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IS THERE ENOUGH FOR ME?

By Michael Strelcheck

The slowing economy is putting a lot of pressure on people's thinking, increasing their stress to unhealthy levels. Throughout the country, friends, relatives and neighbors are out of work or fearful of losing their jobs. Our government has been telling us, for a few years now, that we're experiencing an economic slowdown – but that story is getting old and things are getting financially tougher. With every negative piece of news people's greatest fear; is being validated. You know that fear, it's in the back of everyone's mind, a voice that's getting stronger, reminding us - *there isn't enough for everyone!*

Why does everyone believe that there's a lack of wealth? Perhaps it lies in the fact that most everyone in the world sees needed resources as limited commodities. Like the idea that there is only so much gold in the world! This psychological mind-set drives individuals to try and control valuable resources, which helps to increase everyone's sense of lack.

It seems that humans instinctively have a deep sense of *indebtedness* which holds them back from prosperity. I suppose that could come from humanity's gratefulness for being alive, believing that living has to come at a price! But for whatever reason, people today are feeling scared that they won't be able to afford the things that are necessary to survive.

Our government has the same "lack" mentality, thinking it has to borrow money and go into debt in order to pay for foods and services, and fears not being able to pay its bills. What's up with that? America is abundant in all kinds of natural resources that will support our prosperity for many years, so why do we need borrowed money?

What if human perception is wrong? What if, rather than there being a limited amount (or lack) of resources in the world, the reverse is true, that there is more than we need?

This idea may seem improbable at first, but if we set our beliefs of limits and lack aside for a moment and are willing to examine a new perspective, we may find another reality.

Nature, which magically makes the food we eat and the minerals we use in our products, has the unlimited ability to create. If we doubt this, all we have to do is watch spring as it unfolds. The barren trees and fields of winter appear hopelessly still, without vitality or even life. And then, suddenly, life springs forth with an explosion of creativity, everywhere shoots and blades of green appear, even on surfaces that seem infertile like concrete or rock. The smallest crack in the pavement or even in the rock face of a mountainside will amazingly yield hearty green sprouts of plant life. The same can be said for the seemingly destructive volcanic eruptions that are continuously happening. These eruptions are the birthing furnaces for new

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minerals formed out of the fiery molten core of the earth. And, if those realities don't cause you to reconsider the ideas of limitation and lack, turn your attention towards the sun in the sky. Science has found that solar energy (which is very much like electricity) flows to us with inconceivable abundance. So much so that it would be impossible for us to ever use even a fraction of what's available. Sunlight supplies all living creatures with an energy that fuels their ability to function (like to a plant's process of photosynthesis process). And what's even more astonishing is the fact that nowhere does the earth or sun send us a bill for these abundant resources, but instead - they offer their services freely!

Think about that a second. (It takes a moment to grasp what this really means.) For it's almost inconceivable for the human mind to realize that things of value could be offered without a fee - there for the taking.

Not sure yet that abundance is already yours? Let's throw in the most valuable element needed for life - water! Science says that water makes up about 80% of our body as well as 70% of the planet's surface, making it the most abundant resource we have and that the amount of water on the planet never changes regardless of how much we use! I don't know about you, but I certainly use a lot of it. Where does the water keep coming from?

What seems to have happened is that somehow a limiting "idea" has gotten between nature and human thinking, which has convinced humankind that it's necessary to pay for these things.

The thought that veils our natural prosperity is the long held belief idea that the things we need for survival must be earned. How this has come to be is unclear, whether it's because there was a fear that if people didn't respect these vital resources they would be squandered, so paying for them prevents waste. Or perhaps ambitious individuals creatively saw a chance to "charge" others for what they desperately needed, which was theirs to begin with. It really doesn't matter. The reality of our situation is that nature has the ability to create, seemingly out of thin air, what's needed for its children - without charge. Prove this to yourself; walk outside and pick a flower. Does anything demand payment for it? No. You get to keep the flower free of charge and use it anyway you wish.

If one is to embrace this reality (and jettison their old belief that they must pay, or worse, borrow money in order to enjoy the earth's resources) they would find it easier to experience the natural abundance that is their birthright, as well as help to create a change in the way economics work. The more people realize that food is free, as is energy, the faster the prices for these resources will fall. At the very least this new belief would reduce the stress a person feels, for their "abundant perspective" would ease their subconscious sense of indebtedness.

Politics

A Crime Against Civilization

By Dale Lucht

The other day, someone knocked two chunks of marble off a statue in Rome's Piazza Navona. He then tried to damage the nearby Trevi Fountain. Europeans agreed that this was a crime against the values of civilization.

I wondered how people would refer to this event in America. I am sure the officials would call the crime Property Damage. Everything has a value placed on it. And in America that value is measured in dollars and cents, not in how a piece of art makes you feel.

Civilization entails a collective of individuals working together for the betterment of all. We can also have individuals working just for themselves. Or you can have a mass of individuals working together for a select few individuals. That, my friend, is an extreme view of Capitalism.

