

A Pathway Out Of The Matrix...

HOLISTIC ACTIVISM A GUIDE BOOKLET

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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 founded Town Planning Rebellion in 2020. He is firmly committed to taking a holistic activism approach to the work that he does.

Introduction to the Third 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 or downloading this booklet. This updated edition takes into account what we have learnt since the first two editions were published in 2019 and early 2020. 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. After doing so, it is worth reading the parts of this booklet that are not included in the audio version. Most of this is contained within two newly written chapters (three and four).

Chapter four details the Holistic Activism Guided Meditation. This is a new project that is aimed at creating a different kind of space and context to share the Holistic Activism steps. As with the audio booklet, you can listen to it/download it on the Holistic Activism website or on our SoundCloud page (links to both of these are in chapter five).

Chapter three is about developing 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 movement of movements that incorporates behavioural and systemic change into its approach.

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 whether we are conscious of it or not.

There comes a point whereby 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, every action that we take and each word that we speak, ripples out into society and this too 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.

I have seen many activists burnout over the years and this is often caused by dashed expectations, differences of opinion, and disappointment at seeing little positive change for all of the hours of time that people 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 focus upon changing the system that keeps creating these spot-fires.

While the need for systemic change is paramount, we will not 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 is about integrating both systemic change and behavioural change into our everyday activism. That way, the work that we do can feed into a

comprehensive movement for change that brings along as many people as possible with it.

For that to happen, everyone involved should feel a sense of shared ownership of the developing wider movement. Therefore, HA is about focussing on the behavioural change that can make this happen rather than determining the kind of society that we should be creating. Otherwise we risk recreating the tunnel vision that got us into the mess that we are currently in.

However, HA does recognise that there is an urgent need to transition away from a model of living that promises ongoing growth in consumption. This is because the narrative of perpetual growth has taken a foothold into every aspect of society (including the environment movement) to the extent that any progress towards systemic change is being massively compromised. Thanks to cognitive dissonance (more on that later) this model of living is currently being entrenched by the powers that be, even in face of the rapidly unfolding climate and ecological catastrophe.

Therefore, HA acknowledges that any pathway towards systemic change must be framed around transitioning to some form of 'steady state model' using a process of de-growth. The narrative of perpetual growth has become so dominant that the only option now is to challenge it upfront, otherwise it will continue to strongly permeate into our every attempt to reverse the multiple crises that the world is facing.

The four steps outlined in this booklet are about helping to pave the way to make this systemic change happen. Of course they are only divided into steps for the purposes of explanation and it will become apparent throughout the text that Holistic Activism is a single integrative approach.

2. The Steps

Step 1 – Acceptance, Uncertainty and Presence

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 first step of Holistic Activism is acceptance, uncertainty and presence. This is not the state of acceptance or 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, uncertainty and presence that lies beneath and beyond the mind, before it categorises thought into what is right and wrong or good and bad. In other words 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.'

By understanding acceptance, uncertainty and presence as a starting point to Holistic Activism, 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 should not 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 or not 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 that is worth striving for. With the desire to find a graceful unity that lies beneath our opinions, we are better able to build a movement that is rooted in something that is more constructive and ultimately more resilient.

A willingness to comprehend a sense of peace and wholeness that lies in a place outside of language, is therefore fundamental. 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 because it allows us to forge a major part of our identity in something that lies outside of opinion. This better enables us to see our worldview as fluid rather than being rooted in ideology.

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 originates from outside of the interference of mind. We have largely forgotten this in the West. 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'. However, by learning a meditation practice or ritual, it becomes increasingly obvious that most human doing is counterproductive and that slowing down can be better for both our mental health and for the biosphere.

The embrace of acceptance, uncertainty and presence helps us to nurture an approach to life that values the forest as it is right now, in all of its complexity rather than regarding it as a resource that needs to be exploited. This mindset becomes all the more important as we transition towards some form of Steady State society that places less emphasis on monetary value.

It is good that there is a growing interest in meditation and mindfulness in all of its forms. However, many people are made to feel that they should enter into it with some preconceived outcome in mind. Some corporations have even taught mindfulness as a means of increasing the productivity of their workers. This misses the point. 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.'

Even though this sounds simple, it can nevertheless feel like an enormous challenge. The idea of letting go for the sake of letting go is something that many in contemporary society find hard to accept. Of course we all let go when we fall asleep or when our minds briefly surrender to an experience so powerful that it draws us into deep presence, such as a beautiful music or a sunset. But it is the act of deliberately asking our minds to let go that can feel overwhelming. This doesn't have to be a barrier because fully accepting this feeling of being overwhelmed can be a pathway into that letting go. Being present is about being the observer and accepting everything in the universe as it is right now... and this includes the state of our minds as they are right now (as well as everyone else's).

