

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

## **HOLISTIC ACTIVISM**

**A guide by Mark Allen**

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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.*

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## **CHAPTER 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 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 conscious of it or not.

There comes a point when 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 build a united movement for change.

Also, every action we take and each word that we speak, ripples out into society and this too has an impact. 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 of the disappointment at seeing little positive change for all of the hours of time that people have invested. 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 so long). Therefore, HA is about integrating both systemic 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 focusing on the behavioural change that can make this happen rather than determining the kind of society that we should be forming. Otherwise, we risk recreating the tunnel vision that got us into the mess that we are currently in.

However, this booklet 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 in 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, this booklet proposes that any pathway towards systemic change must be framed around transitioning to some form of 'steady state model' using a process of degrowth. 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 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 for this systemic change. So, while this booklet is about being a more effective activist it is also about helping to create the societal behavioural change that is required to not only reverse the multiple crisis that we are facing, but to also ensure that we do not repeat them.

It is important therefore to point out that Holistic Activism is divided into steps only for the purposes of explanation and it will become apparent throughout the text that it is a single integrative approach.

## **CHAPTER 2 - The Steps**

### **Step 1 – Acceptance, Uncertainty and Presence**

*Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing 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 to fully embrace acceptance and uncertainty. While this is a decision that we make with our minds, it also leads us to a place of deep presence that lies 'outside of our minds.' In the words of Christopher Chase;

*'There's a whole Universe that surrounds us, and lives within us, that connects us to each other. The atoms and energy that dance within you (and as you) have billions of years of history. Life is more precious than diamonds or gold. Yet our values are so warped that billions of humans don't see this. We are taught to crave what is meaningless and ignore what has meaning.'*

We can give ourselves permission to spend time immersed in this presence, simply as observers of the unfolding universe around us, without judgement. This is important because language, by its very nature, breaks what is ultimately complex into something that is much simpler, and in doing so we lose a lot of detail along the way. On top of that, our minds add layers of conditioning, life experience and trauma into the mix. Of course, we do not want to deny our personal traits but we can also remember that an important part of who we are is that which is the observer.

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 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 approached 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 slowing down can be better for both our own and others' mental health and also for the planet. 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 healing both my outer and inner worlds.

Embracing acceptance and uncertainty helps us to develop an approach to life that values a forest, say - as it is right now - in all of its complexity, rather than feeling that we need to reduce it to something like a resource that needs to be exploited. Therefore, it is good that there is a growing interest in meditation and mindfulness in all its forms. However, many people are made to feel that they should approach mindfulness with a definite intention whereas the whole purpose is to spend time as the observer, where there are no intentions. Some corporations have even taught mindfulness as a means of increasing worker productivity. This totally misses the point. In the words of Steve Hagen in his book *Meditation Now or Never*;

*'Meditation ... saturates your life and in time can be brought into every activity. It is the transformation of mind from bondage to freedom. In practising 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. It is worth remembering that all of us 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 beautiful music or a sunset.

It is the act of deliberately asking our minds to let go that can feel overwhelming. But this feeling of being overwhelmed dissipates over time, especially when you fully accept and observe it without judgement. Being present after all is about being the observer and accepting everything in the universe as it is right now... and this includes the state of our mind as it is right now (as well as everyone else's).

Much of our suffering therefore lies in our resistance to feelings as opposed to the feelings themselves. When we try to bury those feelings, they can find other ways of playing out, sometimes in ways that impact other people through the cycle of pain (see step two). This is why we should not feel guilty about giving ourselves the same acceptance and compassion that we need to give to the wider world, because they are two sides of the same coin.

Intellectually we are taught that acceptance is wrong. For many, completely letting go and becoming the observer can feel like we are betraying our intellect, but as you will see in the following steps, this couldn't be further from the truth. Acceptance definitely does not mean compliance and spending time in a state of mindfulness will, when combined with the remaining three steps, lead to an improved and more effective intellect. There are many pathways into presence and some of those pathways will work better than others, depending upon the situation or the individuals involved. They can include everything from rituals to simple mindfulness exercises. One such method 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 of deep complexity, 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 that can 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.

