



The
EGOSYSTEM

a synopsis of the human condition

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A PREVIEW OF THE EGOSYSTEM

A Synopsis of the Human Condition

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PREVIEW - NOT A SALE

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Preface

Appreciate the effort that you are putting in to improve your life. The fact that you intend to read this book to improve your self-awareness confirms that you are invested in wanting to make things better. Improving the world for yourself and for those around you is the most fulfilling endeavour you will ever undertake. Believe it or not, it remains fulfilling even at times when it is not appreciated because the knowledge of having improved someone's life because of your unique contribution remains a piece of success that no one can take from you.

This book is not intended to be read in one sitting. If you manage to do that, and absorb the insights and perspectives that it offers, then you have earned my deepest respect. It is not a complicated book per se. It appears complicated to many because it challenges the norms that rule our lives. You may find it necessary to read a seemingly simple statement more than once just to confirm that where you expected the statement to lead is in fact contrary to what was your assumption. This is not a cause for concern. It simply means that your perspectives are being challenged in ways that you are not used to, and more importantly, it means that you were not fully aware of the assumptions that you were making around that point.

Understanding your needs, recognising your assumptions, embracing your fears, mastering your behaviours, honing your responses, and establishing more informed perceptions about the world are all outcomes that will naturally result from your time reading this book. It does not provide you with exercises to do, or mantras to repeat to achieve the changes that will reduce the dis-ease that you may feel. Instead, it simply makes you aware of why you respond to life the way that you do, which in turn prompts the natural curiosity and intelligence of the mind to make conscious choices to either accept who you are, or to change the cycle if you prefer to be better.

It is not a book to be read once and then set aside. Instead, my hope is that it will be a book that will become a companion to reference from time to time to remind yourself about why you may not be as effective as you would like to be, or perhaps a reminder as to why others behave in ways that defy logic. Either way, it is not a self-help manual, nor is it a manual to be able to make others more predictable. It is only through our knowledge of ourselves that we will be able to relate to and understand others. It unpacks in a non-threatening way our self-defeating behaviours, and lays bare our defence mechanisms that often hold us back in life.

This book will not impose an outcome or define what your reality should be. Instead, it will make you aware of your reality and offer you insights that will empower you to choose whether you wish to live with the way things are, or to change it. The power always was, and always will be yours and yours alone.

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Introduction to the Egosystem

Let me never fall into the vulgar mistake of dreaming that I am persecuted whenever I am contradicted.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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People have often accused me of expecting too much from them. I disagree. I think that people expect too little from themselves. We are often so focused on defending ourselves from being the perceived victims of circumstances, and others around us, that we fail to protect ourselves from becoming victims of ourselves. In a world that we have engineered to create victims for new opportunities for profit, the abrasive mind-set that it spawns quickly sets the tone for how we perceive our worth relative to the world around us. I used to think that I interacted with various ecosystems as I worked my way through life, or simply through an average day, but the more I live, the more I realise that it is the *Egosystems* that drive the events around me rather than any ecosystem I previously perceived.

The Egosystem is the sum-total of how we respond to daily encounters with others, relative to how we perceive ourselves. It is most prominent when we respond through instinctive reflexes rather than conscious and purposeful action. Instinctive reflexes are a result of years of habit-forming assumptions that we eventually grow to believe is our innate nature. We grow to believe that it is who we are and are therefore more likely to believe that we cannot change or control it.

The Egosystem is what causes us to grow defensive in the face of opposition, where we feel persecuted or offended if our opinion is rejected; or we feel attacked or aggrieved when we are unsuccessful at soliciting the attention that we desire.

When we fail to recognise the Egosystems at play, we inevitably get drawn into it and find ourselves trying to defend our contribution in a space that is already dominated by the egos of others. There is no value that can be offered in such a setting. You either play to the egos that you are surrounded with, or you disrupt. When you play to it, you become the disrupted and inevitably find yourself toeing the line to a tune you did not choose. But toeing the line offers inclusion and a hint of acceptance, which is comforting at a superficial level. This is not limited to our social circles though, and in fact, more prone to exist in our professional circles where almost everything becomes a measuring contest. When you disrupt that space, you create opportunity to challenge the status quo, and to prompt others into a state of mindfulness rather than blind tradition.

We are all capable of being morons, so we should not celebrate a successful moron because there are too many principled fools that fell because of the moron's manipulations. But principled fools do not seem to garner much respect either because they appear naïve or foolhardy in their convictions. It is therefore not surprising that there is not much respect in this world, let alone respect for the world we live in. The ecosystem of earth is contaminated by the Ecosystem of us, but we seem to be looking for answers everywhere but within.

We complicate life when we present ourselves in a way that does not reflect an informed view of who we are, nor the convictions that we internally subscribe to. Mindfulness is what is needed if we hope to recognise those moments when we are about to step on that slippery slope presented by our egos. But mindfulness itself, or even its pursuit, often leaves us distracted in our contemplation of what is needed to be mindful.

