

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### WHY DO I DO THAT?

**One of the most fundamental flaws in the human condition is the process of internal conflict – both wanting and not wanting something at the same time. As if we don't already have enough challenges to deal with in the outside world – we have to fight with ourselves as well!**

How many things do you do that you don't want to do? Do you eat junk food, smoke, worry, drink too much alcohol, stay in a job or relationship you aren't happy with, spend too much money ... ? What about things you want to do, but nevertheless don't? Do you never get around to taking exercise, applying for a new job, saying something that needs to be said, being that little more confident ... ?

If you actually went through an entire day with a notepad and wrote down all the moments where you came into conflict with yourself you would likely come up with a surprisingly long list. Aside from the obvious kinds of conflicts, such as those suggested above, there are a whole lot of other conflicts we experience. What about when you're engaged in a simple activity, but your mind is unoccupied? In these moments do you have conflict with yourself about what to think about? Do you start thinking about discomfoting experiences against your will? Or do you ever wake up in the morning and have internal conflict about having to get up and go to work – or do you feel that conflict throughout your entire work day? **There are an endless variety of conflicts inside each of us, both conscious and unconscious.**



With such a limited understanding of the motivational forces in our own behaviour it's no wonder that we also have immense difficulty understanding the behaviours of people around us. We frequently perceive the actions of other people as being illogical, irrational, evil, immature and so on. This kind of denouncement of behaviour demonstrates our own blind spots in understanding the human mind. If a piece of behaviour was completely irrational and served absolutely no positive purpose then it would not be indulged in the first place. In a nutshell, **the common appreciation of human behaviour is quite limited.** Let's make a change to that.

One way of describing these apparently “negative” thoughts and behaviours is that they are “automatic”. The very fact that they occur against our will requires that they be automatic. Another description is that they are “habitual”. Now an interesting thing to take into account is that habits usually start out as a conscious choice. It doesn't take a genius to recognise that habits are created by repetition. So for every “negative” habit, there was once a time when that very thought or behaviour was chosen of our own free will and was consciously indulged in long enough to become automatic. Since these habits began as conscious choices they must have had a positive purpose of some kind. They must have served some need on our part.



When a consistently chosen behaviour becomes habitual we start doing it without conscious thought or effort. It becomes an unconscious process. Our conscious awareness is then freed up to attend to other new behaviours. For the most part this is useful as it enables us to acquire a consistent repertoire of new skills. However, **the difficulty occurs when our circumstances or needs change.**

Suddenly our habit begins to interfere with another one of our needs. The result is internal conflict. **We continue to engage in our old behaviour because it serves one of our needs, yet we strive to delete that behaviour because it causes us problems elsewhere.** We both want and don't want to indulge our habit.

The key factor that stops people from resolving these internal conflicts is that they can't consciously remember why they chose to indulge their habit in the first place. When behaviour becomes automatic, not only do we forget that we are doing it, but we also forget what need it serves. The result is that we perceive our habit as having no positive purpose and unwisely attempt to delete it from our behaviour, which is **DISASTROUS!**

**If we delete a piece of behaviour from our lives, we are effectively cutting ourselves off from the useful purpose it serves.** This leaves a gap where an unconscious need was once filled. So what happens? We use that over-rated thing called will-power to delete the behaviour for a very short period of time before our unmet unconscious needs kick the old behaviour into action again. In short, we don't change.

How many times have you seen people try to delete habitual behaviour from their lives only to slip back into it very quickly? Smoking, over-eating, anxiety responses, wasting money, drug abuse, and all the other "bad" habits. People try time and time again to delete these behaviours and time and time again they fail, not stopping to notice that they do these things to meet needs that they otherwise don't know how to meet.

Poor internal communication is the culprit here. It is of no evolutionary advantage that humans engage in behaviours that absolutely do not serve their needs in any way. Self destruction is simply a by product of established behaviours clashing with new needs.

**Even the most seemingly illogical of human thoughts and behaviours virtually always serve some sort of positive purpose at the unconscious level.** Some of you may be leaping up now and shouting *"what the ... just hold on a minute, I know of several things people do that have no positive purpose"*. Well, I'm afraid I have to leap up also and shout *"wrong! The people who do those things do have positive purposes in mind at some level. It's just that you lack insight into the way they perceive things."* Let's pick out some really "bad" examples of human behaviour and do a little assessment.

