

Steve Biddulph

FULLY HUMAN

A new way of using your mind



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books for life

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Welcome

The aim of this book is to help you to move more freely inside your own mind. To ‘turn the lights on’ in whole levels of your consciousness that you have barely noticed are there. Once all the parts of your mind are awakened, they naturally work in harmony and you can live a more powerful, integrated and spacious life.

The book is based on recent findings from neuroscience, matched with cutting-edge psychotherapy, and my lifetime’s work helping people in the worst imaginable situations to be able to heal and grow. It is aimed at literally anyone who feels that there must be more to life, and that we can do better at being in this world.

Two key ideas are at the heart of the book. The first is Supersense: the way that your body sends you messages, and is doing so *every second that you are alive*. These messages are quicker, subtler and often much smarter than your conscious brain at knowing what is going on. Yet most people totally ignore them.

The second is the Four-Storey Mansion, an easily grasped way of navigating the multiple levels of your mind and getting them to work together instead of (as they often do) tearing you apart. This method is so simple it can be learned by a five-year-old, but so profound that it can help even the most damaged adult.

The book is full of personal stories, journeys and struggles very like the ones that you might be having in your own life. But there is nothing you need to do other than be curious and read along, though we do include exercises to speed things up if you wish. It’s likely that you will come to use what this book teaches every day for the rest of your life.

I hope your life is changed by it, and those changes ripple out around you, so that together we can make things better for our children and grandchildren. Loving each other and the natural world around us arises simply from realizing the connections which were always there. Your mind knows how to do this, and it's just a matter of waking it up.

With love,

Steve Biddulph

Note:

Some readers quite rightly want to know more about the author before they entrust themselves to a book. If that is you, then a few pages about my unusual life can be found at the end of the book. Feel free to go back there first if you wish, otherwise – just jump straight in.

1

Supersense

Andie Llewellyn, part-time GP and mother of two little girls, was having a pretty good day. Her parents were minding the kids, and she'd taken the morning off to go into town to have lunch with friends. Now she was headed for home. She stepped off the train at her suburban station and walked briskly, as the wind was chill, to the car park. She wrestled with her keys and bags for a moment, got the car door open, and got in. From the corner of her eye, she could see a figure in the distance, a young man moving in her direction.

As she started her car, he was closer, and calling something to her. He was well dressed, quite nice looking, it seemed he wanted her help with something – maybe he had lost something or needed directions? Her lifelong habit of good manners tugged at her conscience; it went against the grain to ignore someone. Her hand even went to the window to wind it down. But somewhere in the pit of her stomach a tiny clenching sensation made itself felt, and uncharacteristically, almost in a panic, she drove quickly past him and out onto the road. In the mirror, she saw him standing, motionless, staring after her. Even when she got home, her heart was still pounding. What's the matter with me? she thought.

Back in the tumult of home, the warm greetings of her parents and her little daughters, Andie pushed the incident out of her mind. Until she watched that night's TV news. A man had been arrested by the police near a suburban train station – *her train station*. He had attempted to abduct a young woman at knifepoint, but she had screamed and fought back, and, by incredible good

luck, two other women had driven into the car park just then and the man had fled. Andie's mind took just a few seconds to make the connection – *it had almost been her*. And that poor other woman . . . Andie's husband was shocked, coming into the living room, to find her shaking and sobbing on the couch.

Together, they rang the police. That night, two detectives came to her house, they brought photographs. She was able to identify the man as the one who had approached her car. They thanked her and said that she was very smart to have avoided him. (They carefully did not use the word 'escaped'.) Andie was shivering and shaking again as her husband saw the detectives to the door.

Andie was a patient of mine when I was starting out as a young therapist. She stayed safe and, quite possibly, alive on that windy afternoon because she listened to some very specific signals – literally, her 'gut feelings'. She reacted in exactly the way that she needed to, to protect her own life. This was a wired-in response of the kind that has kept people alive for millennia.