By embracing acceptance and uncertainty and the deep presence that it brings, we can re-forge our identities in something that lies outside of opinion. Instead, we can ground our identity in the ongoing wonderment of everything that is around us, and absolutely nothing in the mind can get in the way of that. Crucially this will make it easier to, in the words of Joseph Joubert, appreciate that 'the aim of argument, or of discussion, should not be victory, but progress'. This does not mean that we should ignore our opinions and perspectives. Instead, we can see them as parts of ourselves that are adaptable, flexible and above all, limited. It is about recognising that our individual minds can never fully take-in the big picture.

That way we are better set-up to ensure that we do not project our own shadow into the activist work that we do and that we can compassionately help to steer others away from doing the same. Our focus then is much less likely to be about making our opinions win out over others. Instead, we can start to look for the common ground that is required to build a comprehensive movement for change.



## **Additional notes:**

Acceptance is also about being comfortable with paradoxes; that is knowing that it is possible to hold what appears to be two conflicting worldviews without feeling morally challenged. 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. In other words, it allows us to connect with other people's perspectives, even if they are not our own and it better enables us to find areas of common ground (more on this in the third step). One example of a paradox is to see the benefit in setting goals while also understanding that activism is an ongoing conversation where the goal posts must keep shifting.

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, including ourselves, perceive and communicate through layers of conditioning, unresolved trauma and projected shadow, we can work together to develop new 'ways in' for people where before there may have been none. Having a grounding in acceptance, uncertainty and the deep presence that comes with it, will make this so much easier to happen.

Importantly, 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 to whatever journey you happen to be on. For myself the four steps provide a solid foundation for all of the internal and external work that I do and still wish to do.

## **Step 2 - Breaking the 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 is the stuff that we do on the outside but like everything we do in life, the outside stuff is a reflection of what is going on in our inner worlds. This is why healing our outer worlds and our inner worlds need to be one and the same. Otherwise, activism like every other aspect of human endeavour, will continue to become (in part) a vehicle for perpetuating human trauma.

Therefore, communication and how we respond to other people has a huge impact on our effectiveness as activists. It is through communication where trauma can either be dissipated or passed on. For this reason, and as discussed in the previous step, this communication is much more effective if it is grounded in the place of uncertainty, acceptance and presence that lies outside of language.

Of course, as mentioned in the previous step, acceptance does not mean compliance. To create the positive change that comes from healing the inner and outer worlds that we have created for ourselves, acceptance must come hand in hand with breaking the cycle of pain. This means making a conscious decision not to project our own shadow outwards while simultaneously choosing to engage in compassionate assertiveness.

Being assertive does not mean 'fighting back' and neither is it about pushing our pain onto the other person. It is about being direct about what you need, want, feel or believe in a way that's respectful of the views of others. However, it is easy for us to project so much of our own pain and shadow into communication. This is why we must carry acceptance into our assertiveness while simultaneously taking good care not to allow the other person's pain to negatively impact upon us.

In short, it is about stepping outside of the cycle of pain. This is the pain

that we pass down from one generation to another and sideways to those around us. Breaking the cycle is about 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 not just acceptance but also 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).

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 is why acceptance is as much about accepting every aspect of ourselves (including the stuff that we don't want to see) and why acknowledging our own capacity to add to the cycle of pain is as much part of the process of stepping away from it.

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

Breaking the cycle of pain is about standing our ground in an accepting

and compassionate way. 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.

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 may also have planted the seed in their mind that there is a pathway out of this cycle.

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 creating constructive collaboration.

### **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 over another. This is as true in activist circles as it is elsewhere 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 achieving a specific outcome in order to achieve a constructive outcome. Otherwise, there is a risk of becoming bogged down in the conflict that is directed by the cycle of pain. As Bill Bullard says, 'the highest form of knowledge is empathy, for it requires us to suspend our egos and live in another's world.' Opinion on the other hand, 'requires no accountability, no understanding.'

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.

The reason why I am focusing 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 it 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 can 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 cognitive dissonance ourselves. The key is to accept that the outcome of a conversation might be different to what you have in mind. This is an approach 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'.

This should apply to the process of activism as a whole. It too 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 in order to make this 'ongoing conversation' approach happen.

