

WATCH: And the Music Played the Band | Charles Eisenstein Mini-Doc (with Transcript)

By [Charles Eisenstein](#)

I want to share with you a powerful 37-minute film that Ben Stewart made from an interview we recorded last summer. I'm not sure if I've ever seen such an effective treatment of what would otherwise be another talking head monologue. Just wow. Thank you Ben!

Watching it, I had the odd experience of learning from my own words. That's because what I'm speaking to in the collective exists in me too. They are the issues I've been wrestling with my whole life. So, I'm not some expert or guru who's got it all figured out; on the contrary, sometimes it seems to me that the reason I'm so insistent on speaking is that I, more than anyone, need to hear what I say. The danger for me is that I say it and say it, keeping it on the outside, directing it toward others, but never letting it in. The music and images of this film opened a gateway for the words to come into me. I know they will do the same for many of you.

We decided to release it without ads or paywalls or digital rights management of any sort. That's a big leap of faith for an aspiring filmmaker like Ben. If you'd like to support our work and future collaboration, you may do so [here](#).

TRANSCRIPT

Charles Eisenstein: Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to do: when I'm speaking to Ben Stewart as an avatar of humanity, I will look at Ben Stewart. And when I'm feeling like a direct connection with some other presence, I'm going to look at the

camera. Yeah.

Ben Stewart: It's not too often in a lifetime that we find somebody who speaks so well to the heart of the matter, that we feel like there may just be a simple answer to the complex problem of human existence. What you are about to hear is an early morning moment in time with Charles Eisenstein on the gift of life and the artist within us all. So, sit back, relax, still the mind, open the heart, and listen carefully.

Charles Eisenstein: Yeah, I can say a little bit about how I got here. And it's not really a path that makes me special because probably you'll recognize, you'll feel like a familiarity to that. But it started with an intuition that normal, s I've been offered it, and life, as I had been offered it, and reality, as I had been offered it – wasn't quite right – a sense of a wrongness in the world. And therefore a hesitancy or a reluctance to fully participate in life.

Different people express that reluctance in different ways; some by lashing out and acting up, some through depression and withdrawal, some through self-sabotage, or it could be laziness, procrastination, getting drunk, getting fucked up – like different ways of diverting, some of your life energy away from the program.

So my journey really was a quest, a quest, which is something that's based on a question. What is the wrongness in the world? What is going on here? Why do I feel alien to this place? Because life is such a gift. Why am I reluctant to fully step into the gift of life?

And that led me to unearth the underpinnings, I mean, what I understood as the underpinnings of our civilization – like the answer to that question goes that deep. It goes to the depth of everything. On one level, and I don't want to be like, you know, a downer here, but on the level of everything is wrong.

The way our society does it from birth – literally, you know, hospital birthing, etc – to death. Our attitudes towards death and the way that we die in this society, like everything is wrong: education, medicine, money, economics politics technology. Everything about the way we live.

Then, the next step of that in my journey was okay, well, it's not that it's wrong, but it is a state of being, a collective and individual state of being that is ready to transition to something else. What is this something else? Who are we and what is the world? What new stories can we tell ourselves about who we are, and what is, and how to live, and where we came from, and where we're going, and what the purpose of a human being is, and what a self is, and what's a man, and what's a woman? And how do you do this thing called life? What's a new story that can make sense of a world that is disintegrating into senselessness as we speak. That's the container of my thought.

I like to use the term, the old story, the story of separation – the story that says that who you are is a separate individual, a skin encapsulated ego, a soul encased in flesh in a world of other. In that story, your purpose here is to make a place in the world to survive, reproduce, maximize your self-interest, contend with all of the other separate selves out there who are trying to do the same. Out-compete them, establish dominance, insulate yourself from hostile or at least indifferent natural forces, and take what you need and what you want from the world. Because why not?

The story that I have been integrating into my being, and I can't say that I'm like, you know and especially impressive example of it, but this is my my path. And I'm sure many people will write will resonate with. It is understanding that my purpose here actually is not to maximize my safety, security, wealth, or self-interest. My purpose here, and the reason that I am on Earth and in this cosmos is that I carry gifts that I yearn to express, to give to the world, just like

every species, just like, every being. Like there's no species in an ecosystem that only takes and degrades the ecosystem. Every species actually contributes to the aliveness of the collective. They contribute to life and beauty – the unfolding of life and beauty.

