

BECOMING PART OF THE SOLUTION (PART 10)



This is the final part of our series: COVID 19 – A Mental Health Response. We have tackled so many issues along the way and tried to offer clear and constructive information and relevant advice to help you make the best decisions around your mental health. Our hope is that part 10 will help you to cement that position further, as it underlines that we are much more powerful than we realise. However, we cannot sit around waiting for positive change, we need to go and claim it.

“We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.”

Albert Einstein (1879 -1955)

There are two choices

There are essentially two options we have in terms of how we respond to life; we can either be part of the problem, or part of the solution. Being part of the problem is easy, it requires little effort. All we need do is continue surrendering to the old familiar patterns, continuing to be victims of our pasts, blaming everything and everyone for our misfortune. And then nothing changes – in fact, in most cases things only get worse.

We have become so effective at being part of the problem that we barely notice what we are doing to ourselves and how we unconsciously add to the pot of negativity bubbling over in the world.

We maintain this position with thoughts such as, “I’m only human”, “this always happens to me”, “I knew it”, “what’s the point, there’s nothing I can do”. These thoughts may seem harmless, but they carry the message of resignation, victimhood and defeat. Over time they become part of our belief systems and they tell us and others that things are fated to be negative and there’s little we can do. It’s important to remember, there is a deep and subtle relationship between thoughts and outcomes. What we hold in our minds, we attract into our lives.

When our negative mindset leads to a negative outcome, we perversely take pleasure in claiming we were right, even when it is our own growth that is stunted. Sadly, there is a strange sense of comfort and familiarity that we feel as we watch our unwanted prophecies being fulfilled.

There is no joy in this mental pose, yet we cling to it as a result of fear and familiarity. There is no peace either, as our minds become places of self-harm, trapped by the notion that remaining within our limitations is somehow better than risking what it takes to become all that we could be. It is this fear of failure, or maybe fear of success, that maintains our unconscious donations to the ills of the world. We remain part of the problem, whilst simultaneously complaining.

When we let go of what we are ‘certain’ about and fight passionately for, we then discover whether our certainty and passion is aligned to the right things. At this point we let go of what we’ve inherited and been taught... and we go in pursuit of the truth about ourselves. As a result, we see everything more clearly.

Those who adopt this position quickly discover that opinion is the enemy of truth. And so, they no longer live by the theories and ideologies they’ve absorbed; instead, they test whether these philosophies stand up to the rigour of an honest audit – which involves conducting a systematic interrogation of all their beliefs.

As you explore your inner world, seeking to better understand who you are and what is worthy of your passion and loyalty, you are able to make contact with your true nature (the authentic self) and step away from what you’ve become (the acquired self). This is often scary business, because it invites you to put aside the ego of certainty and start again with no sense of what comes next. Therefore, courage is needed. It is those with a courageous and honest heart who renounce certainty, dogma, prejudice and transcend the limitations of opinion, as they venture into the uncharted regions of their inner world.

This inward bound journey asks us to move away from the distraction of immediacy and give up the idea that ‘we must have it now’. It asks us to question whether the material world is best placed to meet our needs. If we choose to move in this direction, we begin to see the vastness of the inner cosmos, a world filled with unlimited possibilities. The more time we spend in this space, the more we will be able to fulfil our potential.

The other advantage of the inward bound journey is that we can see our inadequacies, doubts, anxieties, fears and the inertia that holds us back. This presents us with the opportunity to stop running away from our demons and turn and face them. We can start to have honest

conversations with our hearts. Conversations free from condemnation which enables us to hear the real messages of our souls. From this position we can become part of the solution... no longer deceived by the external chatter of the modern world, or by our own fears and limitations.

Who's doing the thinking?

Many of us believe we are best defined by the thing we are holding, chasing, hoping for, that thing which will make us complete. And yet when we get it or get there, rarely is that the case. In fact, most of us at that point are driven to try even harder to get the next thing or reach the next destination, which we are sure will complete us. This constant reaching for something, keeps us stuck, believing we are free, but we are in fact trapped by the external world with its countless distractions, mounting expectations and demands.

Breaking our long association with the problem and becoming part of the solution is quite a challenge... but it is a challenge we can certainly win. We just need to better understand the maze we are trapped in. For that we need to change our perspective and develop a bird's eye view.

Every day we are bombarded with messages, information and data that moulds our opinions and beliefs. The social media platforms are designed to influence and manipulate our minds. They fiercely compete with one another for our most precious commodity, our attention. They know when they have our attention, that our hearts and destinies are open to negotiation on their terms.

Tristan Harris, who in his former life worked for Google as a design ethicist, is one of a growing number of commentators who is speaking out against this mass manipulation. He clearly and passionately tells the story of how only a handful of people are influencing what billions of us are thinking – shaping our choices and decisions in every area of our lives.

