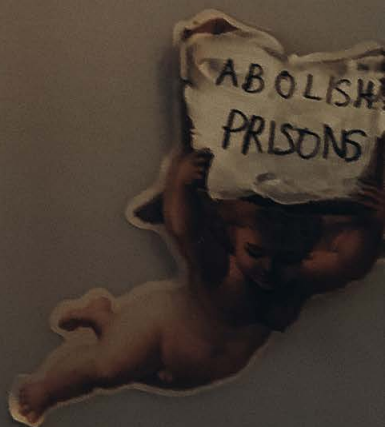


On Realization and Revolution

vol. 2: Applications



Anna Mercury

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Activism as Yoga

It may seem that a protest shares no common ground with a yoga class. We associate the former with chaos and tension, anger and outrage, and sometimes even violence. The latter, we associate with peace and tranquility, health and calm. But as countless yogis have taught for centuries, yoga is much more than what happens on the mat.

The word *yoga*, of course, comes from Sanskrit. The root word is *yuj*, meaning to join, to unite, or to yoke — like a horse to a cart. The typical studio yoga class will focus primarily on the *asana* practice of yoga — the physical poses and stretches — but this is only one of many practices. Yoga, as Patanjali writes in the *Yoga Sutras*, is “*citta vrtti nirodhah*,” or calming the fluctuations of the mind’s experience. Its goal is union — to unite the perceptions of the mind with the truth of ultimate reality (*Brahman*), and thereby experience *moksha*, or liberation.* Ultimate reality is oneness, harmony, balance, peace.

Meditation is a yoga practice — calming and quieting the mind’s thinking so that the experience of ultimate reality can arise. Presence or mindfulness are similar practices. In some “New Age” spirituality, consciousness and self-awareness are used as yoga practices; in coming to completely understand the self, and in learning to act

consciously, the experience of the mind can be brought into alignment with ultimate reality.

Each and all of these is a path to realization, to experiencing ultimate reality as the mind's perceptual reality. In essence, these are paths to making what *is* real *seem* real to the mind. But realization has another meaning; it means not only to come to understand something as real, but to make something real. To real-ize something.

In ultimate reality, all is one. The separations between self and other do not apply. What appears to be you and what appears to be not-you are not distinct. All is one. All simply is. It follows that, in ultimate reality, there is no difference between realizing internally by understanding reality, and realizing externally by shaping reality.

This is where activism comes in. Yes, *that* activism: community organizing, protesting, direct actions, sit-ins, blockades, building dual power. Social justice, climate justice, equal rights and dismantling systems of oppression — each and all of these are yoga. Activism is a practice of realizing the peace, harmony, balance, and liberation of ultimate reality in the mind's perception and experience.

The experience of peace, for some, comes from quiet. For others, it comes from justice. For some, harmony comes from avoiding conflict. For others, it comes from reconciliation, free association, or mutual aid. Some think about imbalanced *chakras*, others about imbalanced power

through political hierarchy or income inequality. Liberation is spiritual. It is also social.

Activism is realization not by coming to understand, but by making real. Shifting your experience by quieting your mind is one path to realization. Changing the world around you so that your experience changes is another. It is all yoga.

I believe that we are all yogis: we are all doing this work of realization, to the best of our abilities, in our own ways. From therapy to meditation, action camps to elections, practice to praxis— we are practicing yoga. Those who might call themselves activists have much to learn from those who call themselves yogis, and vice versa.

Trying to realize as an exclusively internal practice misses half the picture. If all is one, then Mike Brown and Darren Wilson were and are both you. You are Dakota Access, LLC, and you are Standing Rock. You are ISIS and Rojava, Trump, Biden and Sanders, an ICE agent and an undocumented migrant. Your liberation is not realized without all liberation.

Trying to realize as an exclusively external practice shares the same pitfall — sometimes, the experience of ending suffering comes from a change in perception, a quieting of the mind, a release and surrender. You cannot end your own suffering while others suffer, for others are you, and their suffering is yours.

When we understand that we all share the same goal — liberation — we can find new harmonies between our

chosen paths. We may come to share practices, learning from one another's strengths, teaching one another skills, uniting. In working together with a shared understanding of our goal, as fellow devotees and as comrades — our ability to realize, to yoke, grows that much stronger.

If all is one, then Utopia is no different from Enlightenment.

**This is an oversimplification. There are many forms of yoga, offering many different paths, using numerous terms and concepts that are subtle, nuanced and distinct. I do not mean to act as if all of these paths are the same, nor to misuse subtle language, merely to illustrate a point as simply as I can.*

Enough with Trickle-Down Spirituality

This is an essay about why you are limiting your spiritual path if you avoid or ignore social, political and economic injustice.

To actually grasp at understanding Oneness is first and foremost to understand “as above, so below” and “as within, so without.” It is all inseparable. What appears to be outside of you, and what appears to be a part of you, are actually the same thing. If you fixate only on one perceived realm, and deny the importance of the other, you are impeding your own liberation and the liberation of everyone. Liberation from suffering and liberation from oppression are the same liberation.

While I often see the same phenomenon in social justice-minded people, and especially in science-minded people, I’m going to focus today on calling in spiritually-minded people: Hello. It’s time to move beyond your comfort zone, and do away with any belief in “trickle-down spirituality.”

Symptoms of the trickle-down spirituality fallacy include refusing to engage with social change because it’s too #lowvibe, valuing awareness but not accountability, striving for an imaginary state of emotional independence from others, invalidating others’ “negative” emotions (most often anger), and/or repressing these emotions in yourself.

Those who believe in trickle-down spirituality think that their own ascension is possible without the ascension of everyone, and that therefore by walling their consciousness off from suffering, the state of bliss they experience will “trickle-down” to benefit the world, all on its own.

Like trickle-down economics, trickle-down spirituality is rooted in the erroneous belief that to have something is to possess it, rather than to give and receive it. More concretely, it manifests as the belief that bliss is scarce, rather than abundant, and must therefore be jealously guarded from possible upset.

I’ve seen far too many “spiritual” people engage in avoidance, repression, rejection or denial of anything in that doesn’t make them feel good. If this includes you, this pattern of behavior is completely understandable, but it’s time to grow out of it. You’ve gotten stuck in the classic Ego trap of identifying with a concept rather than an experience. Bliss, consciousness, love — call it what you will — this is an active and inclusive process, not a catchable and defensible thing.

If you are on a spiritual path, you have likely conceptualized or experienced the truth that God is unconditional love, and its natural byproduct is abundant bliss. By definition, “love” that rejects, avoids, represses or denies anything is not unconditional. It has conditions for when it feels loving and acts lovingly. It is therefore still rooted in an Ego-based judgment that what it rejects is threatening. Your bliss is still real, but you are weakening it by refusing to face

suffering. The spiritual path is the path of transmuting suffering into unconditional love.

As you begin to extricate yourself from the fears and conditioning that shackle you to your Ego, you may need space from aspects of the world that draw you out of consciousness and into reactivity. Taking space from the world for a time is perfectly natural, healthy and, I think, an integral part of growth towards spiritual consciousness. When we throw ourselves off the deep end, so to speak, into too many stimuli that pull us into Ego reactivity, we often cannot improve consciousness because we struggle simply to survive.

Taking time in spiritual retreat is natural. Living in spiritual retreat is avoidant. Of course, you are allowed to avoid, and you may have very good reasons for doing so. All the same, let's not confuse the fear-and-scarcity mentality of #highvibesonly with the abundant reality of unconditional love. If your state of love and bliss can be broken by engaging with the material world, it is by definition conditional, and you have more work to do.

