

A Pathway Out Of The Matrix...

HOLISTIC ACTIVISM A GUIDE BOOKLET

By Mark Allen

Edition 2 – 2020

CONTENTS

Introduction to the Second Edition

1. Why Holistic Activism?
2. The Steps

STEP 1- Acceptance and Uncertainty
STEP 2- Breaking the Endless Cycle of Pain
STEP 3- Circumnavigating Cognitive Dissonance
STEP 4- The Art of Critical Thinking

3. Towards a Movement of Movements
4. Where to From Here?
5. References and Further Reading

About the author

Mark Allen's involvement in activism goes back to his teens where he cut his teeth at the International Peace Forest, the Nailsworth Civic Society and Greenpeace. He went on to study town planning and co-founded Population, Permaculture and Planning in 2015. By 2019, Mark was firmly dedicated to pursuing Holistic Activism.

Introduction to the Second Edition...

*The embrace of unconditional forgiveness is essential to the success of all the major activist adventures in the world. There may be truth in the savage denunciation of corrupt corporations, politicians, and a media in bed with what Robert Kennedy called 'systems of cold evil' that want to keep exploiting the earth. But this response has two main disadvantages in practical affairs: the excitement of projecting your own unacknowledged darkness onto others keeps you from seeing just how implicated you are. Advocating for any cause in this spirit virtually ensures your efforts will increase resistance rather than heal. Human beings will never be convinced to change their ways by other human beings who try to humiliate them. In nearly every case, such condemnation only reinforces the behaviour it is trying to end. When people are accused of acts they know they are guilty of by others who have contempt for them, they almost always retreat even further into their self-destructive behaviour. If they do change, it is from fear, or perhaps hypocrisy, but not from their own truth. **Andrew Harvey***

Thank you for picking up this booklet. This updated edition takes into account the feedback and learnings that have taken place since the first edition was published earlier in 2019.

A more visual, user-friendly edition three will be ready by the end of 2020 and this will include a holistic activism guided meditation, which will also be available on Youtube and as an MP3. You can keep up-to-date with these developments and more on our website and on our facebook page (details in chapter four).

We have also made an audio version of edition one, so if it is your preference to listen to this booklet rather than to read it, you can do so on the website. I recommend that after doing this, you read the parts of this booklet that are not included in the audio version, especially the newly written chapter three on the development of a Holistic Activism based Movement of Movements (HA MoM).

The idea behind HA MoM is to develop a crucial link between the 'philosophical' stuff and the 'doing' stuff at a time when, to paraphrase Eckhart Tolle, humanity is choosing to work towards either evolution or extinction.

Therefore, our goal is to work towards an ongoing global movement that delivers behavioural and systemic change from the grassroots upwards.

As an activist I urge you to act NOW in the area that best suits you and if it feels right, to connect with our movement of movements. If that isn't your thing, I recommend that you connect with another movement of movements (eventually they will all connect in one way or another) as this will ensure that the work you are doing is part of a growing shift towards systemic and behavioural change.

Importantly we are here to help. You can connect with us in many ways; through the website, the facebook group, by emailing us directly or through the workshops.

1. Why Holistic Activism?

How we can reduce conflict among activists, create campaigns that are long lasting, reach out and connect with people who have different values to that of our own and work towards a meaningful shift in paradigm?

This booklet is meant for activists and this means that it is meant for you, because everyone is an activist whether we are conscious of it or not.

There comes a point with nearly every person where they would choose to protest, even if it is something as fundamental as ensuring that clean water is running out of their tap or that they have clean air to breathe.

In other words we all have a threshold that kickstarts us into consciously changing the world. Holistic Activism (HA) is about reaching out to every person because what underlines this movement is the need to collectively change our approach.

Everything we do also has an impact because each decision we make ripples out into society. Therefore our individual actions are helping to collectively mould the world and in that sense, we are all activists too.

Traditionally activism has largely been about tackling symptoms as opposed to trying to get to the core of those symptoms. Of course there is nothing wrong with that, but we also need to peel the onion back

another layer so that we can also start to tackle the behaviours and attitudes that keep causing those symptoms to arise.

As someone who has been involved in activism since the 90's, I have seen many activists burn out and much of that burnout is through dashed expectations, differences of opinion, and disappointment at seeing little positive change for all of the hours of time that they have invested.

Of course I have witnessed some major successes, only that for every success there seems to be a thousand more battles that need to be fought. We are mostly putting out spot fires and it seems that we are not putting enough emphasis into approaching the mindset that keeps creating these spot fires.

This means that we have to invite everybody to the table. By seeing everyone as a potential activist, we start to pave the way for looking for points of connection with others rather than getting bogged down in the politics of difference.