Let's start with say, mass murderers ... the really bad ones, the political kind. What kind of positive goals could a guy like Hitler have by exterminating millions of people. Well, I'm no expert on that particular war, but from what I've read he perceived what he was doing to be cleansing the human race and creating a better future in the long run. His actions were drastic, but in his mind necessary. Whether he was realistic in his plans or completely barmy is not the point here. The point is that he perceived mass murder as a requirement for progression of human history. He wasn't the first and he's not the last. His henchman may or may not have shared his view, but nevertheless they also perceived some kind of positive outcome from what they were doing.

How about serial killers? The general public are outraged at their crimes and would take pleasure in burning them at the stake like witches. Do these “psychos” have positive purposes while inflicting pain upon others? I’ve studied the subject myself and I’m afraid to say that even serial murderers have positive intentions in what they do. Yet, their behaviour is labelled as “evil” by people who aren’t even religious.



In fact the same brutal, sadistic acts that serial killers perform are also done by governments, soldiers, gangsters and the likes, yet we don't usually label them as being evil. In other contexts we call it *“murder with a motive”* when in fact all murder has motive. A Chinese man, Fou-Tchou-Li, was publicly executed by the death of a thousand cuts in 1905 for murdering Prince Ao-Han-Ouan. His execution has to be one of the most sadistic acts imaginable and it was performed with the consent of both politicians and the public who showed up to watch the execution. How can this be? Are we all evil? No, we just lack wisdom about how to pursue our needs. My assumption in that scenario is that their brutal act had a positive purpose of being the ultimate deterrent against anyone thinking of murdering a prince.

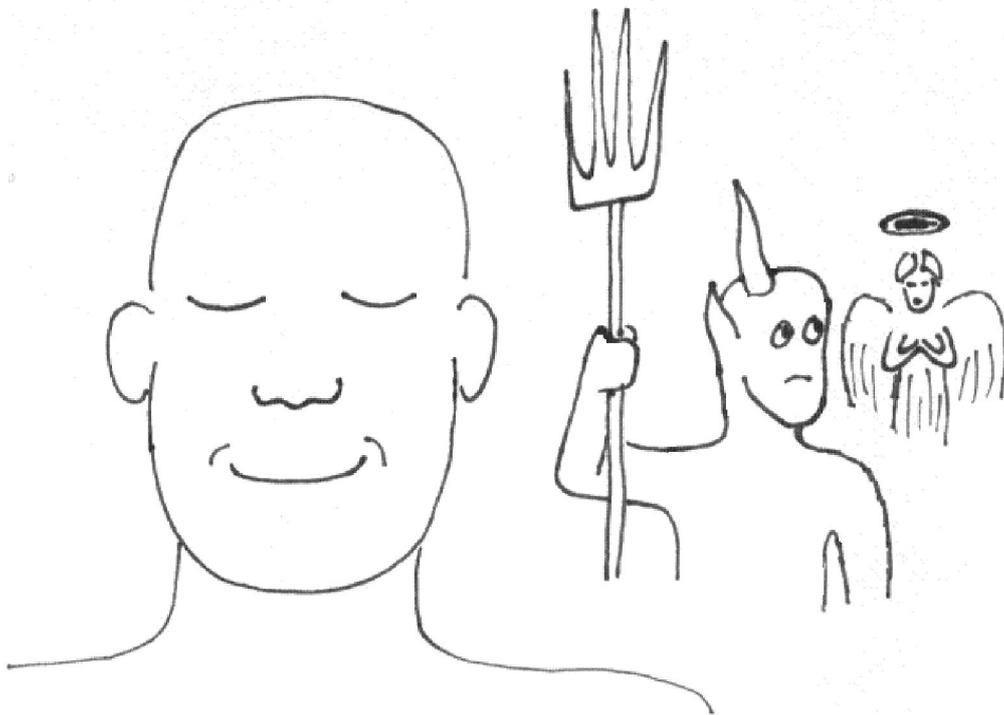
Let's look at one last example, self-harm. *“How can physically mutilating oneself have a positive intention?”* I hear. Well, let me ask you this. If you had to, would you commit an act of self harm to save the life of someone you love? I would and my guess is that you would too. It's all a matter of context and perspective. Some self harmers may be trying to project a macho image to others, some may do it as a way of distracting themselves from

psychological issues that they consider to be more painful and some may do it to attract attention that they otherwise wouldn't get.