By all means, go up the mountain. I have, and I take time to do so regularly. But please, come back when you're ready. I know how hard it can be when you rush back down too quickly, and suddenly all the peace and bliss you built for yourself feels shattered and so, so fragile. What I've learned is that your state of loving awareness will continue to be fragile until you start letting it break, and putting it back together again stronger.

Avoiding any experience of a suffering world is not the spiritual path. It is the path of denial. If you call yourself a light-worker, by all means protect yourself as you need to, but shine your light by giving love everywhere you can. Look around you to all the other light-workers whose lights look different from yours, but are still lights of moving us towards unconditional love. Cornel West said, “Justice is what love looks like in public.”

God (read: Source consciousness) lives in science, politics, economics, relationships, psychology, ecology, and everything. This means that your path to awakening and realization runs both into your psyche, and into the streets. You do not have to declare yourself an activist, or a scientist, or a friend, or a partner, or a healer — you already are all of them. There is no consciousness in pretending you aren't. There is only abdication of your power and denial of your responsibility.

All is One means as above, so below. It means the unhoused and the incarcerated and the starving and the soldier and the cop and the raped and the rapist are all you. It means that no one can suffer for you to be liberated. It means liberation is total, or not at all. It means enlightenment is Utopia, and nothing less. To paraphrase *A Course in Miracles*, no one gets to heaven alone. We all go in together, or no one does.

Enough with the judgments, the avoidance and the fear. Enough with trickle-down spirituality. We need our light-

workers getting gritty and dirty and carnal down here with the rest of the species. It's time to love in public.

The Antidote to Alienation

At its heart, politics is about feeling, because feeling is at the heart of everything.

What makes people engage politically? What makes people disengage? What makes people view the world in one way or another? What makes people shift their political frameworks?

At each point, the answer comes back to feeling. What we feel is who we are. It determines what we need, what we seek, with whom we associate, when, where and for how long. Feelings are what we do, the only tool we have to engage with ourselves and the world. In understanding how to use politics as a transformative force, it's absolutely essential to discuss the kind of feeling being produced by the political movement, and the feelings the movement seeks to tap into.

On the Left, I fear the tyranny of intellectualism. Even our language exists so much in this cerebral, mental place that may be easily made accessible on a tangible level, but doesn't really resonate.

We don't seem to feel much.

And yet, I have yet to meet a single theorist or activist on the radical Left who is in any capacity divorced from feeling. We've been radicalized through war and occupation,

through rape and relationship, through oppression and witnessing.

We do this work because we feel this work. We feel it all so strongly that we can't help but try to build a different world. And yet, our politics is lacking emotional resonance, and seems to flounder where reactionary movements prevail.

I believe the answer lies in connection, in honoring feelings, and in rebuilding community.

Emotional Crisis and the Radical Right

We're facing an emotional crisis in the "Western world." Our sense of community that was for so long proscribed by class, race, place and gender, put into a particular role within a social hierarchy, is eroding. Our understanding of ourselves as a part of a greater whole is withering into feelings of alienation. We are facing strong movements of individualism both politically and culturally, from neoliberal privatization to hipsters. Especially in the United States, we glorify individualism, while isolation and loneliness seep out sideways as inherent symptoms of our lack of community.

Our crisis is disconnection.

Part of what has made the radical Right so successful is, in my opinion, their as-yet unparalleled ability to pander to feelings: to engage people in politics on an emotional basis that often transcends or excludes rationality.

When we speak of reactionary politics, we speak not of reaction to events but reaction to the feelings those events produce. Our reactions happen within us, within our unique and individual emotional landscapes. The right-wing backlash against the progressive gains of the last several decades are rooted deeply in the emotions, mainly the feelings of those for whom the status quo institutions that prevailed prior offered a sense of belonging and accomplishment, but also by those who have been failed by those institutions. I speak not only of the 1%, but of the rednecks and the middle class folks who see their community and society crumbling into something different, and often (in their minds), terrifying.

The Right panders to that fear, and offers a solution: a return.

The Right has been so successful in mobilizing emotions because it preaches of a return to a world where community was felt at the heart of society. The emotional core of Making America Great Again is in an idea of people knowing their place, when the confusion of individuality wasn't felt so strongly. (In particular, the backlash against the erosion of white supremacy as a privileged identity has galvanized an entire movement of disgruntled white people who feel they have no other place to turn to hold onto a sense of community and empowerment than in the psychological wage of whiteness.)

There has been a resounding success on the part of the Right at tapping into the emotional needs of their

supporters, to bring them into a feeling of community and empowerment, and an antidote to the emotional crisis of individuality that so many “Western” cultures are facing.

The success of the radical Right begs the question: how can the radical Left, so often caught up in intellectualism, fit itself into this emotional conversation and offer solutions to unmet emotional needs through building a new kind of society?

Making Leftism Emotional Again

To secure a lasting victory, with any hope of building popularity and longevity, the Left must step into the void being produced by neoliberal capitalism and its corresponding individualist culture, and bring back a sense of community to politics. Politics must be made a space of connection and empowerment, of affirmation of individuals and the organic coalescence of groups that give people back the lost sense of communion.

What the Left can offer that the Right cannot is a lasting vision of community that affirms individuals on the basis of their individuality rather than as representatives of groups that exist within a hierarchy.

What does it mean to build community around empowering individuals?

On an emotional level, it means allowing space for individual experiences, feelings and needs to shape the culture of the politics being practiced. It means establishing structures for empowering individuals not only in an emotional sense, but concretely giving them power and the authority to decide for themselves as communities. To teach values of self-determination and consensus through compromise. This means, often, practicing radical direct democracy in associations, and within those associations, practicing a culture of empowering marginalized voices and recognizing the emotional needs of the individuals involved.

It matters that people feel seen and heard. It matters that people feel connected to on an emotional level. It matters that individual experiences be honored in a way that affirms the emotional truth of every person's experience, and puts them into conversation with one another to form authentic partnerships.

It matters that we practice our authenticity and our vulnerability in Leftist spaces. It matters that we talk about our backgrounds and our needs, our feelings and our grievances. It matters that we allow space for spontaneity, creativity, and organic emergence of connection. It matters that we talk about partnership, friendship, communication, sex, love and care. It matters so much that we honor feelings.

On a social structure level, I believe the Left must engage in practices that build community programs that serve the needs of individuals. It matters that we find common ground with those who many not share our intellectual ideals but do share our needs. It matters that we build programs to serve people's needs that can resist the cooptation of capital and state dominance. It matters that we make political engagement joyful, empowering and caring.

And it's important to remember: there is no single right way to build community.

The very kind of community we're talking about cannot be proscribed, because proscribing a community identity is the antithesis of what we're trying to do here. We're trying to build community that is organic and affirming to the individuals involved, that is inclusive of the previously-excluded, and empowering of the disempowered.

It will, by its very nature, emerge organically out of the individuals involved.

The thing is, there is no return. Consciousness cannot go backwards. In the words of my namesake in *Mister God, This is Anna*, "Mister God ain't got no bum." The nature of our nature is forward movement, progression and change, expansion and connection.

That's what we're looking for.

What we seek, as a civilization, is not a return to anything we had previously, but a way forward that allows us to grow

onwards beyond the present crisis of individuality and isolation. Those of us for whom the antiquated status quo doesn't work will not go back to the shadows.

What we will see emerging, I imagine, is a new way of framing community, where community is a practice rather than a rigid unit. Coming into and out of community, of spaces of communion and mutual aid, will happen organically out of a free association based on individual needs and feelings.

