

In Search of Harmony

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Introduction

For a long time as I was growing up, I was confused and upset by the way people I knew treated each other. What I experienced didn't make sense, and in my early years, I was not capable of making sense of it. Families and neighbours arguing even fighting, gangs of boys in the streets with chains and knives, countries invading other countries, none of this made any sense to me.

People around me didn't help, they were usually rooting for one side or the other, and I was supposed to learn from them. But, it still didn't make any sense.

Like everyone else, my inherent ability to copy and conform meant I ended up doing all the usual stuff - getting a job, buying a house, getting married, having a family, saving for my retirement. Does this resonate within you?

Somehow, it always seemed that one must believe what one is told; and do what is expected of one. Even though I did as I was told, I was always left feeling there was something not quite right, both in the world I inhabited and myself.

So, unbeknown to me until more recently, I had set out on a journey of self-discovery which, so far, has lasted over 70 years.

During that journey, I have covered much ground, and it led me to develop workshops that looked at taking back responsibility for our lives and reclaiming the inherent confidence and wisdom we were born with.

Whoever reads this book is without doubt searching for harmony in their lives and relationships, just like me. The title says it all.

I believe it is a common desire by all humans, but somehow we are distracted from looking by others' insecurities and lack of self-respect, saying things like: "its natural to fight", "we must be loyal to our forefathers", and "we must prove that we are right and they are wrong". Reading this book, tells me that you too want to reject this commonality of beliefs and search for a new meaningful and harmonious way to be.

I have written this book as a series of ideas. They are not training exercises or personal development techniques. Rather they are just presented to you as alternatives to the status quo; and if acted upon would take you on a journey of self-discovery leading to a more harmonious life.

Does this book have value for you, the reader, your friends and family, the world at large?

It does have great value and reward for me, knowing that you, the reader of this book, lived your life more harmoniously and you felt able to pass on the benefits to others in your life.

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I have used the rainbow on the front cover because it is one of the simplest examples of harmony. When the conditions are right all the colours of the spectrum work together to create it. Imagine the spectrum of people in the world coming together to create such a beautiful vision - the rainbow of world harmony.

What is Harmony?

"The world is meant for you and me to figure out our destiny" from the song "a thousand beautiful things" by Annie Lennox. What a wonderfully inclusive and harmonious line. It says it all.

Nonetheless, I thought it might be helpful to give a definition of the word harmony, which is referred to throughout this book. You are welcome to use your own definition and see how this book works with it.

"HARMONY is the working together of all our parts for the benefit of the whole, whether that whole be a person, a couple, a family, a community, a nation or a world full of nations."

Why search for it?

The obvious response to this question is: "Why not?"

Why would anyone seek disharmony? Why would anyone not want the whole to benefit, whether that be themselves, their relationships, their family, their neighbourhood, their country, or the world at large. It is almost the same as asking why seek happiness?

Well, the opposite (disharmony) is not working, the opposite is causing hurt, the opposite is destroying our happiness, our lives, our world. So just because searching for harmony has the potential to increase our happiness, bring us a better world to live in, it is worth seeking!

Whatever our beliefs - religious or not- about why we are here, we have only one chance at it, this time. Searching for harmony may make this the best use of our time here.

Bon voyage

Mike O'Sullivan

"I don't have a rebellious nature, rather a resilient one - the result of a dominant father, I suspect"

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Beginning the search

"Harmony begins when we can speak freely and without judgment"

In any situation where we want more harmony, there must first be the opportunity to speak freely. Without this, harmony has little chance of emerging. We do not have to speak about 'nice' things or 'happy' times, rather just how things are - good or bad.

Our experience tells us that it is not always helpful to speak freely. Not everyone wants to hear what we have to say, and those that do maybe not all the time. Nor, do we dare to say what our heart wants to say.

Step one is to set up the right time and place to speak freely and be listened to. This chapter focuses on the barriers you might encounter within yourself when speaking freely. In other words, what controls or stops you speaking freely.

Where shall we begin?

Let's start with our **insecurities**. For example, we may experience a loss of job, break up of a relationship, a violent attack or abuse - basically, anything we perceive as a threat to our life or livelihood. I am sure you have your own list of what makes you feel insecure.

Well, thankfully, evolution has given us a mechanism to protect us from these threats. As we grew up and experienced danger, we learn ways to cope with it. Assuming we survived the threat, it then became a trusted pattern of survival made up of beliefs, emotions and behaviour. In critical situations, a very important combination that keeps us alive!

