

Seminar on Egalitarianism at Medicine Festival

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Here's a festival talk where I shared some of the most important insights from my travels. The topics in the talk also shape my upcoming book and film projects. Despite the breadth of the topic, I'm excited to share what I've learned.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ISWieK6lAs

So, for those of you who don't know me, my name's Bruce, and as Ruby sweetly introduced, I have had the great privilege of having traveled the world living with many, many indigenous cultures.

I've also made programs for the BBC about...

climate change, I've traveled around the Arctic looking at climate change.

I've also made shows about globalization, traveling down the Amazon, looking at cocaine and logging and soya and gold and oil and all of the issues of our way of life on the planet.

and then all the issues of things like climate change, which are clearly coming our way and so I had this kind of really unique and quite special package of having seen the problems firsthand while they were still being debated here.

You know, is climate change man influence, human influence, and no one really telling you what's on the label of your palm oil packet, biscuits and shampoos and stuff.

But for me, it was real.

I was seeing it.

seeing the problems, but then also having had this extraordinary opportunity to living with people all around the world who are not causing those problems in the same way.

All of us are part of this cycle of life and death.

We're all consuming life, whether it's a vegetable or animal.

in order to be able to survive.

We're all part of that cycle, but some of us are really consuming a lot more and having a lot more destructive impact on the planet for our future generations.

So that was very clear to me and the opportunity to live with indigenous peoples who have a much more localized understanding that what you consume and what you influence and what you take and what you chop down is going to impact your life.

and the future generations.

We don't have that because it's all happening over the hill, except of course now it's coming home to roost and we're waking up to what the **** are we doing, except we're so addicted we can't get out of it.

So how are we going to deal with this? Well, I do believe that the indigenous peoples have the answers, but it's more complex than that because who are indigenous

peoples? I mean, having lived with like 50 tribal groups around the world, they're all very, very different and they all have very different rites and rituals and belief systems and creation myths and all the rest of it.

So you can't just say indigenous people, it's very hard to generalize to such a degree, but if I say you can't, I am going to generalize a little bit.

But what I had in my journeys with tribal people and what you will have been listening to in many of the other the venues around this medicine festival this weekend, so much of it is coming from our indigenous ancestors, whether that's the healing modalities of plant medicines, whether that's the connection to nature, whether that's the understanding of the spiritual realm and our relationship with the world, whether it's the...

community aspect and how to grow up kids with less of the stress that we have because you have communal sharing of paternity and maternity and all of these things.

There's so much that we have forgotten and lost that our indigenous cousins can teach us and that's why Medicine Festival and festivals like it are bringing this to us because it's nourishing and we need it.

It's vital for us.

But I have to say that on all of my journeys traveling around the world, at the end of my time of making this three series of tribe, I did kind of get to a place at the end of that whole years of traveling where I actually thought to myself, oh my God, actually, are we just such a powerful species? And the way that we live together and cooperate together or just basically our social structure is Are we just basically destined as a species to get ourselves in the space we're in now? And even though I was living with all these amazing tribal groups who were having much less impact on the planet than us, I was kind of thinking, well, they're just on the same conveyor belt as we are, but just further back.

We as a species are just bringing ourselves to this monumental moment of like, whatever is coming, but it's not great and is this just who we are? And that was, I didn't ever sort of say that out loud, but that was what was going on in my head because I completely lost all romanticism for tribal people.

Tribal people can be aggressive, tribal people can be at war, tribal people can like destroy their own backyards just like us, not as much, but they can.

So that was where my mind was going until I met the very last group of people that I met on my series of tribe.

It was people called the Panan.

They were nomadic hunter-gatherers living in the middle of Borneo and this group just totally knocked me sideways.

I was like, okay, like I kind of seen it all.

I've been to the most remote places, people still using stone axes.

naked running around the forest.

It's not like I hadn't had lots of really unique and extraordinary experiences, but for a group to really knock me sideways was quite a thing and they knocked me so much sideways, it's almost like, here's a different operating system.

Every other group doesn't matter how diverse or how different they all look, they're all kind of in one camp, and this group is in a completely different camp.

It's like, it's almost like another species.

It's like, what the **** is going on here? It so blew me away and just think about how that I must have been, because I'd seen so much and what it was about that group, and this is the bit I normally go into in a lot of detail, but I'm going to rattle through so we get questions.

It's basically they weren't in the game of power and hierarchy that everybody else is involved in.

Every other tribe I'd visited had a chief, had a shaman, that were involved in some way in competition, maybe with their neighbors.

or within the community.

Every other group I've been with was in some way involved in this game that we're all in, where we see competition and hierarchy and the meritocracy or whatever it is, it's just part of life and that's how we, that's how, and we think, this is how it's always been.

You know, that's what we're told.

It's always been like that.

We've even got major public intellectuals telling us, well, you know, lobsters are all competitive and we look on television now, we see all the tooth and claw of television natural history and then we look at our leaders telling us you've got to be competitive in the marketplace and we're like, well, it's always been like that.

But what I learned when I met the Panan was like, okay, here's a group of people that aren't working from that same operating system and for a while, when I first met them, it was really weird for me because it was like almost invisible.

It's like, it's not something that they're like waving a sign.

I'd read on the anthropological text, so here's an egalitarian hunter-gatherer society unaffected by the Neolithic revolution without leaders and whatever and you're like, okay, that's cool.