I'm certainly not condoning any of this stuff, you know. And I'm not saying that these actions are genuinely positive. Though such behaviour may not be what you or I would presently choose, these people believe what they are doing to be less painful than the other choices available to them.

The key thing to remember is that **even when we can't initially recognise, or even imagine, a positive purpose in what a person is doing it nevertheless is there at some level.**

Alright, so I've put forward the argument that all human behaviour has a positive purpose at some level. What's the point? **Firstly, appreciating the unconscious drives of all behaviour lessens the amount of conflict you feel with yourself and with other people. You start having more patience and less negative feelings about specific behaviours that you and others indulge in. This is a simple way of feeling more relaxed with life in general.**



**The next, and equally important, reason for this kind of understanding is the implication for creating lasting changes in our behaviour.**

**The old idea of “*breaking a habit*” is a myth. It doesn't happen. Human behaviours do not get deleted or “*broken*”. We do not “*quit*” doing things. It's like swimming, riding a bike, driving, speaking, eating and so on. You can choose to do other things for a while, but you cannot delete these behaviours from your brain and nervous system.**

**“Bad” habits are the same. They will always be with you, even if only lying dormant, which is just as well because there may be a time when they suddenly become useful again. All you can do is find new choices that meet those needs more effectively and without creating internal conflict.** If you do this well enough you may even make those old behaviours lie dormant forever, but they will never completely be gone.

Part of my approach over the years for learning how to change habitual behaviours has been to notice natural changes that people have been through and to study how it happened. **I recognised three major patterns of how habits get changed.**

The obvious one, and the one that we have least control over, is that **the person’s environment changes so that they have to behave differently to meet their needs.** This is when the person is made to change instead of changing themselves.

The next pattern of change is when **the individual re-assesses their circumstances and discovers that they no longer need to use the behaviour in question.** They find that their needs are already met in some other way and it’s just a case of dropping the now redundant behaviour and getting on with other stuff.

A personal example of this was when I avoided people for years because of my earlier experiences of hostility as a teenager. When I assessed my behaviour and realised that I was trying to avoid being treated abusively I was then able to re-assess the validity of what I was doing. I noticed for the first time that the hostility I feared was mostly limited to the poverty stricken suburbs I’d once lived in. This allowed me to begin communicating more freely in new environments. This kind of perceptual re-assessment will be explored further in the next chapter.

The third cause of change I consistently found was that of **finding new ways to meet old needs,** which essentially makes the old behaviour redundant and unnecessary.

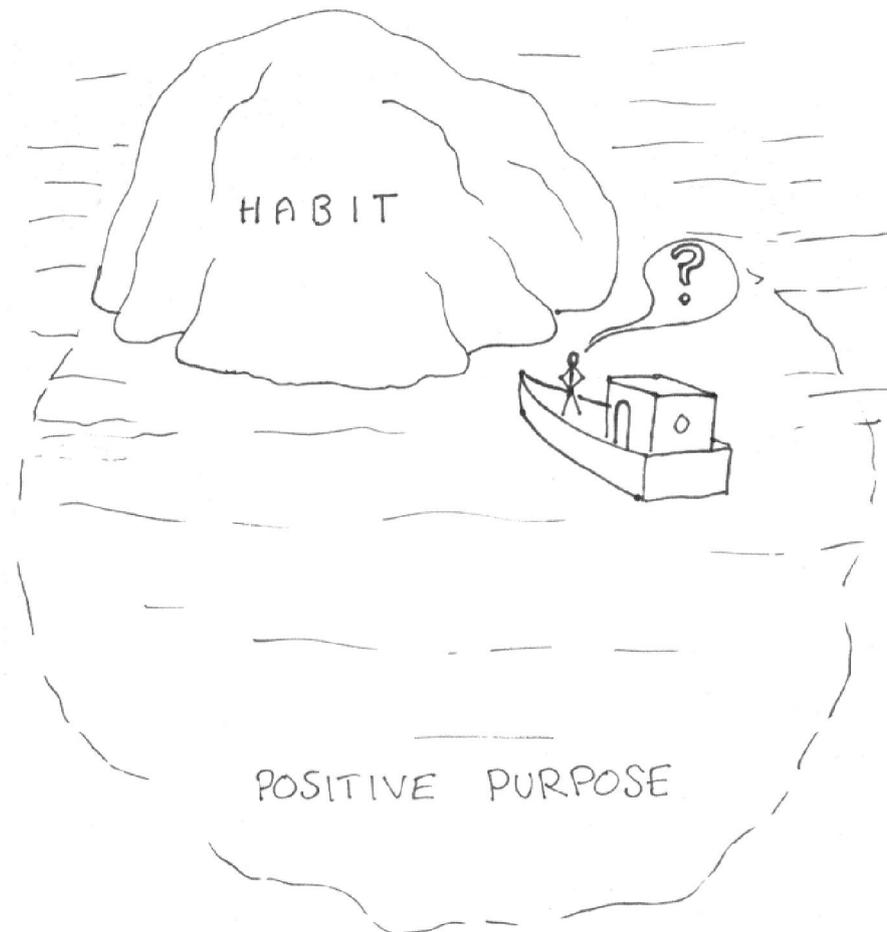
**Put simply, we can change our behaviours by re-assessing our perceptions or by changing the behaviour we use to meet our unconscious needs.**

