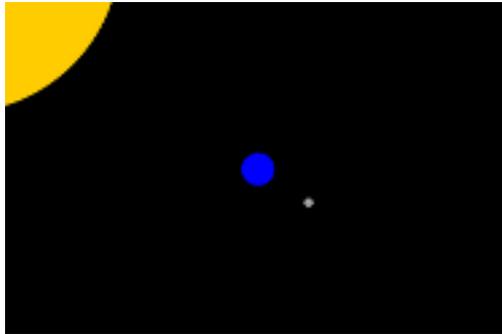


Healthy Life

Improving Personal Health While Making the World a Better Place



www.dpage.org

By Darren Staszak
To humanity and for a better world

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Introduction

Health, our personal health along with the social and environmental health of the world around us is the foundation of our existence as individuals and as a global society. However, sadly much of the world's population lives in a state of chronic poor health caused not by poor genetics or scarcity, but rather poor choices and abundance. In most cases the myriad of symptoms that often accompany this kind of chronic poor health are preventable and reversible when those suffering from them stop doing the things that caused them and start doing the things that provide the body with ideal conditions for health and healing. These things include obtaining proper nutrition, engaging in daily physical activity, getting adequate rest, and maintaining an overall healthy state of mind.

Unfortunately many of those experiencing life in these suboptimal states of health aren't even aware there's a problem as moderate and even low levels of health and the drugs that many require, or have been convinced they require, to maintain them have become accepted as normal. For these individuals the inevitable reduction in quality of life due to poor health is unfortunate, and for a society consisting of many such individuals the overall loss of health, happiness, productivity, and creativity is immeasurable. If we're to even come close to realizing our full potential as individuals and as a global society we must first raise our health standards, and start taking better care of ourselves, each other, and the planet in order to meet and continually raise these standards. This critical and extremely urgent process starts by better educating ourselves and those around us.

Part I: Consumption

Poor Diets and Lifestyles

Are you suffering from PDL? Regardless of whether you are or not a majority of the population is. Symptoms of this disorder can vary greatly and includes things like obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer just to name a few. The problem is that many of those suffering from PDL are diagnosed and treated according to the specific symptoms they're suffering from rather than for the PDL itself. As a result harmful drugs are regularly consumed and dangerous treatments are routinely undergone which merely serve to cover up current symptoms while allowing them to worsen and others to develop. Eventually you end up with a person consuming an assortment of drugs and undergoing a variety of treatments in order to manage a wide range of symptoms all of which stem from a single root cause.

Poor diet and lifestyle, or PDL for short, has become so pervasive in modern society that it often goes unrecognized even after it's consequences become unignorable because people are less likely to call into question their diet and lifestyle if they're surrounded by people and immersed in media where nearly everyone else is eating similar diets and living similar lifestyles. Under these circumstances even when the consequences of unhealthy living do arise people are more likely to see them as a normal part of life and aging than they are as warning signs that they may be doing something seriously wrong whether it be in regards to their diet, lifestyle, and/or mindset. In order to begin properly recognizing and treating PDL society must first recognize just how far off the rails of healthy living it has gone.

For nearly all of our species existence we've thrived on organically grown minimally processed foods and active lifestyles, however over the past few generations we've been shifting to a diet of chemical laden heavily processed foods and extremely inactive lifestyles that revolve around sitting. The consequences of ignoring how our bodies have evolved to function and neglecting their proper treatment has been disastrous as is evident in the pandemic rise of needless suffering and preventable death due to lifestyle diseases which could be more accurately described as lifestyle symptoms. Although poor personal choices are primarily to blame much of this trend has been supported by a broken food and health care system and fueled by marketing. The average person may not need much persuading to eat increasing amounts of cheap and convenient junk food, or to purchase products that promise cures to many of the symptoms a poor diet, lifestyle, and mindset can cause, but they sure get it.

Marketing, Consumption, and Illness

In today's marketing plagued, consumption-centric, and increasingly ill world the average person is incessantly barraged with advertisements designed to sell them processed foods and beverages. In addition, mainstream media is also saturated with advertisements for all the medications and so-called "health and beauty products" that are marketed to mask symptoms which are often caused by the processed foods, medications, and "health and beauty products" themselves. In fact a significant portion of the global economy is based upon this marketing induced demand and the harmful consumption and chronic illness it brings. This detrimental cycle of marketing, consumption, and illness is destroying the lives of many individuals and damaging society and the planet as a whole.

For example, despite the seriousness of today's childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes epidemics the processed food industry continues to use cartoons and celebrities to market junk food and beverages to children who are far too young to understand the personal, social, and

environmental consequences of its consumption. Many companies even go as far as to include toys with their unhealthy food in order to entice children to nag their often health clueless parents to purchase it on their behalf. These types of gimmicks wouldn't be so bad if they were used to help vegetable adverse children develop healthy eating habits; however they're being used to persuade children, adolescents, and adults to eat increasing amounts of health undermining factory farmed, heavily processed, high calorie low nutrient junk food.

Besides the disastrous effect this junk food is having on the individuals consuming it it's also placing an ever increasing burden on society in the form of reduced productivity, sick days, disability payments, early retirements, and health care costs. Moreover the way in which most junk food is grown and raised before it's processed and shipped around the world is environmentally destructive and utterly unsustainable. More pristine forests are being cleared and more toxic chemicals are being sprayed in order to grow more genetically modified corn and soy which is used to produce more sweeteners, oils, and factory farmed meat; i.e., the things largely responsible for making people and the planet sick in the first place. The overall effect is that once people urged on by marketing have consumed their way to illness they become potential customers of all those who claim to have a treatment.

Symptom Management

The major flaw in the standard model of "health care" as it exists today is that symptoms are being treated as diseases and the profit motive isn't in making patients well, but rather in managing their symptoms. As a result fundamental common sense is routinely ignored in favor of novel drugs and treatments. Furthermore many of these drugs and treatments give people the false sense that by taking a pill, consuming a powder, or drinking a potion (which often does little more than numb them from the warning signs their poor bodies are providing) they can keep on doing what caused their problems in the first place; and this has the potential to set them up for even more serious problems in the future. Although an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, a pound of cure is much more profitable to those in the business of symptom management.

Modern marketing trains us to consume from birth and spurs us on until death so it's no surprise that consumption of something or another is the standard treatment for just about every ailment. Instead of ceasing to cause health problems by improving or reducing our overall consumption we're constantly encouraged to consume additional things in order to cover them up. Rather than helping people prevent or cure chronic health problems the "health care" and "health and beauty" industries seek to profit off of them by encouraging the consumption of drugs and treatments. This is evident by the overprescription of drugs and treatments, the quietness regarding prevention, and the near silence regarding cures to many so-called diseases which are often merely symptoms of a poor diet and lifestyle.

The fact is there isn't much money to be made from healthy and self-confident people, however there's a fortune to be made by providing people with the drugs, treatments, and excuses they need to stay in a zone of chronic illness and insecurity. Thus in our capitalist system you can't blame the "health care" and "health and beauty" industries for not going out of their way to educate people on how to avoid, reduce, or stop consuming their products. Therefore the burden of raising awareness and providing healthy alternatives lies with the health conscious and concerned citizens of the world. We must set positive examples and make quality health information available and allow individuals to decide whether or not they want to make use of it and start living better, or increase, maintain, or begin their lifelong drug and treatment regimens.

Who's Looking Out For Us?

A false and sometimes fatal assumption of many who consciously or unconsciously support, and suffer directly or indirectly as a result of this marketing driven, ignorance and apathy dependent food and “health care” system that puts the bottom line above all else is that: “There are people looking out for us such as those in the corporations selling these products and services, and those in the government agencies in charge of regulating them, and if something really was bad it simply wouldn't be used or for sale.”. While it's in no corporations interest to kill its customers and in no governments interest to have a significant portion of its population so sick and disabled that they're unable to work and pay taxes this is far from a guarantee that others are looking out for your best interest.

With regards to the corporations selling these foods, drugs, and treatments most have less than impressive track records when it comes to social and environmental responsibility so it would be naive to expect them to start placing your best interest before those of their shareholders. The best customers of many of these corporations tend to be those that are either ill, ignorant, and/or insecure, and are constantly looking for products that are claimed to provide solutions to what are often self-induced problems. Therefore don't expect the companies profiting from the sale of junk food, drugs, cosmetics or any other such products to go out of their way to reduce the illness, ignorance, insecurity and apathy towards health that keeps them in business.

As for the government agencies in charge of regulating the marketing and sale of these foods, drugs, and treatments they're often heavily influenced if not run by the corporations and industries they're supposed to be regulating. Many corporate leaders and lobbyists turned government officials have a lot of interest vested in the prosperity of these corporations and industries because much of their personal wealth and future prospects may directly depend on the success of these corporations and industries, so don't expect them to place your best interest before their own either. On the bright side the thing to remember is that with both governments and corporations we as citizens and consumers have the power to greatly influence and reform them through our civic engagement and purchasing decisions.

What about doctors, they're looking out for us right? Just because someone has the intention of helping you doesn't mean their actions will. Most doctors are so indoctrinated in the drug-for-every-symptom model of “health care” that they frequently fail to fully recognize and appreciate how capable the body is at healing itself given it's provided the proper conditions to do so. As a result even the most well-intentioned doctors reach for far too quickly and far too often for things like blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar lowering drugs. However in all fairness it should be noted that it's commonly a patients apathy towards health and unwillingness to make the needed lifestyle changes that leaves doctors with few options other than to prescribe what are oftentimes harmful and unnecessary drugs and treatments.

Your health is far too important to be entrusted to anyone other than yourself, moreover working to raise our level of health along with the health of our fellow citizens and the planet we all share is our most basic civic duty. Performing this duty starts by setting a positive example by embodying the health and happiness that results from living a healthy and environmentally responsible life, and sharing our knowledge and experience with others. So lets take corporate and government provided health information into consideration and feel free to visit doctors to utilize their knowledge, experience, and diagnostic tools; but lets be ready to follow up with our own research and experimentation in order to decide what kind of a diet, lifestyle, or treatment, if any, is best for each of us as individuals.

Who's Looking Out For Them?