Holistic Activism accepts the fact that we 'will not save the world' with one set of values alone and it understands that if we do wish to bring people around to seeing another perspective, it can only happen by accepting that person as they are and by focussing on areas of common ground as a starting point for an ongoing process of inclusive activism.

For this reason I was nervous about writing this booklet because the written form is rigid and for some this might not be the best way of communicating what HA is trying to achieve. Therefore I hope that this booklet at the very least, piques your interest enough to want to delve deeper into what Holistic Activism is trying to communicate.

HA understands that every problem that humankind has created for itself is part of a much deeper issue rooted in the human mind and that an increased focus on behaviour change is essential if we want to live in greater harmony. This seems like an overwhelming thing to achieve, but in fact the means of going about this is all about removing layers of conditioning and developing effective skills.

It also accepts that on the frontline of activism there are going to be times when it is impossible to be 'holistic' but this doesn't mean that we

cannot allow ourselves to feel compassion for the people whose pain we are up against. We must assume that there will come a time when the people who we perceive as enemies today will one day be given the opportunity to feel part of a holistic movement that transcends their own pain.

In order to have this insight and compassion, we also need to acknowledge our own pain and have compassion for ourselves. Breaking this cycle of pain is integral to Holistic Activism but to break this cycle we must find peace in acceptance and uncertainty.

2. The Steps

Step 1 – Acceptance and Uncertainty

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right-doing there is a field. I'll meet you there. -Rumi

We can not change anything unless we accept it, condemnation does not liberate - it oppresses. - Jung

The starting point for Holistic Activism is acceptance and uncertainty. This is not the state of acceptance or the state of uncertainty that the mind reaches after it has struggled to rationalise discomforting thoughts. It is the acceptance and uncertainty that precedes thought. It is the deep acceptance that is presence, that the universe is exactly how it is right now as a result of countless interactions and reactions that have intertwined in countless ways since the dawn of time.

It is the acceptance and uncertainty that lies beneath and beyond the mind, before it categorises thought into what is right and wrong or good and bad. It is the green field that Rumi alludes to. As Zen priest Steve Hagen writes in his book, *Buddhism Plain and Simple*;

'What we overlook is that underneath the ground of our beliefs,

opinions, and concepts is a boundless sea of uncertainty. The concepts we cling to are like tiny boats tossed about in the middle of a vast ocean. We stand on our beliefs and ideas thinking they're solid, but in fact, they (and we) are on shifting seas.'

This may seem troubling but in fact it is profoundly liberating. By understanding acceptance and uncertainty as a starting point to HA we are in a greater position to look for the deeper unifying themes that lie behind our opinions and perspectives. This does not mean that we shouldn't value our opinions and perspectives but what we can do is see them as something that is adaptable and malleable, knowing that they can never fully encapsulate the big picture.

For example, irrespective of whether you think that human overpopulation is an issue, there is a strong likelihood that you think that universal access to healthcare, family planning and education is something worth striving for. With a willingness to appreciate the limitations of opinion coupled with a desire to find a graceful unity that is outside of those opinions, we are better able to build a movement that is rooted in something deeper and ultimately more resilient.

The willingness to comprehend a sense of peace and wholeness in a place outside of language is critical if Holistic Activism is to work. This is because language, by its very nature, breaks our relationship with the universe into limited concepts. Therefore, understanding and appreciating the limitations of language is crucial in order to prevent us from descending into the endless and uncompromising narrative that leads to endless conflict. Crucially, it allows us to forge our identity in something that is outside of perspective and opinion and this better enables us to see our worldview as fluid rather than being rooted in dogma.

Deep Ecology teacher John Seed often explains how it is a common trait among indigenous cultures to have rituals that reconnect people to the space that lies outside of language, because they know the importance of maintaining a connection that is outside of the interference of mind. In the West we have largely forgotten this. To be still and silent is often

seen as lazy and unproductive.

When I first learnt mantra meditation some years ago, someone came up to me and said with contempt that 'there are chanters and there are doers in this world', but by learning to chant you can learn that most human doing is counterproductive. The flip-side to this is what we do end up doing becomes more considered and effective. Of course chanting is only one of numerous pathways into the space that lies between and beneath our thoughts.