It is all about the greed. It's not just the Koch brothers or the Waltons who would sell your brother for more money. It's also us. We're not satisfied with a \$50,000 income, we want \$55,000. We also buy Mutual Funds and expect to make more every year. It doesn't matter that companies close plants in the US and move good paying union jobs overseas. That is more money for us.

As a matter of fact, that is how Mitt Romney made the bulk of his money. He bought companies, stripped them of assets and then sent the jobs overseas. Rick Perry claims he created jobs in Texas. Actually he stole them from other states ie.GM-Janesville, or they were low paying jobs. He also claims he balanced the budget, which wouldn't have happened without the stimulus money. Michelle Bachman just takes after Minnesota's State Bird: the loon. At this point we do not have a Bush, Cheney, or Rumsfeld running. These fake patriots who worship at the altar of Mars, but employ intermediaries to fight for them and torture for them.

I'm not a big fan of Obama either. I think that he's trying to cooperate too much with the opposition. I don't think he realizes how much the republicans detest him. He is not enough of a fighter. He doesn't believe enough in what is best for Americans, but what he can get. Democrats need to get the fight back.

Hopefully we keep the passion up in Wisconsin to toss Walker out on his balding head. Make no mistake about it. The Waltons and the Koch brothers will be pouring millions

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into the state next year. It won't be in jobs, but in ads for republicans.

This is an attack that has been thirty years in the making. It used to be against the law for CEO's to be paid in stock options, CEO's were expected to do what was right for their company. The company included the stockholders, the workers, management and the communities. The Reagan Administration was able to change the law so that CEO's could now be compensated with stock options. The result was that CEO's now made their decisions based on what was best for the price of the stock. Merge with another company, sell off its assets, send jobs overseas; the stock goes up and CEO's make millions. It is time to make this illegal again.

In America today we have a clear choice. Choose between immature individualism, where everybody thinks that someday they'll be the rich bully telling everybody what to do. Or behind Door Number 2, we have a mature civilization that values the individual but where we also look out for our neighbors. A civilization that values art and music and knowledge over greed.

The First Socialist

By Joel Matthews

I am not one to apply labels. It is one of the things I still bristle at. Don't call me liberal or conservative, democrat, republican, or even independent. If I must be "categorized" then call me a pragmatic extremist. But in today's society many people blindly follow or dismiss, without consideration, based on labels given by people in positions of power. Time need not be spent on the actual meaning of the word socialism which has become one of those terms. Those who label socialism as a bad thing profess that we are a capitalist republic and all that is capitalism is the way of our nation. Many of this same group views this country as a Christian nation. Sixty percent of Americans believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ. For those that deeply believe in capitalism and profess to follow Jesus Christ, Jesus was a Socialist. One need only to read the Bible to see that this is true.

For the sake of brevity each of the following examples are a paraphrased interpretation. Feel free to examine the actual text in the version of your choice.

Let us start with St. Matthew, chapter 20. It begins with the parable of an owner of a vineyard who agreed on a daily wage for his laborers and sent them out to work. The story goes on that the man found people in the marketplace who were unemployed at the third, sixth and ninth hours of the day and brought them in to work in his vineyard and paid them the same daily wage as those who had been working since the first of the day. So that's providing work for the unemployed and paying all of them a fair living wage no matter how many hours they had worked. Sounds like a modern government program to provide the unemployed with work. Could even be a union except there was no collective negotiation, just generosity of the employer. Generosity of the employer!? That must be when corporations make large donations to political action committees instead of giving their employees a raise.

St. Mark, chapter 10:17 is the story of a young man who asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life.

Jesus replied that he knows he should keep all the commandments. The man replied that he had observed them all since his youth, what else did he need to do? Jesus told him to sell all his possessions and give to the poor. Talk about redistribution of the wealth at a much greater level than anything I have seen proposed recently. Don't just give some money to the poor. Give it all.

St. Luke, chapter 14:13; "But when thou make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind." Free food for the poor and disabled! Sound just like a food stamps to me.

St. John, chapter 9; Jesus came by a blind man. Blind since the day he was born. His disciples wanted to know what sin had been committed by this man or his family that he should be born blind. Jesus told them that neither he nor any member of his family had sinned to cause his blindness. Jesus restored his sight. On the weekend, for free, no charge, no premium for weekend service. Not even a request for a donation.

Jesus performed approximately 40 recorded miracles in the four Gospels. All but a handful were to heal the sick or raise the dead. Free healthcare for those who had no other recourse. In today's society even with the generosity of many, there are still those that are homeless, hungry and dying from very curable health conditions.

St. Matthew, chapter 25:40-45 I was hungry and you did not feed me, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not take me in, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and you did not visit me..... In as much as you did not do it to one of the least my brethren...you did it not unto me. "I don't want to pay for cheaters". Really! Do you "lose" your internet purchases on your tax return? "Forget" about those cash jobs on your taxes? "Talk" your way out of a speeding ticket? Get a "doctor's note" to avoid jury duty or get a day off of work? "Pretend" your child is younger than they are to get them in cheaper or free? "Slip" an expired coupon past the cashier at the store? St. John, chapter 8:7; He who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone. I would rather catch a cheat after the fact then let a child suffer from drawing the circle too small.

