

Tell The Truth: A Unique View Of Yourself And The World

By Tony DiBella

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Introduction

If someone had told me twenty years ago that I would be writing a book on some of the most controversial topics of our time, I would have said they were crazy. After all, back then I went with the grain in so many ways. In fact, my way of thinking and my view of the world were very similar to that of modern society. I went to church on Christmas and Easter because that's what most Catholics do. I used to believe in advertising because that's what the media wants us to do. I chased after success and money because that's what people do.

Don't get me wrong, and I can't stress this enough, there is nothing wrong with any of these things or with any of the topics that I'll be covering in this book. In fact, it's my firm belief that the world is perfect exactly the way it is. I'm in no way trying to change you by sharing my view of the world. It's also not my intention that you take on my views and beliefs. As a matter of fact, there is no right or wrong way of viewing yourself and the world. It's my only hope that you may stop and take a good hard look at your own life with ruthless honesty. It's a way of living called living consciously. And if you aren't living consciously, then you're living your life in a trance, much like sleep walking.

We all take things for granted, and from the time we are born we are taught that we have to do this and we should do that. We are taught right from wrong, and above all, we are taught to think in the same way as the rest of society. The individual is lost and we become part of the herd. The real tragedy is that we actually take it all in as truth or as gospel if you will, and we never question any of it. We're so mesmerized by our beliefs that we've lost sight of who we really are. By living consciously, you are reclaiming your individuality and discovering the taste of freedom. Sure you may like chocolate mint ice cream with a side of French fries, and you'd certainly be unique in that sense, but that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about individuality pertaining to the larger issues in life. The question is, do you believe in something because everyone else does, or did you come to your own conclusions?

My own journey began when I was about twenty years old. At that time I began to question the little things like “Why does everyone dance the same way?” or “Why does everyone stand at long line ups to eat mediocre food?” or “Why do so many people do their Christmas shopping at the last minute when they had the whole year to do it?” I’ve heard it said that some people actually enjoy the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, and to date I still haven’t met one of these people. Anyway, by the time I turned twenty six, I was questioning and interrogating the big issues like religion, nationality, and society in general, but most importantly, I was questioning who I was as a being. I took it to the point my whole world was busting at the seams and falling apart. I remember living in Italy at that time and I was a complete and utter mess. I was very confused because nothing was making any sense to me anymore. This lasted a few days and then came the day when I decided I had hit rock bottom and there was no way to go but up. In fact, my life became progressively better from that point on, and today I’m quite content to be where I am. By now you may be thinking that this sounds like a scary journey to embark on, and I’m here to tell you that you may be right. Everyone is different though so everyone’s experience will also be different. Believe me; I’m not trying to scare you. I’m only warning you that it may be a bumpy ride for some time before it gets better. And it does get better.

By going on this journey, I was willing to face the world, and most importantly myself, with reckless abandon. The fact of the matter is that when you challenge your own belief system and your perception of the world, it can be scary because our beliefs are a large part of who we think we are. So you have to decide what is more important to you; your present state of comfort or the truth! If you do decide to go for the plunge and live your life consciously, there will come the time when you will start to experience the true taste of freedom. This I can also promise you with the utmost certainty. Remember that even the caterpillar must go through a metamorphosis before it can become a butterfly, and butterflies are magnificent creatures are they not?

Having said all of that, I must also add that I have nothing to teach you. All I’m doing is pointing out what seems obvious to me. You are your own greatest teacher. There is no need to look for mentors and gurus when it comes to mastering your own life. Of course, we have a nasty habit of exalting other people to the point we rely solely on them for guidance. The truth is you are the most qualified person in the world when it comes to self improvement and mastery. The world is full of gurus and all of them have something to teach you. Given all of the money that is spent yearly on seminars and self-help books, shouldn’t everyone be as happy as ‘pigs in mud’ by now? You would think so but I still see a lot of dissatisfaction out there.

So, instead of teaching you something new and exciting, I am going to give you a glimpse into my own mind to demonstrate that there are other ways of thinking and viewing the world as well as yourself. The rest is up to you. All I can do is tell you what I believe to be true, but you still have to verify it for yourself. You can’t just take my word on the basis of faith. Trust yourself and let your own intelligence guide you towards truth. Besides that, I can assure you that you will not agree with everything I have to say. You are not me, so why should you? All I ask is

that you keep an open mind as you read through these pages so that you may challenge your own beliefs and decide for yourself if your beliefs still hold true for you.