There is a growing movement based around meditation and mindfulness in all its forms and this of course is a good thing but the nature of Western society is such that a lot of this has been appropriated by people with particular agendas. In other words it has been appropriated by mind. This is why many people enter meditation seeking to achieve some particular outcome or why corporations for example have taught mindfulness as a means of creating more productive workers. In the words of Steve Hagen (from his book *Meditation Now or Never*);

'meditation is a practice that saturates your life and in time can be brought into every activity. It is the transformation of mind from bondage to freedom. In practicing meditation, we go nowhere other than the right here where we now stand, where we now sit, where we now live and breathe. Meditation therefore isn't about trying to achieve anything at all, it is about returning to a space that lies before and beneath the mind's attempt at trying to decide what it should or should not achieve.'

It really doesn't matter what means you use to reach this state and it does not matter if you struggle to find this space. Learning to let go is one of the hardest things that I have ever had to do, even though it sounds so simple on paper. It is an ongoing process that requires commitment and it is essential that it forms the backbone of your activism. However the knowledge that there is a peace in this place outside of mind can be enough to help us to become holistic activists, even if our experience of this space is nothing more than momentary glimpses.

There are many pathways into this space and most are outside of talking or reading. This is why the author of Entropia, Samuel Alexander recently focussed on sharing soundscapes at a recent lecture on how we can transition to a life beyond industrial civilisation.

I find Deep Ecology meditation particularly powerful. Some years ago I attended a workshop where we each found a tree and spent half an hour observing it in tiny detail. After some time it became more than a tree, it became an entire world that is deeply complex, host to countless life forms and a vital part of an incredibly complex web of nature. It helped me to realise that the very concept of a tree is limiting and that, in turn our perception of the world is limited.

The act of reducing the universe into a series of concepts allows some people to raze old growth forests without the burden of soul crushing grief and this is reason enough to understand that we need to reconnect with the space that lies beyond thought. We need to be able to take the time to stand back, especially when we get caught up in the inevitable politics of life that accompanies the gift of language.

When we see ourselves in conflict with others, let us first look for the green field that exists before we form our perception of what is right and wrong. If we ground ourselves in that field we are so much less likely to ground ourselves in the need to win an argument at all costs. Importantly we will be much more likely to accept the other person's perspective no matter how much we disagree with it, because we will know that that person's thoughts and opinion is as inevitable as the wind that blows in the trees.

Having this acceptance will at the very least prevent the pointless escalation of conflict and at best it can lay the groundwork to finding common ground and a constructive platform to work from. In other words, by embracing uncertainty and having acceptance as our starting point we can begin to break the endless cycle of pain.

Additional notes:

The starting point of acceptance is yourself. As Andrew Harvey says; *"Until you face your loathing for and terror of the body, you can never understand why the human race has launched a war on nature it is doomed to lose. This work of facing the darkness in your own psyche and uncovering the levels of stored suffering, self disgust, cultural conditioning and innate resistance in your body slowly starts to shatter the narcissism of your false self, constructed over a lifetime."*

When I meditate I feel the tightness in my chest and a number of other physical sensations. For me, accepting such sensations is akin to accepting the polluted rivers and the dying trees. It is the starting point of the healing that is rooted in Holistic Activism.

How we find this peace depends upon the methods that enable us to best focus on the present. Whether it is walking, losing oneself in music or something else, it will be a place that we can always come back to and always know is there. It is the solace in a world that is driven by endless narrative.

Acceptance is also about being comfortable with paradoxes, that is to understand that it is possible to hold what appears to be two conflicting world views without feeling morally challenged. It is the understanding that while compartmentalising our perspective of the world into separate concepts and perspectives is part of human behaviour, it can never be a true reflection of the complex nature of the universe.

To be comfortable with paradoxes also reduces our risk of cognitive dissonance. It allows us to connect with other people's perspectives, even if they are not our own and it enables us to find areas where we can find points of connection.

One example of a paradox is is to see the benefit in setting goals while also understanding that activism is an ongoing conversation that is always changing and that the goal posts are often shifting... and that this is a good thing.

Step 2 - Breaking the Endless Cycle of Pain

Everyone you meet is fighting a battle that you know nothing about.

- Robin Williams

Pain that is not transformed will always be transmitted.

- Father Richard Rohr.

Activism depends upon communication and how we respond to other people hugely impacts our effectiveness as activists. Therefore, we can enter into that communication from the place of peace and acceptance that lies outside of language (see previous chapter) and carry that peace and acceptance with us, deep in the knowledge that it is enduring and unbreakable.

That way we are better able to fully accept each and every person we meet in all of their beauty and cruelty with the same acceptance that we have for non-human nature in all of its beauty and cruelty. This will place us in the best possible position to contribute towards effective and long-lasting change.

I must again stress that acceptance does not mean compliance. It does not, for example, mean that you have to be willing to be bullied by another person. In fact, it is essential that you do not let that happen. This is why acceptance must come hand in hand with assertiveness.