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These are things we must do. Matthew 22:39 Love your neighbor as yourself. Matthew 5:44 Love your enemies. John 13:34 Love one another. The First book of Timothy 6:10, the love of money is the root of all evil. Love your family, neighbors and adversaries are all good. Love your money is not just bad, but evil. Yet in today's society we continue to take money away from those who have no other recourse and dismiss solutions simply because they have been labeled "bad". Demagogues use labels to scare you when you threaten their money. History teaches us that the downfall of great dynasties and nations begins with the selfish greed of those in power for the accumulation of even more wealth and power for themselves while failing to take care of those on whom their wealth is made. We look with great interest in what has been labeled "the Arab Spring". Those who are choosing to rise up against years of oppression to choose this same freedom. We watch them and chastise their leaders for not doing the right thing, while our own nation degrades into a polarization around money.

America was born of freedom. American history is of doing what is right. I haven't heard a word about what is right or wrong, only about how much it costs. We find plenty of money to support our lobbyists and political candidates. It is projected that monies spent in the upcoming presidential primaries and general elections will run into the billions. Corporations can now form Super PACs that are projected to spend in the tens of billions, but apparently still need tax breaks. Yet we are running out of money for our social safety nets. How much do you love your neighbors? How much do you love your adversaries? How about total strangers? How much do you love your country? Maybe you need only answer one question. How much do you love your money?

Health & Healing

Breakthrough

By Mary Summerbell

Six months ago I found out I have intestinal bacterial parasites due to a weakened immune system from gluten intolerance. The diagnosing doctor told me that given the number and types of organisms, and considering my family history and my personal medical profile, it's probable I've had this problem since I was very young, and possible I was born with this sensitivity.

Oddly, perhaps, I was happy to hear this. Not happy to be

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so sick for so long, but happy to at last find out why. After struggling for decades with multiple mental and physical health issues, I was relieved to discover what could be the root cause of them. My attitude was, "If this is what's wrong, and all I have to do to fix it is change my diet, well, I can do that!" I have so deeply longed to feel better all my life that I'm willing to try any sensible method of accomplishing it.

The doctor said she has never seen anyone respond to this news the way I did. Usually people are upset, asking, "Why me?" and "What am I going to do?" Some break down in tears in her office. For me, this information is validation that I'm not crazy. And not a hypochondriac. I haven't been "wrong" all along.

In fact, I was very right. Very perceptive. Very much in touch with what was going on inside me. What led the doctor to suggest testing for this was my detailed description to her of what I was feeling in my body. Nervous. Anxious. Agitated. Tired. Weak. Depressed. I told her I felt like I had ants crawling under my skin, like little spiky things were moving around all over my insides. In my mind's eye I could picture them in clear detail.

Some of these things felt imbedded so deep for so long that it's near impossible to tell what's them and what's me. Some look like barbed hooks, presenting the question of whether better to leave them in or rend my self to get them out. Deciding, my dilemma. Either way, no escape from pain and suffering. How nutty and creepy is that? Like I'm living my own twisted science fiction nightmare. Thinking of creatively cruel ways to torture myself.

Awful feelings have been in me since I can remember. Some extreme or obvious enough to confront. Others more dormant. Subtle. Subliminal. Like a constant, dreadful undercurrent I kept fighting against. But, finally, all so much for so long - so continuous, so persistent, so pervasive that I was caving in. My health was deteriorating in a frightening way. I felt I was fading. Going slowly down a drain. Dying, maybe. I couldn't keep half-living, but I lacked the energy I need to be truly alive.

What I most wanted was to be alone. I felt absolutely driven to hibernation. I wanted people to care about me. Honestly, I would have liked more support. But I was willing to keep only the most necessary social contact. I needed to be alone most of the time, for a long time, to find my way through this.

And it was in isolation, yet connected to Something All Knowing; that answers came to me, that somehow I knew what to do. For months I stayed home as much as possible. I slept away many days. I read books. Watched movies and T.V. Listened to music. Meditated. Prayed. Waited - for I didn't know what. Cried, sometimes. Other times I just sat for hours and did nothing. I put no pressure on myself to do anything particular.

Most of the time I didn't feel much like eating or making meals. But I made sure most of what I did eat was really good food. I called friends if I needed to talk. But mostly I sat alone. Let myself feel. Let myself think. I let myself be.

One day I was inspired to write a concise summary of my medical history. One sheet of paper. No sentences. Just lists, as chronological as possible, of illnesses, allergies, injuries, surgeries, medications, and reactions to them. I

had the strongest feeling, as I was writing, that if I gave this information, in this way, along with a description of my current symptoms, to my Naturopathic doctor, she, with her medical training, would be able to see something in it, some hidden pattern that I wasn't able to see.

I felt really, truly strange as I presented it to her. But I was desperate to feel better. My will to thrive overpowered self doubt. She listened. Looked at my scribbles. Looked up at me and said, "Sounds like parasites to me."

The day I knew the test results confirmed her suspicions, I began changing my diet and taking individualized tinctures to kill the nasty critters.

