

# The Brown Papers

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## Humanity for Dummies: Moving from Class 101 to Class 202 by Judy Tso, MAA

The Dummies series of books has been very popular in recent years. There is a “Dummies” book for nearly every subject: *Dating for Dummies*, *Anatomy and Physiology for Dummies*, *Divorce for Dummies*. You name it; but I searched Amazon.com and I couldn’t find *Human Beings for Dummies*.

There seems to be a gap. There isn’t a book on the most important subject of all: understanding how to be a human being. How did we learn what it means to be human? Have we internalized the concepts? We get tested everyday in our human interactions, but have we learned what we really need to know?

When I say understanding how to be a human being, I really mean understanding the second word: *being*. We know we are humans but what does it mean to *be*? What is the meaning of the word *being*? Being is a little like existing. What does it mean to exist on this planet as a human being? What does it mean to wake up everyday and live through a whole day and go back to sleep? Even though we wake up and go to bed each and everyday, do we understand the nature of this experience?

What should the quality of that experience be? And here I don’t mean to explore why we should be here on this planet and get into philosophical debate about that. My assumption is that we are here already so what is it supposed to be like everyday while we are here?

I ask this question, because no one really formally taught us what it means to be a human being. We have all learned through trial and error, through the accident of our births, through the parents we were “assigned,” through the teachers we had in school, but it hasn’t been a comprehensive education, and we were never given a formal curriculum. Can you imagine looking at the syllabus for the course entitled Human Being 101? What would be on this syllabus? I know I would have liked to have had that class.

So given that we haven’t attended the class Human Beings 101, it brings up some serious questions such as: Do we understand and accept the basic nature of our humanity? Do we recognize, accept and acknowledge the fundamental characteristics or truths of what it means to be human? Do we embrace all the parts of being human or do we run and hide? Do we linger in denial and blindness? Do we justify certain characteristics and reject others? Do we seek to control certain aspects of the human experience in unreasonable ways? Do

we believe in false myths about what it means to be human?

This article aims to explore some of the fundamental principles about being human so we can move from Human Being 101 to Human Being 202; so we can live with more ease and comfort inside our human skins, so we can relate to all other humans and our world more effectively. I assert that a great many of our human conflicts result from our inability to accept our nature as humans and our desire to believe in and preserve the myths we have created about ourselves.

In the first section, we will look at the things we need to accept. We look at the myths about humanity that we need to shatter. We will look at the parts of our human nature that we could be more compassionate about, that we could accept and acknowledge more fully, without guilt, without embarrassment, without shame, without discomfort - a full embracing of our humanity.

Next we come upon a brief section that outlines “what can change in the world when we accept these truths.” In the third section, “Some more truths about being human” are introduced. In the final section, “Actions we can practice,” we will look at the opportunities we have to stretch ourselves to the next level of human development, Class 202. These are actions we can practice daily.

*Note on how to read this article: There are a lot of concepts here. You might read it all at once or you may choose to read a few sections and ponder the concepts for a week before reading a few more sections and spending time pondering the next few sections. While you read, notice what ideas generate emotional resistance and reflect on what might be causing this resistance. Enjoy and remember to breathe!*

## **WHAT WE NEED TO ACCEPT: BUSTING THE MYTHS ABOUT BEING HUMAN**

Accept that we are a part of the animal kingdom.

We are a part of the animal kingdom not separate from it. We ourselves are a type of animal. The DNA is the proof.

The reality is that from a biological standpoint, we are remarkably similar to all the other living creatures on the earth. Recent research on ocean sponges has shown that human DNA and sponge DNA overlap greatly. On the face of it, we don't seem very similar to sponges, yet along many stretches of DNA sequence, we have the same DNA. If we move from sponges to chimpanzees, the overall DNA similarity between humans and chimpanzees is 99% - only 1% is different.

In addition, the reason we can do research on animals like rats to understand human disease is because our genetic and biological makeup is similar enough to make the comparison useful. We have successfully relied on animal models to figure out much of what we know about how the human body functions. This would not be possible if we did not share huge similarities with animals.

Our biological components are the same as those of the other animals on

the earth. All living creatures on the earth share the same chemical building blocks. We are linked by our biology to all the other species of animals on this planet.