Being assertive of course does not mean 'fighting back'. It is about preventing another person's pain from having a negative impact upon you in the same way that the direct and indirect pain of possibly countless other people has had an impact upon the person who is trying to bully you. It is also about ensuring that you in turn, do not push your pain onto that person.

In short, it is about breaking the cycle of pain. This is the pain that we pass down from one generation to another and also sideways to those around us. While it is essential that we accept the inevitability of this pain, we can consciously start to circumnavigate and in turn break the cycle and show a pathway forward that is less governed by dogma and the inevitable pain that accompanies it. Therefore it is important to know the difference between being assertive and building up your own

ego and invariably adding to the cycle.

If you are accepting, assertive and compassionate you should come out of any given conflict situation without any residual anger or resentment or sense of superiority. In other words you will be able to easily return to the peace that lies in the eternal space outside of language. That way, you will know as an activist, that you are breaking the cycle.

Importantly you will come out of that communication with nothing but compassion for the other person, irrespective of how much conflict was involved. This is why, in order to accept and show compassion for such people, it is essential that one also displays assertiveness if it is needed, otherwise resentment and recrimination will push you back into the cycle of pain.

If someone does not respond well to your assertive compassion (and some will not because they are looking for a fight) do not see this as a bad thing. You will have learnt that working with this person would have likely been counterproductive and that your energy is probably better invested elsewhere.

Secondly, you will have planted the seed in their mind that there are people who are willing to draw a line under this endless cycle of pain, and that there is a pathway out. You can only leave the cycle through acceptance, compassion and assertiveness and if people feel pain from realising this, it is a different kind of pain to the pain that binds people to the cycle. Eventually that pain will have to turn to realisation, even if you are not around to see it.

Achieving this holy trinity of compassion, assertiveness and acceptance will take quite a lot practice and strength. This is why for many people, myself included, reading (or writing) this is not enough. It requires dedication, meditation exercises, role playing, assertiveness training and discussion groups in order to build on what we have learnt. This is why Holistic Activism needs to be an ongoing process with ongoing support. It may sound like a big undertaking but it is vital that we all endeavour to do this because so much activism is caught up in this cycle and so many activists burnout because of it.

By getting our heads fully around the notion of acceptance, compassion

and assertiveness, we will be in the best possible position to develop the kinds of communication that will lead to effective and long-lasting change. This sets us up to avoid the pitfalls of cognitive dissonance.

Additional notes:

Holistic Activism has a lot to say in terms of having a mindful approach to the way we approach trauma but understandably, many of us feel the need to do additional work to release past traumas.

There is a developing wealth of valuable knowledge that is showing us how we can go about this. Also, there are people who are associated with this movement who have some knowledge about the pathways that are available.

Meanwhile, we can find satisfaction in allowing ourselves to bring our unresolved stuff into our activism, knowing that we are perfect, that we will not pass our pain onto others and that we will not take on anyone else's pain... all of this while also knowing that the work we are doing as activists on the outside will help towards our healing on the inside.

Step 3 - Circumnavigating Cognitive Dissonance

Does the right hand side of your brain hold on so dearly to your narratives and deeply held beliefs that it won't risk allowing the left hand side of your brain to methodically validate or disprove your beliefs? - Graham Wood

If people use protesting as a way of pushing their identity onto others then we are in trouble - Clive Hamilton

As stated in the first chapter, we are not going to 'save the planet' with one set of values alone, and neither should we try. No single person owns the truth, yet so much discussion is worn down by our attempts at making one opinion win out over another. This is as true in activist circles as it is anywhere else and it is almost always counterproductive and an ineffective use of our time.

This isn't to say that your opinions are not important or that all opinions are equal, only that your opinion is less likely to have an impact if you go into a conversation with a fixed agenda. The paradox is that you have to let go of outcomes to some extent in order to achieve a constructive outcome, especially as that outcome should be expected to be different to the one that you originally intended. Otherwise you risk becoming bogged down in the conflict that is directed by the cycle of pain.

Nowhere is this more obvious than social media. The very nature of language is reductionist and limiting at the best of times but when it is done behind a computer screen it can lead to a whole host of problems that one might otherwise avoid in a face-to-face scenario. Effective communication requires that we tailor our approach specifically to each person and it is much more difficult to do this when our first contact with a person is a difference of opinion in cyberspace.

This is why most social media platforms end up becoming echo-chambers or pointless exercises in ongoing conflict. Social media does have its place but we need to ensure that we take the correct approach by knowing when to comment, how best to comment and when to walk away from a discussion.