Instead, we can convert it from being something that is often reactionary and conflict-laden into something that is regenerative and integral to our social fabric. After all, activism is as much a part of our society as everything else that we hold dear and it needs to be. For it to be a productive and joyful experience, it must be rooted in our desire to look for areas of common ground or points of intersection. And it is our understanding of the need for acceptance, uncertainty and presence as well as the cycle of pain that we can best make this happen. Importantly this approach better enables people with different ways of looking at the world to work together.

One great example of collaboration that occurred through focusing on common ground is the ban on fracking that took place in Victoria, Australia after a campaign that was driven by a combination of inner-city Greens 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, despite there being strong differences of opinion on other issues.

In other words, by looking for areas of common ground, we can go on to approach more contentious issues in a way that creates constructive outcomes. Some people however 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 that is, until you find a new way of approaching and connecting to that person. As Ozan Varol says in his 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 there is a conscious decision to engage in the four steps of Holistic Activism, the potential increases for people to adapt their perspectives without feeling that they have lost face. Importantly everyone will come out of each 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 relevant to this day and much of it is imbued 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, there is a risk that many of the Holistic Activism approaches that have been discussed so far can be subverted by strong ideologies and vested interests. This is one reason why the fourth step is the art of critical thinking.



## **Step 4 - The Art of Critical Thinking**

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

- Unknown

*Tyranny is the deliberate removal of nuance - Albert Maysles*

The first step of Holistic Activism is about embracing acceptance, uncertainty and deep presence. This provides us with the grounding that is required to build constructive relationships (steps two and three) which, in turn, provides the fertile ground for critical thinking to play a constructive role (step four). By being present and by embracing the acceptance and uncertainty that comes with it, we can feel awe and wonder in observing nature in all of its complexity. That way we can find comfort in being the observer whenever it feels right to do so, rather than succumbing to the urge to control and intervene.

This puts us in the best space to avoid the existential discomfort that can occur in face of the immense complexity that nature provides. It is this very discomfort that, if we are not careful (to paraphrase Joni Mitchell) can lead us on a path towards 'paving paradise and putting up a parking lot'.

While spending time out of mind is important, so too is the importance of using our minds well. Otherwise, we run the risk of heading down the same path towards 'paving paradise' but from a different direction. This is why the four steps of holistic activism form an interconnected approach that both acknowledges the limitations of language as well as the need to ensure that language doesn't lead to the dangerous repercussions that are inherent with cognitive dissonance.

From a critical thinking perspective, an important approach to avoiding cognitive dissonance is to look towards how we can add nuance to both how we frame our relationship with the world and how others do the same. That way, rather than seeking to replace one truth with another truth, we can ensure that all parties come out of the other end of any communication with a sense of ownership of the outcome. This means that real progress has been made and it is why the pursuit of common ground (as outlined in step three) is integral to critical thinking. It is also why we need to be able to step outside of the cycle of pain (as outlined in step two) as there has to be a willingness to collaborate and broaden one's perspective in order for critical thinking to be effective.

Sometimes it is effective to peel the onion back a layer and focus on the issues that are undercurrent to the topic in hand. For example, as mentioned before, if a topic such as 'overpopulation' seems contentious, the focus could be directed towards the role that universal access to healthcare and education can play in a wider program of international mutual aid. Mutual aid can 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.

That way you can connect with others of differing views, and in doing so, find areas of intersection in a broader movement of movements that will contain a multitude of opinions within it. The planet doesn't care about a single opinion but it will be profoundly impacted by a massive movement for change that inevitably carries a diversity of opinion. Critical thinking is an essential component of being able to make this happen because language can never fully reflect the complexity of the world that we experience when we are in deep presence.

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, we should not be afraid to add nuance, examine other perspectives with an open mind and to ask what vested interests gain the most in narratives being framed in a particular way.

Therefore, Holistic Activism is about approaching our opinions and perspectives as an ongoing conversation in a way that feels joyful and regenerative. This not only reduces the risk of burnout; it also enables us to build a more inclusive and robust movement for change. There will understandably 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. Conflict with individuals can, if handled correctly, be a conduit for positive change and that is a topic that hopefully adds nuance to the four steps of HA rather than creating a 'conflict' versus 'non-conflict' polarity.