Re-assessing perceptions is the easiest and least energy consuming of the two so I have found that this is the best place to start. I mean really, why go to all the trouble of finding new ways to meet your needs when those needs may be outdated and invalid anyway?

For these reasons I like to approach behavioural change in the following way.

- 1) Recognise the positive purposes**
- 2) Re-assess the perceptions**
- 3) Find new ways of meeting the needs**

These three core strategies are what the remainder of this book is based around. The first one, recognising positive purpose, is of particular importance in this chapter.



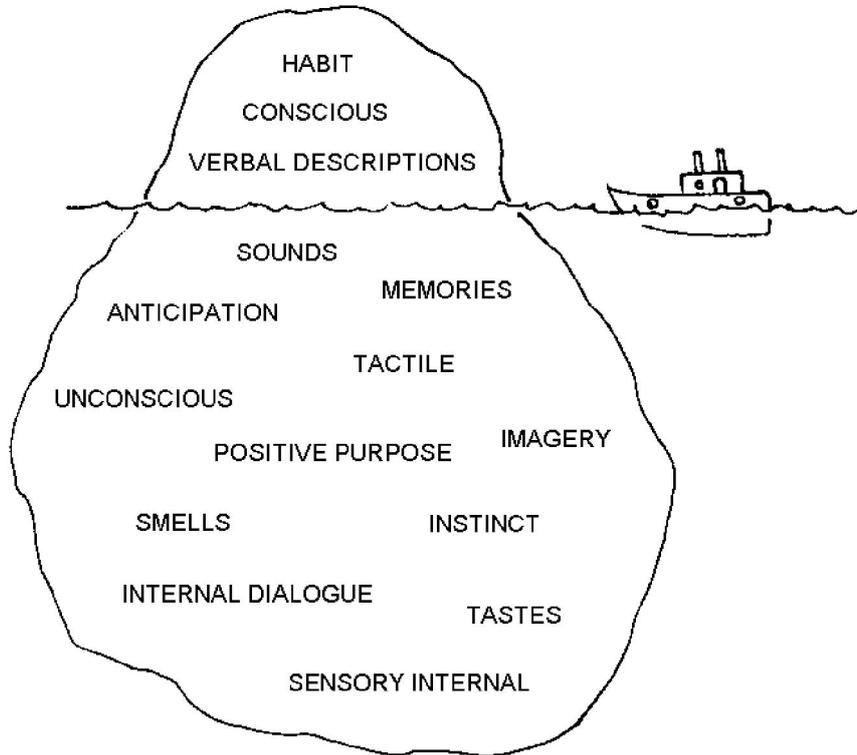
**Recognising positive purpose is not something that people find consistently easy.**

The difficulty is often that people have been fighting so hard to stamp out their habit that the positive purpose has dug itself in at the unconscious level and begins to fight back. Internal war breaks out and as with any war, the greater the pressure and the more the need is denied, the greater the resistance becomes. A unified solution becomes less likely.

So the appropriate starting point before any attempt to change your behaviour is to appreciate your existing actions and motives. You must truly accept that your present thought and behaviour patterns are there to serve you rather than hinder. If you pretend to understand this concept it will not work, as your unconscious knows when you're lying. The existing behaviour is not the problem. The lack of alternative strategies is the real culprit. Only after appreciating the existing positive purposes will you be in a position to alter your behaviour and meet

your needs more effectively. This can even mean temporarily setting aside your eagerness to change.