We share the same biological functions as animals. Those will never go away. We eat, we sleep, we mate. These basic functions are a part of the human animal's reality.

For more information, visit the Dolan DNA Learning Center at <http://www.dnalc.org>.

Accept that we are a part of our natural environment not superior to it.

Our entire development as humans across the earth is intimately tied to the natural environment. We do not survive in spite of the environment, we survive because of what nature provides to us. The soil provides food. The rivers and springs provide water. The air is absolutely essential to life. The animals are our food source. The oil from the ground keeps us warm, fuels our cars, makes our plastic. We rely on all the resources the earth has given us.

Our cultures and our biology have been shaped by the geography and climate of our earth. Human beings have adapted to the environment where they have lived. Two examples of how humans adapt to environment are skin color and adaptation to high altitude. Studies of people who live at high altitude in the Andes mountains and Himalayan mountains show that after thousands of years of living at these high altitudes, their blood carries more oxygen than people who live at lower altitudes.

In terms of skin color, we as humans have adapted to the amount of UV radiation we are exposed to. Different amounts of UV radiation hit the earth at different latitudes. Human skin possesses melanin which shields us from UV radiation. Humans who live in the northern regions of the world that have less UV radiation also have less melanin. Humans who live in the southern latitudes closer to the equator have more melanin. We are remarkably adaptable to the environment or to say it in another way, the natural environment has had strong impacts on humans.

Yet, we believe we have the power to control nature: to control the weather, the rivers, the forests, and the oceans as though we were the keepers of nature. Our relationship to nature is no different than from that of the animals. We rely on natural resources for our survival. We are intimately tied to the earth's health.

In the course of developing technology and creature comforts we have disconnected from our natural environment. Many of us sit all day in artificially lit offices or buildings with artificial air circulation systems and we barely move. We eat manufactured food or food wrapped in plastic wrap. We miss the sunlight, the fresh air, and the physical movement. We live in an artificial environment created by humans and we have isolated ourselves from the natural environment.

We have lost our ability to survive in the wilderness because we have become so disconnected from nature. We can no longer find food for ourselves or build shelters for ourselves because we believe everything will be manufactured for us.

Acknowledge our physical body, remember that we are not simply a mind.

In a related way, our denial of our animal natures and our denial of our ties to the natural environment all feeds our difficult relationship with our bodies.

As European philosophers worked to deny the animal, the biological, the sexual, and the emotional, they sought to privilege the mind. Science itself was born from the privileging of the intellect and logic over the intelligence of nature or of the body. Today, in the US, we live in a culture that emphasizes logic, mind, and intellect.

In our mind-based culture, we would like to forget that we even have a body. Corporations and employees act as though people have no physical needs, that we can work through lunch and don't need to eat. We work 12 hours without breaks. We deny ourselves sleep. When we do eat, we feed ourselves junk food and fast food. We do not exercise our bodies and we take the elevator instead of the stairs. We breathe recycled air filled with germs.

Drug companies support this denial of our body. They advertise every type of drug for every symptom to prevent you from feeling anything for very long. We take drugs to suppress every bodily condition from allergies to headaches to diarrhea. Yet when our bodies are ill or we feel pain, these are actually important messages that have a purpose. They give us a warning signal that things are not right. We need to be able to hear the messages the body sends us rather than the drug the body and suppress its natural cycles.

In our desire to privilege the mind and ignore the body, we also deny our need for sensual pleasures and for the touch of another human. The popularity of massages today is a sign of our need to de-stress, to relax and to connect through human touch.

As we have manufactured this industrial and technology driven world that shelters us from the outdoors and from physical discomfort or exertion, we have doomed our bodies to disease and illness.

Chris Stewart-Patterson, MD in his article in the September 2001 issue of *Shambhala Sun*, makes the point that our modern life is in direct contradiction to what our bodies are designed for, that we still have the body of the caveman:

Evolutionary medicine – the study of how our historical biological development has affected our health today – essentially sees us all as cave people in suits and spandex. Evolutionary medicine's premise is that we are adapted for a very different environment than the one that we currently live, and that this discrepancy has far-reaching health consequences...

We carry the evolutionary design of our Paleolithic ancestor who had to hunt or work the fields throughout the day to survive.

