

PATHWAY TO THE TRUTH OF WHO YOU ARE

Now that sounds a little grandiose doesn't it? It does, especially when you consider that the information here is presented very simply. It's a series of ideas, exercises, and stories, listed one after another, all in black and white. Not all of them will engage you in the same way. But they do lead somewhere...

And they're going to challenge you.

But I think you'll rise to the challenge. Because you want this so bad.

What is it that you want again?

What is really going on here?

What are you going for?

Is it money?

Is it fame?

The desire for money and fame hasn't seemed to get you ahead so far. It hasn't been enough. We need something bigger if we're going to break through this wall and take this bull by the horns. If we're going to get up in front of people on stage, if we're going to market our music to people, we need another sort of breakthrough.

You've been focused on having to be successful. Having to get so many fans, having to get so many 'likes'. All that's well and fine, but it's not the reason you do music. And if you're not focused on the reason you do music it's not going to make sense to you. You're not going to do it.

So why do you even think about going out and playing live? Why do you record music and why do you dream about your music career?

What's The Whole Idea?

What is the dream? To make lots of money.

Why is that important? Because I don't like my day job.

What don't I like about it? Because I've got this gift I want to share - feel compelled to share. I like to be creative. I've got great songs! I'm supposed to interact with people, inspire them, not sit behind this stupid computer in a cubicle all day! This is not who I am. I need to show people who I am. Anyone could do this job.

Why do I need to be who I am? Why do I need to express who I am? Why do I need to show people who I am?

Because I am alive.

You don't want to be told. You know something others don't. You know your truth, though it is difficult to reconcile with the world around you. This truth is more important, and transcends any external advice or information. It's the only thing that matters. Your music is the expression of this truth, expressed uniquely by you and by you alone. You know this, even if it's in a rather vague sort of way.

You've been told you can't be a musician and make a living, you can't be a musician and find a partner, and that you'll never amount to anything. You've done it anyway, well, half of the time. Push comes to shove and you can't help yourself. But you're fixated on proving them wrong, on having to prove something, on having to justify your decisions, your sacrifices, because essentially, you feel guilty about it, mainly to yourself. And that so-so job you've got doesn't help either - you always feel you just need more time. You're always focused on what you don't want instead of what you do want. Guess what? It won't motivate action for your music career and it won't get you ahead.

You need to focus instead on what makes you do music in the first place.

So what's the reason you do music?

It's the only thing that's ever mattered. It's my dream. It's who I am. It's my art.

It's the best way I know to show people who I am. It's the greatest gift I have to give.

It allows me to connect with people.

It allows me to know who I am by connecting with others.

It allows me to help others to know who they are.

Universality

The first time I consciously recognized universality, I was on a bus. I was on the way to work in a downtown office and I just decided to be present. That's right, I just consciously decided to be present. That is, focused on the here and now and not wrapped up thinking about what I was going to be doing that day as I sat there on that bus. I was just experimenting with the idea of being fully present. And I looked around. And I found myself considering all the other people on the bus. Being there with the other people on the bus. Suddenly I found myself noticing and seeing everybody differently.

Each person was going to a different job, each for a different reason, each with a vision of where they imagined their life leading, each with a different dream and their job actually only a moment in time in relation to something grander. A stepping stone to a bigger dream.

Everybody really, ultimately wanting to be known, known for who they were, their true self; everybody was dreaming of 'universality'. Universality is what we want for people when we encourage them. It's the point of all encouragement.

Feeling this, getting into a sense of this, this is a big step, a big key to how you want to be on stage, how you want to interact with the audience.

Universality Exercise

So I want you to do this exercise this week:

Take the bus somewhere, wherever you need to go, but ideally on the way to work in the morning, become very present to your surroundings, and look around.

Once you've settled into your seat, stop thinking about what happened yesterday. Stop thinking about where you're going and what your day has in store. Just be present. Look around. Be present to where you are. Open your eyes. Notice what's going on right now. Look around at everyone else on the bus. Yes, it's ok to do this. Where is everybody going? Everyone pretty much is going to work.

Look at their faces. These are all real people. Each person is going to a different job, each for a different reason, each with a vision of where they imagine their life leading, each with a different dream and their job, relative to their supervisor's job, actually only a moment in time in relation to something grander. A stepping stone to a bigger dream. Each one of them.

Imagine that. See that.

All of these people really, ultimately, they want to be known, known for who they are, their true self.

Everybody is dreaming of being universal. They are dreaming of universality. And it's beautiful and it's the creative force of love really and it's what we actually all want for everyone.

