

Jet Stream

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Part 1

A lot of people around him were cheering when the U.S. military toppled down the Saddam Hussein statue in Baghdad. Some were even teary with seemingly sympathetic joy for the people of Iraq. However, Jack Amano was feeling extremely uneasy. Until then, he rarely felt that he was different. In almost all respects, he was just like anybody else around him. But this invasion did not at all seem right or just to him. To him, it was clear that the publicized “justification” was fabricated. This was a turning point for him.

Jack always thought that it was totally acceptable to use the military force for self-defense and to fight evil forces anywhere in the world. What would have happened if the U.S. had no role during the World War II? To him, this was a natural extension of the individual right of self-defense. However, it was different this time. The whole thing was a fake. It was crystal clear to him.

So, Jack started to read more about history. He learned about numerous mostly covert operations through financial and violent means throughout the world for thousands of years. These included all the horrible things done by the U.S. in Central and South Americas, the cruel use of military force to dissipate the Native American population in the U.S., etc. He thought that none of these are just wars.

Eventually, Jack even started to doubt if there is any just war. All the wars are full of negative consequences. He even started to think that there is no need for the military

forces. If other people hear this, they would call him a pacifist. In addition, he was shocked to find out that “[i]n fiscal year 2015, [the U.S.] military spending is projected to account for 54 percent of all federal discretionary spending, a total of \$598.5 billion.” He even started to doubt the notion of individual self-defense. He questioned himself, “Can we really defend ourselves with a weapon?” Of course, there is a chance that a stranger might shoot him for no reason. Could he *defend* himself in time, at all? What would be the best defense against evil forces ... of any kind? He couldn’t think of any good solution but one thing was clear to him. The use of force can never be the answer. This transition of his perception ignited all sorts of doubt about the mainstream ideas.



Just like most other people, Jack has been seeing a dentist regularly. Unfortunately, his dentist retired and Jack had to find a new one. Following the recommendation of a friend, he started to see Dr. Dreiner. During the first appointment, Dr. Dreiner asked Jack about health history. Jack mentioned his migraine headache since his high-school years. It was always on his left side. But this problem had never been adequately addressed or solved by his family doctor. Looking inside Jack’s mouth, Dr. Dreiner asked when the cavity on a lower left molar was fixed. It was during his high-school years. Then, Dr. Dreiner told Jack about the possibility of the amalgam filling being related to his migraine. Jack was really surprised but Dr. Dreiner’s explanation was convincing. The main ingredient of dental amalgam is mercury, a well-known poison.

It was unbelievable to Jack. Why would dentists use a poison to fix cavities? So, Jack agreed to have the amalgam removed and replaced with a composite filling. To his surprise, his migraine went away within a few days. When Jack learned that the American Dental Association (ADA) still declares amalgam safe, he was infuriated. He lost any confidence in this organization and its members. He was relieved to learn that Dr. Dreiner was not an ADA member. Dr. Dreiner himself felt offended by the position of the ADA. He could not stand that organization. Dr. Dreiner shared more terrible things about the mainstream dental care. For example, root canal treatment will never be able to fill miles of minuscule tubes, which will inevitably left untreated. These tubes, then, can be infected by all sorts of microbes. Another story was about fluoride, another poison. The story behind the inclusion of this poison in drinking water originated from a discussion of how to dispose of this industrial waste cost-effectively.

Dr. Dreiner is a dentist. Yet, he had to fight against many of his colleagues and professional organizations. He had also been threatened to lose his license. Jack felt sorry for him. He thought he was just lucky to know a dentist like Dr. Dreiner. Without his help, Jack would still be suffering from an unnecessary health problem.



A few years later, he had a dull pain in his lower abdominal area. Not having a primary physician, he went to the emergency room of a local hospital. It was appendicitis and he underwent appendectomy. The surgery was “successful.” Then, a few days after his discharge from the hospital, he felt ill again. It felt as if the appendicitis had been recurring. Of course, this was impossible; there was no appendix. X-rays didn’t show anything striking. So, he returned home.

However, the pain got worse and worse and he had to return to the emergency room. The doctors there were unable to pinpoint the cause. It was decided emergency surgery is needed. Then, the doctors found gauze in his body. Due to some nasty infections, he had to stay at the hospital for three weeks. In recent years, hospitals have improved their physical appearances. They look more like hotels. However, Jack didn’t enjoy the stay. He was just a “number” there; nobody really cared about him as a fellow human being. Since he couldn’t do anything productive there, he spent his time surfing the Internet casually. He even learned that medical errors are one of the top reasons for premature deaths. He could have been in the statistics.

Some of Jack’s friends suggested that Jack sue the hospital. But he didn’t follow their suggestions. Jack was becoming skeptical about the culture of suing. There are too many law suits and too many lawyers. Even though laws are supposed to protect people, it even became a tool for the privileged people to protect their wealth and status. Jack just didn’t want to start yet another law suit himself.

Not long after he was discharged from the hospital for the second time, he needed to visit another hospital. His grandmother broke her hip and had been hospitalized. She had been active but was already in her ninety’s. She lost appetite and was getting weaker. As a matter of fact, the physicians inserted to her a feeding tube. Despite its good intention, feeding tube caused a lot of unnecessary pain for his grandmother. It was also painful for all the relatives to see their grandmother suffer.

One day, Jack’s sister, Sybil, told him about her struggle with the school nurse. It was about vaccination. The school district requires that all the students be vaccinated, except for medical or religious reasons. Sybil is against vaccinating her son. This is based on her extensive research on vaccination, including reading a large number of CDC documents. According to the information she obtained, all sorts of vaccinations had been found to be neither effective nor safe. She learned that vaccination is not necessarily immunization. A strange thing is that the CDC still sets the vaccination schedule involving dozens of different vaccines. The CDC as a policy maker doesn’t seem to take advantage of their own research. Often, anti-vaxers are thought that they are against vaccination because of the suspected autism connection. Sybil didn’t share this point. And almost invariably, anti-vaxers are labeled as anti-science. Although Sybil is not a “scientist,” she is sufficiently intelligent to go through various scientific documents on her own. In fact, Sybil even considered a lot of

pro-vaxers as blind followers of *scienticism* (that is, science as religion).