We, on the Left, can tap into the desperate need for community and connection, the sense of antidote to the poisonous isolation of a culture obsessed with individuality, by remembering that we do this work because of our own emotional needs. We seek a world that feels just, that feels built on consent and cooperation, where community feels true rather than dictated, where identities are empowered and diversity is embraced. We do this work because we feel, and it is folly to divorce our emotional needs from the political work we do.

Reconciling Spiritual Oneness and Identity Politics

Sometimes I find myself asking, “Why don’t I see more Black queer New Age yoga gurus?”

Looking at the spiritual teachers who sell out weekend workshops and rack up millions of hits on YouTube, I see primarily white men. Sure, there are some white women in the mix, some men of color (whose wisdom somehow always seems to get Orientalized), but looking around the world of capital-S Spirituality, transcendence into divine Oneness seems the purview of the Alan Wattses and Eckhart Tolles of the world. I just don’t see a lot of Black women. This is certainly not to deny the deeply powerful spiritual teachings of countless Black women, simply that the widely-hailed champions of this space I’ll here dub “New-Age-hippie-land” seem to be predominantly white, and slightly less predominantly male.

And I wonder, why is that? Is the way we frame Blackness and womanhood as a culture that keeps their teachings from finding a broad audience? Certainly, evidence would suggest that both Blackness and womanhood require a visionary teacher to justify themselves far more in the eyes of society.

Is it more that the contemporary New Age spiritual movement is already overwhelmingly white, often

financially privileged, and is part-and-parcel with teachings, rituals and practices that are primarily accessible to the white and financially privileged? Yoga retreats to Central America are accessible to the upper-middle class of California, not to most actual residents of Central America. The psychedelic movement can be all good vibes and rainbows when your body hasn't been criminalized for generations, especially for drug use.

Or is it that this whole "movement" seems to frame Oneness in a way that weaponizes it against the realities of oppression for particular identities? How can we declare "*We Are All One*" when our distinctions in the eyes of society can literally determine who lives and who dies at a traffic stop?

Two World-views

Walking a spiritual path through the contemporary political landscape is a chronic paradox. Do we create our own realities, or are we acted upon by socio-political-economic systems? Is the culprit "scarcity thinking," or colonial capitalism? How can we reconcile the perfection and harmony of all existence with the drone bombing of Yemen? Is there room for both universal transcendence and social justice?

I am of course not going to attempt to speak for Black women, all women, or any folks of color. Doing so would

not be my place. All I can speak to is the seeming diametric opposition of trying to both awaken, and get woke, while refusing to compromise either.

The truth is, the two are not at all disjointed.

I believe that the common “Spiritual self-help” narrative of “*Work on your own growth! Follow your own bliss!*” can be toxic and individualizing, and erases the reality of our interdependence and need for solidarity. I believe that the common political narrative of “*It’s all systemic! We are the victims of an unjust world!*” can be toxic and infantilizing, and erases the reality of our power to create and the need to come into union with our true selves.

It may appear that I am writing about two utterly irreconcilable ways of seeing the world. In a sense, I am. But the remedy to suffering in both world-views is, actually, the same. Socio-political liberation and spiritual realization are the same process.

Realizing Subjectivity

To be awakened is to be fully subjective—in the sense of, to be the subject of the sentence. In the sentence “*I am something,*” spiritual transcendence is about realizing yourself as simply the “*I,*” and no longer the object, the “*something.*” To be the creator rather than the role, the experiencer rather than that which is experienced.

Oppression is an act of objectification. Systems of oppression make objects out of subjects. They then exploit what they have dubbed objects. From the objectification of Black bodies to the objectification of women, from the objectification of workers to the objectification of land — there is no difference in process between the Ego-mind's perception of other, and oppression. This is not to say that all Ego-mind perception is oppression, simply that both are the act of objectification.

To oppress another, you must first view the object of your oppression as an object. The language we use more commonly is that we “dehumanize” that which we oppress, attack or exploit. We make our object less-than-human. What we do, first and far more simply, is objectify it — we perceive it as something separate from ourselves, that our individual will, our Ego-mind “I,” can act upon. But that Ego-mind's “I,” whose particular subjectivity exists only in contrast to an object, is not the true I.

More plainly: “*I am not you*” is not the same understanding as “*I am.*”

When we view anything as an object, we view it as existing to serve a particular function. An object can only exist in contrast. Its meaning is always defined by the role we have decided that it fills. Its worth is always judged by how it fills that role. Only when something is an object can it be exploited or punished, attacked or denigrated.

Spiritual awakening is the act of realizing subjectivity. To “realize” means both “to understand as real,” and “to make real.” In a space beyond definition and separation, in the dimension of Oneness, there is no difference between acting within yourself and acting within the world. All is self, and self is all. Spiritually speaking, this is truth —and the perception of difference can only ever be a perception.

Realization, then, is an act of reconciliation: reconciling our own perception with the reality of universal Oneness, in all its harmony, freedom, peace, and love. Realizing is the act of creating, in the lived experience, the truth of universal subjectivity.

Systems of oppression make a false subjectivity for particular categories of beings. Under white supremacy, whiteness has subjectivity. A white person can be fully human, and just be. Under colonialism, the colonizer has subjectivity. Under patriarchy, men have subjectivity. Under capitalism, the wealthy have subjectivity. Under ableism, the able-bodied have subjectivity. What is considered subjective is allowed to simply be, and everyone else must first live as their role.

Realizing subjectivity is the liberation from objectification. We typically think of spiritual work as coming to understand the self not as a defined thing, but as the subject, the “I” beyond all objects. But spiritual work is the liberation from objectification, and is likewise done by making subjectivity more real. We come to know ourselves as subjects, and we make our subjectivity real. They are

one in the same act. Seeing ourselves as subjects, whose purpose and worth and identity has nothing to do with role, and seeing others as subjects, are spiritually the same. In Oneness, there is no other.

Awakening is coming to know, in full being-ness, beyond role. From a world of full subjects, whose subjectivity is reflected in treatment and opportunity, in law and culture and economy and politics, can arise the universal experience of subjectivity — y’know, that whole “Oneness” thing that gets talked about in New-Age-hippie-land.

Reclaiming the Sacred

Worker is a role. Boss is a role. Ruler is a role. Landlord is a role. House is a role. Farmland is a role. Pipeline is a role. Teacher is a role. Partner is a role. All roles are objects. In the same breath — within a society with any objectification, woman is a role. Man is a role. Black person is a role. White person is a role. Queer person is a role. Disabled person is a role. These are identities that arise out of contrast, and are defined by being separate from a different identity.

It makes intuitive sense to me that, when one has been forced to defend one’s identity from attack, denigration, oppression, murder, slavery or genocide, that one might want to fight for the goodness, freedom, righteousness and sacredness of one’s identity. The talk of transcending

identity and realizing ultimate Oneness might ring hollow. It might look as an invalidation of the beauty and sacredness of those identities. It might seem to completely miss the point.

That is because, in this context, it does miss the point — because spiritual awakening is the act of realizing subjectivity. Union (or yoking, or *yoga*) is the act of uniting what is perception (separateness, objects) with what is reality (Oneness, universal subjectivity). The problem of systemic oppression is that it creates objects. Establishing the goodness, freedom, righteousness and sacredness of an oft-denigrated identity is an act of reclaiming the subjectivity of what has been treated as an object.

Creating a world of more subjects, more full beings allowed to live as full beings — with the freedom to express and to be, to love and receive love, to interact as complete selves containing multitudes and infinities, with others who are complete selves containing multitudes and infinities — this is spiritual work.