In addition to challenging your beliefs, I also offer a lot of advice on how to make your ride through life a better one so that you may live more consciously and more self-aware. My aim is to make you more aware of your thinking and your attitudes towards various aspects of life including people, money, your emotions, love, politics, and advertising, to name a few. You would not believe how much people are affected by these issues and so I'd like to shed some light on them. And if needed, hopefully your eyes will become open to these issues and you'll deal with them on a more conscious level.

This book is the result of my living consciously and its purpose is to share with you a few of the things that have been clarified for me through my own experiences. It's not meant for you to share my beliefs and values, but to simply listen to my point of view and see if it works for you. And whether it does or not isn't important. What is important and what I hope will happen is you will begin to think for yourself regardless of what the general population is telling you. I'm not trying to start a new religion or a cult or anything like that. This book is really about being an individual, which is quite the opposite, and it's my hope that it will help you to find your own individuality.

At this point I would like to add just one more thing. As you read through the chapters, you may become somewhat uncomfortable. You may even feel anger and hatred towards me. I'd actually expect this reaction from most people because I think it's a natural response to what I'm going to say. So I'm going to warn you now. If you have a fragile ego, don't read this book. The irony is that it's the people with fragile egos who really need to read this book. And if you're looking for a book that will sugar coat your life and make you feel better, you're reading the wrong book. This book is for those people with courage and the willingness to see things as they really are.

The topics I've chosen are divided up into two categories: The Inner World and The Outer World. The inner world deals with personal issues that affect a person directly. The outer world deals with external issues that people generally deal with on a daily basis. The chapters will serve as a spring board from which you can start to question your own beliefs and attitudes towards certain topics.

I've arranged the chapters in a particular order and I would strongly recommend that you read them in that order. And before you begin, I have a few words for you to keep in mind as you read each chapter:

I am perfect just the way I am.

As you read through each chapter, you may think that I'm contradicting myself with these words. There is no contradiction. Contradictions appear only in the mind. You'll get much more out of

this book if you read it with an open heart, for this is the only place where truth can be understood.

At this point if you've decided you're not afraid to face your own beliefs, and most importantly yourself, I wish you all the best, and it is my hope that you grow and become empowered by this book.

Part I: The Inner World

Tell The Truth

To live consciously means to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. By this I mean to take anything that you have been taught or that you have taken for granted your whole life, and see if there really is any truth to it. Does it make sense to you? Does it resonate well with you? Do you believe it because everyone else does? Do you do it because it's expected of you? To tell the truth means to interrogate yourself and break down anything that no longer makes any sense to you.

To tell the truth means to be courageous and tell it like it is. It's difficult to go against the grain and be ridiculed for doing so, but I think it's even more difficult to live a lie. By living a lie, you have to face it in the mirror every morning when you wake up. The fact is most people have been lying to themselves for so long that it's the only thing they know. So they take it as truth. In fact, most people will defend their beliefs to the point of getting into heated arguments. When it comes to topics like religion, politics, and sports, people become even more feverish about their beliefs. Obviously a person's attitude towards a certain belief will depend on how important it is in their life. I have seen people get into heated arguments over the most mundane topics and it amazes me every time. In spite of this, telling the truth doesn't mean to impose your beliefs on someone else, because we're all different and we're all entitled to our own opinions. That's a part of being human.

It's also true that my truth may or may not be the same flavor as your truth. What matters is that you discover truth for yourself and live by it no matter what happens and no matter what other people think of you. Throughout your life, you will undoubtedly find that your truth changes with different experiences. It doesn't mean that you didn't come to the truth the first time. It just means that your version of the truth has changed. What does that tell you about truth though? If truth is something that can change, can you really say that it is the absolute truth? Not at all! Truth is relative. Absolute truth is the end result of going from one truth to another until you are able to drop all of your truths and realize that there was one absolute truth all along. That however is beyond the scope of this book. This book is more concerned with discovering your own personal truth. It's about being an individual who is able to think for him or herself without intervention from any other source. Of course your other option is to be a part of the herd who all share the same beliefs.