In fact our average ancestor may have been as fit as a present-day elite athlete, as a result of forever traveling to find or follow food sources. Running and hunting with spears is definitely a hard day's work. And just try digging roots all day with a sharp stick and a baby on your back. No need to seek out calorie-burning opportunities in

that environment, they readily present themselves.

What Patterson is saying is that we are built to move and work our bodies and much of our modern illness stems from this lack of movement and physical exertion.

Accept that humans are emotional creatures.

All human beings naturally experience a wide range of emotions and feelings and yet we have been taught to suppress these emotions. Historically, we have deemed emotions to be inferior. Subsequently we have used the presence of emotions to label women and people of color as inferior. Conversely, we socialized men to oppress emotions as though showing lack of emotion was superior, or showing that you have your emotions under tight control was better than allowing them to be seen.

Men have been socialized to buck up. Act like a man. Don't ever cry. These ideas speak to the rejection of emotions. Emotions do not weaken us. We already have them. To deny them does not make emotions go away. You don't stop having emotions. You may not fully feel them, you may not react to the emotions of others but the emotions don't disappear just because you don't wish to pay attention to them.

Women traditionally were allowed to express the womanly emotions of love and compassion, but were forbidden the emotions of anger and rage. Then as women gained equal rights, some of us have learned to deny our emotions in order to compete in a male dominated world. We too have learned to deny emotions as well. We need to accept our emotions without judgment.

There is a way in which we as human beings have rejected our emotional nature, our very humanity on some level. In doing so, the result is that we have books now that speak to emotional intelligence to help us get back to acknowledging, accepting and being aware of our emotions rather than suppressing or denying them.

Emotions actually are vital to our health and a vital source of information. Emotions inform us of how we feel about our life, what we want and don't want. Because we have had an over reliance on our heads, our minds, our intellect, we have actually lost our ability to make good judgments because we have lost the entire knowledge our emotions provide.

Accept that we are vulnerable, both physically and emotionally.

Our vulnerability according to dictionary.com is our "susceptibility to physical or emotional injury." Let's first look at physical vulnerability. We live in a youth culture that wishes to believe we are immune to disease and aging. Yet, aging is a natural and inevitable process. We break our bones, we get diseases, we age. When we get sick we get frustrated as though this should not happen to us. This avoidance of our physical vulnerability is feeding a tendency to downplay, ignore or deny our bodies and it disconnects us from our real physical frailty.

In denying our emotions, we have denied our emotional vulnerability. Our vulnerability is deeply human. We have the ability to love and be loved, to hurt and be hurt, to be supportive or not. Our vulnerability is the basis for our com-

passion. We cannot be compassionate unless we can first acknowledge our own vulnerability and treat ourselves with compassion. We cannot have compassion for others unless we can open our hearts to them. If you think of the opposite of being vulnerable, you can think of a steel wall or a fortress. It is impenetrable. If your heart is impenetrable, you cannot have compassion for others.

When we pull up the drawbridge and close the gate, shutting down our emotions and making ourselves unavailable, we close the door to the full depth of human connection and relationships. Only by opening our hearts and being vulnerable can we access our human compassion and ability to love. Though I am not suggesting that you invite emotional injury, to be vulnerable means being open enough to be hurt without necessarily inviting it.

The Buddhist nun, Pema Chödrön speaks a great deal of the importance of awakening the heart. In her article, “The Awakened Heart” from the *Shambhala Sun* September 2001, she speaks of the broken heart:

Sometimes the broken heart gives birth to anxiety and panic; sometimes to anger, resentment and blame. But under the hardness of that armor there is the tenderness of genuine sadness. This is our link with all those who have ever loved. This genuine heart of sadness can teach us great compassion.

Accept that other human beings are essential to our well being, that we are interdependent.

Before we can improve our human relationships with each other, we have to admit our own desire and need to have human relationships, that they are essential to our health and well-being, that they are part of what it means to be human.

In this society we have a belief in the myth of rugged individualism. We believe that we don't need help. That our success is attributed to our individual hard work. That we don't need anyone because we can do it ourselves. This belief in self-reliance is a lie.