We're the same, whether as a species, I mean, it doesn't look like that right now and that we are a gift to life and beauty on Earth. Does it? But that is what a mature species becomes. And part of the transition that we are in right now is simply the maturation of the human species. And it's true on the individual level as well, which is why you could make, you know, a hundred million dollars, but if you're not using that to make the world more alive and more beautiful, you're going to feel I wasn't put here on Earth for this. You're going to feel when do I get to live my life and not the life I'm being bribed to live? So, this is the orientation – the orientation of understanding yourself as gift.

And then that orientation, it inspires you and this is what I'm working on, right? It's like in every situation to ask: What is mine to do? What is mine to give? And that doesn't mean self-sacrifice, because it's also a recognition of the giftingness or the generosity of the world too – like to receive fully all of the gifts that then enable me to give forward. But it's the orientation of gift, understanding myself as an agent of the of the continued coming alive and coming into beauty of the world.

If you look at Natural History, it's a history of the world coming more and more alive. Four billion years ago, the world was not alive yet. And then there were bacteria and they became more and more complex and more and more interconnected and then they were multicellular organisms. And then the plants came and colonized the land because the land was dead up until, you know, half a billion years ago. But then the plants came and colonized the land and the insects and the land came alive too. And then the flowering plants came and it

made it even more alive, and more beautiful. And now we've been created as a species, same reason. As long as we're tapped into that – tapped into that story of what is humanity for? Because the old story says we're here to transcend nature. We're here to conquer nature.

That's not actually why we're here. So the more that we're tapped into the story of we're here to contribute to the aliveness of the cosmos, then life has meaning, Then you know why you're here. You know how to orient, how to navigate life. There's a North star to follow. So, that's one way that story tells us how to live. It tells us who we are and why we're here.

And I'll also say that it's not just a narration – that the story is part of a larger state of being. There's a like separation, competition, conquest, domination. That's not just an intellectual concept. It's a state of being. And when you're in that state of being, the ideology of that, state of being is seems natural. Yeah, of course the world is like this. Of course, it's us versus them. Of course, it's me versus you. Son, you got to get out there and you know, don't let anyone take advantage of you and make sure that you're right like that. It just seems natural from a certain state of being that civilization has occupied for centuries now. And that is becoming obsolete. Our Consciousness and our being is moving past that but we're still stuck in the systems that grew up around separation.

Anyone who's ever been in a situation that didn't call on their gifts or didn't value their gifts, you feel confined. You know, you feel maybe resigned, maybe cynical. A lot of people are feeling cynical today. Cynicism is a withdrawal from the world. So we can feel the truth of this. Teenagers especially know it. They are possessed with idealism. They'll never sell out. You know? They want to do something magnificent in the world. They have a great expectation of who they are supposed to be. So what happens? Powerful forces

coordinate to crush that native understanding, powerful programming starting in childhood.

So what's necessary is healing on every level, deprogramming from self-conquest, from the insult to our divine nature that we are taught. That we are anything less than that – than a gift to the world. That misbelief often accompanies trauma. In fact, maybe always accompanies trauma. Sometimes it's the explicit, obvious visible, trauma of abuse and neglect, violation. But it could also be the normalized trauma of, you know, being cast into a classroom where you don't know anybody, and where you're confined indoors when it's a beautiful day and you're supposed to be exploring the kingdom of childhood.

It could be the normalized trauma of having your relationships cut off repeatedly when you're trying to bond. And you're moved from one daycare to another to another, and then first grade, and then second grade. And then your friends move away and you move away. And like the ties that are supposed to contribute to a full self never form. They're broken again and again until you get used to it and you decide well, I'm not going to really make those ties. And I'm alone.

You can see how every aspect of the way that modern humans live contributes to this destruction of our innate knowing of who we are and why we're here. So it's a matter of healing, and I would say in this moment, your willingness to heal. Because the healing is available. And if you find the part in yourself that is ready and has been asking in a quiet voice for a very long time for healing, and you just give that little part of yourself full attention and full welcome – as if you were holding a child, a baby. That alone will set a process in motion because you're validating it. You're saying yes, this is sacred. I hold you, sacred. Miracles will unfold from that.