You may think that you are an individual with your own beliefs and views, and this may be true to a certain degree, but what you need to ask yourself is “where did these beliefs and views come from, and are they really my own?” They may have been taught to you by your family. They may have been inherited through your culture or religion. You may have learned it from your friends. Take a belief and shake its foundation to see if it crumbles. If it does, then it had the wrong basis. Be honest with yourself as you do this. You may be surprised at what you find out about yourself.

In essence, telling the truth is about reclaiming your individuality. At times it may be difficult because of what you may have to give up, but in the end it's worth it because you can actually look yourself in the mirror and say that it's your own truth.

The Earth Used To Be Flat

It wasn't long ago that people thought the Earth was flat. It's difficult to determine exactly when it was proven the Earth was round. However, for thousands of years, the human race shared a belief that was entirely untrue. It took the courage of free thinkers to prove the Earth was round and to present this new information to a world that was set in its ways.

Now imagine if you will, a time long ago when people thought the Earth was flat. Imagine living in that period, sharing the belief that the Earth is flat. All of your friends, family and neighbors believe the same thing so it must be true. Look around you as you imagine this scene. Everything looks flat, including the roads and the countryside. There's no reason for you to believe that the Earth is anything but flat, no? Now imagine that somewhere in your town, there lives a visionary, named Bob, who claims the Earth is round. Everyone laughs at Bob because how could it be possible that he's right and everyone else is wrong? You might also laugh at poor Bob because he must be insane to think such a ridiculous thought. When the rest of the world believes in something, you tend to believe it too. After all, how can 6.5 billion people be wrong?

Even after it was proven the Earth was round, it was still believed that the Earth was the center of the universe. In fact, people believed that the sun and the stars all revolved around the Earth. Of course, thanks to Nicolaus Copernicus, today we think that the idea was absurd because we know better. We might say something like, “Oh those people were primitive. Of course they believed in such nonsense.” So are we going to call ourselves primitive when the next big discovery comes to light?

As a technologically advanced society, we tend to think we know almost everything there this is to know about our world and ourselves. We've conquered space flight, so we know all there is to know about our solar system. We're developing technology more and more each day, so we think we're so advanced that we've got it all figured out. But, what if we're wrong about certain things? What if we're wrong about a lot of things? I personally believe that we still have a lot to learn about ourselves and our world before we can actually say we've got it down pat. I just

wonder what society will say about our current beliefs one thousand years from now. I think it will be interesting to say the least. And quite likely, we are going to be called the primitive ones.

Another prime example of a false belief is that of Greek mythology. I find it difficult to imagine that an entire nation could believe that the Sun was a God and the Moon was a Goddess. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying they were stupid. The fact is, since everyone else believed it, each individual decided it must be true, and you really can't blame them. Based on what we know now, could you imagine believing in that today? You might think it's absurd, but I'll give you a modern day example of shattering a belief.

On June 1, 2008, in Beijing, China, the men's 100 meter Olympic record of 9.84 seconds was finally shattered after twelve years with a time of 9.58 seconds. A difference of 0.26 seconds in this particular race is a huge feat to say the least. I myself thought that it could probably be beaten by perhaps 0.05 seconds at the most, and I never expected such a difference. Of course it doesn't matter what we believe. What matters is that the contestants believe they can beat the record, and it goes to show just how powerful a belief can be. Here is something to ponder. What if no belief existed regarding the 100 meter dash? What would be possible then?

When Friederick Miescher discovered DNA, the world changed once again. DNA is like a set of instructions, or a blueprint if you will, that determines our genetic makeup. DNA carries a lot of information that gives us our inheritance. Today, DNA can predict disease, it can be used to place a suspect in a crime scene, it can prove beyond reasonable doubt who your father is, and it can be used to cure an inherited disease among other things. Mr Miescher changed the world for the better and proved once again that we aren't always right about everything and we certainly don't know everything.

My absolute favorite example of an Earth-shattering belief is the discovery of quantum physics. Now quantum physics hasn't exactly changed the world yet, but it is forcing many physicists, even the hardcore Newtonian ones, to rethink how the universe works. Quantum physics quite simply states that at the microscopic level, our world behaves in ways that contradict classical physics like Newton's theory of gravity or Einstein's theory of relativity. This is not to say that their discoveries aren't true. I'm only saying that they don't paint the whole picture.