Reclaiming sexuality from the clutches of being a sex object is spiritual. Reclaiming meaningful, self-determined work from the clutches of exploited labor is spiritual. Fighting for the sanctity of Black lives is spiritual. Defending land and water from extraction and desecration is spiritual. Look at that word — desecration. Etymologically, it comes from “de-consecrate,” or, to undo the process of a thing being sacred.

Heaven on Earth = Utopia

A world beyond the Ego mind's judgment — that space of Heaven on Earth — is a world of true equality and absolute sacredness. We reach that world not from painting all with the same brush, but from everything shining fully. The universe is sacred when everything in it is sacred. Union is reached when our experience of the universe aligns with the truth of its sacredness. To enshrine the sacred — from land to womanhood to Black life — is to move towards Heaven on Earth.

We do not reach that world by declaring that we have transcended all distinctions. We transcend all distinctions by reaching that world.

When we embody Oneness, we live in a world that is sacred. Everything is a subject, and life emerges out of deep relationships between subjects that are themselves One. When we live in a world that is sacred, we embody Oneness.

Just as (many of us) are seeming to grasp that under this system, all lives will matter when Black lives matter, so too must we understand on a universal level: elevating and consecrating the identities we have desecrated is the act of transcending identity. To realize Utopia is to realize Heaven on Earth.

To answer my own question, every fist raised in defense of the sacredness of Black life is a spiritual teacher. It does not

matter to the universe whether or not the word “universe” is uttered. Liberation is liberation, from the yoga mat to the Capital Hill Autonomous Zone. In wrenching back sacredness from the jaws of oppression, declaring subjectivity in the face of objectification, we do sacred work. We transcend.

Anarchism as a Spiritual Practice

Anarchism is my religion.

Ignoring the black flag ritual trappings and Bookchin/Graeber/Kropotkin pseudo-deity worship, what I mean is that anarchism is as personal, emotional, psychological and universal to me as any religion or spirituality could be. It's a total framework through which I view my life, my choices, my relationships, and the world, as rooted in the ancient Chinese concept of *Tao* as it is in the abolition of state domination (and the two aren't really separate).

When I talk about spirituality, I speak of nothing other than *what is*: our feelings, our selves, our world, our existence, our lives. I'm not getting at anything pan-dimensional or explicitly sacred here — just our psyches, how we relate to ourselves, our communities, how we relate to each other, and making the external practices of horizontalism, self-determination, spontaneity and mutual aid an internal practice too. The societal choices alive in anarchist philosophy have applications at the personal and universal levels, and for a transformation to be total, the internal realm cannot be ignored.

That internal practice and universal framework, I'm choosing to call a Spirituality. If you don't resonate with that word, think of this as an emotional or psychological

anarchism, and feel free to ignore the universal bits if they don't fit well in your mind.

What does it mean to take these structural ideals and build a personal practice and total worldview around them?

The phrase I keep coming back to in explaining all of this is organic emergence: choices that arise naturally out of an authentic state of being. Like rooting our politics in the needs of our communities, we can consciously root our action in our own feeling. Like allowing our order to emerge from the bottom up, we can allow ourselves to emerge from our own nature.

First, the Tao:

Look, you're a natural phenomenon too. You are an inseparable part of nature. It follows that your nature *is* nature. So, acting in harmony with your nature is acting in harmony with the Way of nature, sometimes called the *Tao*. Tao is, at its most simple understanding, the *nature of nature*. If you don't like the term *Tao*, think of it as the nature of nature, or what Bookchin might have called "ecology" (he'd never admit the parallel, so I'll admit it for him.)

Tao is not the *Way* in the sense of a road or particular path, but rather, the *way* the Earth revolves around the sun. The *way* trees grow and flowers bloom. The *way* we are born, grow and die. The *way* that we feel. The *way* we are. Infinitely complex in manifestation and resoundingly simple

in concept, unknowable from a linear and stagnant perspective and yet never unknown because we live it every moment, eternally interconnected, interdependent and intricate: this is the Way of Nature.

In Taoist philosophy, there's a concept called *wu wei*, often translated as "non-action." It is not inaction by any means, simply action that is *effortless*. Try thinking of it like this: a river doesn't try to flow, it just flows. It exerts force and pressure and power for millennia to carve its way through rock to the sea, but its action is a non-action. That is just what rivers do, because that is just what rivers *are*.

Effortless action is to allow your action to arise from your nature, to respect no authority beyond your own feeling and needs in the understanding that they are what is needed and felt, and make choices in alignment with them. Your feelings and your needs are how you go through existence. They are your *Way*. Self-determined, as grassroots as you can get. Are you seeing political parallels here?

Taoism has always been an anarchist philosophy to me. Its fundamental tenets are simplicity and non-coercion: to become aware of yourself, stop trying to control things and let them emerge. To control is to seek to upset the universal harmony of the way of nature. To control is nothing more or less than to use one's force in this world to limit something else from using its force. Instead, we can allow everything in existence to take its own authentic path and use its force in the world in pursuit of its own

flourishing. It is through that individual flourishing that existence as a whole will flourish, through the mutual aid of flourishing individuals, and thus any collective arising only to meet the needs of the individuals within it.

Oneness and Action

Say what you will about a more “spiritual” understanding of Oneness — we can’t escape the fact that we’re a product of everything around us. I mean this in a wholly secular way. We are the result of our conditioning, our biology (which itself comes from eons of conditioning), our upbringing, our experiences, and what we ate for dinner last night. All of us, our whole selves, have emerged from the forces and beings around us, physically and psychologically, materially, mentally, emotionally. We could not be us without them.

And yet, we still are *us*. We are distinct, but not separate, from the world around us. With that distinctness comes the ability to make choices.

Consciousness is nothing more or less than the awareness of our ability to make choices, to act or not act in particular ways. In allowing our action to emerge organically from our nature, we are choosing to align our paths through existence with the *nature of existence*, as our nature is nature.

Making Our Anarchism Personal

As anarchists and libertarian socialists more broadly, we understand this concept deeply when talking about social organization. We believe the best forms of organization come from fluidity and responsiveness to the needs of individuals, from the empowerment of individuals to act on their needs and determine their structures accordingly. We are comfortable and forthright in this realm, but we often ignore the applications of our beliefs at levels smaller and greater than the societal.

We talk about praxis, but not practice. What is praxis but finding more ways to practice our philosophies in action?

We talk about power, but not consciousness. But what is power but the ability to take conscious action, and consciousness but becoming empowered in the choices one makes?

We talk about justice, but not harmony. But what is justice beyond an effort at fostering a lived harmony?

We want to tear down oppressive systems that confine us and condemn our flourishing, and build up new ones that affirm us equitably. We want our structures to be aligned with our needs and responsive to them, rather than enforced, coercive and rigid. We want power to be rooted in each and all of us rather than lorded over us. We want the ability to determine our courses of action for ourselves

and in community, and the freedom to associate based on consent. We want justice to be true and genuinely felt.

Every single one of these structural ideals has an internal reflection, from dismantling systems of oppression to non-hierarchy to transformative justice. Their application to the self can align our action not only with our politics, but with a universal harmony between self, other, and existence as a whole.

Like Dismantling Systems of Oppression but for Yourself
Resisting unhelpful conditioning

A system is like a current: a pattern of behavior strong enough that it has the ability to shape behavior. It is essentially a *conditioning* mechanism. I'd assume many of you have heard the phrase, "Decolonize your mind"? That's what I'm getting at here.

We are a product of our conditioning, and our conditioning is a product of us. As those of us surviving under imperialist statist capitalism know quite well, not all of our conditioning works in service of our flourishing.