We can't expect children to do what most adults can't, and that is to take care of their health. To those selling health undermining products like junk food and using the drug dealer logic that they're just supplying a demand and if they didn't supply it someone else would to justify their actions, innocent children and insecure adolescents are like red meat to jackals and vultures. We need to learn from other large mammals who live in complex social groups and protect our young from these predators regardless of whether they're our kids, our neighbors, or are living on the other side of the world. We can start by working in our capacity as citizens towards making marketing to children illegal starting with foods and beverages; and in our capacity as consumers we can stop supporting companies who continue to market health undermining products to children, adolescents, or anyone for that matter.

Not too long ago it was socially acceptable to sell white candy cigarettes with red tips so children could pretend they were smoking just like the adults, however in most places today I suspect, and hope, this would be considered abhorrent and illegal. I hope society soon comes around to seeing corporations using toys and advertisements featuring cartoons, celebrities, and children having a great time to sell junk food to children just as repulsive as the selling of candy cigarettes from ice cream trucks. As we push for improvements in moral standards and marketing laws we must strive to set positive examples and not use junk food to bribe or reward children, nor should we use drugs to calm or manage children after we've disrupted their digestion and destabilized their blood sugar as a result of the awful things we feed them.

Despite the benefits society could reap by better nourishing and educating the worlds youth this is one area that doesn't get the resources it deserves. Today many would prefer to spend resources on pampering their pets than on helping to ensure a child has enough food to eat or a chance to go to school and break the cycle of ignorance and poverty they may have been born into. Many more would prefer to spend resources on people with 80 or 90 years behind them rather than on those with 80 or 90 years ahead of them. That isn't to say we shouldn't provide care for our elderly, but keeping people half alive for another half year or so is another story when there are still children going to bed mistreated and malnourished on the other side of the world, and perhaps just down the street.

Part II: Psychology

Health Ignorance and Health Apathy

Why do most people seem to not care much about the health of the environment or even their own personal health, and if they do then why do they behave as if they don't? I've spent a lot of time pondering this question and have come to the conclusion that these people suffer from either health ignorance, health apathy, or a combination of both, and as a result are either ignorant and/or apathetic to the personal, social, and environmental health consequences of their actions. Therefore in order to improve the state of global health as significantly and quickly as possible we must first define and better understand the root causes of these two all too common health harming conditions and how to work towards alleviating them.

Health ignorance is ignorance as to what and to what degree certain things or actions are healthy or harmful to us as individuals, society, and the environment. This type of ignorance isn't just a result of a lack of quality information which is information congruent with facts and reasoning, but also a result of disinformation which is information designed to distract one from or to confuse one as to what is quality information. Unfortunately disinformation is what makes up the majority of diet and health related information in the mainstream media and has led many away from the true path of health which lies in long-term diet, lifestyle, and mindset improvements in an effort to promote a wide range of products a person suffering from poor health could be easily persuaded to consume.

Health apathy is apathy towards learning about and acting responsibly with regards to personal, social, and environmental health. If health apathy could be traced back to a single root cause it would be poor self-image. Unfortunately most people have not properly defined themselves or have allowed themselves to be improperly defined by others. This can have disastrous consequences not only for the individual, but also for society and the environment because the way in which we define ourselves is what determines how highly we value ourselves, and how highly we value ourselves is what determines our level of self-respect, where we place our standards, and the amount of mental and physical work we're willing to do in order to meet these standards and better ourselves and the world around us.

Properly addressing health ignorance and health apathy requires two approaches. First we must strive to make quality health information known and available while helping to improve the population's media literacy and critical thinking skills. Second we must help people recognize and appreciate the inherent value in themselves and in the planet which has made everything they know and are possible. While defining ourselves we must recognize the amazing potential we can all realize provided we take care of our health and put in the effort in our respective areas of interest. As we define ourselves as creatures with near unlimited potential, value ourselves based upon this fact, and attribute a level of self-respect and standards in accordance with this value we should do so not necessarily based upon the people we are now, but rather upon the people we are becoming, and the people we are capable of becoming.

Once the issues of health ignorance and health apathy have been addressed the challenge lies in consistently taking the appropriate health conducive actions. As many know this isn't always easy to do as most people have a lifetime of bad habits and addictions to overcome. Therefore even after an individual understands why it's in their best interest to make a change, and realizes that they and the world around them being as valuable as they are are worth the effort, many will struggle and repeatedly fail. These failures to do what one has willed to do are often attributed to a lack of willpower, however willpower is something we all have and something we can all strengthen. In fact we all possess something even more useful than willpower when it comes to pursuing personal

objectives and making long-term dietary and lifestyle improvements and that's mind-power.

Mind-power Over Willpower

Willpower and self-discipline can be thought of as the power and discipline to do whatever it is that one has decided to do, or to not do whatever it is that one has decided to avoid. They're the power and discipline to override instincts with intellect and to control one's desires, impulses, and emotions. Mind-power and self-mastery on the other hand are all about not having a desire, impulse, or emotion that needs to be controlled in the first place. They're about not having to rely on willpower and self-discipline to do or avoid things, but rather to do or avoid them naturally and habitually. This allows one to use their precious time and energy constructively rather than on forcing themselves to do something they aren't keen on doing or resisting unwanted temptations such as the temptation to be gluttonous or lazy.

The process of going from basing one's self-control on willpower and self-discipline to basing it on mind-power and self-mastery can be thought of as mental conditioning. Mental conditioning itself does require some willpower and self-discipline, however investing some time and energy in cultivating an ideal mindset and establishing good habits is much more effective than dealing with issues on an individual basis every time they arise throughout one's entire life. Just remember that if people can be so easily conditioned by others in ways that aren't in their best interest then there's no reason they can't just as easily condition themselves to live healthier, happier, and more contributing lives. Well known yet relatively under utilized, two of the most effective techniques for mental conditioning are cost-benefit analysis and thought-association.

Cost-benefit Analysis

Regardless of whether we're aware of it or not we're constantly performing cost-benefit analyses as they are the basis of the decision making process. Generally these analyses are based upon facts and existing perceptions, however when mentally conditioning ourselves we work with facts while utilizing the pliability of perceptions. In other words not only do we objectively root our cost-benefit analyses in facts and existing perceptions, we also subjectively construct and modify these perceptions in ways that support our objectives. Therefore when I refer to costs and benefits I use the term perceived costs and perceived benefits as these are simply subjective values which we have established based upon the amount of investment required and importance of achievement that we decide to attribute to our goals.

The first step in performing this type of cost-benefit analysis is the same as any other so we must first ask ourselves why we want to achieve whatever it is we want to achieve, i.e., what benefits will it provide us and the world? Second we must ask ourselves what must be done in order to achieve this goal, i.e., what will it cost us and the world? Commonly these costs will be denominated not in money, but in time and energy, and more specifically the time and energy we must invest in light of the other things we could do with this time and energy. Once we've thought out the costs and benefits we can then ask ourselves if the benefits of achievement outweigh the costs of achievement. If the answer is yes then the logical action is to start doing what needs to be done, or stop doing what needs to be stopped.

The difficulty comes when we find that we're unable to consistently do what needs to be done, or stop what needs to be stopped, and this is precisely where we utilize the pliability of our perceptions to modify the cost-benefit balance. For instance, if we find ourselves second guessing our goals when it comes time to put in the work required to achieve them, or become tempted to do anything other than what we think we should be doing in order to achieve them then we should stop

and review our previous analysis and ask ourselves “Is this really worth it?”. If the answer is a definite yes then let's not waste any more time second guessing our actions and get back to work, however if the answer is anything other than a definite yes then we'll have to reevaluate our perceived costs and perceived benefits and begin modifying them in our favor.

In order to turn a weak “yes”, a “maybe”, or even a “no” into a definite “YES” we can add more weight to the perceived benefits. This can be done by coming up with more or strengthening the currently recognized ones, and this can be done by better appreciating the positive personal, social, and environmental implications of such benefits. At the same time we can remove weight from the perceived costs by seeing the required energy, effort, and perhaps sacrifice required to achieve our goal to be less than we currently perceive them to be. This may seem a bit arbitrary but the thing to remember is that it is us who decides how difficult something is. For example, it is us who decides how much “effort” is required to exercise every morning, or how much of a “sacrifice” it is to give up all the foods that are making us sick or at least not helping us get well.

The goal is to tip the cost-benefit balance to the point where it becomes so obvious that whatever goal we're pursuing is worth the effort that there's absolutely no hesitation in our action or doubt in our mind that we're doing the right thing even when it comes time to put in the work or abstain from old vices. While working to improve cost-benefit balance let's remember to fully take into account the costs and benefits not only to ourselves, but also to our family and friends along with society and the environment because the impact of our health and happiness goes far beyond us as individuals and ripples throughout society. It seems there's no limit in our ability to rationalize bad choices so let's start using this ability to rationalize good ones and establish lifelong good habits.

Thought-association

Most people allow thought associations to be established and strengthened by instincts and external conditioning thus allow them to function subconsciously and as a result end up controlled by them rather than fully utilizing them as the effective mental conditioning tools they are. Besides setting oneself up to be exploited by others those who allow instincts and evolutionary hard wiring dictate the establishment and management of thought associations set themselves up for trouble. Perhaps not so much in the day and age such instincts and hard wiring were established, but certainly in modern times where we frequently find our ancient survival instincts working against us. Therefore it's now more important than ever to consciously manage our thought associations while being aware of instinctive pitfalls and those who seek to exploit them.

To illustrate how thought-association works let's look at how it can be used to deal with temptation which can be thought of as the desire to do something one knows they shouldn't. Regardless of whether or not the desire is instinctive and/or induced, rather than wasting time and energy on resisting such temptations the objective of thought-association is to remove the desire causing them. This is done by associating the things we tend to desire, yet wish to avoid, with all the reasons we wish to avoid them; i.e., we should mentally link unwanted desires to all the negative things they will lead us towards. Thought-association can also be used with things we wished we desired but may have an aversion to by associating them with all the reasons we wish to desire them; i.e., we should mentally link wanted desires to all the positive things they will lead us towards.

