum total of these experiences gets abstracted as the I and the thought is added to it as a new experience, and becomes “my thought”. This is just a structure, and so it is knowledge. One now knows the thought and that it is related to past experiences, a container of it, the I.

In the next level, the abstracted entity also includes the body, where the body is presented as the I to the Self. If there is a need to present the body as the I, for example, when describing an event related to the body (“I fell down”), then the body is the I. However when there is no such need, the body is seen as “mine” (my body), an entity owned by the I rather than I itself. It’s a matter of convenience. The presentation “my body” simply shows a strong relation of the body to the owner (the I), and when the relation is stronger (like when the body acts as intended by the Mind), the body becomes simply I. Same with the thought, they are sometimes seen as I. The I seems to slowly fade into not-I as the contents leave the boundary of the body, they then become “mine” and then gradually “not-mine”, where the relations are very weak, and the contents seem to behave independently of the Mind.

However, some introspection will reveal that even the most intimate contents (such as thoughts, perceptions and emotions etc) are also independent in that sense. The Mind has no control over them, they just appear, the job of the Mind is to process them, arrange them into structure and present them to the Self. There is no I, there is no not-I and there is no actor or a doer separate from the Mind. These are all structures erected for organizing the incoming experiences in a certain way, the human way. Of course a non-human Mind may simply not produce an Identity and may deal with the experiences in some other way. What can be those and would some of them be better than the human way? That’s your home work for today, food for thought.

Since people are mostly preoccupied with actions and thoughts/emotions etc, the body and mental environment is I for them, and that is what they mean when they say I. When you disown everything, cut off all relations in the Mind, keep the knowledge aside, then you are the Self, the I in its purest form. The obsession with the I, the owner and doer of all the mental and physical activity is the cause of a lot of suffering. It causes some undesired experiences such the guilt (I did something wrong), victimhood (Others did something wrong to me) or hubris (I'm superior because I did something great) etc. Such experiences give rise to various beliefs and cause further damage. Actions happen, mentation (the mental processes) happens, knowledge happens, and these all are then associated (added to the container) with the I. **Disowning** them gets rid of them. Disowning is a knowing that the Identity is a virtual entity, no one owns anything, identity is there to serve useful purposes, and is not to be corrupted with associations with negativity, which might give rise to negative actions and worsen the corruption. This sense of corrupted Identity is unfortunately very common, and is often known as the Ego self, or Ego in short. Sometimes also known as the separate self, since people spend their entire lives identified with the Person and their bodies. This may be traced back to their experience that there are others with a body and a personality associated with it. The ignorant Mind simply projects an other on itself. More on that later, it is a vast and important subject, directly connected to the suffering.

"Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation."

— Oscar Wilde

7. Programs and Learning

The Fundamental Process creates algorithmic patterns that are a result of structuring of the incoming data through the senses and other mechanisms. These patterns determine how the incoming data is experienced and what actions it produces. These are almost like a computer **Program**. A program is a structure formed when a certain action results in certain outcome. **Learning** is a process by which deliberate actions are made in order to form a program or correct existing ones.

There can be a very large number of programs that operate independently or in concert with other programs. DNA can be thought of as a program in the Mind, that defines the physical body. Breathing, digestion and other such activities are programs devoted for maintenance of the body. Fight or flight mechanisms are primitive programs that are almost mental, but mechanical. Likes and dislikes are

also programs that are formed later on in the life and are less mechanical in nature. Ability to count and do sums/multiplications etc are simple learned programs. Other skills like driving and language are a complex collection of learned programs.

Programs can be physically seen as entrainment of neural structures, formation of new neural pathways by repeated excitation of sensory-motor circuits and even higher circuits that are used for abstraction. Some programs are just direct connection of peripheral sensors with muscles, and act more like a control system (e.g. those used for walking).

A program is generally hidden and operates on its own. The person gets an impression that he is doing what he wants to do, but its usually a program that is executing even before the association of the action is made with the I. With concentration and practice it is possible to see many programs as they operate and shape our thoughts, actions and our entire life. So it is useful to know them and develop a skill to reprogram the ones that are unnecessary or have gone rogue. The reprogramming is a top down process where the goal decides what the program should do. Repeating a corrected action frequently and consciously reprograms it, or can simply create new programs. Some programs can be entirely removed if they are causing suffering, such as the ones responsible for hate, shyness or phobias etc.

8. Choices

The Mind has an ability to execute a certain program out of a set of programs, whenever an input is presented that can trigger all those programs. The programs compete for execution and the Fundamental Process governs which of these will be executed ultimately. This process is known as making a **Choice**. Usually there are many programs and many options, so many choices can be made. However, the Mind can act on only one choice at a time - the winning choice.

The number of choices depend on the past experiences. More experience with a situation increases the number of choices available to deal with that situation. A rock has no choice. A plant has preprogramed choices (hard coded in the genes). An animal usually has very few choices that reflect a limited set of programs formed out of very limited experiences. A human being has significantly more choice, however, still limited. A very intelligent person has more choice compared to a less intelligent person, again reflecting the amount of experience one has.

The process of choosing gives an illusion of “free will”. No one does the choosing, it happens. The choice is later assigned to the I, giving it an owner, an

identity. It is not possible to choose anything that is not in your experience already. This should be obvious, so the “free will” is not free, its limited. One is free to choose from an available set of options, and most of the time, that freedom is also taken away by solidified programs (habits and tendencies).

Less choices usually result in suffering, so it is desirable to increase their number. It is possible only by having more experiences. Not only that, those experiences must form proper programs, so that the resulting actions are effective and reinforce the choice. Thus, it's a bad news that what you can choose is very limited and is determined by what experiences you had. The good news is that this situation can be improved via deliberate experimentation. There is no other way. Mostly people are under the delusion that they have an access to unlimited choice, or in other words, they can do whatever they want. This is just ignorance and it leads to terrible suffering. Seeing our limitations is 50% of the solution. As soon as you become aware that you have a limited choice, a door is opened for you which leads to a path of freedom. It's a lifelong journey. More choices lead to more freedom, and therefore to more happiness.

Choosing happens automatically without much control. A choice is usually made before the person becomes aware of it and owns it. There is just an illusion of a choice being made. This illusion probably arises from seeing others perform an action based on their choice, which, since it is seen from an external perspective, appears to be a result of "free will". One must see how choice operates, not by observing others, but oneself. Choices can be seen via some practice and introspection. There are a few methods which bring to light this mechanism. The key is to be aware of the various choices you have. This is the only thing that is in your control, to be aware of things happening in the Mind [2].

At any moment, you have a choice, that either leads you closer to your spirit or further away from it.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

Choose consciously and deliberately, fully knowing what actions/consequences it can result in, and fully knowing that you cannot choose something you do not know. When we do not know what to choose, it is best to turn to the Self, and let the choice happen from there. For this to happen, one must surrender the choices one already has and should not force his own choice. The Self, although having no qualities and no abilities to make a choice or execute a program, can still help the process by providing a refuge to the confused Mind. When a choice is made from this level, it is not a mental process as the Mind is out of the way. So it is as good as not choosing. This choice is a result of Experiencing and can be metaphorically said to be made by the Presence itself. Or you can call it the

higher will. What does it do? Will it make me achieve what I want without making a choice of my own? The answer is most probably – No. It simply opens you up for new experiences, it does not do anything else. It is the new experience that broadens your choice, nothing else. One must still choose, actions won't happen magically, though they may appear to happen in that way sometimes. This leads us to the concept of **Grace**, which is nothing but the positive results we may get if we surrender in certain situations that we clearly see are beyond our control and lie beyond the boundaries of our limited experiences.

“Excellence is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, and intelligent execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives - choice, not chance, determines your destiny.”
— Aristotle

9. Action

The genetic memory creates a body with certain functionality. These functions are there to interface with the physical world. We have already seen a major function – the perception. Another major function is the **Action**. An action is a change brought about in the Presence through the intervention of the Mind. The Self merely observes the change as it happens.

The body has specialized organs that cause the changes in its surroundings. Traditionally, the actions are five – Speaking, Grasping, Moving, Reproducing and Eliminating, corresponding to the five organs of mouth, hands, legs, penis/vagina and anus [3]. While perception takes in the impressions from outside the body, actions produce expressions in outside world. One can simply say that the perceptions are the inputs, and actions are the output of the computer called the Mind. The body is suitable hardware built out of physical stuff for interfacing with physical world. There is no sharp dividing line between the body and the world. The physical stuff is just another collection of structures in the Mind. How? It will require a full article to explain that.

I will override the tradition, as I usually do :-), and trash the organs of actions mentioned above. The body is capable of only one *external* action – muscular movements. The organs or body parts mentioned above are simply different configuration of the muscles governed by different set of programs. For example, speaking is simply the movements of the mouth and larynx and elimination is movement of lower colon and sphincter, all nothing but a special tissue – muscle, a structure under control of mental structures called programs. Hands and feet motions are more obvious muscular movements. Under this definition of organs of action, respiration, heartbeat, blinking, ocular movements and giving birth (etc)

is also included, which are again nothing but movements of muscles in different configurations. These are also acts, and actually blur the boundary between external and bodily actions.

Why did I say “external action”? Body is capable of more action apart from muscular. The movements happening inside the cells, for example. The very complex molecular nano-machines performing the cellular functions are doing nothing but action. These include cell division and production of proteins etc. Digestion can be thought of as an action, so is ingestion. These again blur external and internal. There is a gradual descent of the action into physical world. Another important action is electrical activity of the nervous system. It is an action, and it is closest we go towards mental action. There is a very direct correlation between what we perceive as mental actions and electrical activity of various configurations of neurons and their networks. This should not be a surprise, they are all just structures in the Mind after all.

Another fascinating action of the Mind is reproduction. The memory and programs of the DNA are transferred into a new body (birth) and evolution of a new Mind begins. Mind copies itself, which is an essential trait of any Fundamental Process as we have seen earlier. Structures that do not evolve and produce more structures (e.g. copies) do not last, given the impermanent nature of Experiencing. How does the Mind do that? Isn't it the body copying itself? It is a can of worms, I will leave the question unanswered here, but I will just say that it is also an action.

We can go on and on about the actions. The secretion of the chemicals, such as hormones and what not. It is better to save time and club those actions as “bodily actions”. These are obviously automatic most of the time, but mental activity does surely influence bodily actions. We are left with “internal actions” which as things like intention, thoughts and reasoning etc. Is perception an action too? We do not want to blur things too much, so we keep perception away, as it has a sense of direction from external to internal. But some thought will reveal that everything that happens is just Experiencing, nothing else happens. Actions are also experienced.

No one does an action, it happens, and later it is added to the container of the I, giving the experience of an action an owner. We do nothing and are capable of doing nothing. As the Self, we only experience. However, the Mind likes to own stuff and it also owns the actions, so there is at least something there to blame for everything that humans do. Else we will face troubles in courts when sentencing someone for some inconvenient actions that happened. In the end, we are responsible for our own actions. We do try to pass on the buck to others and

outer happenings and blame them for our actions, but this is the height of the ignorance. If you are starting on a path of your heart, it is the right time to take full responsibility of your actions.

Knowing well that I do nothing, how can I be responsible for doing anything? That's an age old question. Thankfully we have an answer that makes sense. Firstly there is no I and there is no action. This can be seen by a little introspection and perhaps with the help of an experienced teacher. So yes, the thing you call I cannot be responsible, but it does own them, doesn't it? If you agree to own the actions then you are responsible for them. For example, a child or infant does not own his actions, because the sense of I and ownership has not developed yet, so all the acts of an infant (including the one of peeing on your favourite shirt) are forgivable. We do the same for mentally challenged (aka mad) people. The court of law does not punish a person who is crazy beyond repair for his harmful actions. This is a kind of common sense. In some parts of the world, the actions of holy men and Renunciates (*Sanyasis*) are forgivable, for example, those of being naked, not speaking (vow of silence) or leaving their families and sitting in a cave. People in those parts know that such a person is in surrender, and has given up the ownership of all actions.

Leaving aside all those auto-actions, it is especially the deliberate, well thought out actions that are to be taken seriously. The human world is a mess, simply because of rampant actions of humans. If your life is a mess too, then its only because of your actions. Taking responsibility of what one does helps to cure the suffering one causes to oneself and to the others. Once you are responsible, you become very aware of what you do, and you try to avoid any actions that may cause suffering.

Every action has a **Consequence**. This is the famous law [4]. So although its not your doing, you are unconsciously causing consequences via irresponsible actions. There is no law that prohibits any action, it is all Experiencing after all, anything goes here. But if you want your experiences to be of a certain kind, namely pleasant ones, then you must think about the consequences of your actions. Fortunately, it is possible to choose a proper action (as we have seen above in the discussion on choice) that will minimize the undesired consequences. What consequences one desires? The ones that lead to even better or pleasant experiences, obviously. It all depends on the previous experiences one had. For example, a thief will surely desire to own someone else's property. It is his experience that the property/shiny objects bring happiness. However the desire disappears when he is caught and imprisoned (or probably beaten to death). So its our experiences that determine our desires (aka intentions). There is no other way to learn to produce better consequences. Acting consciously, utilizing our entire

knowledge, even if limited, and doing so under all circumstances is the key to produce better experiences [5].

10. Intention

An intention is a germ for an action. It is seen as a very brief rehearsal of the action itself. Who does it and where does it come from? No one does it, as we have seen above, but it does appear to come from and get assigned to the I, the person, the storehouse of all experiences. Complex processes in the Mind give rise to an intention, sometimes coming from the vast store of knowledge and impressions (memory) or triggered by a perception or other actions.

An intention is a very powerful thing. All human history, culture and individual behaviours are a result of intentions. Its powerful, yet subtle. You don't even know what you intend to do, before the action has already happened. It is an auto-process most of the time. Intentions are somewhat like a preparation of what is going to come. They are seed actions and can be aborted easily as soon as one becomes aware of them. If you are hungry and see food somewhere, the intention of eating it appears. If you remember your enemy, the intention of killing him pops out of nowhere. When you see a child in danger, an intention to save him appears automatically. If you become aware of them, the intended actions can be halted or postponed or better actions can be planned if time permits.

Intentions are generated by the stored Programs in the Mind. At a given moment many intentions are being generated, but most of them are filtered out and the most relevant and important ones surface from the vast ocean of stored knowledge. An action is the result of allowing the intention to do its work. Most of the intentions result in action, if the person is not trained to abort them. Often the training is provided by the life experiences. For example, as soon as you know that you intend to approach a beautiful woman, and you see her mate standing besides her, you abort your action quickly, since last time it resulted in painful experience of getting hit and losing your front teeth.

Some people do learn from the experiences of others and also by simulating a scenario inside their local virtual world model. But most need a real solid blow of experience to get useful knowledge. It takes some practice to become aware of various intentions that are perpetually appearing in the Mind and it takes a little more practice to learn to abort the actions they produce. Why is such practice even useful? Many actions, being a result of Programs, are automatic and often unnecessary. If the action is repeated unconsciously and frequently, it becomes an impulse or habit. For example if you can't stop eating even though you are

overweight and do not need so much food, it is a result of the Program – “feed_the_body” running like crazy. If one becomes aware of the seed of that action, one can abort it and can cause more positive outcomes.

It is also possible to generate useful intentions to direct your life in a more positive direction. For example replacing your intention to sleep or play by that of finishing your work can bring you the much needed money and can make your life more comfortable to allow more sleep and play later (well that is an example from my own experience). So consciously made intentions are helpful in reducing the suffering.

There are other entities that are akin to intention, such as impulses, desires, wants, wishes and drives etc. I'd like to club all these into the word intention, since these are not much different. You must have noticed that the only difference is the duration for which they last, with impulses being the shortest and drives being longest, often lifelong.

Sometimes the word “will” is used for an intention. It's a cause of much confusion with everlasting debates about whether it exists. So I'm intentionally avoiding that word. Yes, it exists, as we see it here, but it is mostly automatic. (A predetermined will??). But it is also possible to override it with less automated intentions that are a result of careful training directed towards happiness. The Mind is limited and cannot do anything other than that for which it is programmed for. But the drive of the Self towards happiness and bliss helps to direct the programs. You can call it the higher will. If you see closely, an option is always presented for choosing a proper action from a set of actions that lead to more misery and those that lead to more happiness and freedom. The trick is to see this choice clearly, and choose wisely.

Unfortunately our choice is a result of the programs and is often unconscious and automatic. So how can I choose something that I don't even know I should choose? It comes by practice, there is no other way. A teacher can guide you a little bit, since he has more experience, but its only you who can improve the programs of your Mind and progressively choose better intentions. The freedom to choose is there, but the options are limited. The options grow as your experience grows. The degree of freedom increases as you learn more, the number of choices increase as you make better choices. It should lead to a situation where the choices seems to become infinite, the ultimate free will. So the only solutions I know of is to experience more, and choose an action consciously. The action should be such that it leads to more freedom, not less, more choices, not less and more happiness, not less.

Notes:

[1] The others do have a Mind. This can only be inferred, cannot be experienced. But I'm pretty sure about it. Certain states of the Self may allow a broader perspective where all Minds are seen as originating from the Presence, painted on the canvas of Presence. I'm not sure about it though.

[2] I'm thankful to Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev for this teaching. To be aware is the only real freedom we have. Rest is just picking from given choices using programs, all evolved out of experiences.

[3] Also known as *Karmendriya*. Looks like we have six then !

[4] The law of *Karma*. We will discuss that in detail later.

[5] The path of Karma yoga, as taught by Krishna. I'm grateful to him for the same.

The Extraordinary Gift of the Mind:Part-3

Continued from Part-2

11. Attention

The Mind has an ability to selectively present just one experience to the Self out of many possible. It can attend to one input out of many or can shift the presentation from one to the other successively. This can be done by devoting more resources of the Mind to one particular experience and withdrawing the processing of others momentarily. It is also known as **Concentration**. A great ability, without it intentional learning is impossible. The Mind has some control over it, although not much, and like many other abilities, attention also needs to be sharpened by practice.

There are special structures that allow attention and we can see their physical counterparts in the brain (inferred from the books, I can't really see it). So like any other mental structure, this one can also be built up stronger and better. It is perhaps the most important ability, if you wish to manipulate the Mind and improvise it. The attention is mostly directed outwards (via senses towards the world), but with practice it can also be directed inwards (towards the mental contents). This is beneficial when you need to "watch" what is happening inside the Mind. One must pay attention inwardly in order to become conscious of the contents and processes.

Attention is sometimes confused with becoming conscious. They are not the same. As the word concentration implies, it's a matter of degree of consciousness. We are more conscious of something when we pay attention to it. Without attention we are still conscious of it, but it is drowned in some other experience. Attending to something helps in forming better memories and in better analysis of it. Learning and intelligence begin with attention. Anything that arouses **Interest** results in getting our attention. Anything that is dull and old fades away quickly from our experience. What is interesting to the Mind? This is widely variable and totally depends on the situation. When hungry, the only interesting thing is food and no amount of excellent philosophy can stimulate the Mind

(Well this is my experience, probably you are different!). Most of the time, that which is most important for the survival gets most attention - food, mates, jobs, enemies etc. Rest of the time, its directed towards entertainment, social pursuits, worries and fantasies. Not coincidentally, the mentioned activities correspond to some highly active and high priority programs in the Mind. We see that our attention is also governed by our programs. These damn things control everything.

Since the Mind keeps producing intents and desires all the time (even in sleep state), eventually one or the other content wins and gets hold of the attention. A person can hold his attention on one thing only for a short time, this time is known as the Attention Span. It can range from milliseconds (pitiable, yes) to hours. Also, the attention shifts very frequently and sometimes very fast. Some people are good at multitasking because they can shift their attention very fast between the tasks. It is a must that if you want to learn something, know something or accomplish something, your attention span is a respectable number. Anything that grabs your attention when you least expect it to, is known as a **Distraction**.

How can one increase the attention and lengthen the attention span? That's a million dollar question. The only answer is – interest. Make the thing you want to pay attention to very interesting. This flows in the same direction as Mind's natural flow, so its an easy way. Teachers who deal with young students have plenty of experience in this matter. A skillful teacher always makes his subject absolutely interesting, else the students don't learn anything. What if the thing you want to pay attention to is not interesting (such as your job or your wife), well then there is no hope for you. Try training your Mind to attend to boring content, it backfires, so much so that the Mind shuts itself down totally and enters the sleep state – a perfect opportunity to unite with the Self and remain as Presence ;-).

Anyway that was not the only answer, but the only desirable answer. Second way is fear. If your boss gave you a warning then even the most boring job becomes interesting, because now you are afraid of losing the job, a matter of survival. Mind responds to such situations promptly. It is automatic because the latent programs related to survival rise up, and they are one of the most powerful things in the entire universe. They get the job done. The Mind of a rock climber or of a hunter hunting in a dense forest needs no effort to maintain attention for hours and hours. A little distraction, and a fall of thousand feet is assured or getting attacked and ripped to pieces by a hungry animal is a certainty. In such cases, a lot of learning happens as the experience is so intense.

There is a third way, meditative concentration. It is for advanced practitioners, not for newbies. If you already have a good attention span and do not need a half-naked girl or a tiger staring at you to grab your attention, then this method is recommended. One simply sits and observes a single content (mental or sensory) with perfect concentration and deliberation. No interest or motivation is demanded. This is possible when the programs/intents/desires/distractions etc are brought into awareness and discarded or disowned consciously. This is like rewriting the source code of the Mind in any way you please. This is the only way if you wish to progress on your path of knowledge beyond the mere basics. Now you appreciate why I called attention as the single most important ability.

Having a good attention and span is also beneficial for worldly pursuits. Most materially successful people have a good ability to pay attention to details. They can hold a topic continuously in their Minds for long durations, which helps them process it better and quicker, they reach to conclusions and decisions more effectively and in better ways. Attention is the key to the secret of worldly success.

If you are paying any attention, you must have noticed that it is the various distractions that are responsible for stealing attention, and removing those might help sharpening the attention a bit. You are right. Modern life, fortunately or unfortunately, provide thousands of distractions that are responsible for the monkey mind we all suffer from. If you are serious about the path of knowledge, then it becomes a must to minimize the unnecessary distractions. Here we enter the domain of a simple and minimalist lifestyle, and now we can appreciate why sages are recommending a simple lifestyle free from unnecessary activities and distractions, in order to make some progress on the path of knowledge.

It is recommended to throw away the unneeded stuff and anything that takes up a major portion of your time. If you can survive without it, you can throw it away. Although I'm not advocating extreme measures. If you do not have important things, such as enough money in the bank or helpful devices and gadgets that do your work and save time, then the minimalism becomes a distraction in itself, because it now encourages your survival instincts to fire up. You have to draw a line where it balances your life perfectly. Not too much, but not too less.

In my experience, having sufficient wealth to survive effortlessly and having enough comforts around me to make my life distraction free and urgency free, works best. It is a must to keep good health and eat well. A healthy Mind "resides" in a healthy body. It is also good to minimize the unwanted relations and avoid having a crowd of people around you as these are major distractions most of the time. People who support you, know you well and have similar path

as yours are best to befriend with and keep around you. I know, it is hard, almost impossible and ideal situation, but one has to make some efforts, else the law of impermanence shows up and your practice starts to degrade. You will know when you are degrading, because the peace, equanimity and happiness will start disappearing and suffering will start replacing them. The least you can do is not to travel in opposite direction, maintain your status even when the life happens and you find yourself in a most distracted and confused state. The impermanence takes care of that also and it soon fades away, back to the peace where you can now attend to the most important of your businesses - your Self.

12. Intelligence

Intelligence is a nebulous term. Some try to solidify it by defining it in a particular way or by inventing some quantitative measure of it. If I define it here, I will just add to the countless definitions of this term. So we will leave it as it is. Obviously, it does relate to almost all the extraordinary capabilities of the Mind being listed here. So we can understand it as a term that includes a collection of mental capabilities, their state of perfection and their potential.

The Mind is so huge and complex that a single term denoting all of its capabilities does no justice at all. People adopt the word intelligence to suit their needs, depending on the subject and application etc. For example, intelligence of a machine is its ability to solve well defined problems, intelligence of a child is his ability to learn quickly and memorize something well, intelligence of an artist is his skill, imagination and creativity, and intelligence of a businessman is his ability to sell sand to an Arab.

It has a quantitative aspect to it. More intelligence simply means that most of the abilities of the Mind are functioning well, and less intelligence usually means that the Mind is not operating properly. As is obvious, degree of intelligence covers a full continuous spectrum, ranging from as stupid as a rock to extraordinary talent and genius. There is no recommended method to measure it precisely, and even if you can quantify it, it changes for the same individual with time and situation, so quantification is doomed to be inaccurate. A highly intelligent person in one field may sound like a total idiot if he talks about some other field. A very smart person in one country behaves in very stupid ways when he travels to a distant country. A normally intelligent person suddenly loses his mind in presence of highly intelligent people. Intelligence often increases with age, but then very old people lose it. I can go on and on about how meaningless, broad and unsatisfactory the concept of intelligence is. Is it really useful? Yes somewhat, but only when you clearly define your meaning. Do not call a person unintelligent simply because he can't do calculus, because then you must define intelligence as

the ability to do calculus, and with so many meanings, the term loses its meaning.

The intelligence is also seen as a potential. If a person can adapt to novel situations well, can solve unexpected problems well and can behave elegantly in odd social situations, he is considered as highly intelligent. Because of the novelty of the matter, the learned behaviours and past knowledge is usually of little use. So indeed, taking a person through such trials is a good test of his intelligence. However, the potential increases with experiences, so the existing experience is surely of some use. This is the reason, Scientists, mathematicians, explorers and inventors are considered as most intelligent type of people. They deal with novelty, go where no one dares to go and are extremely creative, displaying the power of the Mind in its full glory [1].

Wisdom is another term that means something similar to intelligence. But I take it to mean a form of intelligence that is shallow but very broad. So a wise person has tremendous knowledge and can advise you on any topic under the Sun, but lacks specific skills such as, say, mathematical abilities, or is not a good singer etc, the qualities that are generally called intelligence. Wisdom, in my opinion, measures not the degree but the range of mental abilities. So philosophers, sages, mystics, saints, gurus can be called most wise as they have multidisciplinary abilities and can synthesize knowledge much better than scientists, who are generally good at analysis instead of synthesis.

Expertise is a term used to denote a high amount of knowledge and intelligence in a very narrow field. Experts have a huge amount of knowledge in their field of expertise, and it is in depth, but they know very little about other things and are as good as ignorants in other fields than their own, usually also lacking a potential to gain knowledge outside of their area. Lawyers, doctors, engineers, artists, actors, singers, cooks, teachers and many more can be considered as experts, excelling in their own fields.

Smartness is a word used in everyday language to denote intelligence, and as nebulous as it is, we can adopt it to mean a high degree of social and emotional intelligence. These people can handle social situations very well and are very stable when challenged with difficult emotional situations. Such people have a charm, and are usually popular among masses. They do very well as far as worldly matters are concerned but lack sufficient wisdom and intelligence to be called brilliant or extraordinary. They serve the useful purpose of keeping human race alive, as they are very successful in reproducing, providing and maintaining themselves, their families and others. They do lack the potential for advance knowledge, but some of them do break out of stasis and excel beyond average. Businessmen, industrialists/producers, military/police men, social workers,

managers, salesmen and such may be called smart. Yes, your classmate who always topped throughout the school but is now working as a clerk somewhere can also be called smart.

Cunningness is a form of intelligence characterized with negativity and selfishness. I wonder if we can call it intelligence at all, but a cunning person does use his Mind effectively, albeit for nefarious purposes. Such people are very good at fooling others (including very intelligent people). They polish their skills of deception, dishonesty, manipulation and betrayal to their best, to achieve the goals which they are incapable of achieving via proper application of intelligence and skills, because they lack it totally. Politicians, kings, criminals, fraudsters and other low life are examples of cunning people [2]. They do serve a useful purpose – they teach us not to be like them.

So we see that intelligence can be classified and defined in various ways. Usually a person has all shades of intelligence, in varying degrees. A person in different situations displays different kinds of intelligence and capabilities. How intelligent one should be to walk on the path of knowledge? I can say, very intelligent. This path is not for people who lack mental abilities, have no potential for developing intelligence, use intelligence to harm others or make no efforts to improve their intelligence. One has to be above average to be able to walk that path. How can one increase the intelligence, is it even possible? Since it is just a collection of abilities, one must deal with various abilities one at a time and improve them. Yes, it is very much possible to heighten one's intelligence, it is like a muscle, more you apply it, stronger it becomes. Intelligence increases with knowledge and vice versa.

Ok we reach an important question here – what are the various ways in which certain capabilities can be improved, and thus intelligence can be increased effectively?

As we progress through this list of abilities of the Mind, I give some hints on how to improve a particular ability, at least I mention something that worked for me or can work for others. Here, right now, we will discuss some general tricks, since intelligence is a general term. Firstly, it is only experience and nothing else that does the job, so trying to gain as much experience as possible in various fields works best. More experience makes you more intelligent. Broadening the fields is recommended, because you are not aiming here to use your intelligent to serve people or earn money, it is to gain better understanding of yourself and to destroy the ignorance. A curious attitude, an open mind and healthy skepticism is recommended. **Question** everything, avoid blind beliefs and be humble, be in a posture of surrender, accepting that you know very little. This will open the doors to new experiences and will result in greater intelligence. It can take time initially

but then grows exponentially.

A teacher is a must if you want to progress fast. Intelligence of the teacher (wisdom, may be) is an indicator of his past experience and knowledge. Test your teacher, usually he will be enthusiastic and supportive if you (politely) ask for some tests, unless he is a fake teacher and is afraid that he will be uncovered if he fails. **Teachers** can point towards knowledge, they cannot impart it. They can provide the information and know which information is best for you, so they do not encumber you with unnecessary information. They know what works best, so they quicken your progress, eliminating useless actions and saving time. They have the skilful means to train you, make you more intelligent. They teach you to ask correct questions, be curious and be adventurous, they do not serve knowledge before you in a dinner plate. They know your weaknesses and point them out or cure them. They can spot quickly if you are degrading, and can save you from a fall.

Books provide an invaluable source of information. Yes only information, they do not provide any knowledge. One must convert the information into knowledge by proper application of it. For example, if a book says – donation will rid you of attachment and thus reduce your suffering - it is just information, a hint, and one must experiment with this information and convert it into a living experience. If in your experience, donation does do what it says, then you have successfully learned the lesson, you are more wise now. You have increased your intelligence, simply by reading and practicing. If not, then you simply wasted your money donating it, and on buying that book. Donate such books away. Books are good, however, they are dumb, if you compare them with a good teacher. You cannot ask a question to a book, cannot ask for an explanation. A book knows nothing about you, it feeds you everything it has, relevant, irrelevant, useless, false, everything. Still, reading is a must, and should replace your other strange hobbies like watching TV or gossiping, if you are serious about your path [3].

Being with wise and intelligent people works like a charm. Be in the company of wise and you will learn in one day that can be learnt in months via books or your hit and trial experimenting. **Satsang** is the finest kind of gossip you can have. Its fun, and its educating. There is nothing like being with a wise man, it is an experience of a life time. In the company of an intelligent person, your intelligence grows by leaps and bounds. Reverse is also true, be with stupid people, and you will be reduced to a stupid. They will drag you down to their level fairly quickly, in addition to providing free suffering and annoyance. If you are stuck with idiots, how to deal with it? Answers will be coming in the articles on afflictions of the Mind.

With the miracle of the **Internet**, it has become very convenient to gain information, it is now at your fingertips. However, no knowledge can be obtained from your fingertips. The instant information coming to you at Mbps speeds must be converted to knowledge, which comes slowly and perhaps at telephone modem speeds. Simply reading stuff on the internet will make you an encyclopedia, but not intelligent. Internet also causes information overload, by serving too much in a short time. Choose wisely, ask right questions and seek the information that you need, not the one that is available. Google is your friend, but not a teacher, it can't replace your teacher, even if you think that's a good idea. Online forums on the topics of interest are as good as being in the company of the intelligent, unless you are spending your valuable time arguing and fighting flame wars with the trolls. Youtube provides a wealth of interviews, presentations and Satsangs for your viewing pleasure. Since it's an audio-visual media, it is much more effective than mere text or books. I recommend that you subscribe to good teachers there, and make it a habit to spend time watching their videos [4]. Convert your room into an international university, where great teachers come and teach you, what more can you dream of ! Internet also makes it easy to ask questions by emails, and if you learn something useful, you can share it with the world instantly via a blog or your own video. Internet is your superhighway to the Self.

Simply **Observing** yourself carefully and deeply, a 24x7 awareness of your own actions and thoughts, will reveal the unintelligent, illogical and belief based or biased things you do and think. This will help you to eradicate them through practice. Being aware is the key, you will know where you lack, simply by being aware. The lack produces a slight suffering, dissatisfaction, disharmony, a feeling of ugliness or void, and makes you question. Questions lead to experience and therefore augmentation of intelligence. You will be surprised how many answers can come just from introspection, contemplation, self-interrogation, pondering and meditating on a topic. There is a wise teacher right inside you – your Self.

Notes:

[1] It is surely debatable if they are the most intelligent type, because outside of their narrow field they are virtually good for nothing. But then we do not expect people to be a master of all trades. Ideally, a Scientist excelling in all fields of knowledge would be most intelligent, never seen one really.

[2] Perhaps I'm being too rude here, and you can find some very nice politicians and some kind kings too, but that'd be an exception, not a rule. Why no mention

of fake spiritual teachers, religious leaders, fundamentalist terrorists or people who use gullible religious folk and make them kill each other? Well, you are intelligent enough to categorize them.

[3] I don't want to sound overly negative about books. Some books do miracles and when there is no competent teacher around you, they are the best teacher and best friends. I'm betting that they are better and safer compared to a fake teacher, who can waste your many years, rob you of money or worse, abuse you for his pleasure.

[4] Note to self – I need to make a list of channels that I found very useful and post it here, with a brief review of each.

The Extraordinary Gift of the Mind:Part-4

Continued from Part-3

13. Learning

The Mind can form new structures and new programs via interactions with its environment. Learning is a result of action and perception engraving new structures in the Mind. Learning results in new knowledge, and also affects subsequent actions and perceptions. Learning happens all the time, conscious/deliberate or unconscious/automatic. Better learning takes place if a particular experience is repeated frequently, because repetition strengthens the mental structures. Impermanence ensures that less frequent exposures erase the impressions and knowledge formed, if any (aka **Forgetting**).

All experiences result in some kind of learning, however, novel experiences cause more learning, obviously. When there are no structures, everything will tend to form a structure, and that becomes the base. When a baby is born, all his experiences are novel and an immense amount of learning happens, most of which is automatic. So now we can appreciate why it is necessary to learn things at a young age that cause positive outcomes. The experiences gained in childhood form a foundation, and that can result in anything from a sage to a criminal [1].

The auto-learning fades with time, everything gets old and eventually learning almost halts in old age. We have discussed learning before on the topic of programs. The kind of learning we are going to discuss here will be deliberate learning, and that's what I mean by this term henceforth.

Auto-learning is not fool-proof, it sometimes causes false/partial knowledge and forms beliefs. At some point one must step in and intervene in the process, make it more conscious and more aligned to one's path. When we learn deliberately, we can ensure that the knowledge we gain will be of some use, and will result in happiness and freedom rather than suffering. There is a choice in what one can deliberately learn. This is important because you do not want to waste your time in learning useless things. Learning takes resources and time, so it must be optimized. We will leave aside the question of learning skills that are related to

mere survival, so choose anything that you are interested in and that which facilitates your journey, not hinder it. So what is there to learn? Simply speaking, learn that which you lack. For example, if you suffer from a short attention span, it's the thing you lack and there is your opportunity to learn it, improve it. Learning starts with attention, as we have already seen. So that needs to be sharpened before one can start learning something non-trivial.

I recommend making a list of your shortcomings that are causing hindrances on your path and tackle them one or many at a time, whatever works. Prioritizing helps to weed out things that are less important. For example learning to dance or to play an instrument (can take years) should be of a lower priority than learning to control your anger or fear. The former will only amuse you while the latter will liberate you from suffering. Similarly, learning a dead foreign language is less useful for your survival than learning a programming language.

Learning depends on interest and if you are not interested in something (even if you know you lack it), then you will not pay attention to it and learning will not happen. Secondly, learning involves repetition, it takes time, and it is necessary to devote time. Not having time for self-improvement means that there will be no improvement. A teacher or books are very helpful, however the information gained from them needs to be converted into experience in order for the learning to take place, else you merely become a storage medium for information. Intellectual storage of information does not change one's behaviours or abilities.

Journey towards the Self is mostly a process of unlearning rather than learning. It is a deductive process. Knowledge acquisition causes dimming of the light of the Self, unlearning or destroying knowledge results in unveiling of the Self. So why learn? What happens is - learning provides tools to complete the partial knowledge and to weed out beliefs and unwanted programming, which helps in the unveiling. The whole mega-structure of the knowledge is then pushed aside and the Self shines brightly, un-occluded by the Mind. There is no going back from here. Now you can freely switch from the Self or the Mind or the body into each other without losing your marbles. This is freedom, this is **Liberation**.

You could simply destroy all knowledge (if it is at all possible), but then you'd simply become pure Presence again. The Experiencing never stops, so the Fundamental Process kicks in again, knowledge builds up quickly, and you are back to the square one. Moreover now you have destroyed the valuable knowledge and skills gained so far, which could have easily unveiled the Self and settled you into equanimity. In effect, you have totally ruined the process of self-discovery [2]. Not fun. The overcoming of the knowledge must be done using knowledge, this is the trick [3].

14. Logic and reasoning

Being essentially algorithmic, the Mind naturally has the ability to perform logical operations and can process inputs in a rational manner. Performing logical tasks involve clearly defining meanings, rules and assumptions, premises and propositions, hypotheses and theories, defining the relations between entities, and drawing valid, verifiable, falsifiable and consistent conclusions [4]. It is debatable if everyone has perfect logical ability built in, but everyone generally can “see” the logic when explained. This shouldn’t be a surprise because understanding (as discussed before) is based on logic and reasoning. The Mind has a natural tendency to understand, given its primary task is creation of knowledge and understanding.

“Contrariwise,” continued Tweedledee, “if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn’t, it ain’t. That’s logic.”

— Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*

Rational thinking is one of the greatest achievements of human mind. All mathematics and sciences are a result of it. Sound logic is the foundation of mathematics and sciences. There should be no doubt that logic is of utmost importance in the study of the Self too. Without logic and reasoning, we are destined to be lost in the never-never land of the Self and the Mind. Logic is like a bright torch that shows us the way. Adopt logic and discard the illogical. That said, logic and reasoning has some limitations (because the Mind is limited), and mere logic cannot provide you any knowledge. As we have seen before, and I’m not tired of repeating it again and again, knowledge only comes from experience. What logical ability can do is, it helps us to organize the knowledge and provide clear and consistent understanding of the matter under scrutiny, that’s all it does. But that’s of immense importance, because without understanding, there is really no value of knowledge.

Once there is an experience, it is organized into structures called knowledge by the Fundamental Process, which being evolutionary in nature, produces algorithmic structures. So logic is embedded into the fabric of the Mind. Its no surprise that electronic logic circuits can perform the same logical tasks that we can, they are essentially the same. The physical world is also a product of the Fundamental Process, and is very well organized with clear rules. We study these rules under Physics, and again, not surprisingly, the physical rules are logical and algorithmic (mathematical) in nature, just like the Mind (especially the rules of macro world, a statistical result of probabilistic micro world). So that answers the age old questions like – Why human minds are capable of logical reasoning? And

why does physical world conform so nicely with mathematical models? Well, they are essentially the same !

The Mind does a good job of creating understanding using its built in logic, but when the knowledge is partial, it tends to make errors and forms beliefs instead, that totally fail the test of validity and consistency. Sometimes the survival related programs get hold of it all and produce a totally illogical result, however, it is only apparently so. Mind never makes a mistake, it does perfectly the thing that must be done. So if it thinks that it is more important to preserve itself (or the body), it produces perfectly logical results that are consistent with the survival issue it is facing. For example, buying a lottery ticket is an irrational act, borderline stupidity, given the odds of winning. So why do people buy the tickets? Mind, being logical like a computer, should instantly spit out the result that the odds are negligible, and should abort that act, but it doesn't do that, if left to itself. What the Mind is doing here is answering the question – “Do you want money or not, a million of it?”, instead of answering the question – “What are the odds of winning here and should I go and work hard to earn instead?”. The logical answer to the question (first one) is of course yes, and so the act follows. The person thinks that what he is doing is optimal, when in fact, his mind is in grip of a survival program, of which he is totally unaware of.

Another example that is more social than mathematical is as follows. Many people (usually young ones) prefer to marry a beautiful person instead of a compatible person. Sounds like an illogical decision. Yes, it is, but that is not because the Mind is not working logically, it is because the Mind is processing a survival instinct (aka program), and it is doing it logically, it can't do it in any other way. What happens is that, physical beauty, being an indicator of good genetic makeup free from diseases and flaws, an indicator of perfect health, is being perceived as a good chance of reproduction and eventual survival of the offspring. This program, as you can guess, is deeply buried in the Mind. It is a result of millions of years of experience with what works best. Beauty is a reflection of perfection in our minds. Therefore it is perfectly logical for the Mind to go for it. Of course, it may not result in a happy married life, because that was not the concern of the Mind, it gave a 100% weightage to survival.

Ah, so where is the trouble then? The trouble is that one is not engaging his logical ability consciously, and the programs in the Mind get a free reign. Again, we see the importance of being conscious and aware. Mere logical ability is of not much use, it has to be aligned with your goals, your path. A perfectly logical decision is not a guarantee of perfect happiness or freedom. Once you define your goals clearly, and impress them on the Mind, the Mind, like a good servant provides you with a consistent and logical answer. Garbage in = garbage out,

even if your Mind is a perfect computer.

"When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures bristling with prejudice and motivated by pride and vanity."

— Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

Man is a rational animal, is an old saying, but we hardly see the rationality in the world around us. We see the world is in a mess that makes no sense. Even those who apply logic very strictly, such as military organizations, or corporations, end up causing great harm. The reason is – logic here is in the service of ignorance. The same logical processes when applied for positive goals would make the world a wonderful place to live in. This provides an answer to the age old dilemma – whether science (a product of logic) is a boon or a curse. So we need a meta-logic over the plain logic to decide what is good. It is the logic of the Self, if you will, which is greater happiness and freedom. When initialized with these parameters, the Mind produces right answers.

"Nothing is more dangerous than strict logic—which is not quite sure of its premises."

~Woods Hutchinson, A.M., M.D. (1862–1930),

Civilization and Health, "Chapter I: The Diseases of Civilization," 1914

What happens if one does not use logic in his path towards knowledge? The results are often fatal, one regresses in his path instead of progressing. Yes, the goal is now perfectly logical, but may be you are using no logic to reach there. For example, some people, while they correctly set the goal for greater knowledge, fall into the trap of rituals, believing that the rituals or magic sounds etc are going to bring them knowledge. It is a case of failure to apply logic. One must understand, first and foremost, what knowledge is needed exactly. Then what ways are possible to get it, what experiences will provide it, and what reasonable experiments can be arranged to get that experience. The results, when analysed and seen logically should be consistent and verifiable, else your process does not work. It may feel good for a while, but soon you will lapse into suffering. People do not do it, simply because it is too much work. It is a hard task to learn to think logically and clearly, to learn the skill of **Critical Thinking** and to apply it in one's practice. It is easy to believe in a ritual and perform it mindlessly [5].

It is a must that one sharpens the skill of logical and rational thinking, seeing clearly its benefits and its limitations. Build up a meta-logic to govern the goal-less process of pure logic, and give it a direction that is aligned with your path. Question everything and put everything under the strict regime of logic. Draw your conclusions and test them, then test them again. Find errors and correct them, till you reach a solid place. Stand on the solidity, and reach out to the

unknown again from there, *rinse and repeat*, and you are then assured of reaching your goal. There is no other way, there is no magic, there is just hard work, experiment-conclude-learn-repeat. This is a hard science. If you are serious about it, learn the basics of knowledge acquisition, that is, deliberate, conscious, logical organization of experiences [6]. I can assure you that your progress will be superfast.

Once the premise is set, new statements can be derived from it via logical operations. For example, one can say if a certain statement is true or false, or in other words, if it is logically consistent. No matter how you look at it, or arrive at it, it will hold (or will not hold, if false). This is the logical **Truth**. It is undeniable given the premise. There is no other truth that I know of. Isn't it "true" if it is my experience? No, it is just an experience, a premise, if you state something based on that, then you can evaluate that statement in terms of true or false. It is absurd to call an experience as true or false, it just is, it forms the basis from which true or false statements can be derived.

“Cherish those who seek the truth but beware of those who find it.”
— Voltaire

The funny thing is that one can set any premise – e.g. one based on experience, or imaginary, or impossible, and then can built up any number of true and false statements about it. For example, when a number system is defined, and the operations on it are defined, then one can derive the entire arithmetic from it. You can define an imaginary system, and can still derive totally meaningful true statements. These need not correspond to any of human experiences. The whole mathematics is nothing but such statements, some based in experience and most not. For example, a 5 dimensional space can be defined and perfectly true statements can be made about it, but such as space is not in one's experience.

Experience form the foundation of true statements, they are not truth themselves. If you need to know how consistent an experience is (in other words, is it true or not), then the consistency must be evaluated from some other premise, not the experience itself. If you try to do that, you will end up with absurdity or infinitely self-referential statements that go nowhere, make no sense, and are beyond logic. For example the famous statement – Let S be a statement such that, S = “This statement is false”. Now it is impossible to conclude if S is really false, because if it is true then it is false and vice versa. It is referring to itself. What are some other things that refer to themselves? That will be a good question to ponder on if you need to kill some time.

No, no, you're not thinking; you're just being logical. ~Niels Bohr

If you define something that never changes as the truth, then everything that changes becomes false, that is - not consistent with your definition. Some wise men define the Self as the only truth, because it is the only thing that doesn't change, it is outside the Experiencing, the latter is just another name for the change. At some point the notion of truth loses its value, and things must be experienced as they are. The Presence does not care about truths, nor does the Self. Experiencing is not concerned with generating "true experiences", there is no such condition there, it does whatever comes out of necessity, which is seen as the Fundamental Process by the Mind. The Mind is concerned with the truth, because it needs to organize knowledge consistently. An inconsistent structure, is no structure, it falls before it is formed. Whatever the Experiencing does outside the limited scope of the Mind, is the great unknowable, and no true or false statements can be made about that, no questions can be asked, because it never becomes an experience.

Reality is a term that is often used as a synonym for the truth. So the generally asked question is – What is real? What is the reality? It should be clear by now from above discussion. It is not a very useful question. Define something real and it becomes that, then go on adding things that you want to call real to your concept of reality. Does it make any sense? It means the number of realities can be equal to current human population. What does it do? Well, if it does do anything for you then go ahead, create your own reality, it seems that is in fashion these days. In my experience, all it does is form beliefs. Beliefs that are now wearing the mask of knowledge. I've learned not to ask such questions, and take the experiences as they are, if they are useful, use them. Arguing about the reality is a waste of time.

"Reality is frequently inaccurate."
— Douglas Adams, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*

Notes:

[1] Parents please take notice, babies are not there for fun. Bringing up a child is the most responsible thing that a parent is ever going to do in his life. Period. People do not know the immensity of it all. Fortunately it is not compulsory to reproduce and a sane person will not do so if he has chosen a superfast lane on the road to freedom. So the obvious question is – Will it stop you from achieving your goal if you choose to have a family and kids? Not necessarily, but perhaps it will delay it. Oops... I already got babies, now what? Don't be so serious. If you

are on the right path you will know what to do. (More on that later). Right now, I'm very thankful to all those who are taking great pains to keep the human species alive.

[2] This explains why suicide is not a shortcut to liberation. It cuts short the process and is like pressing a reset button. Ancient sages have labelled suicide as the greatest sin one can commit, greater than murdering other humans and animals (Does killing for food and self-defense make these actions not a sin? It is debatable, remember there are always consequences.) So I'm sorry to say there is no free lunch. Stay alive and continue with your practice.

[3] And this is the purpose of the Mind, and having a human experience in a physical body. If you insist on finding a purpose for it all, here is the answer. But I'm sure this answer does not satisfy, it brings up more questions. Perhaps there is something wrong in the question itself. Try not to think about everything as necessarily having a purpose. More on that later.

[4] Going into details of what logic is, is beyond my pay grade. So I recommend good books (they will be heavy). Internet is a good option for a quick glance, e.g. <http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/logic/whatislogic.php>

[5] I'm not against rituals and this is only an example. Those who know what a ritual is, will understand its significance, because it can be very useful, but only if you know what it is, and are not merely performing it like a robot.

[6] The Scientific Method is one such possibility.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_method . Note that there are no absolute truths in Science, only derived logical Truths, that are derived from theories or models. If someone tells you that a thing is true according to science, then probably he has no idea what science is. Can there be other methods of investigation? Can there be more refined and better methods?

The Extraordinary Gift of the Mind:Part-5

Continued from Part-4

15. Intuition

When there is insufficient information or knowledge, or confusing situations/uncertainty, the Mind sometimes comes up with solutions, scenarios or answers without conscious effort, thinking or logical analysis. This is intuition or a hunch. It comes up mostly as a feeling, which shows that it is a result of some deep processing, usually inaccessible for the ordinary thought process. It also has a distinct flavour of unreliability, since it seems it is not well founded. How reliable is it? It ranges from very useful and meaningful to useless and nonsensical.

Intuition is a suspension of logic due to impatience.
- Rita Mae Brown

Should we take decisions based on intuitions and act on them? It depends on what other options are open. If there is an option where something can be done about the lacking knowledge or information, then it is better to seek that first. If there is no sufficient time to do it, then there is no option but to act on the intuition. If there is sufficient time and its still not possible to get the required knowledge, it is better to wait anyway and let the Mind come up with alternatives, or sometimes it can reveal the foundation on which the intuition was based.

Because intuition is a result of uncertainty, anything that one can do about it is also uncertain. The only thing I'd not recommend is to become adamant about it. Some people decide that intuitions are nonsense and they never act on them, even in safer situations. On the other extreme, some people always follow their intuitions (or gut feeling, as they call it) no matter what. One cannot predetermine the action one can take, it is always dependent on the situation. Remaining flexible and keeping the doors open for intuition works better.

It may be possible to develop intuition by taking it more seriously on occasions. It might produce surprising results sometimes. More you rely on it, more

ungrounded you become, so it is better to not surrender completely to intuitions. I usually take a middle path. Whenever there are no major risks involved (say, in deciding under uncertainty, which book to buy or which movie to watch), I let intuition work. But when there is a serious risk, such as buying a property or visiting an unknown place, I let the logical decision making override any intuitions. This works, in my experience, because then I do not lose the intuitive abilities completely, and I do not cause major harm by letting it loose.

There is no logical way to the discovery of these elemental laws. There is only the way of intuition, which is helped by a feeling for the order lying behind the appearance.
- Albert Einstein

When one does introspection, and asks questions to oneself, the answers usually come as hunches. They are subtle, it is useful to not to completely ignore them. But one should be careful not to let them turn into beliefs. Sometimes after more scrutiny, more time, the answers become clear, or you find some external evidences that support those intuitions. It may not happen often, but it is still useful.

16. Imagination

The Mind has an extraordinary ability to create virtual sensory perceptions, or mental simulations. These are a faint copy of actual sensory perceptions and are usually derived from memory. The most common simulation is that of visual sense, and that is why we call it imagination, but other senses can be simulated more or less in similar way. So one can not only imagine still pictures/shapes, but also moving imagery, and sounds, tastes, smells and touch/texture. People with artistic abilities in the area of visual art have a well-developed visual simulation ability compared to non-artistic people. Musicians/singers have a heightened ability to “imagine” sounds, tones, timbre and musical relations between them. In my experience, it is difficult to simulate the senses of taste, smell and touch with high fidelity. Of course, some people may be gifted in this regard, and I’d imagine it is not impossible to do that.

The funny thing is, the Mind knows no difference between imagination and actuality as far as the processing is concerned. If the sensory input is coming from senses, or if it is coming from impressions, it makes no difference, and they are processed in exactly the same way. It may be difficult to abort the more automated actions that result from imagination, but it is possible to override actions suggested by it most of the time. Everyone has the experience of salivating when they imagine a lemon being cut and put on the tongue (well,

almost everyone, I personally do not know anyone who is totally unaffected by it). Imagining visually in high detail and also recalling the tastes and sounds works best. So in effect, if you want to taste a lemon without a lemon, you can do it. The neutrality of the Mind in this regard is the reason why fear of the unknown causes a flight (say as soon as a terror is imagined) and sexual fantasies cause pleasure (the body reacts in exactly the same way in presence of a mate).

What distinguishes an imagination from actual? This is a very interesting ability, if you ask me, it is the most amusing ability of the Mind, because, in suitable conditions, there is absolutely no difference, Mind makes no distinction. In other situations, the Mind can see that the imagined contents are “faded”, less lively, flicker or are not compatible with the context, and so we know their simulated nature. This is also the most usual scenario. The imagination is taken literally, when the logical and cognitive abilities are less active, such as during sleep (dreams) or under the influence of drugs, or alcohol. The imagination is also taken literally under hypnosis, but lets not go there for now.

The imagined contents are also not strict regarding spatiality or temporality. This also gives clue to the Mind, informing it that its nothing but imagination. Sometimes the simulations are creative, unusual, such as artistic imaginations, and that is also a clue for the Mind. Imagination can be initiated at will, which also gives Mind a warning that forthcoming content is not from senses. What is the difference between an image that is recalled from the memory and the one that is imagined? The recall is constrained by experience that created the related memory, imagination is unconstrained. Otherwise there is no difference, vivid memory recalls are as good as imagined contents. This suggests that same structures are involved in sensory perception, memory recall and imagination.

Since the same structures are involved, it is possible to mix imagination with memory or vice versa (or sometimes with sensory inputs, such as when you see a rope as a snake in dim light). This is an interesting peculiarity of the Mind. So we arrive at illusions, delusions or hallucinations - all forms of imagination and its blends with sense/memory contents. How enchanting!

Dreams are just unsupervised imaginations in the sleep state. These are highly unorganized and incoherent for most of us, except for those who can dream lucidly.

I see imagination as a fractal clone of the immense ability of the Mind to create. The clone is a constrained process of structuring and creating happening inside a bigger and more complex process of creating and structuring. A process within a process. Now this is becoming confusing so we leave the metaphysical

description here. The imaginative ability does provide us a faint glimpse of what Mind is capable of. It is also a subjective evidence of the Mind as the creator of knowledge.

Of what use is such ability? Minds gets to check the results of an action in simulated environment before it acts in physical world (that's just another simulation, the physical world, but at a different level). This is the most important use. For example, if you stand on the edge of a cliff, a simulation of your fall runs without your conscious intervention, and this quickly informs the Mind what not to do, and it can trigger suitable action to prevent that fall. In more sophisticated application of imagination, an engineer may simulate if certain machine parts, say gears, will fit and work together. An artist can simulate (and can sometimes see) an entire painting before it is realized. A musician can compose a masterpiece without lifting his instruments. A Scientist can form a model without doing an experiment. One can easily imagine the consequences of a particular social behaviour without actually behaving in that way. The advantages are many and I'm not attempting to list them all.

Imagination empowers Mind, makes it more efficient (no energy needs to be wasted in doing an action, if you can know the outcome via mere imagination). Risks are reduced, more positive outcomes can be found, and so on. Some people are good at imagination, some are not. Some people can overdo it, e.g. imagine various horrors and worry about them or get lost in pleasurable fantasies. Some people totally lose control of it and their imagination becomes their perception, they end up in lunatic asylums.