Any way, Sybil tried to convince the school nurse about the issues with vaccination and get her son the exempt status. But Sybil's son doesn't fit in the district's exemption cases. So, the school nurse had to reject Sybil's request. When Jack heard this from Sybil, he had to question why the majority of people blindly believe the mass media and do not check the scientific research that documents a variety of issues with vaccination.

Jack had been taking nutritional supplements for some time. Until recently, he was taking multi-vitamins, calcium, and fish oil. Now, in his basement, there is a huge box of empty containers. He initially thought that they were recyclable. However, at least in his township and county, they are not. On the other hand, he was reluctant to throw them away. These bottles are well-made and seem to be useful. He also considered sending them to the third world for re-using as pill bottles. But not knowing the practicality of such a project, he hadn't done it.

The pile of supplement containers gave Jack a chance to reconsider the use of supplements. Being curious, he temporarily stopped taking them altogether. After several months, he got sick. So, he thought it was due to the lack of supplements. He resumed taking supplements. However, after another several months, Jack again stopped supplements. Since then, he had been supplement-free. As far as he could tell, there was no noticeable impact on his health. Of course, he gets sick once in a while. But he no longer associated it with not taking supplements. He wondered what he was doing. The pile of containers stopped growing, permanently.

After these events, he paid a little more attention to the health-related literature. He read about *Helicobacter pylori* in connection to gastric/duodenal ulcers. Once the medical community identified that this microbe is always associated with these ulcers, researchers declared that this microbe is the cause of the disease. However, *H. Pylori* is also present with a large proportion of the healthy population. Jack thought that this microbe alone cannot be the cause of these diseases. He also read about the Egoscue exercise. The set of exercises developed by Pete Egoscue are expected to improve various musculo-skeletal conditions, including hip and low-back pains. Some people were even able to avoid surgery by doing simple exercises. Jack wondered how many people are undergoing unnecessary surgery.

Another example was the work of Dr. Weston A. Price. Dr. Price was a dentist and traveled all over the world, especially where "primitive" tribes lived. The crucial point here is that these tribes did not have much contact with the modern, developed world. Dr. Price then discovered that the oral and physical health conditions of these people were excellent. Cavities and periodontal diseases were rare and their overall physical development was well-balanced. When part of these tribes started to contact the modern world, their health

conditions invariably deteriorated. It was an eye-opening story for Jack. Why didn't he know about this earlier?

Another important discovery of Dr. Price is the connection between oral health and general health. He organized a team of about two dozen researchers. His thorough research results clearly demonstrated this connection and pinpointed the impact of oral health to general health. The surprising part of this story is that the results were completely buried by the medical community, until another physician called Dr. George E. Meinig wrote a book based on Dr. Price's discovery. Jack couldn't believe it. Why did the medical community suppressed such valuable information in that manner? There must be similar things happening all the time. Did anyone had some financial stake?

Then, Jack read a story of Dr. Royal Rife and his cancer treatment machine. The medical community literally destroyed his discovery and machines. Jack was still unsure about the effectiveness of the machine. However, the pattern is the same; the medical community "killed" a seemingly successful treatment. Jack started to think that these are just tips of an iceberg. He could not eliminate the newly-emerging suspicion whether the medical community is truly trying to help patients.

If Jack gets really sick or seriously injured, what would he do? One thing that is getting clearer was that he can no longer blindly trust the medical community. He may well reject some of the commonly-held beliefs about medicine and health.



Jack had a fairly mainstream background with two advanced degrees, M.A. in Philosophy and Ph.D. in Linguistics both from the University of Pennsylvania. Everyone thought he had a bright future. However, when he tried to become a college professor at a research university, things didn't go so well. Although he applied for many tenure-track positions, none of the universities invited him for an interview. The reality hit him. Even with his reasonably good academic record, there was too much competition for a limited number of research positions in linguistics. So, he was forced to make some adjustment.

The next academic year, he applied for *teaching* (i.e., not research) positions, a "less desirable" course for many Ph.D.'s. This time, he considered a variety of language-related departments at smaller colleges. To his relief, he was finally hired as Assistant Professor of Modern Languages by the State University of New York at Deer Park. It is still a tenure-track academic position and he will still be able to enjoy an academic life.

For the first couple of years, Jack enjoyed his new life. He especially liked the flexibility of the new job and the opportunity to exercise his creativity. He became the faculty advisor of multiple student organizations, strengthened the department's internship program, and

joined several college-wide committees on various important issues. He spent an infinite amount of time for preparing his courses and checking students' work. He received very good student evaluations. In addition, the campus was close to a lot of peaceful spots between the Catskill Mountains and the Hudson River.

One day, his sister, Sybil, stopped by to see him. She needed to vent about her recent experience of taking a college course as an adult. She wondered how her brother was doing on the other side of the picture. Despite the effort which her professor was making to make his course interesting, she still felt that it didn't peek her interest. She started to question the fact that all the college courses are pre-designed by professors. She recalled that virtually all of her "good" learning experience was self-directed. Her natural interest in birds led her to her current career as a bird breeder. Even though the money is not so great, she simply loves what she does. She was also drawn into wind surfing to enjoy the power of wind ... when available. On the other hand, she hated pretty much everything that was given by someone else. For example, she was asked to take over Jack and Sybil's father's real estate business. But she had absolutely no interest. Jack had to agree; he had no interest either.

So, Sybil declared that college education, or the whole of education as normally considered, is useless because it's all pre-designed by teachers and other adults. There is very little room for students to develop their own self-directed attitude.

Jack was a little embarrassed. He is a professor and had never formulated that kind of thought. Unlike Sybil, he "liked" school and everything was natural. But after the conversation with Sybil, Jack started to pay more attention to his students' behaviors and minds. Then, he started to see "Sybil" in each student. The majority of college students, just like Jack himself, are used to and good at following instructions. But most of them are doing these things based on extrinsic motivation, not intrinsic motivation. That is, they do things because they have to do them for something else: grades, degrees, career opportunities, etc. This was disturbing.

One day, one of his advisee came to see him and admitted that he was suicidal. Jack was shocked. He had no idea what to do. However, after referring the student to the college's counseling service, Jack learned that the existence of a local suicide prevention hotline. Unable to erase the student's sad face, Jack contacted the organization and asked what they were doing. Soon, he started to take the hotline volunteer training and became a volunteer.

