

Failure and the Great Hurdle



The telephone was invented almost 150 years ago. Now we have mobile smart phones - which can also send/receive text messages and emails, take and share and store photos, play music, play videos, play games, double as an alarm clock and calculator, access the internet for all kinds of information, and much more. It hasn't taken long for this astonishing development in technology. Humans can be very intelligent, as well as able to recognise a good thing that will improve their lives.

We've known about the possibility of a greater understanding, love for all, and much better way of being for at least the past 3,500 years. Glimpses of this alternative consciousness have been reported by individuals from various cultures and different continents for a long, long time. This idea of a higher reality has been taken seriously by many - whether clothed in religious doctrine, philosophical ideas, or the language of poetry. The basic aim has been to transcend the limited, small "self" - unfolding human potential to a more understanding and more loving state that is beyond the everyday suffering. Yet, after several thousand years, there's little or nothing to show of any real worth. In fact, if you look at the human situation honestly and objectively, from an evidence-based perspective, there's only a history of failure. Selfishness persists.

Let me quickly emphasise here that I don't for one second doubt the existence of a higher reality, different consciousness, or significantly better psychology that I prefer to call non-selfishness. Nor do I doubt that it can be learnt and achieved by all. But I'm not fooled by nonsense.

If we're clever enough to work out the telephone and technologically develop it into something quite astonishing within a relatively short time, then why have we so far failed to work out the biggest issue of all: the improvement of human psychology? Why haven't we been able to harness the same intelligence, applying it to an even more important area of life? The potential benefits are huge and widespread, going way beyond the positives of increased communication via the phone.

It's both a farce and a tragedy, an almost unbelievable situation. The capability that humans have shown with phones has apparently deserted them when it comes to the central matter of sorting themselves out. People who are smart, thoughtful, and productive in certain things they do somehow become dumb, neglectful, and horrible the rest of the time. Commonly, they act as morons. Or as sheep, zombies, and vampires.

Siddhartha Gautama the Buddha, for example, lived approximately 2,500 years ago and is considered by many to have gained enlightenment whilst sitting under the Bodhi fig tree. (I suspect, instead, that he gained some degree of illumination from a single oneness experience - which, when combined with his considerable prior knowledge of spiritual disciplines, prompted him to embark on teaching Buddhism. To be exact, this is different to what I call and know as enlightenment.) At that point in history, when Buddha was alive, there was an estimated human population of 150 million people. Today, we're approaching eight billion people. So, mathematically, if there had been no progress whatsoever in Buddhism or any of the world's spiritual teachings, it would nevertheless still be reasonable to expect that there might be 53 "enlightened" individuals alive today - just to maintain the status quo, accounting for the large increase in the world's population. If we put aside the delusional ramblings of those who would have us believe that a number of mystical "Awakened Ones" are to be found in caves, monasteries, and the like, the actual situation is stark or desperate. The leading international academics I talked with in the early 1990s couldn't name anyone other than myself who they considered to be genuine and still alive. And, if there had only been a moderate amount of success during the past 2,500 years in teaching humans to develop beyond selfishness, wouldn't it be reasonable to nowadays expect at least a few thousand individuals to have reached the non-selfish psychology? After all, mobile smart phones exist in huge numbers.

I picked Buddhism as an example, allowing at least a thousand years beforehand for Hinduism to prepare the way for such an idea of a better life - or “advertise” this amazing option. Again, a luxury of opportunity that the phone industry didn’t have prior to launching their offerings. But, to be fair, Hinduism has had at least 3,500 years to succeed or fail. Christianity has had just over 2,000 years (and there’s a long tradition of Christian mystics who have glimpsed oneness). Taoism has had a similar length of time. Islam (including Sufism) has had about 1,500 years. Moving sideways from religion to the great philosophers, Plotinus is considered to have benefitted from three illumination episodes or “happy intervals”. And Socrates obviously had significant insight as illustrated by his allegory of the cave, presented by Plato, in which the cave’s chained inhabitants are fooled by shadows. Yet philosophy has likewise failed to stimulate a fundamental shift in consciousness. The great mystical poets like Dante, Rumi, Walt Whitman, William Blake, and William Wordsworth have also had more time than the Great Phone Industry.

Some might think I’m being too hard in stating that there’s been a history of failure, claiming there’s been “progress”. But where is this supposed “progress”? The degree of hypocrisy, contradiction, and avoidance - even amongst those who should know better - is appalling. Abhorrent amounts of suffering continue on an individual, societal, and global scale. It’s so common that it’s normalised. Rather than repeat my lists of dysfunctional and disgraceful human behaviour, plus the resulting suffering, I refer you to another essay in this interlinked series *How do they think? The likely psychology of extraterrestrial intelligence Part 2: It’s the Great Hurdle, not the Great Filter* - or my books on psychology. Humans are at the baby stage, not yet starting to crawl, let alone taking the first few steps, when it comes to the all-important task of shifting from selfishness to non-selfishness. At best, they are just gazing with an infant fascination at the twirling baby mobile hanging above their cot or crib. Progress? It’s a joke.