Take losing fat or improving one's diet for example, eating something we know we shouldn't or overeating in general may provide us with some short-term pleasure, but we must realize that the taste of high calorie low nutrient junk food and feeling of over-satiation is precisely the taste and feeling of getting fat. It is often the taste and feeling of rising blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol; and it is always the taste and feeling of being pushed in the direction of health decline.

Sure a little soda and French fries or cake and ice cream isn't going to make us fat or sick with a lifestyle disease overnight, but is it even worth taking a half step in that direction for such an insignificant 20 or so minutes of perceived culinary pleasure followed by many hours if not days of pain as that junk food and all the toxic chemicals used to grow and process it wreak havoc as it makes its way through our poor bodies?

Conversely, when it comes to mentally conditioning oneself to get into the habit of healthy eating thought-association is equally useful. The key is to base our thoughts associated with certain foods with what happens after eating them rather than with the actual process of eating them. This is because after a lifetime of salted, sugared, oiled, and chemically flavor enhanced food it may take a little while to get acclimated to the taste of health food, aka fresh fruits and vegetables. We should mentally link these foods with how positive, clear, and energized we feel after eating them, and contrast this with having to lie down and take a nap as if needing to recover from what we just ate as is commonly the case with many unhealthy foods. In addition, lets remind ourselves how healthy eating along with healthy living helps us wake up refreshed in the morning, function our best throughout the day, and get to sleep and stay asleep at night.

While working to eliminate bad habits and establish good ones it's important not to restrict our freedom to do whatever it is we're trying not to because doing so sets us up to do something not because we really want to, but because we want to assert our freedom to do so. We end up receiving more pleasure from asserting our freedom than we do from whatever bad habit we're engaging in, e.g., not exercising when we know we should, or eating something we know we shouldn't. It's best to know that we can do whatever we want at any time and that the only reason we do or don't isn't because a figure of authority or even ourselves ordered us to, but because we've made a conscious choice based upon our understanding of the personal, social, and environmental consequences associated with such actions and our commitment to personal goals.

One Shot No Redoes

The mental conditioning techniques mentioned above are useful in eliminating bad habits and establishing good ones, however in the end everything comes down to one life changing realization: "This is it and I'm not getting any younger.". Life is what we choose to make of it and time isn't going to stop and wait for us to get our acts together. Once people have had this profound realization they will see how life wasting it is to spend precious time and energy repeatedly over-thinking about things like trying not to eat unhealthy food, eat too much food, or engage in other health deleterious activities like smoking or drinking alcohol. However what often stands in the way of people who have partially made the realization that life is limited with much of it already gone and with what remains a mystery is the bad habit of procrastination.

When addressing this bad habit rather than simply telling ourselves not to procrastinate we must better understand why we procrastinate. Most likely are our willingness to consistently put off for later what could and probably should be done now is because of one of two things. One, we're not exactly sure where to place our time, focus, and energy; or two it's because we fear the failure, success, or other life changes that could lie ahead. In the case of the former, instead of obsessing over the perfect route or destination in life we just need to pick the direction that feels best now, start moving in it, and make adjustments along the way. In the case of the latter we must recognize that regardless of the short-term outcomes of our efforts they will pave the way to better outcomes in the future, and that change, adaptation, and growth is what life is all about.

Frequently procrastination manifests itself in the form of mind games like doing something we shouldn't in the present in order to motivate us to do what we should already be doing in the future. Mind games like these lead us towards over-thinking, under-doing, and living lives based on

ever extending future dates. Games like these are simply played in order to make us feel better about being lazy or procrastinating which makes it more likely we'll do so again in the future; however the key to reducing laziness and procrastination is feeling bad, guilty, ashamed, disappointed, and perhaps even disgusted about being lazy or procrastinating. This way we'll be much more likely to do our best to avoid repeating such unnecessary mistakes in order to save ourselves from such ill feelings in the future.

In order to make the most of this one shot at this one life we are fortunate enough to have we should do our utmost to live every minute to the fullest as opposed to spending many of them flipping through television channels, mindlessly stumbling around in cyberspace, or in a daze as we wait in lines or commute. The phrase "killing time" should be permanently deleted from our vocabularies and be replaced with "wasting life" because no matter where we are there's always something positive and productive we could be doing. So lets remember that productivity is a series of good habits, and that there are roughly 1000 minutes in our day and what we do with each of them determines the value of our day, week, month, year, decade, and life.

Part III: Diet

What We Eat and Who We Are

For those of us fortunate enough to have a choice what we choose to eat says a lot about who we are by giving others insight into our levels of health ignorance and health apathy which directly reflects upon our overall level of consciousness and concern for the world. Not only does our diet say a lot about who we are it also greatly influences who we are as it is a key factor in determining our moods, energy levels, and health in general. It is my hope that once people realize how much their lives, the lives of others, and the life of the planet is affected by what they eat they'll start seeing each and every one of their food choices as individual positive or negative acts done to themselves and the world around them and as a result consistently strive to make informed and responsible food choices. Food choices should not only be seen as personal health choices, but also as political choices because every time we make a food choice we are in fact voting for not only the kind of food we want made available to us, but also for the kind of world in which we want to live.

For example, purchasing meat, dairy, or eggs usually equates to a vote of approval for factory farms and the animal abuse and environmental degradation associated with them. While purchasing fish or other seafood generally equates to a vote of approval for bycatch, over-fishing, and less healthy oceans and waterways. The fact is there's a lot implicated in our food choices and the sooner we recognize this and start eating responsibly the better our personal, social, and environmental health prospects will be. However the problem we currently face is two-fold, one is a lack of will among the population to learn about how their diet affects not only their health, but also social and environmental health; and the other is a lack of will to implement the changes such knowledge would warrant if not demand. In addition, due to the profit focused rather than health focused marketing of food and dietary supplements there's a lot of confusion towards what should be a relatively simple question: "What should we be eating?".

A "Balanced" Diet

What is a healthy diet? The most common answer to this important question is undoubtedly "A balanced diet.". This sounds nice, but what exactly does it mean? Unfortunately it seems "balanced diet" has taken on the meaning of a diet consisting of foods from all of the foods available to us rather than exclusively from those optimal to our health. It's as if in order to achieve a "balanced" beverage intake it was proposed that we "balance" our water consumption with some soda. Not that we need it or that it's conducive to our health, but just so we're "balanced" and aren't on some extreme water only drinking regimen. Sure we're capable of drinking beverages other than water, and sure we're capable of eating foods other than fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds; but that doesn't qualify them to be considered an essential part of a "balanced diet" or recommended for any number of servings per day.

If we look at the many charts or pyramids claiming to depict a "balanced diet" we almost unanimously find they feature a significant portion of dairy. Does this mean one must eat a portion of their diet as dairy? In other words will not eating dairy inevitably make ones diet "unbalanced" and perhaps deficient in some essential nutrient? The answer to this question is no because the fact that modern humans and their evolutionary ancestors lived for millions of years without consuming the milk of other animals unequivocally disqualifies dairy's claim to being a necessary part of a "balanced" or healthy diet. Therefore I think it'd be best if we started feeding the corn used as cow feed to people and left the cow milk for the cows as this would give us a much better return on our agricultural investment and result in healthier and happier people and cows.

This isn't to say people shouldn't be free to consume dairy or any other non-essential foods or beverages just that they do so because they believe they're healthy, humane, and environmentally responsible food sources; and not because an influential industry or a marketing campaign proclaimed they're an important part of a healthy or "balanced diet". If anything the opposite would be true, however that's for the individual to decide. The important thing is they make their decision based on how certain foods make them feel and impact the world around them rather than on outdated, never correct in the first place, food industry influenced dietary guidelines which seem to have been designed from an understanding of a "balanced diet" to be a diet where the financial interests of food industries and the health interests of consumers are "balanced".

Like "balanced diet", "Everything in moderation." is another commonly misused dietary catchphrase which warrants mentioning. The reason why this phrase continues to be tossed around is because it gives people a false justification for lying to themselves and helps expand the market for things that anyone even remotely concerned with their health, or social and environmental health, simply shouldn't be consuming in the first place, e.g., factory farmed foods. Some claim a more appropriate phrase would be "All good things in moderation.", however this phrase is meaningless because it entirely depends on what's considered good and what's considered moderation. Moreover even when something is essential to life, which would automatically qualify it as good, marketing can easily turn moderation into overload.

Where Do You Get Your Protein?

Of all the diet and health myths in circulation the most pervasive one of all, even more common than the milk myth which is: "You need milk for calcium and strong bones." is the protein myth which is: "If you expect to be healthy, let alone strong, you must eat large amounts of protein and preferably from animals, or consume and combine specific plant foods like beans and grains.". Just to illustrate how deeply ingrained this myth is in the minds of many, as one who eats a milk and animal flesh free fruit and vegetable based diet I'm not only frequently asked where I get my protein and if I get enough protein, questions which I welcome, but I've even been told outright that I don't get enough protein. To which I reply: "Could you tell me roughly how much protein I get and roughly how much protein I need?" to which I'm usually answered by the look of a person who just realized they are merely repeating something they've been conditioned to believe, but have never stopped to think about for themselves which is an all too common habit for most people.

First of all when did protein become nutrient number one? There certainly has been and unfortunately still are populations whose diets are deficient in protein, however they were and are deficient in many other nutrients as well; and while it's true that you'd get sick and eventually die without protein the same goes for any other essential nutrient, so why don't we concern ourselves with these nutrients the same way we do with protein? Is it because of a false notion that sufficient protein is more difficult to obtain in our diet than other nutrients? If so the time for dispelling this false notion is long overdue as it has already caused, and is causing, a lot of unnecessary death and disease in the animals being consumed and the people consuming them not to mention what it's done, and is doing, to the environment. With protein as with most other nutrients too much is as bad as not enough so let's remember that more isn't always better when seeking to ensure an adequate amount of any specific dietary nutrient.