This experience changed his life. One of the most important skills for this volunteering work is "active listening." He needed to mostly listen to what the callers would say. It is important to ask questions that the caller is willing to elaborate. However, there is absolutely no place for giving advice or instructions.

Gradually, Jack applied the same principle during his conversations with students. It did not take too long to confirm Sybil's point. Jack's confidence in "education" started to crumble.

He wondered what exactly these students and also teachers were doing? Even though Jack was trying his best to “educate” his students, he started to doubt if his effort was meaningful. He started to think that he had to really “see” and understand his students before “designing” his teaching materials. What do these students need? He thought. Most of them don’t really like to study. Many of his students were pressured by their parents to achieve and get a “good” job. To escape from the pressure, many of them turned to alcohol and/or drugs. Some were seriously addicted to these substances and on a downward spiral.

It’s not just a few pieces. The whole thing about the current education establishment is dysfunctional. From kindergarten to college. And whenever adults get too creative, children and students suffer. According to Sybil, her son’s school had introduced a new carrot and stick approach, called Positive Behavior Support (PBS) or, alternatively, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Even though a lot of adults praise this approach, at least superficially, it’s just another way of manipulating children and students. And adults do not question what they are really doing. There is no place for children and students to voice their thoughts and feelings. Jack could not eliminate his fear of seeing more depressed and anxious students out of the PBS/PBIS program. Why don’t adults get it? They were all children once.

Jack used to go to many college sport events. Once he started to suspect the whole educational setting, this commercialized aspect of college business started to bother him strongly. This is seriously wrong. A lot of money is involved. But the whole “business” is not at all for *true* education.



What went wrong? Jack recalled the sad face of his suicidal students. Depression, anxiety, and addiction were rampant. He couldn’t blame his students. They were victims. Something is forcing them to feel and behave like that. To him, it was clear that his students receive an unduly amount of pressure from their teachers, parents, and society. That must be it. If we can relieve them from that pressure, they wouldn’t suffer like that.

Then, what is the source of the pressure? To Jack, it seemed this “good life” myth. Everyone wants to be successful. Naturally, people’s attention is on material wealth. Jack’s students want to be successful. Their parents pressure them. But why? The parents want successful retirement and their children must be able to support them. Usually, this means that their children must be sufficiently rich. Of course, they don’t say this out loud. Any way, the parents pressure their children to get a “good” job, to go to a “good” college degree, to have “good” grades at primary and secondary schools, etc. Students these days are told what to do and micromanaged by adults. They are like prisoners, worse than factory workers. No wonder, they need to resort to alcohol and drugs. Still, drug users, the victims, are being punished and not being helped (Jack heard that the situation is different in, e.g., Portugal).

No wonder, the suicide rate is rising. With some delusion, some young people even resort to violence. We cannot stop school shooting by hiring more armed officers. We need to tackle the source of the problem. The good-life myth is destroying children and students. Why don't people see this?

Once Jack got this much, the rest was rather straightforward. What we all need, especially the very young and very old, is unconditional love, not material wealth. Nevertheless, more and more of child and senior care is being handled through commercial enterprises. As long as such services are tied to material wealth, there won't be unconditional love. It seemed that everything was going wrong.



Once Jack became suspicious about the mainstream ideas, he started to see more and more. Jack's thought wandered to various other topics.

Here is one of them. When he was living in a basement apartment a few years ago, he had to deal with occasional flooding. It was extremely bothersome since he had to sponge the seeping water, say, every half an hour. When this happened at night. He almost became crazy. He asked the house owner to do something about it. The owner promised to install an additional sump pump near the affected area. However, this owner was not the kind of person who keeps promises. So, Jack continued to deal with more flooding incidences. Feeling powerless, he searched for some hints on the Internet. Then, he came to a profound realization. According to one posting, the problem is the grading around house. He also found that the water from the roof must be displaced as far away from the house as possible. As soon as he examined the grading around the house, he was convinced that the on-line information was right. The grading was not sufficient and the downspouts were dumping water right at the perimeter of the house. So, he bought two long downspout extensions and attached them at the end of the two downspouts closest to his basement room. He didn't mind spending a few dozen dollars. Then, his nightmare ended. After that, he still experienced some wetness when it rained, say, five inches overnight. But he never had to sponge water.

When he visited his friends, especially on a day with heavy rain, people often complained about their wet basements. Not just once, Jack shared his successful experience. However, to his surprise, almost everyone was stuck with the idea of installing additional sump pumps. Then, many of them also complained that there were occasions when their sump pumps didn't work due to the power outage associated with the storm. Jack always wondered why the mainstream people don't pay attention to the core of the problem. This is the mentality of many people. They are blind.

Then, he thought about the insurance and pharmaceutical industries. It's the money

involved in it. The tricky part is that *everyone* wants more money. So, if we are offered to get more, we would do whatever necessary, regardless of the potentially damaging things involved in the process. This is capitalism. But this is bad. We are screwing the medical system because of money. We are damaging the environment because of the money. Of course, Jack cannot tolerate communism and socialism as he observed in the history. But he strongly doubts the legitimacy of “capitalism” as normally perceived.

More and more, Jack realized that a lot of the things those pharmaceutical and insurance industries are doing to “people” are terrible. He couldn’t stand that pharmaceutical companies ghostwrite medical research papers so that their products appear more effective. He couldn’t stand that pharmaceutical companies pressure physicians to use their products even when adverse side effects are known. He couldn’t stand that health insurance companies control what hospitals and physicians can do. He read a book about Toms River. He couldn’t stand that pharmaceutical companies illegally dumped toxic waste on their sites or even on public lands. All of these are byproducts of capitalism. And virtually nobody around him question the issue underlying capitalism. He was more and more isolated from the mainstream thinking and people.

And of course, the mainstream ideas are being amplified with the power of modern tools. It may have started with agriculture and fire. But it went on to gunpowder, modern weapons, cars, airplanes, electricity, telephone, the Internet, and so on. It’s not that these technologies are bad. Jack just couldn’t eliminate the feeling that these technologies are abused.

So, Jack’s conclusion was as follows: the main underlying problem is the combination of capitalism (and other myths), the huge power of modern tools, and people’s inability to see things as they are. As long as both capitalism and mass blindness are the mainstream, the trend will continue. He just couldn’t stay with that.