This awareness of 'universality' is a key element of what it means to love your audience.

Everyone wants to create something, to be fully expressed, to be self-actualized, to experience connection. It's universal.

Universality II

Universality is quite a concept. Sometimes hard to pin down exactly. And that's because it's a feeling isn't it? It's an awareness.

What do you feel? You feel like you want to be expressed. You want to let people know who you are and you're interested in knowing who other people are somehow. And in that

moment, you feel like you *can* be expressed. That nothing's stopping you.

And in the next moment... what's stopping you?

What's the difference between there and here?

Your limiting beliefs, that's the difference. If you want to permanently be there, you have to deal with your limiting beliefs. This is the secret to the kind of empowerment that turns a musician into a rockstar.

But it starts with an awareness of all the voices that are making demands of you, for all the wrong reasons. All the reasons why you can't be you. Why you can't follow your dream. You have to choose your dream, right now.

RIGHT NOW. You need to make a distinction between what I call your socially-mediated consciousness and your core self.

You need this awareness. Your socially-mediated consciousness is made up of all the assumptions and expectations you've taken on, how you compare yourself to the rest of the world. The salary you need to be making to feel worthy. So that you feel you're making progress in life. The job title you need to have in order to feel worthy, worthy of the love and admiration of your parents and friends and acquaintances. All the reasons you've decided in the past to act against yourself, to take actions that run counter to who you are, that keep you from being who you are.

Your socially-mediated consciousness is fundamentally based in fear. It's *who you think or you've learned you should be* or even that you need to be versus *who you are*. It's the source of your self-consciousness versus your self-awareness. It's the part that needs to assert its worth versus the part that knows its worth. It's the part that dwells in the past or worries about the future versus the part that wants to take action in the present. It's the judging part that keeps you small versus the part that wants to expand, create, and share.

If you're going to get anywhere with your dream, with music, if you're going to be happy, you want to align yourself with your core self, who you are, who you were born to be. The source of your dream. That knows connection. Love. Growth. Non-judgement. Presence.

All of your demons live in your socially-mediated consciousness. And they're keeping you from following your dream. You need to slay them. Ruthlessly. You need to stop listening to them. To stop giving them life.

Part of your mind and body are conditioned to think that there's a cost to doing this. But there isn't. There is only benefit.

Exercise - Champions and Enemies

So where do your limiting beliefs come from? Well, let's find out in an exercise called Champions and Enemies.

And what I want you to do is simply take a sheet of paper and make two columns. In the first column you're going to list the people who have supported you. Who have supported your music dream. These are your champions. And in the second column you're going to list the people who have undermined you, who have shot your music dream down in some way. Who have belittled you. These are your enemies.

You may find that one or both of your parents or your siblings belong in the enemies column. They might be your parents, and you might love them, but it doesn't mean that they've supported your dream. You know the truth. Be honest. You might find past teachers in both columns too.

Do this.

You may find yourself adding to your lists as more ideas and memories pop into your mind over time.

The Castle Blocking Your Path

Imagine your music path stretching out before you over the countryside... your way seems clear.

Until suddenly before you on the path looms a castle, stretching as far as you can see to the left and to the right. There are parapets and walls and towers. And it's blocking your path.

And the walls are constantly being reinforced. You find that every time you attack they are quickly reinforced again.

Should you bring out the heavier artillery?

Whaddaya say?

But hang on, it turns out that this is a magic castle. The more you attack it, the stronger it gets. Now what do we do?

Well, maybe we don't need to destroy this castle. After all, what's the problem? It's blocking our path. We just need to get *past* the castle. Once we get past it, it's no longer relevant. It fades away. Forever forgotten behind us.

So how do we do that?

We make peace with the *keepers* of the castle. So that every time we remove a stone, it stops

being reinforced. So that they're not blocking us from going through the gate. So that when we take it down, it stays that way.

Because when we look closely, we discover that this castle is made of thought. The stones at the top are our negative and limiting thoughts, doubts, worries, shame, guilt, fears. Fear of success, fear of failure. The mortar holding the stones together is made of our core negative beliefs. There's no money in music. Musicians are losers. You can't go on tour and have a family. All the reasons why you can't. And the foundations of the castle are made up of our deeply held inhibiting feelings. Fear of rejection. Fear of judgment.

But the path is calling. So let's get down this path. Our music path. Let's get past this castle once and for all.

And let's do it by undermining its foundations, and by making peace with the castle's keepers, and get through that gate and let the castle disintegrate behind us.

