

# **MIND YOUR ELEPHANT**

## **HOW TO GET RID OF YOUR EGO, CONNECT WITH OTHERS AND SAVE THE WORLD**

### **Introduction**

*This is an English summary of a book "Mind Your Elephant – How to get rid of your ego, connect with others and save the world". The book is free to download on the Internet ([www.mindyourelephant.org](http://www.mindyourelephant.org)).*

Although we are witnessing technological development like never before and although the standard of living has improved for many, it seems that you cannot measure happiness in money. In brief, three things are dysfunctional: people, relationships and society.

#### **Dysfunctional people**

Today people are living day to day trying to survive, competing against each other, guided solely by their self-interest. Even if money is not the centre of your attention, as it is for many, you still have to repay your student loans, credit card debts, mortgages and monthly bills. This has forced many into a rat race that is just gaining speed all the time. People are rushing madly from home to work, getting exhausted doing tedious work and hasting back home for a few hours before having to go to sleep in order to wake up in the morning and do it all over again. Most people have three thoughts at work: when is the next pay day, when will I get the next rise in salary and when the next vacation is. We have been labeled as consumers and we act accordingly. We think we get a piece of happiness by buying. Often, however, it's only short-term satisfaction. Many people lack a deeper meaning in life. People are guided by their egos.

#### **Dysfunctional relationships**

Our relationship to another human being – both familiar and strangers – is cracking more than ever. Family members can sulk to each other for years. Loneliness bothers both young and old; it's no longer only the youth that is being marginalized but also pensioners. At work relationships are often impassive, bullying happens nowadays among adults as well and people are dissatisfied in their jobs. People do not usually know their neighbors and differences between people are hard to cope with. Even on a greater scale understanding between people seems to be absent: abuse, exploitation, violence, corruption and other aberrant behavior are results of extreme individualism typical to our society. When we are so concerned about our own egos, we cannot feel the connectedness between people.

#### **Dysfunctional society**

Financial crisis, food crisis, environmental degradation, pandemics, wars... It seems that the whole system is in crisis. 2% of all people controls 50% of the world's wealth. 20% of the world's population is using 80% of available global resources. The majority of people in poverty live in resource-rich countries, but the system denies them access. Increasing unemployment, homelessness and poverty have also started ailing the so called Western societies. The political system, managed by a small elite, feels distant to the average citizen whose only way to have an impact is to vote in elections every few years. People are talking about exploitative capitalism. They are feeling the consequences of a debt-based monetary system, but they don't know how the system functions. Ego-centric people have been very good in oppressing others without caring about the consequences. Can this go on?

#### **In the book's introduction Tomi Astikainen explains:**

- How he personally got to comprehend the ego
- How he ended up writing the book while he was hitch-hiking through Europe
- What is meant by conscious awakening
- How to differentiate between heard truth, reasoned truth and experienced truth

## So what?

See if some of the following questions catch your attention:

- Do you often feel restless, frustrated or anxious?
- Is your mind consumed by worries about the future; what you should do?
- Do you have burdens from the past; what you should have done or should not have done?
- Do you sometimes feel lonely, empty or separated from others?
- Are there people in your life that drive you mad; people who just don't get it?
- Do you feel overwhelmed by the increasing pressure of society?
- Do you think there should be more to life than working your way to retirement?
- Would you like to improve your community (family, work place, city, country...)?
- Would you like to leave another kind of world for the generations to come?

Unquestionably we are living in a tumultuous time in human history. People feel bad. Relationships are cracking up. The whole planet seems to be in crisis. Then again, although some see only the crisis, a new and better world is in the making. More and more people are awakening to understand what really matters in life.

## Ubuntu

In order to create a better society we must start the change process inside. That's why this text is organized according to African Ubuntu philosophy: "I am because you are because we are".

Before we can save the world we need to have a humanity that understands the connectedness of all beings and that we are all on the same side. We need strong relationships. To enable this understanding and these relationships we have to let go of our ego and mere self-interest. The change has to start with an individual.

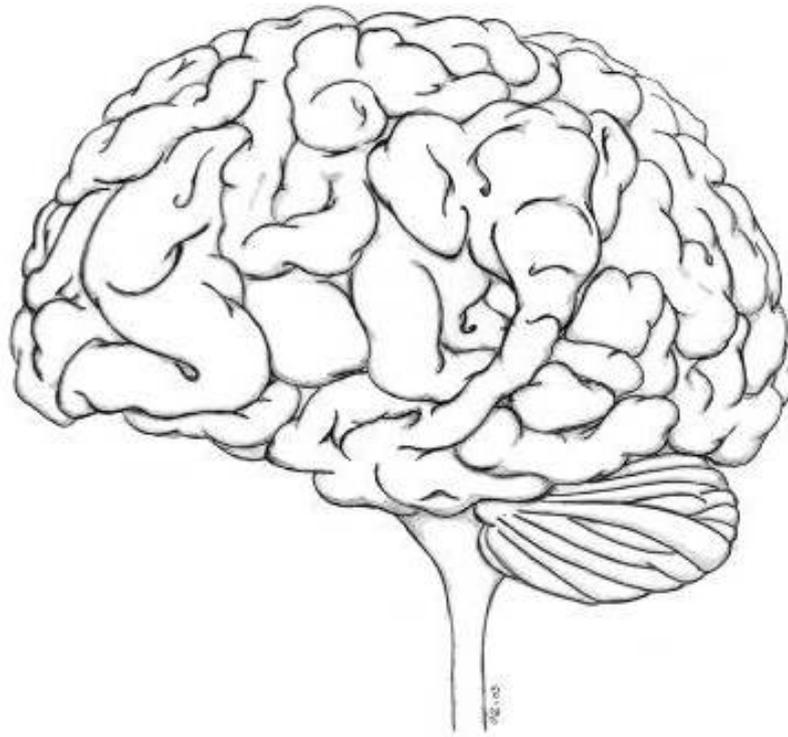
The first chapter concentrates on the individual: "I am". It is about finding "the real me" beyond the false ego-centric sense of self. It aims to answer questions like "How can I understand my ego", "How can I see if I'm in control", and "Who am I if not my ego".

In the second chapter Ubuntu is expanded to relationships: "I am because you are". It denies the artificial separation between people and leads us to understand the connectedness. It is about relating to one another without the ego in the way. It answers questions like "Why should I care about others", "How can I improve my relationships", and "How to go from separation to connectedness".

The third chapter looks at the whole society: "I am because you are because we are". It bites into building a better world through increased communality. It gives clues to why our society is malfunctioning, what is about to happen and what you can do today so that tomorrow will be better for all.

These are not unique ideas of any one person. The wisdom has been collected from Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Christianity, Kabbalah, Bahá'í, Gnosticism, and free-thinkers as well as modern day science, design and technology. It's amazing to see how the same ideas are surfacing all over the world. This is somehow part of humankind's collective consciousness that science is yet unable to explain.

The story is wrapped around an encounter between Anna Were and a mystical Teacher who lead us to the world of elephants.



*“ The time has come to awaken from our slumber and for this the right message has to reach our heart and uplift our spirit.”*

-Ervin Laszlo in the Foreword of the book-

## Chapter 1: Mind your elephant

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Although quite social by nature, Anna Were had always felt like a lone wolf – that in the end she was alone in this world. She had taken her destiny in her own hands, graduated with best grades from a respected university and finally... ended up unemployed. She was confused but knew there was something more waiting for her than a job at a multinational company.

One bright day Anna had decided to take a boat ride to clarify her thoughts. There she came across a delicate-figured person in a bright blue robe who preferred to be called a teacher. Right after the introductions, the teacher asked Anna a powerful question: “How did you manage to grow your elephant that big?” This is how their conversation started.

**A:** Say what? What are you talking about?

- Your elephant... How did it become that massive?

**A:** What elephant?

- The one you are traveling with.

**A:** Umm... I don't have an elephant.

- Yes you do. It seems you haven't just noticed it before. You have not been aware of its presence.

**A:** Why would I have an elephant?

- You tell me. That is a very good question indeed: why do you keep dragging it with you?

Anna still couldn't figure out what the teacher was mumbling about. She thought the teacher was just old and foolish. As Anna stood there speechless, the teacher decided to enlighten her.

- Isn't it so that most of your life has been quite a drama?

**A:** I guess so. I've gone through a lot of shit.

- I would call it elephant dung.

**A:** What?

- We'll come to that later. You've had a lot of worries, people have been unfair towards you and you've had to put up with all kinds of negativity. But now you have finally made it, is that so?

**A:** Well, I don't know if I've made it but I'm definitely much better off now than before.

- You are proud of your achievements, aren't you?

**A:** Uh-huh...

- But you still seem to be confused.