It's a weird ride. I go at my own pace, to keep my balance on my way. As I incrementally decrease my gluten intake, and intuitively use the tinctures, I go through ebbs and flows of emotion, feeling the waves of internal change. Some days I feel good. Stable. Optimistic. Other days I break down from the intensity of thoughts and feelings that hit as things shift inside me. Moment to moment I just try to keep coping with whatever happens. Sometimes I wonder if I'm getting better at all, or if this is just some new kind of crazy I've never been before. Although this detoxing process is often stressful and/or painful, creating confusing symptoms that are difficult to deal with, for now I trust I'm heading in the right direction, that the roller coaster will end up in a new land, and not back where I got on.

My motivating force is that, in all the inconsistencies, I'm beginning to feel an increasing sense of internal integrity. Not moral integrity, but structural integrity. On a deep, odd, infinitesimal level gaining a gradual, growing sense of a new self. I don't know if I've ever felt it before. It's so subtle. So fundamental. So different from most of what I've ever known. Maybe it's new. Maybe it's old, echoing from great beginnings that didn't have the chance to grow and bloom in the past. Whatever it is, it's real enough, substantial enough, to keep me going hopefully forward.

What is most amazing in all this, for me, besides the miracle of finally getting this information, is the way I got it. Not from a book, or magazine, or the latest health documentary on T.V., or some renowned expert.

I have to laugh. The hundreds, (yes, hundreds, maybe thousands), of books I own, and the way for me to get well didn't come from any of them. It came from me, listening. And then acting on what came to me. The doctor helped me, but based on what I told her. It was from Something All Knowing, in me, that I got what I needed.

As spiritual students, we hear it all the time. "Listen to your intuition. Listen to your inner voice. That tiny whisper of wisdom inside you." I've been doing it for years, but this experience has exponentially reinforced my belief in the absolute necessity of this practice. It means survival. Literally.

I'm proud of myself - for toughing it out. And humbled by the complexity of a process in which I am a tiny but important part. I am thankful for past and ongoing support - for my health care team. I am in awe and gratitude of how hard my body must be working right now. I imagine what's happening - microscopically, metaphysically, metaphorically - inside me. Most of my life I've been my own best science project, so this experience is no

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exception. I observe, with curious detachment, what I am simultaneously deeply, intimately involved in. I wonder how it will turn out. What grade will I get from the universe on this lesson?

While I'm waiting for the results, and working hard to make them happen, I patiently remind myself that even if this shift is a big difference for me, it's not the answer to everything. Nothing is a panacea. But I do hope, to quote myself, that in my lifelong, self-motivated quest to "overcome my genetic destiny" this is the big nut I've been trying to crack all along.

If so, ahead for me is a lifetime challenge of dietary restrictions. Currently a daunting thought. But the possibility of truly good health is great motivation. Odds are it will get easier, over time. And, with help, I'll figure out the optimum options for me. I feel I am well on my way.

Spirituality

A Possible Creation Story by Frank Conerton

I have wondered, for most of my life, why this world and this life are not considered good enough. Almost all of the spiritual schools I have read about say that Earth is a testing ground for us humans to develop into other beings. We are somehow stuck here until we ascend to another plane or planet, or just get off the wheel of life.

I am not saying that humanity as it exists now is the peak of existence. I am saying that we do not believe that being human is good in itself, but we need that belief as a starting point to explore what it means to be human. Otherwise, we are on a journey to stop being human in order to become something not human.

I was raised in a religious home and went to religious schools. I was taught that this world was a place of evil and this life was a test to get into a better spiritual world. We were to be in the world but not of the world. We were to rise above the mud and blood to die and go to heaven.

These beliefs are based in the biblical story that was written down about 4500 years ago in the Middle East. That region, the geographical root of western civilization, has gone through tremendous environmental change in the distant human past. At one time, the region was rich and lush. Now it is desert. It is fairly easy to understand the

people who lived in that region, generation after generation, collected stories of a vengeful god that kicked them out of a garden and cursed them to a difficult life.

From our present perspective of time and knowledge, we can see the natural Earth processes involved in the environmental changes. As the last ice age ended global weather changed. Areas that had been bathed in life giving water changed from verdant savannah to parched desert. We have no reason to create a vengeful god to explain the changes. We do not need stories that show a cursed humanity. But these ideas are still deeply rooted in our culture. Why do we need stories that teach this world is a punishment or banishment from a mystical "good life"?

We could start writing a new creation story, one that accepts human life on Earth as good in itself. Here is one such story.

A Possible Creation Story

Before Mind and Being,
There was God.
Complete,
Perfect, All Potential

God, aching, yearning for
expression, until
Potential exploded into Possibility,
Manifesting all Being.

All possibilities:
All possible being-ness,
All possible consciousness,
All possible universes.

Within the infinity of all universes
Within our universe of space and time
is God; the subsisting fabric of every
quantum, particle, atom and molecule.

The molecules of Earth,
Dancing to the Godly urge for expression
Combine and recombine,
becoming mineral, vegetable, animal.

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Becoming human.
God, being human, being us;
creators,
yearning for expression.