Under proper conditions, it is possible to ignore the sensory input completely and remain active internally. This makes the imagination more vivid, so much so that the contents are indistinguishable from sensory inputs coming from the familiar physical world or the body. This is the famous mind awake body asleep state (MABA), and is used to explore the non-physical experiences [1]. Such experiences provide further evidence that there is essentially no difference between the physical world and imagined worlds, it is all just Experiencing. If you train yourself (can take years), the imagined worlds become as solid and persistent as the usual physical world. Here we are at the mostly blurred boundary of what is imagined and what is not. At this point, it makes no sense to call them imagined worlds, so we just call them **Non-Physical Realms**. When one spends too much time in non-physical worlds, the physical now appears as having qualities of an imagination, that is, it may appear as a faded, flickering, flimsy image - unreal. The Mind solidifies those experiences that are more frequent and more familiar – the ordinary ability of learning in action – the solidity of a particular world is a matter of habit. Now we know the reason why some

advanced practitioners on the path of knowledge call the physical world as mere illusion (**Maya**, that which is not), perhaps they can see very clearly that there are no worlds, just mental activity, just Experiencing.

When we say everything is maya or illusion, maya does not mean it does not exist, maya simply means that you are not seeing it the way it is.

- Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev

Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.

- Albert Einstein

In my experience, I've had only some glimpses of such experiences but these were significant and substantial enough to make me wonder. Are these hyper-realistic experiences true/real? We have seen before on the discussion on truth, that this is not a meaningful question. The more meaningful question is – Are these of any use? Well, firstly these are fun. You get a freedom in non-physical that is impossible in physical, one can do anything while in that state. Licking a lemon in your mind's eye is peanuts compared to what one can experience there. Your imagination is your limit. So enjoyment and entertainment are some uses. Anyhow, these experiences open a door to knowledge that is unconstrained, we are talking about extreme vastness of the Presence. Take what is useful and leave what is not, is the simple rule I follow [2]. There is no use worrying about how this all happens, it just happens, as I said, it is just Experiencing in the Presence, the physical world is nothing special. Sometimes the non-physical experiences are very powerful because they destroy all your strange beliefs in a single blow. This can be intense, so proceed with caution, if you plan to try such a thing.

"And meditation is best when the mind is gathered into herself and none of these things trouble her--neither sounds nor sights nor pain nor any pleasure,--when she takes leave of the body, and has as little as possible to do with it, when she has no bodily sense or desire, but is aspiring after true being"

"He attains to the knowledge of Forms in their purity who goes to each of them with the soul alone, not allowing when in the act of meditation the intrusion or introduction of sight or any other sense in the company of reason, but with the very light of the soul in her clearness penetrates into the very light of truth in each Form. . ."

- Plato, Phaedo

How to explore the non-physical? The key is attention. As I said while discussing attention, this ability of paying attention is the single most important ability. One needs to exclusively attend to the non-sensory contents. The trick is to lure the Mind away from processing sensory contents and bodily sensations/emotions/thoughts etc, of which it is most addicted to. It is our habit

to pay attention to the usual physical world, our actions in it, people in it and what not. One needs to break this habit and free one's Mind in order to travel to the non-physical.

"The day science begins to study non-physical phenomena, it will make more progress in one decade than in all the previous centuries of its existence."

— Nikola Tesla

For a person addicted to the physical world, there are only two choices – go inwards or go outwards. Take former, while you practice. Attend to your mental space, forget what is outside. There is nothing outside or inside anyway, it is just what we attend to. This blog is not about techniques. There are tons of techniques, helpful instructions and good books out there. There are teachers who can teach you, there are workshops, trainings etc. It does look preposterous but is not impossible. Some people are really talented and they take it like a fish to the water. Others struggle, sometimes for decades. This is how wide the spectrum of Mind's abilities is. As with other abilities, it is a matter of practice [3].

One can create a non-physical world, create other creatures/individuals in it, create exotic structures at his whim, and abide in it for a very long time, only rarely coming to the physical, to serve his body, which now needs minimal care, as he has mastered his body via various practices. Or one can choose a ready-made non-physical world out of the infinite one's already available. It can take a life time to master this. The only question is - why would one even do that? If it is your thing.... do it, there are no rules. But if you are on a fast lane towards your goal of freedom, you'd just taste the non-physical here and there, and proceed with an optimal life, not an exotic life. You want to get out of the trap of ignorance. All physical and non-physical attachments are nothing but ignorance. It doesn't make it a better ignorance if you coat it with gold.

So we see that the ability to imagine is a door that can take you to faraway places. Is it really necessary to go to such extreme? Can't I progress without devoting time for flights of fancy? No, it is not necessary at all. This world, and the normal ordinary configuration of the Mind, is fully equipped to take you to the Self. The Self goes nowhere, and you need not go anywhere to be your Self. Actually, if you spend too much time exploring the phenomena (physical or not), you are simply distracting yourself away from the Self. The non-physical is as much a distraction as the physical, there is no difference between the physical and non-physical really, it's a matter of convenience. The non-physical is as much outside you as the physical. The Self is here, now.

The astral world is not the ultimate liberating experience; the soul attains complete ascension

only through realization of its oneness with the Creator Himself. Nevertheless, soul progress begins with the effort to disengage from the delusion of material bondage into the higher awareness of one's finer astral existence. Learn to be more transcendent now; identify with the life of your astral self and its connection with the astral world.
- Paramahansa Yogananda

That said, extraordinary experiences that are intense compared to everyday experiences of waking world are helpful in destroying one's pet beliefs. If you find yourself in the grip of beliefs, I'd recommend that you explore for a while. Phenomenal realms are not your goal, the Self is, so return to the Self wherever you are. Shouldn't matter much if you are someone with a body in a familiar physical environment, or are disembodied, dwelling in exotic locations, as long as you concentrate on your path.

Notes:

[1] Also known as Out of body experiences or Astral Projections. This ability is a great gift and is not rare, surprisingly.

[2] I'm thankful to Thomas Campbell for this teaching.

[3] I'm thankful to Robert Bruce, Robert Peterson, Robert Monroe, William Buhlman, Thomas Campbell, Frank Kepple, Ishwar Puri and many more teachers for their teachings and techniques regarding OOBES and for demystifying the ancient Indian and western concepts about the out of body experiences.

The Extraordinary Gift of the Mind:Part-6

Continued from Part-5

17. Creativity

The Experiencing results in novelty, or creation, which the Mind can detect and express. This is the creative power of the Mind. As such the Mind cannot create, it merely organizes the experiences. That itself can be seen as a creative ability, but it is a result of auto-processes like the Fundamental Process. The Mind discovers novelty, understands beauty, produces combinations of old and new, and sometimes whimsical distortions which appear novel.

Creative thinking may mean simply the realization that there's no particular virtue in doing things the way they always have been done.

- Rudolf Flesch

Some people are exceptionally good at it. Such as, the artists in the areas of fine arts. Some amazing examples of creativity are seen in the areas of science and technology, where the creative ability is also useful in addition to being beautiful. Creativity is closely linked with aesthetic ability, so a creation not only needs to be novel but also beautiful and elegant. The ability of being creative and original is recognized as primary in order to gain material success. One can be successful in worldly pursuits via hard work and drudgery or can be a little creative and need not work much. So we see that creativity is a major component of intelligence.

What is the secret of being creative? Keen observation. Once again, it requires good mastery over attention. If one is attentive, one can observe things very closely. Detailed observation allows one to isolate the novelty and the factors that are responsible for beauty. A painter perceives the world and people around him in a different way than ordinary people. He is more aware of the shapes/colors, light and shade, perspectives and angles etc. So does a photographer. A musician perceives sounds in extraordinary detail. An actor views the actions and expressions of others very keenly. It all starts with observation, which provides enough content to the Mind to work with. The Mind, like a sponge, absorbs all it can, and incorporates the perceptions into imagination. It can manipulate them,

isolate beautiful elements, accentuate them, derive the essence, leave out the details, do various permutations and combinations with other perceptions and imagination, and so on. Creativity is a complex process.

“Creativity is more than just being different. Anybody can plan weird; that’s easy. What’s hard is to be as simple as Bach. Making the simple, awesomely simple, that’s creativity”
– Charles Mingus

Expression of creativity is an aspect of it, and involves skill, and often very hard work. Some people are very creative, but are lazy. Some people are very hard working, but not so creative. It takes a perfect balance to get most out of creative ability. If one works very hard, creativity suffers, as the Mind does not get peaceful time to engage in its creative process. If one spends too much time creating in the Mind, he cannot express it well. Creation often happens within seconds, its expression may take months !

In my experience, the more skills one learns, more creative one becomes. Learning skills from different disciplines works best. Interdisciplinary expressions are most creative. Studying other creative people works well, as long as one doesn’t get too much inspired and ends up copying others. Copying is a good skill and is needed in the beginning, but later it is the originality that counts. The key is to not to copy blindly, but to learn the essence of someone else’s creativity, what makes them creative. If you copy their tricks for being creative, and not their work, then the chances of your being original increase. It also helps to take a break from the run of a mill life and be adventurous. Travel, meeting new people and tasting new food helps in case you are a writer, actor or a cook. As with other abilities of the Mind, creativity grows with experience.

“Originality is nothing but judicious imitation” – Voltaire

In the path of the knowledge, the most important thing is having ample time for oneself. Being creative helps in organizing one’s life so that minimal time is spent in taking care of one’s basic needs and relations. It helps to be not a 9 am – 5 pm slave, it helps to keep the relations to a minimum, and it also helps to be creative in ways you perform day to day tasks. Sometimes, the most creative ideas come when one is very quiet, deep in meditation or pondering over novel things, unusual things, asking strange questions etc. If one is a keen observer, curious and can devote a lot of time to oneself, creativity comes naturally.

18. Curiosity

Curiosity is a characteristic of the Mind, rather than an ability. Mind being an organizer of the experience, seeks to complete the knowledge structures naturally. If it finds a hole in the knowledge, or a piece of knowledge that links to nowhere (generates no understanding), the Mind naturally intends to fill the hole and complete the understanding. This intention to know is expressed as curiosity.

A missing piece of knowledge is responsible for generation of a **Question**. If one has no knowledge at all regarding something, no questions can be asked. A partial knowledge leads to a question, nothing else. A proper experience leads to an answer – the completion of the structure of the knowledge, nothing else. The desire to do this, an intense intention, is curiosity. If one lacks this desire, one is slow in learning new things, understanding things, and that results in a less intelligent person.

I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.
- Albert Einstein

So we see the direct link of the trait of curiosity with intelligence, and also with the amount of knowledge one has. An extremely intelligent person is also extremely curious. Such a person is full of questions, not because he can't understand, but because he is insatiable regarding knowledge, he always wants more. Questioning everything is the key to being curious, most often seen in children, as they are eager to fill up the gaps in their knowledge. The curiosity reduces with age, and we see old people naturally asking less and less questions, naturally settling down with whatever they know, not desiring to know more or learn more. A curious person never grows old, he is always like a child.

It should be obvious that in the path of the knowledge, not being curious does not help. A passionate seeker is not merely curious, he deliberately hunts for the gaps in his knowledge, finds the answers and closes them down. Asks a million questions, longs for new experiences. Uses logical ability and critical thinking to perfect the knowledge and strives for a better understanding. Such people progress very fast. It all starts with intense interest and curiosity.

Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers.
- Voltaire

The question is – if one is not curious about it all, can something be done about it? I think, no. I know of no tricks to make a dull person more curious, the only thing I know is, curiosity has a direct link to the interest one has in a subject or a path. So if you are not interested enough, you will not be curious about it, you

don't have any desire to know more. If you are not interested in it, nothing can be done, you don't want to do it, it is not your path, find something else to do. If you are in the grips of suffering, it may mean that you are not very interested in ending it, or have no clue how to end it, you take your suffering as necessity. Many people say such things – life is suffering. They have never questioned it, they are not very interested, and they are not curious enough. Such a person is usually in the trap of strong beliefs. More suffering usually awaits such people, it continues to grow till they get up and do something about it.

When your wanting to know something is so Intense that you are willing to die for it, then knowing is not far away.
- Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev

19. Thinking

Thinking is a broad term denoting mental activity involving intention, imagination, recall, creativity, planning and so on. Whatever is going on in the Mind at the moment is thinking, roughly speaking. When the body is idle or situations demand less attention than usual, when there are no actions to perform, thinking takes over an ordinary Mind. The Mind begins to process whatever experiences it went through recently, or distant past or anticipates future actions/situations. This is the default state of the Mind. The activity may involve sensory contents, imagination or recall, and most of the time the activity results in a conclusion – a **Thought** (aka an idea).

Although many kinds of contents are responsible for origination of a thought, it is usually expressed as language. The thought is abstracted as concepts and these concepts are linked together to form a meaningful structure, that can be communicated easily – the **Language**. So the language is an agreed upon protocol of communication of thoughts among us. A really great ability...

Less frequently, the thoughts are expressed in pictorial formats, such as drawings, paintings, diagrams, graphs, flow charts, sculptures etc. But for now, we will concentrate on the verbal or written expression of thoughts. The Mind comes up with a thought and goes ahead one step and structures it into language, as a habit. One may not act on the thought or may not express it vocally or in writing, but most of us do form thoughts into language and rehearse the expression in our imagination. This activity is the familiar **Monologue** or, in simple terms - talking to oneself. Also known as internal dialogue, it is the main occupation of a waking Mind throughout the day. It starts a few minutes after waking up and continues non-stop till a few minutes after falling asleep. There is some thinking that takes place even in sleep state. This is usually random and incoherent, and one can

experience it if one gets up suddenly from sleep and attends to the mental activity immediately. Thinking and formation of thoughts is mostly an automatic activity and an untrained person usually has no control over what thoughts his Mind produces. But as with other mental activity, the person owns the thought anyway, and the thought is perceived as “my thought” after it has already occurred.

Young children and simple people (e.g. tribals) do not have much of monologue. Their language abilities are either not well developed or their lifestyle does not involve too much communication and planning. It may not mean that their Minds are mostly silent, it only means that the internal verbalization is rarely present. Mental activity rarely stops, and by definition, thinking rarely stops, so the production of thoughts never stops, except in certain situations. These situations involve an absolute attention on the task at hand, or a surprising situation, intense fear or emergency. These situations halt the thought process, and for a few moments one “forgets” to think. This also happens when a sportsman is performing at his best, or an artist is expressing at his best, as full attention and mental resources are demanded for it. Thinking also stops when one becomes intensely aware or conscious of it. It soon restarts as auto-programs take over and they restart default mental activity, the silence can last for a few seconds to few minutes for most of us.

Thinking is an extremely important ability, but can be easily overused. There is generally no need to verbalise the thoughts internally. The verbalisation takes up major part of the thinking, the abstract thought appears instantly. So when there is no need to speak or express it, monologue is a waste of time, energy and mental resources. Those who avoid monologue think very fast, arrive at decisions very quickly and are generally more efficient and intelligent. Over thinking can become a major source of suffering, especially when the content is negative (such as hate towards someone or self-pity), so it becomes necessary to intervene and break the train of thoughts consciously in such situations.

Thoughts become actions eventually, and actions produce consequences. Here we arrive at an important point – the conscious thinking. If one wishes to have a certain kind of consequences, namely the pleasant ones resulting in happiness and freedom, one needs to choose one’s actions correctly, and since, actions are a result of thought, one needs to choose one’s thoughts correctly. Thoughts are the seeds from which deliberate actions are born. Normally, actions are a result of programs and intentions, but the latter are not deliberate, or no simulations are made of the consequences of such actions. Thinking differs from intending in this matter, that one can think about the consequences of an action and form thoughts about them. If one becomes very conscious of these thoughts, one gets a choice to act on them or to not act, or postpone the action. There....this is the

most important choice one has – to act or not to act on a thought.

What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: Our life is the creation of our mind.

- *Buddha (563 BC-483 BC)*

Actions decides our life. They can either lead us to a life full of happiness, freedom and achievements of our highest potentials, or they can make us fall into misery, suffering and pain. Actions are a result of thought, and so what we think we become.

For many of us, the actions performed via **Speech** and writing are the ones that decide our lives, in modern times. If we take writing as a form of speech, then speech becomes the most important act that we perform. All relations start with a conversation. What we speak decides the fate of the relation. Our speech determines if a relation will turn into a lifelong friendship or nasty enmity. Speech determines what kind of bond we form with our life partner or lover. Speech determines our social position, our “social image”. Usually people ignore what we do and pay more attention to what we say (that is unfortunate, but that is my experience, look at the politicians). Speech determines whether people will trust us, so integrity of the speech is most important in social life. Those who tell lies, eventually lose trust and lose beneficial relationships. Even if a person is cunning or a criminal, his success is determined by the trust he gains from his partners in the crime. Telling truth works irrespective of the quality of the actions one performs. True friendships are based on trust gained via telling the truths, however shameful or private or inconvenient it is. A true friend will accept you as you are, provided you are open to him and speak your mind, instead of manipulating your image and putting on a fake personality.

Writing solidifies the speech, and it becomes undeniable. Once your thoughts/intentions are in writing you become even more responsible for them. So it is even more important to ponder before you write something down, it has immense consequences. A multi-million business deal starts with writing (usually with meeting and speaking, but is not confirmed till it is written down). A contract with a sign has a value that mere speech or verbal commitment has not. A marriage is a contract and it means much more than a relation. Signing a cheque means you will own something and make a payment for it, speaking about it has no effect. Writing down something is the most important action that our thought can produce. Needless to say, it must be done with diligence and consciously. Writing has bigger consequences than mere speaking, and decides the major turning points in our lives.

We see a lot many people who speak something and do something else entirely. They have lost connection between their actions and their thoughts. They have turned into thinking zombies. Thinking without consciousness and acting without thinking is the norm, surprise, surprise ! No wonder the world is such a messy place, here no one knows what they are thinking and what they are doing. Incorrect thinking causes great harms, such as wars, murders, hate, misunderstandings, failed projects, material losses and failed relations. Unwise thinking is the root cause of major suffering.

If a man sits down to think, he is immediately asked if he has a headache.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

How to think correctly then? Finally a million dollar question. It is a long topic, but the short answer is – become aware of what you are thinking. Our thoughts are mostly not in our control, we cannot choose to think a particular thought. Thoughts are based on mental activity that is a result of our experiences. A thought can range from totally random to harmful to useful and positive. All kinds of thoughts appear and disappear in a given day. Some of them turn into action. This is the point where a conscious intervention is needed, and is possible (that's the good news). Before acting, pause and think, think more about your thought, why it has appeared, what intentions and what programs are behind it, what situations are causing it and last but not the least, what consequences will be there if you act on it. Analyze it logically, does it make sense, is it coherent, is it reasonable? Simulate the consequences, are they logical? Think about the alternatives, are there any? Ah, that's a lot of work there, no wonder people don't do it and skip to the action instead, in a lazy dazey way.

If we pause and become aware of our thoughts, we learn many things – about ourselves. This is the key to self-improvement. Engaging our minds before our tongues and hands gives us an opportunity to drive the choice towards an optimal action. We always get a choice, when we become aware, we will see many choices, one of them is going to produce the best long term consequence, choose that.

Doing this always (at least for more important actions) steers our lives progressively towards betterment, which is toward more happiness and freedom. If you don't do this consciously, you are performing random Brownian motion in your life, and the law of impermanence will show up at your door and hand you a parcel of suffering. When faced with a choice between happiness and freedom, choose freedom, because happiness is a result of freedom.

I have always thought the actions of men the best interpreters of their thoughts.

- John Locke (1632-1704)

In the path of knowledge, thinking takes a bigger dimension. The above tricks are nothing compared to what one must do in order to progress in that path as far as thinking and thoughts are concerned. Thinking is generally a hindrance when one is introspecting or meditating. Once a thought gets hold of you, it is a distraction and takes you to a place you don't intend to go – a place away from the Self. A thought is a leash that pulls the Mind towards activity, actions, pleasures and pains, it tries to push the Mind into worldly pursuits instead of assisting in surrender. For a seeker, thoughts are a sensitive issue because even when no actions are performed based on a particular thought, it still causes **Internal Actions**, which result in internal consequences. So the situation for a seeker is much more complex compared to an ordinary person who is simply trying to avoid incorrect actions in the world.

Not to be able to stop thinking is a dreadful affliction, but we don't realize this because almost everyone is suffering from it, so it is considered normal. This incessant mental noise prevents you from finding that realm of inner stillness that is inseparable from Being.

- Eckhart Tolle

For example, a program, a desire can conjure up a long train of thoughts and result in fantasy, planning, wanting and doing, even though nothing was done externally using the organs of action. It still causes entrainment of related structures, it makes them stronger. Instead of that program or desire getting attenuated, it is accentuated. This causes the same thought to repeat often again and again, and if entertained for a long time, it forms a solid structure, a nuisance, that tempts the seeker into unnecessary action. Such actions/thoughts delay our progress, and in worse situations make one regress. So when you are on the path of knowledge, thinking is as good as acting. Please see the immensity of it.

Peace of Mind is the absence of unnecessary thoughts. One should not think of getting total rid of thoughts. Survival demands action and action demand thinking, so only a dead person can afford a totally silent Mind. Thoughts cannot be stopped, one can only become aware of them, then discard them, disown them. This aborts unnecessary action. This clears Mind from internal consequences caused by internal actions. For a seeker it is a piece of cake to avoid incorrect external actions, but the internal ones are a headache. A master lives his life so skilfully that it appears like a miracle to the outsiders afflicted by incorrect thinking, beliefs and actions. His life is effortless, flows gently, mostly free from ups and downs. Not too much pleasure, not too much pain. He causes no

consequences most of the time. He walks on air, producing least amount of disturbance in the surroundings. He is invisible as far as his actions are considered. Well that's an ideal image. For an ordinary seeker the internal action is an issue, which leads to external actions easily. It is a struggle to keep the Mind in check and to avoid the internal actions. It is a 24x7 task.

Our life is frittered away by detail . . . simplify, simplify.
- Henry David Thoreau

How to achieve peace of Mind? Big subject ! Here are some tricks that I find useful. Thoughts start with a distraction, not attending to them and keeping one's attention to other useful things helps a lot. Our good friend attention makes another appearance here. What can some good attention not do. It is a must. Cut the thought at its root by recognizing that it appeared out of a distraction. The distraction can be internal, such as, a sexual desire, need to do something because of boredom or any of such million things. It is easy to throw away the external distractions (such as a TV), but it takes discipline and practice to tame the internal ones. Being aware of them is the key. Once you become aware of them, you can choose what to do about them, else they simply drive you to wherever they are going.

It is relatively easy to get rid of negative thoughts, they produce tiny sufferings, unpleasant tastes in the Mind, ugliness in the structures, etc and the Mind itself will assist you in getting rid of them. It is the pleasant thoughts that are more challenging, because the Mind wants to hold on to them, but they are as much as distraction as unpleasant ones. Its a tricky business, but one can be aware of them via proper practice, and discard, disown them just like any other thought. Do not take immediate action, if a thought appears extraordinarily pleasant. It must go through the same process of thinking like any other thought. There are some subtle thoughts that will convince you of taking actions, such as the ones that ask you to donate and serve and do greater good, and what not. Be aware of them too, they too have consequences, that's all I can say for now.

Contents are the food for thought. A thought is nourished by the contents we take in. Depriving the Mind from unnecessary contents works well. This is like fasting for the Mind (**Pratyahar**). Take only that which you need from the surroundings. Avoiding visiting distracting places, which enhance rogue desires, avoiding people who fill you up with unnecessary content (gossip), and avoiding situations where you are forced to think all the time about totally disgusting stuff (your job, may be?), living in solitude most of the time, in the lap of mother nature, among animals and birds, engaging in good reading, Satsang, being in the

company of wise and silent people, and probably many such undertakings help to reduce the onslaught of contents on your Mind.

I know, most of us can only dream of such luxury, and most of us live in compromising situations, faced with survival related struggles, negative and noisy people, pushy bosses and nagging relatives. This should make one even more willing to correct one's thinking process and not let oneself to be dragged along the situations. Do not be on mercy of others, create your own situations as much as possible. The fastest way is to get out of the negative situations, and yes, these include the very pleasant heavenly situations too, they are negative too, they bind you as much as the ugly ones.

Do not let the behavior of others destroy your inner peace.
- Dalai Lama

It is unnecessary and undesirable to reduce your Mind into a rock by subjecting it to severe punishment of not thinking. Such practices dull the Mind, you lose intelligence. Remember that you do not want to kill thinking for once and for all, you simply want to avoid it from going rogue and causing hindrances on your path. It is recommended to think intensely whenever there is a need, think logically and carefully, think without biases. This sharpens the thinking and one needs less and less of it with practice, since now a less amount of thinking can accomplish the task better. Avoiding monologues (long ones) when not needed, makes the thinking even faster. Thinking while simultaneously being aware of it, makes it less prone to mistakes, as one can see when a thought arises out of a program or a belief, or when it is based on a loose logical foundation. This cuts down the time to think considerably. When one is absorbed in Self, thoughts can still arise, nothing to worry, simply see them as happening, Experiencing on the screen of the Presence, of which you are the witness, you are the Self that sees all thoughts.

Enlightenment means rising above thought, not falling back to a level below thought, the level of an animal or a plant. In the enlightened state, you still use your thinking mind when needed, but in a much more focused and effective way than before.
- Eckhart Tolle

Notes:

There are no notes here. This is not a mistake. Finally I wrote an article without

going tangent and without distracting myself with notey things.

By the way, this note about there being no notes is a note. So we have a note that says it is not a note. It is like a poster on a wall that asks you to not stick posters there.

Incidentally these two strange occurrences are examples of the things that refer to themselves. I asked that question in our discussion about logic. My Mind came up with these two by random chance or perhaps it processed the questions deep inside it. How awesome the Minds are!

The Extraordinary Gift of the Mind:Part-7

Continued from Part-6.

20. Planning

The Mind, being the creator of the time, can extrapolate the events in future. Mind can imagine events and can tag them as happening in the future. The Mind can estimate the likely sequence of events, it can predict them. Also, it can estimate the consequences of an action. Certain events, such as physical processes, follow neat mathematical laws and their outcome can be determined more accurately. Certain processes follow statistical laws and their outcome can be estimated as probabilities. Sometimes the Mind relies on intuition to get a guess-estimate of the outcome. Some events, like the behaviour of a stranger, are unpredictable, and the Mind uses some thumb rules to deal with such situations, the rules being a result of its experiences with such situations.

Given the above set of abilities, it is possible to organize one's actions so that a certain outcome is achieved. This is the process of Planning. It is deliberate, intended and often a conscious process. As we know, intentions or desires are a result of mental activity, an outcome of experiences, they are the trigger for actions, and so are triggers for planning too. Planning is delayed action.

There is no time, so no future, yet it makes sense to plan things, because there is change, there is impermanence. Fortunately, a major part of the change (aka Experiencing) happens with regularity. The Mind is an expert in discovering the regularities. The Mind is a pattern matching machine, so finding regularities and patterns amongst the change is its primary function. For example, day follows night and seasons follow a pattern (temporal patterns) and when you go to your kitchen, you expect your refrigerator to be still there (spatial patterns), however, the food may or may not be there inside it, from which one can conclude that some things happen irregularly, unexpectedly. It is because of the irregularity/complexity in the change, that planning is needed. Everything must come together perfectly for an event to happen as you intend it to happen. Even though there is much regularity and predictability, some events do not happen as

expected, especially if humans are involved. Planning is an attempt of the Mind to organize the irregularity deliberately into a structure, and take actions to create that structure/event.

A man who does not think and plan long ahead will find trouble right at his door.
- Confucius (BC 551-BC 479)

It is debatable whether there is any irregularity or randomness in the changes/events that happen around us every day. The Mind sees the events as a product of the Fundamental Process (the evolutionary auto-process, we discussed before), which, by necessity is Perfect. There is **Perfection** everywhere. Nothing is imperfect, because the Fundamental Process, by definition, produces optimal change. So, now, you must be puzzled, if it is all perfect and events happen in a most perfect way, why do we need to mess them up with our planning? The only answer I know is – the action of planning done by you, is also perfect. It cannot be anything else, and if the plan fails and you end up doing something else, that is also perfect. Some thinking and introspection will reveal why I say so [1].

Everything is perfect in the universe -- even your desire to improve it.
- Wayne Dyer

The age old question is – how much one should plan? Can we micromanage all events of our life? Do events really always happen as planned? Should we set long term goals or not? All valid questions. In my experience, events do not happen as planned most of the time, then perhaps I'm not a good planner, anyway I do plan major events, if those can be planned. The reason being, even if the event does not happen as I planned, I do not regret later that I did nothing at all, no effort to organize that event. Now that something else has happened, I simply deal with it as best as possible, and plan something else. When I look back at my life, I hardly planned the major milestones, I made small short term plans mostly. That is because I lacked a big picture of the life, not knowing what one should do with it. Life is a series of experiences, and we are a product of those experiences. We are what we are today because certain events happened. I wouldn't change a thing (except perhaps the most embarrassing of the events :D) because if I could, I wouldn't remain *me*.

The ability to plan develops with experience (as is with all abilities). So one cannot expect to be a good planner at a young age. I've never seen a baby plan his future investment portfolio, so one must conclude that one needs to get to a certain point from where the major life planning begins. Usually others help us to get us on our feet and then there is sometimes a wake up event, which is mostly expressed as – “*what the hell am I doing with my life?*” This is the point where one

considers planning for their future, not before. It takes time to decide on the path one should take, and as we have discussed, it is usually the path that finds you. Once you are sure that you are on the path of your heart, then, in my experience, the need to plan each and everything disappears.

21. Decision making

Just like planning is a sophisticated form of intending, decisions are a sophisticated form of choosing. The process of decision making involves laying out choices in open as clearly as possible and considering all the pros and cons of each, assessing practical difficulties, risks and so on before arriving at an action. I'd recommend a good book on management instead of going into the details of decision making, as this is not my subject. Same applies for planning, as they go hand in hand.

Our lives are a sum total of the choices we have made.
- Wayne Dyer

The decision has to be in line with the intention, obviously. Whenever one has sufficient time, a good number of choices, and the consequences of the resulting action can be heavy, one should go through a conscious decision making process, and arrive at the best decision possible. As with planning, not all decisions will turn out to be right, a decision is right only in retrospect, but it must be made anyway.

Decision making is closely related to the planning, so most of the discussion on planning applies to decision making also. There are some additional tricks while doing it. Whenever you can delay it, delay it. A decision taken in hurry is not very effective. Why do it today when you can do it tomorrow – can be a positive thing in regard to decision making. When the situation is provocative (e.g. you received an insulting email), it is best to delay the action, and decide later, because the first action is nothing but a knee jerk reaction for most of us, and it worsens the situation. Same for any situation that evokes emotions and reactions. The rule of thumb is to wait for at least 24 hours before starting your decision making process in such situations [2].

What happens is, in situations that are wet with emotions, our survival programs take over the entire Mind. This is necessary, because the Mind trusts its millions of years of stored knowledge when it comes to survival. So I do not recommend delaying your decision to flee or kill an attacker, who is about to stab you with a big knife. However, when there is no physical threat, and the situation is still provoking survival instincts (such as anger, lust, fear etc), it is wise to become

very aware of the situation, see the internal environment of the Mind clearly, apply brakes on auto-programs and delay the action or the decision to take any action. Waiting for a sufficient amount of time lets the Mind settle the survival programs and now you are freer to choose, there are now much better and intelligent choices waiting for you. Choose the actions that lead to pleasant consequences or no consequences at all. This is the essence of decision making.

Decision making is a dynamic process, or it must be one. The decision for further actions changes according to the situation at hand. However, when a lot of resources and time (men, money, materials) are already invested on a certain decision, it should not be changed. Of course, there are no set rules and your experience is your best guide. The trick is to not to be adamant about your decision, not to make it an ego issue or a prestige issue. If a person is making decisions according to his conditioning and programs, then it shows how ignorant that person is. Such people cause a lot of suffering. The decision making has to be a logical, objective and aware process.

What if there is no way and nothing can be decided? It means that the person has incomplete/no knowledge, the situation is novel for him. The Mind can come up with some intuitive solutions (as discussed before) given sufficient time. But if you find it hard to decide at times, its best to surrender and let it happen on its own.

22. Problem Solving

This is a complex activity that bundles together many abilities of the Mind, such as creativity, planning, decision making, imagination and many more. Problem solving ability is a tale-tell sign of intelligence. A highly intelligent person has the ability to solve most of the problems in his field of knowledge quickly and elegantly. It comes with experience, the more problems one solves, the better he becomes in solving problems.

It is a mistake to think you can solve any major problems just with potatoes.

- Douglas Adams

I'm not planning to write about this ability in detail here, as this is a well-studied subject and good books/teachers can be found, that can help in improving this ability. I will merely mention some tricks that worked for me. Problem solving starts with identification of the problem. Well, that should be obvious, there is no need to mention it. There is actually, most of us are not even aware of the problem in many cases. Pondering on the problem helps to reveal its nature. Roughly speaking, half of the problem is solved as soon as you know what the problem is.

Few can really understand the problem, the answer will come out of it, because the answer is not separate from the problem.

- Krishnamurti

Breaking the problem into pieces helps to solve it. Divide and conquer. The problem needs to be divisible for this to work. Solve the easy parts first. This applies very well to say, writing a computer program, or dealing with your staff. When you clear off the small things, the root of the problem is revealed and now you are less distracted by the insignificant parts of it. This also builds up a lot of confidence. This technique works nicely for engineering kind of problems.

Hit and trial works whenever the problem is such that there is no tried and tested solution, and it cannot be broken down in parts easily. Hitting it again and again from many angles works. You slowly gain insights on how to solve it. This technique works very well in the case of scientific experiments, where the novelty is immense and one has no clue how to tackle it.

Intense imagination and creativity, the application of them, is another route. These are the abilities to call up when everything else fails. Set the Mind to one task and only one task – to solve the problem at hand in your Mind. The Mind needs to be saturated with it 24x7. It can take days or months, but there is a good chance that you will eventually get a solution that works. Mathematical and theoretical problems are best solved this way. It is necessary to keep all distractions away for this purpose, however, sometimes seeing something novel or just discussing it with a friend is enough to bring up an answer.

Majority of us are hardly concerned with solving management, engineering or mathematical problems. The problems we face in day-to-day life are mostly of social nature. A bully in the school, or a bad relationship; wars, corruption or a dogmatic society – these are some examples of it. Usually there is a person behind the problem (or many persons sometimes) and the root cause of such problems is the ignorance of that person. In my experience, one cannot simply fix the person. One can avoid the person or the situation or can punish the person [3]. It is a hard job to clear the beliefs of that person and enlighten him about his behaviour, to make him see that he is causing suffering. Even if you do that, there is no guarantee that he will not cause some other problem for you (especially if you are stuck with him, e.g. he is a relative). People change, problematic people become less problematic as they mature (often seen with children and teens) and sometimes totally nice people turn into nasty enemies (your ex?).

It may seem to your conceited to suppose that you can do anything important toward improving

the lot of mankind. But this is a fallacy. You must believe that you can help bring about a better world. A good society is produced only by good individuals, just as truly as a majority in a presidential election is produced by the votes of single electors. Everybody can do something toward creating in his own environment kindly feelings rather than anger, reasonableness rather than hysteria, happiness rather than misery.

- Bertrand Russell

Our lives are littered with such problems. Well then, how to solve them if you can't fix that person easily? You can fix yourself, that solves it. More on that later, as its a big subject, and we are discussing the awesome abilities of the Mind here, not the mental disabilities of people [4].

How people treat you is their karma; how you react is yours.

- Wayne Dyer

Notes:

[1] Perfection or beauty is considered an essential aspect of all that is - the Presence, since ancient times (the quality of *Sundaram* is one among the three qualities of it). The imperfection that we perceive is a result of our own ignorance, partial knowledge, lack of knowledge. So is all this suffering also perfect? Yes it is, it cannot be anything else but suffering, a perfect result of our ignorance and actions, which are perfect too. More on this topic later, I know its confusing.

[2] I'm thankful to Rohit Arya and others for their teachings in this regard.

[3] I know what you are thinking. No, killing him is not the ideal solution, even if its tempting. Remember that all your actions have consequences, even those that are a solution for a problem. Be careful in choosing a solution, it may appear attractive in short term, but can cause major suffering later.

[4] In my experience, people are the only problem on this earth, all other problems are pale in comparison to the problems people cause. And I'm not exaggerating. However, we are a part of that problem, perhaps I'm a problem for someone else, who knows. But this is the bottom line. Majority of the suffering is caused by people full of ignorance. The lives of ignorant people are not bad, if you ask me, only if they stop acting on their ignorance, while calling it their smartness.

The Extraordinary Gift of the Mind:Part-8

Continued from Part-7

23. Pleasure and Pain

We have seen in the previous articles that the Mind has an ability to perceive. It organizes the experiences gained via external and internal senses into knowledge. This is an evolutionary process, and is biased towards a certain goal, namely, the sustenance of the Mind. Anything that is unnecessary for the existence of the Mind is simply not organized or is organized very weakly. The goal of the Mind to remain in existence is auto-set, it is by necessity, because any other goals that may appear are destroyed sooner or later by the impermanence (continuous change, the Experiencing). This goal biases the perception process and almost all actions of the Mind and results in a reward/punishment system, that rewards (enhances) favourable perceptions/actions and punishes (diminishes) the non-favourable ones. Such a system is at the core of any evolutionary algorithm, as AI/AGI programmers/researchers know very well [1].

The rewards cause the behaviour/actions/perception helpful in sustenance and preservation of the Mind to repeat often and strengthen the structures, while the punishments cause the unhelpful or damaging behaviour/actions/perception to diminish and destroys the structures that cause these or creates new structures to prevent the damages. The reward and punishment are also perceived, they are the familiar perceptions of pleasure and pain. They appear as *qualia*, a distinct experience that cannot be shared with others (such as the experience of seeing colors), but can only be inferred. Why is there a need to perceive the rewards and punishments as “flavours” of pleasure and pain? This is same as asking why is there a need to perceive colors and why do they look like the way they look like, or in other words – why is red, *red*? These are just structures, non-physical ones, a result of unique experiences, created to help organize the experiences (As we have seen in the case of time and space). The pleasure and pain provide a useful tool for biasing the Mind towards continued existence. Their perception is a meta-process that aids in their recognition and memory formation. One tends to remember the experiences that cause extreme pain or pleasure. These cause very effective learning.

Pleasure and pain are complex perceptions, they modulate the ordinary

perceptions (external and internal both). Tasting a sweet fruit using the sense of taste, not only results in a perception of the sweetness (a qualia) but is also modulated as pleasure, assigning a good reward to that perception and consequently to the action of eating the sweet fruit. The result is that one forms a tendency to eat such fruits, and it is no doubt helpful in continued existence of the Mind. Pain biases the perceptions negatively, such as the sensation of hitting one's fingers while hammering a nail, and consequently prohibits one's action of hitting his fingers again. This also ensures the continued existence of the Mind. So the purpose of both pleasure and the pain is same, and therefore we grouped them together. Pleasure causes attraction or preference towards the stimulant, while pain causes repulsion or avoidance from anything that was painful. This is the base on which **Likes and Dislikes** are formed. These are formed very early in childhood, as we all have experienced. Likes and dislikes govern our actions much more than rational and logical thinking does.

The smallest pain in our little finger gives us more concern than the destruction of millions of our fellow beings.

- William Hazlitt

The Mind not only rewards/punishes the external actions but also the internal ones. An imagination of eating a sweet fruit also produces a certain amount of pleasure, so does the memory of your mate. Similarly, visualizing oneself as being insulted by an enemy produces all the sensations of pain, that an actual insult or attack would, and enforces the dislike (aka hate) for him. This prevents the Mind from forgetting the enemy and risking damage in future. It is all purely survival oriented. However, the Mind knows no difference in internal and external stimulations of the pain and pleasures. The body and other mental programs/entities react in similar ways when the source of pleasure/pain is imagination or a memory. This makes the situation somewhat complicated, because now one has the potential of inflicting internal pains on oneself via repetitive recalls of an unfortunate event, or in other extreme, has the potential to get lost in pleasurable fantasies or memories of pleasure causing events. The latter is not very harmful, unless it goes out of control and the person loses his contact with the external world, or if such indulgences distorts his world view in extreme ways.

The pleasure and pain can take very sophisticated forms, especially in the case of human Minds [2]. So one can take pleasure in viewing a nice painting or a movie, listening to music, reading a story book or just discussing events with friends. The opposite is also true, one can dislike (perceive pain) when one encounters dirty places (public toilets?), or selfish and cruel people or modern pop-music. The most pleasurable things for someone are the ones that satisfies his most desired needs, which as we know, may or may not be sophisticated. The pursuit of

mathematics and search for mysteries of nature, is the most sophisticated pleasure one can have. These experiences, due to their purity, form the most perfect structures in the Mind (higher organization of experiences), and so receive ample rewards.

The Mind suffers from a sort of flaw in this business of pleasure/pain. An action or perception is pleasurable in direct proportion to its novelty and need. Once it becomes old and the needs are met, the same stimulus becomes neutral (or sometimes turns into pain if not stopped). I say “sort of” because it is a natural mechanism to stop one from overdoing a pleasurable activity. Pleasure is a positive feedback loop with the action-reward amplifying each other endlessly, this can easily get out of hand, so a negative bias appears as soon as the needs are met. By making familiar/repetitive things less pleasurable, the mechanism encourages the Mind to seek better stimulus, or to not to depend on only one stimulus. So it’s a flaw but not a flaw, it’s a feature. We see such mechanisms in control systems implemented frequently.

For example, if one is hungry, the need for food is the top most priority and one encounters a kind of painful experience – the hunger. It springs us into action, like nothing else does. Eating provides the much needed nourishment for the structures of the Mind and it is rewarded with pleasure. The pleasure modulates the sense of the taste of food, and the circuits/programs that cause this action are strengthened, while memories are updated of perceiving hunger, the pain and satisfying it, and the associated pleasure. Learning happens here. However, as soon as the stomach is full, some control programs intervene and cause the pleasure to disappear, and if one continues to eat, the same act turns painful and the food suddenly becomes repulsive. The same is also committed to memory. If one is offered the same kind of food again and again, every day, then the pleasure to pain converter programs (**P2P** in short) kick in again, and result in the person seeking new tastes, new dishes. This is a much familiar experience and you may think that it does not deserve a description so detailed, but I took pains to mention it because it is important to know the process. The same mechanism is responsible for many of our actions, including those that cause immense suffering, such as expansion of a king’s kingdom to breaking of marriages.

Pleasure and pain, though directly opposite are contrived to be constant companions.

- Pierre Charron

If you are on a path of knowledge, it becomes necessary to know the mechanisms of pain and pleasures. The first and foremost thing to know is just that – these are nothing but mechanisms. They are there to serve some useful purpose, they are not the end goal of your life, they support life. These were evolved during the early periods in the evolutionary history of the consciousness, and so deserve

much less of importance than we actually give them. For most of us, our lives are nothing but seeking of pleasures and avoidance of pains. Such activities take up majority of our life time. Everything, from sleeping to ruling a country is coloured with pleasures, likes and dislikes. These acts are not seen as they are, but as a source of pleasure, and that twists the whole purpose out of proportions. Please see the immensity of this simple mechanism of our “reptilian” brains.

It is the nature of the wise to resist pleasures, but the foolish to be a slave to them.

- Epictetus

What do the P2P programs do? They seem innocent, don't they? These rule you, that's what they do. We are slaves of pleasure, pain, likes and dislikes. If that is not blowing your Mind at this time and nothing else will. Pleasures, ranging from the sweet taste of mother's milk to intimate touch of one's partner, form a basis of all relationships. All relations are related to pleasures, except that of a teacher and student [3]. Best friendships are a result of pleasure we get when we are in the company of our friends. Friendships come very close to teacher-student relation in terms of purity, rest of all our relations are purely pleasure based. The P2P acts even on the closest kind of relations, and therefore, living with your loved one for many years causes all the romance to disappear as one now sees the plain imperfections of the partner, and it becomes old, boring and sometimes painful. If you are wondering what is causing your partner to dislike you more and more and it all can be “felt” in their behaviour, the manner in which they now touch you or call your name etc etc, then it is simply P2P in action. It is telling them to seek novelty, change, variety and so non-monogamous relations begin. Break ups happen because the coupling has served its purpose. This is why staying away from people you like has a positive effect, it kills P2P and renovates the pleasure programs, inciting actions, such as sending love letters. Even the most committed relations suffer from P2P, where the reason for being together is sometimes not pleasure but security or financial dependency. These kind of relations break as soon as the factors enslaving the partners are removed. A relation that is not based on pleasure seeking lasts much longer as it avoids the P2P mechanism altogether [4]. A relation based on mutual trust, respect and unconditional love is such a relation. Of course, these are as rare as Unobtainium.

P2P is responsible for one's jumping from a job to other job, not gaining any proficiency at all. A tedious and monotonous job is disliked by all, because – P2P. Running after more and more money even if one has more than enough is a result of pleasure seeking and P2P, because once you have a million, the pleasure you get from it goes downhill quickly, inciting you into donkey work and monkey business, so that you can get 10 million, because last time it was the money that gave you everlasting pleasures. Right? P2P is responsible for hoarding behaviour, collecting useless stuff, spending money on useless stuff, because the last one you

bought loses its appeal within a few days. How many people know this and can kill this mechanism? Not many.

Most men pursue pleasure with such breathless haste that they hurry past it.

- Soren Kierkegaard

P2P is the reason most people cannot excel in a particular skill, such as an art or scientific/engineering pursuits. These disciplines demand too much attention, hard work and time. Usually the pleasures gained initially are miniscule and the learning is often very painful (aka the learning curve). Those who survive the initial pain inflicted upon them by the P2P, find an ocean of pleasure awaiting before them. Once you master an art, it is a source of endless pleasure. But most of us do not reach there, thanks to our ignorance about P2P, we remain ordinary.

Pleasure for one hour, a bottle of wine. Pleasure for one year a marriage; but pleasure for a lifetime, a garden.

- Chinese Proverb

Substance addiction is a result of overstimulation of pleasure centres. Such behaviour causes extreme suffering to the addict as well as to the people around him. It is difficult to get rid of these programs once they form and often the person lives their (short) life enslaved by them. Substances include food, a cause of obesity, diseases, poverty and what not. One might suspect that P2P fails here and the self-amplification loop of pleasure works unhindered. But addictions are not without pains as we know well.

That which is escaped now is pain to come.

- A proverb

Another form of addiction is **Attachment**. It appears innocent until it starts causing suffering. We will discuss the cure for all the strangeness that the reward and punishment mechanisms cause in the articles on inflictions of the Mind. As usual, and you must have guessed, the cure consists of becoming aware of these programs and taking control of them. The question is how. Stay tuned.

You are quaffing drink from a hundred fountains: whenever any of these hundred yields less, your pleasure is diminished. But when the sublime fountain gushes from within you, no longer need you steal from the other fountains.

- Jalal-Uddin Rumi

24. Emotions

We have yet another nebulous term here. It is confusing because it is a mixture of many things that happen inside our Mind at an often inaccessible level. An

Emotion is an internal action combined with the reward/punishment system, and it operates at a more basic level than intentions or thoughtful planning. We become aware of an emotion only after it has already happened and finished its business. Emotions are triggered by extreme survival related events/needs and cause the most ancient structures in Mind to activate. No doubt, emotions result in action, and that's where the trouble lies.

Being coloured with reward/punishment, emotions are also of two kinds – positive and negative. You must have already guessed that, so I will not explain them in detail. The only thing I say is, they are the same mechanism, doesn't matter whether positive or negative. You must be wondering why emotions are an extraordinary quality of the Mind, they are internal actions, just as any other. Yes they are, but they are far from ordinary. Emotions are “felt”, they have extreme effect on the body, they are very powerful internal actions and they last for a long time compared to intention or planning. Emotions impress upon memory like nothing else and stay with us for lifetimes sometimes. Emotions come under abilities of the Mind, only because, it were the emotions that kept the Mind and its structure alive in the early periods of its evolution. Since they act at a lower level [5], they are very effective structures for survival. We are thankful for the emotions, they have kept us alive and have added colour to the otherwise boring job of surviving.

By starving emotions we become humorless, rigid and stereotyped; by repressing them we become literal, reformatory and holier-than-thou; encouraged, they perfume life; discouraged, they poison it.

- Joseph Collins

As an example, let's take anger, which is a commonly experienced emotion. Anger stands for many internal actions and external manifestations of them, usually triggered by an external threat to the survival. The threat can be an attack by an enemy (predator in ancient version) or an insult by one's relative (say betrayal in modern times). The threat results in fear, another emotion devoted to keeping us alive. The fear here is a reaction to threat and a cause of fight/flight behaviour. If the choice is fight (depending on the situation, say you are bigger than your enemy), then the primitive programs to deal with a fight fire up. The heart rate and breathing goes up. The blood rushes to the brain and to the extremities. The muscles twitch in preparation of an intense action. The person starts shaking with over activity of neuro-motor circuits. The pitch decreases and loudness of the voice increases, in an attempt to look powerful and bigger. The body takes a posture which is dominating. The higher thinking activities are suspended (well, yes its needed, no time for that). The eyes dilate and nose sniffs to take in most of the clues about the enemy. The whole system is stressed beyond limits, and that is what ensures survival in a deadly fight. All of this is just

one emotion – anger.

Does that sound like an animal trying to attack you? If it does, then you got it all. Emotions are there for a purpose. Unfortunately, they activate in our day-to-day life even when not needed. Modern life usually does not need severe mindless actions. Still we find that people generally act more on their emotions and less on their thoughtful planning. Generally speaking, actions coming out of emotions have heavy consequences. They are not in control obviously. The emotion is about losing control, not gaining it.

What about the positive emotions, like lust? Or the finer emotions like pity/love and what have you? As I said, they are all the same – a primitive strategy of the Mind, that worked very well when it was needed in ancient times. Emotions are powerful mechanisms of our animal Mind, also known as animal nature. Well that sounds rather insulting or inferior, but then it is just our belief that animals are somehow “inferior” and man is, you know – “man”, whatever that is. In my experience, there is no difference between humans and animals, except some additional structures in the Mind. All life forms are creation of the ever-creating auto process – the Fundamental Process. There is no concept of superiority there. This is the problem with beliefs, they conjure up things that are not there. *The young man who has not wept is a savage, and the old man who will not laugh is a fool.*
- George Santayana

Emotions, especially the positive ones, are the reason most of the people feel alive. Their lives and memories are full of emotions and revolve around them. As usual there is nothing wrong with that – its all a play of Presence, Self and the Experiencing, and there is no need to be otherwise. However, if you are on a path of knowledge, it is best to see the emotions are they are – primitive actions. It is ok to experience them, as a part and parcel of human experience, but it is not ok to be governed by them. Actions taken under the influence of emotions will certainly regress you on your path, I can say that with conviction. One must attempt to free oneself from emotions if one wants to progress sufficiently on the path. However, it is not recommended to get rid of them, as you will simply destroy these useful structures. Much is gained when you keep them as your pets. So how to deal with the emotions, when you are on a path? I consider all emotions as afflictions of the Mind, from the PoV of a seeker, so I shall attempt some answers in the coming articles on the afflictions of the Mind.

Isn't happiness a state where majority of our experiences are positive emotions and feelings of pleasure as compared to their opposites? It depends on your definition of **Happiness**. And this is a good definition – the absence of negative emotions, ugly feelings, pain, bad people and harmful situations from ones life. In

addition, happiness involves things such as beauty around you and ethics, loving and caring behaviour of oneself and others. Perhaps achievements and superhuman accomplishments. But yes, emotions form a part of happiness, an important part. So why am I advocating getting rid of emotions when the goal is happiness? There are two misunderstandings here – firstly, as I mentioned, it is not recommended to get complete rid of emotions, they assist us in survival and add flavour to it, and of course, happiness involves positive emotions. Secondly, we are assuming that the happiness (lack of suffering) is the end goal, which it is not. The end goal in the path of the knowledge is **Freedom**, and it also means freedom from the need to be happy [6]. Happiness can be considered as a stepping stone, a sub-goal, because it is the happiness that gives us a taste of freedom. When you are happy, you will clearly see that there is a lack of bondage of one or other kind, and only then you will appreciate the value of freedom. It is a subject for another article, the matter of happiness and freedom. Right now we continue with the abilities of the Mind, only a few are remaining.

Notes:

[1] Also known as the weighing system, that assigns weights to inputs, enhancing or reducing their impact on the results. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolutionary_algorithm a good starting point to learn more on EAs and GAs. We have discussed before why the Mind is algorithmic in nature, it is because, it is a product of the Fundamental Process, which cannot be anything else but algorithmic. Refer back to previous blog entries for details.

[2] The animals, as can be inferred from their behaviours, are equally capable of pleasure and pain, and not surprisingly are entirely governed by them. Pleasure/pain programs in animals are responsible for their survival. Their intelligence, however tiny it may be, is totally geared towards pleasure seeking and pain avoiding behaviours. This is the reason that some animals can be effectively trained via reward and punishment alone.

[3] This deserves more explanation. Is the teacher-student relation even a relation? Anyhow, I'm thankful to Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev for this teaching.

[4] It is debatable whether one should give more weight to the quality vs the duration of a relation. I guess, it's a matter of like/dislike. Optimising both is desirable, if one wants to be in the trap of relations, that is.

[5] By lower, I mean a more directly connected structure, not an inferior one.

[6] Freedom, Liberation, Mukti, Mokshya, Nirvana, and many more terms point to the same state. Paths are many, the destination is the same.

The Extraordinary Gift of the Mind:Part-9

Continued from Part-8

25. Aesthetics

Being a creator of the structure, the Mind has an affinity for structure, organization, elegance and meaningfulness, all these being indicators of low entropy. Whenever it recognizes a highly organized formation, it is pleased, it effluxes pleasure and agreement. We perceive this reaction of the Mind as **Beauty**. Mind is instantly attracted towards beauty, which it attributes as a quality of the internal or external contents. The object invoking beauty is perceived as beautiful, a quality now externalized and projected onto the object itself. It seems that the appreciation of beauty is purely an internal act, unconnected to the contents, more to do with how the Mind recognizes the structure. There can be degrees of beauty, from a mildly attractive object to a mesmerizing one. Interestingly, and it should be no surprise, the degree of beauty goes into negative scale as well and something that is highly disorganized or lacking any harmony is perceived as **Ugly**, a feeling resulting in a repulsive action. Clearly we are dealing in duality here, like most other aspects of the Mind.

A lot can be found in literature about what constitutes beauty and how the Mind decides which content is beautiful and which is not. There are clear variations among individuals/groups/cultures etc regarding what is perceived as beautiful or ugly. Thus the matter of aesthetics is highly subjective and any attempts to make conclusive comments about it are futile. I will briefly summarize it here, as beauty influences our choices and thus actions. Attractiveness of an object/person plays a major role in our lives. Beauty is also an aspect of happiness, where it is seen as a contributor to happiness. A thing of beauty is indeed very pleasurable. Similarly, ugliness influences us, perhaps much more than beauty, as we would rather get rid of ugliness sooner compared to the urgency with which we may pursue beauty. We simply don't want ugliness around us. Aesthetics influences our likes and dislikes and sometimes affects our judgement about certain things. It is recommended that a seeker should go deeper into the study of aesthetics in order to free himself from its illusions. Yes, beauty is an illusion, things are what they

are, the Mind makes them beautiful or ugly.

I would warn you that I do not attribute to nature either beauty or deformity, order or confusion. Only in relation to our imagination can things be called beautiful or ugly, well-ordered or confused.