Foundation Story I

Above all else, there is one most powerful and effective blow that you can ever make to the foundation of the thought castle that's keeping you from your dream. And I'm going to explain it to you by telling you a story. It's a really good story.

I had had one big regret in life. I don't have that regret anymore because it has taught me so much. But my biggest regret was that I had spent so much time with my ex-girlfriend in a relationship that was so twisted and guilt-ridden and warped. I regretted that I hadn't managed to free myself sooner. That I had played that role for so long and it took so much to stop playing that role.

Why didn't I just break up with her you may ask? So simple.

I loved her of course. Well, I knew I had loved her. And I'd gotten used to the punishing psychological (and physical) cruelty of this person, obvious to everyone but me. It was a pattern I'd been conditioned to accept.

But things had gone too far. I was stuck in a box and was but a shadow of my former self. She was stifling and unreasoning. I was restricted and I felt the wrongness of this.

And I was scared of her. Scared of what she would do to me. Scared of what she would do to herself. Almost unconsciously I found a way to build up my will. And I hope she's not reading this because she never knew the truth...

It's a little controversial perhaps, but this series of events was equivalent to an exorcism. The exorcising of a personal demon that was keeping me from getting on with my life. I'm not proud that this is what it took.

I was volunteering at a conference to build my resume and at a dinner event I met an Austrian woman. She spoke German and I had spent a year in Germany on an exchange as a teenager. We chatted. Flirted. And without much discussion, ended up in her hotel room.

That was an interesting experience.

Before getting home I looked in the mirror. And it's not what you're thinking...

I noticed little scratch marks on my nose, ears, and cheekbones from her earrings. That's too much detail you may say... but it was significant, because that had happened before with my girlfriend and let's just say there was no good reason for those scratches to be there... I was going to be crucified.

I had to remove those scratches.

And what followed was the most demeaning thing I've ever done to myself. It reveals the depth of my fear. It was the only thing I could do. I didn't think a lot about it. I took the velcro strap on my jacket and I rubbed those scratches out.

It didn't hurt too much. The scratches scarred over. I was marked. I'd pretty much mutilated myself. But it worked. I told her an accident had happened while moving a crate at the volunteer gig.

After a couple of weeks, the scars healed. I had dodged the bullet.

But mentally I was in a new space. I had carved out a new awareness. I was horrified with myself. Nothing could be worse than feeling like I had had to do that. It gave me the strength to move on from that relationship. So strange, these situations we create in our heads.

The relationship deteriorated steadily over several months. We broke up horrifically. It told her I wasn't in love with her anymore and she found a way to bring me to a new, even deeper depth of misery.

She locked herself in the bathroom and pretended to commit suicide. She wasn't actually doing it, but I didn't know that. There was nothing I could do but plead with her and crumple into a ball. I did not know I could suffer so deeply.

After that episode, the craziness of it all was clear. It was ugly all the way to the end, but within two months things had run their course. Unbelievable sense of freedom. Unbelievable sense of relief.

I had allowed myself to be reduced to nothing in that relationship.

I had been manipulated to the very extreme core by guilt. Never again.

After that I developed a very heightened sense of manipulation by guilt and I simply didn't tolerate it.

Years later though, married and soon to be moving across the country, on a visit by my mom, she asked what I planned to do with myself. I had been working on a new set design according to Tom Jackson's Live Music Method that I was very excited about, and I was full of optimism.

Upon hearing this, with increasing intensity she started constructing some kind of roundabout argument that only vaguely followed a logical pattern. It was saturated with condemnation about how I couldn't possibly be concentrating on my music career when I had a young family. She was layering on the guilt, irrespective of my relationship with my wife and our philosophy of life which unbeknownst to her I guess was well established and well-considered. She didn't seem to be aware or take into account that I might have navigated those very questions in some way vis-a-vis my dream already at some cost. I reassured her.

But later, upon reflection, I was appalled. She had been trying to manipulate me by guilt. And she had been doing it all along, my entire life. I used to buy this stuff. And I knew in that moment that I had suffered my one big regret, that I had had that extreme relationship experience because I had been conditioned to be manipulated by guilt. By her.

I was angry. I was angry for most of a year. I was exasperated with her. My mom visited me in Ottawa and when she got off the plane I couldn't look her in the eye. The visit went badly.

A year later I visited her, somewhat recovered, and on that visit, she in turn didn't respond very warmly either. At one point we went into the basement of her house to look through some old stuff that she wanted me to get rid of. One thing we came across by chance was a picture of her on her wedding day those many years ago.