Facing reality is one of our 16 key factors for being the best you can be. Yet the vast majority of those convinced of the concept of change merely play at it or pay lip service to the idea. Religion has been institutionalised; it’s become worse than stale bread, more fossilised than the dinosaurs. Philosophy has been hijacked by the lazy shiny bums, a sad excuse for intellectualisation. And poetry is little more than sustenance for dreamers. As for the modern New Age crowd, or whatever name they prefer to go under, it’s just a mess of alternatives. The mumbo-jumbo or woo-woo is at the lower end of the sludge, with a mishmash of adapted “spiritual” ideas and practices at the so-called upper end - but none of it achieves actual and significant development. There’s no progress, other than perhaps growing up a bit with age as might be expected with anyone getting older. Lyrics from The Script’s song *Six Degrees of Separation* are relevant: “Tarot cards, gems and stones, believing all that shit’s gonna heal your soul. Well it’s not, no. You’re only doing things out of desperation.”

The spiritual seekers happily get side-tracked into strumming their acoustic guitars or slapping their drums at every opportunity, joining in with the latest protest or demonstration. They dye their hair bright pink or maybe strap on a pair of fairy wings - anything to make themselves feel “different” so they can “stand out from the crowd”. But all they are is a sub-culture of selfishness. The self-obsession and self-preoccupation continues unchecked. And the dysfunction. They like nothing better than a buzz from the latest feel-good factor idea, yet hypocritically sneer at the materialism of lunchtime shopping for yet-another-pair-of-shoes or whatever to achieve the same short-term distraction. Or they’re blissfully “non-judgemental”, until confronted with the harsh reality of child rape or similar. They’re not different; they’re sheep (albeit with pink dye as an identity mark, rather than black or blue). And delusional.

The unstoppable human spirit that yearns for change came out in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a counter-culture movement in America. It spread to the UK, where I was still a teenager. Rock music conveyed lyrics of transcendental hope and new beginnings. LSD-induced insights

awoke the young to that “something more”. Hippies travelled to India to find enlightenment but just got diarrhoea. Communes were started only to quickly crumble under the weight of emotional dysfunction. Then punk rock appeared to help the youth let out their frustrations and anger. The Eagles carried on, singing “We thought we could change this world with words like love and freedom.” Then the rat-race went into overdrive through the 1980s, with money and materialistic possessions becoming the new god. A false dawn had been and gone, soon to be forgotten.

Over the past few thousand years, many strands of wisdom have been realised - not least by those individuals who have had glimpses of a better way of being through oneness experiences. But any resulting knowledge has been incomplete and confused. Then it’s been messed with by those who didn’t really know much, cherry-picked and watered down, resulting in something lesser. It’s mostly been a matter of the blind leading the blind, albeit sometimes with good intentions but certainly not always. The result is a jumble of mumbo-jumbo that’s simply false, truisms that aren’t relevant to the actual process of change, plus bits and pieces which are both true and relevant. How is the proverbial seeker of truth meant to wade through that mess without getting bogged down or dirtied themselves? Traditionally, you’ve needed a guide or guru - but who can be trusted? Most are likely to exploit your ignorance for their own purposes - and the rest of these so-called teachers don’t actually know much more than those doing the seeking. “Those who can, do; those who can’t, teach” doesn’t just apply to conventional schools. The “spiritual” situation has been, and continues to be, an embarrassment.

Meditation has long been the sacred cow of the “spiritual development” movement, held aloft above criticism. I rubbish it whilst on the topic of oneness experiences (another essay in this short interlinked series). It’s a waste of time because it simply doesn’t work. It won’t help get anyone enlightened, into a constant state of non-selfishness.

The idea of mindfulness has been popularised in recent years. It’s been dumbed down and rebranded, becoming another sacred cow. There’s emphasis on some notion of a serene acceptance of life, no matter how messed up you are, often whilst muttering the word “kindness” as if it were a magical “fix all” mantra. Yet the harsh reality is that people are in the psychological gutter, wandering about in no-man’s land where the rubbish is dumped, devoid of any reliable ethical map - a sick mental state that should be challenged and changed, rather than just blandly accepted. But it nicely fits in with the current culture of dumbing everything down and not being able to constructively challenge anyone’s opinion because disagreement is somehow “wrong” or seen as “offensive”. How can mindfulness have anything useful to offer when it’s been hijacked and reduced to a superficial elixir to “solve” the modern woes? Bob Dylan’s lyrics from *Idiot Wind* seem relevant here: “You’re an idiot, babe. It’s a wonder that you still know how to breathe.” The word “desperate” springs to mind.