So how much protein do we need? As measured in grams we can take into consideration the WHO recommendations which are .83g per kg of body weight for adult men and women which works out to be 54g per day for a person weighing 65kg. As a percentage of total caloric intake we can take into consideration that during the time we experienced the most physical growth (when we actually doubled our size in around 6 months or so) we only needed around 6% of our calories from protein. If a rapidly growing baby can get enough protein feeding exclusively on breast milk (which

contains around 6% of its calories as protein) I think it should be enough for me, however I try to eat enough vegetables to get around 8% of my calories from protein just to be safe. Perhaps others will want 10% or even 15%, however I don't know why anyone would ever want any more than that. If you're curious about the percentage of calories in your diet coming from protein or how many grams of protein you're consuming in a day consider trying out one of the many nutrition calculators online.

So how do we get this protein? If we look at the protein content of different plant foods we'll see that even on a vegan diet it's not difficult to get enough protein provided we're eating a diet of whole foods rich in fruits and abundant in vegetables. For instance, if we look at some common fruits and vegetables like bananas, papayas, and oranges; and celery, cauliflower, and green leaf lettuce we find they contain around 4, 5, 7; and 17, 19, 22 percent of their calories from protein respectively according to the USDA National Nutrient Database. Moreover these and other fruits and vegetables contain all the essential amino acids, so nutrient dense foods like these not only provide us with the protein we need, they do so while helping protect us from rather than push us towards premature death and preventable disease.

Once we realize that all whole foods (as opposed to processed foods derived from whole foods like oils and sweeteners) contain protein, and that the human dietary requirement for protein is really quite modest the question "Where do you get your protein?" will sound like somebody asking "Where do you get your sunlight?". In the case of the latter, obviously from the sun, and in the case of the former obviously from food. That isn't to say it's impossible to eat enough whole plant food to satisfy caloric requirements while not getting enough protein, however it would be difficult to do so unless we weren't eating many vegetables and were basing our diets on foods like cassava and dates which are unusually low in protein. Instead of "Where do you get your protein?" the new key dietary question should be "Where do you get your nutrition?" and I recommend getting as much of it as you can from fresh fruits and vegetables.

Ten Dietary Recommendations

Unlike most dietary recommendations the following were written without built in compromises because such compromises only assist people in deceiving themselves as to the harm of their actions. If something is outright harmful to us whether it be electronic cigarettes or sweetened beverages it's harmful in all quantities, i.e, the harm doesn't cease to exist if we stay below a certain quantity it simply increases as the quantity increases. Therefore within these recommendations there isn't any room for junk food provided it's consumed in "moderation" or is "balanced" with healthy food. Health compromises like these shouldn't be included in any list of dietary recommendations as if to make people feel they are "okay" because the only person that can decide what is "okay" is the person making the compromise.

Instead of evaluating our diets and lifestyles based on what could be worse we should evaluate them based on what we think to be the best. However in order to avoid discouraging anyone who may feel a little overwhelmed by the recommendations that follow it must be noted that with dietary and lifestyle improvement the idea isn't "all or none", but rather "the more the better". Moreover these recommendations do contain a great deal of flexibility as they weren't designed to provide a blueprint to a "perfect" diet, but rather a framework in which such diets could exist, and in which people can experiment and work towards them. With diet as with life in general each of us must determine how good we want it to be and how much effort we're willing to put in to make it that way.

- 1.) Increase the amount of locally grown organic fruits and vegetables in your diet.

Locally grown organic fruits and vegetables aren't just the best choice for our health they're also the best choice for the health of the people growing our food and the environment in which it's grown. A little meal planning will help ensure ideal meals, however in situations where ideal food choices aren't available we should do our best to compromise provided skipping a meal isn't an option. When locally grown produce is unavailable generally we should choose the foods which have been grown closest to us in order to maximize freshness and nutritional value while minimizing the resources used and pollution generated in order to transport our food. When organically grown produce is unavailable we should avoid the types of produce which are consistently shown to contain relatively high levels of pesticides in order to minimize the damage the food we eat does to ourselves, the people that grow it, and the environment in which it's grown. Unfortunately for those on tight budgets often the foods priced the cheapest are the ones most personally, socially, and environmentally costly; however there are always deals to be found when one eats what's in season, and investing a little more of a personal or family budget in buying fresh produce will pay itself back many times over in reduced healthcare costs, productivity losses, and days feeling miserable.

2.) Eliminate all factory farmed foods from your diet.

Besides being bad for you (consuming sick and drugged animals can't be good), the environment (feeding many kilos of food that people could eat such as grains, beans, and seafood to a factory farmed animal in order to get back a kilo of less healthy food along with untreated sewage and large amounts of greenhouse gas can't be good), and the animals being consumed (a life lived in horrid conditions with only slaughter to look forward to can't be good), the prevalence of factory farming and the systemic animal abuse that goes on in them is an insult to the ethical standards of our society. In addition, the large amounts of antibiotics used to keep these abused animals alive on such awful diets and in such appalling living conditions is setting the stage for the emergence of antibiotic resistant pathogens. The longer we continue treating animals like inanimate objects and raise them in this manner the more likely we are to give rise to the next global epidemic which our antibiotic arsenal could turn out to be useless against. Factory farmed foods include just about any animal you're likely to be served in a restaurant or buy at a store/market therefore if you feel the need to eat the flesh, milk, or eggs of other animals it's best to know where and how it was caught or raised before doing so.

3.) Eliminate all genetically modified foods from your diet.

Considering the many known and unknown health and environmental risks and issues associated with the consumption and cultivation of genetically modified foods I choose not to consume these foods or support the companies selling them. I hope that regardless of whether or not you're willing to consume GM food, are okay with the patenting and corporate consolidation of the seed/food supply, and support these GM seed/chemical companies that you would agree consumers should have the right to know what they're consuming and therefore support mandatory GMO labeling laws. If genetically modified crops that produce their own pesticides, survive larger doses of herbicides, or have some other novel trait are claimed to be safe and desirable by the companies selling them then the companies selling them should be proud to label their products as containing genetically modified organisms. However on the contrary these companies have spent millions of dollars to oppose mandatory GMO labeling laws in order to keep consumers in the dark about what they're eating and feeding their families.

4.) Eliminate all artificial foods from your diet.

Humans did not evolve eating nor have they adapted to eating a diet full of artificial colors, flavors, preservatives, or any other chemical additives. Many of these toxic food additives have

been documented to cause adverse side effects and some are even believed to be carcinogenic. Furthermore any food that requires such toxic additives in order to be attractive, palatable, or edible is probably a food you don't want to be eating in the first place. The chemical pollutants aka "cleansers" and "cleaners" many of us unnecessarily surround ourselves with and are responsible for releasing into the environment, including our own homes, already place a large enough toxic burden on our bodies and there's no reason to add to this burden via our diets. The easiest way to avoid artificial food additives is by eliminating processed foods from your diet and replacing them with whole and unprocessed foods that look the way they did or similar to the way they did when they were harvested.

5.) Eliminate all heavily processed foods from your diet.

Just because a food may have started off with healthy ingredients doesn't mean it will remain a healthy food after it's been baked, barbecued, pasteurized, microwaved, or deep fried. Anyone seriously looking to improve their diet is best off eliminating all heavily processed foods from it. The challenge of overcoming addictions to things like salt, oil, and sweeteners is nothing when compared to the health benefits you'll reap by doing so. Therefore it would be best to consider any food processing that goes beyond what you can do with your mouth, hands, a knife, blender, juicer, dehydrator, freezer, sunlight, steam, or boiling water too much. Nothing beats eating most if not all of our food whole, fresh, and raw; and eating our food this way reduces the amount of fossil fuels and other resources required to process it.

6.) Eat most of your food raw and when and if you do cook do so with only water.

Other than humans and the animals in their captivity every other animal on Planet Earth consumes a raw food diet and not only survives, but thrives by doing so. This fact alone isn't enough of a reason to say that all cooked food should be avoided, however looking at the average wild animal and the average modern human should lead one to believe that most of our diet should consist of fresh, raw, and unprocessed foods; and our lifestyles should consist of more physical activity. Any cooked foods our diet does contain should be cooked conservatively, e.g., by steaming, blanching, or boiling because cooking with microwaves or with high temperatures can increase nutrient loss and create toxins such as carcinogens. So if you do cook it is best to do so lightly and with only water.

7.) Simplify your meals and practice proper food combining.

Be aware that when some foods are eaten together they may digest differently than they would have when eaten alone and on an empty stomach. Some food combinations may work well for some people, but may leave others bloated and gassy so the key is to keep things simple and look for patterns so you know which combinations work or don't work well for you. With regards to fruit it's best to eat on an empty stomach and as long after eating any fatty foods as possible, i.e., as your first meal of the day. This is because eating slower digesting foods before eating fruit can disrupt digestion resulting in fermentation, and excess fat in the bloodstream caused by a high fat diet, or even a single recently eaten high fat meal, can negatively affect sugar metabolism resulting in elevated insulin and blood sugar levels.

8.) Get in the habit of fasting for at least 12 hours every evening.

The digestive system benefits from a break from constantly having to deal with new food arrivals and there's no reason to be on a 16 hour eating cycle when it's easy to get all the calories and nutrition you need within 12 hours during the day. If you wait at least 3 or 4 hours after eating dinner before going to bed, and at least an hour after waking up before having breakfast it will be

easy to get into a 12 or more hour a day fasting habit. Waking up every morning with an empty stomach followed by some water and physical activity will make a fruit breakfast, or any breakfast for that matter, taste better and digest better.

9.) Be aware of how what you eat makes you feel, experiment.

Some foods and food combinations just don't agree with some people so it's best to keep your meals simple and adequately spaced so you can accurately observe their effects. Although I'm confident that a fruit and vegetable based diet is the diet most optimal to human health regardless of racial or ethnic background (provided those coming from radically different diets give their gut microbiome a few weeks to adapt) there's still some variation among us which must be identified and confirmed through dietary experimentation. However know that dietary experiments won't be of much value if you don't control variables like energy intake, energy expenditure, hydration, rest, and stress because what goes on in our head is just as likely to give us poor health and digestion as is what we put in our mouths.

10.) Remember that a good diet won't save you from bad eating habits.