I was surprised by her immediate reaction. "Isn't that an awful picture? I look just awful" she said. Here was my beautiful mom, radiant in her wedding gown, ashamed of it. The happiest day of her life! I told her how great she looked.

I couldn't be angry anymore. I knew she was repeating and reiterating all the limited things that she had been told by her family. It was deeply embedded, unconscious. When I thought about it, I realized she had suffered for it her entire life. She had suffered more than I.

I forgave everything forever. I've been sending her love ever since.

Before I clued in to her influence in my biggest regret, I didn't need to forgive my mom. I had a good relationship with her. I wasn't angry at all. I didn't know I had a reason to be angry. I had always accepted her messages as having a practical basis. It wasn't until I heard clearly the voice of manipulation by guilt and put two-and-two together that I was able to identify and discount her voice in my head as plain old bullshit: "You can't be a musician and have a family." "You don't want to do that. What an awful life." "Oh, give me a break, Aaron. When are you going to get your head out of the clouds and get a real job!". And more.

Now I am certain she has always loved me and wanted the best for me. And those limiting thoughts she was repeating were an ingrained, learned, unconscious response.

And when I forgave her, truly, those thoughts lost their vitality and they faded away. An intense, negative emotion stopped being bound up in them. I stopped playing the role I had learned and eliciting that limiting response from her. Our relationship changed dramatically for the better.

Right there a huge piece of the thought castle was blown away - my mom's reality was no longer my reality. When I escaped my girlfriend, I learned the key, I gained the awareness, that allowed me to call bullshit on the limiting beliefs my mom had inherited and everything I'd agreed to believe along the way. All the conceptual links validating that perception of reality and in how I thought and limited myself, turned to dust.

And when I forgave her, and insodoing forgave myself for having gone along with those experiences, I eliminated the feeling of regret, the feeling of anger, the feeling of inadequacy, and guilt, those voices lost all power and I was truly free.

Forgiveness has been taught by great teachers for millennia. And it's not something you do just because it's supposed to be 'holy' or 'good'. Get that thought out of your head. You don't do it for somebody, or something, you do it for you. You do it because it's practical.

It serves you. It helps you defeat self-consciousness, become fully expressed and connect with your audience. It frees you from the past. It leaves the past in the past. So you can move on to better things. So you can live fully now. In the present. So you can grow.

Because when you discover that all your core negative beliefs that have led to the worst experiences of your life (or perhaps better said - the greatest learning experiences of your life) are tied in to the voices of your 'enemies', and everything that's ever held you back is built upon the ideas of the influencers in your life, the keepers of the castle, despite their best intentions(!), you get angry.

But by understanding the basis for those ideas you become able to forgive. And when you do, not only do your inhibiting feelings disappear, but the core beliefs turn to dust, and the limiting thoughts lose all power over you.

No One To Blame

Were the powerful regrets I had surrounding my extreme relationship with my ex-girlfriend actually my Dad's fault for having married my Mom in the first place? What made him do that??

What was his conditioning? Maybe it was *his* mom's fault... or was it his *Dad's* fault for having married his mom... and back and on, and back and on...

Quickly you see that there's no one to blame. The whole idea of blame rendered illogical... absurd... It's all just the beautiful evolution of life of which you get to be a part.

And with this realization another big piece of the thought castle is blown away.

Foundation Story II

My Dad is an upbeat, high energy sort who seems to know how to have a good time. He shows a lot of unconditional love. Until I started paying attention to the nature of my own limiting thoughts I didn't realize that some of these were instilled by my Dad and how highly sensitive I was to the messages and judgments of my parents.

It all became clear during a conversation when I was on vacation on Vancouver Island. My Dad was telling me as per usual about how I should get a real job and start contributing to a pension. I told him about my plans for the future and what I was working on.

In the next breath, he actually expressed a deep regret for all the things he could've done but didn't do during his working life. All the risks he hadn't taken. All the things he could have been. I told him he needed to forgive himself, of course.

But this was striking to me. How could he in good conscience be aware of his regret about his own choices and then also repeat the standard line of 'when was I going to get a real job and start contributing to a pension?' As if that was what it was all about? As if that had anything to do with meaning or happiness. As if that had worked for him. The contradiction was so evident, the reasoning so illogical, yet clearly so unconscious for him that he wasn't even aware of it. He was repeating a core limiting belief.