Therefore, much of our suffering lies in our resistance to feelings as opposed to the feelings themselves. When we try to bury those feelings, they find other ways of playing out, sometimes in ways that impact other people through the cycle of pain (see the next chapter). Therefore, we should not feel guilty for giving ourselves the same acceptance and compassion that we need to give to the wider world, because they are a reflection of each other. Our minds are more complex than our minds can ever fathom and accepting this helps us to reconnect with deep presence.

Even if when are not experiencing this presence, simply having the knowledge that there is a peace that lies outside of mind (and that we can return to it) is valuable in itself. This is especially so during those times when it is difficult to separate our minds from whatever activity is keeping us preoccupied. The knowledge that there are many pathways into acceptance, uncertainty and presence is also important and some of those pathways will work better than others, depending upon the situation or the individuals involved. This is why the author of 'Entropia', Samuel Alexander played a series of soundscapes to his audience at a lecture that I once attended.

For the same reason, the Holistic Activism Guided Meditation (see chapter 4) includes drumming, because it is a means of helping to guide the listener into a state of presence. This drumming will not work for everyone. Some may prefer classical music and others will prefer that there be no background sounds at all. It may therefore be appropriate for people to make a their own version of the Guided Meditation so that it is tailored to their needs.

Another method of embracing Acceptance, Uncertainty and Presence is Deep Ecology meditation. 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. This helped me to realise that because of language, our concept of what constitutes a tree is actually very limited. Our reluctance as a society to reacquaint ourselves with this complexity has devastating repercussions and these play out in a multitude of ways. The fact that people can raze old growth forests to the ground without any feeling of deep loss is one such example.

This is why the sense of wonderment that becomes apparent when we embrace acceptance, uncertainty and presence helps us to not only protect complex systems, it also helps us to see that we are all connected at a level that lies behind our conditioned minds and the opinions that they help to mould. That way we are in a better position to look for the green field that exists beneath 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 pursue victory over progress and in doing so we will be in better position to engage in collaborative action.

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, chi gong, engaging in ritual 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.

Inevitably there are going to be times when it is impossible to be 'holistic' but this does not 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 have the opportunity to feel part of an inclusive movement. Therefore, by accepting that many of us are coming from a place of pain, we can help to develop new 'ways in' for people where there may have been none before.

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 has a huge impact on 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 perceived cruelty with the same acceptance that we have for non-human nature in all of its beauty and perceived 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 undermined by those you interact with. 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 undermine 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 sideways to those around us. While it is essential that we accept the inevitability of this pain, we can also consciously start to circumnavigate it. In turn, we can break the cycle by showing a pathway forward that is not governed by dogma and the inevitable pain that accompanies it. Therefore, it is important to know the difference between being assertive and inflating your own ego and invariably, adding to the cycle.

For this reason assertiveness must be accompanied with compassion and this means having the other's best interests at heart as well as our own. Otherwise, we risk projecting our own shadow onto others under the guise of assertiveness (our egos can be clever like that). It is therefore good to at least acknowledge to yourself that you too could share similar thoughts and ways of thinking if this complex universe were to unfold in a different way.

In the words of Alan Watts;

"There are people who are unconscious of their own dark sides and they project that darkness outwards into whoever the enemy may be and say..."there is the darkness, it is not in me". Therefore, because the darkness is not in me, I am justified in annihilating this enemy... But to the degree that a person becomes conscious that the evil is as much in himself as in the other...to this same degree he is not likely to project it onto some scapegoat and commit the most criminal acts of violence upon other people. In order to admit and really accept and understand the evil in oneself, one has to be able to do it without being an enemy to it."

This goes back to the issue of acceptance as outlined in step one. Acceptance is as much about accepting ourselves fully (including the stuff that we don't want to see). By fully accepting our shadow side and

refusing to project it onto others, we are less likely to succumb to it, especially when we are consciously committed to breaking the cycle of pain. Acknowledging our own potential to add to the cycle of pain is part of the process of stepping away from it.

If you are both assertive and fully accepting of yourself and others, you should come out of any given conflict situation without any residual anger, resentment or sense of superiority. In other words, you will feel comfortable in returning to the peace that lies outside of language. Otherwise we risk succumbing to the resentment and recrimination that binds us to the cycle.

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

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 may lead to realisation, even if you are not around to see it.