But like the feeling of being with them was the thing that knocked me sideways.

It's like a part of me that every time I ever go into any setting, it's like, where do I fit in my status in this group? Where am I? And I went there and it was like, that's part of me.

I didn't even know what was going on, but there was just something missing in my relationship.

It's like everyone was equal and I was included in that, but it was just really, really, really weird and I think that if I hadn't been to so many other tribes beforehand, I wouldn't have noticed it.

was really quite invisible.

It's like if that was the first group that I'd visited, I wouldn't have noticed because I would have just been overawed by, wow, isn't this an amazing experience living with a wonderful group of people in the forest? And aren't they sweet? But because I'd seen so many, It knocked me sideways that here was something completely different.

But I didn't have the courage to talk about it.

I mean, I remember coming back to the BBC and saying, like, you know, I've met this group of people and they were like, oh, poor you, don't believe in like utopia, do you? There, And so I was like, okay, what is this? There was definitely something very, very powerful for me, but what was it? And I was lucky after that, actually here, at Wazing, where I met one of the most important people in my life.

He doesn't know it, but I tell him, but he, the most extraordinary person and people, the married couple Jerome and Ingrid Lewis, and they're anthropologists, and Jerome specializes in pre-Neolithic hunter-gatherer society.

So that's people who are still nomadic, living in the forest day by day.

who haven't been affected by what they call the Neolithic Revolution, the agricultural revolution, the domestication of plants and animals and what he told me was like, yes, that experience you had there with the Panan, Bruce, that was the first time that you actually...

truly met a group of people who are indicative of how all humanity was for 95% of our time on this planet up until the agricultural revolution.

From when we first stood upright and rearranged our societies, which I'll come into later, into men and women living together, we created a path to live in a way without hierarchy right up until agriculture for 180,000 years and then it all went haywire later when we got into leaving the tropics and accumulation and to get through the winters and the droughts and who owns what and all of that stuff and the competition and the aggression and all that goes with it came from there.

Now that's a contentious point and there may well be anthropologists in the room who are like, well, that's not what my teacher tells me because it's not universally accepted but it's widely accepted.

But from my perspective, it was like, that was different and we'll go into the reasonings for the sort of like the theory in a minute if we have time.

But what Jerome and Ingrid also did was they said, okay, Bruce, this isn't just one isolated group in the forest.

Every single indigenous community still alive today that haven't been affected by the Neolithic Revolution who are only in Africa and only sort of existing in Africa and Southeast Asia, but every one of those all have these same traits.

No hierarchy, no coercion, no competition, no a whole bunch of stuff and they're all very different cultures, but they have these same principles at the heart and so he was like, why don't you come with me and we'll go and meet the group that I've been spending 30 years visiting and actually I spent five years with them and bringing up my own family.

in the Congo, where there's still 200,000 people today living in this way and I'm like, **** yeah, let's go and it was when I went there that I really tapped into the deeper aspects of this.

Because when I was with the Panan, and anyone who's seen my film, Tawai, you see the Panan, you meet the Panan, but they're so gentle and you can't really see how this is going on.

Like, how is it that they maintain this stuff? It just seems like they're all living in in kind of like a really blissful state and I'm careful with my overly romantic words.

I don't throw romantic words around, but I'm using them carefully because the feeling of being with the Panan is extraordinary.

There's a very famous guy who lived with them for 30 years.

He never saw a single argument.

You know, it's like there's something about them and I can't say that about other groups.

So anyway, I went off to the Congo and I met the Benjeli.

which is the tribe that Jerome and Ingrid told me about and when I was there, I was then able to see much more the tools in play of how they maintain this balance and harmony and there's a whole bunch.

But at the heart of it is the narrative.

You know, anyone who read Sapiens, I think that guy made a really good point at how powerful narratives and stories and belief systems and all the rest of it are.

It's like these are one of the largest tools that we have as a species.

It's like some, you can read in some places that you know humans can't make friends with more than 150 people and that's because that's the size the villages used to be and da da da da and it's like, no, A narrative can spread forever.

Like religion is a narrative.

You can go and meet someone from another part of the world you've never met before and understand the rituals and the and the ideals by which you connect.

Likewise, money is just a story.

It's not even related to gold anymore.

It's just a belief system that we have, and look at how powerful that is, and that goes everywhere.

So narratives are our most powerful tool that we can use to cooperate in an understanding of where it is, what our value system is, across everywhere that those people share the same narrative and that was the narrative that they had, these these pre-agricultural peoples, these nomadic hunter-gatherers, was no one is above anyone else and if anyone tries to be in any way, shape, or form, our job as a society is to fucking sort that out and we have a whole bunch of ways that we do that.

But that's our job.

Because anytime anyone gets up, it's a problem.

Anytime anyone goes down, it's a problem.

We're working to keep the balance and it's not done from a communistic central politburo redistributing wealth.

It's a fully decentralized, every individual's right and job is to speak to power anytime that it emerges.

I remember I was with the...

I was with Jerome, he goes, oh, there's one guy here you might meet one day.

He's spent a lot of time in the other community, the villages outside, where there is hierarchy with, you know, with the other African tribal people, the Bantu people.

He goes, so he's kind of got in his head that he likes this idea about leadership, but he's not, you know, he's not a leader at all.