In our species' long prehistory, there were always dangers, and we needed highly tuned senses to stay safe. A sudden quietening of the birds, a flicker of movement through the trees – we reacted first, and then our brain got going to figure out what to do next. Hide, run, call out a warning. Or just relax and say, 'Welcome home!'

Our brains are very good at this; information coming in through our senses is processed and assessed almost instantly, long before we have time to think or reason. This is your supersense, and it adds up complicated and subtle information to determine what is important for you to notice. It is doing this every second of every day. Before neuroscience properly explained this, it would have been called 'intuition' or a 'sixth sense', but it's neither. It's a very advanced capacity that your brain has, firstly to integrate sensory information at lightning speed, then to run this past the accumulated memory of your whole lifetime, to see if it 'rings a bell'. Your supersense then performs its third miracle – *it lets you*

know. It triggers bodily changes strong enough to alert you – again, faster than words – that this is urgent. And if, like Andie, you are aware, ‘in touch’ with your insides, you will get the message.

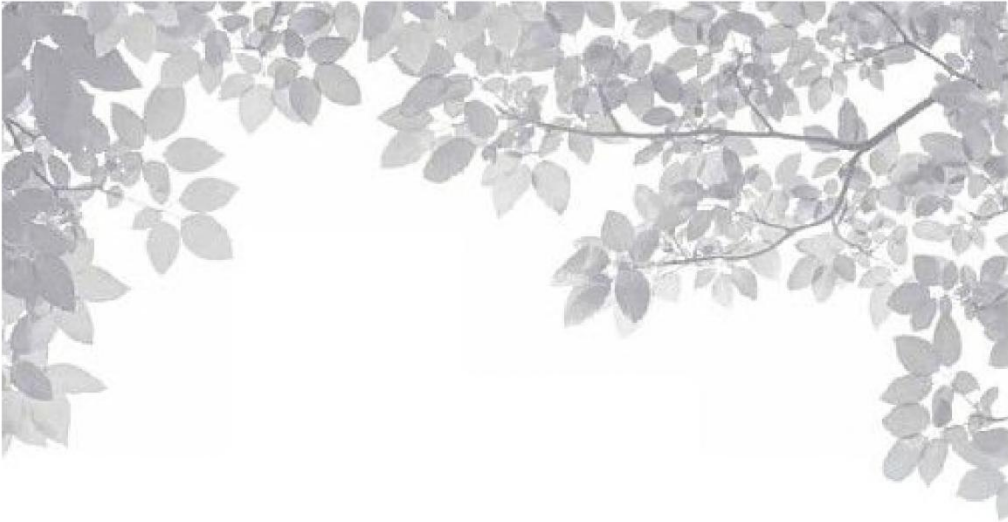
We modern humans have been told, in myriad direct and indirect ways, that our brain is the smartest part of us. By ‘brain’ we mean the thin orange rind of our brain (the prefrontal cortex) that’s involved in conscious verbal thinking, the part that deals with everything from ‘Did I lock the door?’ to ‘Should I get Netflix?’ That part of our brain is impressive, but compared to our supersense it’s a plodding infant. Your supersense is so profoundly capable that understanding it will knock your socks off, though we are getting ahead of ourselves here – we’ve got a whole book ahead of us. You have this supersense, and in the course of reading these pages you will learn to apply it to higher and higher levels of your life. Alone or with family, at work, with friends and out in the world. It is always there, not just to keep you safe, but to inform your choices and maximize your happiness in life. You have a guidance system that is superb, subtle and powerful, and this book will teach you to use it.



