

# **A Pathway Out Of The Matrix...**

## **HOLISTIC ACTIVISM A GUIDE BOOKLET**

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**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- Looking for Intersection and Common Ground

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 what we have learnt since the first edition was published in 2019. 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 Holistic Activism website or on our Soundcloud page. We recommend that after doing so, 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.

The idea behind this movement of movements 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". The aim therefore is to work towards an ongoing global movement that delivers behavioural and systemic change from the grassroots upwards.

On another note, there is quite a bit of repetition in this booklet. This is deliberate as we think that re-emphasising important points is more important than possibly overwhelming the reader with too much information. Also, repeating points throughout the text is intended to help emphasise the interconnectivity of all four of the steps.

So without further ado....

## **1. Why Holistic Activism?**

*How can we 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 to a greater or lesser degree, whether we are conscious of it or not.

There comes a point where just about every one of us would choose to make ourselves heard, even if it is for something as fundamental as ensuring that clean water is running out of our tap. In other words, we all have a threshold that kick-starts 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.

Also, each action that we make, no matter how big or small, ripples out into society and has an impact. So whether we are conscious of it or not, our actions are helping to shape the world in which we live. We are all players, and in that respect, 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 a few more layers. That way we can also work towards systemic change as well as tackling 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 burnout 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 successes too, but 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 is becoming apparent that we are not putting enough emphasis into approaching the system that keeps creating these spot fires. Crucially, we cannot change the system with the same mindset and approach that led us into it (and that has kept us in it for long).

Therefore 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 each individual as they are. This enables the focus to be on looking for the common ground that we share as a starting point. This in turn can segue into an ongoing process of inclusive activism.

Of course there are going to be times on the frontline 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 are in conflict with today will one day be given the opportunity to feel part of a holistic movement that transcends their own pain. By doing so, we will help to develop new 'ways in' for people to join the movement where there may have been none before.

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. In order to do so, we must also find peace in acceptance and uncertainty and this is the first step of Holistic Activism.

## **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 cannot 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 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 - Looking for Intersection and Common Ground**

*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 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 achieved 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

As mentioned earlier, the nature of language is such that it reduces the complex into bite-size conceptual chunks and there is nothing wrong with that (it really can't be any other way). But in exchange for the useful tool that language provides us, we do have an obligation to understand that the way we compartmentalise our understanding of the universe through discourse is limited. In other words, the way we frame the world through language is actually a simplification of something that is much more complex.

Therefore, holistic activism is about approaching our opinions and perspectives as an ongoing conversation and importantly, we can do this in a way that feels joyful and regenerative. This not only reduces the risk of us burning out, it also enables us to build a better movement for change. However, for this to happen, it is important that we also embrace the previous three steps of Holistic Activism.

For example, the ability to think critically relies upon looking for common ground rather than seeking to have our opinions validated. This in turn requires that as part of that process, we are able to step outside of the cycle of pain. Also, spending time in a space outside of language is a great precursor to critical thinking because it roots our 'identity' into something that is not fully based on the concepts that we generate through mind. This better opens us up to being comfortable with adding nuance to our existing perception of what is right and wrong.

Critical thinking will not work nearly as well if it is merely about one person being right and the other wrong (even if that sometimes happens to be the outcome). That only reinforces cognitive dissonance as well as the polarities that critical thinking is meant to untangle.

This is why it is imperative that the focus is as much as possible about adding layers of nuance to what others are saying, as all parties should ideally come out of the other end with a sense of ownership of the outcome.

To take the 'overpopulation' issue again as an example, if the topic is seen as contentious, the focus could instead be placed on the issues that are undercurrent. This could include the important role that universal access to healthcare and education can play in a wider program of mutual aid that is designed to create a more equitable, low carbon world. Populations will stabilise in this scenario irrespective of whether you or anyone thinks that overpopulation is an issue or not.

Therefore, you can connect with others who may not share your opinion, and in doing so, find the areas of intersection in a broader movement of movements that will have within it a multitude of opinions. The planet doesn't care about a single opinion but it will be profoundly impacted by a massive movement for change that inevitably must carry a diversity of opinion within it. Critical thinking is an essential component of being able to make that happen.

Of course, there will be times when you come up against nothing but conflict. For example, the person who is discussing the population issue with you may not be open to adding nuance and may be appalled at the thought of improving equity and the empowerment of women. In such circumstances, that could be the cue to walk away. Of course conflict with individuals can, if handled correctly, be a conduit for positive change but that is a whole other topic and it is one that adds nuance to the four steps of Holistic Activism. One aspect of critical thinking is about breaking down polarities such as the idea that conflict is always bad and avoiding conflict is always good.

This is what is known as a false dilemma. False dilemmas pop up all of the time in a whole range of circumstances. 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 low density development on the urban fringe.