Most of us are fortunate enough to have access to at least 2 or 3 meals a day therefore there's no need to eat more than we need to at any single one of them or in between them because optimal health lies at the edge of hunger and overeating on any diet is one of the fastest ways to poor health. Not only is it important to abstain from eating more than we need, but also from taking more than we need. This should be obvious however the amount of food (along with all the disposable boxes, bottles, and bags used to transport it and the one-time-use straws, forks, chop-sticks and other utensils used to consume it) that is wasted on a daily basis is nothing less than scandalous. The key to ensuring an adequate global food supply is in making better use of the food we're already growing, and making better use of the land we've already cleared to grow it. This starts with consumers appreciating food as the precious resource it is and eating lower down the food chain, i.e., more or all plants and less or no animals.

As with meal time hunger should also determine meal size therefore counting calories is unnecessary because we all have internal mechanisms which tell us when we should be eating and when we should stop eating. If hunger and satiation aren't enough the next best indicators are the sun and a mirror. If you do have a schedule to follow eat and exercise accordingly so you're hungry in time for your next meal. It's best to eat with some regularity, however hunger is always more important than time when deciding when to eat. When it does come time to eat we should be calm because no meal eaten in a stressed state is a good meal, so it's best to take a few seconds before eating to relax and appreciate that we even have food to eat. We should also make it a habit to take the time to properly chew our food because a little more work with our jaw equates to a lot less work for our digestive system and ensures that we're getting the most out of our precious food.

Depending on where you're at in your own dietary and lifestyle evolution implementing these recommendations may seem like a lot. However considering how important our diet is to everything we think, say, and do; and to how we look, feel, and function working to improve it is well worth the effort. Just remember that when making diet and lifestyle improvements it's not "all or none" but rather "the more the better". Also don't just think of all the benefits such improvements will bring to you, but also the benefits you will help bring to your family, friends, and others around you by setting a positive example and motivating them to make their own diet and lifestyle improvements. The positive changes society so desperately needs will start with individuals and ripple out from there, so let's all work towards becoming individuals capable of catalyzing a shift towards a more economical and health conscious society.

What I Eat and Why

My personal diet consists almost exclusively of “super foods” and “functional foods”. Foods that not only provide me with adequate energy and ensure that I have optimal amounts of beneficial bacteria in my gut, but are also loaded with vitamins, minerals, and a wide range of health conducive phytonutrients that nutritional science is only beginning to discover. These foods are sold under many brand names, but most are sold under no brand name at all... they are unprocessed fruits and vegetables. Sarcasm towards processed food marketing aside, to put it simply I eat the food that's best for me and the biosphere which is available to me at any particular time and place because it would be self-destructive and socially and environmentally irresponsible to do otherwise.

This translates into a diet primarily of fresh, ripe, raw fruits and vegetables which I strive to buy in season, locally grown, and organic; and in terms of calories consists of around 85% fresh ripe sweet fruit, at least 10% leafy greens, other vegetables, and non-sweet fruits; and less than 5% nuts, seeds, beans, grains, and edible algae like wakame. I also take a B12 supplement in the form of a 1mg sublingual methylcobalamin tablet a few times a week. On average the macronutrient ratio of my frugivore diet is around 85% carbohydrate, 8% fat, and 7% protein; and with regards to snacks and meals I never snack and I usually eat a fruit meal in the morning, another fruit meal 6 or 7 hours later, and then, depending on what and how much I ate at my second meal, a few minutes or a couple hours later I'll eat a vegetable meal.

Before eating and living the way I do besides the everyday reality of poor digestion which I had had since I was a kid and had accepted as normal I would get through the day by using snacks and sweetened beverages as stimulants. I'd frequently find myself checking the time after breakfast and lunch to see if enough time had gone by to warrant a snack because despite having had eaten just a couple of hours earlier I'd already be feeling a bit dazed, lethargic, and moody. Then a few hours after having had dinner I'd often find myself checking the time again to see if there was enough time before bed to warrant another temporary mood and energy boosting snack. Being on a blood sugar roller coaster and having to micromanage ones mood and energy levels is unproductive, unenjoyable, and like poor digestion should never be accepted as normal.

What follows is a brief description of the fruit meal and vegetable meal mentioned above along with a few dietary tips that I hope will help people increase the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables in their diet and in the diets of any children in their care.

Fruit meal

This meal generally consists of one type of fruit eaten on an empty stomach, after some moderate to intense physical activity, and slowly while standing, swaying, or walking until I'm just about satisfied. If I'm unable or unwilling to make a full meal out of a particular fruit I may eat two types of fruit at a single meal provided they combine well, however be aware that significant quantities of sweet fruits and acidic fruits generally do not therefore are best eaten at separate meals. I avoid highly acidic fruits like pineapple almost entirely as they can damage tooth enamel even if they are fully ripe which all fruit should be before you eat it. If I do eat something that's a bit too acidic I find that chewing on a mouth full of calcium rich papaya or some well rinsed seaweed helps to remineralize a sensitive tooth.

Besides optimizing digestion eating one type of fruit at a meal also has the benefit of letting you quickly know what if anything you're sensitive or allergic to. For instance, fruits significantly higher in fructose than glucose can cause me suboptimal digestion therefore I rarely eat fruits like apples, pears, and mangoes. Furthermore mangoes contain urushiol (the oil found in poison ivy) in their peels which causes me to breakout in a rash upon even the slightest contact, however by wearing gloves while peeling them this can be avoided. Cantaloupes are another fruit that I'm

cautious with because some varieties give me a sore throat due to an allergy to a protein which is similar to a protein found in ragweed pollen. When eaten in significant quantities canistels and persimmons will make me constipated probably due to their tannin content; nor do I do well with nightshades like bell peppers, however I do better with tomatoes if they've been peeled.

I could've probably gone a lifetime without making these food-symptom connections if I only ate small quantities of these fruits and mixed them with other foods, however by eating them alone, in significant quantities, and through repeated experimentation I was able to determine that these are foods I shouldn't be eating regularly, in large quantities, or perhaps at all. However please note that most people have none of these food sensitivity/allergy issues, and that all of these fruits are healthy and well digesting choices. The only reason I'm mentioning these issues is because I know that some of them do apply to some people and the last thing I'd want is for a person to reject a fruit and vegetable based diet simply because they may just happen to be eating types of fruits and vegetables that don't particularly agree with them or are combining them in less than ideal ways.

Depending on where you live the most difficult aspect of a fruit and vegetable based diet could be managing fruit supplies well enough to ensure that you always have enough fully ripe fruit available, but not so much that you need to start freezing it. When possible I prefer to buy or harvest things that are already ripe and ready to eat rather than unripe things which must be ripened at home. This allows me to get discounts on fruit that's in danger of becoming too ripe while saving it from going to waste. Furthermore instead of buying unripe fruit based upon your predictions of how it will turnout after it ripens with ripe fruit you can see, smell, touch, and perhaps taste the finished product before buying. When searching for deals on fruit remember that just because a fruit looks bad on the outside doesn't mean it isn't premium on the inside and that the best way to find deals is to buy what's in season.

When it is necessary to manage fruit ripening at home know that warmer and stuffier locations will speed up ripening, and cooler and draftier locations will slow it down. While managing ripening if fruit flies become a problem I recommend checking to make sure none of your fruit is damaged or leaking and then placing it inside of a mesh bag that will keep the fruit flies out. If ants become a problem I recommend setting up a "fruit island" by placing a stack of a few plastic crates, or whatever suitable items you have lying around, into a tray that contains a couple centimeters of water which acts as a moat around the crates. When using this tactic remember to maintain the water level and to change it every two or three days especially if there are mosquitoes flying around looking for some stagnant water to lay their eggs.

Vegetable meal

This meal is a giant salad consisting of a variety of leafy greens, other vegetables, and non-sweet fruits and may also include any fatty foods I wanted to eat that day. One of my fatty food options are nuts and seeds usually in the form of hemp seeds, walnuts, and the occasional Brazil nut which ideally have been either soaked or sprouted. Generally I don't eat more than 15g of nuts and seeds in a day and I sometimes go weeks without eating them at all because I don't feel well eating them frequently or in significant quantities. This may be partially attributed to the fact that most nuts and seeds have an extremely high arginine to lysine ratio which can promote the replication of herpes family viruses and cause symptoms like fatigue, brain fog, cold sores, and warts in some people.

Moreover most nuts and seeds have extremely high omega 6 to omega 3 ratios and a significantly higher ratio of omega 6 to omega 3 in our diets can potentially reduce our bodies ability to form long-chain omega 3 fatty acids from the short-chain omega 3 fatty acids in our diets. If you've had a fatty acid profile blood test and feel the need to take a long-chain omega 3

supplement I recommend finding one derived from algae rather than from contaminated and depleted stocks of fish or krill who themselves obtained their fatty acids from algae. However be aware that long-chain omega 3 fatty acids are extremely fragile and that supplements and even “fresh” seafood may be rancid by the time you consume them.

Meeting my 1.5kg minimum daily leafy greens, vegetables, and non-sweet fruits quota all raw every day can be difficult especially if fresh clean organic vegetables are unavailable. Moreover only eating vegetables raw can result in relying on a limited variety, at least not as wide of a variety provided cooking was an option, so depending on the situation I sometimes/often accompany my at least 1kg of daily raw vegetables with around 1kg of cooked vegetables. When cooking I recommend using a stainless steel pot with as little water as needed to boil your vegetables without burning your pot in which you blanch or boil each type of vegetable depending on the cooking time you feel is required. Before beginning you would need a pot to boil water, a washing bowl, a food bowl, and a strainer roughly the size of the food bowl. The process is then:

- 1.) Take an appropriate amount of washed vegetables from the washing bowl and place them into the pot of boiling water.
- 2.) When you deem the vegetables to be ready dump the boiling water and cooked vegetables into the strainer which should already be in the food bowl.
- 3.) Lift the strainer along with the cooked vegetables you just poured into it allowing all of the cooking water to drip into the food bowl.
- 4.) Pour the cooking water back into the pot, place the strainer containing your first load of cooked vegetables back into the empty food bowl, and place the pot containing the cooking water back on the stove.
- 5.) Repeat the process until you have nothing left to cook.

With regards to combining fruits and vegetables together as opposed to fruits followed by a brief intermission followed by vegetables, I do alright with bananas and plantains when eaten with lettuce and celery, however most other fruit and vegetable combinations can sometimes yield less than ideal digestive results so if you want to mix your fruits and vegetables experiment and find out what works for you. With regards to blending and juicing I don't feel right drinking a meal and feel great when I take the time to chew my meals like humans have done since before there were humans. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with blending and juicing just that I don't do it, so don't let that stop you from putting a bunch of raw plants and running them through a juicer or even blending them with some fruit provided that works for you.