But I also knew that that standard line had made me doubt and worry and need to justify everything my whole life. That's how powerful our parents' words are. It had made my music career a sort of torture. A race to prove myself. A fear of death. The fear that I was wasting my life and all the doubts that came with it. Of time passing me by. The weight of having to justify everything done and not done. And then of knowing what I wanted to do and needed to do, but not doing it. And along the way I had refused to have fun, travel, sports, whatever, when I could have been working on songs... I had blamed the distraction of romantic relationships in the same way that my Dad blamed my Mom for somehow holding him back... all of the aloneness I put myself through, all tying back to my Dad. Regret was to have been my doom too.

And I knew in that instant that he, unconsciously, had impressed upon me the same pattern that he had lived with. I had lived the same contradiction and it was represented in me having for years pursued a 'normal' career half-heartedly and a music career fraught with pressure and guilt and fear. I had lived the dream boomerang.

The funny thing is, I really never had a moment's rancor toward my Dad. I always connected

him with an unconditional love that had given me strength. Understanding all this other stuff was really just a surprise.

And it's all just so very *human*... And so subtle and often *wrapped up* in love... and of course unconscious.

Are the effects of this on my life something I regret? Where does my responsibility start? Haven't I, after all, just lived life?

It didn't feel like there was something to forgive... but there is.

Do I see today that my Dad loves me anyway and not for what I've accomplished? Not for how I reflect on him? That I don't have to feel judged or judge myself for what I've done and not done? For how I've spent my life?

I have trouble with this one. But I know that I'll never perceive nor experience my Dad as fully healed until I have fully healed. Until I've forgiven myself and see my life from the eyes of the present, each day a new day, and not as someone rushing to catch up to what could've been.

And when I find myself judging my father, the reason is ultimately because I feel judged by him. He's still doing it because I'm still inviting it. And that's because I feel the need to impress him.

But I don't have to impress my father. The shame of my father is not my shame. I do not have to wear the shame of my father.

I need to forgive myself for compromising my integrity for the payoff of my father's approval. True devotion is not about seeking approval.

I may want a deeper connection with him, but a deeper connection may not be in the cards. Or maybe a deeper connection will come when I let go a little. And when I let go and allow myself to move past this context of judgement, the whole relationship will evolve to something new.

Be thankful for the gifts you've received from your parents.

However you've built on them and passed them on and celebrated them and shared them, and suffered and benefited from them, and grown from them and found meaning in those gifts, your parents don't have to/may never understand or even express an interest in those events. Thankfulness is unconditional.

Foundation Story III

Growing up I was ridiculed by my brother. Mocked. Paraded. It toughened me up. But it also always made me self-conscious. It was horrible. The way I walked. Or did anything really. If you mocked him back, he flew into a rage. Destroying everything. Violent. Caustic. Vitriolic. He was a real pain in the ass. I still don't quite understand it. Some people just aren't quite normal. Julia Cameron calls these 3% of people 'crazy-makers'. My brother is not the same guy now. Totally chill. More happy with himself perhaps. I guess he was just a kid trying to get by. Maybe he felt threatened by me, I don't know. But it was uncalled for. It was hard to forgive this one.

And I knew that I hadn't, that I still harboured some outrage, some rancor, some unresolved dark feelings, when even as an adult I immediately got offended by what appeared to be a smart remark from him on a blog post I'd written. I noticed my reaction. I knew there was a problem there I needed to address.

It irritated me. It crawled up my crack. I wondered how I should respond to that remark. I shot off a couple of quick responses and then deleted them. It took me a couple of hours of being irritated before I decided to go for a walk. And on that walk it came to me what I needed to do. I needed simply to send my brother love. Just picture him in my mind, the feeling of his presence, who he is, and love him. It worked. I let it go.

I am free of those feelings toward my brother now and we've never had a better relationship.

And soon after, other things became free. At that time I was walking to my day job every day. I had always been viciously mocked for the way I walked growing up. And one day my body started straightening up. I had wanted to have better posture for quite a while. But I don't think it was a coincidence that I started walking again in a more natural way after I forgave my brother.

Telling this story just sparked a new mantra:

I deserve to be alive.

I have got something to give.

In every moment

And in every situation.

Suddenly I can let my light shine. And my dream becomes less an act of defiance and more an act of sharing. I have more to give to my audience.

What is striking about all this? I have control. It's up to me to emancipate myself from what is keeping me down, from what is holding me back. You do too.

Because who is perpetuating your negative and limiting thoughts? You are. The events that caused them are in the past. How do you stop reliving the past? The secret lies in dealing with the feeling that's attached to the thoughts.