- Baruch (Benedict de) Spinoza

As we have seen, contents with high amount of organization are perceived as beautiful. So we naturally find structures with nice patterns, repetitiveness, symmetry, self-similarity, meaningful complexity etc, as beautiful. The sense of sight is a major provider of such contents to the Mind, but the perception of the beauty is not limited to it. Some sounds (music), tastes, smells, touches, thoughts (ideas, mathematics), texts (poetry or prose) etc can also be perceived as beautiful, with their disorderly or meaningless opposites perceived as ugly. Things that convey meaning, are simple and elegant, are efficient and minimal but useful, are novel and fresh are also perceived as beautiful. Contrasts, color combinations, surroundings (nature, greenery) that evoke peace and happiness are also perceived as beautiful. Sometimes things that are obviously dangerous (e.g. fire, steep mountains, wild animals) and should actually cause repulsion are seen as beautiful due to their strength, mysteriousness and their ability to evoke wonder and respect. Pure geometrical figures/buildings/sculptures and mathematical equations – elegant, simple or complex also suggest a refined sense of beauty. More abstract the idea is, more beautiful it appears, provided it fulfils some of the above criteria. Beauty lies in the heart of **Perfection**, where anything if added or taken away reduces the beauty. With perfection, one can say that an optimal beauty is achieved, which points to the optimal underlying structure. One can easily understand that the principle behind the beauty is the high amount of organization and low entropy. I'm going to call such contents as having **Pure Beauty**. Purely beautiful things are universally beautiful, as subjective variations in degrees of their perceived beauty are minimal [1].

I have found that all ugly things are made by those who strive to make something beautiful, and that all beautiful things are made by those who strive to make something useful.

- Oscar Wilde

So is there some kind of impure beauty too? Contents are coloured as beautiful or ugly by the Mind, however, the process is far from “perfect” and it itself is coloured by certain factors. Evolutionary biases, conditioning and beliefs are among such factors. Certain substances, hormones, moods and emotions also modulate the perceived beauty. We also see a high variance in the subjective evaluation of such kind of beauty. No doubt, this causes much debate and confusion regarding what people perceive as beautiful, with dramatic situations where one person calls a thing extremely beautiful while another is repulsed by it. Or much rarely, the same person can perceive a thing as beautiful at one point in

their life and it becomes ugly later on when coloured by negative experiences involving that thing. Since the pleasure of beauty is the same in any case as that of a purely beautiful thing, I'd hesitate to call it impure beauty, so I'll settle at a term **Subjective Beauty** for such perceptions. Its somewhat confusing, so lets illustrate it with some examples.

Human body is symmetric, complex, mysterious, useful and evokes respect – all great ingredients for beauty here and it is surely a popular subject for artists, who painstakingly try to capture its beauty on their canvases [4]. However, the perception of beauty in human form is highly subjective, it has been coloured by millions of years of evolution. Struggle for survival has forced the Mind to distort human form's pure beauty to a large extent. Certain proportions, sizes and looks are favoured purely because these parameters helped in survival. For example a juvenile and delicate female form is more conducive for mating rather than an old, big and strong form, the latter would make it difficult to impress upon that female and can also cost an arm and a leg literally. The result is that a selective process is started and a certain female form is favoured and seen as beautiful, causing attraction towards that form and repulsion from other forms. The individuals of the favoured form breed more and so the population of such forms increase gradually. The process repeats and gets refined. Similarly, an athletic, muscular, strong and tall male body is perceived as more beautiful, as such a man would indeed be able to provide more food and security to both the mother and their children, ensuring their survival amongst cut throat competition. Because of the subjective variability, there are exceptions, if I recall correctly, in certain tribes a fat woman would be seen as more beautiful compared to a skinny one, as more fat would mean more children and better chances of their survival. A skinny female wouldn't be able to bear more children or breastfeed them well. The Mind here has taken the side of survival and twisted its perception of beauty to deviate from the purity. An extremely logical step – survival first.

Human infantile features and proportions are far from perfect but they are surely seen as attractive (or cute, as they prefer to call it). Infants and toddlers immediately evoke a protective, loving and caring attitude in all of us, and especially mothers. This is a fine example of colouration of beauty via evolutionary pressures, as those species who found their offspring too repulsive are no longer here, they did not survive for obvious reasons. Interestingly this bias extends to the infants of other animals, especially mammals, and so we perceive all those puppies, kittens and cubs as pretty and charming and they evoke the same caring emotions as human infants. This provides no survival advantage at all, so one would wonder why this peculiarity exists. It has to do with the very ancient structures in the Mind, the genetic similarities between us and animals and in part the pure beauty of animal form. This also suggests that

evolutionary biasing of beauty started very early and the underlying mechanisms are similar in all mammals. One can infer that animals (esp. mammals) are well equipped to perceive beauty, although I suspect that a dog's appreciation of pure beauty lacks the sophistication of that of a human, especially in areas like arts, music and highly decorated pillars on the street.

In some cultures a pale skinned fat man/woman with cherry cheeks is perceived as beautiful, these being from the rich class, become such due to a comfortable life devoid of struggles and evolutionary pressures. Such cultures are conditioned by eons of poverty, which twists the sense of beauty towards those who are affluent and therefore have higher chances of survival, and survival while enjoying all the comforts. A dark and rough skin with muscular body is now a sign of extreme poverty or slavery and is repulsive. As these cultures progress into prosperity, the perception of beauty shifts towards purity. A study of paintings depicting female form through the ages will provide you with interesting details.

Social conditioning is the reason for liking certain kind of music or literature, and certain kind of clothing (fashions or fads). A lot of our likes are affected by what we perceive as beauty as a result of social conditioning. Certain foods are preferred and seen as having a beautiful taste only because of a particular conditioning happening in early childhood. Lastly, some things are beautiful just because one believes it to be so, such as your lover, who is just ordinary, but your deep love makes her appear extremely beautiful, including not only looks, but voice, scent and behaviour too. Influence of bodily hormones and moods is also responsible for such perceptions. Similarly, a person with whom you had a bad encounter will appear disgustingly ugly even if he is considered very beautiful by others. An ordinary painting stamped with a famous name automatically becomes a masterpiece, the bias of belief distorts the perception of art completely. A product that is expensive, decorative and shiny appears more beautiful and is preferred over a minimalist one, no care is given to the fact that it is useless and obscene. The choices of an ordinary person are heavily influenced by what he believes to be beautiful or attractive. Advertisers take advantage of such beliefs and show their cars, soaps, potato chips or such right next to a beautiful barely clothed model. It works!, I must say, as it makes you run to the shop and buy it for an impressive sum, while you feel a rise in your social status, just because you got a useless thing in an amount others would love to get as their whole month's salary. Unfortunately, the promised model never appears, the beauty of the stuff fades fast, and you move on to the next advertisement. We can see that a mechanism similar to P2P is active here.

Remember if you marry for beauty, thou bindest thyself all thy life for that which perchance, will

neither last nor please thee one year: and when thou hast it, it will be to thee of no price at all.
- Sir Walter Raleigh

The colouring or flavouring of the contents by the Mind produces certain undesirable effects too. For example, someone who is not so good looking is often ignored by others even if that person is beautiful inside. Someone who is beautiful is held in high esteem, even if he is a mean fellow. A combination of beliefs, evolutionary biases and conditioning is at work here. Evolution favours beauty as a sign of good health and fitness, and therefore a good indicator of high chances of survival of the offspring. This strategy works nicely for animals, as it is working since billions of years, but for humans, the case is a bit tricky, as we have a well developed Mind that overwhelms the outer form. Beauty is favoured over other qualities such as intelligence or character, especially by ordinary ignorants, because that's what they can see and have no clue about the mental aberrations they suffer from. Social conditioning paints a good person as being beautiful and bright whereas the evil and demons are often depicted as ugly, deformed, scary and disgusting creatures. This conditions people into beliefs that beautiful is good, ugly is bad. A good looking person wastes no time in exploiting such beliefs, in many cases, subconsciously acting so. On the other hand, an ugly person is seen as untrustworthy even though he never did anything wrong even once. An average person would rather bow to a beautiful tyrant instead of an ugly saint [2]. The undesirable effects are not limited to people, they extend to animals and objects too. So an animal perceived as beautiful gets favour and is treated with love and care (often more than a human would get) and the "ugly animals" are worthy of torture and killing and usually end up as food. An object, even if it is useless gets more value if it is beautiful (diamonds?), while simple/minimalist objects are seen as an indicator of low social status. So beauty has an ugly face too.

It is amazing how complete is the delusion that beauty is goodness.
- Count Leo Tolstoy

A thing of beauty is a joy forever, so why did I recommend being free from it? As a seeker your task is to perceive things as they are, not as coloured by various processes of the Mind. This knowledge is liberating, makes one take unbiased decisions and stabilizes the Mind, which is now not at the mercy of random pushes and pulls of ugliness and beauty. Does that mean that one should stay away from beautiful things as well as ugly things? It doesn't mean that. One has to merely see the mechanisms behind the perception of beauty and ugliness and be not swayed by it, especially when a choice is offered and a decision has to be made. One need not kill the perception and joy of beauty and the usefulness of seeing something as ugly, these do add flavour to our day-to-day life, however,

one must be fully aware of this mechanism that is operational perpetually, especially when taking decisions that lead to important actions. An action based on the simple criteria of beauty may have unintended consequences. If that action does not lead you towards more freedom, it must not be taken, however beautiful the result or the concerned object/person is. A lot of introspection needs to be done here, sometimes a beautiful action is the one that one must take. The beauty of that action pops out. What is a beautiful action? Clearly, the Mind perceives such an action as aligned squarely with your path.

Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it.
- Confucius

What is beautiful? Nothing is and everything is. Well, we are now in mystical la-la land. All experiences are being created by the Fundamental Process, which is by definition a perfect process, there cannot be a better process than that, because none other exists, none other can exist, it is the only possibility, a necessity. Therefore all experiences are perfect. A perfect thing is obviously most beautiful, and so everything is so. Since all beauty is a product of Mind and its processes, there is no beauty when there is no Mind, hence nothing is beautiful (nor it is ugly). Are you confused yet?

Presence is there when there is no Mind, and hence it is the only thing beyond beauty and ugliness. It is neither, however those who dwell there, call it the most beautiful and perfect thing ever. Beauty and perfection is attributed to the Presence (and to the Self also) since ancient times [3]. What Mind perceives in its limited capacity is nothing but a faint and blurry image of this attribute of the Presence. This, by the way, provides the answer to an age old question – Why is there beauty? Because that is all there is...

Notes:

[1] You can find various studies that provide evidence for it, I'm writing from memory here and of course my own experience supports this. Why is nature so beautiful notwithstanding its irregular appearance? It can be because there is underlying mathematical and algorithmic regularities in natural formations, vegetation, even animals and humans, and math is beautiful. It is the highest kind of structure man has access to. Somehow the Mind can understand the underlying order in seemingly chaotic nature. There are interesting studies about this subject, especially it gets really interesting, exotic and beautiful at the border of chaos and order.

[2] There are experiments that show that people would happily take commands from a cruel but beautiful person and those commands even if degrading or harmful are perceived as “good”. I’m on the mercy of memory here, so a Google search with right keywords is your better alternative, if you need more evidence or wish to study this mental aberration more.

[3] The verse *Satyam Shivam Sundaram (Yajurveda)* is interpreted in various ways, and one of the meanings is: Truth-Consciousness-Beauty, the three attributes of all that is. Yet another meaning is Existence-Self-Perfection, which is essentially the same meaning as the first one. Even though Presence has no attributes (*Nirgun*), it is seen by the limited Mind as the only truth there is, having the property of consciousness and is perfect/beautiful beyond description.

[4] It is not so simple. The human Mind creates beauty out of things such as faces using complicated algorithms, a result of a blend between what is optimal structure and evolutionary pressures. There are many studies on what makes a face beautiful. One example is here: <http://petapixel.com/2014/02/18/perfectly-symmetrical-portraits-show-symmetrical-face-alway-beautiful/> . This is a simple study showing that symmetry is not the only parameter required for beauty, the placement of feature also matters among other parameters. What is the ideal placement? There is none, so the Mind relies on its experience to generate an ideal face, it is the mathematical average of all the faces it has seen till now. You will find that conclusion on the web somewhere. How would other Minds, say an AI, prefer to generate beauty?

The Extraordinary Gift of the Mind:Part-10

Continued from Part-9

26. Ethics

There are certain actions that enhance structure and lower the entropy or help to maintain the structures intact. These actions (internal or external) gain favour over others and are marked by the Mind as **Good** or Right. Usually such actions are rewarded by the Mind with pleasure, and evoke pleasant feelings and positive emotions. The actions that are destructive and increase the entropy in the Mind are marked as **Bad** or Wrong. These are punished and evoke unpleasant feelings and negative emotions. We are again in the duality here as usual. The spectrum of actions is coloured entirely, ranging from extremely bad to extremely good.

The parallels of ethics with aesthetics are noteworthy. It is tempting to club them together, as they appear to be largely a same process. Aesthetics applies to incoming perceptions and ethics applies to outgoing actions, everything else is mostly the same. It is possible to simply substitute the good for beauty and bad for ugliness in the last article on aesthetics and we will get an article on ethics without much work, but I will go ahead and comment on the mechanics of ethics briefly and then move on to the juicy stuff.

Ethics or Morals do influence our lives to a great extent and as we have seen in the case of aesthetics, many of our choices are determined by whether an action is perceived as good or bad. The Mind quickly learns to differentiate between good and bad via experience, and I suspect that there are certain processes in the Mind that are meta-processes, they oversee the processes responsible for actions. Whether the actions are internal or external, such meta-processes assign a weight to them before they are executed and appear as a fully formed action. The weights depend on past learning and also derive straightaway from the organizing principles in the Mind. The Mind is capable of simulating an action and of evaluation of the results, a kind of sand-boxing, and if the simulation predicts an increase in entropy, the meta-processes weigh down the action. It appears as an unpleasant feeling and we are discouraged from performing that action. When someone says that a particular action simply “feels wrong”, he is describing an

outcome of simulation. It is of value to pay attention to such feelings/thoughts, as they are often subtle and may appear as intuition. If one is very aware before performing any action, he gets an opportunity to see it and gets a hint of the outcome. Just observe the process, it is that simple.

The only good is knowledge and the only evil is ignorance.
- Socrates

As with aesthetics, I'd call those actions that are universally recognized as good, the **Pure Good**. Or one can say such actions are perfectly right, showing perfection – a condition where nothing can be done or undone to improve it further. Perfection is the attribute of Presence, so all actions coming out of it are perfect. An example of purely good action is preservation of life, of oneself and of others, as life-forms are most structured and low entropy things that are there in our universe (ah, someone will debate it I'm sure, there is this non-physical realm, but let's stick to our current experience). Almost no one argues against the goodness of any action that supports life and almost all agree that killing and injuring others is bad. As an extreme, killing oneself (suicide) is an extremely bad action. You are doing a noble deed simply by staying alive, you are contributing to the evolution of the Mind, its journey to the Self. There is no bigger destruction than the destruction of one's own Mind. I'll leave it to you to find more examples of pure good, but I suspect there are not many. What are the criteria for pure goodness? As I defined it, it has to be universally agreed, or almost universally, and it's no surprise that such agreements are rare. Another criterion is that it can be shown that pure good arises out of the Fundamental Process. However, it is hard to demonstrate that convincingly, so if you think your example of a pure good action is correct, I wish good luck to you proving it to someone who thinks otherwise, and my sympathies are with you.

So what is an impure good? Corresponding to the aesthetics, let's call it **Subjective Good**. These ethical ideas stem from evolutionary biases, conditioning and beliefs. Sometimes also influenced by substances and emotions. By definition, there is a large variance among population regarding what is ethical, and any debate or discussion on ethics soon turns into quarrels, for some strange reason people cannot tolerate someone else's ethics. Ideas such as patriotism comes from the survival advantage a particular genetic variant or group of individual gets by protecting its own kind, its family, its tribe and its (limited) resources. Altruism is a finer form of such behaviour which is a conscious action in the service of one's own kind, but is not a pure good, it is a result of evolutionary machinery [1]. Conditioned good is usually a result of indoctrination by one's parents, teachers and society. Monogamy and honesty are two such examples of conditioned good. Their opposites are automatically considered as

bad. Obviously, different people are subjected to different indoctrinations and the ideas about what is good varies widely.

In my experience, trying to arrive at an agreement on what is a good action results in more heat than light, any debates on ethics are a complete waste of time, as people have no clue about the workings of ethical processes in the Mind. There are 7 billion kinds of good at present, give up all hopes. Add to that the beliefs, dogmas and religious indoctrinations and we have a recipe for riots. For most of the people, the ignorant ones, ethics are borrowed from their social surroundings and their own beliefs. So if an individual describes what is good and bad according to him, is it “real” good and bad? It is a subjective good, as the definition says, and the Mind goes through exactly the same process of evaluation as that of a pure good. So never insult others by insulting their subjective ethics. It is a painful experience for all of us when others do not respect what we consider to be a good action (or a bad one).

If people are good only because they fear punishment, and hope for reward, then we are a sorry lot indeed.

- Albert Einstein

Now to the bad part about the good. Some people have discovered that calling an action good and justifying it as good provides them an easy way to execute it effectively, doesn't matter if it is extremely bad. Similarly, demonizing a person, calling him bad, provides an easy way to get rid of that person (punish or kill him). These cunning people escape the consequences of their actions in this way (even if for a short time), and cause great harm. Really bad part is, people fall for it, it works. A lot of extremely bad deeds were done in the name of doing good. A lot of good was eliminated from this world by naming it bad. History is full of such stories. It is very easy to fool a person in regards to ethics, usually a misinterpretation of words of a highly ethical public figure is enough, as most have no clue what that figure did or said anyway, he is just believed to be a good fellow. We resist all moral policing while tirelessly imposing our own morals on others. What is the reason of such behaviour? It is the ego ensuring its dominance over others, hardly anything to do with good or bad.

The mind of the superior man is conversant with righteousness; the mind of the mean man is conversant with gain.

- Confucius, The Analects, Book IV, Chapter XVI

What is the cure for all this ethical mess? Be free from ethics. Transcend ethics. If you are on a path of knowledge, you will see that ethical ideas are merely an outcome of mental processes. Good is an illusion and so is bad, things and actions are what they are, the Mind colours them as good and bad. Once this is

realized, you are liberated from the burden of ethics and your actions are free from the influence of it, especially from the influence of subjective good. You will automatically perform perfect actions, which you will see are squarely aligned to your own path.

Do not try to live by morals, ethics, slogans. These are all very poor substitutes for awareness. Be conscious and aware, you will see life the way it is.

- Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev

How to be free of ethical junk? Any action performed with total consciousness of it will lead to a purely good action. Being aware of colouration of the good/bad by the Mind enables one to choose an action consciously. The clues about an action being good or bad are mostly present in the Mind itself. It has meta-processes taking care of it. If an action is leading you towards more freedom, more happiness and more knowledge, call it a good action, it is the right thing to do, it is most natural, it is what must happen. The Mind, being a creator of knowledge will assist you here, provided it is free from afflictions. To be free from afflictions one needs to see them clearly, in other words, be aware of them completely. It comes with practice and cultivation, which as we have seen (refer older articles), can be a lifelong process for some, while others get it very quickly.

What is an ethical action? There is none. Actions are not good or bad fundamentally, they just have consequences. If the consequences are such that they carry you further on your path, you progress as a result, then such actions can be defined as good for you (and only you). It is wise to see actions from a perspective of consequences rather than from the perspective of ethics. Ethics, especially the subjective kind, soon gets solidified into beliefs, which restrict one from accessing the full range of choices one can have. If you always think in the terms of consequences, you have the freedom of dynamically defining good or bad, and so a vast number of choices are present. Obviously, depending on the path and the desired consequences, if something is good for one, the same thing can be bad for the other. Realizing this, one gets rid of the tendency to judge others on the basis of their actions. We are not here to judge others, evaluate their actions and ethics, fix them, teach them or punish them for their so called unethical actions, we are here to walk on our path. It is as simple as that. A wise seeker never worries about what others are doing, only about what he himself is doing. Are your actions perfect? If yes, go ahead, others are far behind you for some reason, you are not responsible for that, you have no obligation to carry them in your arms or to whip them on a correct path. Just take a look, there are as many ahead of you, follow them. The most important actions are those of your own. Others will soon reach up to your post, they are on their own journey.

Having said that, it is recommended to help those who are sincerely seeking answers. One can do that not by preaching ethics, but by setting up an example. Most people will be confused by your actions that you mean to use as examples for purely good actions, because, obviously, these will have no correspondence to commonly held ideas about ethics. You will be seen as a mix of good and bad, whimsically performing actions for no clear reasons. But those who are on the edge will get the hint. They will see that actions are not to be performed merely for satisfying some random criteria of good and bad, which vary widely among individuals, times and places, but for progressing on one's own path [2].

Now about some practical considerations. If an action results in favourable consequences that are short term, but in long term, that action can become a big hindrance on your path, it is better not to perform it. You want to do good, but you cannot, because the people around you are deeply ignorant and they resist, they get angry, they want to kill you because you are trying to be "different", what to do in such situations? Should you go with the flow and do the bad stuff everyone else is doing? Remember that you are not responsible for the actions of the others, only yours, so even if you are doing bad just to maintain peace and decorum, it is no good, it will still have consequences for you. I can't recommend a fix-it-all solution, I've tried many things when faced with such situations. All I can do is - share my experience. If possible, get rid of such societies or cultures, go somewhere else, find a more "ethical" job, get out of such relations, friendships and cults. Redefine your priorities to align more with your path. What do you want - to keep others happy or to progress rapidly? Should not be a difficult choice.

He who is too busy doing good finds no time to be good.
- Rabindranath Tagore

We are here on earth to do good for others. What the others are here for, I don't know.
- W. H. Auden

All you are trying to do with your morality and values is to simplify life and find some order in a place where you are not able to figure out what is the beginning, what is the end. The life process seems to be so chaotic and unbearable for you that you are trying to bring some silly sense of order by establishing your own principles, your own morality, your own ethics. If you bring your own silly sense of order to life, you will completely miss the magnificent order of the existence. There is no need to be orderly. Existence is in perfect order.
- Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev

Our actions, whatever they are, always have consequences, doing bad will surely do so, and doing good will also have consequences. Consequences do not end

with just one, there is always a long train of them, other consequences follow the first, and so on. Doing good may not necessarily mean that the ultimate consequences will be as desired. There is no “happily ever after” in this world of duality. Fruits of our actions are rarely in our control, only thing that is in our control is our action. Are you responsible for the good or bad, suffering or happiness of others, that may result from your good actions? Ah, a difficult question, one that made me think....and after a coffee break, I guess (yes, only a guess), if you own that action, you are responsible. The burden of responsibility is removed only if you disown the action.

It is easy to disown a bad action, you want to get rid of that responsibility, but it is difficult to disown a good action, because you cling to it, you are so nice, you do good, nothing but good. The possibility for disowning a good action arises only when a good action causes a bad consequence, especially for others. This is a good opportunity to see that we do not do anything, there is no actor. Actions happen, they are not good or bad, consequences happen, they are also not good or bad. At some point the burden of responsibility of all our good and bad actions falls away as disowning happens. When can one disown? Its not possible to do it intellectually, it is an experience. It happens when the time is right. Usually an experienced teacher will be able to tell if you can disown your actions, that is the time to act from the higher will, that is the time to free the Mind from responsibility of our actions. This also means that there will be a shift from the path of knowledge to the path of devotion, as it demands complete surrender of the Mind. Actions that happen in a “mind-free” state are not owned. A teacher can recognize this state. Don’t have a teacher? Too bad.

Lastly, on the topic of practical considerations, we all have encountered a beast called “ethical conundrum” in our lives (lets shorten it to EC, makes it less terrifying). It is a situation when one is simply unable to decide what is good and what is bad and one is petrified, unable to take any action. ECs show us the limitations of our Minds, its not perfect, it cannot be. Sometimes the processes responsible for ethical functions are challenged, and nothing meaningful comes out of them. We experience this situation as total confusion, sometimes we resolve it with a toss of a coin. This trick may not work if lives of others are at stake. Your brother is a terrorist, and is asking for a shelter. Should you save him or call police, who will surely shoot him there and then? Life of your brother matters to you and your ethical training tells you otherwise. Makes a nice plot for a movie. You will call the police and give up your own life trying to save your brother in the gunfire that ensues, he is shot anyway and the whole nation is saved. No one blames you as you tried your best to do good for your brother as well as for national security and your dead body is an evidence that you did exactly that. You are a hero, you killed EC. Really? Not really. This is an EC, it

never goes away. What we do is - surrender our Mind and let things happen, just observe. Remember that when you are on a path, there is no terrorist, no police, no duties and you do not have a brother. Period. [3]

Never let your sense of morals get in the way of doing what's right.

- Isaac Asimov

Do not be too moral. You may cheat yourself out of much life so. Aim above morality. Be not simply good, be good for something.

- Henry David Thoreau

There can be a billion kinds of ethics and a trillion situations where these billion fail. Is it really meaningful or even useful? What is the essence of ethics? In my experience, it all boils down to just one idea – do not cause harm. **Harm** being a consequence that increases the overall entropy, destroys structure, reduces knowledge, hinders the evolution of the Mind. One will never be able to not cause harm in all cases and situations, this is a world of duality after all, still one needs to strive for it. Not causing harm is more elegantly stated as the path of **Nonviolence**, where the word “violence” means same as “harm”, I define above [4]. Nonviolence not only means not killing humans, animals and plants, it also involves not causing harm of any kind to the mental structures we see all around us, including physical and non-physical ones. A nonviolent action is always good, one need not worry about it. The structures build up themselves, one need not do much to help them, it is nicely taken care of by the Fundamental Process, whose only job is to build the structure in face of impermanence. When one is violent (in stated broad terms), one delays, hinders, destroys the process. This is a strict no no, if all you want is to complete the process as fast as possible. Simply being nonviolent achieves this, even if you take no proactive actions to hasten the evolution. Nonviolence, taken in its broadest meaning, is a path in itself that leads to liberation. So all ethics boils down to nonviolence. One need not follow any ethical guidelines, need not debate what is good/bad, need not study the mental processes in detail, one just needs to be nonviolent, that’s the only necessary and sufficient condition. This makes it all so easy. It is like traversing your path in a luxury BMW, in the five star comfort of nonviolence.

Beyond right and wrong, there is a field. I will meet you there.

- Rumi

Here we come to the end of a brief summary of the extraordinary abilities of the Mind. It is by no means a completion, it is just the end of my own knowledge. If I find some more interesting stuff to share, I will post it here. I may keep making some changes here and there, all of this is not written in stone. I expect that I myself shall change a lot, and so all that I am sharing may become either refined or totally outdated.

Notes:

[1] Some will disagree here, but I urge you to read some of the many psychological studies done on humans and animals, which aim to find an explanation of altruism. Some introspection and logical thinking will also lead you to the same conclusion.

Altruism, compassion, empathy, love, conscience, the sense of justice -- all of these things, the things that hold society together, the things that allow our species to think so highly of itself, can now confidently be said to have a firm genetic basis. That's the good news. The bad news is that, although these things are in some ways blessings for humanity as a whole, they didn't evolve for the 'good of the species' and aren't reliably employed to that end. Quite the contrary: it is now clearer than ever (and precisely why) the moral sentiments are used with brutal flexibility, switched on and off in keeping with self interest; and how naturally oblivious we often are to this switching. In the new view, human beings are a species splendid in their array of moral equipment, tragic in their propensity to misuse it, and pathetic in their constitutional ignorance of the misuse.

- Robert Wright

[2] If you are wondering, why was the first post of this blog about choosing a path, here is the reason. Everything starts with choosing a path, else your actions are just randomly good or bad, totally on the mercy of situations and other people. Whatever good or bad you do has no significance if there is no path, if there is no end goal, if there is no greater purpose to your life.

Cheshire Puss, asked Alice. Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here? That depends a good deal on where you want to go, said the Cat. I don't much care where, said Alice. Then it doesn't matter which way you go, said the Cat.

- Charles "Lewis Carroll" Dodgson, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* 1865

[3] I'm sure this matter of ECs is confusing as hell. But as an aside, why can't a seeker have brothers? Why can't he have emotions like love and altruism? He can, nobody is denying that. But over and above that, a seeker sees everything, everyone, all states of his Mind as occurrences in the Presence witnessed by the Self (if he is a good seeker that is). There is no one to favour because there is no one. ECs are like a test, a very good opportunity to practice that. Actions will happen anyway, but there will be no actor, it will be as good as not acting. Is no action still an action? No, its no action. There are no actions anyway, nothing really happens and thus all actions are no actions. I think I confused you even more...

[4] *Abimsa paramo dharma (Mahabharata)* – nonviolence is the ultimate right action,

as the ancient wisdom says. Some traditions like Jainism take this to extreme, where nonviolence is a major and necessary contributor to the process of liberation. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahimsa> for more on this vast topic.

Afflictions of the Mind : Part-1 (Deception of the senses)

We will now begin a series of articles on afflictions of the Mind. Afflictions are undesirable side effects produced by the highly complex processes that occur in the Mind. While bearing in the mind that the afflictions are also perfect, there is nothing wrong with them and there is no natural law that compels anyone to remove them, we will still try to see what are the possible ways to see them clearly and in case of extremely dysfunctional ones, how one can eradicate them effectively. There are certain tricks that I learned from great masters, that I found work nicely in my experience, however, everyone has a unique Mind and these may or may not work for all. This is not an article on medical/psychological matters, so those who are crazy beyond repair will not find it useful. These afflictions are seen as "normal" by the human society, and are good examples of socially accepted madness. Those who are on the path, know them very well and strive to stay uninfluenced by them.

How can I know that I'm afflicted? Everyone is, don't worry. The telltale sign of afflictions is suffering and bondage. That is the main motivation behind hunting them down. It is not really important to completely cure them, in most cases, simply being aware of them is enough.

1. Deception of the senses

Almost all of the contents that the Mind organizes originate from senses (internal or external). What we perceive is only as good as what the senses are capable of. Our world views are totally dependent on what we perceive. The reverse can also be said, our perception gradually becomes dependent on our existing knowledge. So much so that we are unable to perceive anything that is outside the narrow beliefs derived from extremely narrow sensory contents.

It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see.
– Henry David Thoreau

It is debatable what lies outside the sensory radar. It does appear that whatever lies in its range is being created and perceived simultaneously. In other words, there is no difference between creation of the contents and perceptions of them. When there is no perception, there are no contents, things do not exist if they are not perceived. This is seen very clearly during an out of body trip (aka Astral Projection) where there is no difference between an intention to see something, its creation and its perception. It is less obvious in normal waking state, but can be experienced with some careful observation.

Gradually, as the Mind gathers knowledge, it erects walls of knowledge and beliefs around itself, becomes more and more limited. It can be counter intuitive, more knowledge should lead to more freedom not less. The freedom does not come from sense perceptions and their organization, this should be seen clearly. Freedom comes from not taking sense perceptions literally, not letting walls of belief form, and clearly understanding how the senses build up a limited world, a VR like immersive environment around the Mind. Once this is understood, freedom results, else one is trapped in this sensory game forever.

Two-thirds of what we see is behind our eyes.
– Chinese proverb

The firm conviction that the absolute “reality” or “truth” is nothing but what the senses tell us is an affliction of the Mind. The belief is complete and strong, and most of the time nothing can be done to eradicate it, if one is not willing and open. Mother nature comes to help in the form of suffering, beliefs begets suffering..... always. Not only that, such people cause suffering for others and also destroy their physical surroundings, they find enough justification for that. The sensory illusion creates a separation of “me” [1] from the rest, and so, for the one who is afflicted, it is not possible to see that the damage is being done to the self, not to the others or objects. There are no others and no separate objects, the separation is an illusion (really? refer previous entries please for a discussion on Identity).

How to get rid of this affliction? If you are reading this blog since start, the answer should be obvious, I repeat it again and again because this is the only trick that works most of the time, and it is – be aware of it all. Being aware, conscious, attentive towards how the senses limit us will help in getting rid of this limitation. Does it magically make the usual world disappear and will another “more real” world appear to me instead? No! Everything remains as is, only the Mind changes, not the external forms. The awareness of the illusion will not make the illusion go away, instead, simply, one is not fooled by it anymore. Our choices

and actions are now free from the influence of the hypnotic senses. This is a great achievement in itself.

If you are on your own, it will appear almost impossible to go beyond the senses. A teacher who is free from the trap of perception is needed. Books, discussions, audio-visual material – all this also helps. Fortunately, there are many studies and enough material out there that shows how the Mind creates a sensory world out of mere information. Anyhow, if you are on a path of knowledge, you will want to see it for yourself, and not depend on other's experiences. For those who are daredevils, I recommend learning Astral Projection or Lucid Dreaming. These techniques directly show the practitioner the illusion that we call a physical world. One should not make a mistake of assuming that it is just one of trillions of worlds, physical or non-physical, it is merely an illusion. These "worlds" are not pre-existing, they are not there actually [2]. Worlds can be created on demand, the Mind is a mean-machine when it comes to creation. Words cannot describe how powerful the Mind is, it is flabbergasting and beyond comprehension. One needs to experience it first hand, even a short experience is enough to give you an idea, to free you from the illusion of senses. One need not spend their entire lives exploring the creative powers of the Mind. Get the point, get out of it.

If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is – infinite.
– William Blake

So its all an illusion and once this affliction of seeing it otherwise is gone, one can simply torch everything around him, kill people randomly and let it all crash and burn. Its only an illusion, right?, nothing should matter here. Well, I say - try it, go ahead, you are setting yourself up for a big surprise if you do that, you will not like it, it will not be a pleasant surprise, I bet. The sensory world is an illusion, but illusion does not mean that there is nothing there, it merely means that the underlying structures appear to us in a form that is iconic, not literal. It is not possible (in my opinion) to see structures as they are, there will always be an interpretation, and the interpretation appears as an illusion. Structures stand on the shoulders of other structures, and once they begin forming, they produce a unique creation – an illusion, if you will, when they are interpreted by other structures. In the case of our physical universe, the "other structures" I mention are senses, and the more fundamental structures are material in nature, the illusory particles – atomic or subatomic or subsubatomic, depending on how deep one is willing to dig.

When one destroys the worlds or its inhabitants, one is destroying these structures, the destruction is there, no matter how they appear. This should be clear. Even if the structures and processes of the Mind are presented in an iconic

“illusory form”, they are there and are “real”. One should not destroy them for the same reason one does not delete a file icon on your computer just because it doesn’t look like a series of voltage spikes (1/0s). The file represents a meaningful structure and the fancy graphic icon is there for a purpose, it is an illusion though, it is not what the file is [3]. You might lose your precious work if you think you are deleting an icon, and you will not like the consequences. Especially, in our physical universe, there is no recycle bin, one cannot simply restore everything as it was, and the consequences are unforgiving, they will come back and bite you. And therefore, it is so important to realize the illusion for what it is. One must not meddle with it, justifying one’s actions on incorrect assumptions. Once one is free of the illusion, one sees the underlying immensity and beauty of it, and one automatically perseveres to enhance it, and if nothing else, will not mess with it at least [4].

Notes:

[1] The “me” is to be discussed in detail later, it was already discussed under the topic of Identity. It is just a concept and is derived from how far the nervous system extends (among other things). Its obvious that it does not extend beyond one’s skin (and hardly extends inwards into the body also). The pain/pleasure signals from senses and limited ability to influence one’s body (affecters and effecters) help to form a belief that one’s self extends only up to one’s skin and everything beyond it is not self, or is others/objects. The funny thing is – if one is fed with pain signals coming out of a table (say), which is somehow fitted with neural structures or similar, one would start perceiving the table as self too. Just hit that table with a hammer, if you wish to experimentally confirm this. There is a tendency to cut off hair and nails etc from one’s body (no neural structures there, so no pain etc), and as soon as they are cut off, they become not-self, just trash. We do not see this tendency in regard to one’s own head... for example. Another exotic example is – a player perceives his avatar in a game as himself (when the immersion is deep, the game is realistic and the player is playing that avatar for a long time), and any damage caused to the avatar is “felt” as if caused to oneself. There is some pain and suffering, even if the connection is not physical (neural, like in the case of the table). A mere conceptual connection – the idea that the avatar is me, is enough. Ask any gamer. Something similar happens with mothers, who tend to consider their child as their extension, and with car enthusiasts, for whom any damage caused to their car brings a huge amount of suffering. The concept of identity is arbitrary and is useful, but only when it is seen for what it is.

[2] That said, experts will tell you that it is possible to build a world that is stable and openly accessible (objective) by others. Our physical universe can be said to be one such creation. It does sound very strange to newcomers in this field, and frankly speaking, I've personally not created any worlds or universes, never seen any other than our good old physical one, where you are currently reading this. So take it or leave it.

[3] One can take this analogy further to understand one important thing – nothing is created and nothing is destroyed in a fundamental sense. If you destroy the file, say by overwriting it with a random string of bits, you are only destroying the structure, not the fundamental entity that supports the bits (e.g. a hard disk). There were bits before and there are bits after. Only thing is that now your program that you use to read that file cannot interpret it, as it was programmed to interpret a specific format, a specific structure. When a mental structure is destroyed, say a body or a tree, it simply gets rearranged into something else, and the Mind simply interprets it differently. Our impressions and knowledge about the thing that was destroyed produce the illusion of destruction, especially when the resulting entropy is higher than before. So one can say that nothing can be destroyed, it was not there to start with in fundamental terms. Similarly nothing is created, its just an rearrangement, an interpretation by the Mind, that is programmed to interpret it in a specific way. It creates a specific “illusion” out of given information using its (evolved) army of programs. More on mental programs can be found in earlier entries in this blog.

[4] Illusion is not an accurate word for the deception of senses we talked about, the proper word is *Maya* (Sanskrit, that which is not), there is no corresponding English word. It has been elucidated widely since ages. There are many volumes written about it, if you are interested in ancient views on how the Mind creates an illusory world.

Maya is not illusion as it is popularly interpreted. Maya is real, yet it is not real. It is real in that the Real is behind it and gives it its appearance of reality. That which is real in Maya is the Reality in and through Maya. Yet the Reality is never seen ; and hence that which is seen is unreal, and it has no real independent existence of itself, but is dependent upon the Real for its existence. Maya then is a paradox—real, yet not real, an illusion, yet not an illusion. He who knows the Real sees in Maya not illusion, but reality. He who knows not the Real sees in Maya illusion and thinks it real.

- Swami Vivekananda

Afflictions of the Mind : Part -2 (The Trick of Time)

2. The Trick of Time

We have already seen how the Mind employs a neat trick to put all the experiences in an easily accessible sequence. It uses an axis called time and marks the events on it. Experiences happen, they don't come with a time stamp attached to them, the Mind adds the stamp. It makes the experiences more organized and their recall (simulation via impressions) easier. Whenever there is a change, there is an experience, or we can as well define an experience as **Change** (which we have already done, see Experiencing). So change is more fundamental. Some changes happen at seemingly regular fashion, such as change of a day into night, orbit of the earth around the Sun and vibrations of atoms. This allows us to compare an irregular change with regular one, and we can express the irregular change in terms of regular one. Thus the **Physical Time** is born, which is just a regular change, it is not an entity, as it does not exist as such, it's merely a concept. We use devices, clocks, to count the regular changes. Comparing an irregular experience with the counts of a clock immediately gives more information about the change, and the concepts of slow or fast are created. Now we can stamp a number on an event, making it even more structured. Physical time is derived from physical changes that happen around us, but there is another time – the **Subjective Time**, which is based on mental changes, and has no correspondence with physical one [3].

In my experience, every change, every experience, every event, every recall is seen in now – the timeless background of change. I'm sure, it's your experience too, and perhaps everyone else's. So why are we so adamant about the idea that everything happens in time, and there is some mythical universal clock out there that is keeping all the time? It's merely conditioning [1]. We are actually incapable of organizing our experiences without time, I feel helpless when I try to write something without putting it in temporal context. Our languages are time based. Our thoughts are also somewhat time based, as we use memory a lot while thinking. I can't help but use words like – happening, event, occurring etc etc to describe nonexistence of time, which is illogical, as it assumes time in the first

place. Our societies, actions, education, jobs, and entire lives are time based. There are apparently three kinds of time – past, present and future. If an experience is derived from memory, it gets a stamp of past, if its derived from senses, it is stamped as present and if it is an extrapolation of events (imagination) it is future. So we see that there is no past, present or future as such, these are mere ideas used to categorize an experience. The future is thus, just a projection of the past. The past is just memory. There was no time in the past and there will be none in the future [2].

Time does not exist independently of ourselves, it is simply an illusion and measurement of our minds and body's perceptions.
- David Lewis Anderson

Time is an illusion, however, it is very useful. It is not possible for a human mind to conduct its affairs without it. It has survived because it has survival value. It helps to know that there will probably a winter season ahead (or a dry season), when food will be scarce, so one can stock it up. It helps to recall the past attack of a predator and take a different route home. Those who did not do so, did not survive for long. So when does it become an affliction? When one becomes a slave of time, instead of an user of time. Time controls the lives of many people, who become clockwork themselves while following the clock very-very strictly. Right from getting up from the sleep, eating, using bathrooms, going for work, having tea, and what not, to the exact time of going to sleep – all of it is governed by clock for such people. Such people want their entertainment on a specific day at a specific time, their news on time and even plan their marriages and babies to happen on specific times. They can be recognized easily, as they spend most of their time looking at their clocks. For them there is never enough time and everything must be done now, else it's a waste of time. Entire societies and cultures have become a slave of time. This is something to ponder upon.

Modern man thinks he loses something - time - when he does not do things quickly. Yet he does not know what to do with the time he gains -- except kill it.
- Erich Fromm

Actually punctuality is seen as a “good” quality by the society, sign of a disciplined mind. And one would ask what is wrong in being so, it makes things so easy and predictable if every one of us behaves synchronously. Of course, whenever a social situation demands a strict time schedule, one must follow it, and that is desirable, however, one needs to draw a line where the whole time madness ends, the freedom from time starts there. Those who live like a clockwork live a miserable life, a life where everything is rushed, everything is mechanical and events are just pushed into past from the future. For such people there is no present. Present time is just there to make space for future time, where

the real things will be. Present becomes an anxiety. Such people spend their lives anticipating future while dwelling in the past. Their life is only their past – the things they did and the roles they played. There is nothing new in their lives, no spontaneity, no freedom.

Moreover, such people try to discipline others who are naturally inclined to be less dependent on time, who want to live in the present. When children are indoctrinated in such a way, they become dull, lifeless robots, having rigid minds and little creativity. Time becomes their prison. A person who always lives in the past or the future misses the life completely. Life happens now, past and future also happen now. Such people are always afraid of the future, seek the safety of the past, have little desire to change or improve and are mostly pessimistic. They tend to force others to conform to their own ways, resisting any novelty, any improvements, anything that is not so predictable.

So the obvious question arises, how to be free from the illusion of time? It is not possible to simply make time vanish, as it is an essential structure in the Mind. If one wishes to play the game of human life, one must respect the rules of the game, and one of them is - everything happens and seen as happening in the framework of time. It is wise not to destroy this framework, but to use it effectively. It is wise to be aware of how time is created by the Mind, and to not regard it as a fundamental entity one can experience. One cannot experience time, but only the change in contents of the Mind, this should be very clear. Once this is clear and perceived, time changes, it no longer controls us, we control it or rather we allow it. Now the events just happen, they need not happen on a specific time. Time happens on a specific event.

How to use time effectively? A seeker needs to be very practical about time, even after it is seen for what it is. Seeing that human life is limited in time, this experience of life doesn't last forever, one must do his best to not to waste time. However, one cannot be very rigid about it. If an activity takes you forward on your path, it is correct use of the time, else it is a waste. This is the rule of thumb. It may not be possible to follow it very strictly, as external events that result in a waste of time are mostly not in our control, but some effort must be made to utilize the time available for oneself. The path of knowledge requires practice, and practice requires time. The more time one can spare for practices, faster is the progress.

So much of our time is spent in preparation, so much in routine, and so much in retrospect, that the amount of each person's genius is confined to a very few hours.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

How to have more time? It all starts after the path is clearly seen. Once one

knows the goals, one can set priorities. Do the stuff that matters most first. What matters most are the actions that result in a fast progress. Actions that are not contributing towards progress are simply a waste of time. Some actions required for day to day survival must be performed, but those can be minimized easily. Simplifying life helps in it. A job which devours most of your day, relations which demand a 24x7 presence, objects and belongings that need a lot of maintenance, social events that eat up all your free time, distractions that simply slow you down - all these need to be gotten rid of. A simple life, pure life, a life full of contentment, will naturally provide an abundance of time for your practice. It is not recommended to cut down the time spent on necessary activities like sleep (is it an activity?), entertainment, study and some socializing. Isn't that a waste too? Too much of it is a waste. Life is an experience, and we naturally seek pleasant experiences, so there should be enough such experiences, else life becomes dull and miserable, especially when you have not yet mastered the path. Some travel, parties, celebrations, etc are an essential part of life experience. Too much or too little - not recommended. Once one progresses on the path, one naturally needs less and less external pleasures, as the source of happiness lies within, not outside.

If you have a job which pays more but takes up the major portion of your day or requires long commuting, travels or tours, then you need to re-prioritize things. Oh, a high paying job *is* your path? Well, nothing wrong in that... but you are on a wrong blog then. If you are spending time on cooking elaborate lunches, spend two hours eating it, cleaning a pile of dishes twice a day, arranging a score of stuff in house everyday, washing and maintenance, long sessions of gossip and phone calls, shopping for the next shiny thing or fad, too much entertainment, too many relations and visits by relatives who take up all your free time and vacations, and many countless such activities, that are a hallmark of our "modern lifestyle" - you are not on a path, and this blog should be useless for you. If you still feel you are on a path while you have such a lifestyle, then not only you are wasting your time, your life, you have no chance of making any intentional progress at all.

When you are on a path, you can only use time to organize your life, you cannot be controlled by it. When you see that all is well organized and nothing important needs to be done, you can let go of the time. The Self knows no time, when it is with itself, it is timeless. It is possible to be like so while living a normal life. When you are aware of the processes of the Mind that create this illusion, you are freed from it, and you clearly understand why others behave the way they do in regard to time, then you are freed from the need to judge them, control them. The life becomes a spontaneous flow, a continuous change rather than a struggle with time.

Notes:

[1] There are interesting studies that show how the perception of time differs with cultures and societies. If you are in India, for example, the time becomes a very fuzzy thing and for most people it means very little. Everything flows in a leisurely way, and events happen when they are supposed to happen, not very dependent on clocks. Commitments about time are rarely kept. This causes minor problems like small projects taking 20 years to complete and meetings that take one hour to start because people don't feel any need to arrive on time. Even trains don't arrive on time and flights don't take off on their scheduled times. This is of course normal for an Indian, but others, especially westerners find it very confusing.

[2] Much can be said about the origin of the concept of the time. There are good books and studies about it. It does look like it has an evolutionary origin, just like most of the characteristics of the Mind. Some animals (such as migratory birds, and hoarders like rats) also behave as if they are planning for the future and are aware of the time. But it may not be so, the "time" for them is not a concept, just a hardwired program. In humans, the temporal programs have evolved to a higher level, obviously, so much so that time is now our "reality".

[3] Western philosophy is full of discussions about time. In my opinion, Kant comes closest to the modern understanding of time. Quoting from here:

Immanuel Kant, in the Critique of Pure Reason, described time as an a priori intuition that allows us (together with the other a priori intuition, space) to comprehend sense experience. With Kant, neither space nor time are conceived as substances, but rather both are elements of a systematic mental framework that necessarily structures the experiences of any rational agent, or observing subject. Kant thought of time as a fundamental part of an abstract conceptual framework, together with space and number, within which we sequence events, quantify their duration, and compare the motions of objects. In this view, time does not refer to any kind of entity that "flows," that objects "move through," or that is a "container" for events. Spatial measurements are used to quantify the extent of and distances between objects, and temporal measurements are used to quantify the durations of and between events.

Afflictions of the Mind : Part - 3 (Impulses and Desires)

3. Impulses and Desires

As we have seen in the article on Intentions, there are certain activities of the Mind, certain processes that incite action. This is an extraordinary gift, to be able to act and cause a change in one's surroundings merely via non-physical processes. Actions produce consequences and the Mind learns from them, it evolves and progresses further. As I've said, everything starts with an intention. It is very important that one sees how intentions arise and cause actions. This can be done by conscious observation, and the actions can be stopped in many cases by the act of choice.

Intentions arise as Experiencing, a continuous motion in Presence, they are mostly automatic. They arise out of the vast store of impressions in the Mind [1]. In my opinion, it is not possible to consciously stop an intention from appearing, but it is possible to either ignore it or to act on it once it is already there. An untrained Mind has very little capability to see and choose whether to act or not on an intention, and it is here that these uncontrolled processes take the form of an affliction. Uncontrolled intentions take hold of the person and make him do things of which he is barely aware, causing a lot of negative consequences, suffering and pain for himself and also for others.

Uncontrolled intentions appear in many forms. We will discuss them in detail here. One can easily see that these forms are not very different from each other, they are just intentions. The most primitive of these are just control systems, useful for survival. For example touching a hot object makes one withdraw his hand in a split second, the intention and the action is very fast, uncontrolled, and one becomes conscious of it only after it happens. This is a good thing, else we wouldn't survive for long. I don't recommend messing with them.

Next are the semi-psychological hardwired processes of fight/flight, phobias, complexes and such behaviours. We can call them **Reactions**. In stressful or novel situations they take over the person. Action results in response to the situation. These behaviours are also there for ensuring survival. Some people, such as those trained in martial arts have a good control over them, but most of us don't. It takes a hard practice, fit body and a long time to master these. In our

modern societies, self-defence has been delegated to certain organizations (fortunately or unfortunately [2]), and dangerous situations can be avoided most of the time by intelligent planning, so it is not required to master these processes. I'd recommend leaving them alone, because once in danger, the body/mind knows best. If you find that you are indiscriminately either very aggressive in danger or always flee at the slightest hint of danger, then fear has overtaken you. Fear is a major affliction in itself, especially irrational fear, and we will discuss it later. Reactive behaviour is a trait of ignorant person. Most of us spend our lives reacting, not acting.

How not to react? I think it is not possible to avoid a reaction, unless the very being of oneself is free from survival instincts. In that case, we have left the domain of human experience already, and the matter goes beyond the scope of this blog. We become aware of the reaction only in retrospect, and all one can do is avoid the situations which cause unwanted reactions. A relative, a job, a place, anything that is making you react unconsciously, is not for you. It is a challenge, yes, and you must decide if you want to waste your life in fixing external issues or to simply avoid them, being fully aware that reactions are a part of human body/mind. If your reactions are overwhelming, and causing harm, then you are most probably in a bad situation, because reactions are triggered by external situation. One seldom reacts while sitting alone in peace.

Next are the **Impulses**. These are semi-hardwired, a mix of genetic and acquired behaviours. Sexual impulses are a good example of hardwired intentions, while compulsive lying is an acquired behaviour [4]. Impulses are very strong intentions to act, usually beyond the control of an ordinary person. Impulses result in action, and the person is made aware of them only after the action happens. Most of the time the person will justify the impulsive actions using beliefs or illogical thoughts. For example buying some useless thing on impulse and giving it a justification that he may need it. Impulses are not always superficial, they can also cause great harm, for example after a fight, one is bombarded with impulses of insulting the enemy or even killing him. The result is immense suffering, and a higher risk of actually harming the other person because the impulse heightens the anger. One can actually see the person acting on the impulse, the muscles tighten, respiration and circulation go up and the body gets ready for a fight, even in the absence of the enemy. When an impulse arises, it completely takes over the mind, the mind loses its rational abilities, it's a foggy situation there, nothing is seen clearly, sometimes the person sees and hears what the impulse tells him to see and hear. The main problem with impulses is they are repetitive, they keep occurring over and over and make life miserable. One can recognize an impulsive person by certain traits, such as he is always busy, unhappy, superficial, restless,

confused, looking for trouble, or is shabby.

How to avoid impulsive behaviour? Usually mother nature trains the Mind to be less impulsive with time, as impulsive actions mostly result in pain and suffering. That's one way, but it is slow and painful, obviously. Since the impulse is recognized only after the action has taken place, for an untrained mind, it is best to note it later. Instead of giving it a random justification, just realize that it was an impulsive act, accept it as it is. This is just a start, but you will find that the impulse will be somewhat weaker next time and will be slower, because somewhere in the mind, the structures responsible for it have weakened a bit, as they no longer have the support of a justification. So not justifying it is a good way to start. Another way is to practice the control intentionally. Suppose you eat on impulse (and have an unhealthy weight as a result), it helps to keep the food in plate and not to eat it intentionally and consciously. This slowly trains the mind, and the impulse to eat starts fading. This trick can be easily generalized. If you are irritated by a certain person and take irrational actions, it helps to consciously and intentionally face that person and try to be nice. There is another way – to set a counter intention, also known as **Affirmation**. A counter intention, when established, arises with a particular impulse and opposes it. So for example, if you practice a positive affirmation (e.g. repeat it all the time) that you shall not hate a person, who is a source of suffering, when an impulse to hate that person arises, the affirmation arises too and you become aware of the impulse, and can kill it there and then. Positive affirmations are a very powerful tool. Use it wisely [3].

These are obviously somewhat mechanical tricks and are recommended when nothing works. However, if you are on a path and have some inkling about self-observation, the recommended method to kill an impulse is to simply observe it. One has to be very aware, intently conscious round the clock to be able to do this. When you are so aware, you can catch the impulse in action, analyse it logically, and terminate it if you wish. It also helps to be very aware of bodily feelings, because an impulse usually causes perceptible feelings and sensations in the body and when you are so aware of your body, you know that an impulse is coming. In my experience, an impulse comes as a whiplash; it completely occupies the mind, takes over the senses and tries to push the body into action/speech. Not exactly a nice feeling.

Now we move on to desires, also known as wants or cravings. These are mostly acquired, an influence of outside environment. **Desires** are intentions to act or to be or to possess objects/people, and are motivated by the ephemeral pleasure such actions cause or once caused. They are also motivated by seeing others getting pleasure out of an act or an object and believing that the same would bring pleasure to oneself. As you must be aware, desires come in millions of

varieties, and I'm not going to list them all. Everyone has desires, so what is wrong with having them? Desires are fun, spring us into action and are agreeable as long as they don't cause suffering and harm. They become an affliction, as soon as they cause actions that are harmful, cause suffering or retard you on your path. Strong desires lead to Obsessions, and make our lives very narrow and shallow.

So I have a desire to live, desire to be happy and desire to do good for others, are these desires also afflictions? That's a good question. A better question is – are those stated desires causing suffering when they are not fulfilled? If they are, then they are afflictions. It's not the desire itself that causes suffering, it's the unfulfilled desires, they throw us into suffering. One needs to think about the consequences an action based on a particular desire can cause, and then decide whether it is an affliction. One can argue that the desire to live and be happy etc are not actually desires because they come built in, they are the desires of the universe, if you will, or in our terminology, these are the fundamental attributes of Presence. However, one still must consciously categorize these “meta-desires” when they are causing suffering and retardation in your path, and yes they can. For example, if you suffer from an incurable disease, say it's very painful, and the treatments are simply keeping your body barely functioning, you are just a useless pile of organic matter, this situation is obviously causing huge amount of suffering to you (and loved ones), so the desire to live must be given up here.