Let's affirm that everybody is an artist, serving life and

beauty on Earth. That's what an artist does. And if you're in those moments when you are a true artist, that means that you hold that sacred above all else. It's state of devotion. Whereas, if you hold making money or pleasing the client, or pleasing the art critics or something like that, above all else, then you're no longer an artist. It's called a sellout. An artist does things more beautifully than they need to be done for any external reason because you are in service to that which wants to be born. So that state of devotion, it says, whenever I am given as my raw materials, not just like physical materials, but the entire situation of my life, I will make as much good and Beauty out of that as I can.

And like you were saying like you face a rock climbing wall. You're not like, oh, man, I'm not going to climb very fast because of all these difficulties, you know, like art actually requires limitation. Just because like say you're writing a sonnet, you know, like you're not going to say, well, I can't really do very good job because this line has to rhyme with that line and so forth. Like no, like you take that structure and you fulfill the potential within it. You're bringing beauty to every corner of the world. And we have to trust that we are perfectly placed in the precise corner of world that demands the unique set of gifts that we have...

That's one way that you could say that we're a gift. We ourselves are artistic implements by, you know, a divine artist. And to participate in that process of creation then, we simply orient toward what is mine to do in this situation. How can I express my devotion to love, to beauty in this particular situation? Knowing that every situation is practice for every other situation. It's part of of inducing a state of being. So it might be something as simple as how you wash your dishes, how you make your bed, how you speak to your child.

Even in those moments that seem like a distraction from your mission. It's like, oh man, you know, here, I am, you know, cooped up all day with my two-year-old. And I could be out

there doing big things in the world. No! Actually the way that you are with your two-year-old sets a template for the way you will do everything else. In other words, it says, it declares here is who I am, here is how I will do it. Every act is a prayer.

Our function as an artist is like how do I make good of this? How do I make beauty of this? It is a fulfillment of who we are that expands to fill up every corner of our lives.

What I've been saying could be interpreted as, oh my God, here's this like impossible standard to be in a state of devotion 24 hours a day, in every single aspect of my life. I can't measure up to that. It's more like as I say these things, something will come to you that is available as some part of your life where you're ready to step more deeply into devotion and you haven't been doing it. But you're ready to do it and there it is, and it's right in your face. It's the next step. It's the step that you've just come ready to do. And as you do that, as you step into devotion in that one aspect of your life, and it might be something close to home, but it might be something out in the world. You know, it might be that you're going to, you have some role to play in public discourse, you know, in politics, and something like that, but it could also be something very, very private. Whatever. It is, you recognize that.

So it's the same orientation that solidifies our home and relational life, that also makes us into courageous actors in the social realm. It's the same thing. So, I don't know what that is for you, or you, or you. All I know is that you can recognize it. It may not be comfortable, but you'll recognize it. The patterns are largely unconscious and that they are so deep, so subtle that they will not be revealed in their totality, and you'll be able to cast them aside. It's more like each step that you take, that natural next step into devotion, into service, it'll do two things.

One, it will give you a level of joy, and solidity, and satisfaction that you had not experienced before except in temporary glimpses. Like you can get transported to that state through many kinds of experiences. But you can't stay in that state without practice. You will know that you are on the right path because you will receive benefits. You will have more ease and joy, connection, fulfillment, satisfaction in your life. And maybe you've seen it before but now it's real.

The second thing that will happen is that it will reveal even more – things that you hadn't even imagined before. So this insidious programming, the subtle programming, it's revealed like peeling, an onion. You know, you peel one layer, then the next layer is revealed, and the next and the next. And there maybe even, like the general trend will be toward more and more joy and fulfillment,

But there can also and will also be dark nights of the soul that are exceptions to that to that trend, because it can be really painful to see the new thing come up and to see the magnitude of your folly, the magnitude of your delusion that you thought that you were helping the world. You thought that you were in service, but actually, the whole time you were just trying to get Dad's approval, you were just trying to look good. And that can be really painful and, and totalizing. And really hard to see that that pain is the process of extracting these programs.