Now I'm not going to get into how quantum physics works because it's way beyond the scope of this book. However, I would urge you to look it up on the internet and read a little bit about it. It isn't difficult to understand and when you do get it, it will blow your mind away. So why doesn't everyone know about quantum physics? Why hasn't it changed the world? My answer is that the physicists are still arguing about whether it's a valid theory and many don't want to admit its validity. It's a scary thing to believe in because it shatters everything we've ever believed about our world and it opens up a huge can of worms. The fact is we can't deny the truth forever and eventually this too will become common knowledge.

I tend to be careful concerning my beliefs and I question anything that seems limiting to me, especially when it comes to beliefs that everyone else takes for granted. I have dropped a lot of those beliefs in my short lifetime and I will be discussing them over the next few chapters. At this point though, I'd like to invite you to challenge your own beliefs. Ask yourself questions like, "Why do I believe this?" or "Does this really make sense to me?" Question everything you've taken for granted your whole life to see if it still holds any truth at all for you. This is nothing new of course. You already know how to interrogate, except you rarely apply it to yourself. It's a whole new playing field and you're the only player that matters. So let's explore some important beliefs that almost everyone shares and you can decide for yourself if there is any truth to any of them for you.

One

One: This is the word that comes to mind when I think of the world we live in. 'One' means that the Earth and all of its inhabitants are interconnected in many very intimate ways. This may be a difficult concept to grasp at first, but if you really put all of the pieces together, it actually makes a lot of sense. When I think of the Earth, I envision one single living organism that started as one and will always be one.

From birth, our perception of ourselves is that we are separate from everything and everyone else on the planet. We learn things like "This is my toy and you can't play with it", or "My name is Tony and I am four years old. What is your name?" We've learned from the onset that we are separate beings with no relation to anyone except for our relatives. Of course I understand this mode of thinking because I used to think the same way. It's perfectly natural to grow up with this way of thinking because, after all, our five senses are constantly telling us it must be true. We see our body as separate from others. Sound seems to come from various sources. We can't feel another person unless we touch them. When we eat a piece of fruit, no one else can taste what we're experiencing in that moment. And of course our sense of smell is different from others because we don't all have the same preferences in flowers and food.

It's true that each person's experience in life is extremely unique in many ways, but that's a part of being human. It's a wonderful gift to have our own likes and dislikes, preferences, personality, strengths and weaknesses. There's nothing wrong with any of these things. If we were all extremely similar, we'd be bored to tears with each other. So that's all well and good, but the concept I'm going to try to convey to you is that we're actually more connected than you might think. However, to me it's more than just a concept because it's just the way things are. To me it is truth because it makes a lot of sense, albeit in a somewhat gross way, and shortly you'll understand what I mean.

Without giving you a lesson in physics, I'm going to try to convey this concept of interconnectedness in the simplest way possible. I'm a big fan of physics but that's beyond the scope of this book. So let's start in the beginning, and no I'm not going to talk about Adam and

Eve. It's a cute story but it just doesn't fly with me. I prefer Darwin's Theory of Evolution over the Bible, but I'm not quite sure I buy all of that either. Theories are called theories because they are not proven fact. So I would rather use concepts that I think have substantial evidence to back them up.

And so we begin. According to physicists, when the Earth formed, it started as a giant cloud of cold dust particles. Gradually these particles came together to form a huge spinning disk whose motion made the dust particles insanely hot. These particles turned into a ball of gases and molten liquid. They then cooled, condensed and took on the solid form on which we live. All of this resulted in land and water. From that arose very simple living organisms which later evolved into more complex living organisms. This process continued for many years until mammals and humans came to be. Of course, this is a theory just like any other, but I like it because it makes scientific sense. However, no matter what the truth is about the Earth's history, what really matters is that we all came from the Earth, and I'm sure most people will agree with me here. We have no reason or evidence to believe otherwise. Besides, we have no evidence of the existence of the Garden of Eden, so that puts an end to that story.

Now here's the point to all of this, and it is so simple I find it hard to ignore. If we all came from Mother Earth, then I would be forced to say that we're all a part of the planet as a single living organism. In other words, we are all extensions of the Earth which is an extension of the Solar System which is an extension of the Milky Way which is an extension of the Universe. Let me put it to you this way: when you look at a tree, do you say, "Here is a rooted trunk with branches, twigs, and leaves?" Of course not, because apart from it taking forever to say all of that, we just prefer to call it a tree. The tree is one and it is an extension of the Earth, just as we are. The Earth gave birth to all of its inhabitants, and when they die, they go back to the Earth where they originated.