Two huge stumbling blocks fully explain the long history of failure. When identified and understood, the situation becomes glaringly obvious. The first is the lack of a precise “how to” framework for achieving authentic change. A reliable blueprint is needed, detailing the “nuts and bolts” components - just the same as is required to manufacture mobile phones, perform medical surgery, fly an aeroplane, etc etc. The second reason is failing to realise the extent of psychological avoidance, in its various forms, and how this frustrates or stops change.

The “how to” framework, blueprint, or map isn’t that complicated. I was able to reverse engineer my own constant non-selfish psychology, working out how it differed from the normalised self-orientated mentality. There are 16 key factors that produce capability. These are primary human qualities that can be learnt (not secondary or consequential characteristics). Most are easy to understand, such as grasping opportunity

and working hard, “never give up”, facing reality, and picture building or linking - to name just four. Another is the need for an anti-hypocrisy test - for which I suggest “actions speak louder than words”. This requires a bit more thinking about, plus a degree of self-honesty to admit and see the problematic hypocrisy. (I’ve said before that the problem with people is that they don’t want to see what the problem with them is.) Scale is another of the key factors which can be initially hard to grasp: it’s a matter of thinking big, but also paying attention to detail. And it’s the mother of all keys, which, when combined with linking, provides the amplification for all the key factors so they can be fully applied to their logical extent. None of it is rocket science; the 16 key factors are considerably less complex, for example, than a Raptor engine within SpaceX’s Starship.

Avoidance is similarly not that difficult to grasp. But it does exactly what it says on the tin: avoidance helps you avoid. It’s learnt by everyone in childhood, then becomes more sophisticated during the adult years. It’s a simple but effective defensive mechanism to deal with emotional pain and disappointment, preventing or reducing future instances that might otherwise lead to extreme insecurity. Rather than bravely facing reality and growing through error-focused learning, you instead make cowardly and feeble excuses - such as “I can’t, because...”. Or you blame someone or something else - as in “It wasn’t me!” - deflecting responsibility. Other tricks of the avoidance trade include minimisation, trivialisation, and intellectualisation. There’s escape into fantasy and myth - as well as more normal distractions. And convenient forgetfulness. Plus outright denial or repression, for when you get really desperate. Whereas psychological avoidance might seem to have initial appeal as a quick fix for the unpleasantness of emotional hurt or turmoil, the medium and long-term effects are negative. You become a twisted, scared, lesser human being. You’ve made avoidance your friend and this has meant shutting off to aspects of life. Your perception of reality is distorted.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was the first psychologist to appreciate the importance of avoidance in relationship to anxiety. He did a good job listing the various types or forms, even if he did make the mistake of wrongly assuming these were fixed characteristics. (Neuroscience has clearly established neural plasticity; we can definitely change, albeit only after effort.) Since then, psychologists have miserably failed to realise the absolutely massive negative effects of avoidance on everyone. Avoidance has been normalised to such a gigantic extent that it’s more or less accepted without mention or murmur. It’s as if toilets and toilet paper haven’t been invented. What a stinking, shitty mess!

So, it’s time to clean up. Anyone with a serious intention to fundamentally change their psychology has to become an expert on the tricks and trade of avoidance in both themselves and others. First, you need to become acutely aware of how and when you avoid. Then this silly defensive mechanism needs to be dumped (yes, pun intended). Avoidance is the enemy of constructive change. Military commanders know the importance of gathering intelligence about their foe - and they know from military history that battles will be lost if this crucial part of action is neglected.

Avoidance and emotion are linked. It’s helpful to distinguish the basic difference between emotion and feeling, rather than vaguely and sloppily lumping them together as is commonly done. Our organisation has covered this specific topic elsewhere, such as in one of our short series of YouTube films: *How to change your life: Emotion or feeling?* Emotions are lesser, limiting, and negative - whereas feelings are bigger, embracing, and positive. Emotions are unhelpful - apart from the few that kick in to keep us safe from real physical danger. If you don’t understand what’s happening, with poor emotional self-control, you’ll be at the mercy of emotional flare-ups. Emotion is a powerful force that was once a very useful attribute to keep early humans safe in an extremely dangerous environment. But now, if you don’t know what’s happening, it will likely stop you from going beyond yourself and realising your dreams. It can be a show-stopper. Therefore, you need to be smart, as with avoidance. To repeat: the two are linked. And they’ll make a fool out of the most intelligent of people if you remain ignorant or under their control.