We would not have grown up without the love, care and attention of parents and caretakers. We would not have been educated without the dedication of our teachers. We would not have been able to get our first job without people referring us to a job opening or being a reference for us and vouching for our good work. We would not have developed on the job without the mentoring and training from our co-workers and supervisors.

We would not have gotten anywhere without the help, support, caring and teaching of many other people, our parents and families, our teachers, our friends, our co-workers. We would not have pushed forward with our goals without the support of loving friends, spouses and children.

We have this myth that we became who we are solely through our own effort but that is a lie. We actually thrive through the help of many people along the way throughout of life.

Accept that we have the ability to change and learn.

We have the false belief that we are born with our abilities, our intelli-

gence and our talents. Either we are born with what it takes or we are not. That is a complete falsehood. Our entire development from the moment of birth is dependent on our exposure to stimuli from other people and the environment. Our bodies and brains are adaptable; they are plastic - moldable, changeable throughout life. We are not born into a permanent, static form; we are constantly changing. Look at infancy. An infant is not born with the ability to do much at all. It develops the vast majority of its abilities after birth. The brain is wired in preparation for stimuli to switch on various developmental processes. If there are no stimuli, either there will be no development or the development will be altered.

An infant cannot develop successfully without interaction with parents and other human beings. Infants would not develop eyesight, the ability to walk or hold objects without exposure to other humans and to the environment. Various experiments with animals have shown that if an animal is isolated from sensory inputs, it doesn't develop properly. For example, if you cover up the eye of a cat as a kitten, that eye will not develop normal sight.

What this tells us is that human beings are programmed with the ability to change and alter our bodies and brains and this "plasticity" continues until death. (Plasticity means capable of being changed or molded and in biology it means capable of building tissue.) Anyone who has exercised regularly for a time and then stopped knows this. You can build muscle, strength and speed with practice over time, but when you quit you quickly lose that muscle and strength. You can then start exercising again and build up muscle and strength and this can happen an infinite number of times.

Neuroscientists are learning about how the brain continues to build neural connections throughout life with the right stimuli. Christopher Reeves' slowly developing ability to recover bodily control and research to repair spinal cord injury is proof that our brains and bodies are plastic, that our nervous system can be rebuilt.

Our society has false belief in inborn talent, that you are born with it or not. In actuality, either you get a combination of support and teaching to develop and you exert your own effort or you don't. Through exposure to stimuli, through learning and through interaction with other humans, we develop all skills and abilities that we consider "normal and natural" to human existence.

The latest research on how people become experts shows that expert chess players and pianists are not born but are created through years of learning and practice. The research shows that becoming an expert at a world-class level of chess for example, takes at minimum four hours of practice each day for at least ten years. This practice involves learning ever more complicated and challenging skills from an expert teacher. These experts also do not possess extraordinary IQ or any other "special" talents. What this tells us is that any average human being who does not have severe mental impairments can with steady practice and learning achieve any goal or objective as long as they commit to developing themselves and have good teachers/coaches. It is about willingness, not capability.

The adage that you can't teach old dogs new tricks is false. Old dogs are infinitely teachable. The real question is: how *willing* is the old dog?

Accept that we belong to the only species of humans – homo sapiens.

Many of our wars and fights in the world come from our desire to make some homo sapiens superior to other homo sapiens. Human beings have created the concept of races in order to support this view. The concept of races was deliberately created to suggest that there are critical biological differences and differences in intelligence between different groups of people. This is an absolute lie.

This idea of race was the insidious creation of Europeans who wanted to gain the cheap labor and resources of other people, tribes or nations. The concept of race was used by Europeans to support their goals of conquest, conquering and colonialism.

The truth of modern biology and DNA research debunks this notion that there are quantifiable differences in the genetic stuff of different “racial” groups.

Although we do have some superficial physical features that vary, our underlying DNA and cell structures are the same and in fact our cultural groups have been interbreeding since there have been human beings. We do not have sets of DNA that are different by race. We do not have a segmentation below that of homo sapiens. In an article by the noted paleoanthropologist, Donald Johanson, Ph.D. the discoverer of Lucy, Johanson notes:

Studies of contemporary DNA, especially mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) which occurs only in the cellular organelles called mitochondria, reveal that humans are astonishingly homogeneous, with relatively little genetic variation.