But anyway, he might meet him anyway.

Well, sure enough, one day this guy comes past, he goes, hi there, my name is whatever, I'm the chief here, and this little kid happened to be walking past at the same time.

He goes, no, you're not, you're * **** and that's his role.

That's his role.

Likewise, I was with the Ben Jelly and we were dancing around with the guys and I was with the guys, they're like stocky, tough African dudes and they pointed at this other guy at the other side of the dance floor that we created as a sort of clearing in the field.

Don't forget the nomadics, they're always moving, but we cleared the dance floor to have this festival and he said, see that guy over there, he's the best hunter here.

We all know it.

Like we hunt elephants.

He goes out with a wooden stake.

He's the best tracker.

He's like, he's the keenest.

He knows all this ****.

He goes out first and he stabs it with a fucking stake and we all came in afterwards.

I mean, bloody imagine the scene.

But we all come in, but he's the best hunter.

We all know.

But a couple of years ago, he started showing off that he was the best hunter.

So of course we had to stop hunting with him and the women refused to cook his food.

because we can't have that ****.

It's just even the status, even the showing off, even the trying to get any more is a problem.

The women aren't choosing the competition winner.

They're not choosing the alpha male.

Everyone is looking for the community as the number one thing and imagine how different that is.

It's the upside down of us.

It's literally almost every aspect of our narratives that we tell each other is on its head and there it is and that's the ***** that lasted for 180,000 years and look at the mess we're in.

Because it gets out of hand.

So the experience of being with these people is something else.

It's quite hard for me to stand here and really describe it.

It's also probably quite hard for you to get your head around it, especially as like, okay, well, Thanks for the story, Bruce, but how on earth is this going to be of use to us in today's world? It's like, where's that going? Hopefully, the film I'm about to tell you about, which is all of this and more, will have some stuff that will be some stepping stones and looking forwards.

But before I get there, I just want to kind of maybe paint a bit more just the sensation of being with people who genuinely are looking after each other.

and who have this narrative that's so ingrained that it's not played out.

There's a group of people who live in Southeast Asia called the Batech who no anthropologist has ever witnessed any violence at all in their society, just none and any time there's even a remotest sort of like tendency to aggression, They see that as a form of mental illness that the society as a whole has to cure.

I mean, this is our deep ancestry and we wonder why we're so sensitive to status.

There's a wonderful epidemiologist, I think, or sociologist called Richard Wilkinson.

He did an amazing TED talk and he's done years and years of, he's a professor at Nottingham, I think.

Amazing work.

on inequality in society is a great TED talk and he points out that every society that has the greater inequalities have the greater social and health issues.

He's like does all this data and he's pinning it on the thing.

So because we think like poverty is related to these problems, but it's not being poor, it's feeling poor and it's the relationship between you and those around you that is the thing, that is the status.

We know the game is rigged.

How fucking frustrating is it when you see the guy with the Porsche? It's like, that is all of those things are the things and you're getting crushed by society.

It's the feeling of inequality is at the heart of the heart disease, the cancers, the incarcerations, the murders, and the statistics show it very clearly.

within the nation states from the stats that they give themselves to the UN and the ILO and all the rest of it.

So it's that is related to what I'm saying.

It's like those people knew that when the gaps start emerging, that our status and our feelings of self-worth and all of these things are very finely tuned to playing into that and yet we've acknowledged a society and a narrative and a belief system that meritocracy is how it's always been and this is the best way for us all to be.

It's totally fine that Elon Musk can have as much money as 20 nations because he's fucking earned it, didn't he? And there's nothing rigged about that, is there? And so, and that's, but we kind of just take it on board and go, yeah, fine, because that's the system that we're living in.

But like for 95% of our time as a species, no thank you very much.

We know that any time that power gets centralized or ossified or fixed or anything like that, it only leads to corruption and we see it with our gurus, we see it with our fucking leaders, we see it everywhere and yet we somehow still just sort of accept it.

It's like they know it, they knew it and deep down we know it too, but we've just kind of accepted it.

So like, wow, that's an interesting story to put back into the world.

I think.

Just even not being competitive.

I remember I was again with the guys in the Ben Jelly running around this area that we'd made for a dance and someone threw out this big long stick into the middle of us and so like, but all of us guys got on either side of this stick, you know, it's like a row of people, one side and the other and I'm like, cool, we're going to have a tug of war.

That's what guys do, where they're split in two with something and we're going to push-pull.

Yeah, that's what happens.

But at no time did anyone, and we're all flexing our muscles and gruffing and whatever, but at no time was it one side against the other side.

At no time was it any individual being showed up or showed down and this isn't a show for me.

This is just an example of the many moments I had where my heart just fucking melted.

It's like, oh my God, the brotherhood of this, which is their daily life, is to support each other.

And, I can't express how deep those moments affected me, because it's they're invisible, apart from the feeling of being there, and..

and I remember saying to Jerome, Well, yeah, I thanks a lot for...

that sounds really glib, didn't it? Thanks a lot for showing me this.

No, it's like, you know, I really appreciate him being with this group and learning all of these tools and techniques they keep for maintaining balance, but how, but surely they must be in competition with the people on the other side of the valley or whatever, because you still don't get it, do you? Because, like, firstly, if you come back here in six months, they won't be here.

This is a nomadic hunter-gatherer society.