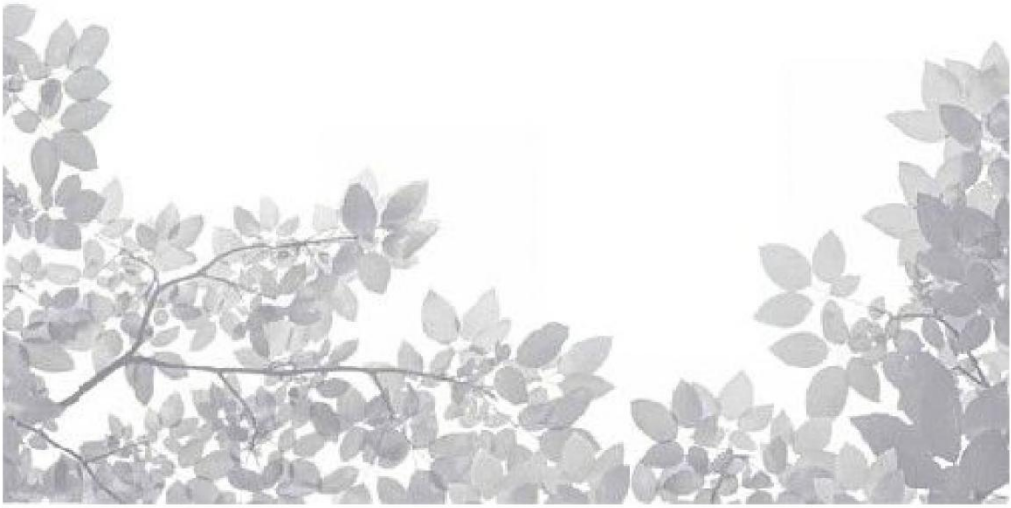
We Almost Lost It

Our internal sensory system is the very core of our humanness, of how our mind is designed to work. So it’s rather shocking that, in the modern world, we have forgotten that these senses exist. We haven’t been encouraged in childhood to listen to them and we don’t even have the language to talk about them. Most people are dimly aware of inner warning signals – disquiet or misgivings; or the positive ones – urgings or yearnings – but we mostly ignore them. This is no small thing; without this information, we may well live a life that is full of blunders, large and small. We might marry the wrong person, choose the wrong career, miss some warning sign in one of our children that turns out to really matter. Or we

just volunteer for the sausage sizzle fundraiser when we really shouldn't have!



Without our supersense . . . we might marry the wrong person, choose the wrong career, miss some warning sign in one of our children that turns out to really matter. Or we just volunteer for the sausage sizzle fundraiser when we really shouldn't have!



Our supersense evolved to be our mind's primary guidance system, our brain's way of knowing what is right or wrong for us, safe or unsafe. If we lose touch with it, a whole cascade of things can go wrong. We won't have a strong sense of self – of who we are or what we want. We may start to lose our way in relationships and find our family unravelling. Ignoring inner misgivings, we may lose touch with our values, and soon we feel that we are living a lie, that we've become just a collection of cliches and poses. We have no power or authenticity in anything we do. Does any of this sound familiar?

If this applies to you, then this book brings a message of hope: if you are struggling in any area of your life, that is something that can change. You can reawaken your supersense and begin to know who you are and what matters to you, and bring wholeness back into your life again. Your life can be so much more. If you are doubtful that this is true, let me present some evidence that you can check out.

In the course of your life, you have almost certainly encountered people who seemed different and special, in a good way. Much more alive and more real than those around them. We all notice such people; in fact, we supersense them from the very first, and the evidence bears it out over time.

Such people often have three distinct qualities. First, their bearing – they seem grounded and unhurried, their attention is focused, and they are right with you, here and now. Second, their manner – they take themselves and life's ups and downs lightly, but at the same time they can be strikingly fierce and grave when it really matters. They are protective of others, and the world. You feel very safe with them. And thirdly, they are non-conformist; they may get along well with others, but they don't live by the usual norms. They are true to themselves and don't simply dance to society's crazy tune.

A person who is 'fully human' stands out from the crowd. Such individuals seem to function on a more integrated level. Heart, head and spirit are going in the same direction.

What brain science is discovering is that this kind of aliveness is a neurological state – of *having more of your mental faculties activated* – and that it is available to all of us. Supersense is the beginning,

the core where personhood begins. Once you can read your supersense, you can then move upwards to emotions, to thought and to a feeling of connection with everything around you. Your consciousness is like a mansion with many floors, and you can open up all the rooms and enjoy what they have to offer. With your faculties switched on like this, you will automatically start to become more integrated; the contradictions between feelings, action and values will start to disappear. You will be and feel whole.