The reason why I am focussing on social media in this chapter is because most readers will be able to resonate with the challenges that this platform of communication throws up. It also happens to be a good starting point for a wider discussion on the way we communicate and how we can ensure that this leads to the most effective outcome.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the key is to enter into a discussion with the holy trinity of acceptance, compassion and assertiveness. If you have the other person's best interests at heart, it will shine through and this will lessen the risk of it descending into an exercise in cognitive dissonance. I should say here what cognitive dissonance is. It has a number of slightly different meanings and definitions but for the purpose of this booklet (and movement as a whole) the definition, according to Frantz Fanon is:

Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new

evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalise, ignore and even deny anything that doesn't fit in with the core belief.

If we can forge our identity in the space that lies outside of language and understand that people can become so attached to a core belief to the point of dogma because they are caught in the cycle of pain, we can avoid succumbing to cognitive dissonance ourselves. The same process can help others to find a way out of their own cognitive dissonance without losing face.

This does not mean that we have to be free of the underlying pain in our lives, only that we can separate it from how we go about interacting with people and thus help free ourselves and others from adding to it.

The key is to enter into a conversation with the acceptance that the outcome might be different to what you have in mind. This is an approach known as co-regulation and is a term used in psychology that means a 'continuous unfolding of individual action that is susceptible to being continuously modified by the continuously changing actions of the partner'.

Indeed the process of activism as a whole needs to be seen as an ongoing process that is always open to modification. As long as there is language there will always be a need for activism because even in the most utopian of scenarios there will always be a need for vigilance. Otherwise there will always be a risk that the reductionist nature of language will, in combination with the mind's tendency to equate opinion with identity, lead to tunnel vision and ultimately, cognitive dissonance. What we do not want to do for example is replace neo-liberalism with some other 'ism' that is just as socially and environmentally lacking.

It is important therefore to emphasise that the ongoing nature of activism should not be seen as a chore. Instead we need to convert activism from something that is reactionary and conflict-laden into something that is regenerative and integral to our social fabric. After all, activism is as much a part of the nature of human society as everything else that we hold dear, in all its beauty.

This regenerative approach to activism must be rooted in our desire to look for areas of common ground or points of connection. Together with acceptance and an understanding of the cycle of pain, many people with different ways of looking at the world can find a way of working together.

One great example of this is the the ban on fracking that took place in Victoria, Australia after a campaign that was driven by a combination of inner-city Greens in Melbourne and farmers across regional Victoria. The fact that this campaign was won by a diverse range of demographics also means that any attempt at reversing this ban will be all the more challenging. It will also now be easier for all of the demographics involved to work together in the future, even if those issues are divisive. In other words, by looking for areas of common ground, you are helping to pave an easier path towards discussing issues where there is less common ground. This is because your relationship is already built on the desire for cooperation rather than the need to gain moral superiority. The fact that you are also employing acceptance, compassion and assertiveness means that the tone of the interaction will either be constructive or you will know that it is necessary to walk away.

There are of course times on social media when you feel that you shouldn't walk away because you are mostly communicating with any third parties who might be reading what you have to say, as opposed to the other person who is commentating. If you continue to employ compassion and continue to critique the message rather than the individual, any third party will not only clearly see what you are trying to say, they will also see the cognitive dissonance of the other commentator.

This highlights the fact that in many cases you will have to accept that others will succumb to cognitive dissonance. As Ozan Varol says in their article, *Facts Don't Change People's Minds. Here's What Does*, 'when your beliefs are entwined with your identity, changing your mind means changing your identity. That's a really hard sell.'

However, by looking for points of connection you are better placed to help either yourself or the other person 'get out of their prior commitment while saving face' because through those points of connection, we can have achieve a sense of shared ownership of the

outcome. It is important to emphasise that this shared ownership can be achieved even if you continue to have fundamentally different perspectives on a whole range of other issues. What is important is that those differences are noted and respected. The common ground that you have achieved will be the foundation from which you might overcome those differences in the future. They certainly will not happen by emphasising your differences over your commonalities.

This goes back to my point that what is needed is to transform activism from a battle of perspectives into an ongoing, inclusive and open discussion. While recognising cognitive dissonance as well as acceptance, compassion, and a willingness to break the cycle of pain, is essential, it is equally essential that we embrace critical thinking.

Step 4 - The Art of Critical Thinking

The problem is not people being uneducated. The problem is that they are educated just enough to believe what they have been taught and not educated enough to question what they have been taught.

- Unknown

Tyranny is the deliberate removal of nuance. - Albert Maysles

The art of critical thinking is most effective in combination with all of the afore mentioned steps of Holistic Activism. We have to be rooted in the peace that is always there, prior to thought and between thought. We also have to be rooted in the desire to build common ground as opposed to reinforcing our various identities. Otherwise critical thinking alone will not be enough to limit cognitive dissonance or break the cycle of pain.