Harris is now a leader of the Time Well Spent movement and is calling for a 'design renaissance'; where media giants, like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram move away from winning the audiences' attention in the name of securing greater profitability. This pursuit of profit has created a race to the bottom in terms of ethics and values, as these have been ditched in the name of greater market share and global influence. Harris coined the phrase 'downgrading', to describe what technology is helping to do to our minds.

What Harris's revelations have made clear is that we need an ethical strategy to deal with the questionable practices that many of the media moguls and creatives of Silicon-Valley are adopting. These institutions and their think tanks are engaged in brain washing on a grand scale. They are using aspects of behavioural psychology to develop sophisticated software, intuitive algorithms and apps, which keep us reaching for something outside of ourselves, often something we don't need. As a result, we are not turning within and asking the important questions; seeking out the real joy providers and peace givers.

Until there is an ethical revolution, changing the way that social media companies are run, we need to become our own regulators. At the current rate of progress, an industry wide ethical strategy will not come fast enough to save us. We are a long way from the changes that are needed – and so our slavish addiction to the internet and information technology means we are unwittingly part of the problem, whether we are aware of it or not.

We need to emancipate ourselves by making better choices and a good place to start is by changing our relationship with the instruments of the virtual world. Begin by reducing your time with your devices. Mindlessly surfing the Internet, caught up in meaningless commentary and inane conversations on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter only serves to maintain a superficial consciousness. It's important to make what contact you have with your devices and the various media useful, constructive and positive. If what you're immersed in is not improving and expanding your mind and bringing joy to your heart, then it's time to look for a new strategy.

“The real danger is not that computers will begin to think like humans, but humans will begin to think like computers”.

Sydney Harris (1917- 1986)

Our relationship with technology is not the only way that we can become part of the problem, it's just that in the 21st century it's arguably the easiest way for us to unconsciously get entangled in the web of negativity, without even realising it.

Other contributors to the problem

An attitude of complaint is another way in which we become negative contributors. The critical and complaining mind makes itself unwell and it also contaminates the atmosphere. It brings others down, as it consumes hope and joy and replaces it with doom and gloom. The complaining mind rarely finds good in anything and doesn't take responsibility for making changes where changes are needed. It's this lack of taking responsibility that maintains the problem because this approach thinks someone else should fix it, when it is you and I that need to fix the problem. Only then will there be a lasting solution. We need to stop playing the blame game if we want to be free from what binds us.

Complacency too binds us to the problem. It promises much and delivers little. Complacency is filled with good intention – and when it doesn't deliver it has no shortage of excuses. The road to hell really is paved with good intentions – and so if we want things to change, we need to

ask ourselves what we can do, however small, to make a difference. We have extraordinary amounts of creative intelligence, but we need to focus our minds on what we want to achieve in order to convert negative energy into positive energy.

Another way in which we become part of the problem is when we are dogmatic and fixed in our point of view. We fall into the trap of believing the way we see things is 'the' way to see things and from that point we become blind. Reality cannot be understood by simply viewing it through one's own eyes. Only when we develop the art of viewing life from perspectives other than our own, can we begin to see the whole picture. This takes practice, patience and humility. Only then can we develop this level of awareness and understanding.

Silos vs synergy

Our preoccupation with silos has further deceived us and kept us entangled in the problem. The modern world is obsessed with specialisms, which has led to the compartmentalising of what it means to be human. Every aspect of human enquiry has progressively narrowed its focus, trying to better understand the human experience – to such an extent that we've stopped seeing the connections between things and where they overlap. This reductive approach has created a situation where experts, even within the same disciplines, are often at odds with one another and those who are from different traditions are rarely having a conversation at all. This sustains the worst elements of the siloed approach and fosters a competitive culture where rather than looking for synergy (the whole is greater than the sum of its parts) we're pursuing what we perceive to be progress.

Synergy does not adopt the arrogance of a separatist or individualistic point of view. It knows that each silo has something valuable to offer and so it seeks out the similarities and tries to understand the differences. By understanding the differences bridges between the various elements can be built. This approach is much needed if we are to transform the fortunes of humankind, as there is no one body of knowledge that can provide us with all the answers. Whatever the question, synergy is the answer.

Another dimension to the way silos effect and infect our lives is well demonstrated in the corporate and health sectors, where different teams and departments within the same organisation, act in their own departmental interests. This is not always aligned to the organisational ethos and philosophy. Operating in this way leads to businesses and institutions becoming inefficient and ineffective.

The 'wisdom of the whole', which comes from the collective knowledge and experience of the many, is replaced by self-interest and competitiveness, which leads to a disintegration of the corporate agenda. What follows is a lowering of morale and the undermining of the spirit of the organisation.