Is there any anti-mainstream community Jack might feel comfortable? He actually tried to find one. Some such communities seem to be “fundamentalistic.” That is, they require blind faith in whatever they think is true. That’s not what Jack was looking for. So, the search was not really successful. He felt that he definitely needs to act but wasn’t sure how. Any way, it was impossible for Jack to continue as before. He suspended everything.



Part 2

Jack was living in a small apartment. So, it wasn't that difficult to get rid of most of his belongings. The last big item was his bed to be picked up by one of his friends. He lied down on the bed just one more time.

After the bed was taken, he took a bus, a train, and subway to the JFK airport. At the ticketing counter, he bought a one-way ticket to New Delhi. The attendant at the ticketing desk was slightly surprised because Jack had nothing to check in. He only had a backpack. After making a phone call to Sybil, Jack boarded. The aircraft flew away from New York eastward. This way, the aircraft can take advantage of the jet stream. By this time, Jack had been fed up with the mainstream and didn't mind getting on board the jet stream. During the fifteen-hour flight, a lot of thoughts came to his mind. It was almost like a dream.

Jack had been to a few countries outside the U.S. But this was the first time he came to Asia. It was the first time he was in a really exotic place. The New Delhi airport smelled different. Still, there was some sort of commonality between this and the JFK airport. Both were bustling with a lot of different kinds of people.

Now, Jack was completely free. He had no plan. He didn't even have a hotel reservation. So, he proceeded to the tourist information desk and inquired about hotels. He was adventurous enough to book the least expensive room available at the desk. With the hotel address in hand, he stepped outside the airport building. Luckily, English is one of the fifteen or so official languages in India and widely spoken. So, he asked multiple people on his way to the hotel. First, he took buses to the area where the hotel is located. He had to transfer once. Then, he walked about half a mile get to the hotel. It was in the middle of the old section of Delhi. Nearby, there were a lot of stores and other businesses. The street was full of people. It was a little like Chinatown in New York, but it smelled different.

The hotel was nothing like any others he had stayed in the past. There was a small handwritten sign outside. The front desk was more like a newspaper stand located in a crummy space on the ground floor of a two-story building. There were a lot of similar buildings connected to one another, just like row houses. Although Jack was initially taken aback a little, he proceeded and greeted the attendant. They asked Jack to fill out the guest registration and required the payment. Due to the exchange rate, the room rate seemed ridiculously low to Jack. He followed the attendant to his room.

The room was very small. To Jack's standard, it was anything but clean. The bed was made from thin metal pipes. There was a sort of mattress. But it was more like a few layers of blankets placed on wooden boards. There was a chair and a light bulb, nothing else. This

would be Jack's home for now. After a long flight, Jack slept very well that night. He didn't even mind the hard bed with a thin blanket.

The next morning, Jack was confused one moment. Where am I? What am I going to do? But soon, he came back to the new reality. It was December and the temperature gets fairly low at night in this part of India. But he had to wash his face with cold water. His breakfast was the leftover bread and butter from his in-flight meals.

When he went out, it was slightly chilly. Then, he saw some people wearing something like a shawl, poncho, or blanket. So, he went into a nearby store and bought one for himself. It made him warm and was a useful tool to wrap himself including his backpack. This could also prevent him from standing out as a western tourist.

The next thing Jack wanted to do was visit Gandhi's tomb. According to his guidebook, it was a little far. So, he took a bus and then walked about a mile. It was in the middle of a fairly spacious park. He just spent the day there, thinking about the next step. It was like a dream. He was completely alone in a far-away country, with absolutely nothing particular he *had to* do. He thought he left behind all the mainstream thoughts and practices he had been familiar with.

On the way back to his hotel, he got very hungry. He ate nothing since the breakfast. So, he stopped by a food stand and bought a few samosas and a cup of chai. Although he had eaten these items back in the U.S., these were a little different. The samosa was not as beautifully shaped but with full of delicate and pungent spices. He asked for some more samosas. He also liked the chai with a lot of fresh ginger. The seller crushed the ginger with a piece of wood in front of him and put it in the pot of boiled, sweet, milk tea with various spices.

After the snack, Jack strolled the busy part of old Delhi. It was very noisy. He wondered why the drivers honk the horn so much for no apparent reasons. He was a little critical about the driving manner as well. Many cars, motor cycles, and other types of vehicles were constantly operating under near-miss conditions. Nevertheless, he didn't see any accidents or ambulances.

Before returning to the hotel, Jack had a dinner at a nearby restaurant. He had a goat curry dish, naan, and tomato salad. Everything was quite simple but he enjoyed it. And it costed almost nothing, to his standard. But this must be because Jack was still converting the Rupees to the U.S. Dollars. He had no idea how much the city folks there were earning. When he left the restaurant, he noticed that a young boy was wiping washed dishes with a dirty cloth outside the restaurant. He felt that he shouldn't have had seen it.

When Jack came back to the hotel, he was fairly tired due to a lot of walking. So, even though there was absolutely no "usual" entertainment, such as cable TV or the Internet, it didn't matter. Soon, he fell asleep. Whether he had a dream, he didn't remember when he woke up the next morning.

Jack spent the next several days without any particular plan. He walked a lot in the city. He watched an Indian movie. Although he had some basic knowledge of Hindi (he got a Ph.D. in linguistics), he didn't have practical, communication skills in Hindi. So, he couldn't understand a word in the movie. Still, he got the idea. The story line was straightforward. There was a protagonist and an antagonist. There was a romance. There were actions. There were songs and dances. And with great effort, the protagonist predictably won at the end. It's Bollywood. At times, the movie goers cheered and booed. It was a moment for him to notice the Indian mainstream culture.

Jack went into a lot of stores: souvenir stores, clothing stores, bookstores, etc. But he bought nothing. He didn't need any. He was just curious about what people were buying. The section of the city he walked was not much modernized. But he knew that there are other sections where large shopping malls exist. He wasn't interested in those.



On the fifth day, Jack decided to leave the hotel and go to Varanasi, also called Benares, an ancient and sacred city. He arrived at the Delhi's main railway station. Unfortunately, only one ticketing window was open. A lot of people were waiting in a line. As if they try to prevent other people to cut in, the waiting people formed an enormous human chain with no space at all between them. So, Jack went to the end of the line and stuck himself right behind the last person, like everyone else. It took a while but people were very patient. The fastest trains to Varanasi would take about nine hours. Jack bought one third-class ticket and started to look for the platform. Since everything was labeled clearly in English, it wasn't too difficult for him to find it. He waited for the train to come.