I do not think I am alone in such fickleness of focus. At one time when presenting this to a very curious but vocal audience, we had a lengthy debate about whether fear preceded needs, or vice versa. Fear is a response to a situation, and therefore cannot be held accountable for the needs that we have. The innate needs that drive us, like wanting to be seen as competent, feeling significant, feeling appreciated, or being liked by others to name a few, is what prompts our fears in the face of how we wish to be perceived by those around us. Our fears stem from our perception of the probability of the fulfilment of the needs that drive us. The greater our belief in the probability of it being fulfilled, the less likely we are to grow aggressive, or to feel threatened when those needs rise to the surface.

Therefore, our beliefs guide our perceptions about our ability to solicit the opinions that we wish others would have of us. As an example, if I want to appear competent in a specific setting, I need to convince myself that I am at least well-read on the subject matter being discussed in that setting. If I doubt my competence on the subject but still want to be perceived as competent, I would be evasive, defensive, or downright bullish in that setting at the slightest hint of being challenged or having my lack of knowledge exposed. This is simply because if my lack of knowledge is exposed, it would undermine my need to be perceived as competent. In other words, if I do not know, but do not want others to know that I do not know, I will become defensive to prevent anyone from taking advantage of my weakness. Simple, right? Probably not.

But this all still sounds more complicated than it really is. The truth is that we need to embrace the fact that we are attention whores by default. The ethics and principles with which we seek such attention is what makes us either whore-ish or noble. It is the same for all our interactions with society and the prevailing norms. If we act within the socially accepted norms, we are embraced or at the least, tolerated. If we do not, we are isolated, or ridiculed, or simply dismissed when we try to contribute. Unless we are entertainers, in which case we are celebrated for anything but being human or normal. That absence of having our humanness recognised and appreciated is what has led many celebrated personalities to self-destruction. The question then arises as to whether our convictions in our views is stronger than our need for inclusion. When our convictions prevail over our needs, we change the world. When our needs drive our convictions, we become attention whores.

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A Collection of Essays

While trying to keep the Egosystem as practically relatable as possible, I recognise that it is not always easy to connect it to your specific circumstances. Over the years I compiled over a thousand essays that describe my personal journey of introspection and self-awareness. I have taken a few that closely resonate with the themes in the Egosystem and include them here for your reference. I trust that our common struggles for purpose and understanding will allow you to find comfort, and perhaps insight in my thoughts and realisations, and that it will allow you to tangibly connect to the value offered in the Egosystem.

Achieving mindfulness is a lifelong journey that never ends. Be careful about having an expectation of achieving a state that defines a point of arrival in your journey. Each milestone reached simply opens a more rewarding and fulfilling opportunity to create and achieve even more. That is the enchantment that life offers us. Never stop learning. Never stop growing. The beauty of being human is only limited by our desire to seek more beauty than we have already seen.

Remember, however, that only a grateful heart perceives beauty, while an ungrateful heart will only see opportunity to exploit an experience to increase their stature or solicit pity in the eyes of others. Courting the admiration of others will harm your journey of self-discovery. Avoid it. Do not go out seeking love or acceptance. Do what you love, and your love for it will attract the love of those that also love what you do.

Live with conviction, and love with sincerity.

Finding My Way

The anguish you feel when you are embarking on something important, or at least want to, and there is a room full of no one that you can use as a sounding board.

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At times, I sit back and wonder how many others become complacent about their misery by convincing themselves that if anyone else had been contending with what they must deal with, they would fall to pieces or kill themselves. I am guilty of the same self-destructive smugness. I look at the problems of a teenager reeling from the betrayal of lustful love threatening never to love again – wanting to destroy themselves and everyone in the process – and I smile. That same smug smile that leads to me forgetting how relative everything is. Just because I have endured more in quantity does not imply that the intensity of my agony was any greater than theirs.

Somehow, I need this insensitive comparison to make myself feel better about my own self-loathing. I sway from being convinced that I deserve nothing better to believing that I am just too amazing to be discovered by mediocre meddlers. That is really what many people are. Meddlers. They meddle in various aspects of their lives, looking for inspiration, but never committing to anything because they are waiting for someone to appreciate them first. The excess we commit in our natural disposition as social beings is in our penchant for wanting to feel loved before we love, being appreciated before we express gratitude, or receiving before we consider giving.

I once heard someone say that a veil exists between this world and heaven. I think that our struggles, our principled endeavours and our consistent striving towards our noble ambitions is what tears away at that veil. If you do not believe in heaven, then consider that veil to be all that prevents you from achieving your utopian ideals, whatever they may be. Your search for inspiration must never abate.