We need to be careful not to allow the siloed way of thinking to contaminate our own lives. Whether it's where we work, our friendship groups or our families, whenever we remain trapped in a point of view and battle to hold onto it, either because of self-interest or a need to

be right, at that point we are part of the problem. We need to reach beyond the boundaries of our own experiences and perspectives, employing empathy and sensitivity. We need to really listen and be open to other interpretations and possibilities.

The truth is often found at the point of convergence, at the confluence between many perspectives, ideologies and disciplines. Each one being assessed on its merits, actively looking for similarities rather than condemning differences. You will find that when you're able to step away from seeing the world only through your eyes, that you are able to see the world through the eyes of the many and it's at that point, that opinion falls away and the deeper meaning to things is unveiled.

Hopefully, you can see through these illustrations how we can unknowingly become part of the problem, allowing our power to seep away. There are too many examples to list here. However, a good touchstone that will help you to realise you've stumbled into this position, is to question whether you are going against your heart. In other words, are you doing something which makes you feel uncomfortable within yourself; ill at ease with your choice and/or decision? When we are not honouring our hearts, we are not being true to ourselves... at that point we are standing in the problem, maintaining the 'hole in the soul'.

The way forward

The problem and the solution are never far apart. Where you find one you will always find the other. One of the primary reasons we go around so many of the same loops is because we are running away from our problems. Little do we realise they can never be outrun – they travel with us wherever we go. Even holidays, retreats and a change of scenery only offer temporary relief to what we are feeling. These are not solutions to our problems because they only manage the symptoms by offering us some distraction for a time. In the end our problem, until resolved, will tirelessly gnaw away at us. The way forward is often straightforward, but it's the application that causes most people to struggle with personal transformation.

The first step is to accept your current position. Being unhappy with where you are, even worse despising it, keeps you fixed in that position. You will find, despite your best efforts, that you won't be able to move. The disgruntled spirit is like the fly that gets caught in the spider's web. The more it tries to free itself, the more entangled it becomes.

Acceptance is a very positive state. It's not to be confused with resignation or defeat. It's the realisation that when we accept things, our energy is conserved and consolidated, enabling us to focus it in the direction of our choice. It is at this point that we can turn and look our demons in the eyes. This means trying to understand the problem and how it manifests in our lives. The more we understand its aetiology (it's evolution and progression), the more we can calm and tame its influences.

It's important to remember that the power that our problems have over us is bound up in the fear that they generate. They endlessly remind us that we are not good enough and we will be found out. The more we believe this narrative the more we become what we think the world

wants us to be. As a result, we get caught in life's subplots, generating numerous characters playing different parts according to our audience... all in the name of trying to belong. Rarely are we true to ourselves.

Armed with this awareness, we can befriend those parts of us we deny, justify and passionately defend. By forming a bond of friendship, we create an energetic shift where the energy works with us rather than against us.

A useful starting point in creating an inner dialogue is asking the question, "old friend, dear friend, what have you come to teach me?" If you ask this question with a sincere heart and are open to the answer, then a new dialogue begins. Listening in this way opens the door to many insights. Opening your heart to hear the sounds from within, does not lead to confusion and despair. Although some of these feelings may emerge, they will fade as your loving acceptance leads to friendship, clarity and love, giving rise to hope, faith and confidence.

Focusing your attention on the internal tensions with compassion is liberating. It ends the relentless struggle of trying to be something other than yourself. It brings calmness to the spirit and clarity to the mind. When you view your problems in this way your creative intelligence acquires the fuel it needs, enabling it to find the solutions it was previously denied.

Conscious contact

The more you engage in these heartfelt conversations the more you will make conscious contact. Conscious contact is remembering that a relationship with yourself is as important as every other relationship that you have. In fact, it's the most important relationship, because it enables you to bring your very best to each moment, to each action, transaction and interaction.

Those who are in conscious contact with themselves are truly present in the moment. This means they listen and connect, undeterred by the dissenting voices from within. They have a quiet river of self-respect and confidence ever flowing. They feel at ease with themselves and are not intimidated by life.

By making conscious contact every day, or as often as you can, you will start to like yourself, and with practice and time, you will come to love yourself. Self-love is not a conceited or vain place, it is a state of consciousness where we are liberated from our mistakes, regrets, unhealthy habits, fears and doubts. It's a place of acceptance, which is only arrived at through the gentle hand of compassion, which continuously strokes and nurtures our hearts.