On the up-side, it may prolong our life or status quo, and once again prove itself to be successful. But there is a flip side. Our ability to discern between real danger and perceived threat is limited by our need to act immediately in the face of danger - the 'flight or fight' syndrome.

At this time, we have no capacity to reason out the pros and cons of the situation, we only have the emotional pressure of the moment to react. And so without intervention, this survival pattern will run its course just as it has many, many times before. Assuming we survive the threat, it proves itself to be successful once again.

I am not sure if you are seeing the importance of the previous paragraph, because it appears to describe normal human behaviour that is useful to our survival.

Well, I want to show that whilst it may prove itself to be your protector, it is also your limiter. It has no ability to consider all possible options and actions. It

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can only give you the well tried and tested response to a situation which disregards any possibility of a better outcome other than just surviving it.

Its mission is to save us from danger or threat. And, it will carry out its duty every time we perceive a threat. It will stop us saying what we need to say or do if that puts us at risk, even if taking the risk would result in a better outcome.

Another inhibitor of speaking freely is what we were taught - the **rights and wrongs of communication and relationships**. In our early development, we learnt many rights and wrongs from some trusted authority or another. It included what was important and what was not, which became our dependable and defensible set of values.

Lastly, our ability to speak from our intelligence is limited by our low dependency on our inherent emotional intelligence - the capacity to recognise and manage our own feelings in our relationships - the subject of several books by Daniel Goleman. The capability of Emotional Intelligence is something we are born with. But, it can remain dormant and undeveloped if our early years lack appropriate education and role models - usually parents, family and teachers.

In summary, when we can speak out our minds, regardless of our internalised oppression or others', then and only then does harmony have a chance and the journey of building harmony in relationships begins.

How do we create the environment where you feel free to speak out?

The following points offer guidance as to what assists and what doesn't:

- Everything said assists progress towards harmony
- Everything not said stops progress towards harmony
- Everything unsaid sabotages progress towards harmony
- Everything felt must be expressed so not to interfere with harmony
- Everything thought must be spoken
- Every idea must be explored
- Every deceit must be exposed
- Every judgment must be suspended
- Every agenda must be postponed
- Every insecurity must be acknowledged
- Every misunderstanding must be explained

What if we can't speak freely?

Harmony requires that everyone has the chance to speak their mind freely, safely and without retribution. It is like sunbathing, it requires the sun.

We require the place, the time, the chance to speak out our minds, an environment of safety and non-judgment. Feeling free and safe enough to speak

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out all our thoughts and feelings is the foundation of building harmony. If we feel or think we can't, then harmony does not have a chance.

Perhaps we start by setting up places of safety where we can get a 'good listening to' instead of a 'good talking to' (something we experience in abundance).

Setting up a 'good listening to'

Often when people are together, they're making an effort to be listened to. Mostly, it does not work because the person they are trying to get to listen to them is waiting desperately and impatiently for a chance to be listened to too. Our need to be listened to is, in general, frustrated by other's needs to be listen to.

One way to get 'a good listening to' is to take turns and agree, "Yes, I *will* listen to you and really pay attention to you for a while, and you will give me a chance to do the same." This is not counselling or coaching or mentoring, it is *mutually agreeing to listen and pay attention to each other*.

In its basic form, it consists of two people taking turns listening to each other without interruption for an equal amount of time. One talks about whatever he or she wants to and the listener just pays attention and doesn't interrupt to give advice or comment or tell how he or she feels. After the agreed time, they swap roles.

It's a fair exchange. Neither is in debt to the other nor feeling used. Afterwards, both usually feel refreshed and think more easily. As you listen this way more times, you get better at listening. The whole process becomes more effective the more times you use it.

Raising the stakes

The idea of sharing time as above has much to offer in our everyday lives. And if we were to raise the stakes to bigger places like inter-culture/nations' tensions, then it would appear too much is at stake. Our insecurities are too big to consider this simple first step of achieving harmony. Most would favour the 'let's give them a good talking to' place or even 'let's give them a good hiding'.

I believe that 'speaking freely' whilst being given a 'good listening to' works at all levels and in all situations, whatever the level of our insecurities - so let's begin!

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Beliefs - our window on the world!

What people say or think is usually founded in a belief system. And, belief systems are based on judgments made about things, people or activities.