Let's look at it another way. Our fingers are a part of our hands, which are a part of our arms, which are a part of our torso. However, the hand cannot say it no longer wants to be a part of the arm and go its separate way. It doesn't have a choice in the matter and it's a part of the whole. You could say the same for your toes and feet and legs. However, when you refer to yourself, you are referring to your body. It's only our perception that sees separation in everything because that's what our five senses are telling us. The deeper truth is that there never was any separation and all of life is intimately interconnected.

There are another couple of ways we are connected with each other. One is through water and the other is through air. You may need a strong stomach for this next part as it can be somewhat disturbing, but it's all natural and it's just the way things are.

Water has four cycles: evaporation, condensation, precipitation, and collection. When we sweat, the water in our bodies is pushed through our pores and it then evaporates to cool us down as we work during a hot summer day. Body water is also lost in the form of vapor as we exhale. You

can verify this by breathing onto a cold piece of glass and you'll find that the water vapor condenses immediately. That water vapor goes into the atmosphere where it joins other water vapor from other sources. When it reaches the upper atmosphere, it condenses and clouds are formed. When the clouds can no longer hold onto the water, it rains. The water then collects in the rivers, streams, lakes, and oceans. Some of it also goes into the ground and into the water table. I have a well at my home and I drink the water from that water table. Some of that water used to be a part of someone else's body at some point in time and the body is composed mostly of water. So basically, we're all sharing the same water molecules that make up most of our bodies. Admittedly, it's gross to think about it in this way but that's the way it works.

We are also connected through the air we breathe. Air is mostly made up of oxygen and nitrogen, but mostly nitrogen. We inhale air and we exhale nitrogen, oxygen, and carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide also contains oxygen. Plant life, including trees, absorbs the carbon dioxide and in turn they give off oxygen which becomes a part of the air we breathe. So we're also connected with plant life in addition to each other. We live in a self-contained ecosystem where all living organisms depend on each other for their own survival. I think that is both amazing and a work of art. Pure genius!

Life is also constantly regenerating itself and consuming itself in a harmonious cycle that never ends, and the Chinese philosophy of the five elements illustrates this point perfectly. The five elements according to the Chinese are as follows:

Fire – Earth – Metal – Water – Wood

The philosophy also states there are two cycles that relate the elements to one another. The regenerating cycle states that:

Fire forms Earth

Earth creates Metal

Metal holds Water

Water nourishes Wood

Wood feeds Fire

The consuming cycle states that:

Fire melts Metal

Metal cuts Wood

Wood consumes Earth

Earth dams Water

Water extinguishes Fire

I really like this philosophy because it demonstrates the interconnectedness of everything around us and including us.

There is no separation and there never was any. The evidence is all around us, and if you care to take a look and see for yourself, you'll begin to see the world with new eyes. Separation is an illusion and it has served its purpose back when we were Neanderthals and our only objective was to survive. We no longer live in that world and separation no longer has anything to offer us. In fact, it has become an obstacle in our growth as a species, and as long as we see ourselves as separate from one another, we will never know what it means to live in harmony, and that is a true shame.

What Do You Think?

I think, therefore I am. This well known phrase is credited to the famous philosopher, Rene Descartes. When I say this phrase to myself, I pick it apart and something immediately occurs to me. It's not a question of whether we exist. I believe we can both agree we exist. It's more a question of who is the "I" that thinks, and who is the "I" that exists. Right now, ask yourself, "Who am I?" Of course the answer will vary depending on who is asking, but a typical answer might sound something like, "I'm Joe Somebody. I'm an engineer. I'm a father of three and a husband. I live in the suburbs and own a house and a car." The exact response doesn't really matter. What matters is that Joe really believes all of this, but is it the truth? To find the answer, we first have to define the word 'belief'.

What is a belief? Quite simply, a belief is a subconscious thought. It's not a conscious thought because if it were, we'd be thinking it in words all day long. Basically what I'm saying is that you don't need to chant your name like a mantra to believe it's really your name. It happens automatically in the subconscious mind and we are reminded of it every morning upon waking. We're not aware of our subconscious thoughts, but that's where our beliefs are stored. Our subconscious provides us with everything we believe about ourselves, our culture, our religion, and our world in general. Everything we have ever learned about ourselves and our world is stored within the subconscious mind.