At about the boarding time, there was an announcement. Although it was in English, he had difficulty understanding it. Then, people started to move. Sensing that there was something wrong, he asked a nearby person who was about to leave there. According to him, the train was delayed and the platform had been changed. Jack followed him to the newly-assigned platform.

About one hour later, the train finally came. There already were a lot of people on board. Luckily, Jack found a seat and sat there. It would be a long trip. So, he thought he'd better be prepared. He bought some snack, Pakora, but forgot to get something to drink. But there was no problem. When the train stopped at stations, there were vendors reachable from his window. So, he was able to buy chai and some more foods.

The train ride was a fresh experience for Jack. Soon after he left the New Delhi station, still within a part of the railway yard, he saw a man taking a shower from running water coming out of a leakage in a pipe higher than his height. It was a relatively cold morning. Once the train got outside Delhi, he saw people here and there squatting near the railroad track. At

almost every stop, he bought a cup of chai. At one time, the cup seemed to be made of mud. It was convenient because it returns to the mother earth right after a single use.

At a rural railway station at about the mid point, the train stopped. There was an announcement and everyone started to get off in a matter-of-fact manner. The only part he understood was that there was something wrong with the train. Noticing Jack, another passenger volunteered to explain the situation. The train has some mechanical problem. There will be no replacement. The passengers were asked to ride whatever train going through the station. Although Jack was not expecting this, he wasn't shocked either.

After several hours, when the daylight is disappearing, the next train came. Jack was taken aback. He couldn't tell if this was a dream. The train was full of people, in the cabins, on the door steps, and even on the roof. He was determined to catch this train but he was not sure if he could make it. Looking for some space to sneak in, he reached the end of the train. There was a small cabin where the conductor stays. With some hesitation, Jack asked the conductor what to do. The conductor examined Jack and realized that he was a foreigner. Foreigners are "out caste" or unclassified. The interesting consequence of this fact is that foreigners are treated somewhat kindly. The conductor shook his head sideways. By this time, Jack knew that it is a positive gesture. The conductor led Jack into his cabin. As soon as Jack went in, he noticed that the cabin was already practically full with several other people, all male. They were sitting on the floor. One person seemed to have some sort of physical and/or mental condition. He was looking nowhere in particular and didn't respond to any new stimuli. Jack had to stay standing in the middle of others.

After the train started, Jack thanked the conductor. As a sign of his appreciation, Jack handed a pack of cigarette to the conductor. The conductor thanked Jack and passed it among the people in the cabin. Some thanked Jack in English and some said something in other languages, which Jack couldn't understand. Then, the people shifted slightly and made some room for Jack to sit on the floor.

The conductor asked Jack where he was going and what he was going to do. Jack said that he was going to Varanasi and wanted to spend some quiet time there. He briefly mentioned that he was fed up with the mainstream thoughts and practices in the U.S. He said that this would be a trip to find out what he can and should do. To this, a middle-aged man with a gigantic mustache responded. "What are you trying to find? Even if you do not like it, there are many rules in this world. If you cannot deal with those rules, you are just wasting your time." Then, an old man in a white shirt started to talk. "I think you are right that too many people are just blindly following rules. I do not know if you can find something useful. But I think it is worth trying. A big mustache does not necessarily mean a big brain." By this, the Mustache was certainly offended. "You, old idiot! I am a graduate of a college. I have read many books and learned all the rules of the world. You just cannot make fun of my mustache." The White Shirt responded, "I apologize for making fun of you. I am sorry. But can you tell us what all those rules are good for?" The Mustache was not at all satisfied with the apology. "You do not really understand how this world works? Without rules, we will

certainly disintegrate into an enormous chaos. The rules hold the world in order. If you insult me again, I will kick your skinny body out of this train.”

At this point, the conductor intervened. “Order, please. The elderly has offered an apology. Let it go, Sanjay. Nobody in this chamber will be thrown out of here.” Nobody talked after that. They were silent for the rest of the journey, which took more than four hours before reaching Varanasi. It was after midnight.

As Jack was leaving the train, he thanked the conductor again. He also greeted the White Shirt. The White Shirt responded, “Good bye, my friend. If you do not have a particular place to go in Varanasi, you can visit one of my friends. He runs a meditation center. He will probably be able to help you.” The white shirt wrote the center’s address and left.

Since Jack was not comfortable venturing into an unknown city at night, he sat on the bench and waited till the next morning came. Eventually, he lay down and got some sleep.



As the white shirt suspected, Jack didn’t have any place in mind. Actually, meditation seemed to him exactly what he needed at the moment. So, as soon as the sun rose, he started to walk to the meditation center. As usual, he needed to ask for help on his way. He probably walked about two miles. But by this time, he got used to walking. The meditation center was on a busy street near the Ganges river, called Ganga by the local people. When Jack showed the piece of paper, the host noticed the name written in Hindi and nodded. After learning that Jack doesn’t have a place to stay, the host introduced an inexpensive hostel near the center.

So, first, Jack settled in the hostel. He was assigned the top of a bunk bed in a shared room. There is no privacy. But he didn’t mind. He left his belongings on the bed and returned to the meditation center right away. The host of the center explained how it is organized. The host is actually from Burma. The practice he offered was a version of Buddhist meditation. On the wall, there was a daily schedule. Seven days a week, there are 45-minute sitting meditation and 15-minute walking meditation alternately. There are several intervening breaks, including the breakfast, lunch, and evening tea. There is a talk/discussion session after the tea. The visitors and members were free to take part in any of the activities. Everything is free but donations are welcome. The host and experienced members are willing to provide introductory sessions for newcomers and help sessions for others as needed.

So, Jack received some basic instructions on meditation and how to spend time there. At first, the 45-minute sitting session was too long. His legs would become painful and go asleep. So, he stopped in the middle. He was told to use the breath as the anchor but not to

force his mind to focus on the breath exclusively. Rather, he was told to observe his mind carefully, especially when it is distracted, and take mental notes. This, he tried. At first, his mind fluctuated among many things and he even didn't notice that fact. Experienced meditators called such a state of mind as "monkey mind."