What this book will teach you involves paying attention in some new ways, but it is not complicated – even a five-year-old child can master it. This is a set of tools to use for the rest of your life, and you will find that it makes a difference from the first day that you start.

It's Not Just About Danger

The origins of our supersense lie deep in our prehistory. We humans didn't show a lot of promise in our early days, skulking about on the savannah, cracking the marrowbones left by lions, or sucking on shellfish on the shores of African lakes.

We had the same acute senses and highly tuned nervous system as a leopard or a wedge-tailed eagle, but we didn't have claws or fangs, and we weren't especially strong or large. Our place on the food chain could have been rather low (i.e. we would have been food!), but there was one thing going for us: it was the skill that was to take us – literally – to the stars. This ability was the key to everything humans have done – medicine, art, music, tandoori-chicken pies. We *Homo sapiens* are the ultimate cooperators. Our species survived and mastered our world by living and working in tight-knit family groups, who cared for and protected each other; at least, most of the time. Alone, we were puny, but, as many a cave bear learned to its dismay, if you took on one human, you took on the whole clan.

Working together takes a lot of coordination and social skill. So, even before we had words, we had to know how to read each other

well, avoid conflict, soothe fears or tensions. We are the only animal to have the whites of our eyes visible all the time, so we can follow the direction of each other's gaze. We have a wider range of emotional facial expressions than any other creature. This helps us gauge each other's mood, both to minimize dangerous flare-ups, but also to create intimacy and have fun, which are very bonding. We are a creative, playful and loving species, too. One of the things that often strikes visitors to hunter-gatherer or other indigenous societies is the warmth, exuberance and natural affection that people show. (This was absolutely my experience in Papua New Guinea in the 1970s. It's commented on repeatedly in *The Continuum Concept* – Jean Liedloff's classic book on Amazonian tribal parenting). It's been noted for as long as the West has encountered the pre-industrial world – these cultures make contemporary city dwellers look like uptight zombies by comparison. They have something we have lost.

Today, we still use the lightning-fast brain-processing that Andie relied on to read tiny signals in the body language of others, their facial changes, turns of phrase, little things that don't add up. So we know when our child is bothered about something, or is not telling us the whole truth. When our partner is keeping something from us – even if it's just a birthday surprise! When a business deal or arrangement might not be all that it appears. This signalling system came long before humans had words. So the language of our supersense is *visceral, not verbal*. It might be your stomach, your jaw, your shoulder muscles, your intestines, your genitals – literally anywhere in your body. If you want to find your 'gut feelings', just send your attention out into your body, especially down its midline – your heart, your digestive tract – but it can be anywhere, as *there will always be something going on*. Even happiness has a gut feeling.

How does it work? All day, every day, your senses take in vast amounts of information, far more than you can consciously pay attention to. Deep in your brain, these are cross-checked automatically with your lifetime memories. Then something remarkable happens. Your hippocampus (where your memories live) talks to your amygdala (where your emotions live) and sends signals down your vagus nerve (actually a vast network of nerves

to your many organs and beyond). All that you know about this is that a physical something happens, suddenly, somewhere, in your gut, your scalp, your shoulder muscles, in the muscles around your heart, or even in your hands or feet, which alerts you that your unconscious brain has something to tell you.

Parts of your body activate and your conscious mind can notice them, question them. What is it? What is wrong? It's an extraordinary power just waiting to be used. A twinge in your stomach can be there for years, around a particular topic or aspect of your life, then one day you ask it what it's about, and it tells you.

The collaboration between your limbic system (which is completely non-verbal) and all the other preconscious parts of your brain is identical to that of our animal cousins – we have the alertness and instincts of a fox or an eagle, but we also have a neocortex that can think and reason. We have to bring both of those together.