A popular example would be the experience of coming into contact with fire for the first time. After that, it isn't necessary to first think, "do not touch the fire", before you move your hand closer to it. It happens automatically and thank goodness that it does. Another type of subconscious belief that we all hold onto dearly is our name. Once we've learned it, we never forget it. The older we get, the more information is stored in the subconscious to a certain point. Then our beliefs become hardened and we become rigid in our thinking. When you have believed in something for say forty or fifty years, it becomes difficult to one day say, "I choose to see this differently." Not only does it become difficult, but scary too, because how do you let go of something you have believed in your whole life?

You can think of the subconscious mind as a computer operating system, and the conscious thoughts are the programs that run in the operating system. So if the subconscious thoughts provide our beliefs about everything, and the conscious thoughts are all of those that get us through the day, the next question is, "what is a thought?" One might say that a thought is a complex series of electrical impulses that cross synaptic gaps in the brain. Scientifically speaking, he or she would be correct, but why did the thought occur in the first place? I would imagine most people would say the thought occurred because we willed it to occur. In other words, the thought is the result of a conscious effort on the thinker's part. To a small extent, I would say that is true. For instance, say that you're an accountant, you can't find your calculator, and you need to add \$64.43 plus \$38.12 using your brain. That's what I would describe as a conscious thought because you, as an accountant, are deliberately using the brain as a means to an end. The answer is \$102.55, by the way, and yes I used a calculator.

However, I would estimate that eighty percent or more of our thinking is involuntary, and the number increases if we're doing a mindless activity such as preparing dinner. I would assume that most people will disagree with me on this. I never believed it myself until I experienced the phenomenon first hand back in 1998 or 1999. Back then I was really into meditating, and I would spend at least thirty minutes with it every day. I believe that mediation is one of those things you either love or hate. I wouldn't recommend it to everyone because it's purely a personal preference. The experience of mediation will also vary from person to person. However, mine was more than an experience. It was more of a revelation than anything else, and it proved to me that I have very little control over what I think, both consciously and especially subconsciously.

I don't remember which meditation I was doing at the time. I did everything the same as I had always done because you should never alter the instructions for a meditation. Meditations are designed to work as directed, and unexpected results can occur if the instructions are not followed to the letter. So there I was, and I remember that I was in a very relaxed state. It wasn't an out of body experience or an altered state of consciousness. I remember being very much in touch with my body and its sensations, and what followed was incredible. Somehow, I became an observer of my thoughts. I just sat there, watching my thoughts roll by like clouds in a pristine sky. I was overwhelmed with amazement. The realization was that my thoughts were not really mine. They just existed on their own without any intervention from me, and for the first time, I realized that I have never been in charge of my thinking.

If you don't believe that my experience was real, that's fine, but I would urge you to try something. You have nothing to lose by trying. It's an old relaxation technique, and you begin by closing your eyes. You then use your mind to simply follow your breath on its way in, and then as it flows outward. Feel it as it fills up your lungs, and feel it as the lungs expel it. Now as you do this, don't think about anything else. Just follow the breath for five minutes. Okay, so you've got five minutes to lose. It could be worse.

It doesn't matter whether or not you do the technique correctly. What matters is whether you were able to stop your thoughts for the whole five minutes. After the exercise is over, be honest with yourself. Were you able to completely bring your thoughts to a halt for more than thirty seconds? My guess is that 95 percent of people would not be able to stop their thoughts for even twenty seconds. It's a harsh figure but that's the way it is. The reality is we have very little control over our thoughts. We think about everything and it's all on auto pilot. It was never meant to be this way. The mind was meant to be used by us as a tool, as opposed to the mind using us, but that's exactly what has happened. This is why you really should not feel bad if you have a nasty thought, one that you would only keep to yourself. Most of it is random nonsense anyway and really doesn't mean a thing.

What we have seen so far is that the conscious thoughts, the thoughts that we're aware of, are in constant motion and out of control. However, the subconscious thoughts are also on auto pilot. This is why we believe the things we do. They are constantly being repeated to us on the subconscious level and we simply take the beliefs for granted. Think about the implications of what I'm saying. If everyone is on auto pilot, what does that say about us as a society? Have you ever heard someone say, "People are crazy?" That's pretty much what I'm hinting at, but I don't mean 'crazy' in the psychiatric sense. I mean 'crazy' as in 'people are running around like chickens with their heads cut off', and I myself am not excluded from that definition. I'm also human. The only difference between me and most people is that I am fully aware of the fact that I'm 'crazy', so to speak.