**A:** I am. I don't know which direction to take.

- How about inwards? Are you ready to get to know your elephant?

It just kept getting weirder. “Is there an elephant inside of me?” Anna thought. Maybe she was thinking out loud because the teacher answered.

- Yes there is. Some people call it ego; some refer to it as self, and the rest call it the thinking mind. I call it an elephant. It's much more precise expression than any of these more professional but ambiguous terms.

**A:** I see.

- You do?

**A:** Not really. Tell me more.

- From the moment you were born you became under the influence of the prevailing culture. Your cultural conditioning started. And what do you think was the prevailing culture?

**A:** Western culture?

- True, but that's not what I meant. There was a hint in the question: what do you think?

**A:** Culture of me? The culture of being highly independent?

- Also true. We are getting there. One more guess. Look at the question: what do you think?

**A:** Think?

- Correct.

**A:** What?

- You were born in the era of thinking.

*For a while Anna thought she was on to something but now she was just more perplexed. What did this have to do with elephants?*

- So, there you were, an innocent little girl growing up and learning new things every day... getting further and further away from the Source. Then your parents or someone else popped the question: what are you going to do when you grow up?

**A:** Yes.

- So, what did you answer?

**A:** I wanted to become what I called a multi-function woman. I didn't have a dream job. I wanted to do a lot of different things.

- Ok, so what was the effect of that question?

**A:** The effect? I guess I became more conscious of what the future holds for me; that I should become something.

- Exactly. I would say you became a bit less conscious because your cultural conditioning now said that you should start worrying about the future.

**A:** I'm not sure if I follow what you're saying.

- How future-oriented are you now?

**A:** Well, I am. I have big ambitions. I set goals and I do my utmost to reach them.

- Ok. That's long-term thinking. Most likely someone said it's good for you. And it is, if you are not consumed by the future all the time.

**A:** I am. I feel restless. I even worry about the short-term future a lot. I often feel that today is not enough, I'm already thinking what should happen tomorrow. I guess I see your point. I should be more in the now, more in the present moment.

- Very clever. But don't say that you should be something. Just be.

**A:** Ok. Now what does this have to do with the elephant?

- Good question. The elephant loves creating problems for it to solve. And once you have tackled one problem, another one arises. You keep incessantly feeding your elephant with worries.

**A:** I see. And it's the same with the past is it?

- It is. I take it you are quite an open person. It's easy to get to know you on a personal level. Am I right?

**A:** Definitely.

- Well, how do you introduce yourself when you get to know new people that you are supposed to work with, for instance?

**A:** I rip my heart open. I tell my life-story; all the ups and downs. I think this is a good way to show example for others to follow; clear the air and create an atmosphere of openness and trust.

- Might be. But at the same time you identify with those ups and downs. You think that's who you are. Without that story you wouldn't be anything, right?

**A:** Of course.

- No. That's your elephant in the forefront. You are only here and now. You are not those stories of the past. Nor you are the future you imagine.

*Anna was lost in her thoughts for a while but she had to admit it: The teacher was right. Anna thought for herself: "I got it. I completely got it. All this time I thought I was my mind, my ego... my elephant." She continued:*

**A:** *Once I was in a situation that you described before, and everyone told their life stories. Afterwards someone said to me that “It was amazing to hear how difficult lives people have had, except you who didn’t have it quite as tough.”*

- *And? How did this make you feel?*

**A:** *I was pissed off. I couldn’t say anything out loud, but I realized I wanted my life history to be as dramatic as everyone else’s or worse...*

- *Can you now see that it was your elephant that was offended?*

**A:** *Yes, it makes sense. It’s insanity to think like that.*

- *It is insane.*

**A:** *So, are you saying that the elephant wants my life to suck?*

- *Yes, it feeds on your worries and problems that it creates. In your situation this was even magnified by the fact that you’re so emotional. Most likely something happened in your history that made you call for sympathy from others.*

**A:** *True. But let’s not go in there.*

- *Ok. Can you now answer my first question: How did you manage to grow your elephant that big?*

**A:** *Sure. My elephant grew and grew because I kept feeding it unconsciously with worries of past and future. I got disconnected from life – from this moment. Because I wasn’t aware of it I wasn’t aware of who I really was.*

- *Very good. I’m proud of you.*

*The boat came into the shore and the teacher went silent. Anna kept waiting and waiting for him to say something. They walked out of the boat together in complete silence. As they reached the harbor the teacher finally spoke:*

- *This identification with mind has surely had an effect on your relationships with others also.*

**A:** *Oh yes. A lot of drama in there.*

- *Very well. How about fulfilling your life’s purpose? Have you been successful in it?*

**A:** *Not really. I wanted to change things for better, but I was unsuccessful. I blamed it on the others. I blamed it on the society. I even blamed it on the whole world, but I didn’t take responsibility of it myself. I guess that was again the elephant...*

- *I’m happy you see that now.*

**A:** *Me too.*

- *I need to go now.*

*Anna was shocked to see that the teacher turned around and started slowly walking away without saying another word. Anna still had so many unanswered questions about her elephant, others’ elephants and the whole world of elephants. “What shall I do?” she shouted when the teacher left.*

- *Mind your elephant.*

## You are not your elephant

People are often suffering from cluttered and unfocused thinking and not necessarily even aware of it. The incessant stream of thoughts, needless worries and trivial distractions are causing a state of restlessness that goes on from day to day. Furthermore people usually think these are their thoughts or that they are these thoughts. But is it possible to say that these are *my* thoughts? If it is so, then who is that me who has those thoughts?

Ego is a misleading and equivocal word so let's instead use the metaphor of an elephant. The elephant is a mental image of who you are. It has been formed based on your personal and cultural conditioning – starting from early childhood. When you ask someone "who are you?" the answer is usually their name, age, interests, profession, title or a combination of these. None of these convey who we really are: they are just labels that we have attached to ourselves over time. It's fairly common that we identify with this false image of self. If you are guided by your elephant, you are not an exception.

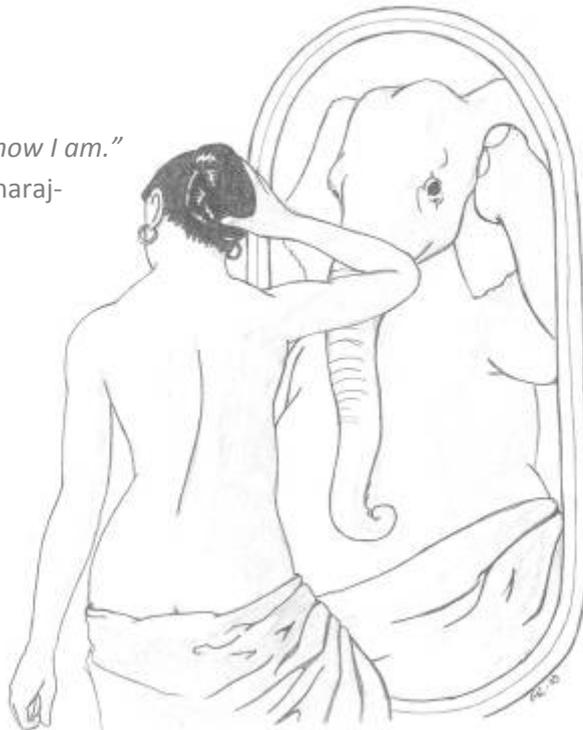
If you are now getting a feeling that this cannot be true, it's a normal defense reaction of your elephant. Every time it feels threatened it starts defending itself. In any case, you are not your elephant. You are the impermanent and ever-changing consciousness beyond the elephant. You are able to observe the elephant and guide its behavior. After hard practice you can even get rid of it completely.

### ***In chapter 1 of the book Tomi Astikainen explains:***

- His concept of God
- The prevailing culture
- The difference between and importance of left and right hemispheres
- Homelessness as a learning experience
- How to spot the behavior of an elephant
- How to deal with fear
- Love

*"I am that by which I know I am."*

-Nisargadatta Maharaj-



## Suffering is elephant food

The elephant enjoys worries, sorrow and problems. The worse off you are, the more rampant your elephant is. And if you are doing well your elephant tries to come up with new problems in order to survive.

### The obsessive compulsive generation

Possessiveness, pleasure, fear, keeping busy and uncertainty of the future are abundant traits in a modern day society. We feel that we have to survive, we are forced to succeed, and we have to win. But all these feelings are coming from the elephant. Remember that your elephant has not had the luxury of just chilling inside your head but instead it has faced years of conditioning. What your elephant thinks can be far from what is actually good for you, who you are and what makes you happy.

### Pursuit of happiness causes suffering

All kinds of craving and desire lead to suffering: including the fact that you are trying to become happy some day in the future. This can be called "when thinking": I will take time off from work when I get a bonus, I will tour the world when the kids can manage on their own, I will engage in the voluntary work that I love when...