They'll be somewhere else and even if you went to that place that they might be, half of them would have gone somewhere and another half, this is an overlapping, ever-

changing way of being that lasts even to this day to 200,000 people throughout the whole tropical forest.

This isn't like restricted to the 150 people in a village.

That's village ****.

We're talking old stuff where it probably stretched as a way of being throughout the whole of humanity everywhere, especially through the tropics.

But it did change and there's a whole bunch of reasons why that may have been coming out of the tropics, having to accumulate to get through the deserts and through the winters or the droughts.

Probably agriculture having its impact because we don't quite know what we're doing and so then we don't know soil rotations.

Populations have to expand massively, well not don't have to, they do expand massively for a whole bunch of reasons and then if you get a crop failure, which you will do if you don't know rotation because we're very new to agriculture in relative terms, then you're going to be hitting Maslow's bottom rung of needs and then starting to be more animalistic again and let's not forget, the place that we're in now is in a way more animalistic than the than those nomadic hunter-gatherers.

What I mean by that is that we obviously did come from species who are alpha male, apex, hierarchical, harem, fighting, competitive species.

That's what the other primates, especially the great apes, are.

Not so much the bonobos, obviously, but the others.

So like, how did this even come about in the 1st place? If what you're saying is true, Bruce, well, when did it start? There's a wonderful organization called the Radical Anthropology Group.

It meets in London and throughout the year and Chris Knight and Camilla, Camilla, I was going to say Parker Bowles.

Camilla, I do, I have to apologize, Camilla, I've forgotten your surname.

run this amazing thing and they've got some, and Chris and Camilla have written some wonderful books and they have some theories around this and one of their theories is how we came about shifting from aggressive alpha male type societies to the egalitarian societies and it touches on probably what is one of the most powerful tools that these societies use to maintain balance.

I've been listing the other ones, the narratives, how they all speak to power and all the rest of it.

There's all this stuff going on.

But probably one of the most powerful tools comes, probably relates to the moment when the egalitarian societies began in the 1st place and here's a story, and it's just a theory.

So No one can prove this.

No one knows it and it's obviously there's going to be nuance and more.

But as a general idea, probably around the time that humans first stood up right, as we know, hips narrow, you give birth prematurely, only the people who give birth prematurely probably survive.

So we're giving birth to very, very premature offspring who are very helpless, which is unusual in the animal kingdom because most things come out, either they jump into a pouch or they come out and they're ready to fucking run and fly, Or they're in the nest being held.

But like us to come out and be helpless was a thing for our species and it's quite possible maybe that the women of our species were like, you know what? It's been great for so long having the genes from the biggest strongest dude, but actually all he's doing is standing around, getting ready for the next fight, and we need a hand.

What about all these other dudes over here, you know? Why don't you come and join us? But that's no good, because it's all adopting in a fight.

So maybe we even went through some evolutionary processes, which is, again, unique for our species, where we don't show when we're in ostracis, when we're in fertility.

and we come into ostriches in synchronization, those things, according to Chris and Camilla, may be evolutionary steps that happen to our species so that the women could go through this revolution of basically saying no to the alpha male and inviting the other guys in.

Because if you try and say no on your own, you'll be overpowered and if he always knows when you're in season, you'll be overpowered.

But if you can conceal that as a form of sex strike, maybe we can try and start this other type of society.

It's a mad *** theory and thought because it would have happened over eons, but this whole, standing up right and all the rest of it would have happened over eons too.

So maybe this is a transition.

It's out there, but it's something in it and the reason I like it is because when again I was Jerome and Ingrid in the Congo, Jerome's like, okay, what I'm going to show you now, Bruce, is I'm going to, I'm going to, there's a ritual that very rarely happens, but I, because he's been with them for 30 years, he goes, I am, and he's been initiated into all sorts of layers of things, he goes, I am going to call the Ajengi and the Ajengi is the male spirit that comes out of the forest.

He goes, I, because you're here and you're bringing a bunch of cash, I'm going to have an ajengi.

I'm not giving the cash to Jerome, you *****.

So that I could make a feast.

Because he goes, normally you'd only ever call ajengi if someone's killed a cat, killed an elephant.

So you then bring in people, you have a huge festival because they've got meat for days.

He goes, Bruce, you're my elephant.

I've killed you.

You're going to bring in the staff and then we can have a feast, which means that we can then invite people to have an ajengi and what the ejengi is, he thinks, and I also think, because it looks and feels like it, and Chris and Camilla think, is the ejengi is the reenactment of that very ritual, which is the moment the women said no to the alpha male and invited the other men in.

I mean, what the ****? If that's true, And let's not forget that these are pygmies in the Congo.

This is probably the oldest unbroken lineage of human beings on the planet.

You've got the San, you've got the Hadza, and a few others in Africa, but they've been very acculturated.

I mean, all wonderful.

Whenever I sort of like make these comparisons between indigenous groups, I'm not ever trying to be negative.

I'm just making a point rapidly.

But the pygmies in the forest have been living relatively unaffected by the outside world for all this time and so here you have a really interesting indication of old, unbroken lineage of people who've never fucking left.

The rest of us...

we all came from Africa, but they're still there and here's their story of how it happened for them.

So it's kind of, okay, you got my attention, all right and what they say is like, this is how society began.

This is how it began for us.