To allow your action to emerge authentically out of your own nature means you often have to resist the very things that come automatically to you. Automatic is not the same as natural; automatic is a reflexive response to conditioning that may well have long been aimed at divorcing you from

your very essence. Resisting our conditioning can be an unbelievably powerful tool, for it allows us to tap into true freedom.

When we feel as comfortable breaking the rules we've been taught to live by as we are obeying them, our action can truly be free to emerge from nothing but our nature.

What is our nature? What we feel, and what we need.

Like Grassroots Organizing but for Yourself
Understanding feelings and needs

I love the term *grassroots* because it has “roots” in it. On the most fundamental level, the root of all of our experience of existence is our feeling. Feelings: physical sensations, emotions — these are how the external world touches our internal world.

Feelings, though distinct from needs, are not separate from them. We feel cold, so we need warmth. We feel hunger, so we need food. The causal relationship between need and feeling flows both ways.

What do you need?

What do you feel?

What do you need to *feel*?

Getting to the roots of who we are means tapping into our feelings and pursuing our needs. If that sounds like a recipe

for chaos, remember that you are not separate from the rest of existence. Your feelings are not separate from everything else in existence; feelings are where you and the rest of existence meet. Feelings and needs are not separate from each other. So, your needs cannot be separate from the needs of existence. That sentence flows both ways as well.

Like anarchism, this takes tremendous trust in others and in yourself to fully understand. When you live as though you are not separate, the needs of others *are your needs*. Call it solidarity if you will. When you live as though you are not separate, *your needs* are the needs of everyone. Dissolving that division between self and other means needs are simply needs, feelings are simply feelings, and action in service of meeting the needs that arise authentically from feeling is action in service of existence as a whole.

This requires actually understanding your needs, which in turn requires actually being aware of your feelings.

Like Horizontalism but for Yourself
Dissolving Ego

If we're going to rail against societal systems that seek to define for us what we need, deserve, and get to do, *why do we do all of this to ourselves?*

Forcing ourselves to be a certain way and seeking rigidly to control ourselves is the exact same paradigm as the state, and as capitalism. It is using force to limit something else from using its force, and taking control away from the roots (our feelings and needs). When we divide ourselves internally into an *I* and a *Me*, that is, look at ourselves as if from the outside and try to control ourselves, we're mimicking the logic of capitalism and state domination; these external forms of domination mirror and our mirrored by our internal relationship to ourselves.

So, seize the means of your own production. Let your action serve your authentic needs. How do you know what your needs are? Become aware of your feelings.

Give up control of yourself entirely unto yourself, to that deeply authentic self, the part of us that *feels*. Rather than trying to determine what you "should" be doing, respond to your feelings and try trusting yourself. Trust that you already have your best interests at heart, and seek not to externally contrive and determine for yourself what that interest is.

Like Structural Flexibility but for Yourself
Responding to the shifts in your needs.

Just as we seek systems that can adapt to the shifting needs of individuals and communities, we can adapt our

action to our own needs. We can adapt our frameworks to our experiences. We can *adapt*.

This is where we come to the concept of “flow states”: they’re basically just *wu wei*. As experiences shift, feelings shift, so needs shift, so action shifts. Allowing ourselves and our action to be flexible, rather than viewing ourselves as some rigid, defined thing, is what cultivates harmony between our action and our nature. When we are aware of our feelings and serving to meet our needs in harmony with our feelings, rather than fighting our feelings, forcing ourselves and controlling ourselves, our action becomes effortless. There is no internal wall against which to push; action simply flows.

Like the river to the sea, there still may be miles of rock to carve through, but that path becomes effortless. Now you are putting your conscious effort towards that which you could never not do, towards that which you are *never not doing*: feeling your feelings, and seeking to meet your needs.

Like Free Association but for Yourself
Allowing the self to be a process.

On that same note, treating the self as a non-stagnant, unrigid process means we can take on and discard parts of ourselves as those parts serve our needs. To quote

Whitman, “Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes.”

Free association within ourselves unfixes our minds from some stagnant understanding of who we are. The nature of nature is flux. Resolute stagnation, and clinging to rigidity, dams the river of our authentic emergence as we wind our ways to the sea of our understanding of The Good Life.

This desire to regulate, control and define the self is nothing but putting an arbitrary border around that which is fluid and migratory. You are not your conceptions of your identity. You just are. Any identity you have fits in some ways, and does not fit in others. Take it on and cast it off as best serves you, from a place of freedom and conscious choice.

Like Transformative Justice but for Yourself
Turning from shame and blame to responsibility.

One of the deepest poisons to our flourishing is shame. Shame, “shoulds,” and questions of fault and blame are deeply tied to a desire to control, which is itself deeply tied to fear. Shame is self-punishment, an excruciating feeling stemming from an internalized belief that a thing we did was *wrong*.

Who, exactly, is this universal judge of goodness that can determine if anything is right or wrong?

Just as many of us seek a justice system that looks to genuine resolution and an inclusion of the wider structural factors involved in harm being done, so too can we apply this framework to ourselves. What situational factors led to us taking the action we took? What conditioning? What experience? What triggers? Now, rather than fixating on self-punishment, how do we best remedy the harm done going forwards?

If shame serves your flourishing by teaching you not to do something that harms you and others, then it has served its purpose. But like all conditioning, it can become automatic, wherein it inhibits freedom, inhibits flourishing, and inhibits harmony.

In *The Tao of Pooh*, there's a little story that's stuck with me. It's about Winnie the Pooh opening a honey jar. All the other animals in the Hundred Acre Wood try to open the jar, but only Pooh succeeds. They ask him how he did it, and he says something to the effect of, "Well, I turned the lid as far as it would go. Then I breathed. Then I turned it more, and it opened."

As trite as the example may seem, it is a powerful lesson about action, about growth, and about learning. To take responsibility, rather than fixate on blame, is to step into the present moment. To become aware of the present situation and one's relationship to it, and decide from *here* how to move forward.

Because the thing about all of this is that you're always already doing it.

You are trying to live your unique version of The Good Life with every step you take. In every moment you are feeling, and responding to your feelings, needing, and seeking to meet your needs.

To practice an internalized, "spiritual", anarchism is nothing more than learning to get out of your own way.

Like Pooh opening the honey jar, you're already trying to do it. Take stock of the situation. Take stock of your relationship to yourself. Breathe. Now, do it more.

Towards Utopia

Frankly, I'm sick of everything that's not Utopia. To me, Utopia is a dynamic equilibrium; it is whatever emerges out of everyone living their personal Utopia, their unique vision of The Good Life. I believe everyone living their unique Utopia could produce harmonious and spontaneous structures of people living in Utopia together. Actually, I believe it's the only thing that can.

In seeking to dismantle systems of oppression in the world, I think it's about time we did the same within ourselves. The more we can practice cultivating harmony within ourselves, the more we can cultivate authentic and

spontaneous harmony with each other. The more we can cultivate harmony with each other, the more we can cultivate genuine harmony in societal structures.

As above, so below; as within, so without.

This is not to say “cease working on the external” — shifting external structures will hasten the internal process, and vice versa.

Start where you are, with who you are, with what you feel and what you need. Start with what feels true to you. Treat this as practice. Experiment. Hold it lightly, and use it as best serves you.

Go forth, my darling radicals, and be free.

The Problem with Government and the Truth About Care

Care, like love, is a verb. It is a behavior — a thing that you do. It is not an adjective like happy or sad — a description of a state of being. Care is not an emotion. It is an action.