### Acceptance is the key

According to Buddha the only way out of suffering is to accept that everything is unsatisfactory, impermanent and has no self. If you accept that ultimately there is nothing that can be relied upon, that there is nothing that can bring true happiness, you start taking everything that comes your way as it is. When you accept everything as a gift the impact of suffering is diminished or even removed.

*"Why are you unhappy?  
Because 99.9 per cent of every-  
thing you think, and of everything  
you do, is for yourself. And there  
isn't one."  
-Wei wu Wei-*



## The elephant has taken over

For most of us it's common to be controlled by our elephants. If we want to regain control we first have to learn how to spot the elephant and then how to control it.

### Elephant speech

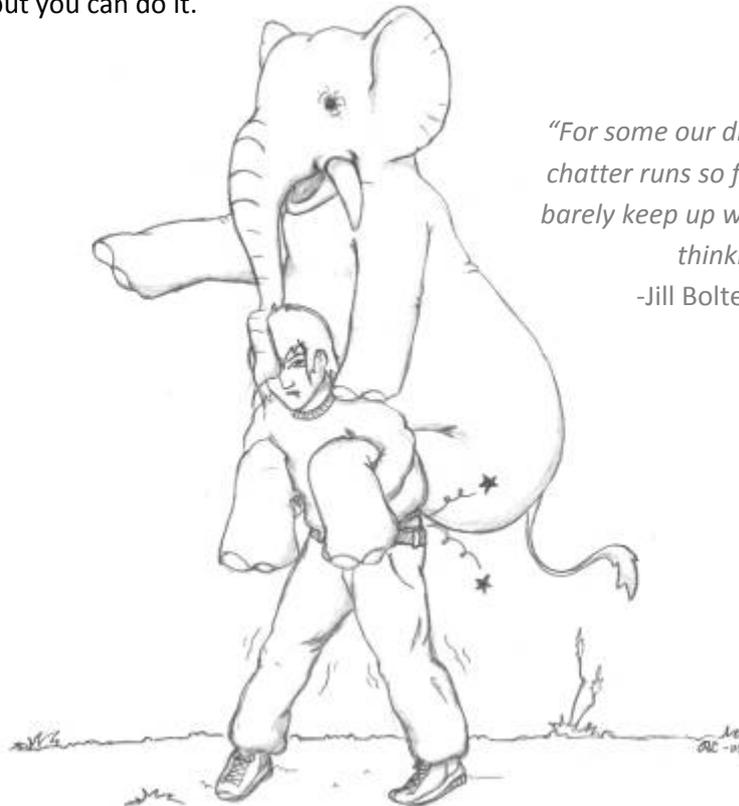
Different cravings, needs, wants and desires are coming from the elephant. How often do you notice the following in your mind: "I need", "I want", "I desire" or "I should", "I could", "I would"? You don't need, want or desire. It's your elephant. Watch the language you use and you're one step closer to catch the elephant as it takes over. Usually almost everything you think comes from the elephant and what you feel inside is the real you.

### Silence the brain chatter

The elephant lives in the past and in the future. If you concentrate on being in the now the elephant is not left with much territory. If you have been in the grip of your elephant for a long time, rushing from one place to another and worrying about past and future, you might find it hard to accept the fact that life is here and now. Your life happens only now, not 15 minutes ago or next year. Easy ways to concentrate on the present moment include for example focusing on your breath or circulation in hands and feet. You can also observe the star-lit sky or move around in nature paying attention to details without labeling everything. Your elephant is likely to treat it as humdrum or to label things – "so what, it's a tree" – but if you don't let the prejudice take over you can sense an amazing range of colors and harmony as soon as you step out of the door.

### Replace fear with love

All human feelings derive from two fundamental feelings: fear and love. The so-called negative feelings are just variations of fear and consequently the pleasant feelings spring from love. Accept that your elephant is afraid. Therefore, a somewhat easy way to get rid of your elephant is to concentrate on love. It takes a bit of time and practice but you can do it.



*"For some our dialogue of brain chatter runs so fast that we can barely keep up with what we are thinking."*

-Jill Bolte Taylor-

## Chapter 2: Crocodile dentist

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Anna was lying on the lawn and gazing at the clouds as they slowly slid past the sun. She smiled and breathed easily. A few months had passed since she had met the teacher. She had understood what her elephant was all about: she had found peace of mind. This serene moment was suddenly interrupted. Anna was startled to notice there was someone lying next to her, staring at the sky. It was the teacher.

**A:** Gosh, you scared me. How did you appear without me noticing anything?

- I'm not accompanied by my elephant, so I don't disturb others.

**A:** Of course.

Anna smiled although she thought the teacher had a very dry sense of humor. She was happy that the teacher was back. The teacher asked another powerful question: "Does a crocodile need to go to a dentist?"

**A:** What? Stop it with your riddles. I was expecting you'd want to hear how I have used the knowledge you gave me. I've thought of my personal history and the effects the elephant has had.

- Go on. I'm all ears.

**A:** Ok. Some years ago I thought everything should go my way. I was over-confident and arrogant. Success seemed to breed more success and my ego – which you later named the elephant – grew and grew.

- And how did it affect your behavior?

**A:** My social behavior was next to unacceptable because of my distorted self-image. In actuality it wasn't a self-image in the first place – it was a reflection of my elephant. But I was blind to it because I liked the way it was. Right?

- Sounds you've done your homework. Carry on.

**A:** Then I faced disappointments. I started failing – which was unheard of for me. As I told you before, I didn't accept responsibility for the failures but blamed others. If I couldn't blame individuals I would blame institutions or even the whole world. It took many disappointments and a very courageous individual who made me see it's my fault – I was the one who needed to change.

The teacher was enticed about the story.

- So what happened?

**A:** I was grateful for this person – still am – and started building the new me with a more humble attitude.

- What did you do?

**A:** I set personal development goals, gathered feedback of my behavior, did personality tests, read a lot of self-help books, clarified my purpose and values and all sorts of things that only a badly beaten elephant could imagine.

- You use the elephant metaphor very eloquently.

**A:** Yeah, I like it. Anyways, so I tried to think my way out of misery. I thought and thought and thought. And finally I thought – again – that I have changed because I was seemingly successful again.

- But you were not, were you?

**A:** Maybe I had learned something, but it was still my elephant in the forefront.

- Can you give me an example?

**A:** For instance, I was obsessed to be right. It was still my way or the highway. I refused to listen to the other person's point of view – let alone try to understand where he was coming from, what was the language he was using or why he would feel that strongly of his standpoint. Gosh, I could be having the same viewpoint but still argue, because I was just using different words to express the same thing.

- So you had to win on every occasion, am I right?

**A:** No. My elephant needed to win.

Anna turned to pick up something from her backpack. She gave a book called "Celestine Prophecy" to the teacher.

- Hmm... James Redfield. Sounds familiar. What did you learn from this?

**A:** I haven't finished reading it yet, but I already learned of the concept of "control dramas". I noticed that I've been repeating the poor me drama in myself – something that I had learned early on in my childhood from my parents and my upbringing.

- And what does this have to do with what you told me before?

**A:** This poor me drama was the reason why I was acting the way I was – trying to get attention, telling my sad story and blaming the whole world if things didn't go my way. But although I noticed it in myself, I felt helpless... not knowing how to let go of it, until I realized it was not me who was carrying the burden, but my elephant.

- Of course. So, noticing that you have an elephant was helpful.

**A:** Yes. Creating the distinction between me and my mind-created ego has helped me a lot.

The teacher did not look satisfied. Anna was wondering why the teacher was not happy that she had learned so much.

- You still haven't answered my question.

**A:** What question?

- Does a crocodile need to go to the dentist?

Anna was bewildered: "What does this have to do with anything?" Then she realized she's being tested further and was glad to answer the question.

**A:** No. I don't think crocs see a dentist.

- And why is that?

**A:** Because their teeth are just fine.

- Why?

**A:** I don't know why... maybe they brush often enough.

- Correct. But who brushes their teeth? They cannot do it alone, can they?

Anna knew this had something to do with what she had already learned. She let the teacher wait for an answer. She knew thinking wouldn't help her much, so instead she just gazed at the sky... She let her eyes wander away from the clouds and into the trees... "A bird?" she thought to herself suddenly.

**A:** There's the bird. The bird is the dentist!

- Excellent. The bird is called an Egyptian Plover. Did you know that?

**A:** Not really.

- Why?

**A:** I just knew it's the crocodile bird.

- Exactly. Why do people associate the bird with the crocodile?

**A:** Because they hang out together so much.

- Yes. Why do you think the crocodile lets the plover to be in its mouth and doesn't eat it?