When we add critical thinking, we help to maintain the holistic nature of activism by ensuring that particular perspectives do not gain credence over other equally valid or potentially more valid perspectives. It allows us to understand that the way we compartmentalise our understanding of the universe through discourse is limiting and that what we describe through discourse is actually a simplification of something that is much more complex.

Our whole society is rife with simplified constructs that reduce the complex into the finite and consequently into something that suits a particular agenda. This is perfectly to be expected. It comes with the nature of mind and language. What we must do is be perfectly ok with having our discourses critiqued and, once again, this is why it is essential that all of the other HA steps are in place.

This chapter is not intended to be a lesson in critical thinking. Instead the purpose is to show the importance of thinking critically and why it is a vital component of Holistic Activism as a whole. A thorough course in critical thinking is absolutely recommended for anyone who wishes to follow the Holistic Activism path and over time a complete critical thinking component will be written. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight a few methods of critiquing discourse in a way that doesn't entrench division.

For example, one critical thinking skill is the ability to recognise when an issue is being broken down into a dichotomy. This technique can often be what is known as a false dilemma and it forces people to take one of two sides. In town planning for example, high density developments are often justified on the grounds that they prevent urban sprawl and that if you oppose high-density development in your neighbourhood, you must therefore be a proponent of urban sprawl. This is highly problematic.

An argument such as this denies the more complex nature of town planning and it ignores the fact for example, that there are thousands of empty houses and other retrofittable spaces that are empty and that a considerable amount of ex-industrial land that could be developed, is left vacant by speculative property developers. In other words, there are other means of tackling the threat of sprawl other than the need to always regard high density development as a solution. Of course high density can play a role but the assumption that this style of development is always going to be the most sustainable approach in response to the threat of urban sprawl benefits particular vested interests. It also marginalises a whole range of other issues such as David Holmgren's Retrofitting Suburbia movement.

Another example is the way mainstream society plays off the economy against the environment by saying that, for example, while the environment is important, we do not want to put it in the way of growth

and jobs. Again this is a false dilemma that suits the agenda of those whose wish it is that the status quo remains the same. The idea that we cannot have a standard of living and hope to have environmental protection is preposterous, yet if these messages go unchallenged, they start to filter into all areas of society including the media. They even filter into the education system where perspectives can start to be regarded as un-disputable knowledge.

For example, as a child I was taught that you had to drink milk in order to have strong bones. I am not saying that milk is necessarily unhealthy but as I grew older it became increasingly obvious that every other mammal on earth manages to get enough calcium without drinking milk into adulthood and that perhaps humans did not evolve to necessarily need to drink the milk of another mammal.

Similarly, for a period of time butter was seen as a worse evil than margarine. We now realise that this is not necessarily true, yet there are many people who are invested in margarine being the healthier option and there are many organisations such as the Heart Foundation who, at the time of writing, are unwilling to change their position, despite a growing amount of evidence to show that saturated fat in particular quantities could be more healthy than certain vegetable oils in particular quantities.

All of this also assumes that there has to be a choice between butter or margarine. It is possible to get through life with neither and there are many cultures who do, so the whole idea of butter versus margarine is potentially a false dilemma that negates a bigger issue. It also highlights the fact that when people are attached to a particular perspective, they will not only fall into cognitive dissonance but also data-mine in order to maintain that perspective.

There is an old saying that you can prove anything with statistics and it is important to highlight the shortcomings of statistics when they are used to prove a presupposed point. Statistics are important and this is all the more reason why we must be vigilant of them being misconstrued to suit a particular agenda.

What is important is that critical thinking focuses on the topic and does not attack the person (ad hominem attack) who has written or said

what you are critiquing. As previously stated, critical thinking must be in sync with acceptance, compassion, assertiveness and a desire to find common ground. In other words, it must be part of a holistic approach to activism that doesn't feed into the cycle of pain.

It is crucial that we use critical thinking as a means of ensuring that terms such as 'sustainability' and 'resilience' do not get appropriated by particular groups and particular interests in order to suit particular agendas. We do not want sustainability for example to become an empty, hollow term used to justify developments that for many reasons would not be deemed as sustainable. It is about having that vigilance in place, not just for those around us but for ourselves as well.

Additional Notes:

If I have a disagreement with what someone says or does, I find that approaching the issue with the mindset of wanting both of us to come out of the discussion in a positive frame of mind, is immensely constructive. I also find that this has much more of an impact.