By getting our heads fully around the notion of compassionate assertiveness and underpinning it with acceptance, uncertainty and presence, we can create the best possible scenarios for constructive communication. This paves the way to developing creating constructive collaboration.

Additional notes:

There is a lot of information online about assertiveness techniques and many are well worth checking out. I have included the best resource that I have come across on effective assertiveness in the 'We also recommend' section of chapter six.

Holistic activism is not intended to be a replacement for any treatment

plans or methods of dissipating trauma and/or developing new approaches to living. It is about adding an extra layer of nuance to whatever journey you happen to be on.

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

We will not '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, as well as being 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 in order to achieve a constructive outcome. 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 many 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 is because most readers will be able to resonate with the challenges that it creates. 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 chapters, the key is to enter into any correspondence with acceptance, compassion and assertiveness. This will shine through in your communication and it will in turn lessen the risk of that communication descending into 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 understand that people become so attached to a core belief to the point of dogma (because they are caught-up in the cycle of pain) we can better avoid succumbing to this cognitive dissonance ourselves. 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 that is known as co-regulation and it is a term used in psychology to mean a 'continuous unfolding of individual action that is susceptible to being continuously modified by the continuously changing actions of the partner'.

The process of activism as a whole needs to be seen as an ongoing process that is always open to modification. 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 destructive. This is why being able to forge some of our identity in a space that lies in deep presence (and

that is therefore outside of ideology) helps us to step outside of the constant rubbing up of ideologies. It is also why compassionate assertiveness can help us to create the conditions that are needed to make that happen.

It is important therefore to emphasise that the ongoing nature of activism should not be seen as a chore. Instead we can 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. This regenerative approach to activism must be rooted in our desire to look for areas of common ground or points of intersection. This, combined with acceptance and an understanding of the cycle of pain, will better enable people with different ways of looking at the world to work 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 now also be easier than it was before for all of the demographics involved to work together in the future.

In other words, by looking for areas of common ground, we can go onto approach more contentious issues in a way that creates constructive outcomes. Of course some people are so invested in conflict that they will resist any efforts to steer the conversation away from avoiding cognitive dissonance and stepping outside of the cycle of pain. If so, the best course of action may be to walk away without resentment, knowing that a lot of time and energy will be saved on everyone's part.

This will inevitably happen from time to time and that is ok. So much of burnout is due to not knowing when to walk away. Of course, walking away does not have to be forever, but it can sometimes be the appropriate thing to do for everyone involved, at least until you find a new way of approaching and connecting to that person. 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, when everyone who is involved consciously engages in the four steps of Holistic Activism, there is a greater potential for people to adapt their perspectives without feeling that they have lost face. Importantly everyone will come out of any interaction with a shared ownership of the outcome. As Dale Carnegie points out in his now over eighty year old seminal work, "How to Win Friends and Influence People", you cannot have an influence over people unless there is an honest intention 'to see things from the other person's point of view'. Despite being over eighty years old, Carnegie's work continues to be very relevant and much of it intersects beautifully with Holistic Activism. If you do not have the time or the opportunity to read the whole book, there are some good summaries of the book's teachings available in cyberspace. There is a link to one such example in the 'We also recommend' section of chapter six.

How to Win Friends and Influence People shows how a genuine desire to connect with people is nothing new. However, as with mindfulness and meditation, without critical thinking there is a risk that many of the approaches in Holistic Activism can be subverted by strong ideologies and vested interests.

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 first step of Holistic Activism is about finding connection in the space of deep presence. This is a space that connects every single one of us and that also provides the grounding that is needed to build relationships and develop critical thinking. By seeing the awe and wonder of nature in all of its complexity, we are better able to find comfort in being the observer as opposed to succumbing to the urge to control and intervene. It is when we feel discomfort in face of this complexity that (to paraphrase Joni Mitchell) we are capable of 'paving paradise and putting up a parking lot'.

But this is not enough. Without the addition of critical thinking, we are all susceptible to once again being led down a pathway towards 'paving paradise and putting up a parking lot'. We are not our minds but we are also our minds and Holistic Activism is about doing both well, so that they form a beautiful symbiosis. This is why there are four steps to holistic activism and why those steps form an interconnected approach that both acknowledges the limitations of language as well as the need to do language well.