**A:** Because the bird is useful.

- Correct again. And what's in it for the bird? Is it just doing the crocodile a favor?

**A:** No. I guess it's eating the stuff between the crocodile's teeth.

- Precisely. So, what do you call this kind of relationship?

**A:** The Croc and plover are in a cooperative relationship? I don't know...

- Come on. Think again. What is it when an unlikely species lives in complete peace and harmony and helps each other? What is that relationship?

**A:** Symbiosis?

- Yes. It's a mutualistic relationship. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century symbiosis was defined as "the living together of unlike organisms."

*Anna was silently congratulating herself for putting two and two together so easily. But she was still baffled.*

**A:** *What does this have to do with elephants again?*

- *Can you name any unlike organisms that you know?*

**A:** *What?*

- *In a symbiotic, mutualistic, coexistence both organisms benefit from each other – in fact they wouldn't survive without each other.*

**A:** *Yes, and?*

- *Other than the crocs and plovers, common symbiotic relationships include for instance bees and pollinating flowers, Goby fish and shrimp, Clownfish and Ritteri anemone, human and the horse. Can you name groups of people who have this kind of coexistence?*

**A:** *Not really.*

- *Well, let's turn it the other way around. Do you know groups of people who don't get along?*

**A:** *Of course. You mean like police and demonstrators?*

- *Yes. Who else?*

**A:** *Israelis and Palestinians... Young and old... Men and women... Hutus and Tutsis... This list really is endless.*

- *It is. How do you think we could better connect with others?*

**A:** *By letting go of our elephants! By understanding the value of cooperation! By seeing that my life depends on others... I guess.*

- *Yes, yes and yes. I'm proud of your progress.*

*Anna's smile was radiant although it had started to rain. The teacher took out his umbrella and left in a typical manner, without even a fair warning.*

**A:** *Don't do it again! Tell me more! Hey... What's my homework?*

- *Go see a dentist.*

## The Golden Rule 2.0

Hillel said "That which is despicable to you, do not do to your fellow, this is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary". This message of compassion is the core of all major religions and philosophies. Maybe we have used too much time to argue about the commentary, while all that time we could have been living the core message. Maybe the world would already be a better place if we had done so. This same message is the second part of Ubuntu philosophy: "I am because you are". Although this would not be natural behavior in contemporary society we can start practicing it whenever we want. Whereas thinking directs behavior, sometimes behavior can take our thinking in a new direction. You can fake being compassionate in order to become compassionate. We can no longer afford treating each other as separate beings. Science has finally proven that we all originate from the African continent. At the level of our DNA we are related to the birds, reptiles, amphibians, other mammals and even plant life. It's time to understand that we are all on the same side. It's time to concentrate on love instead of fear. All suffering we have witnessed is a call to change.

## The Nokia Generation

When you look at Earth from space you can see no borders. The same goes for cyber space. The Nokia slogan 'Connecting People' portrays the fact that we have reached each other with the help of technology. Especially the younger generation ultimately see themselves as world citizens. We are starting to see the Earth as one system and understand the relationships between its subsystems.

## Give for the sake of giving

We have to scrap the question "what's in it for me?". For a long time we have been driven by our egos and tried to hoard as much wealth as possible. Even seemingly altruistic deeds have been ego-driven: by helping others we receive satisfaction. It's time to shift to generosity and serving others for the sake of giving. In an egoless relationship you can see the "self" in another human being and because ultimately everything and everyone is one, it's insane to hurt others because it's like hurting yourself. Relationships of this new age are at their best when full of synergy: the whole becomes stronger than the sum of its parts.

*"We live in a time of chaos, as  
rich in the potential for disaster  
as for new possibilities. How will  
we navigate these times?  
The answer is, together."*

*-Margaret Wheatley-*



**In chapter 2 of the book  
Tomi Astikainen explains:**

- Why and how learning to depend is important
- How intention to receive affects behavior
- What is your natural communication style
- What is appreciative inquiry (AI)
- How to be a better partner, parent, child and leader without the ego
- Understanding personal working styles
- Transition from "old doing" to "new being"

## The elephant in the crocodile's mouth

A synergistic relationship is difficult to build because it takes two to tango. It's not enough that you have awakened and your consciousness has risen to a new level.

### Spot the elephant in both

You need to be able to communicate even with those who haven't gone through this transformation. Remember to observe yourself as well: be mindful in your relationships and see if it's really a plover in the croc's mouth, or if it is an elephant disguised as a bird. Needless to say the latter can be too much to take. Aggressive, passive and passive-aggressive communication styles are typical for the elephant.

### Appreciate assertiveness

Only assertive communication models healthy, productive communication. It means that you speak your mind but that you also take others into consideration and make them feel valued and respected. Appreciation means that you concentrate on what works and build on the good sides of people and situations. Use questions more than strict opinions. This is the style of the crocodile and the plover.

### The Law of the Garbage Truck

Pay extra attention to encounters with egoistic people. They have accumulated a lot of garbage inside: frustrations, anger and disappointments. When the load starts to become too full it has to be dumped somewhere. If it happens to be dumped on you, you know how to act: don't take it personally. Smile, wave, wish them well and move on.

*"Only actions that do not cause  
opposing reactions are those that  
are aimed at the good of all."*

-Eckhart Tolle-



## Elephantastic relationships

When the relationship is based on mutual respect people can count on each other to always seek a win-win situation without intentionally demeaning or putting down the other person.

### Aim for egoless synergy

Mutually beneficial relationships are formed when empathy is used. It's important to understand the difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy is an emotion, whereas empathy is a skill. Empathy means that "you walk a mile in another person's shoes". Remember that before this, you have to remove your own shoes.

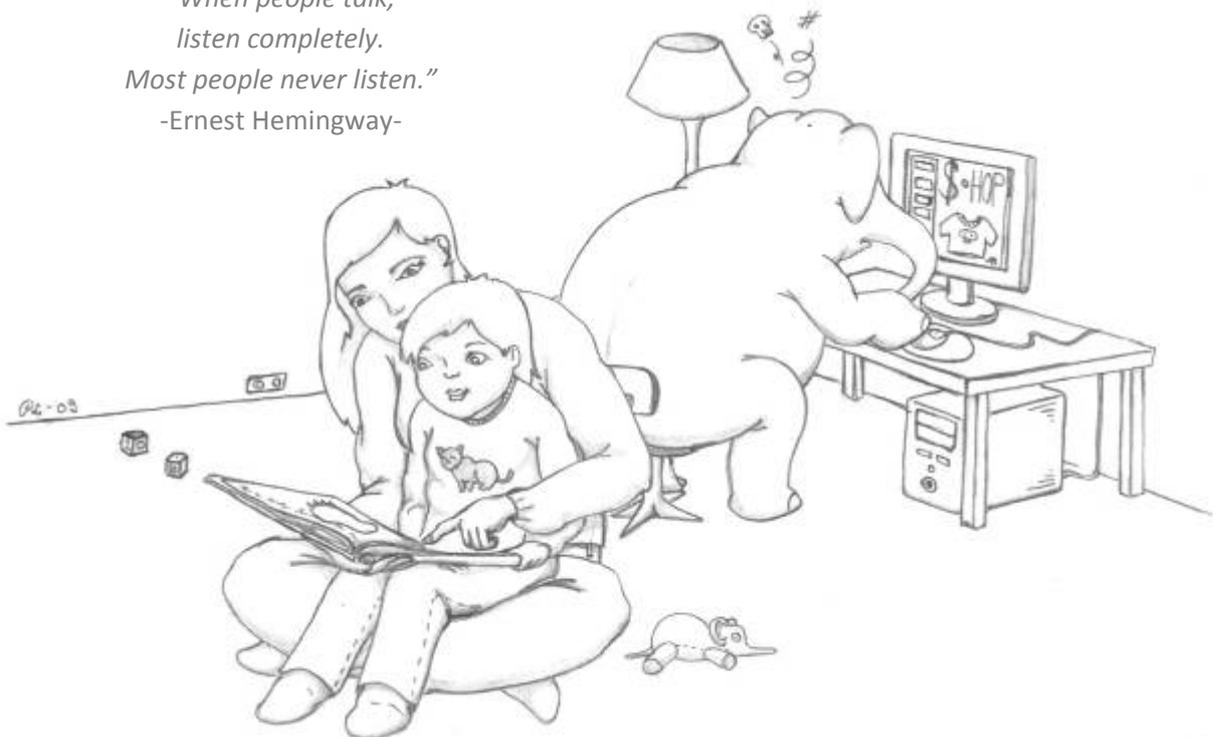
### Practice compersion

Compersion takes compassion one step further. It means that you can feel happy for the success and pleasure of your beloved, even if you were not its source. This applies to parents who doubt if their kids are ready to leave the nest, as well as to polyamorous love relationships where partners allow each other freedom to love others.