For example, I can build on what they are saying by adding more nuance rather than writing it off. That way my actions can help them feel as though they are part of a constructive, ongoing conversation. Of course this is not always possible and sometimes, despite one's best efforts, offence cannot be avoided, but this shouldn't deter us from seeking to build upon people's ideas.

Sometimes the correct response is to walk away, especially if we feel that the interaction will not lead to a constructive outcome. However the aim is to walk away without any resentment on our part. Some interactions work and others don't and there are many reasons for that, so the acceptance as discussed in Step One, plays an important role.

On another note...critical thinking is about challenging perceived 'truths' that are only dominant in our discourse because they suit powerful vested interests. Many of these truths are part of our reality because certain voices are louder than others and because we live in a society

that generally does not encourage critical thinking. This is partly because those louder voices have nothing to gain from people having a critical mindset.

The fact that those louder voices have normalised and legitimised their narratives through the institutions of society does not make them more legitimate. For example, we may regard the idea of a three day 'working' week or universal basic income as radical but from another perspective, the society that we are living in right now is the radical one. Without critical thinking we are bound to this matrix.

This is why both free speech and the ability to think critically are both important as promoting one while denying the other can lead to cognitive bias on a massive scale. Without critical thinking, free speech will always favour those who have the power and money to push their narrative at the expense of others. This can lead to everything from climate change to mass shootings.

3. Towards A Movement of Movements

One of the biggest challenges that we are facing in the right here and now is, how do we create a mass movement for change in this era of catastrophic environmental destruction?

How do we create a united front that has the potential to connect every group together in such a way that the work we are doing at the micro level feeds into a much needed shift in paradigm at the macro level?

The environment movement has largely been ineffective at the macro level because there has not been enough of that critical interconnection of localised grassroots activism with a broader united movement for systemic and behavioural change.

Holistic Activism is tackling this issue by developing what is referred to as a 'movement of movements'. This acknowledges that we can each bring our unique skills, knowledge and insights into a growing

interconnected web of change. This goes well beyond tackling the various crises inherent in a system that is out of kilter. It is also about working towards a shift in thinking and approach.

By joining the Holistic Activism Movement of Movements (HA MoM), groups will not lose any of their autonomy but they will become part of something that is greater than the sum of its parts.

To be a signatory, the group or the individual activist would find connection on five principles, three of which are the three principles of Extinction Rebellion (XR). The idea is that this movement can interconnect with XR but it will also not be confined by it.

The fourth principle is based around our need to shift our behaviour towards interconnectedness with each other and the earth with the understanding that we will not achieve meaningful change with the same thinking that led us into the multiple crises that we are currently facing.

This will be achieved by utilising social permaculture, eco-psychology and holistic activism principles in the way that we communicate and determine policy, from one on one interactions all the way through to conversation cafes and citizens assemblies.

The fifth principle is based on the premise that we agree to work towards some form of post-growth or degrowth society that does not work under the current premise of infinite growth on a finite planet. This will be determined through the citizens assemblies as highlighted in principle three. These assemblies will be a platform for rational and nuanced discussion that seeks to find a common pathway forward in a society of diverse opinions and values.

The assemblies will listen to a diverse range of perspectives including professionals in their field. Crucially they will ensure that vested interests and ideologies do not dominate at the expense of rational nuanced discussion. This will be achieved by utilising the social permaculture, eco-psychology and holistic activism approaches as

outlined in the fourth principle.

The good news is that groups can join HA MOM even if they do not agree with all of the values and approaches of all of the other groups. What matters is that each group connects on the five principles with the understanding that what they are promoting is part of a wider ongoing conversation. For example, vegan groups and ethical omnivore groups could both join despite having very different ideologies. Importantly what they could do is connect on the five principles while at the same time, having a platform to discuss their knowledges at the Citizens Assembly level.

The outcome could be that a society will develop whereby people will choose between ethical omnivorism or veganism and farming methods will adapt to reflect that. Crucially, by working together, the assemblies would help to create a world where discussion around food ethics is central to a degrowth based regenerative society and...if the vegan movement is to grow or/and, if ethical omnivorism is to grow, it will happen under those circumstances, not through the cognitive dissonance that comes when one ideology is pitted against another.

In summary, the principles of the HA Movement of Movements are:

1) Tell the truth

The government must tell the truth about the scale of the ecological crisis by declaring a climate emergency, by "working with other groups and institutions to communicate the urgent need for change".

2) Net zero emissions by 2025

The world must drastically cut its greenhouse gas emissions, hitting net zero by 2025 or as soon as possible after.