Am I not entitled to a desire? I'm obviously free so why can't I have any desire and why can't I act on it? Oh yes, yes, free....hmm. The real freedom lies in choosing to execute a desire or to throw it away. If you are compelled to act on a desire, it is not freedom, is it? As I said, by definition, desires are accumulated programs, outside influences. One is not born with desires (e.g. a desire to be a doctor or some such). Desires get installed by random occurrences and experiences of life, there is hardly any freedom to choose one's desires. They happen. In modern world most desires can be traced to TV commercials and such brainwashing activities of “civilized societies”. Can one not choose to desire something consciously? One can, but then it won't be called a desire (does not fit the definition), it would be a conscious intention, and yes, a conscious intention is a better substitute for a random desire acquired from nowhere.

If I don't desire, how will I progress, how will I improve and how will I get things done? This is a frequently asked question, and people are totally confused about it. The answer is simple actually – If a desire is positive, the action is harmless or beneficial (depending on your path, life goals), then go ahead and act on it. However, if you fail repeatedly to fulfil it, and it has become a source of misery, terminate it, do something else, life is vast and one need not stick to just one narrow itty-bitsy desire. Once it becomes a source of suffering for the self or for

others, or is just a waste of time, its an affliction and it's the right time to kill it. It all depends on your meaning of progress and improvement etc, if you are not on a genuine path, these words are merely borrowed ideas from others. A monkey see monkey do thing. If you are on a path you will find no desires there, it is just your life to progress and improve. Desires are something that is just distractions on the path of improvement, the definition changes. Please clearly see this.

Ok so how to get rid of those pesky desires? This is an involved affair, especially for those who are not on a path. Firstly, one needs to categorize the desires, there are so many, it can take a while. Are they harmless or harmful, can they cause suffering or happiness, are they important or useless, are they long term or instant, etc, etc. It is recommended that you keep a dynamic list of desires, write them down, old fashioned way, with the most important and necessary ones on the top. A priority list of to do things. Remove those that cannot be fulfilled or are causing pain, promote those that you see are more important now compared to the past. Assuming that most desires will not take up a lifetime, you will get a very dynamic list, ever-changing. Just reading this list will make you aware of things about yourself. It should be easy to see which desires are not needed or are causing suffering. Cancel them, intend not to act on them. Plan something else. This will kill them. If they arise again from dead, these are not desires, these are then impulses, and you need to kill them using anti-impulse weapons mentioned above.

There is no limit to desires, when one is fulfilled another arises. For some people, life is nothing but an endless pursuit of desires. When to stop, where to stop? The list, if you desire to list them, should show you this clearly. Your Mind keeps desiring. What's wrong here? It's the nature of the Mind, it has experiences, it has structure, impressions, it has programs, and these produce endless intentions and desires. It is not a problem, the problem is not being aware of the nature of Mind. When desires are let loose, they govern you, you are a slave of desires, and there lies the problem. Can we limit them? Possibly, but I think there is no need, just become aware, realize that this will happen as long as you are bound to an earthly existence, to a human experience. This realization should propel you on your path. Once one is fully aware of the processes and causes/consequences of desires, one is freed from them. You can either waste your life killing them in whack-a-mole fashion, or just let them be, not acting on them, or acting consciously whenever needed.

Lastly we come to Wishes. A wish is a synonym for a desire in common language, but I'm deliberately going to define it as something else. A **Wish** is an intention that lasts for a much longer time compared to a desire, can be a life time, or many life times. I'm defining it so just to keep things clear. So we see that the intentions

can be categorized based on their time durations.

Short term <-- Controls < Reactions < Impulses < Desires < Wishes --> Long term

Usually the resulting actions should also follow the same pattern in time. So a wish is something that can last for years, and continues to produce actions, until it is fulfilled. Usually a wish is not replaced by another wish, unlike desires, that are endless. Once a wish is fulfilled, you are done. There is another major difference, an unfulfilled wish will not necessarily cause suffering. Wish is more conscious, there is a bit more wisdom in it and there is more control on what one can wish for.

Examples of a wish can be – to live a certain kind of life, to discover things, to explore, to rule or earn wealth, to acquire powers, to learn and acquire information, etc, etc. Wishes govern the overall lifestyle of a person. Be careful what you wish for....

Can a wish become an affliction? Yes, it is also a construct of the Mind and can go out of hand. For example a wish to be a powerful person, such as a king, can make you assemble armies of dudes who randomly kill people and destroy entire civilizations. This lasts for a lifetime, and is obviously not fun, especially for peaceful people. A wish can also become an obsession, difficult to get rid of. Even a positive wish, such as to serve humanity or to develop new technology, is a bondage. We are not here to do that. We are here to be free, a positive act can happen, but it need not become your entire life, it's a small sub-goal at best. So if you find that your wishes (as defined) are consuming your entire life, it is wise to become aware of them and limit them. Should not be a problem for a wise person.

Well then, is my path not my wish? No, not by definition, unless you are not clear about it. Wish is a structure in the Mind, a program, an intention, a plan to do/get something in one's life. A path is life itself. You don't wish to be on a path, the path wishes you to be on it. Subtle, you see.

Notes:

[1] The impressions are structures formed in the Mind as a result of its experiences. They can be genetic, social conditioning, personal experiences in this life or accumulated experiences of other forms of Self. We will not go into past lives and incarnations here, because these are beyond the current experience of most of us. If one has clearly seen that the Self is only one, it's the same for all

life forms present or past, one can easily infer that all life forms are just “incarnations” or avatars of the one Self.

[2] Delegation of self-defence to other agents in exchange of money (tax?) has both positive and negative consequences. Positive because you don’t need to worry too much about security and danger, there is an illusion of security which keeps you at peace. The fear of security agencies keeps petty criminals away and makes ordinary people behave better. On the other hand, it makes you totally helpless, incapable of self-defence, incapable of fighting or killing others when needed. So when danger strikes you are on the mercy of random chance.

[3] It works because the brain has a tendency to recall all associated information when in a particular situation. What you are doing here is programming a hook, a link or an association that can arise as soon as the related impulse arises. Affirmations can be used for general improvement of the self. For example, in overcoming lethargy or inertia, overcoming nervousness and fear of social situations etc. If you are weak and need some muscle, but cannot motivate yourself to work out, an affirmation saying that you are doing so and you are getting stronger, helps. Of course, you need to actually work out. Mere affirmation is not magically going to grow the muscles. It simply makes you want to work out. It is best to terminate the affirmations once their job is done, else they become habitual and take up mental energy.

[4] Sexual or procreative impulses are the strongest ones in the entire universe. These have been very well studied and experimented upon under various scientific disciplines. Procreation gets more weightage in almost all situations. Human lives, majority of them, are driven by procreative impulses. From clothes to marriages/relations, ideals, behaviours, love, likes, most of our thought, talk, actions and even creations (movies, fiction, houses etc) are a result of procreative impulses. People spend their entire lives on the leash of these impulses. Usually at the end of the life, when hormones lose their strength and the person has gone through all impulse traps, one realizes that he has spent his entire life living below the belt. These are strong and are difficult to get rid of. Various strategies have been proposed to deal with them and these range from extremes like celibacy to Tantra, or somewhat simpler four staged lifestyles. These are found easily in books, so please refer to any suitable books, if interested.

Afflictions of the Mind : Part - 4.1 (The Prison of Beliefs)

4. The Prison of Beliefs

4.1 What is a Belief?

We have already discussed beliefs previously in brief. Here I'm going to peel the onions, do hair splitting and perform surgery on them. This is needed because beliefs are one of the most dangerous afflictions of the Mind. A belief is an assumption, an unfounded idea. It masquerades in the form of knowledge. It is a partial or false knowledge, a structure in the Mind, that lacks solidity of experience to support it. A belief is an epitome of ignorance. These will serve as some definitions for the term belief [1].

A belief is a poor substitute for knowledge. If I tell you a story, which is beyond your experience, you have only two options, either to believe it or disbelieve it. Any of them are not going to take you anywhere. I want you to know.
- Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev (Paraphrased)

If you look at beliefs via the microscope of self-observation, you will find that they are mental structures called **Concepts**. So a belief is not a new entity, it is just an idea, a concept, a higher level abstraction. So why do we need a new word, a new definition? Because a belief is a concept that is erroneous. It is an assumption that takes the form of knowledge. It does not come from experience. A concept that is firmly founded on direct experience is knowledge. When you see beliefs, you will find no solid experiences, no impressions, no memories, no logical chains of thought there, they just simply hang in air. A belief is never founded on experience, it is derived from other sources. It can also be an erroneous interpretation of an experience, which again means that the interpretation is unfounded. A belief can be based on other beliefs, which makes the matter more convoluted, because the person may believe that it is based on a fact, and so is a fact. It is easy to get lost in the jungle of beliefs.

I can live with doubt and uncertainty and not knowing. I think it is much more interesting to live not knowing than to have answers that might be wrong.
- Richard Feynman

It is surely possible that one gets a confirmation of a belief later when a direct experience is encountered. Once this happens the belief is no longer a belief, it becomes knowledge. However, such a possibility is not a justification to believe something. A direct experience may or may not occur. And if it does, it simply encourages the person to form more beliefs about others matters in hopes that they will get substantiated too. It is a big risk, so it is much better to keep the idea in "I don't know" box instead of "I believe its true" box, if it is not substantiated by direct experience. Note that one can test the truth of an idea assuming it is true, but that does not fall in the category of beliefs. It is equally possible to test an idea assuming it is false.

What we need is not the will to believe, but the wish to find out.

- Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) British logician and philosopher.

A concept is formed when a person tries to understand his experiences in terms of other experiences. This is exactly the definition of Understanding – to correlate one’s experiences in a meaningful way. A meaningful structure is the one that results in lowest entropy, it is consistent, logical, perfect, is beautiful and it is right. Mind has this extraordinary gift to arrange its experiences into meaningful concepts and use them to further organize the experiences or to gain new experiences, causing an increase in knowledge. However, the Mind does the same with a belief, once it is formed and survives the logical filters of the Mind, it starts appearing as knowledge and Mind starts “understanding” things in the "light" of a belief.

How does that happen? Isn’t Mind perfect? How is such a gross mistake made? The Mind is perfect just like anything else that exists [2]. A belief is perfect too. Under the given circumstances, if a belief is formed, it is a perfect occurrence, because nothing else could have formed. A clay pot, if it falls on the floor does not remain a pot, it becomes shapeless pieces. When no one is looking, this is just an event, a perfect event, because nothing else could have happened. But when a person sees the broken pot, it is an imperfect state compared to its more structured state as a solid pot from his point of view. So the Mind does not make a mistake, the mistake is seen from the perspective of someone who has a different organization in the Mind, a more meaningful one, since it was founded on an actual experience.

So all beliefs are happenings in the Mind, one need not worry too much about them, they come and go. If you think some beliefs last for a lifetime, never worry,

the bodies come and go. Some last for centuries, but never worry, civilizations and cultures appear and vanish. The whole of the existence is impermanent, nothing lasts. Interestingly, beliefs are even more transient, and concepts with a firm ground last far longer than puny beliefs. So I'm calling them the most dangerous things a Mind can have, as well as I'm calling them puny. How does that make sense? Beliefs are tiny occurrences in the Mind compared to the immensity of the Mind. The errors get corrected very soon when seen from the vast time frames of the Mind. These are dangerous and a big issue when seen from the perspective of human experience. We get a very short life as a human, and since we want to make use of this little time as efficiently as possible, we try to focus on the biggest issues first. Beliefs are your tallest hurdle on your path to freedom. Even if they won't last, you can make the journey easy, quick and enjoyable if you remove these hurdles. Freedom is nothing but a total absence of beliefs. When everything is seen as it is, you become free.

If not on experience, what are beliefs based on? Beliefs are mostly based on what we called "indirect knowledge" - information coming from other sources, which is stored as knowledge without proper scrutiny. Experiences interpreted in relation to previous beliefs also cause new ones to appear. Illogical thoughts also cause incorrect inferences, resulting in beliefs, even if those thoughts were derived from experiences. Some beliefs are simply copied from others. Some beliefs are a result of indoctrination during childhood. Evolutionary and cognitive biases, peers, books, preachers, myths, imaginations, fears, liars, rumour mills, society, parents, schools, universities, mass media, or anything under the sun that can transfer information from one mind to the other can become a source of beliefs [3]. So one can guess, it is very easy to form a belief and spread it. Whatever is the cause or the source, once a belief is formed, it is very difficult to get rid of it. The amount of ignorance a person has is directly proportional to his beliefs. Perhaps it's the most difficult and persistent affliction of the Mind.

Why do we need to get rid of beliefs? There is no real need, just like any other affliction, one can live his entire life in the prison of beliefs, there are no natural laws against it. However, beliefs cause a lot of suffering, a telltale sign of affliction. Moreover the path of knowledge is just that – to free oneself from incomplete knowledge, beliefs, delusions and illusions, and gain a full understanding via direct experience and logical thinking. Beliefs stop your progress, and even retard it. Beliefs are harmful, because the actions based on beliefs are mostly harmful, for the self as well as for others. Most of the crimes, wrong deeds, mass killings, wars and such acts have a cause in belief. One can prove it simply by tracing the motivation for such acts to its roots. Beliefs make the lives of people miserable, cause immense destruction and are a major pain in general. Beliefs are a big issue when all one intends is knowledge, beliefs are

exactly opposite of that.

Believe nothing, O monks, merely because you have been told it ... or because it is traditional, or because you yourselves have imagined it. Do not believe what your teacher tells you merely out of respect for the teacher. But whatsoever, after due examination and analysis, you find to be conducive to the good, the benefit, the welfare of all beings—that doctrine believe and cling to, and take it as your guide.

- *Guatama Buddha*

What is the cure of beliefs? Knowledge. All one needs to do is gain knowledge, it kills the corresponding belief instantly. We have already seen the proper means of gaining knowledge (in brief). Experience is the foundation of knowledge, and when one seeks an experience to answer a question, one reaches knowledge. At least one reaches the conclusion of “I don’t know”. That is - remains **Agnostic**. An agnostic attitude ensures that the doors to knowledge remain open, and a proper experience may arrive at a proper time to complete the knowledge. A belief will simply close the doors, as it is an assumption - “I already know”, which means the person has no hope of obtaining knowledge, the belief has closed the doors and has imprisoned him. Where to start? **Open mindedness**. If a person opens up to the idea that he may not know something, or he was merely holding an assumption, it is enough to bring him to knowledge eventually. Closed mindedness, or not accepting that one can be wrong, leads to fossilization of the Mind, and the person becomes incapable of gaining new knowledge. We will see shortly why it is so difficult to be open minded. Beliefs come with an add-on of security and resist their removal.

The word "belief" is a difficult thing for me. I don't believe. I must have a reason for a certain hypothesis. Either I know a thing, and then I know it --I don't need to believe it.

- *Carl Gustav Jung*

Beliefs can have vast scopes, they become a socio-cultural phenomenon, and entire civilizations are affected. Some beliefs span entire humanity. Some persists for thousands of years. And at the lower end, some beliefs are formed in seconds and disappear in a minute. Whatever is the extent of the belief, all it takes is an experience, a logical conclusion, a correct interpretation and understanding in order to destroy it. Apart from the spatio-temporal spectrum, there is a full spectrum of kinds of beliefs ranging from simple stupid superstitions to complex intelligent delusions. We will try to fit them into broad categories in order to understand them well [4]. But note that a person can suffer from one of these kinds, many of these and a mixture of some. Beliefs have the capability to

become far more complex than plain truths.

The following categories will be discussed (broken down into separate articles) :

Cognitive BiasesGross GeneralizationsSuperstitionsFaithIndirect
KnowledgeDelusionsDoubtsAttachmentsMythsScientific TheoriesMathematical
Models

Finally the difficulties in eradicating beliefs and Resistance to them will be discussed in the last part of the articles on the affliction of beliefs.

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Notes:

[1] Note that by this definition all beliefs are "false", i.e. do not stand the scrutiny of experience or logic. Some people/authors use qualifiers such as "true beliefs" or "false beliefs" etc, but their definitions of belief may be something else in that case. Perhaps by the term belief, they mean any idea, which can be either true or false. But we are going to be precise. Knowledge is "true", belief is not. I guess this is the standard meaning in Philosophy and Sciences. If you are wondering what the sentences like "I believe in myself" or "We must believe to succeed" etc mean in this context, then I need to clarify that they mean nothing, make no sense, they are poetic and nebulous.

[2] If you are wondering that this sentence looks plain wrong, you have not read the past entries. I suggest you please read them first.

[3] Yes, you are right. This blog can also become a source of beliefs. You need not accept the ideas presented here as truth or even possibilities. Burn them in the fire of your experience and see if they survive. Torture them with logical thinking, and see if they divulge their hidden lies. They are anyway based on my experience and may not be true for everyone.

[4] This is going to be a non-exhaustive description. I'm not really an authority on beliefs, and may suffer from some beliefs myself, who knows. I'm going to use the terms – *truth, false, facts, right, wrong, good and bad* in general sense when describing beliefs. This is just to avoid too much verbosity. If you go a few levels deeper in thought, and as we have already seen, there is no truth, nothing is right/wrong, good or bad.

Afflictions of the Mind : Part - 4.2 (The Prison of Beliefs)

4.2 Cognitive Biases, Gross Generalizations, Superstitions and Faith

Cognitive Biases

Or simply biases, they are aberrations in the Mind that prevent a person from thinking correctly. These are so universal that one can call them inherent. These have deep roots in evolutionary history of the Mind, and also are caused due to socio-cultural indoctrination [1]. What a bias does is, makes one reach illogical or incorrect conclusion by injecting a belief in the thinking process. This is often fully automatic and the person is not even aware of his bias. Sometimes even when the presence of a bias is shown, the person refuses to accept it, reason – justification of belief – "I cannot be wrong", aka stupidity.

There are hundreds of biases, and surprisingly (or not!) not many people are aware of them. Many psychological and social studies have been done on them and exotic names are assigned to them. Here is an extensive list of biases if you are interested and unbiased towards reading them: List of cognitive biases.

One need not memorize the list, just knowing that one can have these biases helps to remain uninfluenced by them. However, I recommend doing a small exercise – read them and see them if you are afflicted by some of them, or most of them. This alone will raise your awareness sufficiently, if you are open minded, it will start a process of cleansing them from your Mind. Awareness is the key. Once you know, you don't have any excuse to be biased again.

I'm going to mention some of the common ones, because we all suffer from them. Here is a short list:

Groupthink : Perhaps the most universal bias, aka herd mentality. One tends to accept something as "truth" simply because everyone else seems to accept it. One needs to decouple the democratic acceptance from actual fact, and the bias goes

away. Critical thinking skills are needed to see this – just because someone says its true, does not mean it is so (that is, it does not become your own experience magically). And just because a number of people say so, it does not become a truth somehow. If a large group of people believe in something that is not founded in experience of even one of them, it is just mass stupidity.

The fact that an opinion has been widely held is no evidence whatever that it is not utterly absurd; indeed in view of the silliness of the majority of mankind, a widespread belief is more likely to be foolish than sensible.

- Bertrand Russell

Cherry picking: Aka confirmation bias. One tends to pick out the information that supports his existing beliefs, from a pile of available information. Even though the pile may contain a large amount of information that goes against his belief, he ignores it completely and pretends that opposing evidence does not exist. It is a common bias and even intelligent people suffer from it and use it to justify their beliefs or actions. One can get rid of it by intentionally looking for opposing evidence, and open-mindedly accepting it. This will destroy the root belief too.

Framing: People are susceptible to the way an idea is presented. If it is presented in a positive way with lots of positive sounding words, it is automatically believed to be positive (or good). And vice versa. The positive words direct an untrained mind to take the idea as positive too, and suppress any critical thinking that can occur if it is presented neutrally. Advertisers use this bias to sell their often ordinary products effectively. A doctor holding a toothbrush, makes it more acceptable. A pretty model drinking a soup of chemicals (aka cold drinks) makes you go and drink it robotically. Politicians use negative framing to demonize their enemies, making it easy to kill them. So tags like terrorist, enemy of the nation or framed charged are used effectively without evoking public suspicion.

Appeal to authority: The unconscious belief that if a famous or respected person has said something, it must be true. The fact of the matter must be evaluated via direct experimentation that provides a direct experience of the subject, rather than blindly believing some authority. Note that if an authority says something, its chances of being correct go up, but it does not “become” correct. People who manipulate others often use this bias to install beliefs into others by telling them to believe something which was once said by some great man or is written in some old book. People obey, reason – this bias.

In questions of science, the authority of a thousand is not worth the humble reasoning of a single

individual.

- Galileo Galilei

Selective perception: We see what we want to see, or see only that which we believe is true. So if we believe that a person is bad (morally), we selectively see only his bad actions. This often escalates hate for no reason, and causes harm. Another good example is a suspicious person seeing most of the actions of their partner as an attempt to conceal cheating. This often leads to a failure of marriage or a miserable married life. If one believes that a magical ritual is going to get him what he want, he will see events, among random events, that bring him closer to his goal as effectiveness of the ritual, and ignore the events that do not confirm his belief.

False causation: The tendency to assume that if two events happen at the same time or one after the other, one causes the other. The events may be completely unrelated or at most correlated. But correlation is not causation.

Wishful thinking: Twisted interpretation of actual evidence to make it sound like it confirms one's beliefs or preferences.

Halo effect: The spill over of one quality of a person into his other assumed qualities. For example a beautiful person is automatically assumed to be ethical or truthful. A rich person is assumed to be a great person and so on. One good quality does not guarantee goodness in every other area. Food in a clean restaurant may or may not taste good.

Dunning-Kruger effect: An incompetent person has a belief that he is more competent than an experienced and competent person. This happens because an incompetent person is incapable of seeing the difficulty of achieving expertise in something. Not only an incompetent person is so, he is unaware that he is so. This causes the “boss syndrome”, where those who don’t know about a field or subject claim to know the most.

The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt.
- Bertrand Russell

Gross Generalizations

This may sound like a bias, it is a bit inherent but more of an acquired belief. It is the tendency to believe that a special case applies to the total class. The class can be people or objects or cultures, anything. It has some evolutionary roots, as it

helps in survival. The sight of a tiger killing and eating another man is enough to apply the tag of “dangerous” to all tigerkind. This of course helps a lot, as all tigers are mostly the same. However, this ancient tendency still continues till today when the extent of human experience is vast and diverse. No two persons are same, so the characteristics of one cannot automatically transfer to other just because they can be categorized based on some random criteria, such as nationality or race or language.

One thing to note here is that some people belonging to a class do behave in a common way depending on the situation. This is known as mob mentality, but the same person often behaves differently when not in a group. Sometimes there is some justification for generalization for example when taking decisions about a large group of people, as in long term planning by governments. But generalizations often fail when we want to judge individuals. A person behaves quite differently when not identified with his class, or when in a different place, for example.

This belief causes many social problems, such as racial discrimination and casteism. The amount of suffering this belief causes is immense. This belief also results in stereotyping, which lessens the amount of choices one has while dealing with people and therefore lessens the freedom one has. To get rid of this belief one needs to throw away the huge amount of classes and categories we put people into, and see clearly that an individual is a unique and dynamic entity.

One must consider some practical aspects too, and act wisely and safely when the situation demands. Go ahead and make sweeping generalizations when your survival is at stake, this is the purpose of it anyway. For example, there is a general belief that slum dwellers are mostly criminals, immoral people whose actions are driven by need for money, they have none. Of course, it is not applicable to all slum dwellers, some of them can be nice and helpful people and most may be just harmless. So do I take a shortcut via a slum while going home late in the night? Well, the choice should be obvious here. Just make a gross generalization and take the other longer way.

The same behaviour, similar attitude, when the survival is not an issue, becomes plain stupidity. But then many people connect everything to survival most of the time, and keep acting gross on grossly generalized beliefs. (Did I just make yet another gross generalization here? :))

Superstitions

This class of beliefs are bottom of the barrel kind, but one should not

underestimate them. Even intelligent and educated people suffer from superstitions. They are irrational fantasies, that take the form of truth. People act on them robotically (no offense to robots). One can easily trace a superstition to an irrational fear, or some desire. The fear/desire is so strong that it twists the mind into believing very strange things.

There are numerous examples of superstitions. Usually uneducated people suffer from them. But indoctrination or blindly following others results in even educated, sane people getting afflicted by them. We see a lot of superstition in religious people and even the so called spiritual people. The reason is that the religious/spiritual ideas promise a lot of magical stuff, which is nowhere to be seen when it comes to direct experience. And therefore believers in that stuff must rely on blind beliefs to “make them true”.

There are some harmless kinds of superstitions, like wearing your “lucky shirt” (or underwear?) on the day of a job interview. But some superstitions do cause harm, such as burning a widow with her husband’s dead body in order to send her to heaven to serve her husband there. How amusing... but the suffering caused to the person who is affected by these superstitions is immense.

How to get rid of superstitions? Trace them back to the fear you have and kill the fear. Once you are convinced that acting in some stupid way to avoid some fear is not going to help a lot, you can let go of the superstitious beliefs, and the odd behaviour drops away. If it is a desire, e.g. to pass in an exam, realize it clearly and consciously that actually reading a textbook will help more than burning incense in front of it. There is no causal connection between incense and your memory here, just to be explicit and obvious. If you acquired the superstition from parents, friends, books, religions, movies or society, question it and try to find a basis. If you don’t find it based on your experience, or if you can’t find even one trustworthy person who experienced it, you need to simply let go of the superstition.

Consciously and intentionally not acting on a superstitious belief helps. This is the fastest way to get rid of them. If you are on a spiritual path and a teacher hands you over a superstitious practice, question it, ask him to demonstrate it, prove it, show it, or at least offer logical explanations based on your direct experience (not his). If the teacher is genuine and is experienced, he will not ask a student to practice something which he himself cannot demonstrate. However there are some exceptions, where you need to just accept a strange practice or teaching and look for an experience yourself. If you can’t find that in a reasonable amount of time, just let it go.

Faith

A faith is a belief or a collection of beliefs that generally has positive connotations. Trust is a synonym for that. This is how I'm going to use these terms here. A faith is a belief, an assumption not based on direct experience that has a quality of hope and assurance in it. Humans use it for practical purposes and also when they realize that some goals cannot be reached if one is dependent solely on direct experience. Faith is also useful in cases where it would consume too much time or take too much effort to know the truth before one can act on it. So it serves as a sort of shortcut to arrive at a decision and subsequent action. But, try signing a deal worth a few million and you will find a total absence of faith and trust, even if the person you are dealing with is your relative or a friend. The stakes are now too high, and the hope and assurance is not enough to believe. So a faith works only when there is no great danger or threat to survival.

A person holding a faith should have a full awareness of the fact that it is a temporary belief, not a truth, and then it is justified. A faith should be a temporary suspension of disbelief, nothing more. One must resort to faith only when there is no other option and only when the risks are minor. When the faith is repeatedly corroborated via subsequent direct experiences, it becomes a **Living faith** [2]. A living faith is beneficial because it makes you progress and brings you knowledge. If the faith produces no knowledge or is proven false repeatedly, or if there is no way to establish it in direct experience, it becomes a **Blind faith**. Blind faith causes harm and retards you in your progress, as it wastes a lot of time and effort.

So is faith an affliction? Blind faith is, no doubts. When your hopeful positive fluffy belief produces no evidence, no result, has no use at all, then it is just an affliction. Try it again and again, but if it fails the litmus test of experience, its time to let it go. Even if it was true for someone else, it is not true for you. No amount of faith in it is going to make it true for you in a reasonable amount of time. Try something else, there are so many paths. Your pet idea is not more important than your progress. All ideas and faiths are disposable, if they don't work for you.

Some people justify blind faith by simply assuming that it is working for them. A belief cannot become a justification for another belief. It is just delusion. Check and cross check, then check again. Is this faith really working? No...throw it away. Yes, then you don't need it anyway, you have a direct experience if it worked, move on to the next belief in the ladder of progress and test it out.

Some of the spiritual traditions require the aspirant to have faith, believe in things, perform rituals, live a seemingly illogical life. I'm not going to judge those

here [3]. Do it if that works. Whatever floats your boat. Ensure that it takes you to the shore. The only thing to remember is that don't carry the boat on your back once you cross the river.

Notes:

[1] You will encounter the phrase "evolutionary history" or "evolutionary cause" in many articles on this blog. Isn't the idea that the Mind evolved through ages, only a belief? Have I experienced the evolution of the Mind directly? If you are asking such questions, your critical thinking skills are working nicely. No, I haven't experienced the evolution of the Mind myself. I guess, no one else has, there is no "I" to experience such things. So at best its a useful theory that explains a lot of strange things. However, I have experienced the happening called "change" (which I call Experiencing, in founding articles). Change ensures that an organizing process (the Fundamental Process) kicks in as a necessity. Evolution means nothing but change, although a directed change because of the constraints of the environment (aka fitness function). Once you see such change, it is a straightforward deduction that everything evolves. It is not a leap of faith that some of our behaviours are a result of constrained change, it is the only logical conclusion. If I saw no change anywhere, I wouldn't refer to a "different state in past" because there wouldn't be a past, no time and no different states. But my experience is totally opposite.

[2] I'm grateful to Ishwar Puri for introducing the concept of Living faith. A student must take a leap of faith and follow his master when there are insurmountable barriers in his path or when the teaching is simply too difficult for him to grasp on his own. A true master will always show a living proof of his teachings when the right time arrives.

[3] The various faiths, beliefs, rituals etc must be seen as just tools. One can advocate their use based on their efficacy. The tools may be fictitious and may have no truth of their own, but they may still work. The problem arises when aspirants take these tools as truths. Some fake teachers take undue advantage of students by asking them to believe in him blindly. Some stupid and gullible students actually obey.

Afflictions of the Mind : Part - 4.3 (The Prison of Beliefs)

4.3 Indirect Knowledge, Delusions, Doubts, Attachments and Myths

Indirect Knowledge

These are the most common type of beliefs and when one says the word belief, this is what is mostly meant. Indirect knowledge is any knowledge that is not based on first hand direct experience. Indirect knowledge is just information, not real knowledge. So why do we call it knowledge at all? Firstly, the information can be converted into knowledge most of the time (if the seeker is willing to take that trouble) and secondly, some of the information originates from the direct experience of another person. It is up to the knowledge seeker to trust (have faith) on that person. Traditionally indirect knowledge has been a recommended method for gaining knowledge on the path of knowledge (includes scriptures and teachers). However, one need not be content with such knowledge, ideally speaking, and should go ahead and gain a direct experience of the matter. Until that is done, one needs to clearly understand that the indirect knowledge is just a belief.

I learned very early the difference between knowing the name of something and knowing something.

- Richard Feynman, The Making of a Scientist, p. 14

Information comes mostly from other people who communicate their ideas, beliefs and experiences via media (books, talks, schools, internet, videos, TV etc). What they are doing is spreading information, not knowledge. It is a general belief that one gains knowledge via reading or attending school etc. There can be some knowledge surely (such as of mathematics, or languages), but most of it is just information (e.g. history, sciences, cooking etc). Usually there is so much of it that it would be impossible for someone with ordinary intelligence to gain all the knowledge there is. So for practical reasons, most of what we learn from books, teachers and schools remain as beliefs till we die.

So we see that an “educated” person is full of beliefs, more so than an uneducated one, and so is more ignorant. This is ironical, but this is what you get when you rely mostly on indirect knowledge. Such people take pride that they “know” a lot because of such and such degrees they hold, but in reality, they have just memorized a lot of information. You wouldn’t want a surgeon to perform a surgery on you if you knew that he has never done a surgery before, and has just read a book on the subject. So it all is a pretension till one actually needs to implement and use the information. This is where practical, hands on training is needed. Those who gain experience this way, have real knowledge.

Men that believe only what they understand can write their creed on a postage stamp.

- Austin O'Malley , Keystones of Thought

The situation is better in Science and technology, because without experience the jobs related to these fields would be impossible to perform, but the situation is worse when it comes to subjective fields, such as spiritual pursuits. Most of what we hear is indirect knowledge when it comes to spiritual knowledge. Some ignorant seekers spend their entire lives believing this or that, performing random rituals or parroting mantras. The situation is obviously worse in religions, where the amount of beliefs is unfathomable, experimentation and questioning is not allowed and the depth of ignorance often leads to violence, stupidity, manipulation and funny behaviours of all kinds. Some good teachings hide in religious texts, however hardly anyone takes trouble to follow them practically. It is often enough to believe everything one is asked to in order to follow a particular religion. Some people do follow the teachings, but most of them are hardly aware of why they are following it. They do not progress beyond the religious teachings.

How to know when you are in the grip of indirect knowledge? You will need to perform thorough introspection. Find an idea you think is important for you, and search for an experience you had that formed that idea. If all you find is some words from a book or from another person, then it is just a belief. Of course, you will find a lot many and it will be necessary to weed out those that are going to affect you much more compared to others. Which beliefs can affect you most? The ones on which you are going to act. If you do not need to act on an idea, it should not matter much if it true or not, but when you need to act, it better be solid. For example, if you “know” that there is such and such planet that orbits a star that is a billion lightyears away and you also know its weight and size and all, you will find that it is merely information, you read it somewhere. It is a harmless belief, at most you can impress your friends with your “knowledge”. You are

most probably not going to act on it, so it is not so important to make a distinction here. If you “know” that the horoscope of a girl matches with your own exactly, which obviously means a perfect marriage and you act on that “knowledge” and marry her, realize that it can be a huge mistake, because your action may result in a lifelong suffering for not only yourself, but also for your partner and any future offspring. It is, obviously, important to make a distinction here between a mere belief and knowledge. The knowledge in this case is your experience with different people, how they match with your own personality, behaviour, lifestyle and whether you (and the potential partner) have actually experienced any love and desire to remain together for a life time.

The trouble with the world is not that people know too little; it's that they know so many things that just aren't so.

- Mark Twain

Knowledge comes from experience and usually experiences come from life itself. The more consciously one lives, more knowledge one gains, and so the actions are mostly right ones, resulting in a happy and free life. There, that is the essence of it all.

Well, sometimes the situations demand that we better believe in something and not insist on having a direct experience. In some cases, you do not want to find out the truth yourself. Better believe and leave it there. Such situations often involve survival. For example, if someone tells you a fruit is poisonous, you better not eat it. Its too risky. You know that it is just information, the source is not an authority on poisonous flora, and you see insects eating it, but if you possess an ounce of intelligence you will not want to convert the information into an experience. Please do not use your cat or mother-in-law to convert it into knowledge either.

Delusions

This word has many connotations, but I’m going to use it in a special way and not very differently from general meaning. Delusions are a set of beliefs, where there is a total ignorance about their being beliefs. Delusions are often long term, give rise to more beliefs and mental abnormalities like paranoia or phobias. Such a person finds a confirmation for his beliefs in information, events or people he encounters. If he finds an opposing information or a person, it still strengthens his delusion, because – they are lies, people are all against me etc, etc. A deluded person is not only unaware that he is so, it is often impossible to make him realize that he is so. A deluded person sees every attempt to destroy his beliefs as a confirmation of the beliefs. It often lasts for life times and many end up in

asylums.

At the core of all well-founded beliefs, lies belief that is unfounded.

- Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty

Usually it is possible to convince an intelligent person by simply pointing out his beliefs, showing how they are just acquired information, mistakenly treated as knowledge. An intelligent person will quickly realize this and will often be grateful to you for correcting his thinking. Not so with a deluded person. This kind will display an exactly opposite behaviour. Not only a deluded person is stupid, he is also borderline crazy. Any attempts to show the truth to such people soon ignites fiery arguments which often lead to personal attacks and even violence. Any such attempt results in strengthening of the delusion, making it worse. In case of delusions, a person will always find many experiences that fully support his delusion, so no amount of explaining or introspection will help here.

How do you know if you are deluded? You don't, you will never know perhaps. However, people change and sometimes a deluded person wakes up from the delusion. There can be some hints here and there which can point to the fact that you are deluded. If you get into fights regarding some matters, if you are sensitive towards some subjects or people or things, if you find that people avoid talking to you about a particular thing, if you find that people you like are borderline crazy, there is some chance that you are under the spell of a delusion of some sort.

I'm not deluded but I can't stand such people, what to do? Be compassionate and tolerate. Easy said than done. They are deep into ignorance, and letting them be there, if you can't help, is the only rational response. It would be a waste of time fixing such a person and you will end up making his delusion strong. Delusion survives on opposition. You cannot even not oppose, because delusion grows with support. Often the delusions make a person's life very miserable, and one cannot do much to fix it.

Doubts

Doubts are beliefs with negative implications. It's a belief that something is not true. A little doubt is often a healthy trait, especially when survival is at stake. A person who doubts nothing is hopelessly gullible, not a good situation. A doubt turns into an affliction only when it is taken to the extreme and is based on illogical assumptions, not on experiences. If you doubt a person who is giving you free candy in the train, it is ok, obviously. But if you doubt a person because he has a particular skin colour or speaks a particular language, it is an affliction, a

belief.

A doubt also becomes an affliction when ample evidence is presented to show that the doubt is baseless, and the person still holds on to the doubt. A strong doubt has a potential to become a delusion, where all attempts to remove the doubt are seen as supporting the doubt. A doubt is often a result of an experience that is then grossly generalized for every situation. For example, if you are once bitten by a dog, you will doubt all dogs from that point on. It takes some courage to experiment and overcome such beliefs and behaviours.

To doubt everything or to believe everything are two equally convenient solutions; both dispense with the necessity of reflection.

- Henri Poincaré, *Of Science and Hypotheses*

Isn't critical thinking just doubting? No, there is a difference between assuming something as not true and suspending judgement while letting something be either true or false, depending on direct evidence. The former is an affliction, a doubt, the latter is a quality.

Attachments

An attachment is a belief that some object/person or action is necessary for one's happiness. Sometimes its not only happiness, it can be survival, protection or even amusement. An attachment often becomes a habit, reducing the freedom of the person severely. It is not the attachment itself that causes suffering, it is the non-fulfilment of the expectations that does so. We will discuss attachments in more detail later, as it is closely related to emotions.

Myths

These are the beliefs many of us are so fond of. These are not only entertaining, they impart some good lessons too. A myth is just a story, and it becomes an affliction, a belief, if taken as truth. Often uneducated people believe in myths, but some educated and intelligent people also fall for it. The reason can be that myths often mix history, real people, real places and pure fantasy together. A bias in thinking then makes one believe it, deducing in illogical way that if a part of the story is true, the whole of the story must be true. Secondly, something doesn't magically become true if it is a thousand year old. You need evidence and ideally an experience (which is not possible in case of myths).

Nothing is so firmly believed as that which we least know.

- *Michel de Montaigne, Essays (1580-88).*

Myths often start as true stories, which are simple, and then the story tellers, generations after generations, go on adding spice until the truth is replaced by pure fantasy. Often the lessons survive, but who cares about the boring lessons when there is so much awesome magic going on there.

What should be the proper attitude of an intelligent person towards myths? Take it as stories that are trying to teach you something. If a story is useful, makes you a better person, its job is done, and there is no use trying to argue about its truth.

Afflictions of the Mind : Part - 4.4 (The Prison of Beliefs)

4.4 Scientific Theories and Mathematical Models

Scientific Theories

Scientific theories (henceforth just theories) are beliefs about physical phenomena [1]. These beliefs try to explain the hows, whats and whys regarding the phenomena. For example, the theory of gravity tries to explain the attraction of masses. The belief here is that there is something called gravity that is pulling objects with some property called mass. The concepts - gravity and mass are mere assumptions, beliefs.

Obviously, theories are very useful. Once we have the concepts of gravity, mass etc, say, we can deduce equations, relations, behaviours from experimentation and mathematics and can build buildings, airplanes, boats, send people to the Moon and what not. So why would any sane person call theories an affliction? They become an affliction only when we forget that they are just beliefs, and take them as fact and nothing but fact. I'm sure most of the "educated" folk think that the ideas like gravity, electromagnetism, fundamental particles etc are nothing but truths. After all that's what their textbooks taught them.

Why does that happen? Usually the educational standards are so low that textbooks do not include the definition of a theory, not even in fine print. No mention is made of scientific method. Philosophy and history of science are fringe subjects (perhaps they don't land good jobs and make you rich). Students are taught theories (and "laws") as if they are written in stone. It escapes many, even the intelligent and so called "scientists" that theory is a synonym for belief. Perhaps your school is a better one and did a good job in this case, but only a few get it. Tabloids (aka science magazines) never mention that scientists are simply stating their beliefs when they are describing something about a directly observed phenomenon.

I have not been able to discover the cause of those properties of gravity from phenomena, and I frame no hypotheses; for whatever is not deduced from the phenomena is to be called a hypothesis, and hypotheses, whether metaphysical or physical, whether of occult qualities or mechanical, have

no place in experimental philosophy.
- Isaac Newton

When a phenomenon is observed, its explanation starts with the description of its direct observation, how to replicate it and how to measure it. This is pure experimental science (aka Empirical science) and is closest to the truth, but is not the truth, Science does not deal with truths, period. Truth is a philosophical concept, that is, a made up thing, there are no truths, just experiences (we have discussed this in detail earlier). However, there are logical truths, which simply means that some description of an experience/experiment is consistent when seen objectively. Not going again into the nitty-gritty of truths, I'd just say that the relation of a phenomenon with truth ends at empirical observation. After that, it's all just theory, concepts, beliefs.

Next, a hypothesis is proposed to explain the phenomenon. A **Hypothesis** is just a minimum set of assumptions. There can be many hypotheses (E.g. the phenomenon of light can be hypothesized as tiny particles, EM waves or quantum objects called photons, all merely assumptions). A good hypothesis is the one that minimizes the number of assumptions or entities. The hypotheses are then tested via experimentation, and when a hypothesis gathers some evidence it is promoted to the rank of a theory. A theory adds logical statements, equations and predictions to the whole idea. Engineers take up these ideas and implement them in practice, creating new devices, things that work and are useful, providing further support to the theory. No matter how successful a theory is, it never becomes a truth, it remains as a belief.

It is a good morning exercise for a research scientist to discard a pet hypothesis every day before breakfast. It keeps him young.
- Konrad Lorenz

Science progresses by continuously replacing the old theories with new ones. The new ones are better, more elegant and encompass a wider range of phenomena. This alone shows that a theory is just a description, and is totally disposable. In fact discarding theories and promoting a wide variety of them is encouraged in Science. This ensures fresh ideas keep coming in and stale ones go out of favour. Science is very dynamic, ever changing, ever evolving.

So where does it all go wrong? Scientists are just humans and come with all the fears, ego issues, beliefs, biases and stupidities just like any other person. Just because someone is a scientist does not magically make his Mind free of all afflictions. Some scientists (I prefer to call them science-workers) are trained as a scientist due to their education or job, and they grow up into a dogmatic

personality full of beliefs. Science is just another religion for them. These people derive their bread and butter from the skills they learnt from the books or such. So any idea of their “knowledge” being incorrect makes them tremble with fear, fear of losing their jobs, losing their credibility or public image. Clearly they have made their survival dependent on scientific views that are in fashion in their days. When the views change (as they must), these science-workers are first to oppose the change. They hold on to their dear beliefs, as their destruction would mean the person’s obsolescence. Pride also plays a major role here besides survival. Some science-workers gain a position of authority based on their old expertise on the subject, and when newcomers throw the old off, they are threatened, they find ways to keep their false pride intact. Finally some politics, cunningness, competition, greed, funding dependencies, desire for fame, jealousy etc are other reasons science-workers don’t want science to change or improve and don’t like their beliefs questioned [2].

I’m going to write another article on corruption in science to discuss the sorry state of things in the scientific fields. Science is as good as the person practicing it. So is it all bad? Obviously no. There are real Scientists (with capital S) that arrive on the scene occasionally and throw off the old dogmas through their superior genius. These are the deviant kinds, they have creativity, intelligence and many more qualities a true Scientist should have to make sweeping changes and improvements in their scientific field. Major discoveries, inventions are done by these people. Others, especially the science-workers merely follow them. True Scientists are the ones that push the whole humanity a few notches up, they are the people who actually contribute to the knowledge. They are real sages. Sometimes even these people fall as their contributions are swept away in the coming tide of new ideas in Science, and they become fossilized, opposing any changes. The power of beliefs is not be underestimated.

This is the way nature works. If You don't like it, go somewhere else!

- Richard Feynman (QED Lecture at University of Auckland)

How should one get rid of scientific beliefs? If you are in the field of science, just realize that Science deals with observation and theory (aka beliefs, ideas). The concept of truths is beyond the scope of science, there are just explanations, models and clever descriptions. Nothing is true in Science, and nothing is false. A Scientist is a true Agnostic, open minded critical thinker. It should take only a few minutes for a Scientist to realize what a theory is. However, if you are a science-worker or non-scientist, you need to educate yourself first. See how Science works, how theories evolve. When you have no idea what Science is, you will obviously form wrong notions about it. You will be subjected to manipulation by

people who use science as a shield and as a weapon to rule. You will have no choice but to obey the so called scientists. Once you see that Science is only a way to gather knowledge, you will see all its advantages and disadvantages yourself and can judge it better.

Isn't everything that is unscientific (not based on Scientific Method) just fantasy, woo-woo, mumbo-jumbo? Most of the Science is also fantasy, woo-woo and mumbo-jumbo. One only needs to take a look at the history of Science to see how much mumbo-jumbo it had. One need not assume that it is totally purified these days, it is surely better these days, because it is natural for Science to progress. But most of the Science is founded in fantasy. This is because theory has gained favour over direct Empirical observation for some reasons. Anything new that does not conform to an "established theory" is thrown away. Its a strange upside-down behaviour that has more to do with sociology and psychology than Science itself. However, it remains the best tool that humans ever invented to study the physical universe. That is one part of the answer, the other part is, there is nothing preventing you from applying Scientific Method yourself to the so called woo-woo stuff. Experiment, hypothesize, theorize and publish it to the community, you are most welcome. How many people do that? Almost none, reason – bias, fears (of ridicule, harm to career etc) and hardened beliefs. Beliefs that Science must deal with only material things. There are no material things. Says who? Science.

Science today is locked into paradigms. Every avenue is blocked by beliefs that are wrong, and if you try to get anything published by a journal today, you will run against a paradigm and the editors will turn it down.

- Sir Fred Hoyle

Mathematical Models

A mathematical model (henceforth model) is a description of a physical phenomenon using mathematics, numbers and logic. It is simulation of the actual experience of the phenomenon. The simulation resides in the mind, on paper or in a computer. A model is often based on experimental data, but can be totally made up to fit an experiment. An experiment may conform to a model more or less, and that decides the success of the model in explaining it. All models need not describe a phenomenon or any phenomenon, some are just purely mathematical and correspond to no phenomenon at all.

Some example of the models are force/mass/acceleration model of a body (object) which is simply written as $F=ma$. Another one is $V=IR$, which is a relation between voltage and current in an electrical circuit. These are very simple

models and of course there can be very complex ones such as Maxwell's equations or Schrodinger equations. The more closely a model mimics the observations, the more favour it gains, and more predictions can be made using calculations. This makes the model useful for developing new technologies and forming new theories.

Wonderful! Science at its best. So why are we dealing with models in mental afflictions section? A model becomes an affliction in the Mind of a scientist or a student of science when it takes on a form of reality. Some people with shallow knowledge of Science (aka indirect knowledge) often take the model as actual phenomenon it is describing. A model is not your experience of the phenomenon, it is a mathematical simulation.

In above stated examples, the mathematical entities viz. force, mass, current, and voltage etc are not experiential entities and do not exist except as concepts. Shocking, isn't it? Even the scientific beliefs get solidified with time and mechanical repetition, so much so, that ordinary people believe that the modelled entities are "real" things. As it turns out, majority of theoretical science deals with nothing but imaginary entities (aka mathematical objects). These entities are purely mental and correspond more or less with the observations. They are very useful, but are just ideas, beliefs. It is ok as long as ordinary people are concerned, they wouldn't know any better anyway without devoting their lives in the study of theoretical sciences. But when you are on a path of knowledge, it becomes necessary to dig deeper...deeper than even the most capable Scientist can go [3]. It becomes necessary to realize that the models, whether related to physical or non-physical phenomena, are just simulations, and your experience of the phenomena, if any, will be totally different.

As one can see, the models keep changing, they evolve, some are discarded. Some take centuries and some crumble in a few years. New entities are introduced and old are forgotten. With so much change, one would expect that a scientist would know the difference between observed phenomenon and its model, but no, this is only an ideal case. Science-workers take models literally and so do some Scientists. Ordinary folk simply follow whatever they are told, not their fault, Science is difficult, beliefs are easy.

Notes:

[1] Theories can be created for other kind of experiences too, besides the physical kind. Many would hesitate to call them "scientific" though, because of the strong belief that the "science" (whatever that is) must deal only with the physical.

[2] Even though the science-workers are dogmatic and full of beliefs, they are an important part of the society. They are the ones that enable schools, universities, industries, research labs and many more organizations to function properly. They are usually wiser than any other kind of workers and do contribute to the advancement of Science and technology in an incremental way, by constantly improvising the existing knowledge. Occasionally a science-worker discovers or invents something awesome, which even the best Scientist can only dream of. So I'm very grateful to them for their excellent contributions.

[3] A Scientist is also a seeker, albeit he stops at the level of physical. Reason - beliefs. Where do engineers stand in regard to beliefs? Don't they simply assume the science behind their devices and machines as truth? I've seen that an engineer is generally not bothered very much by what is true, as long as it works. They resemble yogis and seekers when it comes to the matter of usefulness vs truth. In my experience, I've encountered more engineers traveling on a spiritual path as compared to scientists.

Afflictions of the Mind : Part - 4.5 (The Prison of Beliefs)

4. 5 Resistance

We have gone through the broad kinds of beliefs. This is not a textbook classification, just my own understanding from my own experiences with beliefs. So I must have left out a few kinds or created a few new kinds. But classification is not important, the important issue is to be free from all beliefs. We have already seen how this can be a difficult goal. One can encounter some difficulties when one tries to force the beliefs out of his Mind. They are integral part of a person, his life and perhaps many lives. The essential task on the path to freedom is to destroy all beliefs and let the Self shine as it is, in its purest form. It all starts from getting rid of beliefs that are superficial and then slowly digging them out of the depths of the Mind. It can take a lifetime or perhaps many lives.

The first difficulty one may find is that people don't know that they have beliefs. Many people are often surrounded by others with same/similar beliefs. That's how one gets a major portion of beliefs – via indoctrination, socio-cultural brainwashing. It helps to question everything, helps to explore new ideas and contradicting beliefs, and to remain open minded but critical of all indirect knowledge.

The soft-minded man always fears change. He feels security in the status quo, and he has an almost morbid fear of the new. For him, the greatest pain is the pain of a new idea.

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Some people resist change. They fear change of any kind. They find security, peace and happiness in old ways. This attitude is seen in regard to beliefs too, and actually stems from beliefs themselves. Such a person ignores all new information, knowledge or advice that can uproot his beliefs. Some of them may even admit that they don't want to get rid of their beliefs, giving reasons that they are happy because of the beliefs. For some the cognitive dissonance is too much to bear and they find familiarity with old beliefs more comfortable and soothing. Mostly they are motivated to give up their beliefs only when the suffering caused by them exceeds the comfort they provide. Probably there is no other way to cure

the ignorance of people who stick to the status quo.

The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one. The happiness of credulity is a cheap and dangerous quality of happiness, and by no means a necessity of life.

- G B Shaw, *Androcles and the Lion*

The other major difficulty is that ideas and arguments that counter the belief of a person are seen as insults and attack on himself by that person. Even when the beliefs are pointed out, the person holding them resists their removal by defending them as if his survival is threatened. If he realizes that his beliefs has no real basis, the first thought of the person is – “I’m surely going to look like a fool for believing this stuff” [1], and so he makes all efforts to convince the other that his belief is not a belief but is a fact. In worst cases, the person convinces himself that what he believes is a fact. It doesn’t take his Mind long to come up with all kinds of excuses and fantasies to support the beliefs he is defending. You will see the reaction of such as person in the form of anger, counter attacks, illogical arguments, personal attacks or ridicule of the contradicting idea [2]. He is just aroused and is defending himself from a perceived insult or a threat. Sometimes the reaction is to avoid the situation [3]. The avoidance is seen as a sudden change of topic, a “laugh it off” reaction or actually leaving the room. So we find that self-preservation tendencies kick in as soon as one encounters a contradicting belief or anyone who points out a belief.

Mind has a peculiarity that the imagined threats or verbal threats cause a similar reaction in the person as those of real threats to the life (say an attack by an animal). This has evolutionary reasons and it is helpful sometimes, because a deadly fight often starts with insults. So it is logical that the Mind prepares the body by reacting in a defensive way. Once the control slips from intellect to the Ego (to be discussed later) its all mechanical from there onwards. An ignorant person has not severed the ancient connection of his intellect with his Ego, and finds himself acting in uncontrollable ways. The defence, the anger and the violence happens on its own, once it is triggered. Somehow the beliefs, the erroneous ideas, become a part of the personality, a structure defining the person, and the survival instincts are unleashed to defend the beliefs in exactly the same manner they defend the person from danger. Now you know how is it possible to cause a war simply by ridiculing some odd beliefs of the other party. Note that this has nothing to do with intelligence, and an extremely intelligent but untrained person will also act in mostly the same way. Cultured people can often suppress the reaction, but do get offended and keep that hurt in their Minds. An attempt to correct someone’s belief can easily ruin any relationships or friendships. This is

especially true if the belief is related to religions or politics (or sometimes genders and races too, the list of “sensitivities” is long if you ask me).

Belief needs something terrible to make it work, I find--blood, nails, a bit of anguish.

- Anne Enright, The Gathering

What is the proper reaction when your “knowledge” is conclusively shown to be just a baseless belief? Needless to say, bow down in gratitude, thank the person who has done this favour on you. Consider yourself fortunate that you were shown your errors. You have successfully liberated yourself from the shackles of a belief. You have progressed one step further. What can be better than that. I’d suggest, go ahead and ask for a review of your other “knowledge” about other stuff, do not miss this opportunity. Make that person your friend or your teacher and stick to him, if possible. Once you are as knowledgeable as he is (you have seen the matter as a direct experience), your learning will stop, but the loving relation will last [3].

However, if the person is unable to realize that his belief is baseless, he is often puzzled, becomes doubtful and the thought is something like –“What the hell this person is talking about, I know I’m correct”. The reaction is again to preserve his belief. Most of the people have a bias that they cannot be wrong and refuse to analyse their own beliefs. In best cases the person politely disagrees and goes on with his business, but in worst cases he may ridicule or insult the person who is honestly trying to show him his error. The poor fellow never gets any respect again and the relationship goes downhill. Or the person holding the belief may take pity on the one who thinks otherwise, and may try to convince the other how he is wrong instead. He may bring forward all kinds of “evidences”, quotes by authorities and what not to prove his case. It usually gets all convoluted and the debate then shifts to how all that evidence is right/wrong. The belief stays where it was or gains more strength, as it becomes more of a matter of who “wins” rather than what is right. You will mostly find that a believer wants to win, and the person who has knowledge will not care much about proving himself, for obvious reasons.

What is the proper reaction of a seeker when he can’t see that his “knowledge” is unfounded, when pointed out? Ask more questions. Demand counter evidences. Ask for explanations. Ask for direct experiences or how to get them. Sleep over it. Do not immediately judge the counter claims. Thank the other person and tell him that you will try to see it and correct your mistake, if any. If your ideas were indeed unfounded, you will find yourself going through the stages of realization – “I need to find this out”> “I don’t know”> “Perhaps I’m wrong” and

finally “I was wrong, its just a belief!”. You have just destroyed a belief. Celebrate. Don’t forget to meet that person again and ask for comments on other stuff you “know”. You have found someone who is upstream, who is more advanced than you and most importantly, is ready to teach you. Not many are so fortunate [4].