If you still feel it, in my case, my reaction of outrage and anger at my brother's comment, then you still believe it, you still believe that everything that was said or done to you just might be justified in some way. Otherwise you wouldn't be so threatened by it.

And if you still believe it, then you will never be a rockstar. You won't feel worthy enough. You won't be able to connect with your audience. You won't be empowered to do what needs to be done.

If you still feel it, then you still believe it. Forgiveness is the most powerful way to deal with the feelings. And because it is you who are in control, if you think about it, unforgiveness is masochistic.

Which leads me to a quote by a guy named Michael Beckwith:

"Even if your rational mind tells you it's justified, unforgiveness is self-abuse, because when you're lit with unforgiveness, you're holding on to the toxicity of those particular thought patterns and it's self-abuse because you're telling to the universe, do it to me again, I'm not ready to let it go so let me experience it again and again and again. It's masochistic. All forgiveness is self-forgiveness."

You can't tell someone to forgive perhaps, I mean I don't know your situation for example, but what most people don't understand is, is that forgiveness is in their own interest. It's practical.

Unforgiveness is a form of self-consciousness. You haven't accepted who you are.

And forgiveness is really nothing more than giving up your judgments about something. There is no right or wrong, only experiences to learn from.

How do you forgive - how do you make the choice and clear out the negative feelings?

First you have to notice them when they crop up. And you will likely notice them in your interactions with the people you identified in the Champions and Enemies exercise.

Then, you take your time with it, go for walk, take some deep breaths, cool down a little if you need to. And then you elevate your emotion, just like we did in the Best Moment Exercise and the Envisioning Exercise and the Elevated Emotion exercise, and you let your response be love. You send love to the person. You choose to react with love.

And you may need to do it more than once.

I remember going to visit my mom once and she was down at the beach when I got into town

and she suggested I meet her there. So I went to look for her... and I walked up and down a few sections of the beach near where I saw her car parked. But my mind was swimming with all sorts of exasperation and negativity toward my mom even though I knew better, just because that had been my habit of thought, and I walked the whole beach and I couldn't find her.

And it was only when I pulled myself together and consciously stopped and sent love, actually replaced my exasperated thoughts with thoughts and feelings of love as I pictured my mom in my mind, that I found her, literally moments later. I somehow was finally able to see her.

Because all the feelings just don't fade right away. And there's a few good reasons for this.

Your memories, and thoughts and feelings are stored in your cells - that's what your body is made of - even if it's not who *you* are. As it turns out, your cells physically die and replace themselves at a certain rate - your body is constantly remaking itself, regenerating itself, but for your whole body to be remade it takes something like 11 months. If you don't need certain feelings anymore, they won't be remade, but vestiges of them might hang around for awhile.

Another reason is that your identity doesn't just live on in your head. Your identity lives on in the minds of others who have known you. They have ideas about who you are based on their past experience with you. They have habitual thoughts, feelings and reactions toward you. Your identity lives on just as much in their head as it does in your own head! If you change significantly, until you reconnect with them, they won't have caught up with that change. Which brings me to another story.

Foundation Story IV

It was my birthday and my whole family was showing up. I had grand plans. I had a whole new album of songs and I had designed a whole new show, complete with stories, extended intros, audience participation, props, the whole shebang. I would debut it for my family. I would share who I was with my family, live. The time was now.

I envisioned it. I resolved myself. I rehearsed. My dad showed up days early to help plan the party. He wasn't enthusiastic about my ideas. He superimposed his ideas. I felt put out. I resented it.

My brother showed up. He was working on his phone half the time. He pointedly paid no attention to me. As the weekend progressed it was clear that he-who-had-always-needed-to-be-at-the-centre-of-attention felt like he needed to be at the centre of attention at this family event too. I was sidelined at my own party. I took it badly.

My mom showed up. She was cool. She was happy to be there and she did not impose. But I knew some of my lyrics in one of my songs were potentially incendiary and I was sensitive about bringing that history into the mix as well. I feared it would be perceived as gratuitous criticism and I would be judged and executed.

I felt the pressure building. At the last moment I decided I wasn't going to play at all. I decided that it had become an exercise in proving myself and that I didn't have anything to prove to these people. It just wasn't going to be fun.

This was shattering to me. I had given up. I couldn't believe it. I beat myself up in my mind. I had genuinely wanted to connect in a momentous way to these important people in my life. To give them something. To show them who I was. To bring them somewhere new, to a new understanding. But somehow I just wasn't ready to do that.

I felt like such a failure. I was utterly out of sorts. I thought I was so on top of things and here I was, castigating myself. I desperately sought to get my mind in order. But I couldn't focus on the party and just went through the motions.