Habit is also related to avoidance and emotion. Overall, it's a good thing. Without habit, you'd be spending a lot of time each morning learning anew how to put on your underwear and other clothing, making breakfast, etc etc. Again, once upon a time, in a world now thankfully far, far away, you'd be dead were it not for the remembered lessons of habit. But in those dangerous days, you couldn't be an idiot - or, if you were, you wouldn't last long. Nowadays, you can be an idiot and stay alive, even being liked by other idiots - but at a price. If you want to get serious and clean up your shit, then those "easy" past habits you've developed become an issue. They'll be associated with avoidance and emotion. Plus, you won't succeed in swapping them for better ones without considerable focused effort, which will take months of catching yourself and then making adjustments to your behaviour. Everyone has learnt limiting or moronic behaviour prior to wanting to change for the better, so there's no escape. And, if you're arrogant or blind enough to think this doesn't include you, please re-think and get real. The sad but effective trick of avoidance - and associated normalisation - is that it's "easy" to overlook what you don't want to see or hear.

Avoidance is the biggest obstacle that will block progress. Almost everyone underestimates what they're up against. You avoid much more than you might think, no matter how smart or self-aware you think you are. The same must be said of emotion. But you've also got the lesser obstacles or minefields which are related. Distractions come in increasingly numerous forms, likely to knock you off course or worse. Then there's the issue of integrity. William Shakespeare urged "To thine own self be true" and "Be just and fear not". But the majority of people have very little idea of how to be true or just when they're in the early stages of attempting to change. Contradiction, dilemma, justification, and hypocrisy add to a nightmare of entangled mess.

What I call "the danger of easy" will tempt most people into a half-hearted compromise which will yield zilch, zero, nothing. It's "easier" to play than to face harsh reality. But all you'll do is fail. So you'll perhaps fool yourself into believing there's some "progress", when there isn't any. You'll go sideways, around and around, but not forward. What a waste of time. Meanwhile, there's a mass of suffering in the world that remains screaming out for an urgent solution.

I recently coined the term the Great Hurdle when writing the three essays *How do they think? The likely psychology of extraterrestrial intelligence*. I did so in response to the suggestion that there might be some kind of Great Filter which limits or stops life developing, which I doubt. Instead, the Great Hurdle is a certainty, a real phenomenon, a challenge to be overcome. It's what this particular essay has focused on, demonstrated by the history of failure. There's a considerable problem or hurdle to fundamental change. The bubble of ignorance and avoidance somehow needs to be burst. And if we don't get over it, then we're stuffed - condemned to an ongoing life of dysfunction and resulting misery on an individual, societal, and global level. This is the wretchedness of selfishness. Until there is a major breakthrough, humans will fail to realise their full potential, trapped in the shadowlands, unaware of a fullness of relationship with life.

The longed-for "peacefulness" of "spirituality" is a self-indulgent limitation which misses the point. What's needed is aliveness and capability. Would we be impressed by a mobile phone that quietly sat there in deep meditation, but not functioning? Of course not; we expect technology to actively work. It's frustrating enough when there's a delay because of some software update. We can consider the option of peacefulness once the world's many problems have been solved - although I guess people at that time will still prefer aliveness and capability (which, of course, is the answer to achieving peace). Meanwhile, it's time to stop being silly and to get real.

The next step forward in human evolution will occur as a result of education. Precise education is the only reliable way forward - using our dual framework approach to learn what's relevant and not avoid. What we call "necessity learning", rather than "irresolute learning", incorporating error-focused learning and continual improvement, will need to be employed. The days of messing about and being comfortably numb have to be banished. We have to get serious. We must prevail and progress beyond the Great Hurdle. We must get over it. Once we succeed at what I have called "an almost impossible task", humanity will finally reach the beginning of adulthood. This leap forward will be so significant that the current classification of *Homo sapiens* will be replaced with *Homo liberalis*. We will be liberated. The future will then be very, very different to life as is known now. It will mark the end of stupidity. Society will be all-inclusive, with no suffering. And, assuming that advanced extraterrestrial beings exist, what are the chances that it'll finally be time for them to say "Hello"?

Iain Scott, November 2020

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Essays in this first short series:

How do they think? The likely psychology of extraterrestrial intelligence Part 1: A test of civilisation

How do they think? The likely psychology of extraterrestrial intelligence Part 2: It's the Great Hurdle, not the Great Filter

How do they think? The likely psychology of extraterrestrial intelligence Part 3: A rare window of opportunity

Oneness experiences: a knowledgeable overview

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