This is why, no matter how much, say, U.S. military intervention in Libya may have made me feel bad, I cannot say that I care about it. I cannot say that I care, because I have never done anything about it. I've been vaguely educated on it primarily by accident, and have not put any of my intentional time towards learning more or taking any steps towards remedying the situation. If I said I cared about suffering and civil war in Libya, what I'd mean is, "I would prefer for that not to happen." I would not be saying, "I am doing anything to change it."

The fundamental problem of government is one of hierarchy: some small group of individuals has power over others, and the ability to make decisions on behalf of others without their direct input or consent. Democracy is allegedly supposed to fix this by creating structures of mutual accountability between the government and the governed. Representative democracy is, of course, not real democracy — real democracy is the process of individuals making decisions together towards their individual and collective wellbeing. It necessitates non-hierarchy to

actually function. With an extreme discrepancy of power between one person and those they are making decisions for, there can be no authentic consent. Real democracy is the act of making decisions *with*, not making decisions *for*.

The problem of living in a society with a government is that it causes care to atrophy. Those of us who are governed believe, to some extent, that the act of making decisions for us is someone else's job. We do not act towards our own needs, and so, we do not care. We expect our needs to be met, and we feel tremendous pain when they are not, or we have gone so long without our needs being met that we've entered a state of learned helplessness.

We are told that, when it comes to suffering in our communities, the most our care can amount to is "I would prefer for that not to happen." This is not care.

To care means to act. That action can take many forms — from thought to learning, from creating to destroying, from speaking to listening. When we are conditioned into not taking action towards our individual and collective well-being, we are conditioned not to care.

The reason anarchists are inspired by this moment in American history is not, for the most part, that we're excited to watch things burn. What we are excited by is the collective realization beginning across our communities that government is not meeting our needs, and that by its very structure, it cannot do so without violence. We are witnessing The People awakening into their own power, to

understand that the real meaning of democracy is not begging someone else to make the right decision for you, but to level the playing field and start making decisions together. To start acting towards our collective needs. To care for our needs, and expand our understanding of the possible options available to meet them.

When we do not act, we do not care. When we are told not to act, to sit down, to take it, shut up, we are being told not to care. We are being told not to do what is innate to all living creatures. We are being told to act in opposition to the current of life itself.

So I ask you: What do your needs mean to you? What does your community mean to you? How much is that meaning worth? Is it worth more than five minutes and a ballot box once every four years? Is it worth enough to act, without waiting to receive permission that your needs matter too?

Is your life worth caring about? If so, then become ungovernable, and start governing with those around you. Reject the system that says that decision-making is something that should happen for you, and not with you. Reject the notion that you shouldn't care, and start making decisions with others towards your collective wellbeing. Act towards the meeting of your needs.

You cannot care about everything that happens, and many decisions are simply none of your business. The problem of government is that it makes many people's decisions the business of one or a few people. Those people have

incalculable power over the lives of others, and are tasked with making decisions that can never be consensual and that they should never be making in the first place.

So what decisions should you be making? What should you be caring about? The answer is simply this: you care for what you love.

To love is to take something as a part of yourself. Not to decide for it what it is and project your conception of yourself onto it — we know that is not love. Love is to embrace the needs of someone or something else and act towards meeting them as you would your own, understanding that they are your own, because you love. We care because we love. We love ourselves and our families and our communities and our planet, and so we care — we act towards their wellbeing. We act towards our wellbeing.

And so I ask, again: Do you love yourself and your community? Then care. Then act. Then govern, and govern with — not for. Let others govern themselves, and seek not to govern for them. Trust yourself with yourself, and trust them with themselves, and from this place — act. Care.

Care like the world depends on it, because it does.

Stop Doing Capitalism's Dirty Work for It

Confession of a Former Apple-Thrower

In the 2015 movie *Ted 2*, there's a memorable scene (okay, it's the only scene I remember from that movie) in which the characters climb onto the roof of their building for their regular Tuesday night ritual: getting fucked up and throwing apples at joggers. Slinging fruit and yelling curses, they pelt and verbally abuse a jogger for the sin of... being healthy, I guess. As an audience member, you're meant to identify with them, not with the jogger.

Happy people are so obnoxious. Healthy people are so smug. Look at them. They think they're better than us. We'll show them.

You know the drill.

Quitting drinking gets you shamed by your friends at the bar. Quitting smoking gets you flack from friends who smoke. Paying attention to the foods your body feels good eating and choosing your diet accordingly gets groans from friends who want you to go eat a cheeseburger with them. We take it as a personal affront when people want to be healthier than we do.

Of course, it goes deeper than the physically healthy choices. Doing the mental and emotional equivalent of

jogging is just beginning to take hold in popular culture, and the number of people throwing proverbial apples is even more extreme. I know — I was an apple-thrower before I started jogging, too.

The way people treat you when you start doing anything other than obsessing about your fears and pains, when you practice forgiveness, when you own up to your own shadow and work with it, when you choose to focus positively — its no wonder so few people regularly work at their own emotional consciousness.

In some circles, taking any personal responsibility for your own health and happiness is seen as a betrayal of the movement against systemic injustice that causes collective misery. If you focus on understanding an oppressor rather than judging them, or forgiving someone who harmed you, it's often seen as compliance or capitulation to oppression. Forgiveness is a betrayal of the righteous mission to bring the evildoers to justice. And what is justice? We don't know. Revenge, probably.

From Justice to Healing

The personal choice to forgive, to practice non-condemnation, to prioritize finding and enjoying every ounce of happiness and improved health we can so that our lives can be as beautiful as possible —that's no betrayal of making sweeping collective change. The refusal to

compromise on well-being is the driver of sweeping collective change. If you forever feel like a powerless victim, you're not going to rise up and build a better world.

As for creating justice, when our focus shifts to healing, the question of justice feels moot. Rather than try to balance some cosmic scale of badness, the goal is just to help people live the best lives they possibly can. Internally, this feels like the recognition that holding bitterness and rage is only ever hurting you, and the acceptance that you don't personally have the power to force others to change right now. In place of a pointless crusade, you start practicing the conscious decision to accept what agency you do have to improve your circumstances, and stop tonguing your trauma every day like an existential canker sore.

But when you feel like a victim, trapped in a perpetual cycle of misery against which you feel no power or agency to live better, seeing those around you start to feel and act like empowered agents is profoundly threatening. Either they must be abusers too, because in your mind, that's what people with power do — or they must be judging you and shaming you for being a victim. One thing (I know from personal experience) that never occurs to you if you're stuck in chronic-victimhood mind is that maybe, they're not abusing you, shaming you, judging you or attacking you. Maybe, this isn't about you.

Really. Other people's choices aren't about you. Your choices are about you. Learning that is the beginning of stepping into conscious agency over your own life.

The New Age Meets End-Stage Capitalism

It seems impossible to write about this topic without being an apologist for privileged people who've discovered they can "think themselves happy" and grow judgmental and out of touch with most people for not doing the same. Rather than apologize, I'll just attempt to explain:

First, everyone gets zealous for a while when they feel saved, from Alcoholics Anonymous to finding Jesus. It seems to be a phase we all must go through. Second, you probably are contributing to your own suffering, even though you didn't cause it, in ways others notice, and it hurts your feelings when they point it out. All of us do this, all the time. We are all still learning.

Most importantly, most people who've awakened to the consciousness that their core beliefs and daily behavior influence how their life feels — they still haven't dissolved their beliefs in fault and guilt yet. You can rest easier remembering that their judgments aren't about you. Only your judgments are about you, and you're the one who makes them.