A salt, sweetener, and oil free diet consisting almost exclusively of raw fruits and vegetables may seem a little hard to swallow, literally and figuratively, but it's not. Taste can easily be acquired and lost because taste is in the mind as much as it's in the mouth. If you don't believe me just ask yourself how some people can eat things like casu marzu (rotten maggot cheese), century egg (you can imagine), and balut (soft-boiled fetal duck). It isn't because these people have genetic dispositions to eating what many would consider to be nasty things, but rather it's because they've been culturally and/or commercially convinced that these foods are delicious and desirable. Now if we humans can eat things like these learning to enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables shouldn't take too much work just some thought-association and gradual taste acclimation.

Just remember that everything tastes better when you're hungry and that you shouldn't be eating unless you're hungry. Furthermore once your taste buds recover the sensitivity lost due to

frequent exposure to salt, sweeteners, MSG and other health harming flavor enhancers you'll learn to appreciate the sweet and subtle differences between fruits, and the salty and subtle differences between vegetables. Eventually you'll discover how delicious most ripe fruits and fresh vegetables can be and will begin to prefer them not only for their health benefits, but even for their taste. This shift in dietary perceptions may not happen overnight but it will happen if you want it to.

With regards to nutrition we sometimes forget that too much is often as bad and sometimes even worse than not enough and that dietary supplements may not only be useless, but also harmful. For instance, we constantly hear about the importance of getting enough protein, but not much about how excess protein is also harmful. The same can also be said for vitamins, minerals, essential fatty acids, and other nutrients and the reason is simple. Companies and industries marketing meat for protein, milk for calcium, fish for fatty acids, and dietary supplements for just about everything else aren't concerned with how much you get and how much you need they are only concerned with selling you more.

Nutritional deficiencies can occur on any diet including ones that contain protein powders, fish oil pills, and other dietary supplements; however they're less likely to occur when you're eating a diet abundant in fresh fruits and vegetables from which your body can draw nutrition from as needed and the bacteria in your gut can use to maintain a healthy microbiome conducive to good digestion and optimal health. Regardless of ones diet if possible I recommend that everyone monitors their B12, homocysteine, HbA1c, fasting insulin, and fasting glucose along with other basic health and nutrition indicators via periodic blood tests and be ready to follow them up with their own research and experimentation.

The basic premise of my diet is more fresh fruits and vegetables and less of everything else, however please note that this was written by layman based upon his own personal experience. Furthermore please remember that the title of this section is "What I Eat and Why" and not "What You Should Eat and Why". I say this not to imply that my information is any less valuable than that of a health professionals or that you shouldn't be eating this way, but to emphasize that it is you who has to figure out how you should eat. With that said good luck fine tuning your diet and I hope the information provided in this book helps you do that in a humane and socio-environmentally responsible way, and eventually helps you help others do the same because a better world starts with better people and better people start with better health.

Part IV: Body

Fat Loss and Health Gain

Nowadays body composition is an issue for many if not most people as it seems nearly everyone is either seeking to lose or gain weight. However unless someone needs to make a certain weight class for say a boxing match or a wrestling meet this concept of losing or gaining weight is fundamentally flawed. Instead it's much better to think in terms of losing or gaining health, or perhaps losing or gaining strength, speed, and agility. The numbers on a scale mean next to nothing as it doesn't take a scale to tell us that we're fat or weak, nor can scales tell us how good we look, feel, and function. By focusing on health gain rather than weight loss we'll find that healthy weight loss, or perhaps healthy weight gain, in addition to more energy, improved mood, and better sleep are just a few of the many benefits of becoming healthier.

Like most things in life becoming healthier and attaining ones ideal body composition is easier said than done, but in this case it's only as difficult as one wants to make it. Moreover it doesn't require buying anything other than quality food so ignore all the gimmicks promising quicker and easier results. Sure there may be a grain of truth in that taking a certain powder, pill, or potion will minutely boost ones metabolism or cause one to absorb slightly less of the calories they eat, but one must ask themselves what kind of a person would take a drug or a supplement in order to artificially boost their metabolism or inhibit the absorption of the precious food they eat so they can continue to consume more than they need in a world of finite resources and growing demand in which most food is still grown, processed, and shipped in socially and environmentally harmful ways?

For those looking for a simple, sustainable, and responsible way of losing unwanted fat and gaining health the first step is to improve ones diet by eliminating all of its empty calories, i.e. calories that provide little or no nutrition. By eliminating calories from oils, sweeteners, or any foods and beverages containing them one can greatly reduce their caloric/energy intake without negatively affecting their nutritional intake. Furthermore basing our diets on foods loaded with water and nutrition like fruits and vegetables allows us to eat large volumes of food while making it more difficult to consume too many calories/too much energy. When determining how much energy you should be eating know that hunger and body composition are much better indicators than is calorie counting.

Also like most things in life the hardest thing about losing fat and gaining health isn't getting started, but rather staying consistent. However with the right mindset after a few days of eating less energy and relying on fat stores to make up for the energy deficit eating less will become a habit. Before reducing energy intake and creating an energy deficit one must keep in mind that people don't get fat or fit overnight and that the key to success is in slow and sustainable progress. Conversely, the key to failure is in starving or over-exercising oneself in hopes of rectifying months or years of suboptimal living in only a few days or weeks. Consistently being slightly hungry may not be the most comfortable feeling, but just realize that feeling of slight hunger is precisely the feeling of losing unwanted weight and to rid oneself of that slight hunger is to rid oneself of the fat loss and health gain that accompanies it.

Instead of seeing a constant state of slight hunger as uncomfortable those seeking to lose weight should see it as a sign that they're moving towards the goal of obtaining their ideal weight along with all the physical and mental benefits that will bring. Also remember that the hunger is only as bad as you make it and can be made more bearable by adjusting your energy intake accordingly. By doing so your hunger will gradually fade into the background and as it does you may find yourself even more clear, alert, and able to focus than before. If the hunger ever does feel

like a bit too much to bare and your productivity is negatively affected than odds are you've created too large of an energy deficit and may need to eat a little more at each meal until you reach a point of bearable background hunger. Although an energy deficit via healthy dietary modification in itself is sufficient for losing unwanted weight, increasing your daily physical activity will speed up the process of not only fat loss but also health gain.

Physical Activity

Health and fitness are often mentioned together and rightfully so because although a basic level of fitness doesn't guarantee an optimal level of health it's certainly a prerequisite for it. Fitness is the product of exercise regardless of whether this exercise comes in the form of work or play. Exercise not only benefits the heart and other muscles, but also nearly every other physical and physiological aspect of the body from bone density to blood sugar regulation. Therefore regardless of how one incorporates physical activity into their daily routine the important thing is that they do, and one of the best ways of doing so is by making it a habit. This can be done by using your legs more for transportation and designating screen time as standing time. In other words if you want to look at a screen in order to be entertained then you should require yourself and any children in your care to stand, sway, pace, or walk in place to do so.

Another good way to make physical activity a habit is by attaching it to meal times by seeing the time before and after each meal as a time to earn and “burn” your food. It's best to earn your food by engaging in some moderate to intense physical activity before meals, and to “burn” your food by engaging in some light physical activity such as walking after meals. Even if such pre and post meal activity is done for only 10 minutes a session for someone eating three meals a day this adds up to an hour. As with losing fat the key to getting fit is to start small and stay consistent. It doesn't take much time to get fit and stay fit and those who site a lack of time as an excuse to not be physically active aren't lacking time, but rather time management skills, and perhaps a recognition of the importance of exercise to not only their physique, but also to their productivity, mood, sleep, digestion, energy levels, and health in general.

For those looking to go beyond the minimum fitness requirements of optimal health and push the boundaries of what they're capable of it's critical that they don't force themselves to progress too fast. Among dedicated people what's most often responsible for short-term and long-term fitness failures isn't a lack of will, but rather injuries. Therefore when training always maintain a preventative mindset where you're constantly on the lookout for potential injuries and are ready to adjust your training accordingly because no matter how healthy and committed you are if you injure yourself that's it. Injuries could set ones fitness goals back anywhere from days, months, or perhaps even permanently. Therefore if you feel a problem developing take the proper action before it turns into something serious that could threaten not only your fitness goals but also your overall health.

Considering the wide range of exercise options available to suit a variety of personal preferences such as getting around by foot or bike, growing and harvesting our own food, doing solo sessions of calisthenics, or group sessions of one of many team sports physical activity time should be seen as one of the essential elements and highlights of our day. It shouldn't be seen as a task, but rather as a privilege because not everyone is fortunate enough to be able to take part in recreational exercise on a daily basis. Just think of what someone paralyzed would give to be able to run or what someone too sick to get out of bed would do for such a privilege. So lets cherish the ability to move while we have it and do so while we still can because odds are the more we move now the longer we'll be moving into the future.

Good Posture

While daily exercise tends to develop muscles, improve flexibility, and naturally lead one towards an overall good posture a high level of posture awareness is still essential. It's important to be aware of and to avoid one-sided and unbalanced postures like crossing one leg over the other or laying on your side while propping up your head. If you're going to occasionally be in these kinds of asymmetrical positions it's important to make sure that they're equally balanced on right and left sides. Regardless of how good ones posture is sitting should be limited and earned by standing and walking for as long if not longer. Standing and walking isn't just better for preventing and treating back pain it's also better for overall health so I recommend people work towards establishing the habit of not sitting when they don't have to.

With regards to productivity all this movement doesn't need to reduce ones work output and is actually more likely to increase it. I admit that some people may find that some activities requiring absolute attention are best done while sitting, however I think those who try will find that many activities are enhanced by standing, swaying, and walking. It's easy to reduce your time sitting and increase your time standing when you have a standing desk or a homemade platform you can stand and work at, but even without one you can still do many things while standing and you don't need much room to pace back and forth. Eating can also be done while standing and I enjoy eating this way as I listen to audio or watch video and it allows me to use my sitting credits on things that I must do or feel I can do more effectively while sitting.