Now, I'm not saying that thinking is useless. It's actually very useful, but only if we're deliberately using the brain to think about, say, something important, like driving a car, or doing our math homework. By the way, most people don't think about driving while they're driving. Anyway, that was the whole purpose behind thinking all along, so there's nothing wrong with it. The problem is with the automatic, unnecessary, thoughts, the ones that take up most of our day. Do you have any idea how many hours you waste every day just thinking about nonsense? We all do it and I'm not excluded.

So what does this say about our beliefs? If beliefs are the result of automatic subconscious thoughts, is there really any credibility to any of them? To me, they don't seem to have a solid basis, and since beliefs make up who we say we are, what does that say about us?

Now we've come full circle and we're back to our original question. Who is the "I" that thinks, and who is the "I" that exists? Well I can tell you what "I" is not. I've seen for myself that I'm not purposely thinking most of my thoughts, so those thoughts are not even mine because I can sit back and observe them. Therefore I am not my thoughts, and since my thoughts provide me with my beliefs, I am not who "I" believe myself to be either. So who am I? Who are you? The short answer is that everyone has to answer this question for themselves. Even if I knew the answer, I wouldn't be able to explain it to you because I doubt it is something that can be put

into words. Look at it this way. If the answer was readily available to us, we wouldn't be hanging onto false beliefs our whole lives and you probably wouldn't be reading this book.

Some people spend their whole lives looking for the truth of who they really are, the 'I' that exists, and it's a noble quest. It also seems to be a difficult one because very few succeed, but that doesn't mean it's not worth fighting for. It just means it is quite possibly the most valuable question you will ever answer in your lifetime, and I think that is worth fighting for.

Flap Jacks

Next to intelligent life, the personality is probably the greatest phenomenon in our world. Given that humans are all created equal, it is a great wonder every one of us has his or her own unique personality. Psychology tries to compartmentalize personalities into types, but even that is a generalization and a way to try and understand human beings. I call the personality a great phenomenon because I think it's a miracle that it exists as it does. I also believe it is the greatest fiction the world has ever known. Don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with the personality. It makes us unique and it is a wonderful part of being human, but I believe it is fictitious none the less.

So what exactly is the personality and where does it come from? Well some of it is genetic, and this can be verified when someone shares certain traits with his or her parents. However, most of it is a result of our environment, culture, religion, family, and friends. Every experience we have growing up shapes and moulds the personality. We are born with a blank slate, and the slate fills up quickly as we experience life.

I'm going to use an example to illustrate this point. Let's make up a fictitious character named Jim. Jim grew up in a peaceful suburb of San Francisco, California. The neighbourhood he lived in as a child was quiet and he had many friends. He was born into a Catholic family and his parents sent him to a private Catholic school where he would receive the very best education money can buy. In fact, his parents are very well off, so Jim knows nothing about poverty. In school, Jim is taught, among other things, manners, respect for others, and right from wrong. Jim does very well in school and his parents are proud of him. Jim is growing up to be a fine young man. He is smart, funny, witty, and charming. In fact, throughout high school, girls fell head over heels for him. He is growing up to be a model citizen. After passing the Barr exam, he gets a well paying job as a lawyer. He eventually marries a beautiful woman and has three children.

Based on Jim's experiences, the world is a great place to live in. In his mind, people are friendly and he is a very likable character. He is very well educated and makes good money, so he believes that his friends should be of the same type as him. In fact, most of his friends are well to do. As a lawyer, he has learned to be both tough and cunning, and he knows how to break a person on the stand. Although he knows how to strike fear into the person on the stand, he has the fear of God within him from his Catholic upbringing. Jim enjoys golfing with his buddies

and colleagues, and he prefers a fine Italian wine over American beer. Jim is always the life of the party with his refined sense of humor and witty comebacks. As a father, he does his best to make sure his children get the best education he can afford and he expects nothing but excellence from them. However, he is not a very affectionate parent since his parents never showed him any affection either.

To Jim, life is pretty straight forward. You get a great education, land a great job, marry a beautiful woman, have kids, and make your children repeat the cycle. That is the life Jim knows and that is where his values lie. Now this is just one possible outcome out of many personalities that Jim could have taken on. To really understand why he turned out the way he did, we would have to perform pages upon pages of analysis, and even then we'd only be scratching the surface. All that I'm doing here is painting a simple picture of Jim's life based on his upbringing.