The high degree of similarity between human populations stand in strong contrast to the condition seen in our closest living relatives, the chimpanzees. In fact, there is significantly more genetic variation between two individual chimpanzees drawn from the same population than there is between two humans drawn randomly from a single population. Furthermore, genetic variation between populations of chimpanzees is enormously greater than differences between European, Asian and African human populations.

*Note: for more information on race, PBS has a TV series and you can visit the PBS website: <http://www.pbs.org/race>.*

**WHAT CAN CHANGE IN THE WORLD WHEN WE ACCEPT THESE TRUTHS ABOUT BEING HUMAN**

- By accepting we are a part of nature, we will be able to reclaim how to live within nature. We will behave with greater respect towards nature and natural resources and other animal creatures. We will seek to replace what we use. We will acknowledge that we cannot control nature. We will seek



to rebuild our connections to the natural environment. We will seek to spend more time outdoors

- Rather than seek to take away the environments of the animals, we might seek to live in harmony with them. When the raccoons and foxes, for example, start to attack us, it is because we have threatened their survival by encroaching upon their homes.
- By accepting our animal nature, we can then acknowledge all our instincts, the violence, competition, survival instincts that we and all other animals have. We can seek to mitigate, manage and channel these instincts into less harmful actions. Managing these instincts is not the same as suppressing them. Managing them includes leaving room for them, but not allowing them to take down our societies or harm others. We can only manage the things we acknowledge. We cannot solve problems we seek to deny.
- When we accept our animal selves, we can then be integrated creatures, not disembodied brains without bodies.
- When we acknowledge our bodies as a vital part of us rather than our enemy then we gain the important knowledge that our bodies hold and the important messages our bodies send us. We will heed the messages when we are sick and need to change our lifestyle. We will also take better care of our bodies and honor our bodily needs and cycles rather than try to control them. We will seek to keep active in order to stay healthy.
- When we acknowledge our emotional selves, we will be more balanced, more energetic, more joyful, more loving. When we allow what we regard as negative emotions such as anger and hurt to have their time and space to be, they will dissipate. We can also increase our expression of the emotions we want like joy, love, compassion, empathy etc. We will discover that when we give space to our emotions we gain a great deal more energy because we stop spending so much energy suppressing and denying emotions but instead allow them to be and take their course.
- When we share our vulnerability with others, we expose our true humanity and it is a trust-building action. People respond to vulnerability and emotional openness. We connect to each other when we are vulnerable. We build bonds and relationships. It is an honor when people let us in.
- By accepting our emotional vulnerability, we also allow our loving hearts to make more of our decisions rather than our heads. Our heads often make decisions that are ultimately harmful to people. We will also discover that we have unending reserves of caring and love when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable.

## SOME MORE TRUTHS ABOUT BEING HUMAN

### We always have impact on others.

Many of us walk through any given day and do not notice the impact we have on every person we have encountered during this day. We miss the fact that every word spoken, every facial expression is picked up by someone. We either made a person smile or frown. We may have made a person ignore us but he or she is still aware of our existence.

In every interaction you have with another person, you are having some impact on that other person. It may range from slight to extremely strong but in every case you have put your energy, ideas, feelings forward and it has reached the other people. Your simple existence in a room has an impact. You do not necessarily have to say or do anything in particular. We are subtly aware of everyone in a room.

Think about how many times a day you are impacted by others. Do they know they impacted you? Probably not. Do you know how you have impacted others? Probably not.

We fail to observe how we impact others. We are more likely to think that we are harmless and invisible rather than powerful in affecting other human beings.

### Accept responsibility for our impact regardless of our intent.

Because we don't accept our ability to impact others, we don't take responsibility for it.

We believe that if our intentions are good then we are freed of responsibility. It is not enough to have good intentions. We must observe our affect on other people and look to see if we have done harm or good. If we have done harm no matter that it is unintended, we need to acknowledge and take responsibility for it. This is the critical difference between intent and impact.

In the coaching world, we talk about 100% responsibility for our impact. If each person agrees to take 100% responsibility for our impact no matter our intention, what would the world look like?