Between sitting meditation sessions, Jack also practiced walking meditation. He was told to pay attention to every aspect of his feet. First, he stands on his feet. He notices that the feet maintain the balance in an intricate way. When he starts walking, very slowly, he notices one of the feet being lifted, moved forward, and touching the ground. Then the balance shifts to the other foot. The point of this practice to develop the ability to monitor his body in a dynamic way. So, when he hears sounds, sees something, or smells various smells, he just notices those and return his attention to his feet.

Whether doing sitting or walking meditation, Jack was easily distracted. Even inside the meditation center, there are a number of things that can get his attention. At first, he felt that he was not making a progress. He hears the second hand of someone's watch ticking. His mind raced. Why on earth does he need to wear that loud watch? Isn't he bothered? Maybe, he has attained a sufficient level of concentration and he doesn't even hear it. After all sorts of thinking, he realized that he was completely away from the breath. It was like that all the time.

But after about a week of practice, Jack gradually came to notice distractions more and more frequently. By itself, it was a learning of a significant kind. After learning how to follow distractions, he was actually able to keep attention to the breath, longer and longer. He counts the breath, one (for inhaling), two (for exhaling), three (for inhaling), ..., eight (for exhaling), then starting all over. When his counting is distracted, he notices it and returns his attention to counting. The duration of distractions became shorter and shorter. Gradually, he was able to count several sets of eight without substantial distractions.

After about a month of practice, Jack developed a decent level of concentration. He can count the breath for any number of times. He still notices various sensations. But they no longer "distracts" him from his practice. He can return to the breath right away.

Then, Jack learned a technique called "body scan." This is a way to pay attention to every part of his body in a systematic manner. He begins from the left toe, then moves to the left foot, left thigh, left knee, etc., doing the same for the right leg. He scans both arms, the body and all the internal organs, the neck, then all the parts of the head. At certain points, he feels tenderness. He just makes a note of that. This practice increased his sense of himself tremendously. Back in the U.S., he had never paid attention to his body in this manner. He wondered: the lack of attention to our own bodies might be the number one cause of illness and unnecessary injuries.

Probably, the best thing Jack gained during the first month of meditation training was his increased ability to be aware of many things more clearly. He always thought he was aware

of himself pretty well. But only after this practice, he truly realized how much he was missing. With this realization, it became easier to establish an appropriate pattern and rhythm for his own practice.

The experience at the center was not complete without meals and chores there. Jack ate all the meals there. They were very simple but he enjoyed the simplicity. He felt that he actually *tastes* the meals. Each meal was eating meditation. Some times, it was actually he who prepared the meal. In addition, he did various kinds of chores including cleaning and fixing structures. Since the building was very old, there were constant needs of fixing.

At that time, the meditation center had about two dozen regular members. One of the them was a Japanese. He was always wearing a pair of black short pants. One day, Jack had a chance to talk to him. They introduced to each other. The Blank Pants said to Jack, “Hai, Jack Amano san neh. That is interesting. In Japanese, the order of the first and the last names are reversed. So, I would call you Amano Jakku san, instead. Then, that sounds like *ananojaku*, which means a nonconformist or non-mainstreamer.” Jack couldn’t think of any better meaning to his name. So, he responded, “Yup. That’s me.” But other than that short interaction, Jack didn’t talk much with other members.

The Blank Pants told him that he came to India because he was attracted to spiritual paths. After trying a large number of different approaches, the Blank Pants was pursuing the center’s Buddhist approach. He said he also tried Yoga meditation in the Himalayas. He was not comfortable with it because the final destination was to be united with God. He does not believe in any god. So, the approach of this center was a better fit for him. He said he may not go back to Japan.

“Why?,” asked Jack. The Blank Pants said that he lost everything. He was divorced by his ex-wife. Of course, to him, she was everything. Jack felt sorry for him.

Jack stayed at the meditation center for several months. The new way of life was becoming his norm. He was quite comfortable with his meditation practice as well. His concentration had deepened. He could stay with the breath as long as he wished. His mindfulness had deepened. He could stay with his mind wherever it goes. When his mind is settled and clear, he feels good. But he knows this objectively and is not being carried away. He can maintain that mental state as long as he wants. In other words, he gained the basic meditation skills.

During this time, Jack still thought about his position against the modern mainstream life style. He felt that it was right for him to have gained his insight. Thanks to this insight, he is constantly forced to face the reality. He was able to avoid being absorbed with somebody else’ ideas. He also felt sorry for those who blindly follow the mainstream. However, he still felt uncertain with respect to what he can do and should do. He thought he needed to move to the next step. He decided to explore Deer Park in Sarnath.



Leaving the meditation center and the hostel, Jack started to walk in the direction of Deer Park. It is in the outskirts of Varanasi. It was the place where the historical Buddha gave the first sermon. Many Buddhists still make pilgrimage there.

Although Jack learned a Buddhist meditation method, he didn't consider himself a Buddhist. He still didn't know much about the religion. It was not his interest. Nevertheless, Deer Park seemed an attractive place to visit or stay. As his meditation experience deepened, Jack actually thought about a series of prolonged outside retreats. He wanted to challenge his own mental capacity.

After about two hours of walk, Jack arrived at Deer Park. Walking around the park, he found a place to stay. It was one of the guest houses located just outside the park. The room he was given had a dozen beds on the floor. Probably, the best description of it was a homeless shelter in the U.S. But that did not matter to Jack. By that time, he was used to that kind of setting. And, of course, his main interest is the retreat. For that matter, Deer Park was a perfect place. There were plenty of trees to sit under.

So, this is the way Jack started to spend his days at Deer Park. He eats a simple breakfast at the guest house. The walk to "his" tree takes only about fifteen minutes. It was walking meditation. He sits under the tree and meditate about one and half to two hours at a time. Between two sitting sessions, he does a brisk walking meditation. Then, he goes to a nearby Thai temple to eat a free lunch. Still, he gives some donation. In the afternoon, he returns to the tree and has two sitting sessions and one walking session in between. Before returning to the guest house, he strolls around the park. He goes to bed without eating in the evening.