**A new mindset is needed. A mindset where every behaviour that you witness has a positive purpose.** Very often you will not know specifically what the positive purpose is or how the behaviour serves it, but you must still acknowledge its existence.



There are many ways to go about the task of uncovering the positive purposes behind a given behaviour and to be honest none of them are perfect. They all work at different times for different people, but none of them will work ALL of the time.

The most obvious way is to ask your self questions about the positive purpose, such as ...

**What do I get out of doing this?**

**What needs will not be met if I stop doing this?**

**What benefits will I lose by not doing this?**

There are all sorts of ways to phrase the questions. My suggestion is to simply keep asking in different ways until you hit on a winner. You will get all sorts of answers, which will also be worded in different ways, but what you are looking for is an answer that you can use to move in a new direction of change.

A remarkably effective style of questioning is to repeatedly apply your questions to each answer you get. Think of hierarchies in a corporation or a government body. Basic needs or goals are identified by the head of the

organisation. These needs are separated into individual components and delegated down a level so that each one has a specific person who is wholly dedicated to its fulfilment. Each delegate then develops basic strategies to be implemented to his/her assigned need. These basic strategies then get divided into sub-strategies, which are again delegated down a level. This repeated break down and delegation of tasks can carry on to create a taskforce that has dozens of levels.

Your mind works in a similar way to this. Your core nervous system and basic neurological make up is the head of state and the parts of your brain that have grown in response to your lifelong learning experiences are the delegated workers. In most political/business organisations the further you move down the ladder, the less aware the workers are of the higher issues they are serving. For example, a group of foot soldiers are unlikely to know much about the political objectives they ultimately serve. Our brains are much the same. You can think of your conscious mind as the foot soldiers who do what they're told.

Sometimes, in order to appreciate your motives you need to start at the bottom of the ladder and work upwards step by step. You need to ask the delegate immediately above you what he/she is attempting to achieve. Then you must ask the next delegate above what they are trying to achieve and so on.

Allow me to offer an example of a man who wants to address concerns he has with his partner, but can't get himself to raise the issues.

Q. What do you get out of not expressing your concerns to your partner?

A. I suppose I get to avoid a confrontation.

Q. And what do you get out of avoiding a confrontation?

A. Hmmmm. I get to avoid feeling anxious. I always feel anxious when we argue.

Q. What do you get out of avoiding those feelings?

A. It's not the feelings that are a problem really. I guess I'm just afraid that if I make a fuss over things she might end the relationship.

Q. Yet you're not happy with the way the relationship is anyway. So what do you get out of not letting her end it?

A. I might regret it if I don't find anyone else I'm compatible with.

Q. And what's the problem with not finding anyone else?

A. I'll feel really lonely and probably lose a lot of my confidence.

Notice how repetition of the same line of questioning breaks through the surface problem of "being afraid to address concerns with his partner" to a series of much

**deeper motives.** Depending on how deep you want to go, you could say that this guy's positive intention is to avoid arguments with his partner, avoid having the relationship come to an end, or avoid feelings of regret, loneliness and low self-confidence. All of these answers are different layers of the same positive intention and hence we'll call them **Motivational Layers.**

If you keep asking questions in the above manner you can go on for hours, uncovering dozens of unconscious layers of positive intention. You need to know where to stop. In my own experience, unveiling two or three levels of unconscious motivation is usually enough to start pursuing change with. On the other hand, you can explore half a dozen layers that the individual was already aware of and find no path toward change. **It is the unconscious information – the new information – that will reveal previously hidden opportunities to change.**

Your questions must take the listener, be it yourself or someone else, by surprise. **One way that I know I'm effectively pursuing information is when the questions I'm asking become confusing and difficult to answer, as accessing unconscious information tends to require a lot of concentration.**

At this point I would like to clear up what I mean by *“positive intention”*. The example above may have contained elements that hardly seemed positive. Splitting up with partners and feelings of loneliness may not be positive thoughts, but the unconscious intention was one of protection against these threats and for our purposes here that qualifies as a positive intention. So you could also think of it as a **“useful intention”** or as an **“intention for the individual's best interests”**.