### Communicate everything and be radically honest

When the elephant is out of the way, you don't need to take things personally and even complicated issues can be resolved respectfully. There is a common understanding that when frustrations and bad feelings of anger, sadness, fear, and pain are expressed they are not treated as attacks towards one another. However, discussion doesn't always emerge automatically. It's a choice to be made by both parties. Speaking is important because we cannot read minds... yet. When you discuss without an elephant you can speak your mind openly and honestly yet take other's feelings into account.

*"When people talk,  
listen completely.  
Most people never listen."  
-Ernest Hemingway-*



## Culture of letting go

In order to move towards a better world humanity first needs to let go of entrenched conceptions, old values and obsolete habits. Reality is much more than what we are used to perceive with our limited senses and fragmented thinking mind.

### Acknowledge the facts

Enlightenment means acknowledging the facts. Seeing the reality calls for letting go of familiar and safe. Soon love dethrones fear and being becomes more important than mere doing.

### Do less, be more

If you want to focus on your spiritual development, it's good to make some space for it. In busy every-day life there's so much to go about that this might sound like an off-the-wall idea. In any case, you need to free time to do nothing if you wish to get rid of greed, delusion and attachment to unnecessary things.

### Get rid of needless stuff

To help us in letting go of our elephant – the very essence of who we thought we were, we can practice by letting go of less important things. You can start by making a list of all the things you have, and put them in order of priority. Then let them go – give them away or sell them – one by one, starting from the least meaningful. You will soon realize that your elephant has identified itself with those material things. You can be conscious of this process of letting go and every time you get rid of something, rate how bad it feels on a scale from one to ten. In that moment you know how identified you were with that thing in your life. The more things you can eliminate from the list, the more free space you will gain – physically but also mentally – for more significant things in your life.

### It can feel like dying

Letting go can first feel bad, maybe even like dying. It's because of the fact that all that is familiar and safe is replaced with new and unpredictable. And in a way, it is a certain kind of death. When the elephant steps aside you can be born again and grow up.



*"When I let go of what I am,  
I become what I might be."*

-Lao Tzu-

## Chapter 3: Society of ants

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Anna woke up on a gloomy Sunday morning. She thought she heard the doorbell ring, but she didn't want to get out of bed. She had a slight headache from last night's ad hoc decision to get drunk. The doorbell rang again. "Who can it be at this hour?" she thought and forced herself out of the bed to open the door. She was surprised to see the teacher at the door.

- Hello Anna. I hope I have awakened you. May I come in?

**A:** What? Sure. Sorry for the mess.

Anna put the kettle on and washed her face. She didn't even bother asking how the teacher knew where she lived. Soon they sat down on the couch with warm cups of tea. The moment of silence was broken by the teacher: "Do the ants have a leader?"

**A:** Oh gosh, here we go again. Please don't introduce any more animals in my life. The dentist visit didn't go that well.

- They are insects.

**A:** What? Sure, insects, whatever... I have bad news for you.

- Tell me.

**A:** I guess I failed in the homework. Right after we met the last time, my boyfriend dropped a bomb. He said that although he is very much in love with me, he would like to see other people too.

- And how did you react?

**A:** Of course I got mad. I ran out of his place and broke in tears. I know what you're saying next: that I should have controlled my elephant. But this was too much to take.

- No, that's wonderful. You got a real-life challenge to test your first two lessons. I see you cannot discuss this now. I come back in a week. Remember who you really are and how you can connect to others. Whatever happens: take it as a gift.

\*\*\*

The teacher left only to return in a week's time, as promised. Now Anna was more prepared.

**A:** Welcome. I'm sorry I couldn't handle any more lessons last week.

- That's ok. Now tell me what has happened.

**A:** I spent a couple of days alone going through my feelings. I realized it wasn't me but my elephant that was hurt. I took it as a gift.

- Excellent. Did you re-connect with your boyfriend?

**A:** Yes. I realized he never said or even thought of leaving me. He was very honest. He had not cheated on me. He wanted to stay with me and love me, but he couldn't be fully satisfied with me only. He explained that I fulfill his needs 90% but that 10% is missing.

- Really? And what did you decide?

**A:** There might be someone else coming to our relationship... a common friend of ours. It sounds weird but all three of us are fine with it. She's like a sister to me and seems to be genuinely in love with my boyfriend. If it was anyone else I would doubt it, but she's cool. I don't know what's going to happen but at least we know each other's real feelings. Actually, I feel like his affection and love for me has only grown after I let him be what he is. By setting him free I set myself free... to be more honest.

- Good. I won't pry on any more details regarding your personal things. Can we move on?

**A:** Yes.

Anna had prepared even pen and paper. She was eager for her next lesson in life. In fact she felt a bit like cheating: she had been devouring information about ants the whole of Saturday.

**A:** So, what was the new question about ants?

- Do the ants have a leader?

**A:** *There's the queen. But according to Deborah Gordon the queen is only laying the eggs.*

- *Very good. It seems you've done your homework again. Who's Deborah Gordon?*

**A:** *She and her associates in Stanford have used more than two decades in researching ants.*

- *Ok. Well then you most likely know more than I do.*

**A:** *I do. I never knew how fascinating the world of ants could be. They don't really need a leader.*

- *Why is that?*

**A:** *The ant colonies are sometimes referred to as superorganisms because the ants appear to operate as a unified entity, collectively working together to support the colony. It's a system in which the parts use only local information and the whole thing directs itself. There's no need for hierarchy.*

- *Wow. I'm impressed. That was exactly my point. Isn't it a wonderful idea: acting collectively for a common good?*

**A:** *Yes. That's what made me so excited! Although it was a bit disappointing that we humans have noticed the potential and started researching the implications for such useful areas as military and management.*

*Anna realized what she had just said. She was lost in her thoughts for a while.*

**A:** *Wait a minute. Was your point that we are capable of learning from the ants but as of now we have used that wisdom in wrong purposes?*

- *Well, that's what you said. You're on to something magnificent here. Can you tell me more of how the ants go about doing what they do?*

**A:** *Sure. As said, no ant directs the behavior of others. Thus the coordinated behavior of colonies arises from the ways that workers use local information.*

- *What do you mean?*

**A:** *Well, look at the start of seed foraging every day: a small number of patrollers returning to the nest communicates to foragers both the safety and direction of the route. And if these foragers return successfully with food it encourages more ants to take on the role of the forager and leave the nest. There's no need for assessments or giving directions. It's a decentralized system.*

- *Ok. Now you are truly educating me.*

*Anna was proud of how well she had prepared. She got carried away and wanted to tell more.*

**A:** *Apart from foragers and patrollers, other tasks the ant can take on are nest maintenance and midden work. As the environmental conditions change the ants can quickly assume a new role.*

- *How does this happen?*

**A:** *As ants are leaving the nest they communicate with returning ants and decide what kind of work is needed right now. Thus, if more food becomes available, more ants assume the role of a forager. Or if the nest needs cleaning up a forager might turn into a caretaker in an instant.*

- *Ok. Give me an example how this works in practice?*

**A:** *Sure. Some years ago on a vacation in Spain I left a sweet stain on the table overnight and in the morning I witnessed an ant super-highway. I observed for a while how structured they were. Then I played a prank on them and disturbed the order by spilling water on the "highway".*

- *What happened?*

**A:** *A sudden chaos emerged and most of the ants went wildly running around. The fact that in less than a minute they had created a detour is a clear message that they didn't panic but temporarily switched to patroller role and communicated to others the new route.*

- *Impressive. Do you think human organizations could work like this?*

**A:** *Not in a million years.*

- *Really? Are you saying the ants are more intelligent than us?*

**A:** *Well... yes.*

*Anna blushed a bit when she realized how absurd it was. "Human beings as the pinnacle of evolution... yeah, right." she was thinking. There was one more thing Anna wanted to discuss.*

**A:** *There's something that I don't quite understand.*

- *What's that?*

**A:** *One of the most striking revelations of Gordon's studies is that half of the ants are just relaxing and resting in the nest, doing nothing.*

- *Is that so?*

**A:** *Yep. They are not that hard-working after all!*

- *What do you think is their role?*

**A:** *They don't have a role. Maybe they are reserves if something happens.*

- *Could it be that even the ants that are seemingly doing nothing, serve a purpose? Why else would half of them be engaged in this tedious task of doing nothing?*

**A:** *That's exactly my question.*

- *Well, do you have an answer?*

**A:** *Yes, I thought of one thing but it's silly.*

- *What's that?*

**A:** *Could it be that they are – in a very ant kind of way – meditating and thus contributing to the success of the whole superorganism? Could this be a secret for the fact that they've been around 110 to 130 million years and are now covering almost all corners of the Earth?*

- *Might be. Have you read Mark Twain's "What is Man"?*

**A:** *No. Why?*

- *There's a quote in there: "As a thinker and planner, the ant is the equal of any savage race of men; as a self-educated specialist in several arts, she is the superior of any savage race of men; and in one or two high mental qualities she is above the reach of any man, savage or civilized!"*

## We don't need control

So far we have praised in the name of hierarchy, control, predictability and management. Of course certain leadership is needed from every member of the community but, as we have learned from the ants, control has to be replaced by agile development of the community. It emphasizes open access to information, changing roles, constant communication with others and a common objective. Even people know how to self-organize. A good example is the numerous open-source communities that have brought along a whole new kind of free economy.