Initially, the new environment for meditation practice was a challenge for Jack. Being outside, he had to endure the elements. It can get very hot at this time of the year, even under the enormous tree. He had to live with mosquitoes as well. Surely, he was bitten uncountably many times a day. Naturally, the bites were itchy. But his meditation practice by this time had prepared him for this. He didn't have to scratch. Of course, he felt itchy and made a note of it. Then, he was able to let it go. If this was at the beginning of his meditation career, it must have been intolerable. A funny thing is that the number of mosquito bites decreased over time. Jack thought that this might have to do with also practicing the *metta* meditation, which is the Buddhist-style loving-friendliness meditation. Usually, this kind of meditation is directed toward the meditator himself *and* everyone else. He thought of his family, friends, and strangers. But he also included mosquitoes among them.

Then, it was the beginning of the rainy season. His spot under the tree was on a higher ground. So, he was able to avoid the water, which almost flooded the surrounding areas. Still, it was becoming increasingly difficult to get to his spot. He had to walk through a

number of puddles. And his only umbrella was suffering from broken rims. Often, he was completely drenched. But he was able to handle this as well. During the first session of meditation, his wet clothes get dry.

About a month into the new meditation practice, Jack was improving. Fairly soon after starting to sit, his concentration and mindfulness develop deeply. He still hears sounds. But he is not distracted by them. He feels a flow of delightfulness. He maintains his peacefulness. His mind is steady. But he also is fully aware of the state of his mind. He can stay in that state for a long time. He ends a session equally gracefully. His keen sense remains after meditation sessions.

Jack felt that he gained a new, powerful tool for his new life. He can see things more clearly. He can see things without being overwhelmed by his past experiences. He can see things without fear, even the fear of death. At least, he felt that way.



One day, while Jack was strolling around Deer Park, he saw a woman. He felt that he had never seen a woman as beautiful as she. She was alone and was struggling to go through puddles. Jack approached her and offered his hand. After he helped her maneuver the most difficult areas, she thanked him and left.

Jack knew that he was immensely attracted to the woman. After all, she was incredibly beautiful. He felt that a certain desire was being born within him. He wanted to get closer to her. He even imagined a time with her and developing a relationship with her. However, as all these thoughts and feelings were emerging, Jack was able to track them very clearly. Now, it was just like when he was following various sensations in his body during a session of body scan meditation. He was aware but was not possessed by his sensations. Jack smiled. He was still himself, but a different kind of himself.

Deer Park is full of people from all over the world. There are many Buddhist pilgrims. There are many tourists. And some of them are just like Jack, practicing their own way of life. There also are many homeless mendicants. Most of them mainly approach tourists. Jack too was occasionally asked for donation. Jack tried to see them in the eye but had not given them any money. He was not sure what exactly he should do. While Jack still has some money left, he may eventually become a broke like them. In the future, he may be among them. What can he do to them? What can he do to the future self? At this point, only one thing is clear. He is not afraid of uncertainty. With his improved meditation experience, he gained some confidence that he could handle future challenges. Maybe, these homeless people have already gone through what Jack is just going through. They may be able to deal with greatest challenges.

Even though Jack doesn't have a clear answer to his own questions, he stayed calm. The world is full of challenges. He started to see things clearer. At this point, he wants to continue his meditation practice.



About three months later, the rainy season finally ended. As always, Jack was sitting under the tree. All of sudden, he heard someone shout, "Jack!" He was in a fairly deep meditation. But the way he meditates is not to shut down all the senses. He hears sounds and is aware of that. Normally, he returns to the stable state right away. However, this sounded urgent. So, he opened his eyes. He was so surprised to see his sister, Sybil. He thought he was dreaming. "Sybil! What are you doing here?" To this, Sybil didn't answer and said, "What are YOU doing here? Didn't you think about your family at all? We are all so, so worried."

Jack felt really bad. It was not his intention to cause such a trouble. He called Sybil when he was leaving the U.S. And he really thought that he was on an extended vacation. "Sybil. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to." "You didn't?" Sybil was still upset. "You don't understand what you did?" There was an awkward silence.

"Anyway, I'm so glad to see you, Jack." Jack responded to Sybil, "So am I. I have always been thinking of you. You know, I've been meditating. Every morning, I start my meditation by thinking of everyone that crossed in my path. Of course, my family are the first people I think of during that meditation." Sybil seemed a little relieved.

"By the way, Sybil, how did you find me?" Sybil held a breath. "It's a long story." Then, Sybil told Jack about the search. Here is what she told Jack.

I became more and more concerned as the time passed. After six months, I went to the Deer Park police department. You know, Deer Park by the Hudson, not here in India. I filed a police report claiming that you are missing. Of course, I remember your last phone call. You said you were traveling for some extended duration. I remember the background noise. There were flight announcements. Some of them were in foreign languages. So, I was convinced that you were going abroad.

So, the police couldn't do much but told me to contact the Department of State. The State Department was not particularly helpful at that time. They took the information I provided and said that they cannot do much unless the "missing" person allows them to do. Isn't it ridiculous? Of course, this is due to the privacy regulations. But how could a missing person ask for such a thing?

So, I went to the JFK airport and visited all the airlines. I couldn't get any information, although I knew that the information was somewhere, a few mouse clicks away. They all

mentioned the privacy regulations. I felt hopeless.

Then, after a few months, I was surprised by a phone call from the State Department. They told me that the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi had recovered your passport in Varanasi. Since you didn't contact the embassy, they didn't know what to do. There is no consulate near where the passport was recovered. When the information was forwarded to the State Department, they matched the information with my report and reconsidered the case as "emergency." That's why they contacted me. However, they had no further information and was unable to do anything more.

Since I was so much worried about you, I decided to find you by myself. I flew to New Delhi and visited the U.S. Embassy. Just about that time, the embassy received a copy of the local police report associated with the passport recovery. On the report, there was the name of the person who possessed your passport. The person's address was listed as "Central Jail, Varanasi."

I was taken aback. But this is the only link to you. So, I flew to Varanasi and visited the jail. I met the the person. He was a very short, skinny person with very sad eyes. He did not at all look violent. He was charged for stealing goods at a hostel. He told me where this hostel is.

So, I hurried to the hostel. I really hoped that you were there. But you weren't. After learning about the meditation center, I visited there as well. You weren't there either. But someone there told me that you had left for Deer Park in Sarnath. So, I took a cab and rushed to this Deer Park, half the globe away from the other one in New York. But once I'm here, the park is not as big as the city of Deer Park on Hudson. So, I didn't think that it would be terribly difficult. But I took a while to finally find you. When I saw you meditating under this tree, I wasn't sure if it was you. You looked so different: thinner and with mustache and beard. But you can't fool your own sister. I'm so glad to see you. Not just once, I feared that I would never see you again or see you dead.