From this story we can believe that God is everywhere and everything. When everything that exists is made from the fabric of God, we are perfectly human. When everything we touch is the fabric of God, there is no better, more spiritual, place to be. We simply are God, being human, being us. We are in the perfect position to discover what is possible for us humans to achieve or become.

Ask yourself if you can revel in the joy of being human, living in this glorious world. Or do you feel this is only a proving ground for some future, more spiritual manifestation? Using the bible creation story, one answer is clear. But changing the creation story, naming ourselves creators instead of a flawed species, gives us a different path. Naming ourselves creators forces us to stop asking why a loving god allows war and starvation and children's suffering. Creators must ask why we humans allow these things to happen. What could this Earth become if we accepted our humanity?

What God Tells Me

By Annie Frank

This is my first time writing an article for anything read by a real community, so I hope you like it... and I promise that's my real name.

Ever since I was a very young tadpole, I've wondered about things: things like "Why is this all happening?" and "What happens to us when we die?" and "What makes people so ridiculous?" I mostly blame – er, thank – my father for these thoughts instilled in my young mind. He suffers from severe spinal injury and cannot work, go outside the home, or have a positive attitude about many things. Without any adult interaction (besides my mother who spends much of her time working and sleeping), he has always treated myself and my older brother as if we were adults. He discussed things with us that no other child would, or (arguably) should ever have to, think about, things regarding the true nature of the world and all of its evils (you know, money, greed, politicians, that sort of thing) and his frustrations regarding them. Now, as you might expect, this did take a pretty serious toll on my green and delicate mind: I suffered from terrible depression, paranoia, anxiety, and general stress during most of my childhood years. Don't get me wrong, I enjoyed spending time with other children, reading books, drawing pictures and writing stories, good childhood stuff, but as I entered my pre-teen years, well, I was pretty messed up.

This is not a sad story, however, as my dad's influence has proven to be the best gift God has given me since life itself. You see, I was being introduced to some pretty mature concepts that expanded my thinking beyond recess and who I sat with at lunch, and into the realms of mysterious and philosophical questioning, my young, innoce "the-world-can't-really-be-that-bad" mind searching for explanations for the complex and gloomy realities my dad told me of.

This led me to these questions: Why is it all happening? What is it all for? What does it mean? I was driven to the

nearly maddening thought of today's human "civilization..." sending our children through schools that they hate, only so they may join the nation as one of millions of ants working, perpetuating the machine, building buildings and skyscrapers and retail stores, fighting wars, watching television and having babies and dying and it all going on forever and ever without anything really happening... and just why? What is it all for... what is the goal?

Of course, in response to this, my dad simply said, "You're asking the meaning of life. You could go crazy thinking about that."

This took me slightly aback. So that's it, I thought. What is the meaning of life?

I couldn't have been older than eleven.

Now that I had a concrete question to ask instead of myriad loose ends in my head, something remarkable happened. The answer came. I didn't think it at all remarkable at the time – it just made sense to me, I just figured it out. I asked the question, and my mind came up with the most obvious answer.

There is a reason we humans have such affinity towards tales, stories in books, legends with cute morals and lessons. Life itself IS a story, and each of us is the protagonist. We grow, we change, we face challenges and overcome them, we learn, we become better people; we suffer, we cry, we laugh, we feel, we love. Put simply, we experience, and that is the point.

The meaning of life is to live it.

It didn't stop there. *Why?* my young mind wondered. My mind immediately responded. We must learn all of the lessons life on Earth has to teach us, and then we will graduate to places bigger and brighter. We must learn to overcome nasty human habits and tendencies, escape our temptations that we so easily succumb to: greed, anger, violence, laziness, addiction, selfishness, pessimism, doubt, fear... and learn to embrace nice things like joy, friendship, love, unity, utmost appreciation for life and all the beauty in it... concepts and lifestyles more... Heavenly.

That was it. Heaven. With every learning experience on Earth, evils are to be wrung out of us until we have learned all we need to graduate into Heaven. This process may even take lifetimes on Earth to complete. How can there be a Heaven, an alleged perfect world of united souls existing together in perfect love and harmony (and also full of wonders, beauties, and mysteries so great our feeble human minds would break at the thought of them), if its inhabitants have not first learned how such an existence may be sustained?

It was so easy. I have never once doubted my philosophy; I have complete faith in it, simply because my own mind came up with it and it makes perfect sense to me. I did not consider it at the time, but the source of those obvious yet elusive answers was what many call intuition. I pondered, and in an instant, I thought of the answer, without anyone having given me such ideas. As it is commonly said, there is something magical about our intuition. It is the voice of our enigmatic subconscious mind, our connection to the deeper, higher, greater existence.

Here is where it gets really magnificent. If our

subconscious mind is made of wisdom, abilities, and who-knows-what like so many believe, wouldn't it make sense for it to be a connection to that Heaven, that loving, perfect world of all-knowing souls? Could it be that this mysterious conglomerate Heaven of souls is, with all its grand secrets, what so many refer to as God? It is so often preached that "God is inside all of us," and "We were created in God's image," so what if this subconscious mind of ours, the source of all my answers, is a fragment, lodged inside the very core of our Earth-bodies, of the divine world of unified soul and love, the force that created us, and the place where we shall all end up?