Supersense never stops, even when we are asleep. It doesn't just deal with the outer world; our inner thoughts and ideas affect it too. I am sure you've experienced this – a feeling that just 'niggles' (such a lovely word) and won't go away. It can happen in just minutes, or it can build up over years. Something isn't right. And then, one day, the message breaks through to our rational, verbal mind:

This friend is not a friend.

I am not taking my child back to that carer.

This job is not for me.

My marriage is unsafe and disrespectful, and I will no longer accept that.

Over the years, so many instances of this have been told to me. This one is especially poignant. A friend of mine, now in her late forties, developed a migraine three months into her marriage and suffered from it for almost twenty years. Then, one day, she discovered that her husband had a lover, he had started the affair soon after their marriage. Within weeks of making the discovery, shocked and betrayed, she separated from him. The migraines stopped and have never returned.

Our bodies are amazing things, and they talk to us all the time. If we don't listen, then they have to shout. Eventually, your slowpoke

conscious brain comes online and you work out the next steps you have to take. But first you had to be woken up.

Does It Always Work?

It's important to say here that this sensory processing system is not infallible, and getting your logical brain into gear quickly is still important. Your alarm system can be contaminated by past experiences that are actually random and cause you to have atypical responses. Emma Shirer was a six-year-old girl living in London during the Blitz. Emma had been forbidden, for as long as she could remember, from ever flushing the toilet herself, because she was too short to reach the chain without standing on the toilet seat. She thought this was unfair and embarrassing and, one night, she pulled it anyway. At that very moment, a German V-2 missile hit the house next door. The whole wall of her house disappeared and she was left gazing at open sky – still holding the chain! I met Emma when she was in her seventies; she told me she had trouble flushing toilets, or in fact doing anything slightly disobedient, for years afterwards.



And then, one day, the message breaks through to our rational, verbal mind: This friend is not a friend. I am not taking my child back to that carer. This job is not for me.



Everything that happens in our lives, even horror and tragedy, can be used to take us higher, and make us more free, wise and resourceful. We don't need to have a terrifying experience, though, to be fully alive. Little babies start out that way. We can learn to keep those qualities in our children, to nurture them so they stay wild and free. And we can reawaken that aliveness in ourselves. That's what we are going to explore in the chapters to come.

SUPERSENSE REFLECTION EXERCISE ONE

Looking back over your life, you will have sometimes experienced a misgiving, or just a niggles about some decision or situation you faced.

Choose one example, and give it a brief description, such as . . .

‘That person I met in . . .’

‘That decision I made about . . .’

‘That time as a child when . . .’

Now, if you are comfortable to do so, conjure up that memory more vividly in your mind. As you do that, notice if you experience any actual body signals or responses now. Can you describe the body sensation in words – where it is and its quality or nature? E.g. a kind of clench in my stomach . . . a tight band round my forehead . . . my heart feels kind of fluttering . . . Usually one distinct place will register clearly.

Take a minute or so to just feel that, and as you pay attention to it, notice what it does, how it moves or changes. Finally, blink and look around you a bit, feel your feet on the ground and breathe in and out slowly to let the memory go. Notice that, yes, I have these ‘warning lights’ that go off in my body. Perhaps I can notice them more? They are helpful in living my life.

SUPERSENSE REFLECTION EXERCISE TWO

Think of a challenge or situation that is in your life right now. Some current issue, large or small – work, home or personal – that is facing you or occupying you. As you think of it, what body sensations do you notice? Where are they located – shoulders, neck, belly, face, chest? Now find a word that best describes them: tightness, heat, fluttering, tension, heaviness, wrenching, emptiness or a hole. There are thousands of words.

Just pay attention to that place, and notice if, when you name it, it changes or stays the same, or grows stronger. Later in the book, we will be helping you to shift these sensations while learning what it is they are trying to say. Take an attitude right now that this is your wise, wild-animal side letting you know something, trying to get a message to you. Send friendly thoughts to this part of yourself – you are going to become great friends, and it will be a very helpful ally for living your life.