But I get it. I get the annoyance at the feel-good yoga moms and self-help gurus slinging seminars on the Law of Attraction. In general, these people don't have a nuanced class analysis laid over their newfound psychological robustness that guides them to understand that while yes,

our beliefs shape our behavior which shapes our whole lives, some people have circumstances that make it easier or harder to attain that robustness, or get the breathing room to look at their beliefs and behavior critically. It could be that a mindset of abundance aligns the events that bring home the bacon, but if you grow up rich, living in a mindset of abundance is a hell of a lot easier. If you don't, why on earth would you authentically believe that material abundance is coming your way? What evidence would you have?

This is the point where the New Age meets End-Stage Capitalism: we have personal agency to cultivate an inner world of peace, joy and compassion, and also, we have every possible card stacked against us doing so in the outer world. If our goal is The Revolution, then feeling as personally robust and empowered as possible is our best tool. If our goal is Mass Spiritual Awakening, then changing social conditions to make it as easy as possible for people to feel inner peace is our best tool. The work is always both within and without.

Uncovering the Good Wolf Diet

You've heard that cliché saying about having two wolves that battle within you. One wolf is compassionate, loving and kind. Let's add in: happy, healthy, conscious and in a state of communion with existence. The other is

competitive, warlike and cruel. For our purposes, it's also trapped in self-loathing, addiction cycles and unconsciousness. Which wolf wins? The one you feed.

The question we often fail to ask is, "What does the good wolf eat?"

From low-wage gig labor and soaring rents to mass media and manic consumption waste culture, everything around us feeds our bad wolf. Ours is not a culture that incentivizes us to be conscious, happy, or healthy. In fact, the weight of every social structure around and above us actively disincentivizes us from doing the work to improve our relationships with ourselves and with life.

As Elle Woods reminds us in *Legally Blonde*, "Happy people just don't shoot their husbands." Happy people also just don't shoot rockets shaped like their penises into space. They don't binge shop on Amazon, binge drink alcohol, binge eat junk food, work 80-hour weeks for tech companies or banks, police their neighbors or go to war.

In other words, happy people do not participate unconsciously in colonial capitalism. By extension, happy people are a threat to colonial capitalism. Therefore, the unconscious machinations of colonial capitalism have taken it upon themselves to make people — all people, as many as they can — as miserable as possible.

Let's talk about that misery.

Make America Miserable Ad Infinitum

If there's one thing I've learned on my #spiritual #journey #to #become #happier #and #more #conscious (which, all self-mockery aside, is actually working) — it's this: fault and blame are made-up fictions that ruin our ability to understand and respond to everything. No trauma that befell me and inculcated me into harmful patterns was my fault. I cannot change what happened, but I can change the harmful patterns I repeat currently.

At the moment, in reliving my own trauma, I allow my real and current self to be brutalized by an imagination in my head. It happened, but it is not happening now. The pain I feel now is being created by my thoughts. Just as I made them, I can unmake them. I can change my patterns now. The only thing I can change is now. When I speak of how I might contribute to my own suffering, I am not victim-blaming. I am embracing my ability to respond, and stepping into my agency to determine my own life, rather than let it be determined by what befell me in the past.

Notice how not one word of this was a statement of judgment on you, or how you respond to your own trauma. Any judgment you feel, flowing from you or towards you, is your own invention.

Now, with that in mind — let's get back to the misery of colonial capitalism. It was not your fault that you were born into it. It was not my fault. It wasn't even Jeff Bezos' fault.

Does Jeff Bezos really seem like a healthy, conscious, self-possessed person to you? Yeah, me neither. Harry Truman, Doris Day, Red China, Johnnie Ray — we didn't start the fire. It was burning when we got here. Arguing about who's fault the fire is won't put it out.

Everything Sucks. Now What?

It's true — everything is stacked against us living well. The current wants us to be miserable, addicted consumers working meaningless jobs that destroy our personal lives, collective space and planet so that we become more miserable and addicted so we consume more. That is reality.

That is reality. Now what? What are you going to do from here?

The traumatic and miserable systems into which you were born were, and are, not your fault. The question is: now what? It's not your fault. You're absolved of all sin. Now what? What are you going to do with this moment? Rather than look at responsibility as a synonym for fault, flip the script: fuck fault. What *ability* do you have to *respond*?

When we look at it like that, it becomes pretty apparent that there are a lot of aspects of our lives in which we can learn to respond differently, even if we can't "fix everything" by doing so. We can fight back against the

conditioning mechanisms that perpetuate our own misery in small ways at first. With greater practice, and a critical mass, then we fight back in big ways. We fight against the bad by building the good. It starts now.

Don't Be the Bad Wolf's Pig

The thing is, colonial capitalism doesn't need to condition your misery anymore. You've already accepted your role as its faithful sergeant. You continue to enforce the misery that was forced upon you. You judge those around you for trying to step out of it. You shame yourself for even thinking you might be able to. You didn't start the fire, but you seem hell-bent on keeping it burning.

How could I say that about you? When you'd give anything for some respite from the bullshit and pain? How could I add insult to injury in your impossible circumstances and say that, while this heinous system and these dire circumstances and your very real trauma are not your fault, you are still alive with agency here in this moment and capable of making some different choices in some aspects of your life to reduce your own misery? Don't mind me, I must be a shill.

When it comes to the revolution, I live by the slogan, "If we're not prepared to govern, we're not prepared to win." Likewise, when it comes to my inner wolf infestation, if I'm not prepared to keep feeding my good wolf on a

regular and consistent basis, then clearly, I'm not that committed to it winning.

When it comes to building a better, happier world, if we're not prepared to start now, with the ways we do have power... damn— why would we lay any claim to greater power over the kind of society we live in?

I don't believe the bullshit about pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, but I do believe that we have opportunities to be less miserable every single day, and that the accumulated empowerment of little self-determinations make us much better prepared for the big ones.

The unjust systems that control us want us to live badly so that we keep returning to them as starving addicts for the meager fix their version of self-worth provides. These systems make it much harder to live well. Harder, but not impossible. They want us to be miserable. They need it, if they're to have any power at all.

Stop doing their dirty work for them.

This is What Awakening Looks Like

Dolly Parton once said, “Find out who you are and do it on purpose.” The Internationale said, “Arise, ye workers from your slumber!” As anyone who’s ever awoken, politically, spiritually or in any other way, already knows — you cannot force someone else to wake up.

Full human conscious awakening is never going to happen by force. Our attempts to wake up those around us are never going to look like they’re working. We can lead a horse to water, but we cannot make it drink.

But my fellow horses, look around. We’re drinking. Now, we have the opportunity to do it on purpose.

We are in the midst of a mass collective awakening. It’s not everyone, not yet, but a critical mass of humanity is growing far more conscious than it ever has been, and from where I sit, the change is accelerating rapidly.

It’s hard to spot sometimes, because if you’ve only seen one part of your life awaken, other kinds of awakening don’t look like the real thing. Perhaps you had an acid trip and understood the Universe, but you still don’t get why so many people are mad at Jeff Bezos. Perhaps you realized the injustice of the justice system, but you think the search for inner peace is woo-woo. Perhaps you’ve realized how your trauma has conditioned your behavior, but you can’t seem to change your behavior yet.

These are all forms of awakening.

Look around you — awakening is everywhere. Every conversation is about it. If all you look at is the churning news cycle, it's difficult to see, but look at the conversations beneath the headlines. Advancements in psychological studies of addiction and emotion, how trauma impacts the body, the cutting edge of quantum physics, psychedelic science — we see things differently now.

The proliferation of more diverse political thought, the questioning of unconscious truths about how society is supposed to work, the interweaving of colonial and indigenous sciences of ecosystem management, of modern and traditional medicine — we see things differently now.