Asking yourself questions is one way of finding the positive intention behind a habit, but there will be times where it is ineffective. Being that unconscious information tends to take the form of direct sensory information instead of language, **it can be very difficult to put your positive intentions into words. One way of getting around this obstacle is by accessing unconscious experiences through internal imagery or other sensory based representations.**

Words are a very limited representation of human experience. A few seconds of mental imagery and sound can carry a great deal more information than a sentence. Within a single image you can experience hundreds of colours and shapes forming a variety of objects, characters and locations. Set that image in motion for just a few seconds and it can represent complex interactions between people and their environments, which could take pages and pages of text to describe verbally.

Another way of realising the limitations of language is to compare the amount of time it takes to read a book with the two hours of watching a movie. Imagine trying to describe an entire film in all its detailed complexity to somebody who hasn't seen it. Basically, it would take a hell of a long time. All

in all the non-verbal processing of the unconscious mind is more complex and a great deal faster than thinking in words.

If you find it difficult to put the positive intention of a particular behaviour into words then you can access it through visualisation. **When we have trouble describing our motives it's not that we don't know what the positive intention is.** We have always known it on a certain level. **It's just that it is represented outside of consciousness as a set of sensory experiences.** Typically, we are aware of the tactile sensations of the experience (*these usually get labelled as "feelings" or "emotions"*), but our lack of awareness of the images and sounds of the experience makes it difficult for us to know what the feelings are about.

### Exercise

## **Recognising the positive intentions of your behaviour.**

### Step 1 – Represent the positive intention in your senses

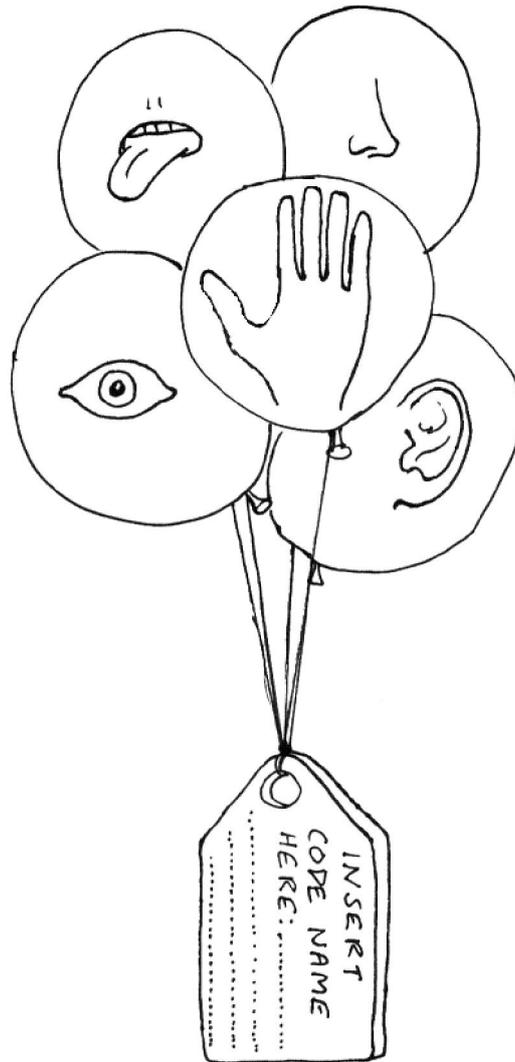
Think of the times when you feel compelled to think and behave in the way that you consciously object to. Now instead of being aware of the "feelings" of the compulsion try paying attention for any internal images and sounds that seem to be occurring automatically. Usually you'll notice either discomfoting experiences that the experience helps you avoid or pleasurable things that the habit helps you acquire.

### Step 2 – Give the positive intention a label

Once you have an awareness of the positive intention you have three immediately useful choices. You can try and put it into logical words, which runs the risk of you distorting the information (*words massively distort experience*) and thus confusing yourself, you can give it a code word or you can draw a picture of it. And yes, there is a difference between describing something and giving it a code word.

The difference is that a code word doesn't have to have a logical relation to the meaning of the experience. It simply serves as a trigger to pull the experience back into awareness. In fact the more ambiguous the code word the better. Something as simple as a letter, number or colour will suffice.

The drawing method is very interesting and can vary greatly. You may wish to draw a meaningless visual symbol, a simple scenario of stick figures or maybe something intricate such as a comic strip of your thoughts. The chances are that as you begin drawing a picture of your motive you will quickly begin consciously finding labels and descriptions of the motives.