When you have a question, just ask, meditate. By clearing your head of "chatter," the loud voices that are not the subconscious's voice of intuition, your mind will become quiet enough for that "still, small voice within" to be heard. If you have a hard time or do not know how to meditate, you have virtually limitless resources for help on the Internet, at the library, and at spiritual growth and awareness shops such as Earthsong in Janesville. Another path to connecting to your subconscious, your inner-God, is living a more Godly lifestyle, embracing aspects of and relevant to God, Heaven, the "Soul Conglomerate." Love yourself: do yoga, eat healthy, go outside, indulge in wholesome, innocent-hearted Earthly pleasures that do not harm yourself or others. Avoid thinking negatively in any way; creating your own joys in your life is a good way to keep negativity at bay. Surround yourself with good smells, decadent foods, and comfy clothes... not to mention people you love. Love others: donate, volunteer, knit socks and blankets and sweaters for the homeless, do Meals On Wheels, build a sculpture out of sticks at a city park, be nice, paint a mural in an unsuspecting place, write something beautiful for the Conscious Community newsletter. Have confidence in yourself – after all, you've got God INSIDE you! If you have issues with confidence, start small. Bake cookies for someone as a surprise. If you don't bake, write a little song, doodle up a picture, give a hug or a helping hand, anything you can think of that will yield a happy result and you can say "I did that!" about.

Just do what your intuition tells you!

I am only seventeen years old and have dedicated my life to these philosophies. I am no longer a slave to depression and paranoia, to the evils and worries of Earth. I face them with courage, strength, logic, open-mindedness, confidence, faith, and the knowledge that with every fight I will learn and grow stronger and better as a person, evils being wrung from my soul and Heavenly aspects being planted in their place. I work to maintain and strengthen my connection to my subconscious. I do what God tells me. She told me to write this article for you, and I have, with hopes that connection to Her, Him, It, God, Heaven, the Soul-Conglomerate, your own subconscious and its voice: your very own intuition, will bring about the ineffable change, personal power, satisfaction, joy... none of these words are good enough... let's say Godliness, to your life as it has to mine.

"And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it."

— Paulo Coelho (The Alchemist)

Pain Avoidance - a Gamer's Perspective

By Brian Burger

The intrepid group of superheroes dove headlong deep into the caverns of pain. The villains had lured them here to trap them in a dangerous web built of good and noble intentions. The heroes looked like something straight out of a comic book and they worked as a team to hunt down their enemies, avoiding all forms of distractions thrown their way, even those that glistened with gold, silver and precious gems. In the end, the villains failed and the heroes overcame their pain and sacrifices to enjoy the satisfaction that comes from accomplishing a difficult goal together.

Ironically, the people driving the actions and dialogue of those courageous and determined icons of justice and goodness were actually plain ordinary people like you and me. They were avoiding life's real challenges, instead skillfully and bravely tackling fake conflicts in a shared computer game called City of Heroes. Indeed, I named the "toon" I play in that group "Void Dance" as a constant reminder to myself of the reason I play.

If only real life were as easy as the virtual world, where diverse people from all over come together with a common purpose in co-operative teams to take on the world's toughest, most painful problems. Instead, we have those who feel powerless acting out their power fantasies online with no impact on the very real threats and opportunities. The virtual life, though rewarding for a short period of time, cannot compare to the sense of accomplishment, pride and joy brought to us by living and loving in the real world as we were intended. So why do people play these games? Why do some become so addicted to them? Is it a form of giving up on life? Is it just a brief respite from what can seem like a harsh and cruel reality? This article won't go into the nature of addiction, adrenalin or the very real-feeling emotional connections made online. But I do think that this is one more example of symptoms related to avoidance.

The fact is, real life relationships and interactions can be very emotionally charged, even painful. Our bodies are

programmed to avoid pain. In fact, pain can be defined as a collection of warning signs from the body that something needs your attention right now! The old vaudeville joke goes something like, "Doctor it hurts when I raise my arm. Can you help me?" Of course I can... Stop raising your arm!" Well usually, when we experience pain we stop doing whatever we think is causing it as fast as we can. There is a certain amount of good sense in that.

However, This avoidance can lead us toward even more pain. One of my favorite quotations comes from R. D. Laing: "There is a great deal of pain in life and perhaps the only pain that can be avoided is the pain that comes from trying to avoid pain."

Whether your distractions take the form of alcohol, movies, reading, obsessive hobbies, or recreational drug use, it's the fact that you are missing out on real life out there that is the real tragedy. What turns hobbies, entertainment and other forms of respite into avoidant behavior can be measured by negative consequences of inaction, opportunities missed and relationships left without nurturing.