2

Living in the Mansion

In almost every career or job today, you will find yourself sent on professional development courses from time to time. They tend to be mind-numbing affairs that have you chewing your briefcase by morning tea. I know this because, some years ago, people began to contact me and ask if I could speak to their team. The team might be midwives, teachers, funeral directors or senior police. ‘Why do you want me?’ I would ask, and I could hear the conspiratorial smile, even over the phone. ‘Because,’ they explained, ‘we’ve heard you don’t put people to sleep.’

In those days, I had mouths to feed and welcomed this employment. But I had no idea about the work of funeral directors or midwives. What could I teach them that would help in such demanding and specialized jobs? The answer wasn’t hard to find – it was ‘being human’. People skills – understanding oneself and others – are as vital a tool to a country police officer as to a member of a royal family or an anesthetist.

These were smart people, often far smarter than me, so I always came from a position of respecting their life experience. Standing in front of the audience, when the day came, after the due introductions, I would begin by asking them to answer a deceptively simple question: ‘What is a human being?’ People would look puzzled for a moment or two, and then start scribbling. After a couple of minutes, I would ask them to call out what they had written.

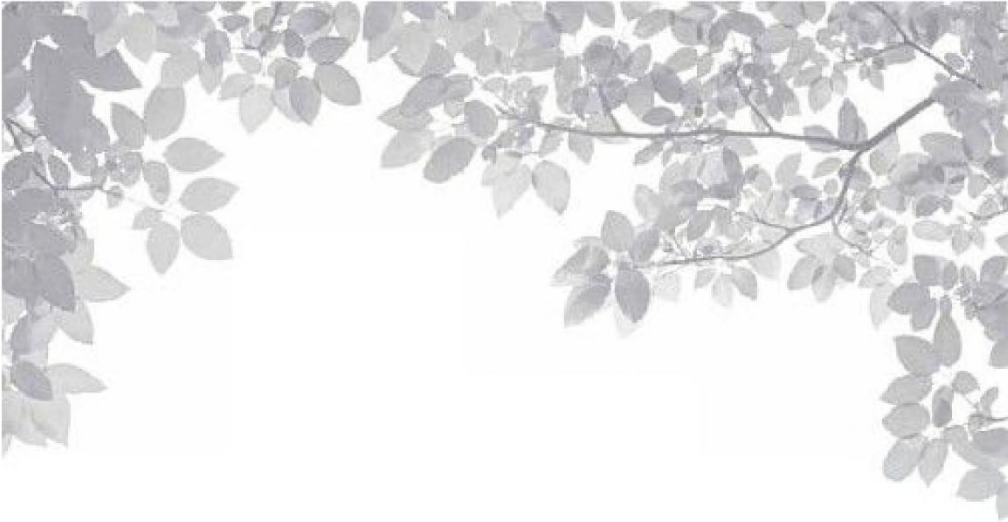
Some people’s answers were concrete and simple: a human being is an animal, a two-legged mammal, or something along

those lines. Others in the audience said that we are a social being. The more idealistic in the room added that we have huge potential and that we grow and learn. Some pointed out that we have emotions and values, and dreams. Some ventured into spiritual domains – that we are created by or are the children of God, or, in secular language, that we are a mix of mind, body and spirit.