What do you make of the following statement:

'What we believe to be true is at best only an estimate of the truth'

Do you agree or disagree?

Let me support and illustrate this statement with an observation. For example: the sun comes up in the east and goes down in the west. Is that the truth? Is that a fact? Is that real? Or is it just a belief!

Well, the facts about the sun are this: it stays still - it is us that rotate! So the notion that the sun comes up and goes down is not a fact, nor is it the truth, nor is it a reality! It is a belief that we maintain in our language and pass on to our children. How many other beliefs have we passed on, and are still passing on, that are neither the facts nor the truth?

You only have to listen!

Although people tell you what they believe about something or other, that does not mean it is the truth about something or other. So as one listens to someone talking out their beliefs one can rest assured that they are not telling the truth, and most probably not a fact nor the reality - without doubt it will be their beliefs.

Its when someone talks out their beliefs whilst being listened to freely (without judgment) that they get the chance to re-evaluate what they believe and nudge themselves closer to the truth. This alone has the power of change embedded in the simple process of listening freely - and you only have to listen - nothing more!!

Emotions - the mechanism of nurture?

Our emotions are the bio-chemical mechanism by which we learn and form our beliefs. How important a belief depends on the intensity of the emotion used to form it - more intensity equals more importance. So when we work to change a belief, which has a high- intensity emotion attached, be warned it has an emotion-packed guardian that will defend its belief intensely.

This is all sounding a bit heavy, but we must understand what gets in the way of us seeking harmony and what has been set up 'inherently' to stop us.

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What can help us to change our beliefs?

First consider the following statements and how they might affect you and your life...

- Beliefs are judgements passed down from previous generations, not yours
- Beliefs are judgements held in place by emotions that resist change
- Beliefs create false loyalties and causes to die for
- Beliefs that are changeable enable harmony
- Beliefs that are not changeable disable harmony
- Beliefs need emotions to make them appear true
- Beliefs are not the truth

There are fewer things in life more powerful than our beliefs. In fact, I would go so far as to say that they are the most powerful thing especially when it comes to what really matters to us and what motivates us. On the one hand, they inspire us to achieve great things, but on the other hand, they can hold us back and limit what we are inherently capable of being or doing.

Take a little look back at your life and identify times when you could have done something differently, maybe more powerfully, were it not for some limiting belief that stopped or hindered you, such as: you felt not capable, or not worthy, or not just good enough.

Much of what we believe to be true about ourselves was told to us by our parents, teachers, family and friends during our early years. Milton Rokeach (December 27, 1918 - October 25, 1988), a Polish-American social psychologist, wrote:

"No person is personally able to ascertain the truth of all such things for him/herself. So, he/she believes in this or that authority - parents, teachers, religious leaders, scientists - and he/she is often willing to take some authority's word for many things."

Although good intentioned, what if our chosen authority got it wrong or handed down their limiting beliefs? It is, therefore, possible that many if not most of our beliefs are 'past down from a previous generation' and 'not ours'. Then what are we to do? How can we discern what beliefs were 'handed down' or 'our own invention'?

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In the words of Eric Berne from his book 'Games People Play' in a chapter named 'After Games, What?', he wrote:

"...there is something that rises above the programming of the past, and that is spontaneity... (and) spontaneity means option, the freedom to choose and express one's feelings from the assortment available..."

It is this rising above the emotional programming of our past, making new choices based on our understanding of today that assists us to create and achieve harmony in our lives, our relationships and in the world.

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Emotional Intelligence - the essential oil?

We let our emotions speak for us as if they are the truth of who we are and what is right. They are inherently judgmental - there is something very right or very wrong connected to all of them. They both motivate and demotivate us and others for the sake of our success or failure - a powerful part of our make-up.

How are they used?

Firstly, people who have experience of us can define us by them, for example: angry man, sad child, anxious teenager. And if we like that definition or we benefit from it in some way, then we may claim it for our very own. In effect, they form that very core part of our existence - our identity.

Secondly, they protect us from ourselves. For example: some time in our past we had a near death experience and survived it. To make sure we do not make the same mistake again, we made a recording of the event, the sensory information, how it made us feel (the emotion) and what we did that enabled us to survive it - the perfect pattern for survival. From that moment on we are highly sensitised to and alert to and situations that comes close to our early recording. The goal is to avoid re-experiencing the emotion of the originating event again - in effect they control us.