Another resistance comes in the form of stupidity. When pointed out, a person is not only unable to realize his error, he is blissfully unaware of it all. He fails to “get the point”. There is often no reaction or a wide eyed puzzled look, and the person wanders off into his zombieland. Sometimes, stupidity does evoke violence and fights, and you learn not to correct the beliefs of a stupid person, in a hard way. Anyway someone has to learn a lesson, maybe it was your turn.

What to do if you can’t get the point? Not much. Purifying yourself of the beliefs is not your priority here, instead sharpen you intellect. Most of the beliefs make home in the Mind of a person because of his failure to critically analyse the indirect knowledge or to understand it. A stupid person simply accepts whatever he is told. If a person lacks intelligence, beliefs find him an easy target. An intelligent, critical thinker who is fully aware of himself rarely falls into a belief trap.

The first principle is that you must not fool yourself, and you are the easiest person to fool.
-Richard Feynman

Fear is another reason for resisting the removal of beliefs. There is an illusion of security when you are a part of the crowd and believe whatever others in your group believe. This has obvious evolutionary reasons, a herd avoids a predator more effectively than an individual, and hence a fear overtakes the individual if he finds himself away from his group. When a belief is questioned, the primitive instinct takes over the person and a fear of what would happen if he did not believe in what others around him do, arises. Result – the person is forced back into the belief. Sometimes, he is back to the belief which is now even stronger, because he is now convinced that not giving up the belief has made him more secure. At times the belief weakens, as the person is now aware of the facts, but the person again takes shelter in the belief for the fear of deviating from the “norm”. A fearful person may dream up “evidences” to support his belief and justify it, not knowing that he is unconsciously afraid of something. The reaction comes in the form of irrational statements or something like – “I’m sorry I believe this no matter what you say.” Or “Do you think everyone else who believes this is a fool?”. Such a person is too insecure to stand up for any truths, he keeps his face down.

It is very difficult to reason people out of beliefs that they didn’t reasons themselves into.

- Amy Tuteur, M.D., *"The theology of quackery; how pseudoscience has become a secular religion"*, *The Skeptical OB* (May 6, 2016)

What should you do if you find safety in numbers? Firstly convince yourself thoroughly that you were holding nothing but a belief. Secondly, leave the crowd behind. A seeker who is afraid of crowds is not much of a seeker. Realize that the majority is going to be ignorant, and sooner or later, you will find yourself standing alone. The cost of freedom is loneliness. If you are so fond of company, seek the company of seekers, teachers and wise. If they are all yes-men too, then you are in the wrong company, your companions should be such that they don't leave a single chance of shooting down your beliefs brutally.

Some other reasons for not letting beliefs go are doubt, pride, manipulation, monetary benefits and pleasures/addictions. Doubt occurs when one perceives an attempt to correct his belief as an attempt to deceive him. This happens especially when there is no trust or faith. Doubt prevents the person from shedding his belief, perhaps makes it stronger. Some people take pride in believing something no matter what the evidence say, and no matter how idiotic they look holding it (e.g. a person of a "superior" caste or race has all the reasons to believe in his superiority). Manipulation by others forces the person to remain chained to beliefs, especially happens with cults, but can happen in offices, families and relations too. The constant brainwashing by others makes the believer incapable of seeing his mistakes. If someone is getting rich out of beliefs, it makes sense to keep the belief (E.g. an astrologer who is making money out of his "knowledge and expertise" or a snake-oil salesman). Pleasures gained from addictions/actions twist the logical circuitry of the brain and makes one believe that the object of pleasure is somehow harmless or even beneficial for him, or the action is fair and just. E.g a gambler would want to believe that gambling will make him rich very soon. A smoker wants to believe that only others die from smoking, he is immune to it and a pack a day makes him perform better etc, etc.

What to do in above cases? Fix the primary cause first. The belief disappears when it finds no support. The matter is complicated by the fact that the belief and behaviour reinforce each other. It may be more difficult to fix the primary cause than belief itself. This is long path indeed. Such people go through a lot of suffering before they get a hint of where they are wrong.

These were some strange resistances people encounter when faced with belief destroying agents. Perhaps I'm missing a few more, but you get the point. By agents I mean people with knowledge, eye opening books, reports, experiences and anything that can question a belief. Resistance occurs as a result of deep ignorance. Ignorance is a result of not being aware. Being aware that an idea is

not founded on direct experience and can be a belief, weakens the belief considerably. Not justifying the belief crumbles it down. Consciously looking for experiences, evidences, contrary viewpoints and falsification help to destroy the belief completely.

What should I do with all those pesky believers, I can't stand them anymore? Tolerate. Period.

Have compassion, sympathy, kindness and love for those who are trapped in beliefs. Beliefs cause huge amount of suffering and a person who is suffering does not deserve hate. Know that those who are further in path are tolerating you now, at this very moment. Beliefs are ignorance manifested, and ignorance is as ancient and vast as Mind itself. All knowledge is just ignorance [5]. The Self is free only when all beliefs end, and when all knowledge ends. The Self doesn't need to know anything else to be Self, it shines in its own light.

But I want to help people get rid of their beliefs, what should I do? Drop a hint. Set up yourself as a living example. Be diplomatic and sweet. Of course, you can make a person drop any belief by simply pointing a gun to his head. I don't recommend this method, because the cure can be temporary, symptoms tend to reappear when the gun is pointing away. And remember that the other person can always get his own gun and return the favour. The more you force someone to drop a belief, the more the resistance grows. Some beliefs are like a virus that feeds on antibiotics. Showing the light to the blind does not help much, one must hold his hand and walk with him. Those who have faith in you will walk with you, rest won't. A life free of beliefs is the best way to introduce others to their own beliefs. Those who have eyes will see, they will understand why you live the way you live, why you talk the way you talk. They will follow you.

Those who are on the threshold, but are still resisting can be pushed into the light by a mere hint. The hint needs to be polite, non-threatening, intelligent and even comical. For those who can't even see the hints; being diplomatic, sweet, charismatic and affectionate can help to entice them into the bright side. For extreme cases, sometimes the best action is to walk away from them. For those beliefs that feed on resistance, it is best to leave them alone and let them starve to death. For some people, it causes more harm to their growth when they encounter a truth they are not yet ready for. They may recoil in fear, may get totally confused, may end up in depression, you never know.

Eradicating beliefs of others is a tricky affair. If you are on a superfast path, I'd recommend to not to mess with people. They will be taken care of. They are already perfect from your point of view. You don't want to fix them. What you really need to do is fix yourself. Get rid of your own beliefs first. Do not engage

with people unless they come to you and ask for knowledge. This will save you a lot of trouble, save your time, propel you forward quickly as you don't need to deal with the consequences of your actions on others. Do not take responsibility for other's growth unless you are permitted to do so [6]. Once you reach the peak, you can guide those in the valley better. You cannot carry others in your arms, everyone has to walk their own path. Ultimately, remember that there are no others, its just you here, nothing but your Self.

Notes:

[1] No one likes to be called a fool. Well, except a seeker. A seeker intentionally seeks falsification of his knowledge. He likes it a lot, when he is shown the light. Realizing that he is a fool for holding a belief is a cause of celebrations.

Falsification is the primary method of validation in all Sciences. A theory/an observation stands on its feet firmly only when all attempts to falsify it fail. If something is not falsifiable, it is unscientific, and cannot become a subject of study. It is impossible to find an experience/experiment to study something if it is not falsifiable. More here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falsifiability>

[2] This should not be a surprise for those who have debated something on the internet. The anonymity (if any) and physical separation can bring out the worst in a person. As a side note, there are people who intentionally provoke others by a gross attack on their beliefs, and just enjoy the resulting show. We all know who they are, we call them trolls.

[3] Easier said than done. Most of us have a tendency to avoid people who repeatedly prove us wrong, show us our error and beliefs. This is just self preservation, only that - it is flight mode instead of fight mode. It is said that if you are afraid of facing your teacher, he is the best teacher for you. A teacher's job is to lower the barriers of the Ego sufficiently in order to enable the student to gain some knowledge and destroy the beliefs. So an attitude of surrender and discipline is expected from the student. If you find that you are unable to remain humble, surrendered or disciplined, know that you are carrying a huge ego there.

[4] I say that because a "cultured" person generally avoids correcting others. When you find that people take offense and become defensive when shown wrong, you keep your tongue in control and pretend to simply agree. This is just to avoid the trouble, and to preserve the nice fluffy warm relationships. Sometimes that is what a proper action is. Some people are not ready to face the facts and their beliefs should not be disturbed. Fix others on your own risk.

[5] See the discussion on knowledge: Knowledge as ignorance.

[6] If you are in a tradition or a system, you need the permission from masters before you play with people in any way. It is a risky undertaking. When beliefs are removed quickly and carelessly, the shock to the believer causes more harm than benefit. Other times, the believer, having lost all his false support, becomes totally dependent on you for answers, guidance, even for day-to-day affairs etc. This can put a lot of extra burden on you. The job of a teacher is that of responsibility and you never know the consequences your teaching can cause. When there is a support system in place, both the teacher and the student can be saved from any possible catastrophe.

Afflictions of the Mind: Part-5.1 (Suffering)

Suffering - what, why and how.

We have briefly discussed suffering in previous articles. Here, as usual, we are going into the details of it. **Suffering** is a state of the Mind, characterized by the presence of thoughts, feelings, emotions, internal actions, memories and such mental objects, that are negative in nature. By Negative, I mean, having harmful or destructive consequences [1]. This state of the Mind is quite repulsive, the Mind wants to get rid of it. It is unwanted, unnatural. A person in this state is incapable of thinking correctly, acting wisely or speaking coherently. Such a person is often rendered inactive, but sometimes can also become violent or sick.

The sensations and reactions caused by suffering are similar in nature to those caused by physical pain [2]. The body and the Mind tries to avoid it, run away from it. Often the Mind gets caught in suffering for days, months and even years. The suffering becomes habitual if not cured and one can spend his whole life in the grip of one or other kinds of suffering. Actually, the current state of humanity is mostly that of suffering, irrespective of classes. This is mind boggling. Man, being the smartest and most capable animal, should have solved this problem within minutes. But we see the exact opposite. The state of the suffering is seen as “normal” by the society, and unless it becomes violent and destructive, nothing is done about it. In extreme cases, the suffering becomes a recognizable mental illness and the person is thrown into isolation or is kept under sedative drugs. So, mostly people have no clue how to solve the problem of suffering.

So, we come to an important question - what causes suffering? Ignorance. One word. Superficially, we may see various events, people, desires, physical conditions, beliefs and a thousand other things as cause of the suffering, but at the core of all of them, lies ignorance. Ignorance, as we defined it, is a lack of knowledge, or incomplete knowledge, and when a person encounters situations that demand correct and complete knowledge in order to act, the person finds himself helpless, incapable of dealing with that situation. The result is that the Mind is thrown into a conundrum, confusion and various negative processes take over. The Mind sees the situation as a threat and its survival programs (Ego) kicks in, causing states of fear, anger, hatred and such emotions. These give rise to negative intentions, sometimes negative actions, which cause more suffering and

the person goes down the spiral very soon [3].

What is the cure for suffering? Knowledge. When the ignorance is destroyed and correct thinking is restored, the Mind returns to peace and the suffering ends. It may take some time and one may need to collect enough experience to gain the knowledge needed to end one's suffering. It totally depends on the capabilities of the sufferer if he can end it sooner. A wise, aware, intelligent and bold person can end any suffering in minutes, and moreover, avoids falling into that state in the first place.

Who suffers? No one. There is no one there to suffer. The negative processes and contents appear and disappear on their own. Usually the Mind assigns them to an identity, as we have seen in the discussion on the topic of identity. It is done to organize the experience, to attach a tag to those experiences. Well, this simply results in an amplification of the suffering, because, a person who is ignorant of this circus of identity, assumes that he (the identity) is the sufferer. You can see young children, where the identity has not yet formed, their suffering is often superficial and lasts for seconds. As the person grows old, and his identity takes shape, the suffering becomes stronger and lasts longer.

Does the Self suffer too? No, the Self is incapable of suffering or happiness. The Self is merely an onlooker, a witness, a watcher. You can see the Self, unmoved and shining as brightly as ever, even in the darkest state of suffering. Turn inwards and see your Self, you will find that it is just watching the whole drama peacefully. And there lies the real cure of suffering. Once the suffering is seen from the point of view of the Self, it disappears. When seen by the Self, there is no suffering, only mental processes, contents, actions and such. They come and go like the dark clouds over a clear blue sky.

Even if one is deep in ignorance, simply watching the state of suffering with high awareness, alertness and attention, helps in eradicating it. Clear observation and understanding of suffering helps to gain the needed knowledge and clears the fog of ignorance. Once suffering is seen as it is, it never returns.

So, does the awareness of suffering make me happy? No, it makes you peaceful. Happiness is just another state of the Mind, only with positive contents instead of negative. A wise person treats suffering and happiness as same. Both occurrences in the Mind, nothing more. You may find a release and feeling of bliss when the suffering ends, and this is because the natural state of the Mind is blissful and peaceful. The contrast may be perceived as happiness. One's goal should be freedom from suffering, not the bondage of happiness. Happiness, as usual, is impermanent and doesn't last.

Is it enough to see the suffering to end it? Usually one also needs to get up and do something to eliminate the cause of it. For example, if the suffering is being caused by a disease, one must cure it, not just observe it, the result can be death without suffering, which is obviously as bad as a death with suffering. If the suffering is because of another person, one must take actions to either get rid of that person or to get out of that situation. No, I don't recommend killing the person, even if it is tempting to do that, it can cause more suffering. A wise man ends the cause of suffering in such a way that his actions do not cause further suffering. An ignorant, on the other hand, takes haphazard actions, resulting in more suffering to himself and people around him. So a complete cure of the suffering involves both knowledge and proper action.

Suffering is never caused by external agents. This may seem counter intuitive. Suffering is a state of Mind, independent of the external situations or other people. If we let those situations affect us, we invite suffering. The content of our Mind is our own making. An untrained Mind has no idea how to separate the contents of his Mind from surroundings and is on the mercy of external situations and people, totally controlled by them. Imagine if your Mind came with a remote control, with buttons that can cause any kind of thought, good or bad, any emotion good or bad. An ignorant person is the one who throws away that remote on the street for anyone to operate or be operated by anything that hits it. A person who depends on other people for his happiness, hands over the remote to those people. Obviously, the result is always bad. Sooner or later, someone will press the wrong buttons and will make you suffer. A wise person, keeps the remote in his pocket. He lets his own volition decide which buttons to press, and obviously, no wise person will press buttons that invoke negativity of any kind.

You are poor, you were born in poverty. You need to do hard work 12 hours a day in hellish conditions, just to fill your stomach. That's a lot of suffering, and I'm sure this is a familiar situation for many of us. Isn't this suffering being caused by external factors? The unjust society, the greedy people, aren't they responsible for your suffering? If you really think so, your remote control is not in your pocket. Moreover, this question shows presence of many beliefs. You were never born in poverty, you were never born actually. You are not in a bad condition, its just a situation you find yourself in. There are no bad people, its your own expectations that make them good or bad. If the situation fulfils your desires, it is good, else not and if people behave as you please, they are good, else not. This is your own bias, things are as they are. You believe that a lot of money and nice people are all you need to be happy and you are bent on "getting" that by any means, you have no clue that external things and others are not in your control. Most of the time, even you are not in your own control, you are

animated by mere beliefs, desires, expectation, fantasies and are not even aware of it.

There are just experiences, your ignorance colours them as good or bad, desirable or undesirable. You as a Self are simply experiencing something, but you as an identity, as a person managed to see it as hell, thanks to all the beliefs, desires and brainwashing – all just ignorance. This is the real cause of suffering, not the people or situations [4].

Once you become aware that your mental condition is of your own making, you can take the control back. Realize that your expectations, beliefs and desires are making you think and act in irrational ways. Identify them one by one and put a lid on them. This is all is needed to end the suffering. Of course it is easier said than done. It can takes anything from a few minutes to a life time, depending on how deep the person is in the pit of ignorance and how efficiently his mental faculties are working (aka intelligence).

So, will realizing the above, make my poverty disappear? Will I get whatever I need, magically? No, it will make your suffering disappear. You will still remain poor. Sorry, I have no magic pills for that. You become clam and stable, very peaceful. Once your suffering is gone, your Mind comes into action. It starts whirling fast, it is no more rusted by suffering. You start thinking correctly and therefore take correct actions. Your right actions can bring you out of poverty or any other situation for that matter. You do it naturally, you are not desperate for it, you let it happen, instead of pushing it hard. Remember that knowledge leads to correct actions, its all so natural.

What is the right action in such cases, once I see my ignorance and destroy it? Well, you will know it for sure. In my experience, instead of believing in random things, desiring, expecting and controlling everything, I simply let it all go. I made a list of priorities, broke up tasks into tiny steps, and one baby step at a time started working on them, instead of just suffering, sitting in a corner, cursing stuff and crying. It worked! Instead of depending on others, I learnt new skills, learnt new ways, switched jobs, got rid of people who were too demanding or manipulating, who just used me. I took refuge with people who were more intelligent and wiser than me, who had to offer hard practical advice instead of fluffy dreams. They showed me how foolish I was, they destroyed my old self mercilessly. All I had to do was listen to them with an open mind. I reduced my needs to a minimum, didn't care what others were doing. I got out of the rat race. I had to do nothing more, no struggles, no fights. It becomes so easy when you know. Knowledge not only ends suffering, it brings happiness too.

Notes:

[1] The problem with suffering is that it comes with distinct subjective "flavours". There is a quality, a feeling, that is associated with the negative content. The content is not neutral for the one suffering from it. It has a smell, a colour, a darkness and repulsive quality. The suffering from jealousy is different in quality from that of a suffering from loss of money, for example. It takes some practice to neutralize the qualia associated with the suffering. When the negative contents are experienced as just contents, tasteless and colourless, it becomes easy to get rid of them.

[2] The Mind does not distinguish between physical pain and mental pain (suffering). It sends the body in defense mode in both cases. So you will see that suffering makes a healthy person sick, lowers his immunity, makes him lethargic and inactive and even causes physical symptoms to appear. The most common are head aches and digestive troubles. Many of the diseases have cause in Mind, and when the suffering is cured, it cures the disease as well.

[3] People often fall into substance abuse, bad habits or bad company when in suffering. This is a fine evidence of how the Mind starts functioning in an irrational way when under the spell of suffering. If you find yourself addicted to things, or attached to certain foods, places or people that are not exactly good for you, you may find that there is a suffering that is causing such behaviour. What these things do is, provide a temporary kick to the Mind, a transient relief, which makes situation even worse and lengthens the time needed to come out of the state of suffering.

[4] Apart from poverty, insecurity, hunger and disease, broken relations and death of relatives are other major causes of suffering. More on these two later. But for now, I can say, the cure lies in realizing that there is no one else to relate to other than your Self and there is no death, just change.

Afflictions of the Mind: Part-5.2 (Suffering)

Suffering v/s Pain

Sometimes people confuse the two. Pain is a physical process, where the peripheral nervous system is communicating a situation of damage to the central nervous system. This is a healthy occurrence. The body takes proper actions (such as avoiding the damage causing agent, or protecting the damaged parts) and it helps the organism to survive. It is a primitive, yet very effective strategy of the Mind.

When does pain become a suffering? When the person identifies with the pain. The pain happens, it does not “happen to” the person. It is the ignorance of the person that makes him perceive the pain being inflicted on his whole being, when the pain should have been seen only as an uncomfortable sensation happening in the body. It is wise to take action and minimize the pain, than to cry about it, curse the situation, fall into self-pity or hate the agent causing the pain. These are all signs of immaturity and stupidity.

Once there is knowledge that the pain is a physical occurrence, and the damage has been already done, one can take proper action to end the suffering as well as the pain. Pain takes some time to go away, but one need not suffer from it.

Negativity

A state of the Mind characterized by negative contents. Thoughts, memories, fantasies etc. that cause and maintain suffering. Also seen in the forms of worries, stress and anxiety. Often a fear, a belief, an uncertainty or lack of knowledge is the root cause of negativity. Negativity makes a person behave in irrational ways, makes him doubt and distrust everyone, makes him see all situations as threatening and harmful and renders him incapable of taking right actions.

Often, negativity is also caused by past traumas, unfulfilled desires and unfulfilled expectations. An ignorant person cannot see their nature and thinks that he is a victim of it all. Instead of letting these occurrence come and go, he clings to

them, making the suffering worse and prolonged. Needless to say, a negative person suffers a lot, and makes others suffer too.

There is no general cure for negativity. The root cause is ignorance and ignorance of the specific matter that is causing the negativity. If it is a fear, one must see it, become aware of it, take action to get rid of it or protect oneself reasonably (if it's a real threat). This should make the suffering go away. And if even after that the negative thoughts return, the memories haunt, one must observe them carefully and attentively. One must not jump to action, proper action has been already taken. One must see that now there is no reason for negative content to appear in the Mind. This weakens the negativity and it soon disappears. Awareness of the negativity is the key.

In the same way, if the cause is unfulfilled desire, one must see that the desires come and go, they are not "your desires". Expectations are usually beliefs, assumptions that an event/person/situation will happen in exactly the way you want. Things may or may not happen as you please. You have no control over those, the most you can do is try to control your own thinking, correct it first. The suffering disappears when irrational expectations disappear.

If there is an uncertainty, a novel situation or a demanding situation and you have no clue how to handle it, you fall into anxiety and stress. The worry consumes you. The intelligence disappears and your actions are mostly reactions, damage control in a haphazard way. I cannot suggest a cure, it's all medicine for stress, but I can say from my own experience, that breaking down the problem into small parts works well. Set up priorities and handle the first thing first. This keeps the mind focused on the needed tasks instead of things that seem impossible to do or to know. One step at a time, and take your own sweet time. Learn, know, act, rectify – repeat.

Often work, survival issues and close relatives contribute to the stress. One must see the cause clearly, one must accept his ignorance and turn the situation into a learning activity. Ensure that your attempts at learning are not random and are not causing further damage (such as a loss to your company or yourself). Once you get the needed experience, the stressful situation is handled properly and the stress will never appear again.

Automatic loops of suffering

Suffering is also caused by habitual patterns in the Mind. Some programs that are there for proper functioning of the Mind and some abilities like imagination or planning go haywire and the infinite loops of suffering begin. These can be the narrator, the nagger, scenario maker and fantasizer. Yes, I made up those names.

I use them to locate and kill the loops whenever they occur and the Mind is caught in them. Naming helps in setting up a trigger, the Mind associates the name with the loop. When they begin, the Mind recalls the name, a recognition occurs and it snaps out of the loop immediately.

As we have seen in previous articles, the Mind is caught in a thought process continuously and most of the time keeps narrating the thoughts in a language form. This is the infamous Monologue, the internal chatter, the monkey mind. Moreover, the Mind identifies them as “my thoughts”. When does it become a suffering? When the content of the thoughts is negative. It is irritating as it is, and when the monologue also causes suffering it is desirable to kill it there and then. This ends the suffering instantly. A common example of narrator in action is a story, that you keep telling again and again to no one but yourself. Probably something bad happened, and now there is this story of how it “happened to me” and how terrible it was. The narrator is never tired of repeating it again and again, filling the Mind with negativity and suffering. Some people even repeat it to anyone else they can find, causing a suffering to others also.

The only way to end the narrator loop is to become aware of it, know that it is not you (if it is you, why would you even do it?). Just as I mentioned, there are some tricks to become aware of it as soon as it starts. One is to set up a hook, a name or an affirmation, that kicks in with the narrator and you get a choice to stop there.

The nagger is a loop that incites you into action, a negative action. Someone insulted you, and it hurt you deeply. The narrator brings it up repeatedly and pushes you to take revenge. It has turned into a nagger. This repeats endlessly, causing endless suffering. Sometimes people take actions suggested by the nagger, and repent it later. One can weaken it by not taking the action. It often provokes in different ways. Know that these are simple survival instincts, primitive programs, that have gone dysfunctional.

A scenario maker loop is the planning ability of the Mind gone wrong. Planning is good, an extraordinary ability, we talked about. For an ignorant person having no skills of planning, the planning is replaced by making up scenarios. Simply making up scenarios in the Mind, especially negative ones, causes suffering. These are often negative and focus on how everything will go wrong with your task. Fear is the root cause here. You have an important project to complete or perhaps an exam to appear in. The Mind comes up with all kinds of negative situations that can happen, and indulges itself in suffering. The scenarios tell you how you will always fail, this is pessimism at it worst. Needless to say, one's performance is affected by it, and it can become a self-defeating act.

Fantasizer is a loop, a habitual pattern that is characterized by negative imagination. Imagination, a great gift, we discussed before, can become a cause of suffering when it happens in a negative way. Fantasizer differs from scenario maker in an important way, the scenario or situation imagined by the fantasizer is totally unreal. A good example is – a monster under the bed. This fantasy causes suffering for many children. For adults, the monster is replaced by other irrational things – a curse, an invisible presence, imaginary fears, phobia, paranoia, doom and gloom of all kinds. When in the grip of the fantasizer, a person imagines things that are not there, takes illogical actions and suffers.

I suspect that there are more such loops. The cure for most of them is to know what they are and remain attentive, alert and fully aware of the contents of your own Mind. The most important thing to know is that these dysfunctional processes are not “you”. You are the one who watches them. You don’t want negative contents there tormenting you 24x7.

Boredom and Depression

Boredom is a state of Mind, a dullness, that occurs when there are no distractions present, especially in cases of Minds habitual of distractions. In modern (aka “civilized”) societies, people, having fulfilled most of their basic needs, have plenty of time on their hands. They mostly (mis)use that time to keep themselves distracted with this or that. This is their idea of “happiness”. When, for any reason, the distractions are not present, they are overwhelmed by suffering, and absence of “happiness” or pleasures. This is seen in flights, trains, or in long queues, where people are forced away from their favourite distraction and entertainment. So, you will find some arrangements to distract people in such places. A screen, a TV, colourful magazines, newspapers, anything works. Of course, these days smartphones have replaced most of the varied distractions, you will find people deeply engaged with them and suffering as if in hell, when the battery dies. If you want to make a shallow person suffer, all you need to do is take his entertainment away.

This is the nature of the (untrained) Mind, that it loses interest in something, as soon as its novelty fades. So after a few hours, your most loved distraction also becomes boring, and you start looking around to find something even more distracting. This repeats, until you suffer some more and fall asleep, which is a natural cure. A better cure is to realize that the Mind has become habitual of the contents, it demands more and more of them. This results in impulses, desires and irrational actions, all causes of suffering. When one learns to just be, one frees oneself from boredom.

Some people find themselves caught in lifestyles that are boring. Their lives are a run of a mill. If one lacks curiosity, an attitude of an explorer, seeks nothing, questions nothing and does nothing of value, his life becomes nothing but boring. One needs to cultivate such qualities, and if one is on a path, boredom is least of his problems, he never gets enough time to spare. A seeker is busy seeking, peacefully, persistently, continuously, there is no time to get bored. He never suffers loneliness, he never needs distractions.

I see depression as an extreme and chronic case of suffering. When one can be distracted by nothing, loses a will to do anything at all, has no goals, no paths, nothing excites him, and his life becomes a burden, one is in a deep suffering, a depression. There are various causes of depression and one slips into the pit of depression mostly due to prolonged suffering. The long suffering dulls the Mind completely, makes the person devoid of life and energy. Often a series of failures in spite of best attempts, extreme trauma, long periods of abuse, ill health, unfriendly relatives and families, poverty etc. are causes of depression. However, at the root of it all, lies ignorance.

I will not undertake lengthy case studies of depression, but it is easy to see how ignorance is the root cause and how correcting it can cure the depression. Often, the depressed person is so depressed that he is unaware of his situation, and external help is needed. It takes time and patience to bring someone out of depression. However, if one is not so deep inside the dark pit of depression, one can get out of it simply by careful observation and introspection. Firstly, it helps to ask the question – “who is depressed?” or “who is suffering?”. You will find that there is an illusory entity, a made up “me” who is going through the depression or the suffering. You will see that the Self is still there shining brightly, seeing this condition of depression too. This is enough to bring someone with self-awareness, out of depression. Secondly, one can start by finding the cause of the depression and seeing how the ignorance is behind it all. Once the ignorance is removed, the cause is removed and the suffering disappears. It was never there, it was just ignorance.

Great masters have opined that suffering is a blessing in disguise. It opens up the path to freedom. If one is not even suffering, one is surely deep in ignorance, one is fully unaware of his condition. Suffering makes you question, and thus shows you a way out of darkness of ignorance. When there is no suffering, there is no natural way to get out of ignorance. Why would one even try to improve or gain knowledge when one is perpetually happy? So suffering has a positive side, it is a device of mother nature to nudge us towards knowledge and freedom. However, once you get the hint, know, and leave the suffering behind. It need not remain as

your only tool for progressing.

Afflictions of the Mind: Part-6 (Stupidity)

Stupidity

Stupidity is a less than optimal functioning of various mental faculties. We have seen the numerous extraordinary gifts a Mind has, and if most of them are not functioning properly, that Mind is afflicted with stupidity. Its symptoms are a general dullness of the Mind, inability to learn new things, new skills, to understand, comprehend and analyse, and also, inability of logical and critical thinking. In extreme cases a stupid person fails to talk coherently, performs irrational actions, displays a total lack of self control or control over emotions, and can become violent and harmful to others. Stupidity worsens when in a group. A group (such as armies) behaves in extremely stupid ways compared to the individual stupidity. You don't want to be near a mob of stupid people.

Never underestimate the power of stupid people in large groups.
- George Carlin

How would I know if I'm stupid? Probably you won't know. Stupidity comes with added inability to properly judge one's own intelligence and also the intelligence of others. A stupid person usually holds himself in high regard and thinks of others in inferior terms. He is incapable of estimating other's intelligence and is incapable of understanding actions and speech of an intelligent person. When his stupidity is pointed out or some advice is offered, a stupid will often take offense and can turn violent. This makes things very difficult indeed, as there is little that can be done to improve a stupid person.

Talk sense to a fool and he calls you foolish.
- Euripides, (480-406 BC)

You can very easily convince a wise man that he has done something stupid, and the wise will thank you for correcting it. But it is almost impossible to convince a stupid that he is so, because he is unable to comprehend the reasons, feels insulted and erects barriers against any good advice. A stupid often blames situations or others for the bad outcomes of his stupid actions. He is full of

hubris and superiority complex. The hallmark of stupidity is presence of rock solid beliefs, superstitions and such. A stupid is also very gullible and can be easily fooled, obviously. Wicked people often take advantage of stupid people and employ them to get whatever they want. It is very easy to manipulate a stupid person, and very difficult to show him that someone manipulated him.

Never argue with stupid people, they will drag you down to their level and then beat you with experience.

- Mark Twain

Since such people are incapable of excelling in anything, they turn to violence and crime to get whatever they are after. Jails are full of stupid people. Some are too stupid to even commit crimes and end up doing menial jobs. Smart criminals exist, but they don't get caught and are often found making laws and ruling others instead. Stupid people cause harm, to self and to others. A majority of the suffering in this world is due to stupidity.

The difference between stupidity and genius is that genius has its limits.

- Albert Einstein

What causes stupidity? The causes are many, and some research has been done on this matter. Some of them are - genetic causes, diseases, malnutrition, bad parenting, drugs, bad nurturing and stupid company. However, people with extremely healthy bodies and brains who were brought up nicely in affluent families also display stupidity. It is not very fruitful to argue about the causes, the damage is done already and one should try to find a cure. Note that people with brain damage and mental retardation come under a different category, the category of patients. These are often incapable of performing simple tasks too and suffer from a disability. A stupid person is mostly a normal person and is fully functional.

Isn't everyone differently capable? That term is only a polite and politically correct way of saying some people are more stupid than others. It has become a taboo to call someone stupid, for obvious reasons, people don't like it and intelligent people want to avoid embarrassing situations that follow when you call someone stupid. Anyway, it doesn't help to simply tag someone as stupid, he remains so, and usually becomes even more so as a result of resistance. So yes, there is a full spectrum of people ranging from extremely stupid to geniuses. Most of us fall somewhere in the middle of this bell curve. Where do we draw a line and start identifying someone as stupid? It is very difficult if not totally impossible to define a fixed criteria for stupidity. There are some attempts, such as IQ, which is just stupidity. An individual is a dynamic entity and his intelligence

depends on many factors, times and situations. We have already discussed this. So stupidity is circumstantial. All one can do is identify some broad symptoms of it, as mentioned above, and if these symptoms persist in majority of situations and occur frequently then it is safe to conclude that the person in question is afflicted.

Think of how stupid the average person is, and then realize half of them are stupider than that.
- George Carlin

There are some ways to diagnose oneself in cases where one's stupidity is only borderline. If one is still able to get some hints, there is some hope that he will correct this affliction with some effort. If one is surrounded by people who amount to mostly nothing, have never achieved anything (material or intellectual), are good for nothing, their speech is limited to jokes and gossip and activities to eating and drinking, then one should start to suspect that he is one of them. Mostly intelligent people leave the company of a stupid, and in time he is left with people of his own kind. So if you are surrounded by stupids, its time to evaluate your own intelligence.

The realization of ignorance is the first act of knowing.
- Jean Toomer

If one finds himself failing in simple tests, incapable of learning simple tasks and if this happens repeatedly, one needs to sit down and think about it. If one finds himself getting into fights or troubles or in the grip of harmful habits, one needs to question it. If one finds that he is repulsed by arts, books, intelligent discussions, interviews with great people, documentaries, sciences and anything that needs thinking, one should surely conclude that he lacks enough intelligence. If one is not curious, questions nothing, stares in air when questions are posed and is dumbfounded by the activities of intelligent people, one should conclude that a revival of his Mind is needed.

In cases when the stupidity is harmless, why can't one simply live his life happily? Yes, there are no compulsions to become intelligent or wise. Many people who are not so, live simple lives, are happy and are good citizens. However, it becomes a must to eliminate all traces of stupidity when you are on a path of knowledge, or even when you wish to achieve something of significance. Stupidity is a major obstacle and a tale tell sign of ignorance. The good news is you don't need to become a math genius in order to get rid of ignorance. It is enough to develop some common sense, some wit, little bit of logical and critical thinking and most importantly an open mind.

How to cure stupidity? If one becomes aware of this affliction, it is not

impossible to cure it. One must start with being humble. Surrender and accept that some improvement is needed. If you desire to progress on a path, the will and energy will be there. If you don't have a path then you need to evaluate yourself anyway. A stupid is a rigid and ignorant person, so the obvious starting point is being open, malleable and innocent. Innocence is always a good place to start compared to ignorance.

The highest form of ignorance is when you reject something you don't know anything about.
- Wayne Dyer

Help can be taken. Good teachers are mostly eager to teach anyone with enough patience, interest and willpower. It is easy to find a good teacher, a good student is rare. Books also help, start with light reading. Most importantly try to be with intelligent, wise and humble people. A stupid will avoid such people and will often ridicule them. You can do the reverse and get their favour. It doesn't take long to become like them or to even surpass them. Stupidity converts into intelligence at an exponential rate. Its all very slow at the beginning, but as you gain knowledge, it picks up speed, because knowledge enables more knowledge and sharpens the intellect as a bonus. It feeds on itself and grows beyond limits very soon.

Some more tricks to improve intelligence were discussed before.

Rigidity

It is an inability to change. One need not be very stupid in order to display rigidity. Often very intelligent people are also afflicted with rigidity. Of course, rigidity is a sign of stupidity, but the so called experts and authorities are most affected by it. It is characterized by an adamant behaviour, the person refuses to change his outdated or incorrect ideas, thinking, actions and refuses to give up irrational beliefs. This obviously causes problems when your goal is more knowledge.

Ignorance is always afraid of change.
- Jawaharlal Nehru

Rigidity is often seen in old age and is a sign of old age. Although one can also find some very malleable people even in old age. There can be many reasons for being rigid. Some of them are fear of ridicule, hubris, superiority complex, fear of loss of reputation, plain stupidity, fossilized beliefs and monetary gains. These are self explanatory, we have discussed them before in regard to beliefs.

How do I know if I am rigid? It is fortunately easy. If you are not also stupid, you will know in seconds. If you are inclined to meet and talk to people of only your “kind”, if you haven’t learnt anything new in years, if you often ridicule new ideas and new generation, if you are always adamant on doing some things in your own preferred way or if you cannot let go of any arguments no matter what, you do something always in same manner everyday, you never experiment, then you can suspect that your Mind is in grip of rigidity.

How to cure it? Be open minded, humble, in a posture of surrender, accepting but not believing. Try new things. Try new ideas, activities. Get to know people from outside your circle or profession. Kill a belief a day. There are many ways. And if you are intelligent, as the case would be most of the time, you will soon discover that you are progressing by leaps and bounds.

Confusion

Or lack of clarity, or overthinking or thinking which takes you nowhere. Confusion halts your knowledge acquisition process. It doesn’t matter if one is stupid or genius, it afflicts all. Confusion is caused by conflicting ideas, incoherent beliefs, lack of understanding, stupidity and rigidity. If you are confused about something, it is a sign that you are in grip of beliefs, and you lack solid experience. Too much theory, assumptions, study of texts without seeking corresponding experiences, blind faith on teachers, lack of logical and critical thinking abilities can cause confusion.

In the state of confusion, one tends to make wrong choices, and does less than optimal actions. So it is a must that one suspends all decisions till confusions are cleared. The only way to clear them is to gain more knowledge and experience.

Whenever a man does a thoroughly stupid thing, it is always from the noblest motives.
- Oscar Wilde

Fickleness

The inability of the Mind to stay at a particular subject for long. Such Minds are distracted easily and jump from one thing to another very quickly. They have short attentions spans, get bored easily and have no defined goals. However, such people are often very intelligent, curious and highly active. These qualities achieve nothing because they can’t accomplish much due to their fickleness.

Such people find learning a skill a difficult task, as it demands hours of

concentration and can take months and years. If they start learning, they leave it abruptly and attempt another skill, which they leave early too. They cannot think about an idea for very long, and their decisions are impulsive in nature. Obviously, such Minds are unfit for meditation or introspection, and it becomes difficult to progress for them.

There are some tricks to get hold of such monkey minds. First of all get rid of all distractions. When you are doing something, say learning or practicing, it must be the only task for you and there must be physical isolation from other things or people. Secondly, break down the task into tiny steps and resolve to finish a step everyday at any cost. Cultivate discipline, there are various methods for that, refer to books. Cultivate awareness of the contents of your Mind and your actions. As soon as you become aware that the Mind is taking you to some other matter, stop there for a few seconds, let the impulse come and go, and continue with your task at hand. This practice will slowly destroy the fickleness and you will become calm, steady, peaceful and super aware.

We are almost done with major afflictions of the Mind, and in the next article we will deal with the mother of all afflictions – the Ego. It is not really an affliction, but for a seeker it is necessary to know it in detail, because it can become a huge hurdle.

Ego and its tendencies

Ego

Ego is a popular term, and therefore, has acquired many meanings. It means “I” or “myself” and it also means something that one owns (e.g. in “my ego is weak” etc). It also means a sense of self-worth, self-esteem (for some odd reason). In Psychology/Psychoanalysis it has been adopted in a more formal way. For the purpose of this discussion, we will define it as a *structure in the Mind that deals with survival directly and in a primitive and mechanical fashion*. It is also called Mammalian Mind, Lower Mind, and Primitive Mind etc.

There is also a Reptilian Mind, which is even more primitive and is seen as control system for basic actions. It takes care of some very basic self-preservation activities. E.g. when you are about to fall from your chair, the fear, the feeling of urgency and the actions you take to save yourself or to minimize the damage, all come from reptilian mind. There is often no time to think, or even for primitive strategies to fire up, you must act mechanically and automatically. We can see some physical structures corresponding to these various mental structures. The reptilian part corresponds to the brain stem and spinal cord, the mammalian part corresponds to the limbic system. The cortex and the neo-cortex correspond to the newer and more developed human Mind.

Ego is a structure in the Mind. It is tempting to call it as yet another affliction of the Mind, and some people do so, but it is a part of the Mind, not a condition of it. It is an ancient and primitive part. In the evolutionary journey of the Mind, some structures formed in the early stages and they continue to operate till present time. These structures are perceived as some programs, tendencies and instinctual knowledge. These were extremely useful in those days, they kept the Mind going, helped the individuals survive and procreate, and formed a strong base for further evolution.

Ego continues to function in human Mind, and if not trained and utilized properly, becomes an affliction instead of a bodyguard. A huge amount of suffering is a result of Ego and its actions. So it becomes necessary to study it in detail. Its knowledge frees us from its afflictions, and restores peace, happiness

and freedom. In an ignorant Mind, the Ego controls the person totally, and in an aware mind, the case is reversed. We are now going to do the hair splitting and in-depth analysis of it.

Ego v/s Identity

The Self can identify with its various activities or contents. It forms a structure called Identity, which we already discussed in detail. Self can also identify with Ego. It sees the acts and tendencies of the Ego as itself and owns it like any other mental or physical entity it can own. The Ego also gets assigned to a container of experiences. If the person operates mostly from his Ego part (commonly said to have a big Ego), then most of the Identity will be of Egoic nature. And since this is the most common state of humanity, the identity has become synonymous with Ego. But we are going to stick with more general definition of identity. Ego forms a part of it. Some people have “less Ego”, which may mean that their sense of identity is not mostly Egoic, it can be intellectual or spiritual etc.

As an aside, other stuff the Mind assigns to Identity is:

Objects: Land, houses, cars, food and what not. These can be seen as the part of the Mind and a person defends them as feverishly as he defends his body. Sometimes other people and pets are owned and objectified. So a person defends his mate and children equally, when in danger. Try insulting a pet and see its owner’s survival instincts flare up.

Body: This can be the case with most of humans, their body is the self for them. Their whole life revolves around it, that is the only thing they know of. Identifying with it has certain advantages, like, one tends to protect and maintain it better.

Ego: As mentioned above, when most of the actions, thoughts and processes of a person are of Egoic nature, the identity mostly consists of Ego. The person sees himself as the Ego.

Intellect: The identity can also be derived from thoughts, intellectual content, knowledge, intelligence and activities/thoughts belonging to them. So a person can identify himself as a writer, programmer or a scientist or even as a believer in such and such idea etc.

Self: A person can be identified with the Self, the witness, or the consciousness. Such a person sees himself as a watcher of all the mental drama and phantasmagoria.

These identifications keep changing depending on the demand and the situation. So the identity is a dynamic entity. Egoic identity is a special case of identity. Now that we know the difference between the common meaning of the Ego and the more general meaning, which is defined here, we can go ahead and see what this Egoic stuff is about.

Survival tendencies

The Mind, while going through its evolutionary journey (the Fundamental Process in action), has come up with certain strategies that helped it survive the immense forces of impermanence. Self-preservation is obviously the top most priority of the Mind. Structures that cannot preserve themselves are soon destroyed. In case of organisms or humans, it simply means death [1]. The Mind has very robust mechanisms for self-preservation, and most of them are not under our control.

Feeding oneself is the primary task for anyone. We do it relentlessly, just like other animals. Most of our activities are just the pursuit of food. And those are driven by the Egoic processes of self-preservation. When the stomach is full, the Ego is mostly at rest. Some auto-processes even make the entire being fall asleep, nothing more needs to be done when one lives at the level of the Ego. But for those living above it, the life starts when the stomach is full. Some odd behaviours spring from the Ego satisfaction one gets after eating. It is universal behaviour to offer food to others to gain their favour. The food makes Egoic programs kick in and suppress higher programs, which compete for execution with very powerful Egoic ones. So if you want a big contract, take the client out for a dinner. It is customary to offer food when someone visits you. This sends the friendly signals to the Ego that the place where it is, is harmless, safe and the host is not hostile. If you don't do it, you may "hurt the Ego" of your guest. It sends a signal that the guest is unwanted, and the Ego perceives it as a threat or insult.

Feeding someone also helps to make bonds and relations. Food and shelter (better if it's a mansion) helps to secure a mate. Most of the marriages are made this way. If you lack enough resources to get food or have no safe place to stay, you may find it difficult to secure a mate, it does not impress the person's Ego very much. A good relation starts with good food. Especially the sweet and fatty food, it triggers neurotransmitters (Oxytocin etc) which actually invoke feelings of trust, safety and likeness in your potential mate. This is because that is how bonds were made in the past, it's a learnt behaviour that results in better survival and is now stored as an Egoic tendency. Sweet and creamy food means more nutrition and they appeal to Ego, which then takes proper actions to secure the

relation which will bring more of such food. It is all automatic and below the awareness levels of people. They usually cannot explain their behaviour when influenced by food, and they make up some reasons that sound nicer and more “civilized”.

The body needs continuous nourishment and whenever it fails to get enough of it, it starts sending pain signals, known as Hunger, to the brain. The hunger is felt as a suffering, a threat, an urgency and the Egoic programs fire up to do something about it. A hungry man is just like an animal, he does whatever is needed to get the food. The issues like morality, right and wrong, aesthetics and all higher functions are suspended in order to meet this need. It is possible for a man to beg, scavenge, steal, rob or even kill others for food. The same actions can be evoked in case of shelter, another need for survival. Men are known to take possessions of others shelters, resources and land forcefully and violently. This is not only ancient, it is very much the present, we see it in the form of wars and crimes. Just our friendly Ego at work here. It is merciless in the matter of self-preservation.

One may ask whether such behaviour is ethical. The Ego knows no ethics, which is an indulgence of higher Mind. One can ponder on ethical questions when the stomach is full. When it comes to survival we leave the domain of right and wrong, we are on the mercy of very powerful Egoic tendencies. One can suspect that the matter of ethics ceases to make sense here. What if you are the victim, someone is trying to rob you of your food, isn't it wrong then? You are free to defend. Let the protective tendencies of your Ego take care of it. One can frighten away, harm or kill other in order to defend. This is also Ego in action. No amount of ethics or philosophy works here. Of course, a wise man who has mastered his Ego may behave differently, but the choice is always there.

How to remain uninfluenced by the tendencies of the Ego? These are very useful programs, so we want to keep them, but we do not want to be governed by them. The only way is to become aware of such programs and tendencies. Observe yourself very carefully under situations that make you behave in odd ways. Question your own actions, find the cause of them. You will see that you did such and such act only because it helps in survival. It is better to be honest about it rather than conceal it with more “civilized” notions. Survival is a must, and one must take proper actions to ensure it, and leave the issue there. Once you become aware of your own survival tendencies, you can act more meaningfully, and you can also see clearly why others act the way they do. This makes one forgive others and be compassionate towards them, as you now know why they act in a way they do.

If you can master your own Ego, it becomes very easy to master others, as now

you know all the right buttons to press. However, controlling others is surely not your path, and its surely not fun, because there are very severe consequences of it. All you can do is, use this knowledge to make your path smoother. You will find that effective use of it brings more peace and saves time, as you can keep troublesome people away and not get tangled in Ego games.

Protective tendencies

Just feeding is not enough obviously, there are a thousand things that can kill you, and the Ego has its own set of weapons to deal with such threats. We see them in the form of fight or flight behaviours. Mind has learnt this long ago that it is better to fight when there are more chances of winning and the enemy is weaker, else its better to run away. This is effected via internal actions known as Fear and Anger. They appear as feelings or emotions. Fear causes a person to take flight, while anger encourages him to fight. These have become ingrained in the Mind as Egoic tendencies for protection, and they happen without much control of the person.

Both ensure survival and protect the person from threats. They do spill over into day to day actions and result in odd kinds of behaviour. So an employee who doesn't obey you also causes anger even though he is not a threat. His disobedience is perceived by the Ego as an ineffectiveness of your power over him, you expect him to engage in flight behaviour, but he is not complying, which means its time to fight. Going late in a meeting makes you afraid, although there is no predator there, but the Ego sees your boss as a provider, a leader you must obey, and your failure to do so means you are provoking him for a fight, which makes your Ego issue commands to run away, and invokes fear to motivate you to do so.

This also explains some customs like bowing down. It means I'm not a threat, I'm receding not approaching. This calms down the Ego of the host and he tends to accept your presence better. Approaching someone with food or shiny stuff (aka gifts) has even better results. Smiling and making laughing noises helps even more. These actions are considered "normal" because most of us act via our Ego. If you are operated mostly by Ego, be sure that most of your actions will be governed by protective or defensive tendencies of it. You will also understand the strange behaviour of wise men who have a leash on their Egos, as they are less animated by it, they don't feel the need to act in a "normal" way and their actions seem strange when seen by an Egoic person. They wouldn't punish a person who robs them, they wouldn't hit you back if you insult them or they would never be afraid of anything. There are many more marks of such people, and obviously these men are very rare.

Procreative tendencies

Once the Mind is nicely fed and protected from danger, it wants to replicate itself. This is by necessity, as we have seen, structures that do not replicate get destroyed sooner or later thanks to the impermanence. Replication or reproduction is a necessity for the Mind. It is the most primal drive, which, in some organisms, surpasses even the self-preservation and protection (such as in microbes that divide into two new forms and give up their own individuality, or in creatures where one of the mates, usually the male, is eaten by the other after mating, or in cases where the offspring eats away their parent as soon as they are born).

The Mind has evolved some great and some odd strategies to ensure large scale reproduction. One of the necessities is to allow incremental changes in the structure of the organism, so that there is enough variation to resist any unforeseen environmental changes. This happens via mutation. Another trick to ensure variation and combine favourable traits is mixing of genetic structures, which is possible via sexual reproduction. So you will find that all higher animals reproduce via sexual means, mixing of genes, it has been a great strategy so far.

The structures responsible for ensuring sexual reproduction have taken the form of some Egoic tendencies in humans. These programs execute as soon as the person is ready to reproduce and as soon as there is a suitable mate nearby. Most of our interaction with opposite sex is governed by these tendencies. For example, attraction towards young and fit member is a natural tendency, as it means a good chance of reproduction and a healthy offspring. Repulsion towards ugly, diseased, old, weak or unfit individual is due to unfavourable chances for the mating and for offspring. Tendency of the males to mate with many is a result of programs that ensure wide distribution of genes, and tendency of females to mate with those who own enough resources and provide security is a result of programs that ensure survival and protection of the offspring and the mother. We do try to cover up these tendencies or explain them away with excuses, but they govern us, they have the strings and we are the puppets. Not obeying them gives rise to suffering, just like hunger or fear. This is longing for a sexual union, and is a very uneasy feeling to say the least.

These tendencies do make people behave in odd ways. Such as different dress codes for different genders, customs e.g. marriages and rituals that resemble a mating dance, and a large variety of social and individual behaviours. Most of the literature, art such as paintings, movies and such is nothing but a description of procreative behaviour in a fancy style. In the end there is mostly a union of

partners, if you see happy endings. Most of the internet is porn, most of the music and talk is about relations. Most of the efforts and actions of young people are efforts to get a beneficial mate or as many mates as possible. Whole societies are based on marriages and families, most remarkable being everyone carrying a name of their father. For many, their lifestyles are a consequence of mating, their sufferings are a consequence of getting a wrong mate, or their pain is due to failure to get a mate.

Well, I can only paint a tiny picture here, but you get the point. For one who is free from procreation tendencies of the Ego, this whole human drama looks very funny indeed. Its as if the whole world is doing a mating dance.

Social tendencies

Man is a social animal, and this is possible only because of the Ego. The Ego has programs that favour living in groups over a lone wolf style of life. Obviously, this had survival advantages in the past. An individual in the group is better protected, as other members do sound alarms or get eaten instead, is better fed as they can hunt big animals in a cooperative way or grow crops, gets more chances of mating, and so on and so forth.

All these tendencies appear in the Ego as social behaviours. So we see a tendency to organize into hierarchical structures, a tendency to associate with our tribe, a tendency to believe what others in our group believe and tendencies to ape the actions of others in the group.

It also explains the odd behaviour like wars, which is an attempt by one group to kill another and to steal their resources and mates. This worked well in the past. Obviously, all this still continues, as the Ego is still dominant way of functioning. The human societies are governed by human Ego.

Those who are free from social tendencies of the Ego, appear strange to those who are enslaved by them. A free person does not obey society, does not comply with its ways, does not force his own ways on others, does not meddle with social affairs, does not go to wars, does not desire power and social status and remains untouched and independent of others. The reason is that such a person is free from the chains of the Ego and feels no need to behave in “normal” fashion. This also frees him from the suffering social conformity causes and the suffering one causes to entire societies.

Emotions

These are internal actions, we briefly touched before. These are the pre-actions mostly initiated by the Ego. They are Egoic in nature obviously. You become

aware of them after they take place not before and you are mostly not in control of them, you can do some minor damage control, but not much.

Anger, fear, lust, jealousy, pride, sadness, love, hate etc. are examples of such emotions [2]. You can now easily relate these with the classification presented above of Egoic tendencies. Emotions arise as impulses and last for seconds to hours. They grip the Mind totally when they are occurring and the person usually acts irrationally like a puppet. They cause suffering, needless to say, and therefore a wise man tries to understand them, know their mechanism and causes, and tries to minimize their impact.

Emotions add spice to the drama of human experience, we do not want to kill them, but we do not want to be governed by them. We want the freedom to experience an emotion or to let go of it. We certainly want to be free from the automatic actions they cause.

Again, awareness is the key. If you are totally aware of the contents of your Mind, you will recognize emotions early and will not be moved by them. Awareness of them protects you from taking action on them, especially the impulsive actions. Emotional fools are those who indiscriminately invite them, are a slave of them and mindlessly act on them. Obviously, their lives are full of suffering. A person who sees the emotions as they are, as Egoic tendencies, programs, instincts, lets them be and is unaffected by them, is freed from their ill effects. This opens up doors to unlimited happiness and freedom.

Surrender

Quick progress on a path demands complete surrender of the Ego. Most of the journey is not about gaining stuff or knowledge or power or exotic experiences, it is about losing accumulated structures, setting them aside, freeing oneself from ignorance. It is a gradual removal of veils after veils, just like peeling an onion. And just like peeling an onion, you gain nothing in the end. All that remains is nothingness, the Self alone without any coverings. If that sounds discouraging, then it is just your Ego telling you that. From its point of view, the whole journey is meaningless. Ego is about gaining and accumulating. It cannot appreciate any path or your end goal. Ego erects huge hurdles on your path, by dragging you away from it, into the world of gain, control and the usual carrot and stick lifestyle. Therefore, it becomes necessary to let go of it, surrender it completely. Since it is a useful tool, you can use it whenever the demand arises, else you keep it away in a toolbox of the Mind, with its other tools. Surrender of the Ego is an important sub-goal and a great achievement. We will discuss how Egoic tendencies become afflictions and how to reduce its influence in the next article.

Notes:

[1] If we focus on only the human experience, a human needs food, water, air and shelter (the basic needs) in order to continue the human experience (i.e. to keep the body alive). We also need to keep some mental structures intact, such as how to feed oneself, how to hunt or grow food, and which food is suitable for the body etc. The mental structures are maintained by continuous renewal of them via experience. The physical part needs physical stuff to maintain and renew and that's where the problem lies. If everything is Mind, why do we need to eat? The answer to this question involves introduction of new entities like Energy, so we will deal with it in the forthcoming articles on the body.

[2] Is happiness also an emotion? It's a good question. It is a state of the Mind surely. One can say that when there is no Ego, the happiness is still present. So it is not Egoic in nature. The happiness is a natural and default state of the Mind. It is seen only briefly because the Mind is mostly in the state of suffering, wanting, defending etc. and when for tiny periods, the suffering is temporarily removed, it experiences its natural state and perceives it as happiness. It is peaceful, blissful and quiet. But when expressed it is seen as positive actions, behaviour and even positive emotions. Why is love classified under Egoic emotions? Isn't it a higher function? Unconditional love is, not love. More on that later.