This is the beginnings of everything and in this ritual, you've got this fucking penis, phallic, leafy thing coming out of the forest.

This is the spirit by which we used to become pregnant and then you've got all the guys like dancing around to keep the thing away from the women and it's like, all right, okay, so maybe this is what Chris and Camilla are saying and so the film that we're going to make is going to be called A Jengi in homage to that spirit, not homage to the spirit, but to the ritual.

Because for me, that's phenomenally interesting.

that moment.

But what really takes it from there is that what it seems like, and okay, I'm throwing out conjecture here, but what it feels like when you listen to Jerome talking about the relationships in the community is that the women made a pact with the men when they invited the men in.

It's like, okay, guys, you can come and live with us, but you've got to leave behind your competitive and aggressive ways and then we can fucking live together as society and call ourselves equal, et cetera, et cetera and that's the pact that they made that lasted for 180,000 years, give or take and so at the heart of it is the women and this agreement and what happens much more regularly, the Ajengi ritual only happens every now and then, but what happens much more regularly is another ritual called

the Ngoko and Ngoko is when the women come together and they remind the men of this fucking thing that they agreed to 180,000 years ago and what that is, now what I'm touching on, and it's a complex thing to talk about, especially in today, but what that is, where the women come together and they basically hold the men to account for their behavior and so you have all the women, old and young, all coming together, and they are singing songs and and basically pinpointing the guys if someone's been a lazy lover or if someone's been aggressive in the home or whatever it is.

But what's fascinating and what's the most extraordinary thing about living with an egalitarian tribe like this is that this was the first time probably that I had been with a group of people where I understood equality for the first time.

Because I'd come from a place where you think equality is sameness.

But that's not how they see it.

Equality is just equal in status, equal in value.

But everyone's different and for them, the men and the women are different too and so when the women come together, they don't have to be acting from their masculine in order to be powerful.

They don't have to be acting like men in order to be powerful.

They come together and they are using their own quality of whatever the **** it is they want to do in order to hold these guys to account, but they do it tends to be with laughter and song and play and teasing and sexuality.

It's like, don't behave yourself, you're not going to fucking get any.

That is the energy of these, and it's not like I'm going to...

isolate you and ridicule you as a toxic masculine.

It's like, no, Yes, your behavior has been not good.

We as a group of women are going to come together and we're going to give you all of our power in our special way of knowing how to.

But it's not to outcast you and separate you.

It's until you laugh at yourself and then you're back in with us.

Because that's their wisdom and people say to me, Bruce, that just sounds like a matriarchy.

I'm like, no, because a matriarchy is another form of hierarchy and those women had the wisdom to know that any archy is no good.

So what they do is they come in and they are probably the, well, I think almost undoubtedly, the strongest force in the community.

But they know that if they hold on to that, it leads to resentment and da, da, da, da, da.

So they then step back and let the guys come out.

The guys don't do anything like the same.

They just sort of dance around and flex their muscles.

But that's one of the really key things that I noticed and I know, and we can ask questions about it later, that's a complex story to be putting back into today, but I

just have to tell you what I witnessed and how it was working and how that society was to be with.

I'm not here talking about any old society, I'm here talking about this thing and that was the one of the tools.

So that's the insight and I'm like, all right, I spent then the next 10 years going, having had that, I left the BBC, I made a film called Tawai, which is a bit more of a spiritual journey, less about this.

It touches on it, but it's not, it's like, I still don't feel like I've got it off my chest, if I'm honest.

So after having said I'd never make another film, I've decided to do that.

A friend of mine, Beatrice, is in the audience somewhere now, has been really helpful in putting it together.

We're about to do a fundraiser soon and in this, it's like what I've spent the last 10 years trying to figure out is like, okay, so Bruce, great, lovely insight, thanks very much.

I speak to myself like that.

But like, you know, how's that helpful? What can we do with this? And so this last decade, I've been trying to figure out, is this just a time gone by? Is this only possible because we had abundant, equal access to abundant resources in the tropics? And this is because we came from this Jengi thing, you know, is it just the genie is out of the bottle and you'll never get it back? Or is there something that we can transpose from those people, the wisdom of how they maintain balance, the wisdom of how they brought it about in the 1st place? Don't forget, they had their own revolution that dismantled the alpha male, but they knew not to fight the alpha male.

You'll never win if you fight the power system the way it is.

It's what Einstein and Audre Lord and Buckminster Fuller all said.

It's like, you can't fight this system.

Don't try to.

You'll only break yourself against it.

Create something else that renders the old obsolete.

Or use different tools, different tactics.

But don't just fight it, because then what you'll do is you'll just replace one type of power system with another and we've seen that on our own history.

So how do we learn from these people? Is there anything that we can reapply? And I think there is, which is why I'm here talking.

So in the film, we're going to tell that story, because the first and most important thing is knowing what's possible.

Knowing how amazingly versatile and extraordinary we are as a species, and knowing that these communities can live and they are, I remember saying to Jerome when I was with the Panan, or talking about the planet.

He goes, they're the most peaceful people on the planet.

I'm like Jerome, I'm making a film.

You can't just come out with these like, you know, it's kind of blase statements. He goes, Bruce, I'm a head of anthropology at UCL.

When I say they're the fucking most peaceful people on the planet, it's because by the means by which we do these tests of peaceful communities, these types of community come out by a wide margin, the most peaceful people on the planet and they're fucking anarchists, no leaders.