In addition to static positions the importance of good posture also applies to movements. As with sitting and standing, while walking it's important to avoid letting ones back hunch or head fall forward by maintaining a straight line through ones hips, shoulders, and ears. Also while performing routine and repetitive movements it's important to ensure that they're performed roughly equally on both sides. For instance, if you have a tendency to carry a backpack over your right shoulder, use your right arm to sweep, or use your right hand to use your computers mouse it's important to do so with your left about half the time with the goal of becoming equally comfortable and proficient with both sides. Eating, brushing your teeth, and even writing with your other hand is also doable with a little consistent practice and not only is this balancing of postures and movements great for your body it's also great for your brain.

Personal Hygiene

Proper personal hygiene isn't about covering-up symptoms that manifest themselves on the outside of our bodies, but rather preventing these symptoms. However as is the case with most symptoms many suffering from things like bad breath, blemished skin, and body odors often turn to cover-ups rather than addressing root causes. This has created a huge market for companies selling toxic “cleaning” and “cleansing” concoctions to treat the external symptoms of a poor diet and lifestyle, and has left many people covered in a wide array of harmful chemicals which they wash into the water supply nightly and reapply to their bodies daily. This not only has some people suffering from symptoms they might not think to associate with all the chemicals they cover and bathe themselves with on a daily basis, it has also exacerbated the process of ecological decline which already threatens many species including our own.

Chemical and “natural” cover-ups are unnecessary when one is in good health and the benefits of good health go far beyond simply not having bad breath, blemished skin, and body odors. Thus it would be in our own self-interest, in the interest of the poor people who must be inundated with the smell of detergents and perfumes when a person covered in them walks by or into a confined space, and in the biospheres interest that instead of buying harmful chemicals to mask the odors of poor health we simply get healthy. Nowadays it may be hard to believe but many people including

myself use only one cleaning agent for all of our home cleaning and personal hygiene needs. This miracle cleaner can clean your hair, skin, teeth, clothes, and dishes. Its chemical formula is H₂O, but it's more commonly referred to as water. So the next time you see an advertisement for some “cleanser” or “cleaner” just remember that water, air, and sunlight are all you need for the cleanest home, cleanest clothes, and cleanest body money can't buy.

Sleep Quality and Quantity

Adequate and quality sleep is essential to one's health because it's our bodies' chance to focus on maintenance and recover the best it can from all we put it through. Therefore when we consistently deny ourselves the opportunity to sleep as our bodies require we do ourselves irreparable damage. What kind of long-term effects this sleep deprivation induced damage will have on one's health, aging, and life expectancy depends on a number of factors, but one thing's for certain they won't be positive. Considering its importance sleep should be seen as non-negotiable. If necessary we may be able to move it around or split it up via naps, however we shouldn't expect to consistently sleep less than our bodies require without negative consequences.

The optimal amount of sleep a person requires depends on a number of factors including their age, health, what they did that day, and how much they slept the night before. Therefore instead of placing emphasis on some hours-per-night sleep recommendation I think it'd be more accurate to say that we need to sleep until we wake up naturally with enough energy to keep us fully alert and energized throughout the entire day. Therefore the ideal amount of sleep depends on who's sleeping and when, so don't let someone who claims to sleep 4 or 5 hours a night tell you otherwise or make it seem as if sleeping “too much” is a waste of time or a sign of laziness. Most people who make such unlikely to be true sleep claims are either very old, a rare exception, or don't feel the need to include all the time they spend napping or “resting” as sleep.

We must also remember that it's not just about how much we sleep, but how well we sleep. When it comes time for bed all the day's issues must be set aside and if this proves difficult I recommend one gets up and writes out all they need to until they feel they can give it a break and leave it for the next day after they've rested and are in better shape to deal with it. Besides bringing any anxiety or anticipation to bed another surefire way to degrade our sleep is by going to bed when it's “time” rather than when we're tired. As with meals sleep should be earned, earned by doing all we can with the time and energy we have for that day, and just as true hunger is guaranteed to greatly improve a meal true tiredness is guaranteed to greatly improve a night's sleep.

When we go to sleep is often determined by our life schedules and some schedules are pretty inflexible, however I suggest everyone does their best to awaken early in the morning to take advantage of the free and environmentally friendly lighting just as we humans have done for most of our existence. If you find yourself consistently going to bed and waking up later than you'd like try adjusting the time of your final meal. Depending on what we eat, how much, and what we do afterward it could take anywhere between 3 and 6 hours before we're ready for bed so it's best to plan our meals accordingly. Sleeping in a place where the morning sunlight shines in will also help, but it's important that while we are asleep that our rooms are as dark as possible while ensuring there's plenty of fresh air. Improving one's sleep habits and lifestyle in general will have one sleeping and waking far better than any drugs such as sleeping pills and caffeine could deliver and without any of the negative side effects.

As with physical activity there are far too many benefits gained by getting enough sleep, and far too many detriments incurred by not getting enough sleep to list here. Also as with exercise those who regularly cite a lack of time as an excuse for not sleeping enough upon closer examination may find that the problem isn't a time issue, but rather a time management issue.

Frankly if someone doesn't have enough time to be physically active for at least an hour or two every day and sleep as their body requires they should make sure they have enough time to be weak, run-down, and vulnerable to illness. Also when calculating all the time one has saved by not exercising or sleeping they should be sure to factor in all the productivity and creativity losses they will inevitably experience as a result because adequate physical activity and sleep are not only essential for a healthy body they're also essential for a healthy mind.

Part V: Mind

A Healthy Mindset

Much of what makes up a healthy mindset is grounding in an understanding of oneself, society, and nature. Understanding oneself starts by knowing the meaning of life which in my opinion is to enjoy life and continually grow as a person while making sure the world is a better place with you than it would be without you. Understanding oneself also means recognizing that our life as well as the lives of those around us will eventually come to an end and that this end can literally come at any moment. So when life does get tough it's important to remember that things could always be worse and to remind ourselves that life's too short for a bad day.

Understanding society starts by learning about how the world works and figuring out what we can do to make it work better. As global citizens it's our civic duty to be informed and involved especially pertaining to matters that we are directly or indirectly responsible for via the purchases we make or the taxes we pay. We should be ready to peacefully stand up and speak out in support or opposition of ideas and actions that directly conflict with our independently, objectively, and rationally thought out ideas pertaining to how society should be organized and function, and how the environment should be protected and restored. In this time of unprecedented social, technological, and environmental change the need for our participation in managing human affairs has never been greater.

Understanding nature starts by recognizing where our lives and everyone and everything in them comes from and realizing that we're all living on a little rock that's floating through space and the only thing keeping us alive is an extremely fragile film on the surface of Planet Earth. Unlike Planet Earth itself which doesn't notice what we humans do on it's surface this fragile film, aka biosphere, that miraculously managed to envelop this planet and over billions of years develop its surface into the biologically diverse and hospitable place we know it as today is extremely fragile and is very susceptible to our collective everyday actions. Therefore as the most intelligent and technologically advanced species on this planet protecting and managing the biosphere is our most sacred and fundamental duty.

Another aspect of a healthy mindset is the ability to think freely. Freethinking is independent, objective, and rational thinking that is unfettered by ones wishes, expectations, and previous conditioning via oneself, ones peers, and figures of authority that relies on facts and reasoning to determine the acceptance, modification, or rejection of new ideas and information and spur on evolution in existing understandings and beliefs. Freethought is a magnet for information that calls our assumptions into question whereas unfree-thought (which is thought confined to self-imposed boundaries which are dogmatically defended via rationalization and/or stubborn denial) acts as a force field which shelters a person from having to deal with such information.

What most hinders the social evolution towards a global society rooted in freethought in which decision making is free from the irrational influence of tradition, patriotism, and faith is dogma. Dogma leads to collective thinking and the rationalization of falsehoods and the most pervasive and pernicious forms of dogma are cultural, nationalist, and religious. Sure there are other forms of dogma such as dietary dogma, however dietary dogma has never caused nor does it continue to threaten civilization with genocides, holy wars, or nuclear conflicts. Besides acting as brakes on social progress all forms of dogma, including those that are relatively benign, act as brakes on human potential. By better understanding the three most ubiquitous and dangerous forms of dogmatic thinking we'll be better able to remove many of the mental barriers that stand between us and a better world.

Culture: What's Wrong With Tradition?

There's nothing inherently wrong with tradition but there is something wrong with how most people blindly adhere to and perpetuate it. Despite the diverse global cultural heritage available for our personal use in many places it's as if people weren't free individuals, but rather cultural prisoners whose primary duty in life was to act as vehicles to represent and preserve whatever culture they were born into. This is unfortunate because tradition should never take priority over an individual's right to decide what aspects of their native culture they're willing to accept. All people must be free to paint the living canvas that they are with all of the cultural colors globally available and to imagine and create those that are not.

However in our increasingly culturally sensitive world tradition is given sacred status and isn't called out often enough for what much of it really is which is ignorance and dogma blindly passed down from more ignorant and dogmatic times. Instead of being taught to question tradition children are too often taught to blindly accept it and be proud of their native culture as if pride was something that could be inherited. All people and especially children should be encouraged to be critical of all culture and the traditions it contains and to freely pick and choose from all cultures the elements which they find useful. Instead of a global society with thousands of cultures we should be evolving towards one with billions of them, one for each individual.

Just because something may have existed for hundreds or perhaps even thousands of years doesn't mean it should exist today let alone be perpetuated into the future. Many cultural traditions should have been discarded a long time ago, e.g., male/female genital mutilation, burning joss paper/fake money, whaling/dolphin hunting for the sake of culture and tradition rather than subsistence and survival, and the use of handshakes as a common greeting/effective way to spread infectious disease. Culture and traditions should not be blindly preserved, but rather continually appraised and it should be determined on a person by person basis whether or not such things should be perpetuated, modified, or discarded as this will promote cultural evolution and social progress.

Nationality: What's Wrong With Patriotism?