Throughout this series, you have been offered numerous examples of how to make conscious contact. Remember, there is no panacea. No one thing will make you well. That's the myth of the modern age. Immerse yourself in those introspective activities that help you to feel most connected to yourself and pursue them with passion and sincerity. Also, work out which other activities and pastimes bring you joy and pleasure – and ensure that these are adequately represented in your life too.

Make these activities pillars of your peace palace. The term we have repeatedly used for these pillars is non-negotiables. When you make the joy givers and the peace makers non-negotiable in your life, then you permanently become part of the solution. If you haven't done this yet, one thing you might consider doing is re-reading part 6 (The Story of Health) and creating your own Story of Health plan. This will help you to develop the momentum for positive change.

A book of insights

Those who are inspired to create a book of insights find it is an uplifting pastime and a powerful catalyst for change. This simple exercise demands very little by way of time and energy and yet gives an enormous return.

Firstly, get yourself a nice notebook, something attractive and appealing – whatever your choice, you want to be drawn to it whenever you see it.

Over time, gather comments, affirmations and quotes that inspire you – statements that have been made by others that have illuminated something you'd previously not seen or understood. These may come from people in the public eye, or those who are influential in some way... but they could just as easily come from a friend, a neighbour or it may be something you've overheard.

Some of the things you choose to record may have come from listening to a play, watching a movie or from a dream, or a daydream. They may be the by-product of a meditation, or something inspirational you were reading. Sometimes the insight will have come out of your own mouth and surprise you with its clarity and power.

You can assemble the book of insights in whichever way suits you best. Generally, people find it beneficial to have only one quote, mantra or insight on each page. You may choose to build your book around themes and specific topics or let it organically develop. Make the book your own. Do what 'feels' right. You can if you wish, accompany the thoughts with appropriate images, to further underline the message.

Once you've built a collection of insights you can use the book as a reference and a guide. You may pick it up and just look through it from time to time and remind yourself of its contents. Or you may choose to use it more intuitively, by holding the book whilst focusing on a concern or question and then randomly opening the book and seeing what insight awaits you. This can be a valuable guidance system at times when you need direction and it can enhance your moral compass.

You need to interact with your book of insights regularly to enjoy the feeling of enrichment this beautiful exercise offers. If you feel inclined to add this to your repertoire, we are sure you won't be disappointed.

Here's a meditation we hope you find helpful in becoming an agent for positive change...

Please remember to treat the dots as pauses, to enable you to absorb the meaning of the words; and to generate feelings of sincerity. You may choose to record this meditation and listen back to it at regular intervals. Or simply read it and reflect on its meaning at times of solitude:

With the passing of each day I lovingly accept who I am and where I am... my mind and heart are gently held by compassion... she eases my discomforts and self-loathing... my regrets, guilt and shame are fading... and the weight I have carried is dissipating... compassion reminds me that I am not where I have been or what I have done... my behaviour is not who I am... I can either be wedded to my bad choices and decisions... or I can sit in the awareness of their many insights and gifts... this is what I choose...

I choose to learn from my failings... by remembering they are not who I am... they are where I have been and what I have done... I choose to lovingly let go of these burdens... and compassion lifts me up so I can see more clearly and make wiser choices... compassion teaches me that if I sit in my feelings of despair and inner turbulence then not only do I make myself feel worse, I add to the pot of negative energy...

I now choose to be part of the solution... I connect to the deepest and wisest part of me... the part of me that lacks nothing and knows exactly what I need to do... it's the part of me that's been silenced for many years by my busyness and freneticism... but now I can feel it rising... it's a light, bursting forth like a fountain... on the screen of my mind I can see that fountain of energy emerging from deep within me...

It represents the very best of me... it's bursting with peace and power... and as it rises up and passes through me I am healed by its grace and majesty... every cell, organ and sinew is repaired, renewed and nurtured... but the light is not confined just to my brain, body and mind... it extends beyond my physical form...

I can see the fountain rising high and its light exuding far and wide... I send my light out to those I know and love... wishing them all that they need... I see them saturated by the light... the light is soothing and healing... uplifting and inspiring them... and this brings me great joy and pleasure... I sit with this feeling for a while...

I now send my light to those I don't know... those who are in need in some way... lacking something... desperately seeking something to comfort their hearts... I wish them everything that they need to be happy, whole and well... I can see the light saturating their minds and their bodies... and that light ripples out into their lives... I imagine them finding what they need... I feel contented, knowing that I am part of the solution... I sit with this feeling for a while...

The light continues to rise in me... and I continue to share it in my neighbourhood... my community... and the wider world... I pledge to spend some time each week becoming the fountain of light... and spreading that light far and wide... the more I spread the light, the happier I become... and my own mind and body are nourished... I am at one with myself... I am at one with life... I am part of the solution... and I sit with this feeling for a while...

“Don't be afraid to fail. Be afraid not to try”