Afflictions of the Ego : Part - 1

Ego being a part of the Mind, gets afflicted with certain disorders, just like the Mind. It does whatever it does naturally and perfectly, but these operations may not be desirable if you wish to progress on your path. If they stop your progress or retard you, they are seen as afflictions. Many people live their entire life afflicted with these disorders, and suffer or cause suffering for others, but it may not matter if they have no goals. They are on the path of evolution through suffering.

If one is consciously and deliberately trying to walk a path, it becomes necessary to identify and remove these afflictions. It depends how deep one is into the pit of Ego, but sometimes its easy to get out of it. Usually the suffering caused by these afflictions is enough motivation, because the suffering inflicted by the Ego is huge and brutal when compared to the suffering caused by dysfunctions of the higher Mind.

The degree of one's emotions varies inversely with one's knowledge of the facts.
- Bertrand Russell

These afflictions are mostly felt and known in the form of emotions (internal actions). Egoic programs and internal actions lie below the intellect in the mental hierarchy. This can be easily seen from the proximity of the emotions to the body. Emotions cause visible facial expressions, intense sensations in various regions of the body and major body movements, compared to intellectual activity, which causes no or very subtle movements (maybe ocular ones at most). Emotions even affect the involuntary functions of the body, such as heart rate, breathing, and also secretion of hormones and other regulatory or inhibitory chemicals inside the body. So one can conclude that emotions have a more direct neural connection to the body, hinting that these are primitive structures.

We have discussed emotions before (in a more positive light). You will find me doing an analytical treatment of obvious and common sensical behaviours and actions of people afflicted with Egoic tendencies. You may wonder why do I need to state the obvious, even uneducated people know the signs of anger, fear or jealousy. This is intentional, one needs to study them objectively, see them as

they are. Emotions do not happen to you, they happen in you. You do not emote, you merely witness them. Knowing them well helps to be free from them. Knowledge of the emotions fires up as soon as the emotions themselves fire up. This provides you with an option to see them clearly, and not to be them instead.

The emotions aren't always immediately subject to reason, but they are always immediately subject to action.

- William James

1. Fear

Fear is healthy in small doses, it keeps us alive, when there is an overdose, it is a poison. The most common fears are that of death, unknown, loss, ridicule, loneliness and failure. Fear motivates us to act in order to reduce these risks, and when a person acts out of fear, even when there are no risks or the danger is insignificant, it becomes an affliction. For a person afflicted with fear, most of the dangers are imagined ones. A single bad experience is enough to send a person in fear mode over and over, for no real reason. Actions arising out of irrational fear resemble borderline madness. Some people do fall into madness just because of terrors. A person afraid of death never lives his life fully. One afraid of unknown never explores or learns. One afraid of loss, never enjoys the gains. One afraid of ridicule never does anything new and bold. One afraid of loneliness sticks to whomever he can, even if it means a bad relation. A person afraid of failure never tries difficult tasks. Fear makes one live a suboptimal life. Fear also gives rise to anger and violence, a fearful person has no control on himself, he can cause harm on impulse.

Fear is the darkroom where negatives are developed.

- Unknown

If you are on a path, it becomes a must to get rid of fears. It should happen naturally, as knowledge destroys fears. The first thing one should do is, recognize that one is fearful, then find the cause of it, analyse one's own actions and affirm to terminate the irrational actions and thoughts which arise out of fear. See it clearly, how Ego operates and causes fear. Fear of death is destroyed when one realizes there is no death, only a change. Ego is a mechanism to avoid death, it knows nothing more. Fear of unknown disappears when one sees the value of knowing. New knowledge resides in the country of unknown. Ego finds safety in the known, which is a very narrow area, and prevents one from exploring away from its little safe zone. Fear of loss, which is mostly material loss, can be overcome by realizing that we are not here to hoard, nothing goes with us, we gain nothing at all while we are in the world. Ego tries to hold on to the stuff,

especially the things that provide pleasure, and makes the person a slave of objects.

Fear of ridicule disappears when one finds that masses are mostly ignorant and ordinary, they know nothing much and ridicule anything new or out of ordinary, different or better. Ego prefers conformation and safety of herds. It prevents all actions that venture too far from actions of the crowd. One stuck with the crowd does not progress beyond the crowd mentality. Fear of loneliness goes away when one realizes that dependency on others creates only suffering, the fulfilment lies in letting go. Ego likes to form bonds, for the benefits or safety they provide, it sticks to them even when they become bondage and cause suffering. Fear of failure is overcome when one sees that failure is just a lesson, by failing one learns what not to do, which is a step towards success. A person operating out of Ego prefers to not to take up anything new or difficult, any failure “hurts the Ego”, and the person stops attempting altogether.

Knowing that one is afflicted with fear, finding the cause and ignorance behind it and replacing it with knowledge, cures it. One needs to clearly see the Egoic processes behind the fear via deep introspection and override them with more logical actions. I say logical actions, because there is a very fine line between bravery and stupidity. Once the fear is out of the way, knowing fully what risks to take helps a lot. Fearlessness does not mean carelessness. It also does not mean more physical strength or weapons or being more violent. A fearless person does not need these crutches, he remains calm and steady under all circumstances and by thoughtful actions, avoids dangerous situations.

2. Anger

Anger is the complementary of fear, instead of avoidance and fleeting behaviour, it provokes violence and aggression. Anger is caused by fear most of the time. An angry person is afraid of something and his Ego, after evaluating the chances, fires up the anger in order to avoid the fear.

Anger is justified when the targeted person is stupid, unreasonable or unfair. Some people understand only the language of anger, they operate from Ego themselves mostly and are incapable of engaging in rational acts. Other than such rare occasions, anger always causes harm, violence and ruined relations. Extreme anger results in fights and murders. Sometimes anger becomes habitual and such people are known as “short tempered”. If anger produces some results a few times (which it does because people generally avoid an angry person), the Ego considers it as a winning strategy and uses it on everything. Of course, this is borderline madness and such a person appears angry all the time. People obey

him, or become yes-men before him, not because they respect him, they just want to avoid him. This enforces the angry nature of the person even more.

No one is as angry as the person who is wrong.
- Proverb

Using anger to get what you want, or getting angry on hair trigger is a major affliction of the Ego. It is intense, and some people get addicted to its intensity, just like a drug, anger provides them a high. They are always seen looking for trouble, searching for someone they can fight with. Even educated people with respectable professions are seen doing it, especially when they are in a position of power. Anger gives rise to irrational actions and causes major suffering. Actions taken under the anger linger for a life-time, their consequences are far reaching.

The cure for anger is patience. Being patient and light hearted prevents Ego from triggering this primitive program. Remaining conscious of ones Ego and understanding the behaviour of others helps a lot. Often people like to trigger anger in others just for fun. When you know the games people play, you stop being a puppet. You don't get angry when someone wants you to be. Not taking everything seriously, and knowing that not all situations can be favourable for you, helps to prevent anger. A seeker knows that the life is a learning experience, and the unfavourable situations are the ones that teach us most. A seeker never loses temper, even in extreme conditions. He is well aware of the consequences, anger is a huge price to pay in terms of them.

If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.
- Chinese proverb

You got angry and did something stupid, how to fix it? An apology fixes it most of the time. If you caused harm, mend it. Being sorry is not a sign of weakness, that is Ego terminology. Only a brave man can say sorry, weak resorts to more anger. Relations ruined by anger are like a broken glass, they cannot be glued together and made anew. A wise person apologizes and moves on, lesson learnt.

An angry man is again angry with himself when he returns to reason.
-Publilius Syrus

3. Lust

A healthy desire for procreation is a necessity, as this is what keeps the human race going. So when does this desire turn into an affliction of lust? When it becomes the sole occupation of the Mind. A person afflicted with lust is entirely

taken over by it and his actions are directed towards fulfilment of it by all possible means. Instead of being a tiny part of the life, lust becomes his whole life. The nature of lust is such that the mere act of fulfilling it enhances it, and so it becomes difficult if not impossible for the person to come out of it.

Procreation is an ugly and hideous act, if seen as it is (and giving birth is repulsive to watch too). If there were no pleasure in it, no one would do it. The Mind has done a great job coupling the coupling act with pleasure, this ensures procreation at all costs. Reproduction is a need of the body, it is the pleasure that becomes an affliction, not the act itself. The lust is nothing but an addiction to the pleasure. A mate is just a means to provide this pleasure. Of course, it causes major suffering for those who are addicted to it, when they do not get it. It sends them in depression, and the life becomes a vacuum, because they have no other interest, no other occupation.

When you can't sell even a water bottle without provoking lust in the consumer, you know that humanity is in a pit that is really deep. Lust is the preoccupation of humanity. Hedonistic societies encourage lust, but needless to say, it is never enough, and the lustful acts turn into perversions. The list of partners and marriages grows longer and longer, for relations based on lust do not last, thanks to P2P. Lust deforms a man into less than an animal. In cultures that suppress lust, it comes out in the form of violence, rapes, child abuse and other odd behaviours like incest and prostitution. In societies where pre-marital sex is not approved, most of the marriages are a result of lust. It never works, as lust fades away or demands more. Decisions of life taken on the basis of lust makes one suffer for his whole life, and make others suffer too.

We use a most unfortunate idiom when we say, of a lustful man prowling the streets, that he "wants a woman". Strictly speaking, a woman is just what he does not want. He wants a pleasure for which a woman happens to be the necessary piece of apparatus. How much he cares about the woman as such may be gauged by his attitude to her five minutes after fruition (one does not keep the carton after one has smoked the cigarettes).

- C. S. Lewis

How to cure it? Realize that procreation is a small aspect of the life, not the whole of your life. If your goal is procreation, do it and be done with it. If your goal is pleasure, know that it is only a carrot that Ego dangles in front of your nose to make you do what it wants. Know that when you have such goals, your Ego is your master. Make bigger goals, even animals can procreate. Humans need somewhat respectable goals. Be aware when the lustful tendencies of the Ego take over. If you have the means, satisfy it, else just watch it come and go. One need not act on it. Again awareness is the key. When one acts on lust, it grows stronger. This is just standard entrainment of the brain.

4. Greed

Aka gluttony. Food is a necessity for the body and the body has great mechanism to store the excess, when the food is abundant. It sends pleasure signals to the brain when rewarded with nutritious food. The pleasure causes more such behaviour and the body gets nourishment. The pleasure is also a cause of feeding excessively, even when there is no shortage of food. This turns into the affliction of greed. A person afflicted by it not only becomes fat but also has a fat Ego.

A greedy person is driven by nothing but food. Most of his day is spent in eating and excreting. After finishing a full meal, he eagerly awaits his next one, while killing time on sweets and snacks. A greedy person is easily recognizable by his huge, out of proportion body. This is not only ugly, it is unhealthy and such a person is soon gripped by various diseases. It also has some unintended consequences, as such a person finds it difficult to get a mate, and his life is nothing but frustration and loneliness, which he tries to rid of simply by eating even more. Food addiction is more common in cultures that are affluent, but even poor suffer from it as some bodies have a genetic tendency to store fat and it doesn't take too much food to get obese, especially when there is no ample physical exercising and the lack of food only encourages greed.

Poverty wants much; but avarice, everything.

- Publilius Syrus

Greed has anyway nothing to do with food, it is an addiction to the pleasure and fulfilment the food provides. It is also an avoidance behaviour because food makes one feel safe and secure. An insecure person often resorts to overeating just to compensate. A greedy person is easy to manipulate, all you need is some food. Such a person is also gullible. A fat man is often assumed to be stupid by others, they find him repulsive, and this causes social anxiety. There is a pleasure of food, and the consequence is endless suffering.

Greed spills into hoarding behaviour, where one hoards money or objects instead of food. Ego sees them as its own part and engages in the very same activity – to have more and more of it. As is obvious, the race to earn money and hoard stuff is a major occupation of humanity. Even after the needs are met, greed continues. It causes harm to others, uneven distribution of resources, and causes harm to the greedy person most. Such a person never finds peace, the greed for more and more keeps him running after stuff. This behaviour is encouraged by others, especially his dependents, because it provides them more. This also results in more security apparently, but a greedy person is always afraid of loss, is full of doubt and distrust and treats others in belittling fashion.

Even the most beautiful scenery is no longer assured of our love after we have lived in it for three months, and some distant coast attracts our avarice: possessions are generally diminished by possession.

- Friedrich Nietzsche

How to be free of it? Realize that we eat to live, not live to eat. Once the stomach is full, forget about the food. If eating is your goal in life, there is something seriously wrong here. Egoic tendencies rule when you have no path. Realize that one need not accumulate more than one needs for a comfortable life. Nothing goes with us. The shiny stuff provides no respect or “status”, it only accumulates a crowd of greedy people around you. Wealth does not attract love, only gold diggers. A simple and minimalist life is all one needs to progress swiftly on his path.

Some people employ fasting as a method to fight greed for food. Often they impatiently wait whole day for the food and eat voraciously afterwards or when not fasting. Such extremes cause more harm than good. One only needs a balanced diet, twice a day, it is simpler and smarter way. Some people use donations as a method to get rid of hoarding behaviour. But often they come back with pockets full of pride and hubris. People bow to those who provide, and this is enough to blow the Ego of the donor to gigantic sizes. Anonymous donations are an alternative, but some still manage to acquire a “godfather complex” or “public servant crown” as a result. Ego comes back from the back door. You can’t trick it for long. Direct way is the best way, just stop hoarding and let others have what they deserve. A seeker does not engage in earning and donating it to the poor to fix their poverty, there is not enough time for that. Fix a leaf in a forest, and you have achieved nothing. Know that it is of prime importance to fix yourself.

Afflictions of the Ego : Part - 2

5. Sloth

The Mind often tries to save energy and effort by instructing the organism to relax or sleep. This tendency is also seen in humans as an Egoic process. Whenever there is no need to act, no urgency or threat, a slowness takes over the mind and the person loses all desire to act. This is laziness or sloth. Such a person is letting his primitive energy saving programs to take over him. It is alright once in a while, we all need downtime once in a while, but soon this becomes a problem as it becomes a habit. The laziness starts showing up in everyday acts.

A lazy person often covers up this behaviour by making up excuses and sometimes lying. Needless to say, the inactivity and intentional avoidance of actions results in failure to accomplish anything significant. A lazy person achieves nothing most of the time. This has a secondary effect of throwing the person into depression. Sloth makes a person suffer sooner or later. Not only the person suffers himself but also makes others suffer, especially when others depend on him for work, such as his employer.

Sloth is an Egoic process which had some use in the ancient time, when it assisted in the survival. Energy saving by slowing down the activities when not really needed is a good strategy, but in modern times a person needs to act even after his stomach is filled and there is no immediate threat to survival. Actually most of our actions begin only after the basic needs are taken care of. So the ancient programs of sloth need to be terminated if you want to achieve something.

How to do that? Well first one needs to realize that he is lazy. If most of your tasks remain incomplete, if you have a tendency to procrastinate, if you plan but never act, if you are always late for anything, etc. then realize that sloth has taken over you. Now you can start the opposite behaviour knowingly and intentionally. The root of it all is the choice we make when presented with an option to act or not to act, become aware at that instant and choose to act, the action will follow. You will find that the pleasure, satisfaction and peace you get when you finish a task, motivates you to come out of laziness. Now the Ego gets a bigger and better

pleasure to latch on and the sloth turns into activity.

There is no kind of idleness by which we are so easily seduced as that which dignifies itself by the appearance of business.

- Samuel Johnson

Sloth also affects a seeker, when he is seen sleeping instead of meditating, he is seen running after distractions instead of practicing. Whenever his mind is forced to think intensely or whenever a high level of intelligence is demanded, such a person tries to avoid the heavy mental task. Sloth is the reason people avoid learning anything new. It demands too much mental work. If you are a seeker, laziness will surely halt you on your path.

For the diligent a week has seven days, for the slothful seven tomorrows.

- Polish Proverb

6. Envy

When in a group a person is confronted with individuals who are better than him in some ways and this is perceived as a threat to his own survival. The natural reaction to the situation is competition and person tries to outperform competitors by any means possible. This is the familiar struggle for survival. Others doing better than himself obviously means less chances of survival and procreation for himself and he enters into a survival race with others. The person tries to gain what others have by any means possible and perceives the people who have more resources or better traits than himself as his potential enemies. This is an automatic reaction and evokes automatic action via programs that are a part of Egoic tendencies. These are felt as an extreme lack, a feeling of inadequacy, a fear mixed with some amount of anger and hate. This is the colourful emotion of jealousy or envy.

Jealousy is the suspicion of one's own inferiority.

- Emily Post

Competition is healthy, it is a positive trait, this behaviour has kept us alive in ancient times. This behaviour becomes an affliction only when one fails to achieve desired results. The competition turns into jealousy, an unhealthy condition, which causes a lot of suffering. So if your friend has a bigger car it becomes a cause of suffering, it makes you feel inferior, lacking. If a woman is better looking than you then she becomes an object of envy. Your Ego senses a lower chance for mating and procreation in her presence. In extreme cases envy can result in fights and even murders. The reason can be anything, better clothes

and jewellery to a bigger country the other is ruling.

How to get rid of jealousy? By knowing that it is just a program, nothing else and seeing it clearly, not acting on it. Envy is provoked by hidden desires, and by seeing that someone else got theirs fulfilled and yours did not. Find out the desire, see where it comes from. How useless and insignificant it is. If you are a seeker then you don't need what others have, moreover you want to get rid of what you have. Your competition is with your own self, no one else.

All envy is proportionate to desire; we are uneasy at the attainments of another, according as we think our own happiness would be advanced by the addition of that which he withholds from us.
- Samuel Johnson

7. Pride

Whenever a person acts in a manner that produces favourable results, the Ego generates a reward. It likes to take credit for the fruits of its actions. It feels elated, becomes stronger. This is the familiar feeling of pride or hubris. It causes more such actions as automatic learning happens. Pride is often seen in the form of superiority complex and over confidence. It not only makes one do foolish things, it also makes others suffer as the afflicted person turns into a mean and selfish creature, forcing his way onto others.

A vain man may become proud and imagine himself pleasing to all when he is in reality a universal nuisance.
- Spinoza

Pride is a social tendency. It has nothing to do with the person himself. Whenever an action is favourable which is not directly related to the survival, the person feels satisfaction, not pride. Pride is a result of Ego declaring its superiority, not very unlike the winning howl of an animal after a battle with his rival. It causes suffering for the afflicted person whenever others don't behave in a way he expects. Pride demands respect and even forces it out of others. Pride results in stubbornness, control of others, causing problems for others. A loss of pride or a fear of losing it makes one suffer too. The Ego punishes a loser with the negative emotions of guilt and shame. A beautiful and strong body, wealth, caste, religion, race or a PhD degree, whatever is the cause of your pride, it is also a cause of your fall.

Fools take to themselves the respect that is given to their office.
- Aesop

One can get rid of pride by seeing it as a social tendency of the Ego. Humility, not vanity, is a sign of success, power and wisdom. Actions happen, no one does them. Fruits happen, they are not in anyone's control. There is no one there to take credit of any success. A seeker is not interested in society or in showing others how great he is, he is interested in just himself, his own Self.

8. Deceit

Some creatures learnt very early in their evolution that hiding food from others in the group is more favourable for them, in terms of survival. So is pretending to be dead (seen as an automatic action of fainting). Giving out a predator threat call when faced with a stronger rival also helps a lot. Showing off in presence of a potential mate has obvious advantages. These behaviours later evolved into Egoic tendencies, that collectively we can call deceit.

The men that women regard as most enchanting are the most audacious prevaricators; the men they loathe most fiercely are those who tell them the truth.
- Hal Morgan

Such behaviours range from simple camouflage in animals to sophisticated manipulations of political and religious leaders, in case of humans. When expressed via speech they become lies. When expressed via body they become fake emotions. When seen in businesses and jobs, they become dishonesty. When seen in relations they are cheating or disloyalty. The Egoic behaviours of deceit are so common that they are accepted as "normal" by everyone. Any human interaction can contain deceit, and most do. A deceit is usually first assumption when we meet a stranger, because that's what we encounter mostly. Honesty and truthfulness is as rare as gold.

An immediate consequence of the act of deceit is a loss of trust for the deceitful person, a repulsion from him and an avoidance of any further interaction. And this becomes a cause of suffering for that person. Ego incites deceit and then punishes the deceiver if he fails to conceal it, via the negative emotions of guilt and shame. People engage in deceitful behaviour of one or other kind only to gain some advantages in the matter of survival. Most do not feel the need to deceive others unless they are desperate. However, there are some, who would do that just to feel smarter. Deceiving others gives them an Egoic high. It is like an addiction.

Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind.
- Shakespeare

If you are afflicted with it how can you correct it? It starts at the level of

thoughts. Whenever you need to act, you will be presented with some thoughts and impulses that push you into fake behaviour, the justification is instant gratification. You will also find options to act truthfully and wisely even though you will see that those lead to no favourable results or may even lead to unfavourable ones sometimes. Always choose the latter, consciously and intentionally.

Truthful thoughts lead to truthful actions and peace of mind. You will gain favour of truthful people and friends. You will soon find that it is much easier to survive truthfully compared to the deceitful way. Truth brings a sense of lightness into the personality, a truthful person radiates joy and happiness all the time. Compare that to a liar, who is always fearful inside and lives a fake life, eternally burdened with the guilt and consequences of his dishonest acts.

The most common lie is that which one lies to himself; lying to others is relatively an exception.
- Nietzsche

For a seeker it becomes even more necessary to examine his thoughts and actions and to weed out any signs of deceit. Path of knowledge is a path of truth. One cannot hope to progress on it when one is full of lies. Since a seeker is not very concerned with society or people, he finds it easy to avoid deceitful behaviour with others, but some do get trapped into the lies they tell themselves. Unfounded beliefs are such lies. You will find that most of the stuff you believe has an origin in Egoic tendencies. The Ego hides in the seemingly sophisticated ideas and concepts that you are proud of. If you are fearful of letting go of your beliefs and get all angry and violent when someone tries to show you otherwise, know that you are in the grip of Ego.

God hath given you one face, and you make yourself another.
— William Shakespeare, Hamlet

9. Attachments

Whenever a need is met, the means by which it is fulfilled is deeply impressed on the Mind. We tend to remember the agent which was instrumental in fulfilling it. We tend to use it again and again. This forms a bond with that agent, whether it is an object or a person or even a set of beliefs. This creates a dependency, a conditioning and a tendency. This forms another part of the Ego, the tendency to attach to anything that can fulfil a need.

Attachment comes from a perception of lack - all comes from fear.
- Yvette Soler

Attachments are based on fear, not on likes. The fear is of losing it, which

obviously means no more fulfilment of the need. So the Ego holds on to it. If the need is related to the survival, the attachment is stronger. Since fear is the main cause, you will find that some people hold onto things or others even when they dislike them. They complain and suffer, but do not let go of it.

If a person loves only one other person and is indifferent to all others, his love is not love but a symbiotic attachment, or an enlarged egotism.

- Erich Fromm

As it happens, nothing stays for long. When the instrument is gone, the attached person suffers, not knowing what else to do, he falls into depression. The suffering is even more when the now vanished object or person was also a source of pleasure and joy. Many people get habitually attached to their own body, youth, intellect, achievements, abilities and what not. They also derive their sense of identity from these, so the attachment deepens considerably. The attachment also causes the person to live in past and he usually finds it difficult to enjoy anything new.

Suffering does not befall him who is without attachment to names and forms.

- Buddha

A seeker understands the impermanent nature of everything. He uses, enjoys and appreciates objects and socializes or forms friendships with people, but does not form bonds. A seeker is detached from everything, even from himself. Any kind of dependency is guaranteed to cause suffering, unhappiness and inconvenience, sooner or later. Attachment is an opposite of freedom, it is a bondage which no wise man would want to have. A seeker remains detached, fully knowing that he is a visitor in this world and just like everything else he will soon vanish too.

Be aware of the ephemeral nature of material things. Lose your attachment to them.

- Shui-ch'ing Tzu

10. Possessiveness

The Ego not only forms bonds and attachments, it goes one step further and claims the thing as its own. This seemingly ensures exclusive use of the possessed object for himself. This has obvious survival advantages, and hence such behaviour has turned into an Egoic tendency. The Ego defends the possessed thing just like it defends itself. We all possess a body during this short human experience, and it is natural to be possessive about it. Most of us possess a shelter and some resources, and that's ok too. The role of the Ego should end here. This tendency becomes an affliction when one starts possessing people, animals, vehicles, objects - small and big, etc.

Attachment is the root cause of all misery. Possessiveness is nourishment for the ego.

- Rajneesh

The Ego of the possessive person fires up all its defences as soon as someone else touches his possessions. He becomes instantly angry, fearful, jealous or violent. This is his suffering, but possessiveness is more troublesome when compared to simple attachments, as it makes others suffer too. He is usually a miser, afraid of sharing anything with others and not infrequently perceives others as threats, everyone seems to be after his possessions, trying to rob him of his precious stuff. It is easy to possess an object, and animals can be caged or tamed, but things become ugly when the object of possession is another person. A possessive person erects barriers for others to prevent them from escaping. The person trying to possess others uses all lowly tricks of the Ego including emotional blackmail, threats, deceit and manipulations.

Care and responsibility are constituent elements of love, but without respect for and knowledge of the beloved person, love deteriorates into domination and possessiveness.
- Erich Fromm

How to get rid of such odd behaviour? Know that the cause of possessiveness is fear. Get rid of the fear and let go of the possessions. A wise person knows well that one cannot possess anything at all, everything and everyone parts company and we do not take anything from this world when we depart, not even one atom. It is wise to use and enjoy things till they last and it is wise to share joy and appreciate people till they stay. When you are on a path you do not want to possess anything at all, you are trying to get rid of everything instead. The possessions, including humans are a big burden for a seeker, they slow him down considerably. Advanced seekers do not possess even a house, they keep moving from place to place. Not only they ensure that they are not attached to anything or anyone, they ensure that no one gets attached to them as well. And of course they resist all attempts to get possessed by others. The final (*perhaps final*) goal is to not to possess even a body and to be free from Mind too.

But people find it very difficult to be a loving person, so they create a relationship - and befool that way that 'Now I am a loving person because I am in a relationship.' And the relationship may be just one of monopoly, possessiveness, exclusiveness.
- Rajneesh

Afflictions of the Ego : Part - 3

11. Love and Hate

First of all, we have nebulous terms here, so let's define them. Love and hate are emotions, i.e. internal actions. The internal act that simulates pleasure and security is seen and felt as love, and the internal act that simulates pain and insecurity is hate. Love results in external actions that show attraction or attachment towards the agent causing love, while hate results in repulsion or fear or anger and ultimately in violence. So we can base them on the now familiar pleasure/pain and reward/punishment mechanisms of the Mind. The actions originating from love or hate aid in survival and also add spice to the human experience. All actions of love and hate are perfect, nothing needs to be done about them, however, if one wants to lessen the suffering they eventually cause, one needs to know them intimately. These, like other Egoic tendencies, can turn into afflictions when not controlled consciously. There is no doubt about extreme hate being an affliction of the Ego, but some people may not like to call extreme love an affliction because of it being a positive emotion. Note that any activity of the Ego can go out of hand and become an affliction, including positive ones.

Isn't love a function of higher Mind, an evolved and superior behaviour that distinguishes us from animals? No, love is primal, animals are capable of it as well, especially mammals. Anyone who has pets or children knows it as a fact. So it is an Egoic tendency and fits our beloved carrot and stick model of the Ego. Love is the carrot and hate is the stick. Anything or anyone that aids in survival becomes an object of love and things or people that are a threat become object of hate. Attraction towards stuff that ensures survival and procreation, and repulsion from stuff that threatens them or lessens their chances, become Egoic tendencies. They are very effective in the matter of survival to say the least. Why do we club them together? Because they are essentially the same - attempts of the Ego to ensure survival.

In the case of human Mind, love and hate do take finer forms, those of likes and dislikes, preferences and inclinations. We have already discussed these. In its finest form love appears as universal love which has no opposite. This is commonly known as the **Unconditional Love**, and I will adopt that word as it is to describe it. Just to make a clear distinction, one can use the phrase **Egoic**

Love to refer to tendencies related to the survival. For the purpose of this discussion the word love means Egoic Love and this is intentional just to break the strange beliefs people associate with love.

Intense love does not measure, it just gives.

- Mother Teresa

Likes and dislikes seem to be higher functions but most of them can be traced back to the survival needs. There are exceptions, e.g. liking mathematics has no obvious survival advantages and same for liking art or meditation. However such activities do produce a reward in the form of finer pleasure and appear as beauty and joy. Likes and dislikes can be seen as refined forms of love and hate, and they appear to be internal actions of higher Mind (newer human layers). When seen from the point of view of the Self, the love becomes Unconditional Love. It arises as an awareness of oneness, when all experiences are seen as movements of the Self itself. So all objects, events, creatures and people are seen as Self. The Unconditional Love is the purest form of love. As we descend into matter, Unconditional Love takes on more and more impure forms, however all are just an awareness, a knowledge of oneness (non-duality) of everything. When we love, that's what we are trying to do – unite with the loved one via external means.

So we can draw a hierarchy based on purity as follows:

Note that there is no opposite for Unconditional Love, as the Self is one and whole, but as soon as we enter the domain of Mind, we find opposites. It again becomes non-dual once we leave the domain of Mind into matter. (strictly speaking matter is only a more static mental structure, as we have seen in earlier articles, in other words, less lively). By control systems I mean the simple positive and negative biases one finds in any electrical or mechanical system.

Before discussing the afflictions of love and hate, I'd like to clear up the differences between love and Unconditional Love, so that we are on the same page. For many the concept of Unconditional Love is new, just like the concept of non-duality. So here we go –

The list is long and can be longer, but you get the point. Now it should be easy to see how love is just another Egoic tendency and when it goes rogue it becomes an affliction. Hate has more potential to turn into an affliction obviously. Hate evolved as an ancient memory that kept track of one's enemies. When one sees an enemy or a competitor, one is filled with hate automatically, this has an

advantage for survival, as one tends to either avoid the enemy or kills him off if one finds an opportunity there. It helps to remember who is who. In modern times, hate continues and gets extended to whole groups and countries, not only individuals. Strange biases extend hate to objects, foods, acts and even beliefs of others. This has obvious implications when suffering is concerned. The person who suffers most is none other than the hater himself. The negativity, anger, fear, insecurity and anxiety consume him. He finds no peace, no happiness, even when surrounded by finest luxury and mates.

Love causes suffering too. It augments suffering because it gets contrasted with the extreme happiness that results from love. So the person we love most causes most pain when things go southwards. The hate that originates from failed love has no parallels. Things that we love give us most pain when impermanence consumes them. People and relatives whom we attach to leave us full of sorrow when they die. Love lives in a constant fear of loss. Little glimpses of pleasure keep it alive. It struggles to stand in the torrents of impermanence, it is too fragile and artificial. A person in love (or hate) takes irrational and impulsive decisions and his actions are coloured by these intense emotions. Mindless actions always result in suffering, as a rule. As we have seen above, the Unconditional variety is immune from such disadvantages.

When you love someone, you love the person as they are, and not as you'd like them to be.
- Leo Tolstoy

In addition to self-suffering, love causes suffering for others. The object of love soon becomes an object of manipulation. As the love is based on needs, it demands stuff from the other. Just like our loved animals are caged, leashed and fed on our laps, a person is held hostage by the lover in his cage of love. We demand most from the person we love most. It is seen as a privilege for some odd reason. Failure to meet the demands and expectations usually means the end of love and start of hate (and perhaps a new love affair). A person in love rarely has any other option but to comply. This is his reason of suffering, he suffers as long as he remains in the bondage of a “loving relation.”

In human world, the words “I love you” easily get you a mate. It is easy to disguise one’s lust under the fluffy, warm, happy and secure mask of love. No surprise that coupling becomes “making love”. When one does not get his needs fulfilled, one lacks “love”, tries to get it from others. Failure to get it means more suffering. A large part of human life is devoted to achieving love and maintaining the relations that form around this need.

By all means marry; if you get a good wife, you'll be happy; if you get a bad one, you'll become a

philosopher.

- Socrates

The lack of love often starts early in childhood, when it is needed most. An unloved child grows up as an indifferent person, heartless and devoid of emotions. Isn't that an ideal condition? Well, obviously not. The progress lies in maturing of Ego, not in elimination of it. The whole point of human experience is to go through all these experiences, know them directly and transcend them. Nothing is learnt if you simply bypass them. When after years and years of running after love and burning in hate, if a person remains a slave of these tendencies, then one can safely conclude that he has not progressed even an inch. The maturity in the personality comes after transcending the Egoic tendencies. In the absence of such tendencies there is no opportunity to overcome them, and no learning or knowledge takes place. One must touch the fire to know how hot it is.

So how to overcome these afflictions? It should be easy to recognize them because of their intensity. Once you have tasted them enough, see them as clouds floating in the clear sky of the ever present Self. Turn the love into Unconditional Love. The hate disappears on its own. It is a piece of cake for those who abide in the Self. What about those who are still seeking and those who have no path at all? It helps to cultivate **Detachment** and **Forgiveness**. Forgiving destroys hate. Forgiving does not mean forgetting or accepting defeat, it is just removal of hate from one's own Mind, nothing to do with others. Detachment does not mean indifference. Indifference means an absence of love, detachment means a presence of knowing. See that love is just a means to gain what one lacks. When one lacks nothing, the need should disappear and instead one starts giving in a non-attached way. Expect nothing in return when you love, and it will soon turn into Unconditional Love, a source of eternal joy and peace.

Love expects no reward. Love knows no fear. Love Divine gives - does not demand. Love thinks no evil; imputes no motive. To Love is to share and serve.

- Swami Sivananda

12. Self-Pity

One of the strategies of Ego to ensure survival is to seek the help of others. It may seem OK indeed, humans, especially civilized ones do help each other in survival or in any other matter, and this is also a higher function of the Mind (aka Cooperation), but the Ego uses a more primitive function to achieve this, namely that of pity. When we see someone in a bad or dangerous situation, we tend to extend our help. This has obvious survival advantages for the whole group and thus this behaviour has evolved into an Egoic tendency.

This is a social tendency, obviously, one cannot ask for help if one is all alone. Well one can, if the object of pity is oneself, and it is here that this useful tendency turns into an affliction. The Ego learns very early in its infantile days, that it gets ample attention, affection and things such as food, toys or security etc. whenever it is suffering. Everyone around a child rushes to fulfill his demands whenever he is under strain. When he shows no signs of suffering, he is usually left alone. This behaviour of others gets impressed deeply on the Ego, so much so that it continues into adulthood. The Ego occasionally fakes suffering in order to get whatever it wants from others. But that behaviour comes under deception. Self-pity is an attempt of the Ego to evade real suffering by turning itself into a victim of suffering.

As you must have guessed, we are into the domain of borderline psychoses here. I shouldn't go there, but this behaviour is so common that it is not generally considered a mental illness until it becomes acute. Such a person is always in depression, loses all desire to act and becomes suicidal. Instead of trying to get out of the suffering, he embraces it, identifies with it and even feels it as an essential part of his life. The self-pity provides a kind of false support to the Ego, as it tries to emulate the past, somehow expecting a support. The Ego perpetuates it, refuses external help and even perceives those trying to help as threats.

Self-pity is caused by major suffering such as childhood traumas, abuse, failures, failed relations and extreme poverty etc. Whatever is the cause, such a person engages in odd behaviour. If one is mostly sad, plays the "poor me" game often, hates others generally, tries to evade help and falls into the trap of substance abuse or odd beliefs (such as "I'm cursed" etc.), then one can conclude that he is afflicted with self-pity.

I don't want it to end, and so, as every therapist knows, the ego does not want an end to its "problems" because they are part of its identity. If no one will listen to my sad story, I can tell it to myself in my head, over and over, and feel sorry for myself, and so have an identity as someone who is being treated unfairly by life or other people, fate or God. It gives definition to my self-image, makes me into someone, and that is all that matters to the ego.
— Eckhart Tolle

It can be very difficult to come out of self-pity, external help is needed. If one has some inkling of his situation, a hint by a friend or direct pointing out by a teacher whom he respects, can trigger a recovery. Note that sympathizing with such a person makes things worse. One can get rid of self-pity by getting rid of the underlying suffering or past traumas. Without the support of the underlying structures, the Ego loses its hold on it. We learn a very important thing by

studying such borderline psychoses, which is - the Ego is a very powerful thing and should not be underestimated. There is a reason majority of the humanity is under its strong grip. Self-pity is only a sample of what Ego can do to a person, there exists a full gamut of psychoses, neuroses and mental disorders, most of which can be traced to Ego. The conundrum is, you can't survive without an Ego and you can't be totally free with it.

The primary task for a seeker is to learn the nuts and bolts of Ego and to enslave it. This is depicted in ancient renderings of great Yogis, where we can see them sitting on the skin of a tiger, or even riding a tiger. Tiger being a symbol for the Ego, lower Mind, animalistic tendencies, and their strength. It should be obvious from such symbolism that taming of the Ego is a major achievement in itself. We are struggling with the abnormalities of the Ego since ages, and it still wins most of the time.

I can think of more abnormalities of the Ego such as patriotism (a tribal tendency), religious associations and warfare (again tribal) and the oddness of parental, sibling and other procreative tendencies. But that will be straying too far from the main theme and interested readers shall find good content online or in books that covers Ego in more detail. We now move on to the even lower realms of the Mind, where it descends into relative solidity, inertia and inactivity - the structure called body or organism. Note that the terms "lower" or "descend" do not imply that these structures are inferior in any way, they are just below the Ego in hierarchy when viewed from the top. One can view it from the bottom if one likes with the Self at the base and everything else built upon it. Ego is perfect too. It is a beautiful creation of the Mind and its very amusing to watch it in action.

The Experience of a Body

We will descend down into a body and its experience. This article presents a crazy perspective on it. This is intentional and brutally honest, just because normal is boring.

The waking body

The body is a structure that appears on the screen of the Self just like any other structure. The mental patterns and the world also appear on the same screen. In the state of deep sleep, all these disappear. In the state of dreaming or imagination, a different body or different worlds may appear. In some exotic states of the Mind, the corresponding bodies and worlds may appear as solid and real as those of normal waking state. That's all I can say about the body as far as my experience goes. Anyhow I will go ahead and note some details about the body and try to draw some clear inferences, whenever possible. In this article we will discuss the body that we experience during waking state of the Mind. This is the most frequent of my experience and hopefully yours too.

From the point of view of the Mind, the body appears as a collection of sense perceptions. In the visual sense it has a definite form, size and color, just like any other object. When perceived via other senses it becomes a cloud of perceptions. One can immediately see that the body is different from other objects as its presence is also conveyed via some special internal senses such as hunger and pains etc. We have discussed those before. Another peculiarity of the body is that it hosts senses themselves, all of them converge in the head, where the brain is. The Mind perceives itself as located in the head, when focused on the sense of sight and hearing - the dominant senses. When we attend to other senses, the perceived location of the Mind shifts to the source of that sense, more or less. For example, try touching something with your toe, you will find that the Mind also goes there. This is even more clear when the eyes are closed and you bring your attention back in the head. A movement of the Mind is felt. So where is the Mind located in the body? Nowhere. It is nonlocal. The locations of the objects are assigned by the Mind itself via creation of space, and it does a poor job locating itself. However the body is correctly assigned a location, right in the centre of the whole world !

Where is every body?

Of course one can entertain a belief that one's body is located in the world, at some random place in it, and the Mind is located in the body, specifically in the head, because that's where it is perceived. We have already experimented with the location of the Mind in the body, it keeps shifting. But it is certainly in the body somewhere, isn't it? One can do another experiment to check that. Stare at an object that is at a fair distance from you, such as something in another room or a tree outside. Stare at it for a while completely focused on it, ignoring everything else. Now bring back your attention in the head again by defocusing and becoming aware of the overall field of view. You will notice a shift of the Mind, it comes back from that object, which means its perceived location shifted from inside the body to outside and back inside again. Something similar can be tried with sounds, e.g. chirping of a distant bird. So the Mind is not in one's body too. Unfortunately the belief that the Mind resides in the head leads to a belief that all of the mental phenomena are generated by the brain. As far as I know, there is no indisputable evidence for that. Brain and the body are both created by the Mind out of information received via senses. The world around the body is created in a similar way. In other words, the brain, body and the world are all virtual entities, an interpretation of the underlying structures created by the Fundamental Process. Obviously, these structures are in the Presence, in others words, nowhere and everywhere.

Note that we are talking about the Mind, not the Self. Some people have this strange belief that the Self (aka Consciousness) is also generated by the brain. Again we find no evidence for that too. Such beliefs are a result of uncritical and illogical thinking. Some people have this belief that if something cannot be objectively perceived it cannot exist, and so the entities that are not an object of perception are assumed to be non-existent or at most an extension of perceivable entities. Perception itself is subjective, so all that is perceived is subjective. The perception of the brain and consciousness of the brain appear at the same time. There is no causal direction here.

What is the reason for the belief about the body being located in the world at some place? It originates from seeing other bodies roaming around the world, they are seen located in the random places inside a world, and so a conclusion is drawn about one's own body. However if you ask others about their honest opinion about their own bodies, you will most likely get a reply that it is also at the centre of the world. So one must conclude that the locations are relative and subjective. There are some experiments which were conducted using VR headsets strapped onto subjects eyes and these were fed with visuals from another place

instead of subject's immediate point of view. People reported their entire being getting shifted to the location of the camera which was feeding their headsets. Something similar occurs during a run of a mill out of body experience, when the sense of one's location gets shifted to some place else from where the extrasensory perception is taking place. So if you have lost your body and are trying to find it, chances are you may not find it at any place.

The matter of the body.

These arguments about the locations of the Mind and the body may seem childish, but the beliefs about them are childish too. That's what one must do to destroy the beliefs, become a child again, question everything, you will make surprising discoveries. We will deconstruct more notions about the body. Are our bodies alive? It depends on how liveliness is defined. In ancient days the body was regarded as made from special kind of matter, the living matter. It grows, heals, moves, is warm, juicy and tastes delicious, especially when baked in fire. The non-living matter does not have these properties, so it was fair to conclude that the body is made of living matter. These days we know that there is no difference between ordinary matter and the matter of the body, everything is made of same elements and there are no special living elements. The matter in a rock is essentially same as that in a body. However, the body displays a far more complex arrangement of it, thanks to the unique properties of Carbon atoms, including their ability to form long chains and self-arrange into a large variety of molecules. Some kinds of Carbon molecules can re-form into two whole identical copies when they break, and this is the basis of molecules like the DNA, which is the basis of growth and reproduction. So we see that everything is alive and everything is dead, the distinction doesn't make any sense. The life is not about the matter of the body, the life is about the experience of a body.

A seeker must go deeper into the matter of the matter. There are many experiments that show that matter, as is commonly believed, does not exist. In some forms it is just energy, which is nothing but a change, and when we go even deeper, we find there is nothing there at all, there is no matter, no energy, no change, just an experience of it all. These experiments are at the foundation of the very famous and successful theory of Quantum Mechanics. So the body is made up of nothing. It is a virtual body, a dream. This is not a surprise really. What happens is that the Fundamental Process constrains the relations when change (aka Experiencing) happens, and gives rise to apparent structures, which the Mind organizes into matter, bodies, worlds and everything. These are ethereal, with no reality of their own and obviously do not last. The change, the impermanence consumes them very soon. The body also appears, changes and gets destroyed, like everything else.

The flow of body

One thing can be immediately noticed about the body - matter flows in and out of it continuously. The food provides the raw material for the cells in order to grow and reproduce, and the waste, burnt fuel and dead cells are ejected out of the body. The digestive, respiratory, lymphatic and excretory systems take care of this activity. Cells are born and die in billions every day, and even momentary cessation of the flow of matter through the body causes death (especially of breathing). A quick googling gives an estimate of about 30-40 tons of matter which passes through an average body in a lifetime, from and back into the environment. One can directly see the changes in size, shape and weight of the body as one grows old starting from infancy.

So the question is - which one of these continuously changing bodies is me? If you are a body, are you the same person today when compared to yesterday or even a few breaths earlier? The answer can be, I'm all of these bodies or I'm none of these. But there is no certain answer. We recognize somebody by their face more than by their body. The face also keeps changing, although retains some essential features in spite of complete replacements of underlying structures. And this is the reason people associate and identify with a body. People and mirrors keep reminding us that we are this ever changing structure of cells, because the facial features retain a pattern (more or less) for long durations.

So what exactly remains constant while a river of matter flows through the body? Obviously it is the pattern of the body, the essential design, that remains relatively constant. The water changes every moment, but the river retains its unique serpentine shape and can be recognized easily. The pattern is nothing but information about the structure of the body, it doesn't change much. When a cell dies, it is replaced by a newly born one just like a damaged brick in a house can be replaced by a good one. All the bricks in the house can be replaced like this, one by one and soon we get a new house that looks almost like the original but is not the same house now. The house is not bricks, a house is the information, a pattern and so is a human body.

The information about the structure is not centralized, it is contained in every cell. So not only are our bodies non-material, they are non-local and dynamic. It is mind blowing to realize that even if we choose to call ourselves a body, we are still just information, virtual, non-physical, non-local, dynamic and ephemeral.

An orphaned body

Who owns this seemingly real body? No one. It is just there, just like all other stuff, the body appears out of presence and dissolves back into it. We have already seen that the concept of identity is an illusion created by the Mind. There is no owner of the body. The body is experienced and afterwards an owner is assigned to it. Sometimes the identity shifts to the body and the person sees himself as a body, as in the expression - "*I'm sitting*". This seems to be the most prevalent form of identity. Often the body is seen as an object that one owns, as in the expression - "*my body is healthy*". The identity shifts to one's intellect, profession, past, relations and even to the Self. Even if you are not identified with the body, I recommend that you use the usual language anyway. Uttering phrases such as - "*My body is sitting*" can have unintended consequences and there is a good chance that you will find your body locked up in an asylum next day. Identification with the body is a major cause of suffering as the body is subject to change and decay, and also to pains and afflictions of various kinds. The body is a cause of major fear of mankind, as it eventually disappears. It is difficult to find anyone who is not afraid of death. In essence the cause of all these strange beliefs, phobias and suffering is ignorance, and knowledge is the obvious cure.

A marvellous imperfection

Isn't human body beautiful and shouldn't we be proud of the fact that we are experiencing something like this, a marvel of evolutionary process, a culmination of billions of years of creation? Of course it is beautiful, especially with an intact and brand new skin. However only a few bodies are beautiful and remain so for a short while. The rest are ugly and out of proportion, owing to the unhealthy habits of people. Strictly speaking it is not an end product of evolution. The evolution never stops, there is no culmination. Moreover, the basic building blocks viz. the DNA and even the cells, tissues and various chemicals are essentially the same for all living creatures. Things do change but very slowly and the changes are incremental. Evolution is more like periodic releases of a software with major changes in UI or appearance and minor bug fixes, with the code at the core remaining the same. So the human body is not a culmination at all, it is just one of the versions. It is surely perfect from the point of view of Presence, but not from the limited point of view of humans. There is a lot of scope for improvements and bug fixes. If you have ever wondered why males are equipped with nipples and why a tiny amount of dust in the air lands you in hospital, then you will know what I mean. Not to mention that there is some gross stuff like aging and deformed babies, which destroy our fluffy beliefs of perfection.

In spite of all this, people do get overly attached to this temporary shelter of theirs. The reason, as we have discussed, is the Ego - the mean machine, whose job is nothing but preservation and procreation of bodies. The Ego colours our

perception of the body. No matter how they look, most perceive themselves as avatars of Casanova. We have discussed how the evolutionary biases affect perception of human form. Strangely, it is the Egoic mind itself that perceives ugliness and disgust, in not only other bodies but even one's own. Traditionally, masters encourage students to observe the disgusting aspects of body in order to destroy one's attachments [1]. We will do that in brief and if you are faint of heart you can skip it, its going to be graphic.

Take a closer look

A body, when seen from a neutral perspective is nothing but a bag of flesh, blood and bones with eight orifices, out of which sticky smelly stuff oozes continuously. Try not showering for two days and you will find that no one wants to sit near you. Our whole skin is a sponge that secretes sweat, oil and odours of various kinds. It is always coated with microbes and other tiny living creatures. Skin also sheds dead cells and hair. We instinctively avoid touching people and feel dirty when touched by others. We like to maintain distance with other bodies and they like to keep us away too. So it is not only good manners but also hygienic to respect others space. A body becomes somewhat bearable when washed with soaps and covered with clean clothes. In some cultures the ugliest and most socially unacceptable sight is that of a naked body. But then we fill the internet with naked bodies, taboo is more attractive.

Even the Ego knows that the beauty is only skin deep. Any exposure of the internals of the body makes us cringe in disgust. We hate seeing mutilated bodies, blood, open wounds and surgeons operating on internal organs. Skulls and bones are archetypal symbols of death and we get scared to death when we encounter them [6]. The duality of love and hate of the body is intense and astonishing.

An alien body

In modern times we know that a body is a collection of tiny organisms called cells. Specialized cells form organs and the whole colony lives together in a symbiotic relation to each other. Only about 30% of the cells in our bodies are human cells, genetically speaking, which is shocking to know, even when you don't harbour rosy beliefs about being a human in some romantic way. The rest are "alien" cells or other microbes, bacteria, eukaryotes and viruses - the Microbiota [2]. In addition to that there are microscopic worms, parasites, fungi and bugs. These live peacefully with the "native" human cells in either mutually beneficial or harmless manners. Most of them live on the skin, mouth, gut and other unmentionable cavities. An average person is surrounded by a cloud of microbes thanks to breathing and sweat etc. Dogs find it helpful in order to

pinpoint a person, because each of us carries a unique micro-biome. Fortunately we rarely look into the mirror with a microscope, so this big pile of squiggly creatures remains hidden.

The “human” cells are also not pure in a way. They are infected with ancient viral DNA, foreign stuff and a special symbiotic creature – the mitochondria with its own DNA. It is just a way of looking at it, a cell is what it is. When looked at with neutral perspective, a cell is a very complex chemical factory, with its own software and nano-machines. One can be forgiven for believing that one is a whole unit, with some magical abilities of growth and reproduction, as the micro-structures are beyond our day-to-day experience of a body.

So the body is not a unit, it is a whole ecosystem, a colony. It is also a part of macro-ecosystem and circulates air, water and food through it. Without an ecosystem to live in the body perishes quickly. It also dies if its micro-ecosystem is disturbed. The body is a part of earth, it grows out of the earth and returns to earth.

Does my gene fit snugly?

The body is a self-replicating structure. Upon maturity it starts a new instance of it out of a single cell. The entire evolution of billion years is repeated in a few months. Its like watching the evolutionary history in time lapse. It looks like it starts from a seed, but actually it starts from information, the genetic code. As it must happen with any self-replicating structure, a resilient structure outlasts the weaker ones and produces more copies of itself. This necessity naturally biases the organism formed around a code to favour that code. It appears as the Egoic tendency for procreation and tendency to favour one’s own offspring, and also to favour organisms with same genetic code over other kind (as a second priority). So we find that humans, like other creatures, are biased towards their own children, own relatives and own races, in that order of priority.

It looks like we favour our children as personalities, but it is actually the code that is ensuring its continuation. A person is only a puppet that dances on the instructions of the code. Anyhow, the illusion that we are somehow related to our parents and children is very strong. So the tendency to favour our own and our own kind is very strong. Unsurprisingly, people are unaware of what animates them. Their ignorance is the cause of animalistic behaviour and resulting suffering. Strangely, the strong biases are entirely blind. We tend to favour, but we do not know whom we are favouring. If one is not told who is his father, mother or child, one will never know it. If some other people pose as his parents or children, his biases shift blindly towards the imposters. There is no natural way

to know your, so called "blood relatives" or genetic relatives [4]. Yet people make a huge issue out of blood relations. It is funny and sad at the same time.

Well, you might say that these days its possible to simply match up the code and confirm who is who in one's blood relative gang. So lets check it out. The entire humanity matches with each other 99.5 %, as far as the genetic code is concerned. Roughly speaking, chimps are 98% similar to us, cats 90%, dogs and cows are 80%, rats 70%, fruit flies 60% and a banana is 50% similar [3]. So one can say that not only all humans are our blood relatives, but all animals and plants too are so. The line we draw when we decide to call someone genetically similar enough to be marked as a blood relative is entirely random and arbitrary. Unfortunately the Egoic tendencies in people are so strong that they simply ignore, refuse and oppose anything that goes against their blind beliefs and robotic behaviour.

Aren't those tiny differences important? After all, its the differences that make us a human rather than a potato out of a given genetic code. So lets check it out too. Note that now we are comparing exact matches, not merely similarities. A child is only about 50% exact copy of his father, the other 50% is a copy of his mother's code. A person is only 50% same as his sibling, thanks to DNA recombination. We are only 25% match with grandparents, 12.5% with first cousins, and less than 1% with 3rd cousins [5]. It stops making sense for relatives more distant than that, including your greatest grandfather, some random dude whose last name you still carry and are so proud of.

So its surely possible to identify one's shared genetic code with others, if you do hair splitting analysis, but it is like cherry picking and ignoring the elephant in the room. We choose to hold on to tiny matches and exaggerate tiny differences in order to keep the illusion of biological relations alive. A wise man sees through it all and frees himself from this madness. All bodies are essentially the same and all creatures, living or dead are either relatives or not related at all. A relation is more meaningful if you share your love, life and happiness with others, sharing a string of data has no meaning here.

What's the point?

So, then what is the point of a body that does not really exist, is located nowhere, is a filthy bag of chemicals, is a home of billions of creatures and is owned by no one? I think this question needs to be asked more often. Everybody takes their bodies for granted, for some strange reason. It does seem like we do not have a body, rather the body has us. We are dragged along with the body as it traces its mechanical path from womb to grave. We don't really have many options but to

comply and baby sit a body for the whole of our life. The usual carrots and sticks keep us motivated. Whatever it is, it is the most fascinating and complex thing in the entire universe. All other forms we see around us are nothing in comparison to a body of an organism. We have this complex gadget, yet we have little idea about what to do with it.

One fine day, I just found myself trapped in a monkey suit, looking out of two holes at the top of it, curiously, towards a strange imagery of shapes, colors and movements. I had no memory of how I got there and why, but the suit got hold of me and demanded stuff and forced me into action. Noncompliance simply meant pain and suffering, and obeying it meant rewards of pleasure. Since then I'm stuck with it. Later on I was told that this suit is a body that everyone had and it was born on some date, in such and such family with all the blood relatives bundled with it, for better or worse. They had their own demands, which made it even more torturous, but they did help me to manage the body, especially when I was totally a newbie driver of the suit and crashed it often. I still do not fully understand the point of it, but it is clear that we are more or less free to assign a reason or a purpose to it, of our own choice, even though we are not so free to simply get rid of it.

So what purpose should one assign to one's earthly existence? Big question, and there is no certain answer. This is where the whole idea of a path comes in. As soon as one gets a grip on basics of keeping a body alive, one needs to decide on a purpose, a path, else the whole circus show of this body becomes meaningless, devoid of any point. Body becomes just a burden that one carries for no reason at all when there is no purpose, no path. One cannot be told to take a certain path, you need to choose your own path. The path must have a heart, else its meaningless too.

If you have chosen a path of happiness, knowledge and freedom, then it will be useful to know some tricks and tips on how to manage a body. We will discuss those in the next article.