The purpose of government and the economy, the meaning of gender, the role of the individual in the media, the role of the activist in society, the kind of world we want to live in, the power we have — we see things that we didn't see before.

What before once unquestioned is now in question. What before was impossible is now pondered. What was unintelligible begins to have an order.

Perhaps, this is still unintelligible to you, and you have no idea what I'm talking about. You think this article is, as one of my readers put it, "psychobabble." If this includes you, that's okay. You may not see it, and I might be wrong. I ask,

though, that you notice that not everyone around you agrees with you. Some people are seeing things you aren't.

To see it, you can't keep your focus on the trees. It's in the forest, in how you're relating to the ecosystem you're in. It's a pattern, not a detail, that I'm talking about. Not everyone is waking up at the same rate, or to the same things, but collectively, a critical mass is awakening.

At the outset, awakening looks like a breakdown — because what before was unquestioned is now in question. The roles are unfixed, the meanings are undetermined, and what to do is uncertain. This is what any elevation in consciousness always looks like at first.

Political awakening first looks like disillusionment and the utter rejection of everything you thought you knew. You don't know what's right, you just know that what you're used to is wrong. Then, you look more broadly, read more widely, and a new shape to the world begins to form. You have a new direction and you know now what to do.

More spiritual or emotional awakenings also look like a rupture from everyday reality at first, too. That's what an awakening is — it's a change in how we experience the world, so everything is going to look different and be very confusing for a while. But as you keep going down your path of healing and personal transformation, a new texture to living begins to form.

I don't think that I'm enlightened or right about everything. I know I err on the side of optimism, because I find that

makes it easier to keep doing the hard work of making change. But I've gone through enough of my own awakenings, across enough different vectors of experience, that I know an awakening when I see one.

We're waking up, people.

Wake up to the fact that we're waking up. When we realize this is what we're doing, we can start doing it on purpose.

For me, my awakening began in one area of my life. Politics came first. I became aware of political injustice at a very young age, grew increasingly angry and disillusioned with the world, and then found new ideas and theories in my twenties that gave my politics a new shape and trajectory. Spirituality came next. I was interested in it as a child, thought about it all through my teens, began to understand it in my early twenties, and started learning to embody it last year. Psychological and emotional healing went along with the spirituality.

The more awakenings I went through, the more I saw the same pattern in each one. Now, I consciously seek out new awakenings. I look for ways to challenge my habits and beliefs, uncover new truths about myself and the world, find new ways of relating to life and everything in it. Awakening is my hobby, and everything in my life has gotten better as a result.

If you don't think you've had an awakening, you might be right about that, but I doubt it. Have you never realized something you didn't know before and changed your

actions accordingly? Every story we have is about awakening. *The Hunger Games* is about awakening. *Cars* is about awakening. Hell, what is *Pride and Prejudice* if not the story of two people awakening to how their pride and prejudices might not be serving them? In call of these stories, changing unquestioned beliefs changed people's lives.

Any noticeable increase in awareness, consciousness and agency is an awakening. Take it from me, all awakenings follow the same pattern. All we've been doing is awakening, bit by bit, here and there. That is what we're doing because that is what we do. Now, let's do it on purpose.

I know, it all looks so bleak and miserable right now. I know, there's no way it's happening fast enough. I know there are so many reasons to despair. Go ahead and despair. That's totally okay. I'm not telling you to have hope. I'm telling you that we're awakening.

I know too, that other people's awakenings might not look like awakenings to you — but they are. When you've only been through one or a few awakenings, the pattern of awakening is hard to see. When you've been through enough of them, you realize it's always the same.

There's a famous story in Buddhist tradition about three blind men stumbling upon an elephant. None has ever seen an elephant before. When they bump into the elephant, one finds himself touching the trunk, one finds himself

touching the tusk, and one finds himself touching the stomach.

To the man touching the tusk, he thinks that what he's touching as a big, hard, spiky object. To the man touching the trunk, it's a long, smooth tube. To the man touching the stomach, a flat expanse of cracked skin. The men argue over what it is they're touching, and even begin to attack one another, each man believing with the righteousness of real knowledge that what he's experiencing is the truth.

At first, they can't comprehend how the others could possibly believe such nonsense. What they don't realize is that the others are telling the truth, too. It requires good faith for them to walk to each other's position and learn something new for themselves.

I'm not saying you need to go agreeing with people you think are insane. I'm not saying you need to do anything. I don't determine what you need to do. You do.

All I'm saying is: this is what a collective awakening looks like.

Be Your Utopia

How do we undo this world?

How do we unravel ourselves from the coils of systems that traumatize us, control us, oppress us or turn us oppressor, degrade us, punish us, imprison us mind and body? How do we survive, and how do we change the world around us?

The current of this world runs within us. We are caught in a river, and our swimming in it only makes the current faster. How do we climb out?

Perhaps in looking to change the world, we must look to change ourselves. Yes, the problems I speak of are systemic, and solutions must likewise be systemic. But perhaps the problem is not the nature of the system, but the power of the system. One way to combat it is to give it less power.

There is a way we relate to ourselves that is indicative of a larger culture of dominance and submission. We punish ourselves, we control ourselves, we judge ourselves daily, hold ourselves up to standards of productivity, beauty, righteousness, and financial success. We attach ourselves to status, to power, to positions over others. We bolster the structures that imitate our own way of speaking to ourselves, and in living in these structures, we speak their language internally.

The line of guilt cannot be drawn to self or system alone. It's a circle. It goes around and around. What if we take

ourselves out, one by one? What if we change the things we stand for, and learn to stand for our ideals with our own two feet planted in something new? Perhaps then, we will be the rocks that slow the current to a halt.

Look at the world around you. Look at the square buildings and the streets like lines. Look at the way things grow within and between them. Look at the way you grow: it has never been a straight line, and the harder you cling to a feeling of control, the further you seem to find yourself slipping from anything that feels true.

So I ask you: What is your truth?
How does the world look to you?
Who do you want to be?

Take the question of the world you want this to be and the person you want to be and dissolve the line between them. Find your utopia. What does it feel like? What does it value? How can you do it now?

You will find yourself bumping up against the world around you constantly. Change it where you can. Have the conversations that matter; don't settle for the ones that recycle old content until it's dry. Read. Listen. Make the changes in your way of being that embody the world you want to see exist.

You are not in this alone. There are others out there, wishing for the world to look the way it could in their dreams. You will find them, the more you peel away the layers on the surface and look for what is underneath. You

will find the ones who tell you that you are not insane. You will find the people who help you grow in the direction that feels natural.

Systemic change is an absolute necessity, but if we do not change ourselves with it, we will continue recycling the same kinds of systems with the same kinds of power structures. Yes, the right system makes it so much easier for us to grow in the directions that feel innate and organic: systems that foster trust and inter-connection, affirmation of self and equality of opportunity. But systems are only as strong as those who live within them.

The day we say No, that enough of us say No, we will find our systems crumbling.

There is more room within this world to change than you might think. You can change the way you speak, to yourself and to others. You can change the way you support yourself. You can change the things you do, refuse to give up, and find every opportunity to build this world as a new utopia and take it. Do the things you would love to see someone do. Stop doing the things you hate doing. Find the spaces where the world lets you breathe and scream into them as loud as you can.

It is our task to live our utopia now, to the best of our ability. If we don't, we can still maintain the hope that things will change. If we do, we don't even need to hope: we can trust that things will continue in the direction we are

pushing them, that the momentum will grow, and someday overcome everything we struggle against.

If you want to stop the current from recycling you as a piece a world that tears you apart, stop swimming. Turn around. Swim the opposite direction. And find those swimming with you.