Sybil stopped and took a breath. Jack stayed silent for a while and said, "I'm so sorry, Sybil. It was never my intention to cause you this trouble. I was really thinking about taking an extended break. But it is actually taking long. I still need to continue this path to find out something very important for me. Yes, I realized that I lost my passport. But I didn't want to interrupt my path at that point and neglected to report the incidence to the embassy."

"Jack, I only have one more day here. The day after that, I will need to fly back to New Delhi and then to New York." Then, Sybil seemed to be thinking for a while and said, "Until the time I leave here, I want to see just how you spend your days here. I will try not to disturb you. I will follow you wherever you go and observe whatever you do. I just want to make sense of what you are doing."

Jack seemed a little hesitant at first. But eventually, he agreed. Sybil followed Jack the rest of that day and the whole day next day. In the evening, Sybil returned to her hotel. The last

day, at the beginning of the first morning meditation, Sybil had to leave for the airport. They hugged tightly and parted. Sybil was crying. Jack didn't know what to say. When he started the meditation session, he noticed that his mind was still agitated. Many scenes from his past came up. He wondered if he thought of Sybil as much as she thought of him. When both of them were kids, Sybil once rescued an injured bird and helped it regain the strength to fly away. One day, Sybil asked Jack to feed the bird while she was out. For no apparent reason, Jack didn't say yes. So, Sybil had to take the bird with her. Still, she came to see Jack.

Even with those recollections during the meditation session, Jack continuously returned to his breath. Paying attention to his memory is also a good practice. He gained good insight about what his past was.



Several more months passed. Another winter came. It was getting cold. But Jack kept up with the same routine. But one day, probably due to the weather, Jack caught a cold. He had to stay in bed for a few days. After feeling better, he resumed his practice. However, he got sick again. He knew something was wrong with his body. By this time, he had developed a keen sense of what was going on inside. But he didn't go to a doctor or take medicine. He just rested. He started to lose weight and strength.

Even during this time, Jack "meditated" ... in bed. Naturally, it was a different kind of meditation. He didn't have the usual physical strength to develop the level of concentration and mindfulness we was able to gain earlier. Nevertheless, he was able to pay sufficient attention to his body and mind. Even though he didn't know exactly what was happening inside his body and what was causing it, he noticed that his body is deteriorating at an alarming rate. He was not fearful. He was even peaceful. He didn't regret that he was not able to "accomplish" much in the "mainstream" sense. He had a sense that he actually *did* accomplish what he could and should have done. He thought, "when we die, we can't bring anything with us. No money, no fame, no status, neither friends nor family, truly nothing. We will all return to the mother earth and contribute ourselves to the future world."

With his remaining strength, Jack tried to write a letter to Sybil, telling her that he is seriously ill and will never see her. But his strength expired before writing the address. So, the letter was never mailed. With the letter in his hand, he lost consciousness. There was no pain.



Part 3

Then, Jack opened his eyes. He was sitting in a meditation position in his apartment in Deer Park. That is, Deer Park, New York. When he checked his phone, it was the same day he left for New Delhi. “Was it a dream?” It felt as if he traveled back to his apartment on the jet stream. Then, Jack realized that he was wearing exactly the same clothes as he was wearing in Deer Park. That is, Deer Park in Sarnath. He was also wrapped in the shawl/poncho/blanket. He had mustache and beard. He even had the final letter to Sybil in his hand. His conventional wisdom was not at all useful for understanding what had happened and was happening. This seemed impossible to happen in just a few hours.

However, Jack was not really surprised. He accepted his experience as it was. He thought that truth might well defy time and place. His mind was as clear as it could be.

Then, there was a phone call. It was from Sybil. She sounded really excited, “Jack! I had a strangest dream. I was in class this afternoon. I had never fell asleep in class. It was the first time. In the dream, you left for a long trip. With great difficulty, I traced you in India. This was because the State Department recovered your passport. I went to India and found you meditating in a park. It was too real. How are you doing?”

Jack responded quietly, “Hi, Sybil. You don’t need to believe me or your dream. But it actually happened.” There was a moment of silence. Then, Sybil said, “What?!” She couldn’t continued. So, Jack continued, “If you think that it was a dream, I had basically the same dream. I went to India and you came to see me. I remember all the details. And I now look exactly like when I was in India. Just come and see me. I want to see you anyway.”

Jack added, “The reality is that virtually everyone is living in a sort of ‘dream’ not a real life. We just don’t realize it.”

When Sybil came to Jack’s apartment, she couldn’t believe what she saw. The apartment was completely empty, as if Jack was moving out at this moment. Jack was sitting on the bare floor in the half-lotus position. He was a lot skinnier than when Sybil saw him the last time. He had mustache and beard. He was wearing the same clothes and was wrapped in a blanket as she remembered from the dream. And he was holding a crumpled letter in his hand. Still, it was Jack. They embraced each other tightly. They sat there for a while without a word.

“Now, what are you going to do?” Sybil opened her mouth. “Well, I am leaving the apartment anyway. I don’t really know what exactly I am going to do. But I know that I don’t need to go anywhere very far ... any more. Anyway, let’s get out of here and eat

something.”

So, Sybil and Jack went out and had an early dinner. They bought sandwiches and sat in a nearby park. Then, they walked a while. After about half a mile, Jack stopped in front of a homeless shelter. He recalled the homeless people around Deer Park in Sarnath. He said, “Sybil, I’m going to stay here for now.” Sybil couldn’t believe it. Until just a few hours ago, Jack was a professor at the State University there. Now, he says he is becoming a homeless. But this was not the biggest surprise for her today. Regardless the difficulty, Sybil accepted Jack and whatever he was going to do. She was certain that Jack definitely had a moment of awakening. They hugged tightly. Then, Sybil walked back to where she parked her car.



Jack went into the shelter and greeted the staff there. They welcomed Jack and led him inside. One of the staff was his student. She said to Jack, “Hello. Ah ..., you remind me of one of my professors.” To this, Jack simply smiled. He was becoming invisible ... like the air we breathe.