## 50 % of the ants do nothing

We have heard that ants are highly industrious but according to research it isn't so. Maybe people can also learn to appreciate being and not just constant doing. Due to developing automation it is no longer feasible to keep people in tedious routine work because machines are able to get the job done better and more efficiently. Could human potential be released to more holistic duties that call for more mental capacity? Should the system change? Should it be accepted that life is not only about work?

## Competition is not enough

If ants were in dire competition against each other their society would be in chaos. Competition has its time and place but in all natural systems cooperation is much more critical for the health and survival of the system. Would your body be able to function if your intestines, bacteria and cells would be in competition?

## We are already connected

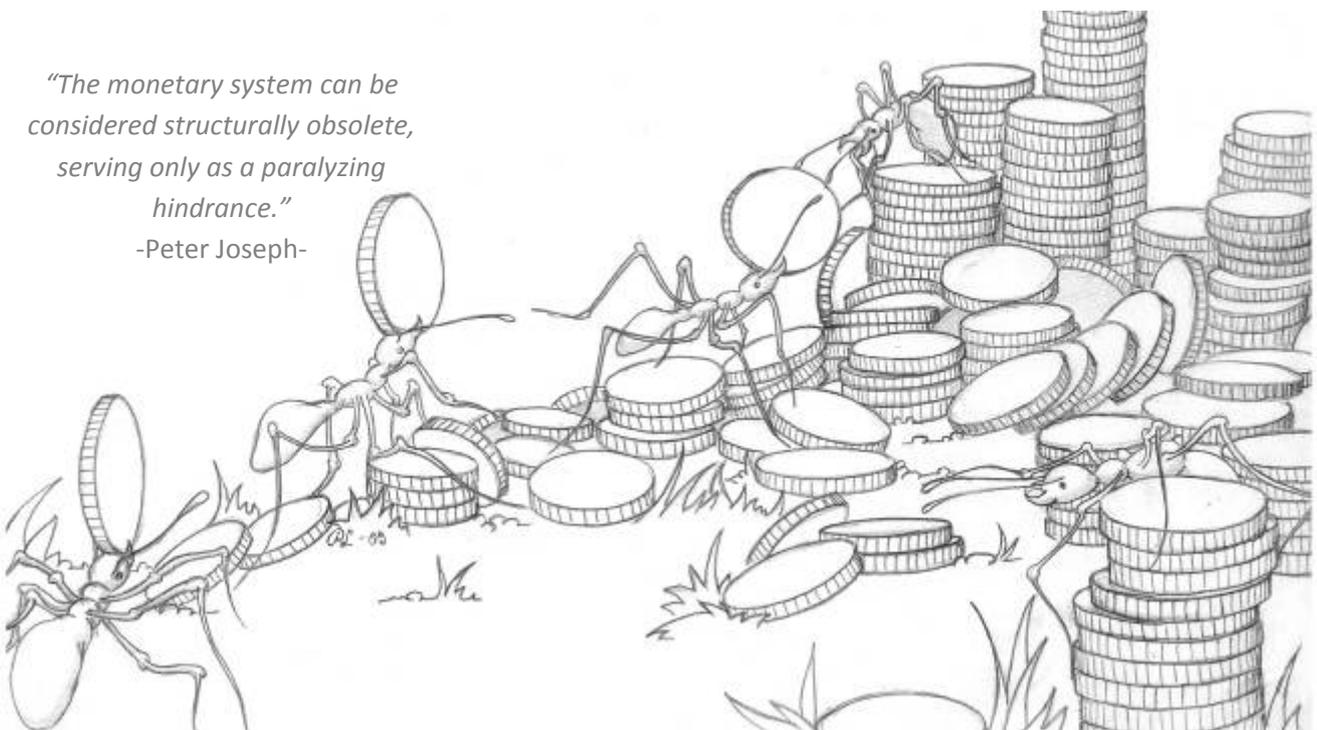
We don't need to increase communality and cooperation but remove obstacles from those. We are already connected. We just haven't noticed it in this society that stresses competition and greed. The truth is that we can't afford to continue like this if we wish to survive as a species.

**In chapter 3 of the book Tomi Astikainen explains:**

- Three visions for a future society
- The downsides of the monetary system
- Examples of alternatives to the current system on individual and community level
- The importance of technological development
- Learning points from social entrepreneurship, polyamory and open-source communities
- The need of change in different areas of society
- How to find a new exciting direction for life

*"The monetary system can be considered structurally obsolete, serving only as a paralyzing hindrance."*

-Peter Joseph-



## The monetary system is unhealthy

Ego has driven the monetary system into crisis. The elephant is stomping on the industrious ants. Individuals, companies and even countries are crumbling under the weight of debt. Intentional or not, the money elite is doing better than ever, while the so called middle class is shrinking all the time and more and more people are sliding into poverty.

### System-created values

Even if it's often claimed to be a fact; greed, self-interest, dishonesty and elitism are not part of human nature. They are system-created values that were not present in hunter-gatherer communities before the birth of the monetary system.

### Who creates money?

Where does money come from? Who issues money? More and more people are starting to notice the dysfunctional nature of the monetary system but still only few are interested in these fundamental questions. The truth is that the fractional reserve banking system allows banks to create money whenever someone takes a loan. In EU the minimum reserve ratio is 2%. To put it simply the bank needs to have 2/100 worth of the issued loans in reserves in the vault of the central bank. Other than that the money is newly created – zeroes and ones on the account without any real value. What about the interest? Who pays the interest? To match the amount of a loan a principle is created into the money supply, but the issuer of the loan is also expecting to be paid interest. This amount of money is created by no one. Because of this there's never enough money to repay the debts and it's inevitable that someone fails. In the case of bankruptcies and foreclosures the banks receive capital goods such as houses, cars, companies, machinery and whatever has been the collateral. The poor get poorer and the rich get richer.

### Nature and we suffer

Do you live in freedom or in debt slavery? Apart from unfortunate individual losses and whole countries yielding under excruciating debt there is one more nasty side-effect of the profit-driven system. The demand for continous growth forces producers to make products that are easy to break or otherwise go obsolete right after the warranty runs out, so that they can sell a new product after a given period of time. This has led to alarming resource depletion and pollution. The media has had to be harnessed to convince people that they need all kinds of unnecessary products so that the system can continue to function.

There is no solution to the financial crisis in the current system. The system has to allow interest-free money to be created by people themselves. There are a lot of good examples of local exchange trade systems that not only guarantee a functional economy but also increase trust between people and encourage collaboration. Even this can be a mere period of transition to a humankind with new values.



## Towards a new society

Apart from socialism and communism people find it hard to see alternatives to the capitalistic system. Even if people understand the downsides (and sometimes horror) of capitalism they take it for granted. However, we have started witnessing a new wave of free and open concepts (Freeconomy, Gift Economy, P2P production) that has been enabled by development of technology. Thus we don't have to think that the only alternative to capitalism would be going back to the roots – to barter economy or even to hunter-gatherer lifestyle. We can build a new kind of society that is based on advanced science, technology and humanity.

### Equal opportunity to abundance is the key

Absolute equality is a myth that is not worth striving for, but ensuring an equal basis for everyone is a foundation for a more just and humane society. Even with contemporary technology and the automation of basic functions of society we could ensure that everyone has access to food, water, shelter, sanitation and whatever one needs for living. It's already possible; we just need the will to make it happen. We shouldn't be competing for such fundamental human rights. It only creates friction in society and increases psychological stress, causing the whole society to falter. One could argue that change for better will not happen because the current society is not equal and the small elite is in control of the ever-growing working class. However, it's also beneficial for the current elite that all of humanity shifts to a whole new level. That needs a change in values: elitism, self-interest, greed and dishonesty have to give way to a new culture.

### New culture is needed

When people's basic needs are met, when people feel the connectedness of all life, and when the ego is not in the way the focus moves from preserving status quo to actually developing the society. Dignity, justice, generosity, abundance and meaningful co-creation become the new values.