Luckily, over the final two days of the event I gradually made peace with myself and I managed to enjoy it by the end.

Weeks later I wondered what had really happened. I had planned to debut my new show to my family. But I had not realized that my family was the hardest audience I could play for. That they had expectations of me based on who I had been, who they had known me to be, which had confused me. That there was a group dynamic that was inhibiting, that was founded in long-established group and individual patterns. Role playing that was the most natural default and which insidiously worked on me. And that I had unresolved emotions regarding my family that I had forgotten, but which had come to the fore with everyone in the room.

Basically, old ideas about who I was lived on even after I had changed. They had come back to haunt me. I existed as an idea. But this idea was different in my mind versus what my family had remembered and learned and automatically expected. It was jarring.

I got clearer and clearer about things and when I played my new show at an Ottawa venue two and a half months later I had the best gig I ever had.

And it wasn't long after that that I got a chance to share my new tunes with my family after all. A month later I played an hour-long radio show at Carleton University and my whole family tuned in from across the country.

In the end I got what I wanted, more or less. I was thankful to have had another opportunity. I was absolved.

BE PATIENT, BE KIND TO YOURSELF, EVERYTHING DOES CHANGE.

If you don't perpetuate the pattern, guess what? It goes away. Everybody moves on. Everybody evolves. You have done a beautiful thing.

Are there people in your life that you can't play for? That's a good indicator that there's something to work on there.

It's up to you to address all the stuff you bring on stage with you and which whether you realize it or not, is getting in the way of your best performance. It's up to you to obliterate all of your self-consciousness. This is a highly personal process... only you will know what's really going on as you unlock your fullest potential, step-by-step.

And every time you forget a fear you remove another brick from the path. Every time you successfully recognize, conquer, dismiss, and forget a fear you get better and faster at it until eventually, the path is clear.

Because boom, boom, boom, that castle is now looking more and more like a pile of bricks for sure. At this point it's just a pile of rubble with a gate. But that rubble is still blocking the path. And the gate would be much easier to get through if you had the key. Luckily we have a few more tools to help us.

Which brings me to my favorite quote from a book called A Course In Miracles. And it goes like this:

"The escape from darkness involves two stages:

- A. The recognition that darkness *cannot* hide. This step usually entails fear.
- B. The recognition that there is nothing you *want* to hide, even if you *could*. This step brings *escape* from fear."

This is the whole nature of the stage experience summed up in one quote. Your self-consciousness, your fear, your doubts, your 'darkness', is exposed when you are on stage.

Whether you are aware of it or not, *all* of your self-consciousness is being exposed to the audience every time you go on stage. What is your self-consciousness made up of? Well, every single fear you have regarding your music career... Fear of failure (what it means about you if you don't make any fans), fear of success (all the things you *won't* be able to do if you are to live the life of a successful musician and how your life's going to change), guilt (how can you indulge your dream when other people need you?), shame (how can you waste your life pursuing a career like music?), sense of conflict (how can you have a family and be a musician?), second-guessing (can't you be happy doing something else?) - all of it!

People are paying attention and they notice it. People notice that you feel uncomfortable on stage. You aren't looking anyone in the eye. Your body language is protective. Despite all your

pumping and readiness before going up, in that moment when you're behind the mic on stage, everything changes. You feel fear of some kind or another, it's bewildering, and you don't connect with your audience. In that moment when you're exposed, part of you knows without a doubt that indeed darkness cannot hide.

If you're going to be able to get up on stage and take over the room and have the best gig you've ever had, you're going to have to obliterate all of your self-consciousness.

How do you do it?

Well, by actively observing and seeking out and striving to identify every negative emotion and limiting thought that you harbour. You *want* to notice these things. You want to expose these things. There's nothing you want to hide even if you could. You're eager to notice these things because you want to deal with them. Because once you've dealt with them, you're free.

Take notice when you're self-conscious or guilty about something.

Take notice when someone says or does something that causes you to feel shame or guilt.

Take notice when you avoid someone or avoid taking some action because of shame or guilt that you feel.

You don't want to hide it even if you could.

Foundation Story V

One morning, unbidden, a recurring thought entered my mind, and once I identified it, I was thankful for it, because it gave me an opportunity to clear another block getting in the way of me connecting with my audience. I was thinking about childhood friends and the fact that some had requested to be my friend on Facebook and I needed to respond. There was a list of about 8 or 9 of them but one stood out in particular. It was my best friend from Grade 6.