Now let's paint another picture. This scene takes place somewhere in the war torn Middle East. This boy's name is Abdul and he is four years old. Every week, there are at least four shootings in his neighborhood. Bombs go off on a regular basis and one of them has taken his mother's life. He lives with his father and his brother in a small two bedroom run down apartment that is in serious need of repairs. He is taught early on about how to use an automatic rifle. After all, one needs to learn how to protect oneself from the enemy. To Abdul, the whole world is the enemy and it is every man for himself.

Abdul's father can't afford to put his children in school and so he teaches them what he knows. It's hard enough for him to put food on the table and clothing on their backs. Abdul does not grow up with games and play time with his friends. Instead, he and his friends play another game. They mug people on the streets for all the money they have in their wallets. They also have to constantly look over their shoulders because they know very well the same can happen to them. Abdul doesn't know much about joking around and having a good time. Life is very serious for him and the wrong move can result in his last.

Abdul grows up strong and independent, relying on brute force to get what he wants out of life. Everything is a struggle for him. He prefers friends who are tough and strong like him and looks down upon the weak. He has learned about the Western world and he hates all of us because he believes that we're all living in castles with an abundance of money and food. Abdul eventually resorts to drugs and drinking to ease the awful pain of living. It's a horrible life for him and he has a lot of hatred and anger inside of him. With his mother dead and no sister, he doesn't have any respect for women because he has never had much contact with them. Instead, he prefers to rape women, and at twenty years old, he's already been in jail twice for it, and those were only for the times he was caught. Abdul is a miserable man whose sole objective in life is to fight and survive. It is the survival of the fittest. Nothing comes easy and everything is fair game.

Do you see what I am saying about how the personality is molded by our environment and the people we interact with while growing up? If Jim was born into a poor family living in a poor

neighborhood, his personality and his life could very well have been very different. Abdul also could have been a different person had he been born into a rich Italian family.

The point I'm trying to make is this; the personality is mostly the result of circumstance. So if the personality is so malleable, so flexible, that it can be molded into anything, how much truth is there to it? Its only foundation is your experience of life, and since experience is subjective, then so is the personality. The personality is like a flap jack. It seems solid until you put your hands on it and you realize that it bends, twists, folds, and breaks apart easily. The personality is so flimsy that you can even change it if you don't like it. There are many self-help books out there that can teach you how to change things about yourself. If you follow the instructions correctly, the techniques will often work. So how much credibility can you give to something so flimsy and changeable? The way I see it is that if something can be changed, and is not permanent, then it's not real. Only the unchangeable is real.

The saddest part of all this is not the personality. The saddest part is we believe in it and we judge each other based on it. To us, the personality is everything and it is the scale we use to size up another person. We say things like, "That person is too serious, I don't like him," or, "She is very funny. I like her." So essentially what we are saying is that we like and dislike the falseness in each other. We get so caught up in the wrapper, we fail to taste the candy inside.

If my parents had remained in Italy instead of moving to Canada, I too would have been an entirely different person. I would have grown up in the midst of poverty in a small village in the mountains. I would have gone to a different school and made different friends. My values would have mirrored those of the Italian people. My way of life would have been different, as would a typical day living in a small village in the mountains. I would have had different jobs and those experiences would also have molded my personality differently. My personality would have been completely different compared to what it is today.

To be honest with you, my personality was totally different twenty years ago compared to what it is today. I look back at that person and I don't even recognize him. It is hard to believe it was me. If I look back at my childhood, I was a completely different person then too. I really don't recognize that person at all. In essence, what I'm saying is my personality is full of dog poop, and it means absolutely nothing to me. It's not who I really am at the core of my being. So the question is, who am I? If I could answer that question, I'd probably be writing a different book. That is the honest truth.

Having said this, I must also add that it is possible to break free of our conditioning and not allow it to affect us as adults. There are many people out there who have been dealt a bad hand in life, but they do have the power to learn and grow from it, instead of letting it become the driving force behind their personalities. Even Abdul has the power to change if he really wants to. However, it's not the personality that allows us to do this. The personality is just a shell. It's the mask we wear when we interact with others. Essentially, the personality is powerless. The

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