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, 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 burn out, it also enables us to build a more inclusive and robust 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 a desire to look for common ground rather than seeking to have our opinions validated. This in turn requires that we commit to stepping outside of the cycle of pain. Otherwise critical thinking risks being thwarted in the pursuit of victory over progress. Also, spending time in a space outside of language is a great precursor to critical thinking because it roots our 'identity' in 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 perceptions 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, as mentioned before, if the topic is seen as contentious, the focus could instead be placed on those issues that are undercurrent to the topic in hand. This could include the important role that universal access to healthcare and education can play in a wider program of mutual aid. Mutual aid needs to play a role in developing a more equitable, low carbon world and 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 must inevitably carry a diversity of opinion within it. Critical thinking is an essential component of being able to make this 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 looking at the undercurrent issues or adding nuance and they may be appalled at the thought of improving social equity across all nations. 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 that hopefully adds nuance to (rather than contradicts) 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 that 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 a range of 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 '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 must go hand in hand with critical thinking because promoting one without the other can lead to cognitive bias on a massive scale and as we have learnt, this can be very dangerous.

A lot of critical thinking is thwarted by techniques that are used to try to force preconceived outcomes, so it is worth getting accustomed to these techniques. According to Karla Cook there are fifteen logical fallacies and you can read about them in her excellent online article (see the 'We also recommend' section of chapter six). It is worth knowing when these fallacies are being used because this will again better help you to steer

the conversation away from the pursuit of victory to the pursuit of progress.

Without critical thinking, free speech will more than likely favour those who have the power and money to push their narrative at the expense of those who try to add nuance to those narratives. From there they can go on to filter into the education system where they become 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 obtain enough calcium without having to drink 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 of the two. As a result, 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 of course 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, they will 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 know when they are being misconstrued to suit vested interests.

What is important is that discussion is about focussing on the topic and not attacking 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.

With vigilance can also come humour. Being able to have a laugh is cathartic for everyone involved. It breaks down barriers and puts things into a fresh new perspective. The first step of holistic activism is about embracing uncertainty and acceptance and this provides much opportunity for humour. Our role as activists is deadly serious but as Bill Hicks said 'it is all just a ride'. He knew how to use humour to communicate what are otherwise serious issues and for that, I am eternally grateful.

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 Holistic Activism 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. Holistic Activism Guided Meditation

The Holistic Activism guided meditation was written and recorded to communicate the four steps that are outlined in this booklet in a way that may be more effective and approachable to some people.

You can listen to and download this meditation on the Holistic Activism SoundCloud page. The link to this page can also be accessed through the Holistic Activism website (details in chapter five). Alternatively, you can read from the transcript (below) and create your own form of group meditation. There is no copyright, so please feel free to use it how you wish.

The Holistic Activism Guided Meditation Transcript

Welcome to the Holistic Activism Guided Meditation. There will be a few minutes of speaking followed by six minutes of drumming. You do not have to absorb or listen to everything or anything that I say. You can come back to this meditation many times so there is no right or wrong way about how you approach this. Each time you listen to this meditation, the journey you take will be different. It cannot be any other way. Feel free to simply accept whatever journey this takes you on...

I invite you to breathe slowly. Take some long deep exhalations and relax into the space.

Feel free to focus on allowing yourself to feel acceptance with where the world is right now at this very moment. This includes all of the pain, and all of the beauty. You do not have to think about it, just feel it. Accept that right now you do not have to know anything and you do not have to have any judgements about anything. Simply be aware of your presence; everything from your breathing...all the way to any sensations that you may be feeling in your body. Right now everything in the universe is at is and you can relax into this space and accept it all without judgement.

There is always solace and peace in this space, even if you cannot feel it now. It is the peace that lies in pure awareness. We used to dwell here a lot but as we have grown older, we have spent less time here. This is because we have been taught that we are our minds when in reality, our minds are only part of who we are. We are also the awareness that lies outside of thought.

This is what the medieval poet Rumi describes as the green field that lies before right and wrong. To fully know and feel this green field is the first step of holistic activism. It is about being present, embracing uncertainty, complexity and acceptance. It is only by fully accepting something that we can start to transform it and by fully accepting ourselves and the wider world, we will feel less inclined to pass our pain onto others or enable them to pass their pain onto us.

This is why step two is about breaking the cycle of pain and step three is about looking for the common ground that we share and building upon that. These steps help build an activism that is rooted in connection rather than conflict. Let's start the process of applying these first three steps. Take a deep breath and exhale slowly...

Now imagine a beautiful place in nature and make yourself feel comfortable. Marvel in wonderment at the complexity of the nature that you see and feel here and relax into knowing that this is greater than your mind can encapsulate. And that simply being the observer and watching the world unfold... is perfection. This is your space. You are safe here. You can feel immersed in this presence.....