Framing the issue in such a way can deny the more complex nature of town planning. For example, it ignores the thousands of empty homes and other 'retrofitable' spaces (as well as a considerable amount of ex-industrial land) that are often ignored in our urban conurbations. In other words, there are different methods 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 can benefit vested interests. It also marginalises a whole range of other discourses 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, we do not want to put the environment 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 (though this may be different to how we currently define standard of living) and hope to have environmental protection is disingenuous. Yet if these messages go unchallenged, they start to filter into all areas of society, including the media. 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 'growth at all costs' society that we are living in right now is the radical one. Without critical thinking we are bound to this matrix. This is why free speech and the ability to think critically are both important because promoting one while denying the other can lead to cognitive bias on a massive scale. Without critical thinking, free speech will more likely 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.

Without critical thinking, narratives that have not been properly critiqued can filter into the education system where they can be regarded as undisputable 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 whose worldview is 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 and 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 pre-supposed 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 also 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.

### **3. Towards a Movement of Movements**

One of the biggest challenges that we are facing in the 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 in a way that enables the work that we are doing at the micro level to feed into a much needed shift in paradigm at the macro level?

The environment movement has largely been ineffective because there has not been enough interconnection between localised grassroots activism and the broader movement for systemic and behavioural change. Holistic Activism is helping to tackle this by pursuing what is referred to as a 'movement of movements'. This acknowledges that we can each bring our unique skills, knowledges and insights into a growing interconnected web of change.

That way, we can ensure that the very important reactive stuff such as fighting to protect old growth forests is intertwined with the proactive stuff too. This means that our activism will also be about working towards creating a system that does not regard old growth forests as an expendable resource.

By joining a movement of movements, groups do not lose any of their autonomy, but they do become part of something that is greater than the sum of its parts. We have created five principles for a movement of movements that is centred around systemic and behavioural change. The first three principles are the three principles of Extinction Rebellion (XR). It is really important that we intersect and share common ground with such a massive movement for change, but we want to go further.

This is why the fourth principle is all about utilising social permaculture, eco-psychology and holistic activism principles, so that we can develop long lasting systemic and behavioural change.

The fifth principle builds on that need for systemic change by working towards some form of post-growth or de-growth society or Steady State Economy. How this society looks will in part be determined through the citizen's 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. Crucially, the assemblies should utilise the social permaculture, eco-psychology and holistic activism approaches that are outlined in the fourth principle. That way we can ensure that they do not succumb to ideology and vested interests.

The good news is that groups can join a movement of movements without everyone having to agree on every issue. As emphasised earlier, we will not 'save the world' with one set of values and opinions alone. What matters is that we connect on a common desire to see systemic and behavioural change with the understanding that we are part of a wider ongoing conversation.

For example, vegan groups and ethical omnivore groups could both join, despite having different ideologies (though they share more in common than many realise) and both would have a platform to discuss their perspectives at Citizens Assemblies based around food ethics and farming practices.

This is why the four steps of Holistic Activism can play an important role in making this happen. By working together, groups that may oppose each other in certain areas could help to create a world where discussion around food ethics and the absence of industrial animal farming is central to a de-growth based society.

Of course the conversation doesn't have to end there and it does not mean that all conflict will or should go away. However, developing an understanding that there are certain forums where stepping out of conflict is the right thing to do is something that can be developed through the behavioural change that is inherent in holistic activism.

In summary, the principles that we propose for a HA based 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 de-growth 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 Holistic Activism, we encourage you to join us, either as an individual or as an activist group. You can do by this by contacting us through the 'Contacts' (below) or through our website.

We can assist in many different ways and you can contact us anytime. We host and assist others with workshops and run conversation cafes as well as citizens assemblies. We are also always happy to chat and share ideas

Please check out our website: **[www.holisticactivism.net](http://www.holisticactivism.net)**

We also have a facebook group called **[Holistic Activism and Behaviour Change](#)**.

You can also email us at **[info@holisticactivism.net](mailto:info@holisticactivism.net)**

You can listen to an audio version of the first edition of this booklet at the Holistic Activism website. We also have our own **Soundcloud page** and you can also listen to (and download) the audio-booklet there. This page will (at the time of writing) also be a place to listen to a number of projects that are currently in the works.

We are currently putting together a **HA Guided Meditation** and that is expected to be finished by the end of September 2020. We will also shortly be launching the **HA Podcast Series**. This will cast an HA eye over many different topics and current affairs, all with the aim of helping to build a united movement of movements.

You can view the Holistic Activism Soundcloud here:  
**[https://soundcloud.com/holistic\\_activism](https://soundcloud.com/holistic_activism)**

We 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 in the 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 the articles and books that I make 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 The Matrix - 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



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