- **Meaningful co-creation and agile development:** People contribute to meaningful projects that give them fulfillment. People create solutions together where they are needed. Strict structures and hierarchy give way to developing everything with an agile mindset.
- **Generosity and abundance:** People help each other and share resources for everyone's benefit. There's no more artificial scarcity, but best practices are transferred freely around the world.
- **Authenticity, awareness and dialogue:** Egoless people stay up-to-date on common issues. Dialogue is based on honesty and trust. One doesn't need to be afraid of being deceived because there's no longer a motive for dishonest behavior.



## What kind of world would you like to see?

## Be the awakening

You don't necessarily agree with everything that you have read so far, but if you made it all the way here most likely something inside of you is saying that change is inevitable.

## Off-the-creed

Awakening to connectedness of individuals leads to improved relationships, which in turn create stronger communities and a stronger society. We cannot be sure what the future holds but we can take part in building a better tomorrow. In order to do this we have to let go of our fixed views and adopt a new kind of culture. We have to do the right thing, not the way it's always been done.

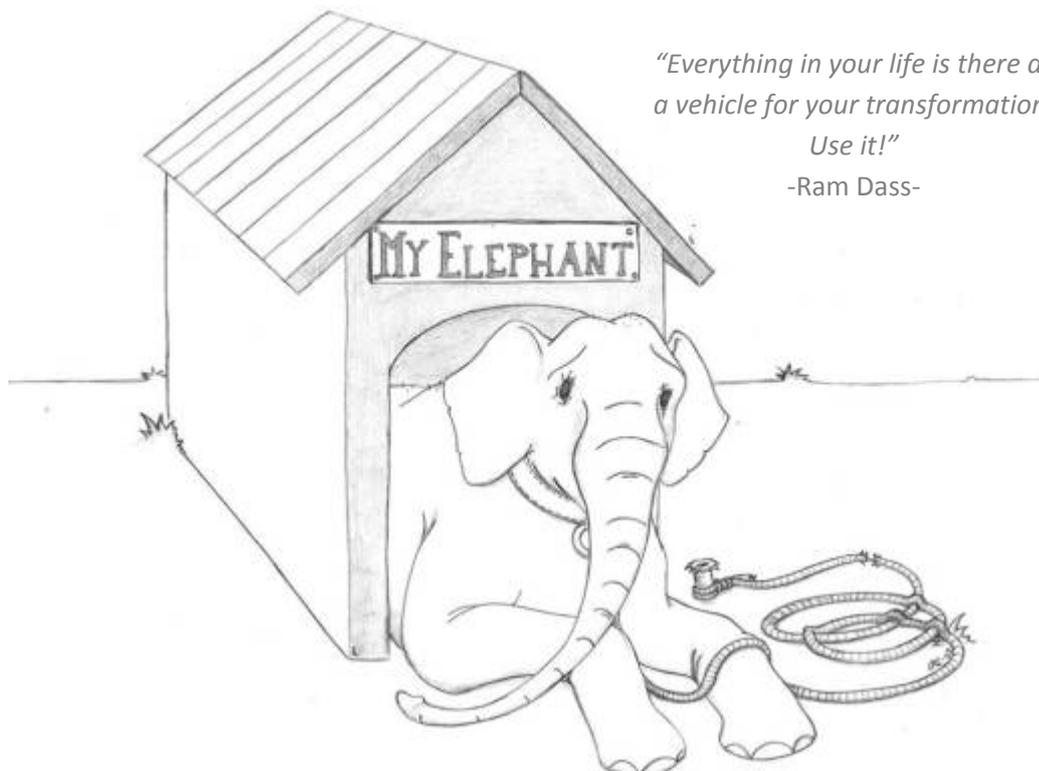
## Off-the-greed

The monetary system that we have is obsolete. It is based on distorted values and artificial scarcity. It increases inequality and limits possibilities to lead a good life. It perpetuates the status quo and doesn't encourage development. We can choose a different kind of future and start taking steps towards it. If our choice is based on Ubuntu we start creating a future where individual freedom, altruism and power of community are emphasized: "I am because you are because we are". On an individual level we can already now let go of greed and make space for a new kind of value system.

## Off-the-grid

The old system doesn't function anymore and we are currently living in suffering because of it. Good news is that the transition to a new society has already started. We need a vision of the future but even more importantly we should align our current behavior with this new direction. No matter what area of society you are working in, or even if you are unemployed, you have a certain strength that you can build on.

More about that in the actual book: [www.mindyourelephant.org](http://www.mindyourelephant.org)



## Epilogue: Insight from the future

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*Anna had joined a company that was helping young people to find their calling in life. She was passionate about the job but had agreed to work only 20 hours a week. She wanted to leave room for her own development and spending time with people closest to her.*

*Anna had not seen the teacher in a long time. She was fiddling with her new business card where her name said simply "A. Were". She was about to give it to the teacher who had agreed to meet her one more time. Anna had demanded to know where the teacher had gained all the wisdom. The answer had been confusing: "from the future". But Anna thought it somehow made sense. There was definitely something otherworldly in the teacher's wisdom.*

*Beatles was playing in her iPod: "Imagine there's no heaven. It's easy if you try. No hell below us. Above us only sky. Imagine all the people, Living for today... Imagine there's no countries. It isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too. Imagine all the people. Living life in peace... You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will be as one. Imagine no possessions. I wonder if you can. No need for greed or hunger; a brotherhood of man. Imagine all the people, sharing all the world... You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will live as one."*

*Anna saw the teacher climbing up the rock where they were supposed to meet. Anna had never been in this grandiose place although it was just half an hour from her home. The evening sun illuminated the trees.*

- *Hi Anna. I'm afraid my time is limited. I'll grant you 20 questions but then I must go. This will be our last time together.*

**A:** *Ok. I'm so happy to meet you again and of course sad that you are leaving. But since we don't have much time there's no point of beating around the bush or start arguing if you're really from the future or not. I believe you. Let me start by asking a very personal question that has been bothering me a bit: Are you a man or a woman?*

- *This can be potentially confusing for you, because you have placed such an importance for gender roles in your society. From very early on in childhood you were conditioned to take on a role of a man or a woman. This restricted you and you identified with the role. We learned to reach a balance between feminine and the masculine. In your merely physical terms, though, you might see more of a woman than a man. This question, however, is of no importance anymore.*

**A:** *Ok. You are right. It was a bit confusing. But I think I see your point. Let's take an easier one: Are you married?*

- *The establishment of marriage as such is long gone in the society where we live. It was largely a legal arrangement and as we got rid of most of the laws there was no need for anymore. In general, love is no longer restricted to any one being. We tend to love everyone and everything that surrounds us. However, we still have stronger partnerships with a limited number of people – companions that we hold close in our lives. Some people still prefer to have just one partner. In our current circle of companions, at the moment, there are seven adults altogether.*

**A:** *Right, let me get this straight. Who's in your family? Do you have kids?*

- *Everyone is the family. There are no boundaries, no separateness. We are taking care of each other's kids and it gives us great joy and happiness.*

**A:** *That sounds nice... awkward, but nice. So, what do you do for a living?*

- *To my surprise you ask this question only now. Isn't it the most common question for people to ask in your society? No offense, but we find it amusing how people in your time identified themselves through their job, education or title. In our society everything happens through voluntary participation. We don't have jobs as such; we do what we are good at and what we enjoy doing. Your next question would be 'what's the catch' or 'where is the incentive', right? This can be difficult to fathom because you are still living so separate from each other and you haven't realized the connectedness with all things and beings. In our society the incentive to participate comes from the very fact that we are all one: there is no competition, except at the football field and in the organized idea competitions. The good news for you is that you have already started replacing competition with cooperation. You have started awakening to the fact that competition is slowing down progress; it's like using your right foot to step on the left one to try and run faster.*

*Now Anna gave the teacher her card where it said "A. Were – Partner". The teacher examined the card, gave a gentle smile and waited for the next question calmly.*

**A:** *I like that analogy. I see your point. I wonder if you really need money in a society like that. There is no need to be better or more well off than your neighbor, right? What do you have then? What do you own?*

- *You are right. Money was an obsolete tool that you will soon find out. In your time many people still cling to that without noticing it's utterly an imaginary concept. Figures on your bank account don't have any value in the end. We no longer have the concept of ownership. Our first priority after the great shift was to ensure basic necessities for all. We realized it's in everyone's benefit to ensure equal opportunity for all. We are much stronger species due to this fact. As for the ownership, it would be stupid to own – say – a car. In the participatory society development goes so fast that if you owned a car it would soon be obsolete – no one would make improvements in it and everyone else would be sharing cars much better than yours. It's amazing how much space we created by stopping at own things: there is no more need for parking lots.*

