

Introduction to Spiritual Freedom

Chet Shupe

While looking at replicas of humanoid skulls, at a natural history museum — one dating back three million years — I remarked to the curator, “Compared to us, those individuals had very little knowledge. But they were free to be true to their feelings, and were likely much happier than we are.” She agreed, and I wasn’t surprised. After all, isn’t the freedom to satisfy our feelings what contentment and happiness are about?

Under the title of Minimalism, this meetup has addressed the advantages of a minimalist way of life. But the materialistic culture that surrounds us constantly works against minimalism, by keeping us all routinely judging success, mainly in terms of material wealth. Ignored, in our culture, is the fact that there are *two* kinds of wealth — material *and* spiritual.

We all know that food and shelter are physical necessities we can’t live without. But no one seems to notice the blatant lack of our most basic spiritual necessity — the need for meaningful relationships. All around us, we see people living without the intimate, interdependent relationships that pre-civilized humans took for granted.

The pain of social isolation is rampant in our modern world. Every individual suffers from it, because we depend on money for survival. Instead of living by helping each other, through which Homo sapiens found spiritual gratification throughout evolution, we compete against one another for material wealth. Indeed, in civil cultures, social isolation is the principal cause of depression, addiction, and suicide, and of many other afflictions that plague our world. Taken together, these blights on modern humanity provide clear and damning evidence of just how spiritually impoverished we are!

Our culture fails to understand that human emotions constitute the core and substance of the human spirit. How could people understand that, when, to “make it” in our world, we have little choice but to serve self, by accumulating personal wealth, a way of life that ignores the crucial human need for emotional gratification. Emotional gratification is not a small thing. It is the *spiritual* wealth that fills the heart with the natural contentment of interdependent relationships. If we could be true to our feelings — thus, “spiritually free” — we would be living, right now!, a much happier and quite minimalist way of life, because our relationships, rather than our “things,” would satisfy the hunger of our souls.

The current course of human life is a perilous one. Indeed, it constitutes a depravity that already shows signs of hastening the demise of our species. It is important for us to understand that, if our species does cease to exist, no individual human will be at fault. No. This catastrophe has been developing since the advent of civilization, back in a time when intimate, interdependent relationships were still the principal source of human contentment and belonging. Despite the hardships and conflicts primitive people faced, it was a time when the human lifestyle was a celebration of life made manifest through the simple daily acts and interactions of ordinary people tending to one another’s emotional and material needs.

It is a vast gulf that separates that earlier, more natural, human life from our modern one. The modern addiction to wealthseeking over human connection carries a foreboding message. It is a warning that something has gone wrong with human existence — something terrible and deeply hidden, which yet leaves blatant tracks throughout our world, such as the lurid consequences of endemic loneliness, broken homes, and habitat destruction. How ironic it is that so many suffer, today — even the privileged — when all any of us really want is the sense of belonging and wellbeing that exists in the state of intimacy that can only be experienced through the interdependence and mutual trust of sisterhoods and brotherhoods.

Though we humans have been detached from that kind of intimacy for thousands of years, our spirits have never lost their existential need for it. It is a need so strong that the pain of it not being fulfilled is poignantly felt in every modern human heart, yet dutifully rejected as an aberration, in the context of societal norms. In this perverse self-rejection of natural feelings lies the human problem.

To solve it, we don't need more modern inventions, more education, more institutions, or more good intentions. Rather, something now unforeseeable must happen that will drastically change mankind's perspective on the significance of feelings. Once we recognize why feelings exist, we will know what life is about. This knowledge will lay bare the myth of humanity as a special, superior, form of life — evolution's ultimate goal. More significantly, it will explode our own mythical belief in the efficacy and achievements of modern civilization.

Modern as we are, we will be as shocked by the drastic change in perspective that will come when we understand why feelings exist, as the people of Galileo's time were shocked by the discovery that the sun — not the earth — was the center of the then-known universe. That discovery exploded the "knowledge" claimed by the astronomers and well-informed of his day. When modern humans discover why feelings exist, this, too will invite the inevitable wrath of theologians, ideologists, politicians, and behavioral scientists, whose countless explanations for why people suffer are so inaccurate as to be useless in solving the persistent social problems we face. The powerful inertia of a world that recognizes rules and laws, while rejecting human feelings as the basis for social order, guarantees universal resistance to the very idea of spiritual freedom! Recognition, by modern humanity, of the need to be true to our feelings will explode *the myth* that manmade laws can control the unknown future to desirable ends. Lacking that myth, the hegemony of the concept of civil rule will cease forever.

When humans are no longer misguided by the illusion that legal and monetary systems give us dominion over everything, including our fate, the reign of civil rule will end, after thousands of years. Free of having to comply with legal edicts, humans will once again behave in ways that serve our species, and our spirits will reward us with feelings of intimacy and contentment. The myth that justifies legal systems is the belief that life is about *our personal* survival, or the survival of the *state*. But, from the human spirit's point of view, life is about something infinitely more significant, which is our *species'* survival — the survival of life itself.

I don't believe people are looking for the meaning of life as much as they are looking for the experience of being alive.

— Joseph Campbell

Rediscovering the Wisdom of Human Nature: How Civilization Destroys Happiness, a book I authored, provides my view on why we moderns are increasingly discontented, and anxiety ridden, despite all our modern marvels. It will be the primary reference for this meetup, whose title I have changed to [Introduction to Spiritual Freedom](#). Other books, such as *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* by Sebastian Junger and *Sapiens: A Brief History of Mankind* by Yuval Noah Harari will be referred to also. ***Rediscovering the Wisdom of Human Nature*** is available at Amazon and other book outlets. For those who join this meetup or may be considering it, the book is available for no cost at:

<https://spiritualfreedompress.com/intro/>

Also, at this location, find reviews of the book and a short essay I have recently written, "An Invitation to Re-think Our Belief in Civil Rule."