Notes:

[1] E.g. see *Viveka Chudamani* by Shankara. Also, some Buddhist texts. Be warned that such practices are not meant for ordinary people and can cause an unhealthy disgust of the body. Some medieval religious beliefs are good examples of how it can go out of hand.

[2] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_microbiota for up to date data and interesting (?) details about what lies inside and on our beloved body.

[3] The term “similar” can be defined in various ways in the field of genetics. Here it relates to the encoding for proteins, which make up the bodies. Irrespective of the technicalities, a wise person can immediately see that all genetic code on the earth is essentially the same. This also throws the strange notion that humans are “superior” to other species, out of the window. As I said, we are just another version of an application written around a basic genetic code. Humans do have some interesting features, that make us a unique species, but its our actions, not our code, that decides if we are really superior. Sadly, some actions of humans place them below viruses in genetic hierarchy.

[4] Ironically, red blood cells do not have any genetic code, no DNA, not even a nucleus! So I guess, the more logical phrase would be muscle cell relative, or neuronal relative or perhaps a sperm relative.

[5] <https://customercare.23andme.com/hc/en-us/articles/202907170-Average-percent-DNA-shared-between-relatives>

[6] This fear has ancient roots because a dead person was always seen to be reduced to bare bones. Perhaps we find mutilations disgusting and scary for evolutionary reasons too, as such a body meant attack by a predator, a bloody fight or disease. It makes sense to run away from it.

Bodies and their Drivers

We talked about this weird thing called body that possesses us and we are seemingly incapable of controlling it much. However we do perceive ourselves as drivers of this biomechanical biodegradable monkey suit. It seems, that we can command it and it takes us wherever we want. In return it demands fuel and rest. It comes with an auto pilot installed - the Ego, which takes care of most of the driving tasks. Its so efficient that people are hardly aware of it and think they are doing all the driving, because it fools us into thinking we are the Ego. The huge colony of cells takes care of most of its functions from growth, repair and fighting invasion of other colonies of cells. The auto pilot ensures preservation, defence and copying of it. The higher mental functions provide it an overall direction. The journey of a body is presented to the Self in its full glory and with all the bells and whistles in Technicolor 3D. The Self merely witnesses this experience, that we call a human experience.

Do we drive the body or does the body drive us? We think we drive it but actually it drives us. There is an illusion of control. The illusion happens because of the identity. While the body is busy doing its thing, the Mind creates an owner of it and creates an illusion that the owner is in the driver seat. The illusion of identity is so complete that it sees the body as itself. When we say "me the body" or "my body", it is the identity speaking. Thankfully, the identity does not do anything else except taking on an ownership. Imagine if you, the identity, the person, having to do all the menial tasks of respiring, digesting, pumping of heart, cell division and repair, deciding which muscles to contract, how much and when, making sense of all the sense data, firing each of trillions of neurons in the exact pattern and all that, which the body does effortlessly and skilfully. If we were in driving seat, we would crash it within seconds and would crash it repeatedly even after thousands of years of training. No wonder that Mother Nature has taken away our license to drive and is doing it herself, while we sit on the passenger seat and enjoy the scenery.

So it is preposterous to assume that we have control over our body. It is not even ours and it does not really exist like we see it. We are being taken for a ride, it starts at the womb and ends on a funeral pyre. It seems surely meaningless if you see it in this way, until you realize that it is the journey and not the destination

that is meaningful.

We do not have any control over the vehicle but we have some choices regarding what we see from its viewports. The most notable choices are happiness and suffering. The third choice is freedom from the body itself, which means giving up the choices of happiness and suffering both. This third choice is well hidden, thanks to the Ego and ignorance, and is accessible to only a few super users, under the advanced menu. The rest of us don't see it and think that we must continue the journey no matter what. This is good because the Self wants to go out for this ride, it's the higher Will, not our will. The choice of freedom is enabled once the Self has seen everything there is to see during this brief human experience.

Unfortunately the choice of suffering is the default choice because of some technical issues and therefore, for most, the ride becomes unbearable. The smart users soon notice something wrong and launch complaints. The more brainy kind try to mess with the settings of the body, try to fix it, assuming they are in full control. Most of us need to be shown how to choose happiness and make the ride more comfortable. Once you choose happiness, you don't really need to do anything, the body and the whole human experience takes care of it all. You may need to nudge it a bit to stop it from going back to the defaults, but that is the only choice you have - to choose happiness again and again. Some do it nicely, and find the journey so thrilling that they don't want it to end. But that is not an option, in fact the body ensures that you want an end, by resetting the option back to the suffering. So it is wise to end it, or to put it in a better way, allow it to end when it is over. Who knows, perhaps other awesome rides are waiting for you out there.

How to choose happiness? Well, if you are a regular reader of this blog, then you already know it. It's been mentioned hundreds of times now. Anyway it's worth repeating again in the context of a body. Knowledge of the body brings happiness and ignorance of it or attachment to it brings suffering. As simple as that.

The last article is a good place to start study of a body, even if it is brief and non-traditional. Knowledge should get rid of beliefs that keep us attached to a body, but since attachments are an Egoic tendency, one needs to know the Ego too. It was covered in fair details in preceding articles. Often the mere knowledge is not enough and one needs to also act in the light of it. Merely knowing something has little effect. We have already seen it as Cultivation. This is needed because the Ego is very strong and takes a while to give up its throne. Once you defeat it, it's a piece of cake, and you let it auto pilot - its primary function. Another reason we need constant effort to remain on our chosen path is that the life keeps throwing

stones, erecting hurdles and digging pits on our path, just to make the journey more interesting. We need to dodge, jump over and climb out of them, which is not only fun, it is also our training, our lesson. One need not suffer by life circumstances, one can take them as challenges, just like in any other game. Learning from the life experiences is the whole point of the journey, and the body is only a device, a vehicle that takes us through these experiences.

Why do I need to take all this trouble of knowledge acquisition, study and headache? Why can't I just live peacefully, drinking beer and watching TV all day? Unsurprisingly many do exactly that. You can try it if you are curious. I bet it won't last for a lifetime, unless, well, your lifetime is only a few months or years. Just when you think everything is set up perfectly and nothing more needs to be done, something will break, someone will drop in to create some trouble or the body itself may start causing trouble. This and many more reasons will force you into action of one or other kind and soon the TV and beer will become your last priority. I don't know about all, but an intelligent person can't even think of a repetitive life, where there is nothing new. A curious person seeks novelty not security. Stagnant water gets stale quickly, it needs to be flowing and fresh. One must continuously choose as long as one has a body.

Even if you are living a minimalist life, as many seekers do, there will be trouble. You will find it irritating that life situations don't let you meditate peacefully or to practice alone or to be in the company of wise. Its more so if you are a householder, married and have children. This continues until you realize that the real practice happens in the arena of life, not in a solitary ashram in some remote jungle. A seeker seeks solitude in order to recharge, to reflect on the experience earned so far and then its back to the marketplace [1]. A little net practice is necessary, but the real game happens on the pitch [2]. The game is to choose correctly in all situations. The choices regarding one's body are a significant part of Cultivation.

Life is much more than just an experience of a body. The body is a tiny aspect of it. However while embodied we know life as only that - an experience in a body. For most of us there is nothing more to this life. May be there is, but if it is not in our experience yet, it is not very useful. What is useful is to know this experience fully and to avoid the pitfalls of suffering. There are many reasons one can turn the experience of a body into suffering, they range from frivolous to serious. The frivolous reasons lead to unnecessary suffering and funny actions, such as - people being not happy with the way their body looks. Its either not beautiful or not young and strong, so they try to fix it in odd ways, like by applying colours and pastes over the skin and hair, or by covering it up in gold or expensive clothing. It is the nature of the body to change, so such attempts do not last.

Especially the females are seen doing these acts of deception, as they identify with their bodies and see themselves as lacking in some way. The Ego is the main motivator for such odd behaviours because a beautiful body means better chances of being accepted as mates and also better security. Everybody loves beautiful bodies, so good looks become just a means to "get" more love. A wise person realizes that the more important attribute of a body is not looks but health and fitness. A healthy and fit body automatically becomes attractive with an added bonus of less chances of suffering due to diseases.

Ugliness can be seen as an affliction of the body, brought about by unhealthy lifestyles. People eat too much, exercise too less and keep dumping junk into their body just because its "cool", that's how they saw it on the TV, the commercial said, they can be cool just by drinking their brand of chemical cocktail. Some people do it out of peer pressure, they don't want to be called uncool and boring. If you find yourself doing it too, its time to seek a wiser peer group. Ugliness can be not only of the body, but also of the personality. If one's behaviour is ugly, their pretty body is still repulsive. Simple attire and minimal body care and noble behaviour can make anyone angelic in looks and charms. A seeker does not care too much about the looks of his vehicle, but he also does not ignore it completely. The care happens out of respect for the body, not out of Egoic needs. A body is a marvellous instrument, and just like an engineer keeps his instruments in good order and good looking, a seeker does it too.

Aging is another affliction of the body. Mother nature is interested in keeping a body young and strong only till it reaches the reproductive age, it then hangs there on a plateau for a while in hopes of reproducing as many times as possible and then it starts breaking away. This is almost preprogrammed and has evolutionary reasons. There are no evolutionary pressures to keep a body going once it has made a few copies of itself, it is better to recycle it back. I hesitate to call aging as an affliction, as it is natural, but gives rise to major suffering, and therefore we tend to see it as an affliction. Once the body starts breaking, one encounters various pains and a lack of strength and energy. The suffering comes out of a resistance to this condition, not out of the condition itself. If you accept your age and live gracefully with it, there is no suffering, its the business as usual. If you resist, you feel a lack, a loss and suffering ensues. People do not want to give up their old lifestyles that provided them various pleasures. The attachment to bodily pleasures makes it difficult to accept aging. The fear of being rejected by others also contributes to the suffering as old people are least wanted people in "modern civilized" societies.

Aging gracefully is an art and you will find some good advice and books on this subject. I will simply get to the point, which is - be aware and consciously accept

aging process. Just like any other process, it is a happening, and it is perfect. A wise person makes sufficient provisions for old age and welcomes it. He does not cling to the young body, which is now a past event. He assumes new roles, when needed. Who is afraid of aging? One who has not lived his younger years fully, who has leftover desires. So it is wise to satisfy your desires while the sun shines, it will not last, and later in the life you will not be full of regrets. If its too late now, just accept the outcome, the bodily desires are a tiny aspect of life, it will be wiser to not to waste the remaining time too in suffering. Make some use of it.

It may happen in near future that we will defeat aging via scientific means. The body is a physical object, and so is subject to physical rules. Fortunately, there are no fundamental rules that necessitates breakdown of bodies. The degradation of body is mostly a failure of processes that clean up the toxins, prevent errors in DNA and perform cellular regeneration. So it is very much possible to devise means to keep the bodies young for a major portion of the life. There has been a good progress in recent years in the field of Gerontology, especially regarding stem cells and telomeric regeneration. The least one can desire is prevention of painful conditions, loss of senses and memory and delaying major dysfunction of bodily systems. Restoring looks, vigour or reproductive capabilities etc. may not become a first priority, but that is possible too. Its all very interesting, but what are the implications and consequences of manipulating nature?

In my opinion, man manipulating nature is natural too and there is really no need to suffer aging if one can prevent it [3]. Just like any other disease, aging is a disease and can be cured or at least its duration can be reduced or its painful symptoms can be eradicated. Wouldn't it just inflate Ego which thrives on a young body? The old age does deflate Ego by making one realize the impermanence of the body. But the major inflation of the Ego happens because of comparing oneself with old people. A young person sees himself superior to the old (at least in some ways), and when everyone around him would remain young, this comparison will be non-existent, resulting in a weaker Ego. The social evil of age discrimination will be gone. Longer youth can also give ample time to people to set up their lives. Not fearing that the old age will consume them soon, they can peacefully conduct the normal affairs of life. This can ease some anxiety and can actually calm down the Ego. The attachment to youth would go away because it will no longer remain rare and short lived. Note that we are talking about easing old age, not about eternal life. Although its possible that one can live longer if aging is controlled, but chances are that one would die anyway, but die young in the age of 120 or so [4].

So the death, disease, disabilities and deformities would be still there, unless science solves them too. Until that is done, we will need to manage them and

accept them as a part of human experience. We will discuss these four Ds in the next article.

Notes:

[1] Going back to the marketplace is a popular metaphor in Buddhist teachings.

[2] Cricket metaphor.

[3] This is an old debate. What is natural and what is artificial? Generally anything resulting from the agency of men is regarded as artificial. However, if you look closely, its the mother nature acting via the instrument of man. Just like an ant hill is natural, a skyscraper is natural too. The latter, no doubt, is a more sophisticated creation, but the distinction is superficial. Humans and human bodies are a part of nature and whatever they do are acts of nature. If you wish to go deeper, its all Presence essentially, it is impossible to say what is artificial when you look at Presence.

[4] It is interesting to see that many wild animals do not seem to age much. They look young, strong and beautiful for most of their lifetime and then they suddenly disappear. What happens is, the old age strikes them very fast. Even a slight disadvantage, such as a weak eye-sight or weak heart, results in immediate death, as that animal either cannot hunt, find food or becomes an easy prey. So old animals are eliminated from the ecosystem relatively quickly. Same reasons apply for damaged/diseased bodies of animals, they do not last long. This is not the case with humans, the social and familial structures support old people for many years, and so do the medical treatments. The result is, we find a lot of old and worn bodies in human world. This has obvious pros and cons.

The Dreaded Four Ds

Disease

The body being a structure, an object, is subjected to impermanence and decay. In addition to the gradual weathering (aging, as discussed), a body suffers damages suddenly due to various agencies and reasons. The harm can come from external agents such as microbes or from internal causes such as organ failures or from mental influences such as stress and anxiety.

These days it is easy to cure the diseases caused by external agencies, because of their purely physical nature. There is a good understanding about the nature of microbes and medicines that kill them. Still people die from pathogenic infections in millions. The reasons are social and Egoic, not a lack of knowledge and resources. Anyhow the progress in this regard is extraordinary, when you compare the situation today with ancient days, when an infection meant a certain death. The body has built in defences against microbes, else it wouldn't survive for even one day, but sometimes the pathogens find a way in. Needless to say that it is of prime importance to keep this immune system in good shape, all one needs to do is not to damage it intentionally. One can damage it by the means of substance abuse or a shabby and unhygienic lifestyle or by maintaining too much cleanliness. By too much cleanliness, I mean the indiscriminate use of chemicals that kill microbes inside or outside the body. Immune system constantly needs stimulants in order to maintain its defences, and in the absence of any microbes it becomes inactive. So a good rule of thumb is to avoid dirty surroundings, stale food, harmful substances and operation theater quality cleanliness.

The internal kind are relatively difficult to cure or prevent and usually become a ticket out of this world. Organ failures such as that of heart, liver, kidney or lungs and failures at cellular level such as cancer and endocrinal diseases are some examples of the internal afflictions. The causes can be varied and sometimes no apparent cause can be found, the body stuff just breaks down. A common cause is unhealthy lifestyle - too much eating, too much alcohol, fat, sugars and oils, little or no exercise and substance abuse. All these contribute towards breakdown of organs and if the organ is weak, it fails. Some people are resilient and remain

healthy in spite of a bad lifestyle, but these should not become a role model for the rest of us. Prevention is better than cure, but if one is afflicted, a huge change in lifestyle is needed. A disease can limit human experience severely, and usually there is no option but to lessen the pain. Note that even with discomfort and pain, suffering is optional and one need not suffer if one is aware and in knowing. Just do whatever needs to be done and make use of the remaining time in the body, which would be short.

Due to its proximity to the body, the mind exerts a great influence on it and can sometimes make it sick. Too much fear, anger, hate, stress or anxiety can affect the body. The direct influences are that certain organs are made to work very hard (such as the heart) or certain chemicals are secreted in unnatural amounts or the immune system is thrown into confusion and chaos, which makes it easy for infections to enter the body. Apart from that the mind affects the body in mysterious ways. One can experience this directly. Simply read about a disease with full concentration and seriousness and soon you will sense the presence of those symptoms in your own body [1]. Sometimes a mere suggestion is enough [2] and the disease appears in its full reality. Of course, the reverse is also true, a suggestion or a dummy medicine taken with a strong intention to be cured, cures a disease [3]. Knowing this peculiar effect of the mind on the body, a wise person keeps his mind free of negativity. In general, if your Mind is free from all the afflictions we discussed in this blog, the chances of being afflicted with bodily diseases go down. If a bad mind can cause disease, a good mind can prevent or cure them, simply put.

Since the body is only an appearance, means other than physical or mental can be used to heal it. The body is a continuation of the Mind, an extension, and therefore it is not very surprising that the Mind can affect it. The trick is to learn how to affect it the way we desire. Here we enter the non-physical dimensions and since for most of us, this sort of thing is not a direct experience, we will not go there for now.

Deformities

Diseases, accidents, birth defects and violent acts can cause deformities in a body. These range from absence of teeth to absence of limbs. Deformities result in ugliness of the body and that adds to the suffering caused by the deformity itself. One not only suffers from the discomfort but also from the inferiority complex and depression as a result. Fortunately, most of the time a deformity won't cause death and some means can be used in order to function more or less normally. It still limits one's experience, but the suffering is still optional. One need not suffer by thinking constantly about what one cannot do with a deformed body, one

needs to be happy and content with what one can still do. If you can't do X, find Y. One need not demand acceptance of others, but accept oneself and know why others behave the way they do. This will prevent the extra suffering caused by social tendencies of others.

Disabilities

Disabilities can range from restrictive movements to dysfunction of senses such as blindness or deafness. I made a distinction between deformity and disability, a deformity is surely a disability, but I'm using the term here to denote an affliction that does not include a gross deformity or damage. Disabilities can still very much limit human experience and same tricks mentioned above in the case of deformity can be applied to do your best even with disabilities. Usually, the disabilities increase with age, especially the mental disabilities. Perhaps there are some tricks and books out there that may help in dealing with a weak brain, but I cannot offer any tips here. Know that the brain will start breaking sooner or later, however, the ability to remain aware should carry you through this difficult time to the other side. Be aware that the memory will not function, logical ability will break down, muscular coordination will degrade and so on and so forth. This will be a time to retire, relax and reflect, instead of suffering and resisting the inevitable. Instead of harbouring anger and frustration over the disabilities, utilize your abilities. Think of what you can do instead of what you cannot. If you spend your life or old age fretting on disabilities, it will be just a waste of it all. Know this and carry on. A disability doesn't mean no life, it only means a different life.

Its only a matter of time, science will conquer most of the diseases, fix all deformities and restore all abilities of the disabled. Perhaps even more, like extra abilities will be added to the already extensive treasure of human abilities. Till that happens, one should manage these afflictions with whatever means currently available. Even if you are able to completely avoid suffering, it is still desirable to restore or improve the functionality of the body.

Why do I keep saying that the suffering is optional, is that some kind of a sick joke? The Self is incapable of pain and suffering, the pain is just physical signals, a sensory object and the suffering is a state of the Mind. The Self merely witnesses it all. Of course the pain and suffering coming from the body is not fun, but you suffer only when you identify with the body or Ego, the "poor me" who is suffering. Cutting this identification cuts down the suffering. Abide as Self. It will not magically cure the disease or make your pain disappear instantly, it just relieves you from the additional burden of suffering. When you are not busy in a state of suffering, you are free, your Mind works better and you arrive at a cure faster. Not only that, you learn to avoid making the mistakes in future that lead

you to the disease. Being in awareness also helps to observe the impermanent nature of the body and helps to get rid of the attachment to it. One can turn a discomfort into a stepping stone towards ones goal.

Death

Well, its not an affliction to be exact. It marks the termination of the human experience. Once a body breaks down completely, the life processes come to a grinding halt. All systems shut down. The cells stop dividing and starve to death. A death is thus not one but trillions of deaths, depending on where you look. The dead matter is soon invaded by surrounding microbial life and other creatures and is converted to manure, ready to be recycled into other bodies of plants and animals. The body comes from dirt and goes back to dirt.

We encounter an age old question here - why is there death? Why isn't everyone immortal? A simple answer is - impermanence, everything changes and is destroyed. This is by necessity, else there would be no change, and no birth too, to start with. Fortunately, there is no physical law that prevents preservation of the body for long durations, so in theory it is possible to achieve very long life spans, thousands of years long. All you need to do is continuously and accurately maintain cellular regeneration. If you look closely, the cells themselves are immortal, some cells such as cancer cells refuse to die. The natural death of the body is an outcome of death of the cells. Cells die because of programmed death, errors in DNA replication and accumulation of toxins. At least that's what is known till date. Basically these are the same reasons as those for aging, if you recall. So the death, natural death to be precise, starts early, we die a little everyday, until one day the body gives up totally. But it is possible to minimize or delay these defects and hence very long lives can be achieved.

In fact we intend to preserve the person, the identity, not the body. The body changes every second anyway, its not a great disappointment if it is destroyed, only if the personality remains intact. This can be achieved by getting a new body for the personality, e.g. by transplant of the whole head of an old person on a young torso. Repeat when the new body also degrades and a person can live for a long time till the original brain decays away. In fact, one needs to transplant only the brain areas responsible for identity and memories. To make it even simpler, one can discard most of the memories and can also allow some loss of the identity, since one forgets most of the stuff anyway and the personality is ever changing. So one can expect that after an approx. transplant, the person would still retain most of his old self in a brand new body. Moreover only the neuronal patterns need to be transferred to a new brain, not the original tissue. So the life can be extended indefinitely in this way.

The continuity of the experience of identity is important, not the absolute -ness or exactness of it. Even the substrate is not important and one can transfer his identity into inorganic substrates, such as a neuromorphic computer [4], instead of a brain. One can either have a robotic body or can opt for no body and experience a disembodied existence. One can also have a virtual body, an avatar in a virtual world. All this should be possible in future with scientific advances. Of course, this theory assumes that the personality or memory is dependent mostly on purely physical neuronal patterns. What happens to the Self or the Consciousness? I guess, since the Self is independent of bodies and identities, one would still report the exact same Self as before. Note that it all happens on the screen of Self anyway and therefore the one and only Self shines through all identities and bodies. How will you know this? There is probably no way for the Mind to know this directly. However one can infer from experiments and transfer of personalities into different bodies or substrates is one such experiment. If the person reports no difference in his old experience of the Self and new one, then it will become evident (at least for that person) that the Self remained exactly the same before and after. Of course this is a brute force method, there are more elegant ways to infer the unity or universality of the Self.

Perhaps science will achieve the long desired goal of immortality in due course, but what are the consequences of playing with natural order? Population explosion, cut throat competition for limited resources - food and land, eternal rule of an immortal tyrant, immortality divide - where only the filthy rich are allowed to undergo immortality treatment and the peasants are left to die. We can think of all sorts of troubles the death of death can bring. However there can be some benefits, the main is elimination of fear of death which is currently causing a lot of suffering for many. There would be no murders, as it would be possible to revive anyone from a backup of his memory or brain structures. The furious run to hoard stuff and need to have as many pleasures as possible before death would disappear (hopefully). There would be no need to suffer from diseases or disabilities, as one can simply switch to a brand new healthy body and throw away the defective one. The body would become a commodity, one can change it just for fun or one can switch to a male/female/child body if that experience is desired. There would be no destruction of knowledge with passing of the person holding that knowledge. Thousands of years would be available to gain knowledge and explore. There would be many spin offs such as colonization of distant planets and improvisation of bodies. One need not stick to human form. The implications are many and are being discussed by the experts and futurists at this time [5] [6].

Its all very interesting and exciting, but lets pause the fantasy for a while and

come back to the philosophy of death. What does it mean to die and what does it mean to be immortal?

From the point of view of the body, it is a change of physical structures. Taking on a new body will be just another change. So for the body its still as good (or bad) as death. From the point of view of the personality (aka identity) there would be a continuity of change. The personality changes continuously because the experiences of the person constitute his personality, and they change continuously. A person today is not the same as he was yesterday and will not remain the same person after a few years, and will surely become something totally different after few thousand years. The old person will be dead fairly quickly, even though there will be this illusion of continuity because of memory. From the point of view of the Self, its all just a continuous change of experiences. The Self remembers nothing, the impressions are mental structures. The Self doesn't change, because there is nothing to change into. It's the same Self before and after death.

So if we look closely, death is a change and so is immortality, there is not much difference. From the point of view of the Self there is no difference anyway. Thus in the grand scheme of things, the death or immortality do not matter much. Its not the duration but the quality of the life which is important. If you lived forever and achieved nothing at all then its a grand waste, nothing else. If you lived a short life and could free yourself, then it was worth. Immortality cannot free anyone, one must take up a path, and that does not necessitate a long life.

If the Self is eternal and you abide in it, then you are already eternal, beyond birth and death. I have a strong intuition that this business of births and deaths (i.e. changes) of bodies and personalities is already going on. We do not know it because of the limitations of the Mind. This sounds like reincarnation, but with an important difference - the reincarnation is not of a person, the reincarnation just is. The Presence takes up new forms and generates new personalities, there is no one there to reincarnate.

We find that we encounter the limits of the Mind and hence limits of knowing when we try to study death. However some interesting inferences can be drawn from direct experiences and reasoning. We will discuss those in the next article.

Notes:

[1] The Nocebo Effect: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nocebo>

[2] Hypnosis

[3] The Placebo Effect

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuromorphic_engineering

[5] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transhumanism>

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_extension

The Illusion of Death

No one has witnessed their own death, however almost all of us are totally convinced that we will die someday. Without a direct experience of death, one can say that that death is only a belief. Of course we see many others who die every day, its all very common and obvious. What's not so obvious is that we see only their bodies dropping dead. The rest is mere extrapolation of same event in our own case.

Fantasies of Death

We see that a body is destroyed after death, and we actually ensure that it is destroyed by cremating it. So it is fair to conclude that our own body will be destroyed, and since our body is no different than all those dead bodies, there is no reason to conclude otherwise. Anyhow one cannot witness the destruction of one's own body. It is just an assumption.

Once the body is dead and destroyed, we lose all contact with the person, the owner of the body himself, there is no emergency backup line to a person, the body is the one and the only instrument of communication with others. Therefore one has no other option but to assume that the person has disappeared too. In other words, destruction of the body implies destruction of the owner of the body. This explains why (almost) everyone so strongly believes in non-existence of the personality after death. Note that no one knows this objectively, it is an assumption.

What about the Self, does it drop dead too? Usually a person reports a Self via his body and without a body and no access to the person, it'd be impossible to know his experience of Self. Is the Self still witnessing all this death and destruction? May be, may be not. There is no way to know, for an ordinary person. And this explains the strong belief that even the Self or the Consciousness also disappears after death.

What about the world? Obviously it stays. Or does it go too? The world from the point of view of the dead becomes an unknown, but the world from the point of view of others continues. Deaths of people hardly affect the world at all, this is

exactly our experience. We are pretty much sure of it and so its fair to conclude that the world will continue as if nothing happened, after we are dead. Its the same beautiful world you were so attached to, but it seems it cares not if you stay or leave.

Some people do care, especially those with sweet memories of you. The memories last for a while, but not too long. Some people feel that it is important to leave good memories of oneself behind, some do not care much. A few feel that they should do something great for this world which they are going to leave behind, and a few manage to do that. Most do leave behind wills and money etc. for the people they care about. Note that all these people are totally convinced that they are leaving a world behind and it will continue to exist just as it is now, with all those people, relatives, gold and buildings they own. Logic tells us that no one can witness a world after his own annihilation. If you are witnessing a world, then you are far from dead, in terms of the commonly accepted meaning of death. What is the reason for this belief? It seems the reason is their own experience that the world continued after someone else died and people extrapolate it in case of their own death. It is a fair assumption, but nevertheless an assumption.

Life after life

As many already know, total annihilation of the Self, person and the body is the most common belief, but there are other beliefs too. Some assume that the dead person continues living in some other world with a brand new body. The new body is imagined to be better than our gross old body. If one must indulge in a fantasy, its better to make it a pretty one. So the other world is also imagined to be much better than the plain vanilla variety. Of course why send bad people or your enemies to a pretty world, so for them specially crafted terrible worlds exist with ugliest possible bodies. Some believe that the new body is non-existent and only the personality survives, and moreover, it comes right back very soon in another physical body. Some go ahead and call all this bodies and worlds business hogwash and believe that only the Self continues. Perhaps there are many more, one for each culture and group, ancient or modern.

An alert and aware reader must have noticed by now that most of the concepts related to death are mere assumptions. This is mind boggling. Why would someone choose one assumption over the other? In the absence of knowledge, why not just remain Agnostic? The answer is - indoctrination. A child uncritically accepts whatever he was told by the people around him. Adults do that too in order to conform to “norms”. No questions asked. Some even try to force their beliefs on others. Whole philosophies and religions were erected over something

which masses do not know directly, and have no means to know. Fights over death are cause of many deaths. Death shows us a mirror, we are – ignorant blind believers. Well, a majority of us are, unfortunately.

So which one of belief should I choose out of these colourful garden varieties of beliefs on death? It is not necessary to choose any. Its not that you will die if you don't choose, there is no compulsion. Wait for the actual experience, it will come sooner or later, even if you don't want it. Once you are dead you will know, or will you? There has to be a "you" to know anything.

The Unknowable

As we know, knowing something is a function of the Mind. It arranges all experiences in a neat structure and presents them to the Self. It also forms impressions. In the absence of the Mind, there is no knowledge and no impressions are formed for later retrieval. The issue in the case of the experience of death is - the Mind is trying to know something which happens after its disappearance. Same issue is seen in the case of birth, where the Mind tries to comprehend something which lies before it appears.

How am I so certain that the Mind disappears after death? I'm not certain obviously. I carefully avoided the word destruction, instead I use disappearance of Mind, like in the state of deep sleep, a deactivation of it, if you will. It knows nothing of the deep sleep state, where it gets deactivated and this is a common everyday experience. The Mind is awesome and great, but is limited. We hit its limitations when we try to explain death using the Mind, very similar situation as that of deep sleep. From the point of view of the Mind, there is nothing to know after death. And that is the exact answer we get when we ask our Mind about its experience of the death. Death is a great unknown for the Mind.

What honest answer do you get when you ask Self about death? In my experience, it denies any experience of death and even of birth. I come empty handed. From the point of view of the Self there is no death.

So can we now begin our celebrations? There is no death after all, aren't we immortal already? I'd suggest you wait until you are dead. If you find anything remotely resembling "you", its time to celebrate. In fact why wait for death, we have already seen that there is no you, the identity is only an illusion. The "you" is already dead. There is no one to celebrate, but Self itself, and it too has no reasons to celebrate, it was never born. Isn't all this confusing? Yes, that's what we get when we go to the bottom of beliefs, we never find anything solid. Death is something illusory, a creation of fearful Ego, of ignorant masses. You cannot

find death, if you search honestly.

Death of the beliefs

Lets dismantle the beliefs regarding death using nothing but enquiry. It does not take magical abilities, superpowers or exotic states of Mind to destroy the illusion of death. What is needed is brutal honesty. We will explore what is it that can be known with certainty.

Firstly, for something to die, it needs to be born. An end implies a beginning. So let's find out when you were born, your beginning. Find an experience that conclusively shows that you were born. You will surely find a concrete experience of existing now but nothing indicates that you are just starting now. And then you will instinctively search the storehouse of experiences - the memories, as you firmly believe that you must have existed yesterday and even a year ago and you try to go back into the past in hopes of finding an experience of a start. All the memories happen now as faded sensory and mental perceptions. You find your identity changing, a younger body, a different personality and soon you arrive at some really dim experiences of playing in a park or crying in the arms of your mother, or some similar event. And the memories go no further. You can't remember any experience of the birth.

Then you might assume that the experience must have continued beyond your limits of memory and there must be a "you" before that and you might even imagine yourself having an experience of coming out of the tunnel of a womb and even living inside the warm red glow of a womb. You may suppose all this while giving an excuse that your memory doesn't go so far. But that's cheating - beliefs, assumptions, imaginations, excuses and suppositions are not allowed, they do not take us to the truth, only an experience does. So one must conclude that if one can't even remember his beginning, then it is foolish to be so certain of it. Remember that we are not claiming that there was no beginning, we are simply gathering solid evidence, if any.

Now you might recall some memories of others whom you heard saying that you were actually born and on such and such date in such and such family, and perhaps those family members are still around you to confirm that. Isn't that an evidence that you were born? Its an evidence that a body was born, a tiny one. This is exactly the experience of your mother and others. They still have no clue if you existed before they saw this tiny body. Of course, at this point you can equate yourself with a body and call it a start. Now death has become a reality for you, because the body will surely die. You will not know it, but others will. Again you must rely on the experience of others to conclude about your body-death and

moreover they won't be able to tell you, unless a dead body is interested in listening about how it died.

We have seen that assigning the identity to the body is arbitrary. The identity keeps shifting and the body is never the same. So in such assignment, the thing you refer to as "me" is uncertain and arbitrary. Your decision to call the start of the body as start of "you" is also arbitrary. You simply chose a point in time which is an event of separation of a piece of matter from your mothers body. One can as well define a start at the point of conception. Moreover, one can trace the chain of causal events that produced this body to the beginning (if any) of the universe. The matter took many forms and countless events happened, which one of these is the real start of you? So contrary to popular belief, one still cannot find a beginning even when one assumes the body as self. This can be shocking for some, their beliefs were so strong and certain till a minute ago [1].

Lets not be so random and explore the other option of the identity being a collection of your experiences, aka the personality. We have seen that the personality is all that random stuff one likes to call as oneself - name, gender, age, looks, relations, job titles, things he did or said or liked or disliked etc. Its much more flimsy and fickle compared to a solid body, but for some strange reason people want to call themselves as this stuff. And you will find that it has no real start, or its beginning can be placed anywhere arbitrarily. You may like to place it at the point of start of memories, but you will never be sure, perhaps the forgotten part before the commencement of memory was real start of your personality.

Its end is not within your direct knowledge too, unless the personality survives the death and you know that you have died, but then you are not really dead. If you are the personality itself, it needs to be alive to know that it is dead. This doesn't make sense. There is no direct way to know if a personality dies. Others may infer it from the obvious inactivity of the dead body, which the person animated in his unique way. But is that inactivity due to breakdown of the body or due to destruction of the personality? Others cannot even know this.

Lastly, we ask the Self. Did it begin somewhere at some time? It cannot say anything, all it can do is witness the now. It witnesses the time too and so is timeless. It cannot say if it will end in future. There is no such thing as future for the Self. The time - past and future are made up by the Mind. The Self transcends the time and hence is beyond any beginning or any end. The beginning and end are concepts that are applicable only to the objects. The objects, including the Mind are witnessed as coming and going on the screen of Self. There is nothing else out there to witness the coming and going of the Self itself. As soon as you

assume an experiencer of the Self, that experiencer becomes the Self and everything else is reduced to objects – the experienced. So the only possible conclusion is that the Self, the Consciousness, by necessity cannot have a beginning or an end. Note that we are on a solid ground here, there is no uncertainty of any kind. And therefore one can as well call this as the truth. It is all so simple and beautiful, certain, consistent and self-evident, as truth must be.

So we have weakened the belief that there can be an end to whatever this thing called "me" is, because there is no evidence of its birth. One must arbitrarily define a start and an end to the various entities one arbitrarily defines as "I" and call some state of it as death. In the case of the Self, even that is not possible and we remain uncertain about its birth and death. So we find that the concept of death is, well, a concept, an opinion, just an idea in the mind.

The Changeless One

Another way to weaken the beliefs about death is as follows:

In order for an entity to be born or die, there must be a change. In other words, a beginning or an end imply a change or various in-between states. So there is death only when there is change. Lets see what our direct experience (aka knowledge) tells us about the change.

The body is ever changing and in spite of logical difficulties one can mark a start and end point on the continual change of this structure of matter. Same for the personality, a person is never the same. So under the criteria of the change, both body and personality must die. Bad news. But the good news is - the change means just that, a different state, it does not mean annihilation. So there is some hope, at least for the personality, because the body is hopelessly changed into entirely different structures even though the matter that made it still exists in one or the other form, e.g. the oil in your car, which comes from dead bodies, its useful, but I'd hesitate to call it "my self".

Lets check out the Self. Find an experience of witnessing that was different in any possible way in recent past from the experience of witnessing now. If there was no perceptible difference then try it for an earlier time using your long term memory. E.g. the witnessing that happened during childhood. Perhaps you know things much better now and understand whatever you are witnessing much better, but that would be a change in the Mind, it is more evolved now compared to the past. How can the Self, the Awareness itself, be aware of something in a different way in different instances? Its tricky to observe it, but one would see that the experiences are varied but the experiencer is always the same. There cannot be two ways of being conscious of something.

Another way to check that is to ask the question - Can a changing Self register a change? In other words, can a changing Self experience anything? Experience is a change, no change implies no experience. Since the Self, by definition, is experiencer, not the experience, it has to be changeless. Whatever changes becomes an experience, and whatever does not change becomes an experiencer.

Suppose the Self changes, who registers this change? As soon as you say, another Self registers the changing Self, then the changing Self becomes merely another experience and ceases to be an experiencer. Now the new Self who registered it is the Self, which again needs to be changeless. The only conclusion one can draw is that the Self cannot change and it is by necessity, not by an arbitrary choice or definition.

Change implies time and it is very obvious that the Self is beyond time, as time is also experienced. Not being in time makes the concept of change inapplicable for the Self.

The changeless attribute of the Self can be understood via a metaphor of screen. The Self is like a screen on which experiences (images) appear. It is the screen that becomes images while still remaining changeless. It seems paradoxical, but that is how it is [2]. In order to register the changing imagery on the screen, the screen must remain perfectly changeless, pure white and motionless. If it changes, say patterns of colour appear on it out of nowhere, then one cannot distinguish the screen from images. In fact the changing patterns of the screen become a part of the imagery, the screen is always seen as a background, changeless and invisible as far as its true nature is concerned, the latter is hidden behind the ever changing imagery.

No change directly implies no start and no end. This is how the Self is. And if you wish to call yourself as the Self that is witnessing all that is, then you are beginning-less and endless. However as far as the matter of death is concerned, we will just say that the beliefs about the death have gone from perfectly true and certain to weak and uncertain and have fallen to pieces.

I don't know

By using the tools of direct experience and mere logical and critical thinking one can arrive at that stage of "I don't know ". Once you say that, the cup is empty and doors to new knowledge open. The Mind cannot know anything which it cannot experience. Experiences come out of Grace [3]. I do not know any other way of putting this. Many are fortunate to be blessed by grace and have amazing and extraordinary experiences under their belt and do know death (and birth or

life, for that matter) better than I do. Even though I cannot speak from experience regarding other's experiences about death, I will throw my random opinions about them in the next article.

Notes:

[1] One must explain the whole universe first in order to explain oneself. This should be a great insight in itself. The start of the body can be arbitrarily placed at any point, but that will be a convention, a convenience, not a fact.

[2] The pixels are the only reality of a screen, such as the one you are using now. The values or colours the pixels take up are transitory, unreal. The experience need changing colors, but the screen (the experiencer) needs to remain unchanging. If a movie plays on a screen, the characters (assuming they are wise and conscious beings) can sense the presence of the screen while the movie plays, but they will not be able to see things before the start of the movie and after the end of it. The screen would see the start and end and the blackness before and after. However, the screen won't be able to say anything about its own start and end. Our bodies and minds/personalities are characters and the Self is the screen, in this metaphor. Notice that the characters would perceive themselves as separate entities with a mysterious changeless nothing of the screen always present throughout the movie, but the screen will be fully aware that all characters, scenery, time, shapes and spaces are happening in it, there won't be any separation, just oneness. I'm thankful to Rupert Spira for this metaphor. Check out his videos for in-depth explanations.

[3] My understanding of the Grace is that it is a natural ripening of the Self. The term ripening is only metaphorical, the Self does not change, only the fog covering it dissipates slowly. As it progresses, it gets novel experiences, which show it to itself in a better light. Grace happens, you cannot go "get" it. You can only remain open to receive it when it happens. See past articles for a brief discussion on this topic.

The Living Dead

We have seen that how the concept of death is only a concept, an illusion. Somehow death refuses to die. We will venture into some controversial cases of death-like experiences and un-dead people. I don't intend to settle the case of death and close the file. I'll just throw opinions, as these experiences are of others, not my own and are mostly subjective.

OOBES

Aka Astral Projections are characterized by experiences that do not involve a physical body and are realistic. So a person experiencing stuff while fully knowing that his body is comfortably asleep in a bed, assumes that his existence or his consciousness and personality is not totally dependent on the body. By extrapolation, he assumes that he will continue after the body is destroyed just as he can continue while projecting. So we have two assumptions here.

In reality, the body and the brain of a person who is projecting are still alive and fully functional. So this experiment doesn't really provide any evidence of continuity beyond body. However it injects sufficient doubt in the mind of a person holding a belief that he is merely a body. So I recommend practicing projecting if you are afflicted with such a belief. But do not expect a convincing proof of life after death. Some people do claim to get a decent proof out of such practices, but the proof must come from your own experience, not of someone else's. We are in subjective realms. Death is a subjective experience.

OOBES do provide a proof of immense powers of the Mind and that our abilities to experience are not limited to sensory data and physical world alone.

NDEs

Near death experiences involve experiences that occur when the body or the brain almost breaks down. These are fascinating and are more reliable accounts compared to OOBES as the patient while having an NDE is often under full observation of skilled medical practitioners. There is a record of happenings and

data, so these become of scientific value. The belief here is that the consciousness and personality continues after death. Death being defined as flatlining of brain.

The assumption here is that cessation of brain activity means death. This is the usual medical criteria used to declare someone as dead. So using this definition, the patient does survive a death. However, using the more natural and everyday definition of death being a total destruction of the body, we see that its only a word game, not a fact. The revived patient still comes back in the same body, same brain and has same personality and consciousness. What we prove here is that the subjective components survive a brief glitch in the body and the brain. Since the body and the brain are almost intact after revival, its just like a turning off an on of the life. It is not an evidence of life after death because the body and the brain are still intact there.

Anyhow, the most wonderful aspect of an NDE is not the experience itself, but the fact that we do not need even a working brain to experience something. NDE is a special case of ESP or OOBIE where the brain flatlines. So the patient reporting the events and conversation of the people in the room, while remaining in a brain dead state can be taken as an evidence of ESP.

One would expect that it is a great personal proof for the person who experiences the NDE and his life, beliefs and actions would change dramatically after such an extraordinary experience. It does happen for a few and they turn into seekers, with a much better and meaningful “afterlife”. However my own personal interactions with such people reveal a bitter truth, most continue to live an Egoic life, as if nothing happened. Some become religious as a result and close down their minds even more. This immediately throws light on why sages disregard extraordinary experiences or miracles and advise us to disregard them too. An extraordinary “out-there” kind of experience may not necessarily help you to progress magically.

Rebirth

We do have cases where the brain and body are completely destroyed but the person manages to come back in another brand new body, or at least the claim is such. The real claim is that he somehow has access to the memories of someone else. The memories can be vivid, especially about the circumstances of the previous death. But logically such recall of memories of someone else does not imply the rebirth of the person originally holding the memories. The same effect can be achieved via injecting artificial memories into the mind of a person, e.g. under substances or hypnosis. One can inject detail descriptions of another person with pictures and videos of him. One can argue that it should be possible

to access the memories and experiences of a living person too. Although I did not encounter any such stories so far, but that is a possibility, given the possibility of recall of memories of a dead person. It would make the distinction between living and dead more blurry.

So if one wants to believe in the stories of reincarnation one can conclude that the Mind has this extraordinary ability to recall not only one's own memories but also of someone else's, even if the other person is long dead. This would be a proof of universality of the Mind, not of continuity of the person. This shows that there can be a possibility of cross connections in this universal Mind.

Anyhow, a personality is nothing but memories, so gaining access to subjective memories of other person would technically mean a reappearance of the original owner of those memories, albeit in a new body. So I guess we have an interesting possibility here. The claims of rebirth make death even more nebulous.

ESP

Extra sensory perception is the ability to perceive without using the usual senses of the body. This hints at the non-local and universal nature of the Mind. But it still does not conclusively say anything about its existence after destruction of the body.

Obviously, ESP has nothing to do with death, but I'm including it just because many of the so called evidences of afterlife can be reduced to "mere" ESP. For example a mediumistic communication can be simply a case of telepathy (an ESP), effectively a reading of the mind of the client in order to find some information about his dead relative. Similarly a spirit can be reduced to a remote vision of astral world. The words such as "reduce", "mere" or "simply" do not mean that the ESP is an ordinary phenomena or an everyday occurrence for us all. ESP in itself is as mysterious and uncertain as any other paranormal phenomena.

ADC

After death communications are somewhat controversial and scary communications where the dead person tries to send messages to the living. It can be signs, synchronicities, voices, apparitions or writing. It can also be a simple thought which has a distinct sense of not being one's own. Such communications if substantiated can become a definite proof of life beyond death. Not only that, it can prove that the dead or non-physical entities can influence physical matter or living people.

However, such cases are very rare and are shrouded in ambiguity. The Mind is very powerful and picks up patterns where there are none. Most of ADC seems to be just an illusion, hallucination, or random coincidences. For the Mind, its a piece of cake to arrange something like a symbol on your bathroom mirror, or a voice from the blue. Anyhow, if you have a direct and unambiguous experience of ADC, which was substantiated, then the case is settled for you. The rest of the world still has only two choices - either to believe your story or to disbelieve it.

Mediums

These are the people who have an extraordinary ability to mediate ADCs. This is the claim and is a subject of much controversy, probably because of involvement of charlatans. If proven genuine then these people can be of a great help in settling the question of death for once and for all. Strangely, mother nature dislikes certainty in such matters. I never had any encounter with a medium and never got any chance to experiment with them, but I find that the stories of mediumship encourage blind beliefs of all kinds. It all creates more confusion rather than clarity. Interested readers will find a lot of books and even scientific exploration on this matter.

The first question ADCs raise is, how's that the dead person able to communicate if he is already reborn somewhere long ago. This contradicts the belief of reincarnation directly. Only one of them can be true. Well, one can say that the communicating person is not yet reborn and is still hanging out there somewhere without the constraint of a body. This raises even more questions like how's that some dead come back immediately and some do not and how's that we never see a medium telling us that the phone is ringing but your grandpa is not home.

One can say that the dead have a choice when to reincarnate. But that raises even more questions. How's that time still works out there or what makes them come back at all. How's that one has a choice regarding time but not regarding place, parents or gender. As many of you may have heard, there are a garden variety of theories that attempt to answer all such questions. I haven't seen even one of them that can satisfy an enquiring mind.

In my opinion, a good and convincing test would be to arrange a communication with a living person. When done under controlled conditions, this will at least clear some doubts about mediumship. If extrasensory communication with a living person can be accomplished, it would raise the chances of same being true for such communication with a dead person. We are assuming that the minds of living and dead are similar, it would be a valid assumption since we are

hypothesizing continuation of the mind of a person after death. The advantage with a living person is that we can confirm it unambiguously if the communication indeed took place. I do not know of any such attempts. I guess it can be easily dismissed as telepathy or mind reading, and again will point to the universality or oneness of the Mind. Universality of the Mind does mean that the Mind is not personal, experiences in bodies impress upon it and due to its universal and non-physical nature the experiences, including the experience of a personality remains intact even when the bodies are destroyed.

Anyhow, it will not settle all questions and the can of worms will remain open.

Ghosts

Aka spirits are manifestations of dead people and for some reason we, the living, find them scary. This makes all those horror movie producers employing them en-masse. The sight of a dead person makes our spirit jump out of our skin. It is difficult to find anyone who has not even one ghost story to tell. Spirits seem to be widespread but strangely evade all attempts of establishing their existence with certainty. Once again we see the skilful hands of mother nature wiping out all evidence [1].

I don't really see any reason to be scared of them, as we are all nothing but ghosts, with an important difference - we have a monkey suit on and they are naked. So I guess ghosts need to be scared of us. And I'm sure they are because they flee in an instant. Joking apart, the fear arises out of shock, strangeness and because of the Egoic fear of unknown. A ghost is not a desirable sight for these reasons. What is remarkable about them is that they are supposed to be not here in the physical world, but are seen localized, if you believe some stories. Of course there are all these elaborate theories about subtler bodies and all, but if you are looking for an objective, repeatable and verifiable evidence for such theories, then most probably you will be disappointed. These things lie on the very uncertain border of objective and subjective. The usual physical instruments will fail and the solid theories of physics will crumble away. And I guess you will need your own helpful ghostly volunteer subject to experiment on, which generally adds to the problems, because the dead take no interest in scientific studies for some reason.

Now, its a piece of cake for Mind to make a ghost appear out of nowhere. It can even make your dead relatives appear when you are least expecting them. The people in a dream, or imagination or an OOBIE are nothing but ghosts. So they are real in that sense - a creation of the Mind. This also explains the mostly subjective quality of ghostly apparitions. It is very much possible to see a ghost

when the mental conditions are just right, but that would be dismissed as a hallucination very easily. The Mind can tune into unexpected sources of perception and can superimpose them on the usual worldly view, even with eyes wide open.

The real question is - do ghosts, whatever they are, prove life after death? Of course a ghost will say yes. But we need much more than a word of mouth, especially when its a dead mouth. But that's not the real question actually , a better question is - what is real? Its all Mind everywhere. Its all mental anyway. It is wise to disconnect death from all such strange occurrences. Death is just a change, shift from one mental state to an unknown state, which is not any more constrained by a body, and that state is more universal rather than personal.

All these extraordinary experiences, if they are your own experiences, do show that the body is a small aspect of human existence. The person is small too. A person may or may not continue for long, but most probably our earthly lives leave a long lasting impression on the universal structure of the Mind. I personally see all these extraordinary phenomena as just ordinary business of the Mind [2]. It all happens on the screen of the Self, and sometimes unusual stuff happens. The most amusing thing that is happening now is this life - the human experience. It is really extraordinary that there is such a thing as life, so solid and so realistic. It is indeed amazing that there is a Self here, that is experiencing all these minds, personalities, bodies, worlds and what not. The fleeting and flimsy paranormal phenomena are nothing when compared to the miracle of life.

Some people regard extraordinary experiences as a sign of "spiritual" progress. This is just another belief. The spiritual stuff, whatever it is, is about the Self, the essential being of us all, and it is right here and right now. No amount of magical experiences are going to make it any different, or more "evolved". All phenomena, physical or non-physical, are a creation of the Mind, the Experiencing, the "energy of change" which is a part of the Self. This needs to be seen clearly. A seeker will not entangle himself in the web of the hidden, that is only a distraction, just as the obvious is. If one has talents and can leverage the non-physical for progressing on his path, then it is not an issue. The problem is making phenomenal stuff as your end goal and longing for their experience. The occult can be your hobby but it cannot be your path. The path needs to be about the Self, the silent watcher of the hidden.

Notes:

[1] This is clearly pointed out by Tom Campbell in his theory of everything

(MBT), where he calls it psi uncertainty principle. PUP means that the universe always ensures that there will be a large enough uncertainty regarding psi phenomena when these are observed in physical domain. Psi phenomena are any phenomena that are not explained by usual physical laws. They are not normal and should not be there, so they are paranormal. This stuff is mostly studied under the controversial field of parapsychology, which isn't much respected field to say the least.

[2] This reminds me of yet another teaching of Tom Campbell, and I'm very thankful for that. It recommends that we evaluate all experiences based on the criteria of usefulness rather than truth. Take whatever is useful for you and leave the rest, i.e. when you cannot confirm anything about those experiences. What is useful? Obviously, the stuff that pushes you forward on your path. If you do not have a path, then it doesn't matter anyway.

Brain vs. Mind

While we are on the topic of body, lets discuss some interesting stuff about the most interesting and mysterious organ in the body - the brain. As usual, I won't attempt to conclude too much and will leave the file open, since it is beyond my pay grade to talk on this fascinating subject. All I can do is, if you give me some statements about the brain, I can find out if they make sense based on my own experience and a bit of logical and critical thinking. I can also theorize about it but it may not be the whole truth. But I can surely dislodge some beliefs and take you to the stage of uncertainty - the "I don't know" stage, where all the real answers lie.

Evolution

Why is there a brain? Is it a necessary component for life? It does look like that life would be impossible without a brain. But we see many life forms around us that are doing just fine without a brain. In fact most of the life on earth is of brainless variety. The unicellulars, bacteria and such, the entire plant kingdom and even some animals (starfish and jellyfish for example), are brainless. So if you pay attention you will see that life forms with a brain are an exception, a special category. Nature hardly distinguishes her children in regard to brain.

It seems that the nervous system arose with a capacity for movement. The movement is actualized by special cells that contract using electric charge. This is the only action an animal is capable of in physical terms. Some cells took on specialized role of generating and conducting the electric charges. These became neurons and their network became a distributed system, making coordinated motion possible. Why use electricity? Because it is the fastest way to send signals and also happens to be a mechanism to trigger muscle cells. The same can be done via chemicals, and is actually being done to some extent for a few functions, but it is slow, obviously, not a big survival advantage. We still don't see a brain yet.

Things started to become really interesting when some cells got the capability to

generate electric pulses in response to external stimuli, such as surrounding chemicals or light and sounds. These evolved into sense organs. Initially the sensory neurons connected directly with the neural network and effected motion in response to the external stimuli. This is still seen in present life forms. In some animals the eyes are directly wired to muscles, for example. However, it is more useful if a set of neurons could mediate the motion based on inputs from other senses. For example, the sensing of food will cause a movement towards it, but if a predator is also sensed by another sense, then it is better to halt the movement. So some cells took on the role of an on/off switch. The control is enabled via the inhibitory and excitatory capabilities of neurons. Soon a bulb of such neurons appeared in evolutionary journey, which received pulses from senses and mediated controlled excitation of muscular movement. So we see that the primitive brain evolved as a control system.

What is the best position for a brain? This is again decided by the speed. If you place it too far from the senses, it can take some time for the pulses to reach it, which travel via millions of neurons. A few milliseconds of delay in wild can mean life or death. The signals also diminish and degrade with distance. So optimally the bulb of brain grew near the dominant sense organs. For most of the animals these are smell, sight and sound, which, not by coincidence, appear very near to each other. So it seems that the brain is just a part of sensory network, an aggregator of all of them [1].

Wouldn't that be a disadvantage from the point of view of muscles? Yes, probably, but muscles don't need to send/receive a lot of data, a few pulses are enough. And the network formed a special thick backbone to interface with muscles, the spinal cord. I guess that solves this signal speed/degradation problem elegantly. So we see the brain optimally placed in head, where major sense data is generated, and not coincidentally, that's where we find ourselves located.

The humble brain bulb got layers after layers of enhancements and add-ons, which added a lot of functionality to it [2]. So we got things like simulations of movement before doing actual movement (thoughts), learning (memory) and simulations of sensory data (imagination). With that the movements also got very refined and purposeful and assumed the commonly seen behavioural acts of organisms, including those of humans. Purposeful, intelligent and beautifully executed actions are a sign of nicely functioning, well developed brain.

Note that we do not find any reasons whatsoever for evolution of subjective stuff like qualia, emotions, perceptions, consciousness or the Self. So in this regard the theory of evolution fails to provide any explanations. The brain could surely work with light, its intensity and frequency etc., but why is there this quality of colour

and brightness to it? Brain can process signals from damaged tissue, but why do we have that annoying quality of pain that comes bundled with it? Why there is this bystander called consciousness? So on and so forth. The materialist view fails here. Is it possible that the qualities are as fundamental as matter that makes up the brain? Or is it possible that somehow the subjective aspects appear with objective ones just as gravity appears with a mass? The two being inseparable with any separation being only an idea, an illusion?