### Step 3 – Access the positive intentions of the positive intentions

You can use it to access deeper levels of intention. For example if you gave your motive a codeword such as ARGON then the next question would be something like *“what am I trying to achieve for myself through ARGON?”* We are effectively asking *“what is the goal of the goal?”*

When using code words or images, the logic of the experiences may not be apparent at first, but rest assured that it's in their somewhere. These rich sensory experiences are fragments from the natural workings of the unconscious mind, so you're best learning how to work with them rather than against them.

Though the above exercises may seem strange at first, it is actually very easy when you get used to it. Its importance becomes more apparent when you start noticing less conflict within yourself and a greater awareness of the rich tapestry of your thoughts, feelings and behaviour as a whole.

A long time ago I asked myself *“what is human behaviour all about? What is its core purpose? What is the one basic motive that drives everything that every person ever does?”* At first I came up with the usual conceptual answers such as *“happiness”, “love”, “adventure”* etc., but these were far too vague. Different people go after different types of happiness, where as I wanted to know what all the different forms of happiness had in common.

I then expanded my question to ask *“What is the driving motive in every behaviour in every living organism?”* I started cross-referencing animal behaviour with human behaviour and noted that the basic functions of food, warmth, sleep and protection from physical danger and the elements seemed to be the fundamental drives in animals (*not a theoretical breakthrough*), but that it didn't seem to be as simple for humans. Basic physical survival and reproduction may be definite factors in our existence, yet there are many other activities we indulge that are seemingly unrelated. I was curious.

This prompted me to begin questioning myself and others about the things we want as individuals. By choosing not to accept dead end conceptual answers, but to question such ideas even further, I started getting answers that seemed to have a universal theme to them. I learned how to break down complex motives from their vague labels to their basic unconscious functions.

It very soon became apparent that aside from biological specifics there is no difference at all between human motivation and motivation in other living species. What does differ is the complexity of behaviour that we humans use to fulfil our needs. Animals use simple strategies like hunting, digging and climbing to find their food, where as we humans will *go to university ... so we can get educated and qualified ... so we can get a job ... so we can earn a decent income ... so we can buy food and a home with a kitchen to cook in and to pay for the gas and electricity we use to cook*. Another species may engage in physical battle with one another for the right to mate (*come to think of it certain people still do that*), where as we may *buy clothes and make up ... to look attractive ... then call a friend ... to have someone to go for a night out with ... so we can drink and dance and talk with people we're attracted to ...* and so on. You know the routine.

The civilisation we humans live is so darned complex that we've had to abandon some of our animalistic behaviours. We now have to create complex long term behavioural plans just to fulfil our basic needs. Since these plans are too deep in complexity to be held in our momentary awareness they get shifted into unconsciousness and become automatic response patterns ... habits. The examples I've offered above are very simplified. The sheer complexity of how we structure our behaviours consistently amazes me.

At the core of all this is the nervous system. Nature has motivated us to look after our physical constitutions by instilling within us a nervous system that senses injury, blood chemistry imbalances, temperature and so on. When our physical constitutions are failing in one way or another our nervous systems feel all the appropriate sensations – pain, hunger, discomfort, stinging, aching, burning – that will kick us into whatever behaviour it

takes to restore our physical constitution. The same goes the other way. That which is good for our physical constitution tends to bring pleasure. By linking pain with hunger we are motivated to eat. By linking pleasure with sex we are motivated to mate. **This is the basic function of behaviour.**

Nature has even provided us with a brain, which can record experiences of pain and pleasure and then give us a mild shot of them in advance (*fear, lust, excitement, worry*) when it anticipates that those external conditions are going to occur again. *We often call these anticipations of pain and pleasure “emotions”, but they are more like “anticipations”.*

Now you may be wondering why I'm bothering to communicate these ideas here. My intention is simple. It is very easy to become confused about human behaviour, be it your own or someone else's. **By knowing the route behind all motivation it becomes a simpler task to understand why you do the things you do.** If you know that pain/pleasure sensations are always going to be at the core of a given pattern of thought and behaviour then it becomes a mere task of finding the logical sequences of perception and strategy that lie between the surface behaviour and the pain/pleasure motive it serves.

These concepts will become increasingly relevant throughout the remainder of this book.

As we were exploring earlier, the overall key to understanding your own behaviour and response patterns is to dig your positive intentions out of unconsciousness layer by layer.

So let's assume now that you have taken these concepts on board and developed the skill of understanding behaviour and the motives that drive it. What do you now do with this understanding?

It's time to move onto the next important issue in self-therapy ...