Now imagine a person who in the past has left you with some bad feelings but not deep hurt. It doesn't matter if this person is living or deceased. Invite them over as your guest and let them know that you have compassion for them... but for your sake and for theirs, you will not let them pass their pain onto you and you will not do the same to them.

You are showing compassionate assertiveness, not out of spite, but for the both of you and for the universe. You are breaking the cycle of pain.

Now feel free to hug them or wave them goodbye and watch them leave and settle back into the eternal presence of your right here and now. Feel free to exhale deeply and embrace a sense of acceptance and letting go...

When you feel ready, invite that same guest back over, knowing that your interaction with them will not perpetuate the cycle of pain. This time invite them to join you to build a conversation on an issue where you might share some common ground. You can acknowledge that you do not necessarily agree with them on other issues but that is ok because right now you want to connect with them on one issue at the deepest level that you can. You can agree also to try not to judge them on those areas where you disagree. Instead, acknowledge to yourself that you too could have shared similar thoughts and ways of thinking if this complex universe had unfolded in a different way.

If you see yourself connecting on an issue, embrace the feeling of empowerment that this gives you and sit with this. If however, your guest appears to resist your invitation to find common ground that is ok too. Feel free to sit with them, without judgement and enjoy that feeling of deep presence. If you perceive that they are using this as an opportunity to engage in conflict, remind them that you have decided to no longer engage in the cycle of pain and with compassion, invite them to sit with you in meditation and listen to this drumming... If they are not comfortable with this, you can ask them politely to leave the space. You are in control here.

How this person reacts is like a 'choose your own adventure story' but as you now wave them goodbye, you should feel empowered, whatever the outcome. Whether it is through finding an area of connection or because you have engaged with them in a compassionate assertive way... or both.

This is like watching the first seeds sprout in a garden that you have just started to plant.

These three steps help us to better engage in the fourth and final step of holistic activism which is the art of critical thinking. Critical thinking as a means of building deeper connection is about adding nuance to people's ideas, looking to connect on the deeper underlying issues that influence our opinions and breaking down polarised perspectives. By taking this approach all parties can feel part of an ongoing, constructive conversation. Holistic activism is about using minds our well but, as described in the first step, it is also about being comfortable in a space outside of mind. The two are a symbiosis.

So let's say no more words. Instead, feel free to let go and listen to the drumming. Let it take you to where you need to go. You do not need to get attached to the words that I have just spoken. You can revisit them anytime. You can play this meditation anytime or read the holistic activism booklet. But for now, feel free to lose yourself in the drumming and allow it to take you where you need to go.

Six minutes of shamanic drumming and then....

I now invite you to start to open your eyes and slowly come out of the meditation.

5. 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 emailing us (see below) or through our website.

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

Please check out our website: **www.holisticactivism.net** We also have a facebook group called **Holistic Activism and Behaviour Change**.

You can also email us at **info@holisticactivism.net**

We also have our own SoundCloud page where you can listen to and download the audio version of the first edition of this booklet, as well as the Holistic Activism Guided Meditation. There will also be occasional Holistic Activism podcasts that will be posted to the page every now and then. These podcasts cast an HA eye over many different topics and current affairs 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

Feel free to use apply anything that you read in this booklet to your own activism and develop ongoing discussion around it. We can also assist in helping you to facilitate this. We look forward to hearing from you :)

6. 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 which may be more effective in the right here and now.

I would also like to acknowledge all of the cultures, traditions and individuals that have shared the knowledge that Holistic Activism communicates for the betterment of human and non-humankind throughout the ages.

References

The Hope – A Guide to Sacred Activism - Andrew Harvey

Buddhism Plain and Simple – Steve Hagen

Meditation Now or Never – Steve Hagen

Accepting Your Shadow Side – Alan Watts celebrates Karl Jung (Youtube)

Facts Don't Change People's Minds. Here's What Does- [Ozan Varol](#) (online)

How to Win Friends and Influence People – Dale Carnegie

We also recommend:

Assertiveness, Non-Assertiveness, and Assertive Techniques (pdf) - <https://socialwork.buffalo.edu> (online)

The Best Summary of How to Win Friends and Influence People
Farnam Street (FS) (online)

15 Common Logical Fallacies and how to spot them – Karla Cook
(online)

Society Is Made Of Narrative. Realising This Is Awakening From The
Matrix - Caitlin Johnston (online)

Collaboration and empathy as evolutionary success stories
Daniel Christian Wahl (online)

How to get people to overcome their bias
Tom Stafford (online)

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

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

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