Waiting for the calm, for the ease or the breather between life's throes will always be a futile exercise. There is always just one more thing before I should be at ease. Always one more thing I need to do or get out of the way, or one more thing that needs to be achieved. If only I can just get past this or just get that resolved, then I will be able to focus on what I need to, or rather want to focus on. But I suspect that this same cycle of insanity is what causes people to lay in their death beds wondering where they lost sight of what was important.

The philosopher's view of life is insensitive, although often truthful. Philosophy is often a cold comfort in the face of dis-ease. It is the kind of uneasiness that rears its ulcerous head when my energy levels are lowest, and

the brain clutter is highest. It is the burden of being conscious. Not awake. Conscious. Aware. It is tiring. Even when nothing is wrong, the realisation of how little it takes to make everything go wrong nags like an annoying itch that cannot be reached because it is in between the skin and the bone, but not quite in either and scratching it only causes it to flare, but rarely to abate.

That is reality. That annoying bit between the head and the heart that cannot be fully rationalised, nor fully dismissed.

My life is less than ordinary. It always has been. I always imagined ordinary to be a normal home, with a normal family, normal parents, with general growing pains and the usual social circles to round it all up. Children that have a healthy dose of sibling rivalry, but a healthier dose of family unity. Parents that each play their own parts equitably so that a vague sense of order and balance resonates through the home. Overall, there is a general sense of wholesomeness accompanied by an unashamed sense of mediocrity in celebrating the little life stages that each of the kids make it through, while the parents grow content with having put their kids through school, and then maybe college or university, followed by marrying them off into good families to start that entire cycle again.

That is not my life. Never has been. Improving on that would be extraordinary, but less than that must then be less than ordinary. That would be my life. Less ordinary, and somewhat weird. Part of the weirdness was instilled at an early age when I realised that I was not like my siblings, so seeking affirmation from them for what interested me was never an option. My parents had their own distractions, so seeking out fatherly guidance was not an option either. And thus started the troubled journey of finding my own way in life.

There is a boon that accompanies such a journey, and that is the ability to forge new paths and take the less travelled roads (oh, those damned clichés). The opportunity to make your own mistakes without having someone around to tell you 'I told you so', nor having someone around to constrain your thinking or creativity in line with their fears, or failures.

But there is a burden that accompanies every boon. That burden is the anguish you feel when you are embarking on something important, or at least want to, and there is a room full of no one that you can use as a sounding board. No one that you feel comfortable enough to share that passion with because you know that your reality is very different from theirs. Your frame of reference is

different from theirs. Your self-imposed limitations, your fears, your desires, your perspective, is all different. Therefore, seeking sanity in their reflections is a futile exercise.

At points like these I wonder if this is what it may feel like, in some small way, to be an orphan. To be without guides, or mentors, or pillars of strength. To instead find yourself to be that pillar of strength, that guide, and that mentor for others, with the means to guide you being not much more than a quirky ability to reflect while indulging, or to observe while acting, coupled with a resilience that cannot be explained. There is a stubborn obstinacy within me that refuses to give way to convention. When I fight that stubbornness to 'get along', I find my health suffering because of the unnatural tension that it causes within me. More recently, I found it to be financially unhealthy as I flitted from project to project to feign progress in my life, while never fully committing to the outcome of any as I avoided dealing with issues of significantly greater import than the projects I opted to pursue instead.

The likely delusion in all this is that I seem to think that my circumstance is special. This world appears to be more dysfunctional than wholesome. Our drive for individual instant gratification has already eroded the sense of community that we all long for, but towards which most are not willing to contribute. This is an important point. I always hear others complaining bitterly about the decay of society, but rarely do I find anyone acknowledging that they belong to and are significant contributors towards that very same society that they lament so much.

Perhaps the secret of finding my way lies not in internalising but rather verbalising my clutter, because once it is out there in plain language, the sense or stupidity of it all becomes blatantly obvious, making it possible to sift through the muck so that I can find the gems that would lead me on to the next leg of my journey. Perhaps, in some way, by being brutally honest about this internal struggle, others will find familiarity in their life's burdens and instead of avoiding or denying that part of themselves, they will accept that the struggles they face are only unique permutations, but certainly not unique struggles. I think such familiarity strengthens our resolve to prevail. If only there were more that were willing to be brutally honest about their weaknesses, perhaps then society would be stronger.

"The flower fluttered in the wind and blossomed radiantly as if the whole world was admiring it. At that point I realised that it was beautiful even if I was not there to admire its beauty, and for a brief moment I felt a deep yearning for people to be like that flower."

(The Egosystem)

Paying attention to detail around you is the easy part. Understanding why you take what you do from that detail is the not-so-easy part. That's emotional mindfulness, and that's what the author delivers on in this powerful read. The Egosystem is a hard-hitting take on introspection and self-awareness. It leads you on a journey to achieve a level of mindfulness where it matters most. Your emotions.

"Superbly insightful and thoughtfully put together."

Dr Yazeed Seedat

"This book is that rare thing, a genuine self help tool."

Vasim Malik

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