I had always felt a bit guilty because I started getting more seriously interested in girls and popularity in Grade 7 and it had impacted our friendship. We were just kids growing up of course, but I felt like I had sort of more actively caused a change in the friendship at the time and that it had caused some confusion and pain. Another side of that whole thing was that he and I had always competed for the top of class award at the end of year through grades 1 - 6.

Now here he was, decades later, friending me. Why hadn't I responded?

I suddenly realized I hadn't responded because I was ashamed. I had no statistics of note. He had become a Physics Professor at the University of British Columbia and I had no job title or income or status to mention. I didn't want to appear to be a failure. I didn't want to be judged and executed. More essentially, I was not proud of what I had accomplished in life. I was a loser. I had nothing to show.

This was the feeling of my thinking. It was in my head. And when I thought about all the reasons for my path, it suddenly occurred to me that the shame itself was the only thing I really had to be ashamed about. I had held on to my dream all that time. Some part of me had stayed clear on the value of connection despite the fact that I myself had forgotten what it was. I had never given up on my dream. Despite all the hardships, all the obstacles, all the reasons why not. And it was a big dream. A beautiful dream of inspiring vast crowds of people. Despite all, the shame had not gotten the better of me.

It was clear what I had to do. First I forgave myself. Then I friended him and every one of those people waiting for me on Facebook.

This was a big one.

The Key To The Gate Of The Castle

The key to the gate of the castle is forgiving yourself. When you forgive yourself, you step through the door.

...It was the insight that I didn't have to prove anything, that there is nothing I have to prove, that was the trigger for a profound dissolution of ego, of a spontaneous obliteration of every negative or limiting thought. The recognition that the motivation of having something to prove was actually a form of fear. The fear that I will have seemed to have wasted my life. A fear that I will have proven unworthy. A fear of judgement. Of my own self-judgement. A fear, a darkness, that I had to let go of, to shine light on. The insight that I did not need to justify all of the tradeoffs I had made in the name of my music career that had limited virtually every other aspect of my life. All of the jobs I had quit, all of the money/time I felt I needed to reserve instead of traveling to see people I loved (but for whom I wanted one day to play music for!), all of the opportunities in other areas that I had let fade. All of the career progress and earnings I had forgone, every relationship I had let die because I couldn't possibly be a rockstar and also have a family, every broken outcome that had resulted from the decisions I felt I had to make to retain the potential for a career in music. Basically, I did not need to justify never having lived life to the fullest somehow (in my own mind), by succeeding in music. At last I was free to love myself. To love everyone. To love everything...

So now, in your hand, you have the key to the gate... are you going to go through it?

Are the piles of bricks still blocking the way?

You're beginning to get a sense that your potential to inspire your audience is the same infinite potential it's always been. You've always known it somehow. You know it's possible for you.

So what are you gonna do?

Because you want this, right? You want this. Why else would you be here? How bad do you want it??

Imagine this. Imagine going on stage without a moment's doubt that you belong there. You're immediately oriented toward your audience. There's excitement, nervousness, but it doesn't hold you back, it lends you energy. You do all the things you planned to do in your live show and it's an ambitious set. You go for it just like you envisioned. You're not self-conscious about these things. *You are pursuing excellence and surrendering the results to the unknown.* You tell your stories. You look people in the eye. They hear you. They're affected by you. They're inspired by you. They admire you. And it's because of 'how you are', first, and 'what you do', second.

What you do is relatively simple to learn, and really, a pleasure to learn. How you are is what we're working on now.

If you want to learn more tools and techniques to help you connect with your audience, boost your presence and always take the next step in your music career, and some help and support as you continue on your journey, email me at aaron@makefansnow.com and let's talk about it.

The Truth of Who You Are

When you've wanted to share something with the people in your life... when you've wanted them to understand who you are, when you've wanted to let them know who you are, when you've wanted to play your songs for them, do you know what it is that you wanted to share?

It's not what you're proud of, your likes or dislikes, your fears and worries, the things you want, the things you complain about, your accomplishments, your knowledge, your travels, your guitar skills, or even your latest song.

It's all those things and none of those things.

It's a moment that's beyond you.

It's a revealing. A connection.

The Source that they share too.

Forgiveness and where it leads.

What it is to 'Know Thyself'.

An acknowledgement, a shared acknowledgement of something greater.

Because the truth of who you are is the truth of who they are.

Spirit.

The core.

Pure creative energy. Unlimited. Thought is the particle. Emotion is the wave.

Omnipresence. Omniscience. Omnipotence.

Why would you EVER hold anything back?