After all, one component of critical thinking is about breaking down such polarities. This is what is known as a false dilemma. False dilemmas pop up a lot 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 'retrofittable' spaces (as well as a considerable amount of ex-industrial land) 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, there may be a time and a place for increasing densities, but the assumption that we should focus on demolishing robust buildings in order to accommodate it, is problematic. This marginalises a whole range of other approaches that can be used to accommodate increased densities such as David Holmgren's Retrofitting Suburbia movement. Therefore, it is always important to ask which vested interests stand to gain the most from certain perspectives being championed above others.

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 who wish for the status quo to remain the same. The idea that we cannot have an acceptable standard of living (though this may be different to how we currently define an acceptable standard of living) and hope to have environmental protection is disingenuous.

The false dilemma is just one example of the many logical fallacies that are used to get in the way of critical thinking and most of us are guilty of using them without realising it. Therefore, it is crucial that we know what they are so that we can compassionately steer the conversation away from getting caught up in them. According to Karla Cook there are fifteen logical fallacies and you can read up on them in her excellent online article (see the 'We also recommend' section of chapter six).

Redirecting conversation away from logical fallacies is crucial in ensuring the loudest voices do not get to dominate the narrative. The fact that those louder voices have normalised and legitimised their world view 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. Even those aspects of society that we regard as positive, such as the championing of free speech can lead to detrimental outcomes if critical thinking is not also championed. Otherwise, the outcome of free speech is more likely to favour those who have the power and money to push their narrative at the expense of other perspectives.

Over time these narratives filter into all levels of society and become regarded as indisputable knowledge. They even filter into our education system (which still has a long way to go in terms of teaching critical thinking). For example, as a child I was taught that you had to drink cow's milk in order to have strong bones. I am not saying that cow's 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 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 some organisations 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 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. Statistics play an important role so it is especially important to know when they are being misconstrued to suit vested interests.

For the same reason, 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. When I say vigilance, I do not mean the furrowed brow, cortisol pumping type, I mean the vigilance that comes through joyful regenerative activism that this booklet has discussed.

What is important is that discussion is about focusing 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 does not feed into the cycle of pain.

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.

## **CHAPTER 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 about 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, knowledge 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 come up with one such model that builds on the growing Extinction Rebellion movement. The first three principles are the three principles of Extinction Rebellion but we want to take it two steps further.

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

lasting systemic behavioural change so that (to paraphrase Bayo Akomolafe) the way we respond to the crisis is no longer part of the crisis.

The fifth principle builds on that need for systemic change by working towards some form of post-growth or degrowth society or Steady State Economy. How this society looks will in part, be determined through citizens' assemblies (as highlighted in principle three). These assemblies will be platforms 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 principle four. That way we can ensure that they do not succumb to ideology and vested interests.

The good news is that groups can become part of 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 because of a common desire to see systemic and behavioural change, with the understanding that we are all 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 (or other similar forums) 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 degrowth based society.



In summary, the principles that we propose for a movement of movements that builds on the Extinction Rebellion model are:

### **Principle 1 - Tell the truth**

Governments 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”.

### **Principle 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.

### **Principle 3 - Citizens’ assemblies**

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.

### **Principle 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.

### **Principle 5 - Recognising the need to transition to a form of post-growth or steady state 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 principle three) using the approaches as outlined in principle four.

## **CHAPTER 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 HA 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 to others or enable them to pass their pain to 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 connections 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 our minds 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.

## **CHAPTER 5 - Where to from here?**

If you connect with the four steps of Holistic Activism, we encourage you to connect with us, either as an individual or as an activist group. You can do 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. We are 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)

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.

You can view the Holistic Activism SoundCloud here:

[https://soundcloud.com/holistic\\_activism](https://soundcloud.com/holistic_activism)

Please feel free to share, copy and distribute any part or all of this booklet.

## **CHAPTER 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. Holistic Activism is about repackaging these teachings in a format which may be more effective in the right here and now.

*I would also like to acknowledge all the cultures, traditions and individuals that have shared their teachings for the betterment of human and non-humankind throughout the ages, some of which Holistic Activism now attempts to pass on.*

### References

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

The Hope – A Guide to Sacred Activism - Andrew Harvey

## 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).

Anything by Alan Watts (there is a lot on Youtube), Vandana Shiva,  
Steve Hagen, Bayo Akomolafe, Eckhart Tolle, Joanna Macy and the  
countless number of First Nations teachers whose oral wisdom dates  
back thousands of years.

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

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*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. - **Andrew Harvey***