Perhaps we do have something to learn from our "toons" after all. Those qualities we admire in them: courage, diligence and the ability to overcome their pain through sacrifice and teamwork; these are all abilities we have been given. We have all the bravery we need inside us to see even painful tasks in front of us clearly. We can gracefully take the steps necessary to live in the real world with all of it's unfairness and inequities. And we can do it without causing unnecessary pain for others or ourselves. By all means don't go out looking for pain. And if you can simply "stop doing that" then stop. If, however, you are tempted to avoid looking at a problem squarely and catch yourself playing "Void Dance" too much, then it's time. Time to look inside and find the courage you were given and walk forward into the light. That's when you dive into the pain and stop trying to dodge the matter. Pain is temporary; life lessons are permanent. This very simple concept transformed my life. May you remember your inner courage as well.

I'll leave you with a quote from Mary Tyler Moore: "Take chances, make mistakes. That's how you grow. Pain nourishes your courage. You have to fail in order to practice being brave."



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Psychology

Is Your Age Just a Number?

By Doris Deits

It seems that most people have a particular age in mind that affirms they have reached an undeniable and inescapable realization – “I’m OLD.” For my sister, that age was 40. I remember her emotional angst at the time. I just couldn’t understand how that one little number could be so disheartening. I chuckled to myself, vowing that would never happen to me.

So here I am, sixteen years later, just a few weeks before my 50th birthday and I can honestly say that I totally understand what my sister was going through. My internal launch sequence for an emotional meltdown was just attached to a different number. My voice now rings with the same dawning realization of the inescapable horror of becoming old that my sister had all those years ago. When I speak the words ‘I’m going to be 50’ the weight of doom and hopelessness rolls off my tongue like a ball and chain, linking me to slow and sure demise. ‘It’s all downhill now’ a voice whispers.

I find myself wondering why everyone wants to live so long. Our society doesn’t value old people. Nobody wants old people. Nobody wants to BE old people. Where do we soon-to-be-old-but-not-yet dead people go? How long before wrinkles become the only thing people see when they look at me? Which organ will shut down first? What the hell is a colonoscopy?! What happened to my youth – I’m not ready to be old yet! Stop the clock!!! How will I get to the other side of 50 without some seriously strong medication?

To relieve the panic, I went to lunch with a friend of similar age. She, too, felt the same urge to slap people who thought turning 50 was ‘Awesome.’ We laughed about our versions of this getting old conundrum and joked about the hypocrisy of our society because it puts such little value on people after a certain age. But by golly they will take your money for the anti-aging products! We decided the fear of aging was an elaborate marketing ploy. Sure, aging has its downside, but it’s not all bad, right?

My friend and I both agreed that we certainly didn’t want to relive the challenges of getting this far in life a second time. The first time around was rough enough! The wisdom I’ve acquired thus far has brought me to a place of understanding and contentment for which I am truly grateful. If the price for this wisdom is a few wrinkles and gray hair, so be it. It happens to everyone. But why aren’t we more celebratory about the good parts of aging? We need *something* to look forward to, don’t we?

Personally, I feel that I have a lot more to offer my family and my community at the age of 50 than I did at 20. Quite honestly, my head just wasn’t screwed on straight ‘til I hit about 40. As I look at the 20 and 30 somethings around me, I’d say that even though they can be pretty awesome and insightful, they still need a little more cooking time, just like I did.

I’ve also found that most ‘older’ (but not yet senile) people are more calm and centered. Not a lot upsets them. They’re more laid back and accepting of things around them. There seems to be an appreciation and enjoyment of life not typically experienced in their earlier years. Plus, they have absolutely no sympathy for anyone younger!

I think we should be talking about these ripe old ages as a time of enjoyment and fulfillment. I figure I’ve still got a decade or two before its time to crack open the Depends and order a set of dentures. I plan on the best years of my life being ahead of me because I finally like being ‘me’ and I no longer care what other people think – another getting old perk!

So as I toast myself into the world of becoming a ‘crone’ (ouch, still hurts!), I pledge to transform this next phase of life from a perceived horror into a thing of exquisite beauty, even if my joints do get a little stiff!

Environmental

The Long Emergency

By Jeanie Johnson

“There will be hunger instead of plenty, cold where there was once warmth, effort where there was leisure, sickness where there was health, and violence where there was peace.”

The Long Emergency ~James Howard Kunstler

This summer will no doubt break old and set new climate records in the Midwest and in many other parts of the United States. As I write Oklahoma and Texas are living through an extended drought that makes the 1930s look not as bad as we used to believe. Combine that with what is now being called The Great Recession (some say The Great Depression Part II) and we have witnessed (and suffered) the beginning of what author James Howard Kunstler terms *The Long Emergency*. Kunstler writes that this time will be characterized by intense climate change, economic roller-coaster rides, shortages and/or outages not only in electrical service but in goods and services as well and upheavals across the globe. It all sounds familiar.

Andy and I attended the Ogle County Energy Fair in August at the Fair grounds. It was wonderful to spend two days with people who were thinking about sustainability, about the drawing down of resources, reducing the human footprint, and discovering ways to re-connect with neighbors in turn building resilient communities. We were in heaven! Following five years of intensive study on peak oil, resource depletion, global water issues, global climate changes and more, we were both beginning to feel like we’d somehow donned hair shirts and were wandering in the desert. As one author we read commented on his own journey through this awakening and what happened when he ventured out to suggest these topics to friends, “I’m a lot like a skunk at the party!” The Energy Fair (there’s one in Custer, WI, too) was the proverbial shot in the arm, we felt like we’d come home. We attended session after session on things like: Finding A Sense of Place, Building

The American Dream Home Out of Trash, Seed Saving, Straw/Clay Construction Techniques in Urban Settings, Bee Keeping, Updated Solar Technology, etc.