See how far we've come with our narrative understanding.

Anarchy, anarchy without leader or archy could mean a few things without hierarchy, basically.

Like monarchy, one leader, you know, so anarchy.

So that's all it means.

It doesn't mean throw the TV out the window and write in the streets, but that's what we've interpreted to mean chaos.

because that's the world, the paradigm that we've been swimming in for so long.

But actually, these people with no leaders and no hierarchy are the most beautiful people on the planet.

I mean, it's just mind-blowing.

So how do we go about reintroducing this idea? And even if we can't, you know, we're not all going to go and be hunter-gatherers again, and I don't think we should.

That's not what I'm trying to profess.

But what I'm thinking is, what are the principles? What are the theories by which these people maintain this and what can be reintroduced and so the first one is knowing it's possible, knowing how flexible and resilient and amazing we are as a species and that we're capable of this is just the first step.

Because that's the thing we all come up against is stop being so naive and idiotic, which is what I feared for so long.

But it's like, no, I'm bolstered now by the academics.

This is the real thing and it's weird that the academic world knows this.

I remember actually here at medicine last year, I gave a very similar talk and someone came up to me afterwards and goes, Bruce, I love, I love it, I agree with everything you say.

Oh, by the way, I'm head of anthropology at whatever, whatever, and I agree with everything you say, but the only thing I don't get is like, why are you fucking telling everyone? And I'm like, because you haven't fucking done so.

Why is it still in these ivory towers of academia? And it's like, no one knows about this.

We're still having debates with Jordan Peterson saying, well, you know, we've always been competitive, so that's what we, it's like, no, No, this is who we are and what we're capable of.

So that has to come out first and then it's like, okay, what are the principles? And when I look at the principles, it's like no coercion, no ownership, no accumulation, no all of this stuff.

It's like, oh my God and you start pulling them out, you're like, You're going to try and persuade people to not accumulate, to not, it's like, it's just an impossibility to imagine those things.

But then when you pull them together into like a law, I need, this is a new bit I've added to the chat, I quite like it.

I don't mean law like LAW, I mean law like L-O-R-E.

Like what was the law of the forest, the law of the jungle? What was the law which is like kind of the culture, the meme, the essence, and it's ultimately about power.

Every one of these things that they have, so if you read in the anthropological text, it's like non-coercive societies, non-hierarchical, it's like, but each and every one of those, no coercion.

Even parents aren't telling their kids what to do.

If a kid wants to, as soon as you can walk, you're a fully functioning member of society, you can go and live next door if you want.

Doesn't mean that the parents aren't loving and joyful and offering advice and all of that.

Of course that's happening.

But no one is telling anyone what to do.

It's a **** to think how far away that is from our lives.

But you also think about it, like how much we all push back from those things.

So it's like they're so subtle.

No accumulation.

Well, we all know accumulation.

Look at Elon Musk.

Accumulation in its own right is a form of power.

No hierarchy, no leaders, no shamanism.

Before shamanism, everyone had their own direct connection with the divine.

They're all hunting and gathering.

Anyone who's seen my film, that's what it is to be present, to be able to catch the monkey.

You've got to be in your body and senses.

You're all present to forage.

You've got to be present.

It's not the same as farming.

We've lost that daily meditation that we used to have that kept us balanced in our minds and bodies and therefore feeling the empathic connection with a forest that can guide us.

No coercion, no ownership, no ownership.

Everything comes from nature is for us all to share.

Like, so, but you know I said to you earlier, these tribes, they're all, they're different. but they all have these same principles.

So like the Panan, you visit the Panan and they're all constantly sharing because they're like, oh, I just feel like I have to be giving everything away.

Whereas you go to the Benjeli and they're like constantly stealing.

It's like, but it's the same thing, no ownership.

When I say stealing, it's what they call demand sharing.

Like if you're not using it, I'll have it, thanks very much.

But it's still the same principle.

So you see what I mean? They're not all, the cultures aren't the same, but the principles are.

Okay.

So all of this stuff at the heart of it is power.

They know that when power gets out of hand, it causes problems and it ultimately becomes corrupt.

So how do we do this? Well, firstly, we make the film, we write the book, any help you can give us will be appreciated and we get the story out.

Then we have to start rethinking about how we educate our kids.

I can see my friend Uri at the back there.

last time I was with Uri, I was with another friend, Elsie, who might also be here, who's just started a democratic school where I used to live in Spain and in this type of school, we've got no basically no hiring.

The kids are running the show and so what we have in most other schools is like, sit in a row, do what you're told, and I'm out front and it's no surprise we all get sent to fucking happy to march to war.

Or like, where's my leadership? Where's my direction when there's a problem like a pandemic? It's like, because we're so used to being, needing some kind of leadership, some kind of, some authority figure to guide us.

was imagine if you went to school like our friends have started in Spain and there's more of them, but there's some of them around in the UK and I know that this is not as easy as just what I'm about to say because there are complications with all these things, but as a principle, trying to understand that...

What we're teaching kids at school, which is all about competition and hierarchy and coercion and all those things, is basically how it starts and there are other educational systems that interrupt that and empower the individual, empower the child to make his own decisions, even in his own education, in his own, in all of that and those schools are, they're fucking terrifying.