What's wrong with patriotism is that it's simply a term used to replace nationalism within one's own national borders. In other words irrational bias towards one's own country is called patriotism, however irrational bias of others towards theirs is called nationalism. Patriotism isn't just an irrational bias towards the country one lives in it's also an irrational bias towards the citizens of that country which translates into a relatively increased value placed upon their lives, and a relatively decreased value placed upon the lives of those elsewhere. All lives are not equal in value, however the value of a life can not be based upon citizenship or any birth ascribed characteristic, but instead must be based upon the net positive or negative effect it has on the world. Therefore when governments and citizens consider taking military action instead of calculating human costs in terms of foreign casualties they must do so in terms of how many of their friends and family they're willing to sacrifice or put in harms way in order to achieve an objective.

Patriotism is also a potent distraction from a nation's internal problems which inevitably impedes its progress in addressing them by directing national focus at problems elsewhere and at the harm others have done to a nation, and away from its own problems and the harm it has done to itself. This sets the stage for a poor historical understanding of a nation's past crimes committed against those outside as well as within its borders and results in national identities significantly based on the dislike or hatred of others. Although patriotism has an ability to bring about temporary unity and stability within a nation it has an even greater ability to bring about division and instability among nations. Moreover any domestic unity and stability generally doesn't last for long

because people soon use this type of irrationally biased team oriented collective thinking to create new lines of division and designate new adversaries within their own borders which can result in partisan politics and civil wars.

Instead of viewing nations as isolated planets floating in their own distant and autonomous regions of space and inhabited by radically different forms of life they should be seen as huts in a cramped village on a small island inhabited by one family. Each hut should have a degree of autonomy to run its affairs provided the way it does so falls under a set of basic island rules consensually drafted and designed to ensure human rights and environmental protection. For instance, just because someone is a member of one hut doesn't give others in that hut the right to persecute them, and just because a patch of land is under, a patch of water is beside, or a patch of air is above one huts jurisdiction doesn't give that huts members the right to spoil it. If the future of our species is to be a bright one we must view nations in this way and see our global society as a collection of freethinking individuals rather than as a collection of collectives all faithful to their own forms of dogma.

Religion: What's Wrong With Faith?

The problem with religious faith is that it stifles freethinking and has distorted humanities relationship with nature by instilling in many a false sense of divinely sanctioned arrogance and entitlement along with the groundless idea that a supernatural being is in control of or influences what happens on and to this planet. It has also further divided us as a species, however unlike a division seen as sanctioned by a mortal and fallible leader this one is seen as sanctioned by an immortal and infallible God and is therefore more easily used to rationalize and justify irrational thoughts and unjustifiable actions. That isn't to say horrible things haven't been done under the banners of other types of dogma, however it's much easier to get people to kill others and die themselves when they think it's sanctioned by a God, and that by doing so they're ensured a one way ticket into a posthumous paradise where their deceased loved ones are said to be waiting.

While religious faith may be necessary to get otherwise good people to temporarily suspend morality and do hideous things it's not necessary to get ordinary people to do good things. So although religion has done some good during it's reign over the minds of much of humanity such good could have been and often is done without it, and without any of its faith based side effects, e.g., sectarian conflicts and holy wars. The fact is that most people do good things not because they hope to score points with a God, but because they were led to do so by their innate sense of empathy which evolved via natural selection in our highly social species as well as in our chimpanzee cousins as a survival strategy, and because making a positive difference in the world made them feel good and added meaning to their life. Since this is the case why not leave religion as the all or none believe or burn proposition it exists as today behind and replace it with something more conducive to creating a better world.

If we're to see religion retreat back to the knowledge deserts from which it emerged it must go there voluntarily and without any of the force or coercion that got it to where it is today. Therefore there must be a viable alternative that makes it irrelevant to those who still consider it to be relevant. Something that provides people with grounding derived from an understanding of where they came from, where they're going, and what's expected of them in the meantime, and helps provide meaning, purpose, and a moral compass in their life. However rather than provide another doctrine for people to fully accept without question and create exclusive collectives around I think it's best to get people thinking for themselves and creating their own life/world view as a part of their own individual culture. I hope this book invokes some thoughts on the subject and if anyone's looking for a term to loosely describe their own self-made system of values and beliefs to those who may still be using an off-the-shelf one from the last millennium I recommend Healthcentric

Freethought.

With much of the world still knee deep in dogma the task of shifting from our money-centric unfree-thinking society towards a healthcentric freethinking society rooted in the recognition that we're all living on a little rock that's surrounded by inhospitable space and the only thing keeping us alive is the biosphere, and in the realization of the oneness of our species along with our interconnectedness to all things anytime soon may seem unlikely. However if religious texts give contemporary society anything it's hope, hope by reminding us just how far we've morally, socially, and scientifically progressed since those texts were written. They serve as a testament to how we can breakout of old mindsets and change our ways of living and looking at the world. With this in mind lets make personal, social, and environmental health our primary objectives while working to improve the populations freethinking skills by encouraging others, and ourselves, to think and question more because doing so will inevitably lead society in the right direction.

Dogma, Division, Tension, and Conflict

Faith is dangerous whether it be in cultural, nationalist, or religious dogma because although ethnic pride, nationalism, and religious faith don't necessarily make people do evil things they do serve as clear lines of division which make it much easier to do evil things to those on the other side of those lines. In order to reduce the human tendency to form exclusive groups and think in terms of us and them we must recognize the absurdity of the all too commonly accepted notion of pride by birth or group membership because all too often people seek to become a part of a group in order to distract themselves from their own inadequacies by claiming pride in the contemporary and even historical achievements of others in their group. Lets remember that pride is something that must be earned and is not something that can be inherited or attained by waving a flag, wearing a costume, or simply claiming membership to a particular group.

For a species that loves to hold on to grudges it's important to note that guilt is also something that can not be inherited. It's collectives such as political parties, nations, and religions that have any shame or guilt resulting from past actions inextricably attached to them for as long as they exist, and not individuals who may have been children or yet to be born when such actions took place. While it's true that everyone has some degree of historical baggage this begins to accumulate from the moment we're born, and not from the moment the country we happened to be born in was founded, or the religion we may have been indoctrinated into was fabricated. Members of a group may be covered in shame related to atrocities committed by past members, but not because they were born into or even chose to be in a particular group, but because they may have chosen to downplay or even deny such atrocities ever took place.

We must learn from our mistakes as a species and not attempt to cover them up as this only brings shame upon ourselves while denying future generations access to historical lessons which came at extremely high costs. Therefore historical facts must be presented in their entirety rather than framed within a portrait those insecure and seeking to hide behind an imaginary righteous and glorious collective would like to paint. We must teach students not only the unedited history regarding past conflicts, but also about the mindsets behind them and the conditions that helped created them. We must then learn to look for these conditions in the present and do what we can to address them before they culminate into the next unnecessary conflict that future generations look back on and ask: "Why didn't they see that coming and why couldn't they have avoided it?".

While working to ensure the nations we reside in respect international law we must always be on the lookout for us/them thinking induced pre-conflict tension, and work to defuse this tension before it builds to dangerous levels and something tragic or trivial happens to set it off. We've gone from stone tools to smart phones and wooden sticks to thermonuclear weapons, however many of us

still retain the same kinds of superstitions and tribal mindsets that humans had centuries if not millennia ago. Therefore it's important to remember that although this civilization took thousands of years to develop, and this biosphere took billions of years to evolve they can both be destroyed in less than one. If wide scale conflict not seen since WWII, or the threat of thermonuclear war not seen since the Cold War seems unlikely in todays increasingly globalized and interdependent world just imagine how likely it would be in an over-consuming and overpopulated world suffering the consequences of climate change and ecological decline where international disputes aren't over gold, oil, and ideologies, but over food, fresh water, and survival.

Conclusion

Although we should think freely as individuals we must view our daily actions in light of the collective because if even a small minority of the over 7 soon to be 9 billion people on this planet all think that they're exceptions to the rules of responsible behavior that apply to everyone living within this overburdened biosphere, and it's alright if they eat resource devouring heavily polluting animals everyday, or if they or their food and water travels unnecessarily, or if they waste a little food, water, oil, electricity, or some other form of energy or natural resource because they're just one person and nobody's looking, or because they saw others doing the same it will be extremely difficult for our civilization to sustain itself. If this sounds overly pessimistic and you're confident that people smarter and wiser than you will make sure things are alright then better familiarize yourself with world history, take an analytical look around the world, and think again.

It's not an exaggeration to say that the fate of our species and the biosphere itself is in our hands. We must recognize all that's at stake and take responsibility for it by doing all we can now in order to avert future catastrophes, many of which are already in the making, because in the case of our species long-term survival on a planet worth inhabiting it's far better to be safe than sorry. Future technologies have the potential to save us from many things, however one thing technology can not save us from is our own ignorance and apathy because only we can do that. So it's up to us to catalyze the shift from our wasteful society rooted in consumption-ism towards a more economical one rooted in contribution-ism in which personal success is measured in terms of contribution rather than in the ability to consume, and national/global success is measured in terms of the health and well-being of citizens, society, and the biosphere rather than GDP.

While working to increase our contribution and reduce our consumption along with the amount of waste we create on a daily basis it's important to recognize that waste does nothing to improve our standard of living while doing much to lower it by depleting the resources and denigrating the environment our standard of living depends on. Our goal as consumers should be to know where everything we consume comes from, how it got to us, where it's going after we're done with it, and most importantly to ask ourselves whether or not we really need it and to take this knowledge into consideration before every purchase we make. The true cost of an item is rarely reflected in its price and more often than not cheap isn't cheap and free is hardly ever free unless you're referring to the products and services the biosphere is capable of providing us as long as we don't ruin its ability to sustainably do so.

Those of us alive in the 21st century are living through what may turn out to be the most critical time in our species existence for centuries if not millenniums to come provided we are intelligent and fortunate enough to make it that far into the future. We face many difficult challenges in the years ahead such as alleviating extreme poverty and creating just and sustainable economic and agricultural systems all while working to protect biodiversity and mitigate the climate change and ecological decline we've already set into motion. Those of us alive today shoulder a great responsibility as our species stands at a crossroads with one road ending in a cliff of global conflict, famine, and disease; and the other stretching out as far as the universe itself. It is the direction in which most of us push and pull in over the coming years and decades that we will go, so lets get to work.