### Accept that we make split second judgments and make up stories about each other.

Everyday of our waking lives, we are making judgments about each other. It is a natural thing that we do. While thousands of years ago, when we made a split second decision about whether a tiger jumping out of the forest was friend or foe, it saved our lives, today our immediate judgments are often less useful. We stereotype; we judge based on past experiences; we label people. Often these judgments are false, prejudiced and in serious error.

We need to accept the fact that these judgments happen and we need to take action to make sure we do not make decisions or act from these judgments. For example, all day long we have assumptions about people. That person is rude. This person doesn't work hard enough. That person doesn't have good managerial skills. When we judge people in this way, we dismiss their importance or we label them as enemies. Instead we need to question our judg-

ments and alter them.

We are also good about making up stories about people. If a person sends us a dirty look in the hallway, we might make up the story that this person dislikes us or is angry at us. In fact, this person may be thinking hard about a problem or this person may be expressing their frustration having left a difficult meeting. Their expression may have nothing to do with us except that we passed the person at the same time as they made a face.

Accept that we are not perfect and we make mistakes.

In our US culture, we have this belief in overachievement and perfection. We do not allow failure or mistakes. However this is an unreasonable standard. We make mistakes all the time and it is a valuable part of the learning process.

Take the famous comedian and Monty Python member John Cleese. In his management video, Cleese “tackles the thought-provoking idea that mistakes are a crucial part of the creative process. He shows that each mistake is a valuable lesson.”

Accepting our own imperfection allows two key things to free up. First when we are more gentle and accepting of our own mistakes, it gives us the room to learn and grow rather than be ashamed or upset about our mistakes.

Secondly, by accepting our own imperfection, we are then able to accept the fallibility of others. We are then able to be compassionate about the mistakes of others and to be able to support the learning and growth of other people.

Accept that the majority of our limitations are self-imposed.

Our own beliefs are powerful limiters of what is possible. If you don't believe in something, you never explore it to see if it is possible. When you write something off, it means you do not pursue the possibility. That is why believing in possibility is so essential. If we don't think it is possible, we don't even try. Many of us are working from untrue assumptions and beliefs. If we believe that life cannot get any better, we refuse to exert any effort and indeed life does not get better. If we believe we cannot succeed in graduate school we can't. If we believe we won't be able to get a better job, we won't. Before there can even be possibility, there has to be belief. Before there can be change, there must be a belief that change is possible.

On a related note, we often internalize the beliefs of others, how they see us and what they expect from us. The Pygmalion effect has been long researched. This effect describes how we perform to expectations. If our boss expects little of us, our performance suffers; if our boss believes we can do great things, we soar to meet those expectations. If we hold high expectations for ourselves and we demand high expectations from those around us, what becomes possible?

Accept our own power.

Each of us has a great deal of individual power. This power includes our ability to love and care for others. It includes our ability to teach others, our ability to persuade and influence others. Yet more often than not today, people

feel disempowered. We forget that we can control our own decisions, emotions, attitudes and behaviors. We also forget that given the fact we are social beings, we have a great deal of influence on others. Think about the power of peer pressure and social rules and norms. We know others have power over us yet we forget we have the same power to influence and impact others.

We forget that all the great changes in our world over thousands of years were made collectively by people. When we grouse about how things won't change, we forget about the amount of change that people have made in the last 100 years. Put yourself in the place of a person who is 100 years old, a person who remembers the horse and buggy and who now surfs the Internet to email great grand children. We human beings are the ones that made all that change. Each of us drives that change today. Change wasn't and isn't made by space aliens, it is made by human beings.

### **ACTIONS WE CAN PRACTICE**

As we become more comfortable in our skins, we can really utilize the gifts of our humanity.

#### Practice Acceptance

We can start with acceptance. So much of our energies are spent resisting, denying, covering up, ignoring what is true that we have forgotten our ability to accept the truth about ourselves and each other.

What if we practice accepting ourselves and each other every single day? What if we practice accepting all the circumstances and situations that arise each day. What if we accept our own imperfections, even as we seek to improve ourselves? What if we accept the fallibility of others even as we seek to teach or coach them to learn something new or stretch themselves.

We have so much more practice with resistance rather than acceptance. Each day, practice accepting something you resist, whether is it accepting the new computer system at work or the fact your child is going off to college or that your co-worker likes to listen to music at work.