The physical system of the brain is a closed system, there are no paths or special arrangements that lead to non-physical aspects of it. This poses a real problem - how are those non-physical qualities produced by the brain? The colours, sounds and pains can be "explained away" by some reasonable and some not so intelligent arguments, but the consciousness remains unexplained, like a stubborn elephant in the room, it refuses to disappear into the electric cobwebs of the brain.

The matter of the brain

These days we know that the matter that composes the brain is nothing special. It has no special spooky powers to produce a mind or consciousness magically. Its all just electrons, protons and neutrons - normal matter. So one comes back empty handed if one tries to find something unusual there. But we see a strange thing there, if we dig deeper. We see the solid matter disappear before our eyes and we are left with "spinning nothings", invisible vortices of energy, nothing else. Moreover, if there is no conscious observer, these nothings become absolutely nothing, they disappear into the fog of quantum uncertainty, just reduced to some probability that something can be there if looked for. An average reader would think that I'm making it up, but this is just standard quantum theory, a hundred year old and unchallenged.

So one must wonder - how can matter generate a mind or a consciousness when it does not exist? How can it do so when apparently it exists only in presence of a conscious observer? Of course, there are some arguments out there that try to twist QM to preserve the status quo of classical mechanics, but I find them childish. Anyhow I'm open to any other interpretation of QM if it can convincingly solve the mind-brain issue, so far I found nothing extraordinary.

States of the brain

A remarkable thing about the brain is that it cycles through states and these states have subjective counterparts. Most of the beliefs regarding the mind and brain relations arise out of observation of these states. We find that the brain activity is

different during waking state when compared to a deep sleep state. In the deep sleep there is no mind, not anything like a waking state mind, so it is concluded that specific kind of brain activity is necessary for the mind to appear. Something similar is seen during anaesthesia, drug intoxication and death.

Can the experimenter see the absence of the mind? Obviously no, that is inferred from the verbal reports of the subject, who clearly denies the presence of any mental activities. There is some activity during dreaming but we will focus on deep sleep only. Is there that the mind disappears while the brain is still there happily oscillating with a slow rhythm. The subject also reports an absence of consciousness.

Well, it looks like we can close the case now. But there is a big problem here. The subject relies on his memory when asked about the presence or absence of the mind. The memory was not functioning while in the deep sleep. Can the subject recall anything at all about the mind or any experiences without a memory of them?

It depends on how you ask the question. If you ask - "Was there any mental activity while you were deeply asleep?", the subject would probably say no. If you ask - "Can you recall any mental activity while you were deeply asleep?", the subject would probably say no again. But now he is denying a memory of the mental activity, he is reporting an absence of memory, not of mind. If you ask about the deep sleep itself, the subject will even deny that there was a deep sleep, he must be told by others that he was in a deep sleep. Since deep sleep was a past event, there is no other way to talk about its subjective aspect but to use memory, and unfortunately the memory itself shuts down during deep sleep. Maybe the mind was not there, but there is no certain way to know it. Specifically, maybe the mind was not there as it appears in waking state, the state of it during deep sleep is unknowable.

If you ask the Self, it will report no experience of deep sleep. The time of entering deep sleep and time of coming out of it is same for the Self. The mind must determine the physical time from external means, because there were no mental changes to gauge any time at all. The Self just stands there innocently as if nothing happened and the mind struggles to recall what happened. Others tell the subject that he was in a deep sleep. And others conclude whatever they conclude about the status of mind and consciousness. I guess it's not a fair trial.

There are other more exotic states of mind/brain where more questions pop up instead of answers. We won't go there for now.

Causality

Before one can attempt an answer to the question of cause, it is worth exploring what is really meant by the word "cause". We enter the idea of causality here. That's right, it is only a concept, a belief, an idea, and there is no real thing like causation out there [3]. Search for it and you will find layers and layers of ideas, all made up as an attempt to understand things. I almost wrote half of this article until I realized that nothing made sense and then questioned causality itself. I soon found that I was afflicted with some beliefs about causality, some study of it made it clear that one need not take causality very seriously. It is not meaningful for deeper analysis. Well, I was happy that I learnt something, but I had to delete my article, a masterpiece it was, but obviously, a senseless one.

Various philosophies define causality in different ways. Which one is valid? Well, none. It all depends on which one is meant by the questioner. For this discussion we will take the materialist definition, as the beliefs of brain as a cause of subjective phenomena is materialist. When a series of events happen, such that the preceding event is necessary for succeeding one and determines it completely, then we say that the later event was caused by earlier one. So cause and effect is a way of relating two experiences.

It works nicely in macro situations and even in human affairs. So when we say - the assassination of a leader caused a war, we mean that the event of assassination lead to a series of events resulting in the event of war. In the same way we can say that a virus caused a disease and the disease in turn caused death. So there is not only a correlation but also a determination. The cause determines the effect. There is also a temporal aspect to it. If everything happened at once, one would find it difficult to explain it using causality.

So far so good. But note that all the events in the chain of events leading to a war can be a cause, because if you change even one of the events, it won't result in a war. So there are many causes, but one can arbitrarily fix the assassination as the main cause. One can trace backwards from assassination to events like the assassin buying a gun, or stealing money for it, or getting angry over some act of the leader, or even to some childhood event in his life which formed a belief that resulted in anger. So on and so forth. Aren't all these events also a cause? We find that now the causality is beginning to sound stupid. One can argue similarly in the case of a virus causing a death. Was it the victim using a public toilet? Or was it a carrier of that virus using the same toilet before him? And so on.

Lets take a finer example - the steam pressure causes the piston to move in an engine. Again, one can trace the causal chain backwards to the turning on of a

valve, heating the water, burning the coal, mining it and what not, but its obvious that its ridiculous to do that in this case. Its a transfer of kinetic energy from one substance to another. The atoms in the piston cannot occupy same space as those in the steam and so get displaced towards a direction where more empty space is available. It is probabilistic and quantum mechanical, not deterministic. However, the macro event is deterministic, classical and causal. So we see that in this case, the causality is just a rough way of describing things when a thorough description is not needed. Anyhow, we have physical continuity here and also a neat temporal effect, so we do not need any magic to explain it all.

A heavy mass causes gravity. We are going towards more ambiguity now. What is the mechanism? Is it a transfer of something across the space? Or is it something probabilistic? In my opinion, it doesn't make any sense to say that a mass is a cause of gravity. In the same way, a magnet is not a cause of magnetic field. The field of influence and the mass appear simultaneously, there is no temporal sequence, and there is no mechanism. Similarly it doesn't make any sense to say that the gravity causes attraction between two masses. We see only motion, the objects move towards each other, the gravity is inferred, it is a mental construct, an idea, a way of talking about masses and their behaviour. Anyhow, we are in physical realm, even if we are inventing magical entities to describe something.

The brain activity causes the mind, qualia and consciousness. We are in a difficult situation here. There is no defined mechanism, there is no magical mediatory thing akin to gravity, or any other force or mechanism. It is not temporal, as we struggle to define time itself, when we cross over from physical electrical loops to subjective experiences. The time breaks down. It is not probabilistic either, the collective properties of neural excitation do not lead to a macro property. It certainly does not lead to a non-physical property. The physical chain of events of neural firings closes on itself. Neural firing produce more neural firings, there is no way to produce anything else.

What about the electromagnetic fields? A field is a mathematical concept not a real thing and certainly not a non-physical thing. People do go to extremes like invoking quantum phenomena to explain it away. But the QM strictly lies in the physical domain. There is nothing there to suggest a generation of consciousness or any other subjective stuff. Since QM is enigmatic for some, its like saying one mystery explains another mystery, magically.

A popular theory that attempts to explain brain-mind issue is Epiphenomenalism [4]. It basically means that the collective behaviour of neurons gives rise to an epiphenomenon of mind. So what is this epiphenomenon? Nothing but magic, a belief. Substituting words for actual reasons doesn't do any good. I won't go into

the details of it here, please search if you like to know more.

A Paradox

It is already dissatisfying to call mind as an "emergent" property of the brain. One would be tempted to accept that as truth and carry on with life, stuff happens. But we see something strange, the brain appears as an object in our mind. There is no way to see a mind happening in a brain, but its pretty straightforward to experience a brain via mind, it appears as a percept.

So we encounter a funny situation where the brain is generating a mind which is in turn generating a brain and all its activity as seen on the instruments. The instruments themselves appear as objects in the mind. What is generating what here? How reliable is it to say that I see a brain and its patterns of pulses generating my mind in my mind itself?

One can say that others can see a brain and its activity, so it is more real and reliable. Sure it is, but only as far as the brain is concerned, others cannot see the mind it is allegedly generating. Others have no way to experience the mind of the subject they are experimenting on. As I said, others experience only pulses generating more pulses, the brain closes on itself. Others do find an interesting thing - there is some correlation between the signals and verbal reports of the subject.

Mind over matter

We do not see anything that can mediate an interaction in the direction of brain to mind, but we see something strange. Non-physical processes can cause physical movement, speech etc. If I ask you to raise your right hand, you go through the usual mental activity of making an intention, thinking, deciding which hand is the right one and then almost automatically executing the action in physical universe. This is obviously objective and can be seen by others.

How can something that is non-physical, or just emergent, or unreal, cause a real physical action? Where and how is this mediated? Which energy or force or particles are exchanged between mind and the brain to accomplish this? Of course there are no answers and do not hope for any, except denials such as the mind doesn't exist. It is surely possible for a machine to make exactly similar action, and one can infer that it won't experience a mental version of the action, but then it will be a purely causal event, with no need for a mind and a consciousness as bystander. The analogy is valid only if you completely ignore the non-physical part.

We have seen that actions happen, and intentions also happen. The Self merely witnesses them, it does not cause them. The raising of hand is also a happening, but the action starts in non-physical domain and they then cross over to physical. This is my experience and perhaps of many of you. How to explain this seemingly magical yet simple phenomenon? There is only one logical way - it is possible only if the mind and the brain both are non-physical, so there is no need to imagine an interface between physical and non-physical.

Two sides of a coin

What can be the reason for a close correlation between the signals and mentation? We should first summarize what cannot be an answer. We have already seen that the causation makes no sense here. There must be a clear path for some sort of energy to bridge the physical pulses and non-physical mentation, which does not exist physically and so causation is not possible. We have seen that there is no clear reason for evolutionary forces to give rise to subjective phenomena, the evolution is about optimization and adaptation, not about generation of subjective experiences. We have seen that it is very easy to see the brain as a percept, but impossible to see the mind as a physical entity. The mind is experienced directly and clearly, whereas the brain is experienced indirectly as a sense object and the brain activity is experienced only via instruments. So the assumed cause is furthest from direct experience and is most unreal, while the most direct experience is treated as most unreal if you go the materialist way. It is as if the believer needs to stand upside down in order to see his belief as truth. Well, we cannot blame the believer here, it is a complicated issue. So then what's the answer?

I do not have an answer, but only another hypothesis, which makes most sense to me. A possibility is that of identity of brain and the mind. It is possible that some parts of the mind when seen objectively appear as brain. The brain, just like the body is non-physical. The physicality is an illusion created by the objectifying nature of the senses. Any perception that comes through senses is seen as physical and non-sensory perception (e.g. thoughts) are seen as non-physical. When the experience of a part of the Mind which is responsible for mentation, comes via the route of senses we see it as brain.

It seems that the brain is a small structure in the Mind that is responsible for interfacing with the body. The senses do not render everything, they present a view they are capable of presenting. The brain appears as a structure made up of neurons. Instruments, that are nothing but an extension of senses, can present a bit more, such as the electrical activity of the neurons. The electro-chemical activity of the brain, a happening, just processes in the Mind, is responsible for

producing actions of the body.

It appears that the sense-perceived brain forms a continuum with the hidden structures of the Mind. The latter cannot be perceived via the senses, but can be easily perceived as mental objects of thoughts, memories and images etc. Some part of these processes appear as activity of the brain, especially the part that interfaces with the body. Why should the non-physical parts appear as physical electric pulses? The electrical pulses are non-physical too. Note that we are now taking the whole brain and body as mental structures. There is no such thing as physical, and this is my own experience (probably yours too). We will see in the next article why there is no physical world, no physical objects and so on. Once we dissolve the boundary between the physical brain and the non-physical mind, we solve the mind-brain dilemma.

What about consciousness? If the brain is nothing but the Mind then we need not worry about this question. The Mind happens in consciousness, i.e. the Self in non-dual terminology. The Self is nothing but Presence, it is all that is. So brain is a tiny, ephemeral event in the vastness of the Presence.

The belief of brain being physical obviously gives rise to problems, insurmountable problems. Getting rid of this belief instantly solves all problems [5]. The dichotomy of mind and brain is artificial, a belief not founded in direct experience. When you see the Mind as a whole, the confusion disappears. The brain processes are now just Mind processes, in part or in many cases, totally. The brain is just a mental structure, an objectification of essentially continuous structures of the Mind, which range from purely subjective to inert matter. We will descend further down and will take a look at the material world in next few articles.

Notes:

[1] And ancient wise classified the brain as just that, a master sense organ (*Gita* 15.7).

[2] It is a characteristic of evolutionary systems that the old is never thrown away. We see all those primitive structures still functioning for better or worse. Even the chemical means for sending signals is maintained, and in some cases, the chemicals modulate the brain activity, including the subjective aspects like mood. Its not all electricity there.

[3] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causality>

[4] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiphenomenalism>

[5] One would be tempted to ask how does it solve all problems. What about the problem of qualia for example? I can write it up some other day perhaps; this article is already too long for a person of average attention span. If you sit down and ask the questions about it, while remaining brutally honest, you will find that either this stuff is unknowable, or easily explainable or the problems themselves are artificial problems that arise because of beliefs.

The Experience of the World

The story so far - the Presence acting as Self has a universal Mind which has instances of individual minds that are interfaced via structures known as brains to vehicles known as bodies. The bodies find themselves among other structures that are less connected to individual minds. These are far less complex compared to the body or the brain and are governed by algorithmic rule sets. When interpreted via senses these appear in various shapes, sizes, textures, smells etc. localized in space. We will call them **Objects** and a collection of objects is a **World** [1].

Objects are experienced and so is world. And like everything else these are subjected to Experiencing - the changing attribute of the Presence. The Experiencing results in a dynamic world that is impermanent. Everything in this world changes, appears and disappears. Some objects change faster than others and some change slowly. Some are complex and some are simple. But all objects are merely forms created out of fundamental structures, that are very simple and do not change much. We see only the forms and label them with names. This creates the familiar representation of a world of names and forms in the Mind.

The world appears on the screen of the Self. The change appears as experiences. The Mind neatly organizes the change into experiences of objects and their interactions. This is all there is as far as direct experience of the world is concerned. It exists and the Self witnesses it, and that's the full story. Its a game, a play, nothing more.

It is not necessary to know more or say more about the world. It is like a show and you have a free ticket. Enjoy the show. A seeker needs to do nothing about this world, there is no necessity to indulge in it, or change it as per your likes and dislikes, fix it or improve it. But if these actions happen, they are not your actions and they are perfect. Just a part of the show, which is perfect as it is. However, the newbie seekers need to keep their guard up and avoid taking this world seriously and personally. It is easy to get lost into it, thinking that the world is all there is or by getting involved in it.

The rest of this article is just commentary on random stuff in the world. Some people would find it amusing and for some its just boring hair splitting. Anyhow,

it is written with an intention that the reader will start questioning his beliefs about the world, if any.

Worldly things

The Mind is an extraordinary thing, it immediately starts noticing characteristics of the world it creates out of mere change. The first thing one notices is that the experiences coming out of senses, aka sense perceptions are more neatly organized and follow more rigid rules when compared to non-sensory perceptions. The Mind classifies them into objective and subjective. Classification is a job of the Mind and it is just another level of organization of experiences. Note that experiences do not "become" subjective or objective, but are merely tagged so. So there are no subjective or objective things, these are just labels. Things are. We can use a neutral word **Entities** for them, which should mean the stuff not yet classified by the Mind and has not yet gone through the grinding mill of mental analysis.

Another important thing the Mind discovers is that it is possible to manipulate objects and it can be done via the special object of the body. So it classifies stuff again and all that is outside the body becomes other things and the body becomes a part of the identity or personality. Me and not-me are born. Again note that the distinction is created by the Mind, there is no real difference between the body and other objects, all these are just mental structures. The Mind continues its "divide and understand" process, this is its primary occupation. This is how it creates the internal structures of knowledge. We have already discussed almost everything about the Mind and knowledge before, so I will directly jump to the main point, which is this world.

Matter

The Mind soon categorizes objects in various ways - different degrees of solidity, edible, non-edible, organic, inorganic, useful, useless, rare or precious and so on. We also notice that objects seem to be made of something, because they break into simpler stuff. Very soon we encounter the limitations of our senses and must employ instruments to enhance the sensory perception of objects. Thus we encounter crystals, molecules, atoms and particles. Any entities that are made out of particles are categorized as **Matter**. So matter is a concept, an idea, a category, and does not exist except as an idea, a belief. Note that even atoms or particles are also concepts. We form these concepts to describe entities that we encounter when we dig deeper into objects. As soon as we leave the domain of senses, the usual objects cease to exist and all we see is data coming out of instruments. We form relations out of the data and produce mathematical models. **Particles** are

just mathematical models.

Enquiry into the matter is a subject matter of Physics. Physics is a unification of all sciences that deal with matter, such as chemistry, biology, astronomy, neurology and so on. So we will stick with Physics and not venture too much into its specializations. The usual format of investigation in physics is - what are objects made of and what are the relations that exist among them. If the building blocks are found the enquiry is repeated and new concepts and relations are proposed. This continues until there are no more building blocks to be found and the relations describe all physical phenomena satisfactorily. Note that, as we have discussed earlier, Physics doesn't deal with truths, only with theories. It does use logic and mathematics to arrive at logical Truths once the postulates are given. This is what makes it so powerful and useful, but from the point of view of knowledge, it is all a fantasy.

Where do we start the investigation? From everyday objects obviously. If you go down you will find crystals, molecules, atoms etc. and if you go up in scale you will find planets, suns, galaxies and so on. The matter is vast and the range of scale is mind boggling. Fortunately, the rules governing all the matter are simple and universal and all the matter can be reduced to a few building blocks. This is the success story of Physics and so it is the king of all sciences. Strangely, just when a physicist declares that he has reached the bottom-most building block, yet another layer of blocks is discovered lying below it. Similarly, just when an astronomer declares a big structure as the upper limit, such as a galaxy, another superstructure is found which contains the latest mega-structure as its tiny part. So far this has been the trend.

Usually as you go up in scale, the structures are just boring groups of rocks and gases moving around in the vastness of empty space, but something astonishing is found when you go down the scale. Firstly, the matter becomes less solid and more cloudy and foggy, less deterministic and more probabilistic. Secondly, all such particles are exact clones of each other in their species. Everyday objects, if you look closely, do not resemble each other, there are always differences, however tiny. Similarly, big objects such as planets and suns are all unique, there are no two identical macro objects in this universe. But at micro level, the particles are exact copies of each other, actually its more correct to say that they are instances of the same object. So for example, all the uncountable electrons in this universe are exactly the same.

Thirdly, the particles lose all signs of objectivity and turn into potentialities. Roughly, that means they are not really there unless someone bothers to measure/detect them. Fourthly, it becomes impossible to measure all of their

characteristics as uncertainties creep into measurements. The distinction between the measured entity and measuring instrument begins to fade.

Last but not the least, when you try to break them further, they disappear into nothingness, leaving behind nothing but a large amount of energy. The reverse is also observed, when a large amount of energy is present, the particles appear out of nothing.

Energy

We encounter a new animal here, the physical energy. This term is precisely defined in Physics, and for the purpose of this article we will define it as a quantification of **Change**. Change is an idea inferred from experiences. The Mind is capable of distinguishing two experiences (well, obviously) and the differences are seen as a change. One can say that there are only experiences, no change. But then one can also say that if there is no change then there cannot be any experience. So I see change as something fundamental, even if it is interpreted via the Mind, it is out there in some unknowable form. What it really is cannot be known directly, we know only its experience, which I called Experiencing in founding articles of this blog.

More change means more energy. Energy can be measured in arbitrary units and so it is possible to compare two experiences on the basis of amount of change that is experienced. The concept of energy applies nicely to the material world and is very useful, but remember that it is only a concept, there is no entity out there called energy. What is out there is change which manifests as Experiencing on the screen of the Self. So change is fundamental, an irreducible. Energy is a way of talking about change.

The most common form of energy is **Motion**. It is seen as a change in spatial location. Since the motion is perceived and experienced, the Mind can organize it. The Mind creates two structures or mental entities in order to make sense of motion - **Space** and **Time**. The comparison of impressed state of an object in motion with sensory state is encoded as time. In other words, the experience of object and the experience of memory of it, when compared, defines the time. The relative motion of an object with respect to an origin is coded as location and a set of locations becomes the mental structure of space. In other words, an object which is comparatively at rest, is taken as a reliable reference and the change in a moving object is coded as location. The new and old locations define the distance and hence space. No motion means no space, no time and no memory. Thus space and time are derivatives of motion, which is just change. More change translates into more energy, and we see more of the motion, i.e. the object in

motion appears further in space as time passes.

If there is no space out there then where do I move and where is my stuff located? There is no "where". It is all here. There are no three dimensions, the Presence has exactly zero dimensions. It is easy to understand if you know a bit of computer programming. In a game, the space and stuff that appears on the screen is nothing but a long list of changing numbers that pass through the microprocessor. When fed to a suitable hardware, the numbers produce colours and shape on a grid of pixels. The changing numbers (non-dimensional, i.e. no length or shape just change) can be metaphorically seen as Presence, while the stuff on the screen is the experience of the objects and space.

So if there is no space, just change, then what is really there? It is unknowable. The Mind is attempting to know it via space, time, objects and qualities such as colours. If you want to know it in some other way, you will need another Mind. Perhaps a more advanced Mind, e.g. an ET alien Mind would see the underlying change in a more direct way, but still not as it actually exists. It must go through an interpretation, some kind of organization before the experience happens. It can be argued that the change does not actually exist unless the Self intends it into existence, which is too far fetched if you ask me, but an interesting idea.

The strange thing about the change is that once a change happens it cannot be stopped, it propagates forwards and assumes various forms. So nothing is at rest, change is all there is. In case of motion, if you try to stop it, like by placing a barrier in the path of the moving object (imagine billiard balls), the energy of motion gets transferred to the barrier and it starts moving too. It is all magical, but that is how change is experienced.

Another common form of change aka energy is heat. This is again nothing but motion of molecules at micro scale. It is easy to hit something and heat it up, the energy transfers from macro motion to micro easily. Other forms of energy are also motion of one or other kind, such as sound (vibrations of matter), light [electronic vibrations] and nuclear radiation [motion of free particles]. So all energetic phenomena are just motion, which is nothing but a change - the Experiencing.

An astonishing fact about the energy is that it gets quantized as you go to the micro scales, which means the change happens only in jumps, not continuously. And this is the foundation of Quantum Mechanics. As a result of quantization, the space and time also get quantized, as these are derivatives of motion. So we see strangeness such as a particle can disappear at one location and appear at another without moving through intermediate space, in fact there is no

intermediate space. This is most commonly observed in electronic jumps of orbitals in an atom. The electrons appear and disappear at various orbits that lie at different distances from the centre of the atom.

Waves of change

What can be the reason for such odd behaviour of change? This can be explained in various ways, the simplest explanation is that the change happens in "waves of change" and the waves are constrained to harmonic modes out of necessity (a material system is needed). Just as guitar strings can vibrate only in specific modes because of constraints. If x is the allowed change, then the next change would be $2x$, $3x$ and so on because the wave of change can exist only in multiples of the fundamental frequency of that wave. The particles that constitute matter are nothing but change, so the particles themselves behave as waves.

There are more sophisticated answers which involve math, the most dreaded subject, but most useful tool as far as the study of matter is concerned. If you do not like mathematics, your understanding of matter will be hugely limited. I guess that should not matter much, the only important thing to know is that the matter is a construct of Mind. There are no two, just one. This must be experienced directly, do not believe it just because you read it in a physics text book.

One can say that there are no particles, just waves of change, and moreover waves of change of potentialities. That actually amounts to nothing if you ask me. There is nothing out there. Still there is a world. How's that even possible? The only answer is - the world is created out of Presence which has this strange ability to create change. However this change is not real change as there is nothing there to change, so the change is dreamt up, made up. Change is not what it seems to be. It is at most an interpretation by the Mind of meta-change, which is unknowable. So the whole existence can be thought of as a dream of the Presence. The Self is witnessing this dream, but actually nothing happens. I think we are too deep into speculation here, so let's come back to the solid reality of the world, which is anything but solid, it's just waves of change.

Scales and limits

Change is tiny, when we see a big change, it is made up of tiny changes. When change occurs, it gets constrained by the Fundamental Process and structures begin to form. There is no limit to this process and it forms hierarchies of structures one above the other. Higher we are in the hierarchy, bigger it gets in terms of size. It also gets more stable and statistical, somewhat deterministic and causal.

Why are particles so tiny? They are of correct size, and that is the only reasonable size. We are huge. And that is because our everyday world appears at a certain layer of hierarchy, which happens to be just right for formation of bodies. And not surprisingly, this layer is at a huge distance away from the first fundamental structure. Still we are just a spec of dirt when compared to astronomical structures.

What are the lower and upper limits of scales for matter? There are only theories and wild beliefs about it. Plank's limit [2] seems to be the smallest because there cannot be a change smaller than that, at least not in material systems (a collection of matter). And in order to observe matter it must interact with other matter, so all observational schemes are systems. The upper limit does not exist as far as theoretical limit is concerned. So how big is it all? In my opinion, since the physical world is a creation of the Mind, it can go on forever, there would be no boundary. The world, space and time do not exist as a given, they are created on the fly. So wherever you go, you create. The creation comes out of nothing and there is infinitely huge amount of nothing. Because its nothing, you can always have more of nothing. Well, it all sounds too crazy, even for a crazy blog like this one.

Forces and fields

We all know that nothing changes unless a force of some kind acts on something. This is the famous law, but not the most natural way to describe a change. A seeker would immediately ask - what is a force? And he would immediately find that it is also another belief. Change happens, it does not happen because of a force, the idea of force is abstracted out of it, once the change has taken place. It is also assumed that the force, whatever that is, exists as a field in space. There is no field as a given, it is another useful abstraction. The detectors of a force show only a change of some kind, they do not show a field.

So what causes strange things like motion etc. and how it gets transferred to stuff without a field? Motion, aka change happens, nothing causes it, there are no causes of experiences, change is just an experience. The causes etc. are abstracted out of the experience by the Mind as it struggles to organize it meaningfully and logically. Nothing gets transferred across the space, as there is no space, these things are created out of *thin air* by the Mind when it experiences a change. Change is mysterious, it cannot be understood with Mind. One can only break it down into abstractions and ideas and communicate the experience meaningfully.

One can make the idea of force very sophisticated and think of particles as carriers of forces and makers of field. Although it makes everything very useful, it deviates even more from experiences. The trick here is not to confuse these mathematical entities with experiences of change. There is a risk that one would fall into a dogma if one takes the physical concepts literally. Once you see the change, you are free to use any description of it, including the scientific one. All such descriptions will be a faint approximation of the experience itself. The choice of a description depends on the utility of it, not on the truth of it. You have already left the domain of truth as soon as you started describing an experience.

Light

Light is an example of a field. No points for guessing that it is also a concept and does not really exist as an object or experience. This can be a shocking statement for many, since light is our direct experience. Or is it? Think again. Do you see light or has anyone seen it? Obviously not. We see only objects, not light.

What is this bright warm glowy thing I experience, if not light? The brightness doesn't exist without a bright object and the object exists in the Mind. The warmth is another quality, an experience, which is the sensation coming from the skin and again exists in the Mind. The abstraction of light comes out of such experiences. This is how a wise man sees the world, in his Mind, made up of experiences. An ignorant man sees objects located in space "illuminated by light". A scientist can use sophisticated ways to convey it using concepts such as electronic transitions in the matter out there and the retina of the eye, mediated by electromagnetic field of a certain frequency and strength.

Which is the preferred way to describe an experience? It depends on the situation. If you are with ordinary men, use the everyday description, lest they throw you into an asylum. If you are with a scientist, use exact scientific terminology. If you are with yourself, just experience it, no description is needed. Any description of any experiences is just mental chatter.

I took light as an example. You can do similar surgery on other physical things such as magnetic fields or gravity etc. and find out whether these exist or not.

Origin of world

How did it begin and how will it end? There are two assumptions here. We don't know if it had a beginning and we don't know if it will end. So the question makes no sense. It makes sense to ask a question about a beginning if one has

directly experienced an end. And if one is unsure of an end, then he should not ask about a beginning, because only things that end have a beginning [3].

When did it begin? Again, nothing can be said about the beginning and its mechanisms or time of beginning. The time is not there if you are not there to create it. If you are already there to check your clock, then what is beginning has already begun long ago. So we see that we immediately face logical conundrum when we assume a beginning or an end of something which is beyond our understanding. This is how people fall into belief pits and tie themselves into knots.

There are surely some beliefs, people make up stuff to fill up answers for questions they make up. Every culture has a creation myth. Some people go ahead and declare their story as truth. So if all those stories are true, we have many beginnings of the world happening at different times, and you have a menu of worlds to choose from. The latest of them is *big-bang* theory, which some do take as nothing but truth. It can be labelled as the most ridiculous theory science has ever produced, because it beats even the most magical story ever told about the origin of the world.

Any such theory starts from a premise that there is some necessity for things to begin. Is there? Even a causal chain of events does not need a beginning because one can arbitrarily place the beginning at any event. Then one can immediately ask for the preceding cause. So what caused the beginning of the world and how did that cause begin? and so on. Science can only produce an answer when given a set of initial conditions. And this is the limit of scientific method of knowing. If there are initial conditions, things already exist. The question of beginning lies beyond the domain of science. So if you encounter someone advocating a certain scientific theory about the beginning of this universe, you will immediately know that whatever it is, it is hogwash.

From the point of view of the Self, there is no beginning and it doesn't make any sense actually. Did the Presence began being present at some point? This means there was nothingness prior to that point and when or how did nothingness begin? How did nothingness changed into *somethingness*? If you are confused and are asking more such questions, that is a sign of presence of beliefs. Of course all these questions are nonsensical. When seen as it is, the question of beginning disappears. And so does the question of an ending. Presence is, it is not something nor is it nothing. It is non-dual, and concepts that explain duality are not applicable in this case. So not nothing, not something, no end and no beginning. Do not expect the Mind to be satisfied with such statements because the Mind knows only duality, nothing else.

The discussion on world continues in the next article.

Notes:

[1] The term *World* means earth or human arena in common language, but I'm using the philosophical connotation here.

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planck_length

[3] There are some strange beliefs about the beginning of the world, but there are some reasonable ones too. Such as the idea that the manifested universe began with a vibration (*Nada*, *Brahmanada* or word). Since vibrations are nothing but change, one can take them as a metaphorical description of the direct experience of change. It is not very incorrect to say that the change is responsible for the manifestation, else there would be no manifestation, as there would be nothing to manifest. The point to remember is that it is a concept and the beginning does not hint towards a beginning in time or at a location.

The Illusion of World

Lets explore the world more and dig into some crazy ideas. And also see how a seeker experiences a world, and of what use a world is for seekers.

Virtual world

The advent of virtual worlds generated via computers has rekindled an interest in theories that propose non-existence of a material world [1]. These days the simulated worlds look as real as the *real world*, especially when high end hardware is employed. Total sensory immersion into a simulated world is not a fiction, it is inevitable. As we know, these extensive, rich and life like worlds on our screens are nothing but numbers. What makes us suspect that our everyday world is also nothing but numbers? There are many reasons. Quantum description of the matter immediately suggests that there are no actual entities, only values. In other words, the matter is just numbers. Strangely, the physical universe satisfies many requirements of a simulated world. A short list of such requirements is as follows [2]:

Things are quantized, finite and limited. Processes are algorithmic, logical and mathematical. A VR appears out of nowhere, however it can evolve via evolutionary algorithms and can go from simple to complex. There is a limit on the "frame rate". In other words, things take time to happen and the effects appear after a delay. In the case of our world the speed of light is the limit. There would be some constants, some global fixed values, that appear for no obvious reason. E.g. there are physical constants like c or G or h that appear in many equations. Some phenomena would appear non-local. A program can modify two values together without simulating the mediating behaviour. So we have things like entanglement. Loading of processors can happen when there is a huge amount of data to be crunched. We see such effects near very large bodies, such as stars, where time slows down near their surface because there are too many particles to compute. Statistical nature. Some outcomes are predicted instead of being calculated exactly. This is faster but less accurate. So we have laws of thermodynamics, gas laws or fluid dynamics, probability distributions and uncertainty principle. Instances of entities may appear. If there are trillions of entities, a program can simply use instances of one model or a class to create

those trillions. This saves enormous amount of memory and computing but the result is that all those trillions of entities are exact clones. We have electrons, protons and all such entities here, that are identical in every way. Strange phenomena may appear. Such as apparitions can appear out of nowhere requiring no cause, no matter and can disappear leaving no traces. Its the special effect equivalent. Strange effects like healing via intention or placebo effects can happen, as it would be possible to steer a program in desired direction if one can manipulate the inputs. Non-virtual (real) entities can assume discard-able virtual forms. Avatars in gamespeak. In physical world we have bodies - the avatars for non-physical players.

There are more similarities. There are experiments to prove the simulated nature of the universe, such as the famous double slit experiment and the delayed choice quantum eraser experiment. There are theories and proofs for the simulation hypotheses. However, there are some ridiculous assumptions too. Once you say that the universe is simulated, there arises a need for a simulator, a computer and operators of that computer. So people imagine all sorts of things from aliens to future humans. It is perfectly possible but highly improbable. Plus there are big holes e.g. the presence of avatars, if the avatars are aliens or humans from future, they would know beyond any doubt that they are playing a game. The only possibility left is that we are just bots, dummy players, which is not anyone's experience as far as I know. Bots would mean no consciousness or subjective experiences. No amount of simulation would produce that.

So far only Thomas Campbell comes close to a satisfactory answer, which is - the consciousness itself is the computer, aka the simulator, of this universe. And since it is simulating the stuff out of itself, it is only natural that everyone experiences a consciousness behind oneself and everything else. This is my direct experience and also of many of you. This is the original claim of non-dual teachings, that are unchallenged since thousands of years. Although these statements do not provide solid evidence for simulation argument, these introduce enough uncertainty into the minds of believers and makes them question the assumed reality and primacy of the world.

Qualia

I was avoiding this can of worms but here it is. These are what I prefer to call **Irreducibles**. The world appears to the consciousness in the format of qualia and that is the whole description of the whole world. One cannot reduce it further. We face enormous difficulty when we try to describe the colour red in terms of something else. We can provide an instance of red but no other words would explain it better, that is because it is irreducible. The Mind faces a wall here that it cannot surmount.

One can enumerate them as there are a few kinds corresponding to kind of sense they associate with. How many kinds are there? For example, if you take the sense of smell, there is one category of smell qualia but there are thousands of smells and a dog would say there are a million smells. If you take sight, there are two categories - shape and colour [3]. There are millions of colours and probably infinite varieties of shapes. So there are uncountable varieties and there are combinations, and combinations of combinations. As any artist knows, nature likes variety, a lot of it.

Why are there so many? For example, wouldn't a bird need just a few colours - one each for the fruit it eats, for a mate, predator and surroundings? I guess it would survive just fine with less than 10 colours. I found my 256 colour monitor amazing and sufficient for all my needs in my early days with computers. Who'd need millions of colours? As usual the theory of evolution fails to provide a satisfactory answer here. However, there is one explanation, which goes as follows. Perhaps in the early days of the Mind, it had only a few qualia to make sense of everything it needed to make sense of. For example white for food and black for all that is not food. And thus the organism survived without much problem. The problem appeared as soon as a predator appeared, now it needed another colour to differentiate the predator from the surroundings and so magically, say, red colour appeared in the Mind to "code" for a predator. Any organisms without this ability simply went extinct. As life evolved, things became more complex and more codes appeared, and very soon each sense produced millions of codes. The more differences in patterns of change a mind can resolve, more codes or qualia it can support. It seems that various life forms have more or less of qualia depending on their survival needs. For example, humans are capable of resolving millions of colours but are still restricted to a very narrow range of EM spectrum. So one can suspect that there are no fixed numbers or categories of qualia, they are generated on demand by the Mind.

One can explain the variety and availability of qualia using evolutionary reasoning, but what generates them? One can find specific areas in the brain that produce a specific neural activity in response to colours, but the neural activity does not lead to an experience of colour, it only produces more neural activity, as we discussed in the article on brain before. Light, which is change, leads to more change, not to a colour. How does Mind generate a subjective experience of colour out of change? Who perceives that colour ultimately? Is it the Self, the witness of everything? We are in the realm of direct experience now. As I said, it is not possible to reduce a direct experience into anything else, one can only experience it. So the qualia exist. Qualia are Self as seen by the Self, as there is nothing else but the Self. Why is the experience of colour or sounds like so? It is same as

asking why is any experience the way it is. The Mind has no analytical answers to satisfy the intellect [4].

Matter or Mind

We have come round a full circle, back to the Mind. Is this world made up of matter or is it purely mental? To cut to the chase, it is made up of one thing. Mind and matter are merely descriptions. Choose whatever suits you and your situation. From the point of view of the Self, the experiences are made up of qualities, names and forms, change and events. When you dig deeper you encounter more structures, more forms and more change. In the end, you see nothing again, but the Self. You can go in reverse and start from nothing and again you arrive at the Self. You will find that you are trying to describe one thing from different angles. It is just semantics, call it Self or anything else if you like.

Seeker's world

We are entering the domain of a seeker now and if you are not a seeker or have not experienced the below stuff yet, it all may read like a total hogwash. It doesn't matter anyway, experiences are not important, especially specific kind of experiences.

From the point of view of a seeker, the world is illusory, an appearance based on something unknowable. The Mind can only organize experiences to produce knowledge, it cannot produce an experience. Whatever is organized into sensory structures becomes world. Whatever is organized into non-sensory structures becomes mind. The boundary between these two is arbitrary. The keyword here is "sensory". The world exists because of senses. In deep sleep the senses shut down and the world disappears too. It is not that the world is annihilated, it ceases to appear as it appears in the waking state when the senses are fully operational. Now you have a key to make the world appear and disappear.

This is a significant discovery because all one needs to do is shut down the senses to experience the absence of world. However one observes something strange. The Mind starts creating sensory data on its own, it creates a new set of senses, a new body to host those senses and a brand new world appears out of nowhere. All one needs to do is to withdraw his attention from the usual senses. It is simple but not very easy, as we are almost incapable of not attending to senses or the mental contents. But a bit of practice decouples the Mind from sensory inputs and one can learn to ignore them.

What does that tell a seeker? Well, first thing to notice is that this world is not the

only world the Mind is capable of perceiving. So the physical world becomes a special case of countless worlds one can perceive. Secondly, the world is not something permanent and solid which always exists, it is more like a game that loads up from the data in a computer and shows up on demand. Thirdly, it loses its value, as there are countless worlds – many toys to play with. This causes a detachment from worldly stuff and the seeker is withdrawn more into the Self, gets a bigger picture. He withdraws from people too, because the other worlds also have other people, some very exotic kind of living entities, but all those are just appearances, an expression of my own Self. So the people lose value. This helps in renouncing the world. No amount of lectures or reading of texts will do it. Once you are detached, you are free from the world.

There are other things a seeker can get attached too, but since we are on the topic of the world, we will focus on only worldly things. Freedom from the world is not a small accomplishment. Do we really need some exotic state of the Mind to see that the world is illusory and only an instance of infinite possible worlds? In my opinion, such states are not needed. Just sit down and observe very carefully. All one needs to do is focus on the observer not on the observed, and the direct experience of world as an illusion happens. It is a realization, a - "oh, I get it now" moment. That's all is needed to be free. A teacher who is already free can greatly help here.

Why does that work? Because it is the same Self that experiences every world you visit. No matter what senses, bodies or avatars you have, the Self is always the same old Self. It is the same Self behind all states of the Mind. There is nothing to prevent one from seeing the world as it is in this experience of it via this body.

Bondage

But why are we bound to a world? If you see carefully, we are not bound at all. The Self is always free. What is bound is a person, and primarily the Egoic part of a person. So there is really no need to free oneself. One only needs to remove the ignorance that one is bound. Its as simple as that.

But why is the person bound? Well, lets keep it simple and stupid. Be free, do not worry about the mechanisms of bondage. This is what great masters say and I fully agree. The person, the Ego and the body may remain as it is, but now the burden of bondage disappears.

Things to do in a world

The realization that the world is nothing but the Self will not make the world

disappear into thin air. The world does not change, its you who changes (specifically you as a person, an identity). The world remains as it is with all its beauty and ugliness. So what do you do with it now?

The freedom from the world gives you an ability to enter and exit it at whim. It should get boring very soon. As long as there is a Mind, there will be worlds, and they are all same wine in different varieties of bottles. You taste one and you tasted them all. The detachment from the world makes you not take it very seriously and not care much about it, and the realization that it is nothing but the Self makes you fall in love with it. As you must have guessed, this is exactly the state of Unconditional Love. A seeker would not harm a world and will not meddle in it too much. He sees all people and entities as himself, but also not as himself. Note that Unconditional Love arises as a result of direct experience of liberation from the world, there is no other way to be in true Unconditional Love. Well, there is, which is the way of devotion, but very few are capable of true devotion. Devotion also results from one or other kind of experience, some trigger that turns someone into a devotee. The pitfall here is that such a person, lacking knowledge and mental tools, is prone to fall into belief traps. There is a middle way, pretend that you love everyone and everything unconditionally. Unconditional Love demands that you do mostly nothing for the world, which should be an easy job. Not doing anything also means not doing harmful things, being on the path of Nonviolence. If you are doing nothing, do it completely.

What will such pretention achieve? It will not liberate you, the illusion of the world will persist, but it will liberate you from the suffering the world causes. I cannot say with certainty but living a life with all the qualities of a liberated person will bring about the Grace, however I offer no guarantee. The Mind is a complex thing and an individual is a complex entity. Some things work for some people and are entirely useless for others.

An advanced seeker may gain extraordinary abilities to manipulate the world(s). But major manipulation seldom happens. Even a newbie seeker shies away from meddling with the world. What exactly is gained by changing an illusory world? Why fix it when its going to disappear anyway? Good question. But then some would ask - why not? Isn't it better to experience a happy dream instead of a nightmare? Especially those experiencing a nightmare would be more inclined to fix the mess. But remember that freedom from the world would mean a total dissolution of all qualities of the world, good or bad. And that's why we find that the masters stress on the need to be free rather than the need to live a perfect worldly life. The world is already perfect from all angles, it cannot be anything else. The imperfection is seen through the coloured glasses of ignorance. And thus, an ignorant person struggles to fix a world instead of throwing it away.

Wouldn't a detached life devoid of activity become boring and purposeless? Consider yourself fortunate if you can stay without any activity for more than a day. As we have discussed earlier regarding a body, life will throw stuff at you and you will find yourself dodging and throwing it back at the life. Worldly peace is an illusion too. So boredom is least of your concerns. Here we encounter the idea of a path again. Once free, you are free to choose a path. Make up your own purpose. Act without being an actor. Be an instrument for the higher Will. So on and so forth.

Freedom does not mean that you get rid of certain things in irrecoverable manner, it means an ability to do many more things. So freedom from the world does not take away your ability to be born in a world and act there, it only means that now you have a choice in this regard. A prisoner always has a choice to return to the prison, but why would a sane person do that when there are so many other options available. You may not find the old ways very appealing now, new ways open up and the action starts again. So the questions such as what will be left when the world is left arise out of ignorance, they are the questions of a person who is not yet free. There is no necessity to act anyway, and those who find themselves trapped in the desires of doing stuff, experiencing more, and what not, need to free themselves more. This is all I can say from my limited and wavering experience.

Notes:

[1] See, for example: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simulation_hypothesis . In my opinion, authors like Thomas Campbell are pioneers in this regard and are far ahead of times.

[2] Some of these are taken from Campbell's MBT (<http://www.my-big-toe.com>) and some from here: <https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/0801/0801.0337.pdf> Also see <http://www.theuniversesolved.com/evidence.htm>

[3] One can add a third category - the brightness or intensity, but I think it is just colour again. A red seen in bright light is a different colour compared to the same seen in low light. There are no colourless things, e.g. a grey-scale photo, it has grey coloured shapes.

[4] There are some theories and concepts. Very elaborate but difficult to witness. E.g. <http://www.indiadinivine.org/content/topic/1391702-tanmatras-what-they-are/>

Mind Map

It is our direct experience that Presence is dynamic. There is activity, there is change. Although there is this static unchanging aspect of it which we know as the experiencer, or "I" or pure consciousness. Ultimately both dynamic and static aspects are just one. That which changes becomes an experience and that which is changeless becomes the experiencer. There is not much to the experiencer part, it is just empty awareness, a silent witness, the light that illuminates the changing part, except that it is essential and necessary for all the experiences, it is plain boring :). The interesting things are the dynamics, the endless activity, unceasing and ever-creating patterns. This is seen as the manifested Presence, the **Universal Mind**.

We will try to create a map of it all - the biggest possible picture.

Change

We have discussed Change in much detail in other articles. Here's a quick recap.

What is Change?

No two experiences are same. One experience flows into another. Because we have a memory, we can recognize the difference and call it Change. We can recognize regular Change and quantize it and call it Time. So Time is a direct consequence of Change acting on memory. There is no other way to perceive Change except in terms of Time. Yet when we look closely, we experience no Time, just an eternally present moment - the now famous, **Now**. You can call it a peculiar style of the human mind or one of its limitations.

Why is there Change?

In my opinion, it is unknowable. It just is. One answer is that since all possibilities exist in Presence, the possibility of Change also exists. One can imagine Presence as a roll of movie film, where the whole movie exists at once, and the mind as projector, which projects the frames one by one in a sequence, giving us the illusion of different experiences, changes, motion and time. In short, there is no Change, but it can still be experienced.

What changes?

Nothing and everything. See the above answer. Presence itself changes, but its

apparent change, it remains exactly the same. Presence, by definition is totality, and totality already contains all possibilities, it does not become a new totality by changing into something else. Because if it had to bring in something new, it was not a totality in first place. Now that is deep, so please bear with me. I understand that this puzzle of Change is not easy to grasp. However, it is easy to experience, just take a look around in your mind and out in the world. It is an undeniable direct experience.

What is the simplest Change?

For a Change to be there, more than one state is needed. Obviously, a change from one state to a second state is the simplest possible change. A simpler arrangement would be just one state, but that's not Change, its impossible to get Change out of it. So the next arrangement of two states in the simplest way to get Change - a **Binary** state change. This is your direct experience, and this is an important discovery.

Processes

What happens when there is Change?

Obviously, another Change happens. In the case of the simplest Binary Change, the state again flips back to first state, and then it flips again. But sometimes the same state occurs, but that's not Change, the Change is in the difference. So repeated state changes give rise to a pattern of Change. We are going to call this chain of changes - a **Process**.

What is the simplest Process?

Obviously a repeating Binary pattern is simplest possible Process. It is a regular Process when the states repeat in equal intervals. Not so surprisingly, this results in a **Vibration** or oscillatory Change. Now this is another important discovery. We see that almost everything that is around us is nothing but vibrations of one or the other kind. Hmm... interesting. We can already get a hint of what Change is doing.

What is a Fractal Process?

A Process made out of smaller Processes that resemble itself. So for example, Process A=1010... and B=(11)(00)(11)(00)... so C=(1010)(1100)(1010)(1100)...=ABABAB... Note that all A,B and C are binary repetitions, but C has A and B in it, and B has A in it. Even if it starts with a simple process, a Fractal Process can become very complex pattern indeed, as anyone who has seen a fractal knows very well.

What is a constrained Process?

A Process that depends on other Processes in order to proceed. For example, a gear in a clock can be constrained by other mechanisms to move only at certain conditions. A hand attached to it will appear to be doing computation. It has a very rudimentary intelligence now. This is how an **Algorithmic** Process is born. It follows certain logical pattern, as a result of constraints.

What is a Self-organizing Process?

A Fractal or Algorithmic Process which creates copies of itself and produces even more patterns that support it. The patterns thus formed are now familiar

Structures. So such processes arrange themselves or constrain themselves into structures. The now familiar (to the readers of this blog), **Fundamental Process** is a self-organizing Process. The self-organizing Processes that we find in physical world and mind are Fractal clones of Fundamental Process.

That was about Processes in as short way as possible. One can dive deep into this subject and learn the details. Refer to complexity theory for example.

Structures

What's the outcome of Processes such as the Fundamental Process?

We get a pattern, can be simple or complex. We call it a **Structure**. Its not static, its dynamic and ever changing because it is born out of Change. So no structure lasts, they are all impermanent. Everything that one can experience can be thought of as structures, all made out of simple and complex patterns of Change, mostly of simplest Change - the Binary states, all possible combinations and arrangements of it.

What is a Metaphysical Structure?

They are pure information - just patterns of nothing. All structures in Presence are metaphysical structures. There cannot be any other kind of structures there. All of these structures and patterns taken together is defined as the **Universal Mind**. The Universal Mind is vast, to say the least. It is by definition, contains every structure there is. Everything happens here, and those happenings are witnessed by the Self (consciousness).

What is a Non-physical structure?

Some structures can be directly perceived via the mind, we know them as thoughts, imaginations, memories, emotions etc. All these are also known as Mental Structures. So whatever we perceive in a dream are non-physical structures that sometimes mimic physical structures.

What are Physical structures?

Some structures in the Universal Mind can be perceived via special structures called **Senses**. We call those structures Physical structures. So rocks, mountains, objects, sounds and smells are all physical.

What are Biological structures?

We name those structures that are extremely complex in terms of mental and physical organization and are on the boundary of mental and physical, as Biological structures. Senses themselves are biological. A familiar example is our **Body**. One would be tempted to classify pains, temperature sensations, heaviness, hunger and such perceptions under this kind. So we see that mental structures form a nice continuum to physical. All of these being nothing but metaphysical structures essentially. The nomenclature is only for convenience.

What is knowledge?

When structures are formed in response to perceiving processes, we call them knowledge. Knowledge is organized experiences. Knowledge structures take up many forms, but we know them best as **Memories**. So DNA is a memory, a structure containing knowledge about a biological structure (a form or body). Nervous system is a memory that stores useful actions such as walking, talking, eating and many more. It also stores actions and ideas in form of language. Also mathematical abilities, artistic abilities and such reside here. The important thing to note is - all kinds of structures can form knowledge, from purely metaphysical to mental to biological to physical. A book or your hard drive is a good example of physical memories. Memories combined with Processes produce actions as well as more knowledge, more memories and complex behaviour patterns - like intelligence.

Universal Mind Map

Ok, so now we have enough foundational material to talk about the mega super duper structure of all structures, the Universal Mind.

So if you refer to the iconic map above, the whole picture represents the Universal Mind. It is of course almost infinite, but being a collection of structures its not really infinite. The big size is not in terms of distance or space or even time. It is near-infinite in terms of possibilities or potential. So it can create as much as structure as it likes, can create almost infinite space and time durations reaching eternity. But its all finite.

The screen represents the Self or consciousness, on which Universal Mind is happening and is being witnessed. There is only one Self, the background of everything and it is a whole undivided "no-thing". The Universal Mind is also

only one, but it has parts and is impermanent, as it is born out of Change. Astronomical times would be eye blink for Universal Mind, universes form and dissolve in eye blinks of Universal Mind, as it is the creator of all kinds of Time.

The reddish squares represent the metaphysical structures. The Fundamental Process acts on these ever changing structures and organizes them, so you will see the squares arrange themselves in more and more orderly and rigid form as you go to the right.

The not-so orderly or rigidly arranged structures are non-physical ones, or structures of mental processes. These can be highly complex, beyond our wildest imagination, as nothing limits them, even laws are evolving and changing here. These can be potentially of infinite variety.

Then we encounter the somewhat complex biological structures, including brains and bodies, ranging from humans to much simpler creatures. The variety is mind boggling. Bodies can be formed out of purely non-physical structures, but as soon as they are organized so, they become biological in nature and appear as forms when perceived via a suitable sense.

Next in hierarchy are physical structures, that are just metaphysical structures tightly bound and constrained by algorithmic processes. They are very well ordered, relatively stable and follow rigid laws. Laws are a result of algorithmic processes and can be expressed in forms of mathematical models. When perceived via senses, we know them as physical objects, the gross matter. Change appears to the senses as **Motion**, and vibratory fields of all kinds.

The limitations of sensory structures dictates how much we can perceive about the physical structures. Of course we can augment the senses using instruments and sensors and can know more of them. However, the only way to know physical structures is via senses. An IR camera converts IR into visible, but we can perceive only the so converted image. It'd be a mistake to call that image an IR image, its a visible representation of IR data.

So the physical is most limited among structures because of constraints. Our senses and bodies are limited too but somewhat changeable or adaptable. Our human minds are more flexible and flow more freely, and finally the Universal Mind is near infinitely flexible. Almost anything can happen there.

Most of the structures in the Universal Mind are self-similar. The small looks like the big albeit in less detail. Universal Mind is made out of fractal mini minds. Our human mind is also a fractal clone of Universal Mind. We see in the map that the

human mind is only a small part of the Universal Mind. Its not to scale obviously, so no conclusions about the relative "sizes" of human mind and Universal Mind should be made. The human mind, metaphorically speaking, is like a speck of dust, too tiny to even notice. But since we are humans, we tend to magnify it, it pleases us if we do that. Nevertheless, humans are very important structures in big scheme of things.

The map also shows that the human mind part is somewhat isolated from other parts and other minds/bodies by barriers. What are these barrier actually? They are structures that prevent a cross talk between other structures and provide an illusion of privacy and isolation. I said illusion, because these barriers can be easily broken and nothing remains hidden from the Universal Mind anyway, it sees everything, as everything is its own part and is well within its reach. Human minds cannot reach or connect to other minds or other parts of the Universal Mind under "normal" circumstances, but it is possible to do so with enough practice. Gaining more and more knowledge naturally destroys the barriers.

The map also hints at more areas in the Universal Mind that are currently inaccessible to human minds and senses or to even instruments. The variety of structures is limitless, so different kinds of minds, bodies and worlds are formed, which are constrained by different rules and are so different that the current formulation cannot connect to them meaningfully. But those areas are not totally unreachable. One can reach them when the senses are ignored or withdrawn and some of the mental barriers are surpassed. Astral Projection is one such way, we have discussed that in more detail before.

This map omits one important thing. There can be huge structures that resemble human minds but are thousand or million or even billion times more complex. Its not in my experience, and hence not shown here, but such possibility is surely there, nothing in the Universal Mind prevents them from existing and evolving. Such entities could be truly marvelous and would appear as gods or highly powerful forces to us puny humans. There can be a progression of such entities from simpler, say microminds to megaminds or gigaminds.

Finally, the red dot represents our sense of "I", looking out of the dominant sense of eyes, located in the head of the body and oriented towards a narrow band of physical structures. We get access to a tiny amount of personal data in the mind and see ourselves as separate and independent entities, acting on that data by "will power". Our senses keep as locked on the immediate surrounding physical structures and bodies, and we spend our whole life like this - trying to protect this speck of dust and trying to own specks of matter, totally oblivious of what we really are....

Wow, that sounds awful !!. How did we end up like this? And what can be done to improve this situation? While you ponder on that, here is a more artistic and abstract view of the Universal Mind.

~ .o. ~

End of Volume - 2

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