Parents have always said to those kids, like, oh my God, all the kid wants to do is just play on his iPhone all day long.

But the trust of allowing the inner The urge to learn is a big thing, but there's a lot there, but there's something in it that is slightly...

complex in the way that we're suddenly bringing up kids.

You remember the Stanley Milgram experiment and the Stanford prison experiment, all these things.

They're like, well, this is human nature because we're just like, you know, someone with a clipboard telling you to press a button to fucking murder someone.

It's like, well, they're just going to do that.

It's just who we are.

No, it's not.

He's putting an egalitarian triceperson in front of that and he's never going to do that.

It's like, why are you telling me to do this? No.

It's like our education system is at the heart of so much of our behavior as we go through and we're invisible to it and we're and we're so caught up in this sort of like, Well, we need they need to be in the marketplace so they can be productive, and all of that is this curse in a way of productivity, curse of growth, curse of everything that we have that we feel is the only way that we're going to get through, but it's because of the system and talking about the system itself, it's like the It's very easy for each and every one of us to point and go, that's the problem.

That's the problem there.

Look how rich they are, look how coercive they are and all the rest of it and you see it in activism A lot.

It's like, that's the problem.

You're the problem.

It's like, I think that the other thing that I've realized through really sitting with this is like, the problem isn't the people.

We're all part of this We're all part of this and actually, I would say 90% of the rest of the world, we're the problem.

So it's all very well, I was pointing to someone else.

But let's not forget, this is a global problem, global issue.

It's like we're all on the spectrum in many ways.

So it's the, don't hate the people, hate the, don't hate the, don't hate anything, but like work on that idea.

It's the system and we're remembering that we're also hugely problematic by just being functioning members of this thing that we're in, causing all the problems we are around the world.

We are, still an empire here in the UK that is taking so much from the world.

We are that.

We are problematic.

For every pound, there's an article recently, for every pound we send to Africa, we get 20 back, you know, to all of the nefarious nonsense going on.

It's like, we're still an empire.

So like, When remember those things when you start pointing, it's like it's the system that has to be reconsidered, I think.

So how do we go about doing that? Well, for me, one of the ideas that's really fascinating, oh my god, I'm going to run out of time, there's not going to be any questions.

Sorry, Ruby.

I can't, oh, I'm so terrible.

Like we're living at a really interesting moment in time where tech That's the first time I've mentioned tech and my whole title was ancient wisdom in one.

Oh my God, I'm so bad at this.

Yeah, what to say? You just have to...

sorry everyone.

So...

That's sweet, that's sweet.

Tech, I mean, I would rather be stood here talking to you about foraging, climbing trees, growing food, horticulture.

I mean, that's where I'm at in my heart.

But what we need is tangible **** to really deal with the problems we're in and like, and stuff that can spread like memes and to be an idea that can take purchase and really deal with power and to just say, we've all got to love each other a little bit more, or we've all got to look at ownership and stuff, it's just not going to do anything.

There has to be something tangible that really interrupts this runaway train of madness that we're all a part of and I do think that this law, this meme of power is at the heart of it.

Because all of those things that I just listed all have power.

So how do we do that? Well, at the moment, power comes in many different shapes and forms.

But one is interesting is like, it's just decision making.

we've again been lulled into this idea that actually we have democracy, which is supposedly the best thing, and we have representative democracy because there's no way that we can all get involved in all the decisions, so we'll leave it to the experts and we're like, okay, cool, that's how it works, that's better.

But actually, that's not how those people would do it and one of the reasons we have to leave it to the experts is because we think everyone's fucking stupid.

Now we didn't want the whole, look at what Hamda Brexit, it's like madness, it's like that.

So that's, we've been lulled into believing that and actually if you look at the tribe where there's no violence, you look at the tribes I've been to where everybody is a fully functioning member of society, that for me tells me that there aren't people just born bad, born evil.

It's actually, it's all about society.

The environment itself is the thing, the most powerful thing and if we can fix that through healing and a whole bunch of stuff, we can also believe in each other and know that by coming together we can make right decisions and yes, it might mean that we

are going to have some teething problems along the way, but there's nothing that's more problematic than the direction that we're currently going in and we know that our leaders can't make decisions for the well-being of us all, because they're so caught up in their own addiction to power that they will make the decision that just gets them back in power, rather than thinking about what our kids need in the future.

So that is the problem.

There's too much money in the middle.

The central idea of the Ben Jelly is the power gets stuck, it gets corrupt and we know it.

Look how long we spend just listening to the nonsense of our leaders' love lives and it's like, what the ****? Why can't we make decisions about real things rather than listening to the petty nonsense? of all the in-party politics.

It's like, what is actually going on? And we just buy into it, and the news just feeds it to us.

It's like, what the ****? And we can do it differently, and tech now finally has arrived where we can use tech to trust and that's what's needed.

So blockchain, I'm not going to, firstly, I don't have time.

Even if you hate it, even if you see the environmental issues, all the rest of it, it's coming and our kids are going to know it and there is trustworthy cryptographic elements of that are coming and once we know how to truly use that, we can start infiltrating the system to make decisions.

So an example would be for an open source, I really have to rush this now, open source app where only people in my, let's call it, let's start locally with my local constituency, local authority.