Each day, work on being at peace with whatever shows up. Experiment with being joyful about each and every circumstance and situation.

#### Moving Beyond Tolerance

How can we practice accepting those we disagree with? We used to speak of tolerance, but today tolerance almost has a begrudging connotation to it. It has come to mean "to put up with." When you put up with something, you do not truly appreciate it or accept it.

Tolerance of differences is not sufficient. We cannot stop simply at recognizing that beliefs and behaviors can be different. We must be able to appreciate the person even when we disagree with their values or beliefs or if we disagree with their approach or work style. Many of us cannot appreciate the person we disagree with. It is as though we judge the person by their beliefs and behavioral practices. If they agree with us they are good and if they disagree

with us, they are bad. If a person is polite, they are good. If they are rude, they are bad. We need to separate the judgment of the person, the human being who deserves compassion, understanding and connection from judgment of that person's beliefs or behaviors.

### Compassion

We have the ability to show compassion and love beyond the close circle of family and friends and we can choose to exercise that capacity. I was recently with a group of employees at a financial firm and when we discussed what it means to treat people with respect some telltale words were missing: caring, love, compassion. When I asked about these words, people did not think they were possible in a work environment. Why is it that we cannot have caring for each and every person we encounter at work? There seems to be an assumption that we only have energy to care for certain limited number of people, a small handful of family members and friends? This assumes our hearts are small and stingy. Do we want to live from this expectation? Our hearts are as big as we allow to be.

Seek to increase the amount of compassion and caring you give. See if you run out of heart or energy. We can expand our heart to carry this additional compassion.

### Seek to learn what is our impact

To understand our impact on others, we must be more observant and ask others for feedback. We must pay greater attention to the expressions, tone of voice, non-verbal messaging of others and we must ask people for feedback on how we affected them. We can also seek to let others know what their impact is on us. As we get practice seeking this feedback and giving feedback to others, we can take responsibility for our actions and seek positive effects.

### Inspiration

We have the capacity to inspire and motivate others. How well have you been doing to motivate those around you? How much emotional energy do you spend persuading, inspiring and energizing those around you? If you are feeling tired and are unable to inspire, if your default way isn't working, try another approach. Try humor, try cajoling, try gentleness, try sadness, try apology, try gratitude.

As human beings, we are remarkably clever, and chameleon like. Have you utilized all your wiles, not to harm others but to inspire, motivate and cajole others to the positive behaviors and efforts you desire?

### Live in the Now

It's amazing how we miss the entire moment we are living in while we worry about the future or plan for the future. Living is not about the past or the future. It is about appreciating; noticing and observing the moment we are in right now. Nothing more. By living in the now, we can enjoy what shows up with each passing second. We are able to adjust more nimbly. We are able to laugh at the wondrous things that happen in each moment. We are able to ap-



preciate simply taking the next breath.

Consciousness/ Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the way to graduating from Class 101 to Class 202. It is about being aware of the nature of our human selves, being aware of how we interact and impact each other. It involves being conscious of the thoughts and voices in our own heads.

Consciousness of our own thoughts and feelings in the moment is a learned skill. We must practice to improve. There are many ways to get to mindfulness, through physical exercise, through yoga, through meditation, through observation. These are only some avenues.

**GRADUATION**

We can graduate to Class 202 and we can move beyond our caveman selves, but it takes an understanding of what humanity is really about and it takes a willingness to accept and live in harmony with the truths of being human.

In order to help you graduate to the next level and to take action on the ideas in this article, in the space below, write down at least one thing you will agree to do, to practice, to explore or learn more about in response to the ideas in this article:

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Judy Tso, MAA is an anthropologist, trainer, consultant and speaker and the founder of Aha Solutions Unlimited, a firm devoted to Solutions for Growth and Change. As a multi-disciplinary thinker, Judy has sought to combine knowledge from the fields of anthropology, business, creative problem solving, acting and coaching in order to help human beings discover their full potential. She holds a Master’s Degree in Applied Anthropology from the University of Maryland College Park and Bachelors degree in Economics from the Wharton School. She is trained in the Coaches Training Institute model of coaching and leadership and is walking the Shambhala path.



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