**A:** *That makes sense. But I still don't want to let go of the BMW my dad bought me. Anyways, you mentioned that you ensured basic necessities for all. In case you don't have to work in the traditional sense, who makes the food? Who cleans the floors? Who does all the boring stuff?*

- *Most of the repetitive tasks are automated. Buildings have integral cleaning systems. Basic food production is automated and delivery arranged so that food and clean water is available everywhere. However, many people do enjoy cooking so there are quite a few common kitchens where we congregate for more special meals.*

**A:** *So, you don't work and an automated infrastructure is catering to your essential needs. How do you spend your time? Doesn't it get boring?*

- *First of all, there is a difference between 'not working' and 'not having a job'. It's like the ants, remember? We take part in common development projects according to our competencies and interests. We don't call it work but participation. It is true that we don't have to participate every day and every waking hour. We invest about 5-10% of what you would call time in these projects. Otherwise there is freedom to enjoy and enquire. There is a great emphasis on being rather than doing. It is very common for people to just sit and observe nature or do something together. And no it's not boring. That word is long gone. We don't have time as such. You will soon notice that time has been just an obstacle. It becomes irrelevant very soon. So don't worry if your watch runs out of its battery. Oh yes, it should be mentioned that apart from being and enjoying many concentrate on education.*

**A:** So, how is the education system? What did you study?

- Watch your language, Anna. Try to become more present. We did not study, we are still studying: astrology, space travel, meditation, historical anthropology, music, oceans, engineering, football, cybernetics, play, molecular biology, design, gene technology, IT, robotics, media production, and teaching are some of our favorite topics. It really depends on one's interests of what and how much they want to know. But all in all wisdom has great value in our society. It's more than knowledge – more than mere intelligence. Although there is a certain curriculum people go through when they are five to ten years old, other than that education is voluntary both from the learners' and the teachers' side and these roles keep mixing. For instance there is a great deal that can be learned from infants. They are always closest to nature and still carry parts of that wisdom from their earlier lives.

**A:** Whoa, that is a bit too much for me to believe. To be frank, I wasn't paying attention to what you said because I kept pondering on two things... first was football, but I don't want to waste a question in that... the second one was why you told me to watch my language. I realized that the language one uses creates the reality. How do you communicate? Has English become a common language for all?

- Ok, next time when you are immersed with your thoughts we'll make sure there is silence. We emphasize listening more than speaking. We realized that there was so much misinterpretation happening in the world because we didn't have a common language. English was not suitable to be a universal auxiliary language due to its limitations. We studied older languages like Pali, Sanskrit, Arabic and Chinese and created a world language that doesn't leave room for interpretation. In our language the sounds – the wavelengths – carry the meaning much more than the words. In written format it resembles scientific formulas. After we cleared all that mess from the old world, we noticed that our species also has telepathic abilities. It helps a lot. One more thing regarding communication is that we practice wisdom collection. We centralize all the knowledge in what you would call the internet. It is automatically translated to all languages.

**A:** You still have internet? What is it used for?

- It serves a dual purpose. On one hand it is a repository of knowledge, open for all. On the other hand, it collects all the data that it needs to run the functions of society.

**A:** Wait a minute... Internet runs the society? Now, seriously, who calls the shots?

- Soon after the collective awakening, that we refer to as the great shift, we dismantled the obsolete political structure. We realized that with our new set of values and true understanding of the world, we don't need decision makers. Laws, restrictions and punishments gave way to common sense and compassionate communities. What remained were the basic operations: construction, food production, transportation, pollution removal, recycling and the like. These didn't need a political structure but could be outsourced to a computerized decision-making system. That removed so much clutter and errors. We became free to concentrate on development rather than holding the strings.

**A:** Wow! That makes a lot of sense. At first I was about to ask aren't you afraid that the machines take over but then I realized how stupid my question was – that we the people have been our greatest threat so far. So many wars have been started because we couldn't agree with ourselves. That reminds me... What is your religion?

- Well, we did come into agreement. People all over the world started realizing that the teachings in all the religions come from the same source. As they started seeing beyond the words – into the real wisdom – they no longer thought that their religion was the only truth. After a while there was no longer a need for religion as such. Knowledge became much more important than beliefs. People no longer hold deities. If something is worshipped it is life on planet earth. We love nature.

**A:** *Ok, enough politics and religion. Tell me more about yourself: where do you live for instance?*

- *We live everywhere. When we realized the ownership of property had become obsolete it freed people to move around, meet other people and stay where they wanted. We don't own land or houses anymore. Some people do prefer staying for longer in the same place and some people are more mobile. We don't have locks in the doors anymore, just a color code that tells if the place is available right now: red means reserved and people would appreciate privacy, yellow means there is someone but you are welcome to join, and green means it's empty.*

**A:** *Sounds nice. Well then, how do you move around?*

- *Mostly we walk or use bicycles, roller shoes, skateboards or horses. In the city we have travelators and monorails. Also cars can be ordered. For longer distances we take a magnet train or a freight boat. No more waiting at the airports.*

**A:** *Skateboards and horses? That's not really what I was expecting. How are the cities then?*

- *Some of the best technologies have already been invented. We realized skateboards and horses were not only largely available but also great ways to focus your mind on the present moment as you move around. Otherwise you'd fall and hurt yourself. You asked how the cities are. Although the cities are connected to each other, they are very diverse and differ from each other. But there are some common traits. Cities are optimized in regard to use of space, energy and infrastructure. They are very green, silent and peaceful. Animals are co-habiting the cities with us. Usually the cities are circular, consisting of various rings for different purposes. All in all there's so much good energy around – the cities are much more part of the nature than in your time.*

**A:** *You keep saying 'our time'. How old are you anyways?*

- *This incarnation in your time would be 118 years old. I know it sounds a lot to you. Once the pollutants were removed and nature was clean again, that only increased our life expectancy. Exercising the mind and body added up. It's amazing how your physical condition improves when you have love and positive energy everywhere. We did save the best practices of western medicine, introduced healing nanobots and new transplant technologies but mainly we are using natural medicine when need be. Healthcare has finally reached its real meaning; it's no longer just treating the symptoms but addressing the root issues proactively – maintaining health more than treating disease.*

**A:** *Interesting. It really sounds tempting. How do we get to the future?*

- *We'll let that question pass. You should have answers to that already if we were successful.*

*Anna noticed that she was running out of questions. She had used a stick to draw a line in the ground for every question she had posed. Quickly calculating she realized she only had three left. For a while she thought why the teacher had refused answering her previous question. Then it dawned to her. With a grin on her face, Anna posed the third last question: "How is your elephant doing?" The teacher beamed in content and answered:*

- *It's good to hear that question. You've come a long way in your awakening. It might not come to you as a surprise that in the future people are no longer dominated by their egos. They are less vulnerable, more approachable and less culturally conditioned.*

**A:** *Are you like the crocodile and the bird? Give me an example of synergy in the future.*

- *Hmm... that's a tough one, because synergy is everywhere. Very well... In our local district all 150 people had come together to re-program the building robots in order to build a new city in the sea. We were very excited about it and everyone was participating to their fullest for several months. But every time we asked the computer to give us a system sketch of the city, there was something missing. We couldn't put our finger to what it was. It just didn't feel right. Our kids heard about the*

dilemma and all 28 of them gathered to help us. They organized an imagination play that they fed to the computer in real time. We took a system sketch after that and it blew our minds. Now there were slides, colors, and creative structures. All sorts of fish, coral and sea life was harmoniously circling around, even inside the structures. It looked like an underwater amusement park. We loved the sketch and the building robots started their work. Now, that was synergy!

**A:** *Wow! I can imagine. By the way, I noticed that today you haven't used the word "I" or "me" at all. Instead you keep saying we... I guess you're saying there's no "I" in the future team either. So, you are like ants. My final question is: If we were like ants, how would we plan and build the future society?*

- *One of the historical figures in the future is Ajahn Brahm – a Buddhist monk who lives in your time. He shared a story where he was walking in the mountains and got suddenly surrounded by mist. He didn't know which way to go anymore so he decided to go back. Unfortunately he couldn't see even arm's length forward so he got lost and almost fell down from a cliff. If he had not been completely in the present moment he would have died. Although he didn't know where to go, he knew that he needs to go downward to get a clear vision. He went away from the mist and finally found his way back home. Anna, remember: future is emergent and surprising. It's time for you to let go of the analytical thinking mindset. Let go of the egoism. It's not going to take you any further. Get away from the mist. You don't need to plan a perfect spiritual and harmonious society to the last detail right now, but you can start taking steps towards it. Remember it's not about the destination but the journey; there is no ideal society.*

*Anna had been listening intently, staring at the setting sun. Now she noticed that the teacher was gone. Tears ran down her cheeks; tears of joy, peace and love. The mist was rising. She stood up and took the first step.*