Okay, so we've got the normal council, And when they come for election, I'm going to stand there for election with this app that's just been created by the people and we trust it and we believe in it and only people in the constituency are able to communicate with each other, no bots and we're all doing this.

There's a whole bunch of stuff that will enable this in a really good way.

You just have to take my word because I don't have time.

I could then stand for election and go, if I get in, whatever you as the constituency want, I will do.

I'm not there.

I'm just the person holding the app and if you want me to go through the yes door or the no door, I'll just do that.

Which basically means that everyone in the local community, when there's the debate on what's going to happen to the bridge by the church or whatever, it's like, well, actually, we can have a say in this.

Normally, what we have a say every four years, it's no surprise we're so apathetic and we're talking about football and stuff rather than what's going on, because we just don't, we just know we've got no say in it.

Imagine if you can start having a say.

Imagine if you can start knowing that your voice is actually going to be heard and that your decisions will be made and then something comes up that's really important to you.

can then go, oh, right, well, actually, I'm going to start campaigning for my, I'm going to do it on the pub and have a chat about it.

I'm going to, everything might shift in that we've suddenly become empowered.

The tech is there now that would allow that.

I haven't time to go into it, but it's coming and it's, oh, no, it's actually here.

It hasn't been built properly.

but the tech itself is here and so we could start using that to literally diffuse the central power.

Like the women didn't fight the alpha male.

They diffused, they understood what's the energy, what's the source of energy by which he is powerful because he has the reproductive rights over us.

So we're going to refuse them and do our own thing and it's similar.

It's like we're going to We're not going to fight the system.

We have to use the system to get in there and then diffuse it from the inside and we can do that.

You can't just say, well, we need to create something else.

It's like, yeah, well, they won't let you create something else because they'll just never implement it.

So we have to go in stealthily and then find a way of then bringing that power away from the middle and as the power comes out from the middle, suddenly we have to reconnect in a different way.

One of the single biggest problems in all aspects of our lives at the moment is this disconnection.

You hear it.

It's where the addictions come from.

It's where so it's the pain of disconnection and loneliness and also we don't have to deal with our **** because we don't have to deal.

with anything at all.

So we're all just living in our own stuff and we never have to let it go and we're shouting at the TV.

But it's like when we actually have to start connecting again, the healing can begin.

I think and now this was going to be like 20 minutes of the talk.

So I went too far in the other space.

But like the healing is the thing that has to come alongside this and I know that the rest of the day here is about medicine and where's Ruby gone, and psychedelics and stuff.

So maybe that's a nice place for me to end.

But clearly to just hand back the power to everyone now could be problematic.

But if it happens gradually, if we can step into it and start becoming re-enfranchised, re-empowered, And it's, direct democracy, as it's called, or pure democracy, isn't the same as anarchy and egalitarianism, but it's a step towards re-empowering us and not only re-empowering us, but also the rest of the world, giving us, telling us that they're not going to give us all that stuff for free, et cetera, et cetera.

It's A rebalance, an idea.

All it is an idea whose time has come, I think and the reason that I believe in that is because Firstly, we have to think of something else.

We know that the way we're going isn't working.

It's like if we didn't have these problems facing us, I wouldn't be here talking to you about this.

It's like it's so far out there.

There's no philosopher in history that even imagined egalitarianism as a way of being.

Because it's so far away.

Literally, you read anyone Rousseau, Hobbes, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Jesus, Mohammed, anyone.

No one even thought of egalitarianism as a way of being because it's so out there and yet I've been there, I've seen it, I've touched it.

It's real and not only is it real, but it's how humans lived for so long.

So that in its own right gives it credibility.

So we can do this and if you think that the enlightened, you know, the indigenous wisdom has deeply affected the world in the past.

Communism, which, by the way, this isn't, and I don't, it's not what I'm proposing. Some people think it might be.

It's not.

This is very, very different.

But that, which clearly had an impact on the planet, came about because Marx was reading about the Huron and people from the Americas.

Likewise, the Enlightenment movement came from the French philosophers who were reading the teachings of the writings of the Jesuits as they came back.

So indigenous insights have had an impact on the planet in the past.

There's 2 clear examples.

But neither of those influences were from the egalitarian space.

This insight into egalitarianism is only appearing now.

It's only really coming out now and so we don't know how this will impact us.

But we're so thirsty for an idea, and it touches us so deep.

It makes sense and there are tools for us to enact it if we want.

It may be that we don't want, because we're all sitting pretty, thank you very much. Hey, it's nice being on top.

But like the Ben Jelly women visited me in a dream, they're like, it wasn't a dream, it was an IOS ceremony and those Benjelli women came to me like, you fucking let it out.

You let it out and I'm like, what? Like, you let it out and I think they weren't talking to me, they were talking to us, our society.

They were like, you will let it, you fucking let it out.

We know what happens when the gorillas fight.

When the gorillas fight, the whole fucking place gets destroyed.

Everything gets torn apart.

Whole fucking trees, everything just gets.

We know that energy.

You let it out and I'm like thinking to myself, like Russia, China, like, there's like, that's the energy and they didn't name it in the dream, but it was like, there was this like the alpha male energy, the fucking fighting, the competition, that energy goes, you fucking let it out and they're like, the only thing that gets that energy back in the box is the women coming together because they know how.

The Ted K Archive

Bruce Parry
Seminar on Egalitarianism at Medicine Festival
2023

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