3) Citizens' assembly

We will create citizens' assemblies to hear evidence and devise policies to tackle the climate crisis. Citizens' assemblies bring together ordinary people to investigate, discuss and make recommendations on how to respond, in this case, to the ecological emergency.

4) Recognising the need to change our behaviour.

We recognise that we will not overcome the climate and ecological emergency with the same mindsets that led us into it. Therefore, social permaculture, regenerative consciousness and holistic activism need to be integral to whatever we do both at an individual and a group level.

5) The need to transition to a form of post-growth or degrowth society. We recognise that the current system works around the premise that there can be infinite growth on a finite planet and that this is a major cause of the crisis that we are facing. Therefore, we must transition to something different. This will be determined by the citizens assemblies (as outlined in the third principle) using the approaches as outlined in the fourth principle.

4. Where to from here?

If you connect with the four steps of HA and connect with the need for systemic change towards some form of 'degrowth' society, we encourage you to join the HA Movement of Movements (HA MoM) either as an individual or as an activist group. You can do by this by contacting us through the 'Contacts' below or through the website.

If you would rather not join this movement of movements, please consider connecting with other activists and organisations in another way. This may include a movement of movements that has a different focus. We will all likely connect in one way or another over time.

Also feel free to join us as well as other movement of movements. We have no idea where HA MoM will lead us. It may become huge or it may be absorbed by some other comprehensive movement for change that grows much bigger.

Feel free also to connect to HA in any way that feels right and connect with us, even if our movement of movements is not your thing. We can assist in many different ways. You can contact us anytime and we can help in whatever capacity that we can.

We will be hosting and assisting with workshops, conversation cafes and citizens assemblies. We also need to recruit and train facilitators to make this happen and to spread the movement.

That said, HA is an ongoing conversation and it will likely change over time. This booklet is only the start of that conversation and that is how it should be. No discourse should be rigid and uncompromising to change.

Please check out our website: www.holisticactivism.net

This is a great resource for getting further involved.

The facebook group is called **Holistic Activism and Behaviour Change** and it also incorporates the amazing work of behaviour change facilitator Suse Scholem.

You can also email us at info@holisticactivism.net if you would like to attend a workshop and if you would like to be involved in building the movement.

In the ensuing months we will be establishing:

Regular HA meet-ups

Facilitator training

Establish a not-for-profit Holistic Activism foundation that can support the process of developing HA groups across Australia and beyond.

This booklet will also be developed further and more writers will likely be required to develop concepts and make HA more accessible to a wider range of people. It is after all, an ongoing conversation. I shall look forward to hearing from you :)

5. References and Further Reading

There is nothing in Holistic Activism that is new. All the wisdom that is needed to 'save the world' was written down (or not written in many oral traditions) a long time ago by teachers from all parts of the world. I am not claiming to be the author of any of these teachings. This is just a repackaging of ideas into a step-by-step guide which may be more effective right here and now.

I would like to acknowledge all of the cultures and traditions that have shared this knowledge for the betterment of human and non-humankind throughout the ages. This is a list of articles and books that I make direct reference to in the text.

Below that is a list of suggested links for follow-up reading and below that is a list of movements and discourses that have influenced Holistic Activism.

Buddhism Plain and Simple – Steve Hagen

Meditation Now or Never – Steve Hagen

Facts Don't Change People's Minds. Here's What Does- Ozan Varol

Critical Thinking as an Anarchist Weapon – Wolfi Landstreicher

Embracing Your Demons: an Overview of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy – Russell Harris

The Hope – A Guide to Sacred Activism
Andrew Harvey

Further Reading Listening and Watching:

We strongly recommend that you read, watch or listen to the work of: Charles Eisenstein, Joanna Macy, Uncle Lewis Walker and John Seed... and there are many others.

We also recommend:

Society Is Made Of Narrative. Realising This Is Awakening From TheMatrix - Caitlin Johnston

Collaboration and empathy as evolutionary success stories
Daniel Christian Wahl – online

How to get people to overcome their bias
Tom Stafford – online

Esteem - the power of vulnerability (full documentary 2017) - Youtube
A documentary made with eco-psychologists and deep ecologists about how our relationship with the environment is a reflection of our internal worlds.

Also, a great critical thinking resource can be found at:

<https://thebestschools.org/magazine/15-logical-fallacies-know>

Movements and Discourses that have influenced Holistic Activism:

Social Permaculture Deep Ecology Non Duality

Eco-psychology Buddhism Post

Structuralism Acceptance Commitment

Therapy Mindfulness **Taoism** Quakerism

The author would like to acknowledge that this booklet was written and published on Wurundjeri land of the Kulin Nations.

Edition Two 2019