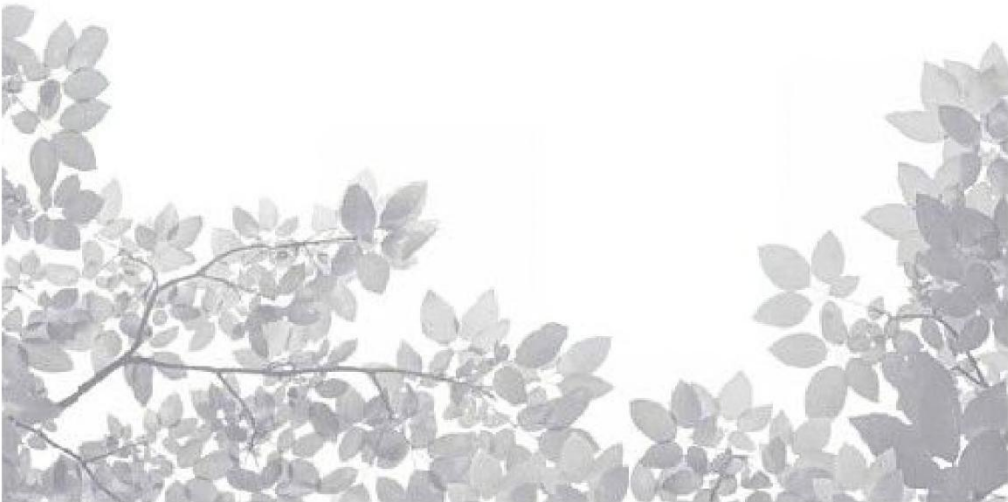
This is not a trivial exercise, because our model of what a human being is will powerfully shape both the person we are and how we treat others. The depressed person will have a depressing idea of what a human being is, and the kindly person will have a kindly view. The angry, resentful person will have a pretty crappy view. You'll notice immediately that something important is going on here. If you don't think much of human beings, then *deep down you don't think much of yourself either*. It's not hard to see how this can be self-reinforcing and really get out of hand. I am repeating myself here because I don't want you to miss this: what you think a human being is, is *probably the most important thing about you*, because it determines how you treat everyone you ever meet, and how you treat yourself. So you need to be absolutely sure you haven't got a wrong-headed idea about such an important fact.

I have had many patients who as children or teenagers were told by their parents, with great force and repetition, that they were 'a piece of shit', or something along those lines. Few people come out of that kind of childhood without some serious scars. But even for a child coming from a kind and loving family, there are still the messages of the larger world to contend with. The culture around us essentially tells us we are just one big appetite, or one big ego. If we fall for this – and few can be completely immune to it – then we will never be happy. If we are to live a full life then it's critical that we have the best and most complete view of what a human being is, what we ourselves are. The whole point of this book is to dramatically expand your view of what makes up a human being, what makes up you.

The people in my training seminars always, without prompting, arrive at a conclusion that human beings have *multiple dimensions*, that there are layers or levels to what we are. And this is definitely true from a neuroscience viewpoint; our brain's structure, and therefore our consciousness – the way our brain works – is layered.



What you think a human being is, is probably the most important thing about you, because it decides how you treat everyone you ever meet . . . and how you treat yourself.



There is a deeper problem here as well. If we ignore a part of us – our feelings, our body, our values, our sexuality or our spirituality – that part does not just lie quiescent. It continues to exert a force on us, but just without our knowing it! It is like an inner mutiny, which we can't read or integrate. And since some of those layers are very powerful, we can end up absolutely torn in pieces, deeply conflicted and confused. And we just don't add up as a human being. Our life won't make sense.

When we don't access all areas of our own layered mind, our lives lose their integrity. Others experience us as incongruous, untrustworthy. We become sleepwalkers in our own lives. And losing our power in this way, we become easily enslaved.¹ The hyper capitalist life – rushing, stressing, consuming – takes a terrible toll on families, which we just assume is normal. And if it's normal, then there must be something wrong with us – and our family – that we can't keep up. Just as women in the 1950s thought there must be something wrong with them when they weren't fulfilled in aprons, cooking scones, contemporary men and women feel inadequate that they can't sustain the lonely, competitive harshness of twenty-first-century life. Our children, too, are growing up in a world that's increasingly nasty, aggressive and punishing of everyone who does not meet impossible standards in things that really don't matter at all – such as fashion, body shape, possessions.

So many really terrible problems that readers will recognise – divorce, anxiety and stress in children, rebellion and self-harm in teenagers – are the direct consequence of this. People who are integrated and in touch with their power do not put up with the way of life that is handed out to them, they look for something better. They start marching to a different drum. These are the people who change the world. Our hope lies in more and more of us doing just that.

When we learn to incorporate and use all the layers of our humanness, amazing things can happen, we find our own rhythm and our own power. So now it's time to set out for you what those levels and layers are, and how to move about in them. It's time to tell you about the Four-Storey Mansion.



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