Thirdly, they protect us from others. When threatened we can act in ways that astound us and others. Emotions are the fuel that drives us to defend ourselves and control anyone threatening us. Here the goal is not to avoid our emotions, but to use them to bring about a good result for us - i.e. to control others.

Lastly, their contribution to decision making is paramount. Although we have a highly developed brain that can gather information, sort it, analyse it and evaluate it, we still depend upon our emotion to guide our decision making.

In summary, emotions define us, they control us, they control others and they influence all our decisions in a major way - in effect they own us.

"our emotions display how we have been judged by others, they are not who we are"

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How do we create the environment where our emotions work towards harmony?

First take a look at the following statements and notice your reaction to them...

- Emotions disable harmony when we let them control us or others
- Emotions display how we have been judged, and not who we are
- Emotions give beliefs their illusion of truth, and are not the truth
- Emotions have limited decision making capability
- Emotions are self-centred, not harmony centred

Emotional intelligence refers to an ability to recognise the meaning of our emotions and to use them to enhance our understanding and decision-making. This ability is the essential oil that smooths our passage to achieving harmony. It overcomes the challenges that emotions alone cannot when two people, two communities or two nations are working to resolve old and conflict-full differences.

Emotional intelligence (as described by Daniel Goleman) comes automatically as a result of acquiring and using the following competences...

- **Self-awareness** - *knowing what we are feeling and using those preferences to guide our decision making*
- **Self-regulation** - *handling our emotions so they facilitate rather than interfere with the task in hand*
- **Motivation** - *using our deepest preferences to move and guide us toward our goals*
- **Empathy** - *sensing what people are feeling, being able to take their perspective and cultivating rapport*
- **Social skills** - *handling emotions in relationships well and accurately reading social situations, interacting smoothly and using these skills to persuade and lead, negotiate and settle disputes for cooperation and teamwork.*

They are an essential pre-requisite to building harmonious relationships and are in themselves the essential oil of harmony. Best we get implementing them for ourselves and in our Educational Systems, if we want our children to grow up in an harmonious world.

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The Breakdown of Harmony

'Why' by Annie Lennox symbolises relationships where the opportunity for harmony is slipping away, and loyalty to our own belief systems become paramount. This breakdown in harmony has consequences to the relationship, which may continue, but usually at a cost, to one or both parties.

There is a principal that operates here, whether we are talking about couples, cultures, or nations; and that is:

'the one with the biggest oppression always wins'.

It is always those who act most forcibly to maintain their belief systems over others that win. The others have no option than to resentfully concede or become the bigger oppressor themselves - the recipe of war.

This is how oppression works, whether its nation against nation or simply an individual bullying another.

Many relationships evolve to this place over time as the deeper beliefs systems reveal themselves. It then becomes a matter of 'self-survival' - sometimes misnamed as 'self-respect'.

In human society, it is true to say that the biggest oppression wins over any other, every time. The individuals, communities, cultures that experience the biggest oppression are most likely to die for their beliefs especially as they are instilled by the previous generation that raised them.

To achieve harmony, we must put the maintaining of self-respect on hold. This is the crucial ingredient to achieving harmony.

When we have no hope of achieving harmony (in the words of Annie Lennox: "this boat is sinking"), then we take our self-respect off hold and take action that achieves an inner harmony.

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Harmony - are you ready for it?

So far we have covered several principles that impact on harmony. There is still a need to understand our need for harmony. Could it be true that some people do not want harmony in their lives and relationships? Is it true that some people seek harmony in everything? Is it true that some people do not really care one way or the other?

The aim of this book is to ignite your interest in searching for harmony and start the process of change to achieve it. So...

Are you ready to take on this aim?

James Prochaska, a University of Rhode Island psychologist, established four levels of readiness that people go through if they are to achieve successful personal change.

Oblivion - people at this level aren't ready at all. They deny any need to change and resist any attempts to change them. They just don't see the point.

Contemplation - people at this level see the need to change but are not quite ready to carry it out. They tell themselves 'someday they will do something about it'.

Preparation - people at this level have begun to focus on how to improve. They are aware of the problem and eager to form a plan. They are ripe for change.

Action - people at this level embrace change, in particular their emotional patterns, the way they think about themselves and their long-standing habits.

You may find it useful to consider where you are in relation to personal change and how this book might assist you to take action.

"Harmony is the catalyst of all beautiful relationships."