By the time we left the Fair grounds we were smiling and energized. Perhaps, we thought, there are places to connect with others who are interested in preserving as much of the wild as we still can, learning how to live with much less, re-evaluating their lives in light of the challenges coming ahead, recognizing that the fossil fuel era is over and that the changes we have set in motion in our environment are going to bring us issues we have, so far, willfully ignored and denied but which will test us all as individuals and as communities. This summer was an example of that right here in Wisconsin with the sudden storms becoming intense in such a short time, downpours, violent lightening and near-hurricane force winds. Kunstler reminds us that in *The Long Emergency* these will be the new order of the day not a once in a few years occurrence.

Many presenters at the Energy Fair spoke on community – what it means, what it is, what it could become. All of them were speaking from direct experience. They were involved in community-building wherever they found themselves; rural, urban, even suburban. They brought stories of how others can do this critical work without running afoul of fears we all have: Will I like these people? What if my beliefs are different than theirs? How do we resolve differences? One gentleman who spoke to these struggles told us this story. He and his wife had moved to a very rural area in Northern Illinois. So rural that not much went on in the little town of 515. There were no cell towers, no high speed, no wireless, no Walmarts, no 10-Plexes, no big box anythings. There were lots of big trucks and lots of guns. He decided that in order to begin the process of community building – because he and his wife wanted a community – he needed to get to know his neighbors. When he told someone about that they shook their head and said, “Jack, those people aren't like you. They've got guns and they want to be left alone.” But he didn't buy that and figured he didn't have anything to lose so he drove out to the closest house and introduced himself. Over the course of several months he got to know pretty much everyone in the town and when he called around for volunteers to help clean up an 1800's cemetery, the folks who came in droves were the people others had warned him about. He reminded the audience that the coming long emergency will not be a time when we can flit from here to there looking for just the right people with whom to live in harmony. The music is soon to stop. We need to take a chair. Whether we live in Janesville or in Arcata, California (a town Andy and I always dreamed might be our last home) we will need to work with what we have, build with the folks who are our neighbors and weather the coming storms together as best as we can.

When I studied global poverty issues in the 1980s in Mexico I learned something that wasn't on the course outline. About four days into the first session a member of the U.S. delegation died suddenly when she aspirated medication. It was a horrible experience to be so far from home, in a community that did not have access to our version of health care and away from friends and family. The woman was the mother of two young boys and the wife of a distraught, grieving man who had to make

arrangements from Wisconsin via the military attaché in Mexico City and with the aid of the American Consulate. Our friend's body laid in state at the program's hacienda for two days before being flown back to Wisconsin. During those days something exceptional happened. Common people from all over the city came to pay their respects to us and to the woman whose body lay quietly in a small room. These particular people were from the barrios, ravine and railroad settlements where the most abject conditions greeted us each day we went to sit with the residents. Homes were made of cardboard boxes and corrugated tin, water containers sat in the midst of cheek-to-jowl cramped spaces to catch the infrequent rains. Children played in dirt where nothing had grown for decades. Yet these folks walked across the city, in many cases more than seven miles, to sit with us in our shock and grief. They brought bouquets of exquisite flowers purchased at the open market and offered them to us with warm hugs and soft touches. They stayed to pray with us, sing with us and, on the second day, rise to speak to us about their own experiences with loss. It was a remarkable experience and one that has stayed with me all these years. It was community without fear, connection without judgment, compassion with deep reverence.

I say to myself that if these impoverished people can live with so little, in such destitute conditions, and smile wide, embrace without hesitation, give from their hearts without holding back and work diligently to celebrate connection then we can all do that. We can all build resiliency now in our own communities with the people who live next door, who have differing views and beliefs and in situations that are challenging. One of the things I learned from my time in Mexico is that those of us in the over-developed world have a very hard time letting go of expectations that we can always have, do and be more by our standards of wealth and power. We also have trouble letting go of the trappings the wealth bought for us and so, as one presenter said on Sunday, “Perhaps we should not have In God We Trust on our money. Perhaps we should have In Stuff We Trust as we, and the rest of the world, are drowning in our stuff.” In our rush to have, do and be more we have missed the beauty and wonder of community we could have built, and still can, with our own hands from the ground up with all the warts and struggles that go with that process.

Kunstler's book *The Long Emergency* is a novel. It is set in the not-too-distant future. The town in the book has become the quote at the beginning of my article. It doesn't have to be like this. Not all of the future has to be dangerous and bleak. However we would do well to consider it a just-in-time cautionary tale that has deep relevance for us right now. Things are about to change dramatically, in fact we are seeing that as it is happening. It is time for us to be about the work of connections, community and resiliency.

For the Seventh Generation.