The forces that are arrayed against change to lock in the status quo, there's no rational way to overthrow those forces. As long as we buy into the old story account of how change happens, which is force versus force and the bigger force wins. You know, whoever pulls harder on the tug-of-war pulls, the prize to their side. Whoever has the most power, the most military force, the most money. They're the winners, and you're the losers. As long as you buy into force versus force, the situation on Earth is utterly hopeless and resignation actually is a good step. Paralysis is a good step, because it

says I'm not going to try the impossible anymore the way that I've been doing it. I'm not going to try to, to outbox, Mike Tyson. You know, I'm not going to try to, I'm dating myself here, I'm not going to try to outwrestle Andre the Giant, right?

There's another way. And to reach that other way requires what's called burnout, what's called paralysis, maybe even depression, despondency, resignation as you put it. And there's something on the other side of that. There is a matrix of causality that does not operate by force that you can tap into when you are in a state of devotion and surrender. That's when miracles happen. That's when like, in order to live in that reality where, you know, exactly where to be and when to be there where you are riding waves of synchronicity. In order to be in that reality, you've got to stop controlling things. Because when you try to control reality, you are actually putting yourself in a reality that works by control. And you have no access to the power of synchronicity, the power of being at the right place at the right time with the right person, the power of, you know, these spontaneous miracles.

This bardo, this in-between state of the resignation of the paralysis, you and I don't know how long it needs to last for any given person. When that state has ripened, they will be receptive to the ingredient that you're speaking of. Their receptivity will magnetize that ingredient to them. That ingredient might be you coming with the right message and the right example at the right time. It might not be any words you say to them. But it might be that they witness your devotion. And that your devotion is so obvious that they can't explain it away through their cynicism. Maybe they witness your generosity or the generosity of somebody that that doesn't fit into what they thought was real, doesn't fit into their resignation that yeah, this world is just shitty people, etc., etc. And there's no hope.

The intervention, that other ingredient could take the form of

a psychedelic medicine that shows them directly that their worldview of despair is missing some important information. So yes, there is another ingredient. But if I'm speaking to somebody in this state of despair, cynicism, paralysis, and resignation, this extra ingredient is not something that you have to accomplish. The extra ingredient is not an accomplishment. And the only thing that you can do in that state, at this moment, is to recognize that you still secretly have hope. And to feel the truth of what I say right now, which is that that other ingredient will come to you. And simply being in that truth also sets a process in motion. And you can feel it right now.

You're not alone here. This territory exists for a reason. There's nothing that's not love.

So the state that we've been talking about of resignation, despair, and so forth, that's an intense, distilled version of the state that most people are in most of the time. There's a tinge of resignation. There's a tinge of despair, even when it might be temporarily overridden by excitement or addictive energy. You know, like something's going well. You know, the future is so bright I gotta wear shades. Like things are going great, you know, temporarily. I'm on a high. I'm on a roll, but underneath that there's a despair that we take for granted as normal in this society. And there's a philosophical foundation of that despair. It's inherent in believing that you are a separate self in a world of other, because you're alien.

This confinement into a small ghetto of reality is a pervasive, almost universal state in modern society. And certain people who are sensitive and in a certain stage of their evolution are going to experience it in intense form – not as misfits and exceptions to the rule, but as exemplars of the rule. They are almost channeling a generalized state of being. So therefore what I'm saying is not specific just to those who are in an intense depression.

So this intervention, this other ingredient we were talking about, it could be a psychedelic or something that's called in from the outside, in response to our readiness and to our need, that is one of the ingredients. It shows you that there's a there there. It confirms the secret hope that I was talking about. And it sets you on a path.

However, there's another ingredient beyond that, which I was talking about earlier. And many people have had this experience, you have this epiphany. Finally, you get the epiphany. And you like this changes, everything. And I've got to live by this. I got to remember. I can't forget it. I can't forget it. I've got to hold on to this. And you eventually find out that you can't hold on to it. What was once an obvious direct experience becomes a practice, a principle. Then it becomes a memory and then it fades. And you're like, was I imagining things? Maybe I was just high, You know, maybe I was just whatever – like that wasn't real.

How do you hold onto a reality that contradicts the reality that everybody is holding for you and holding you in? And not just people, but, but like the economic system. I mean you might have an epiphany about abundance, but our money system, our economic system, shouts scarcity at us every minute of the day. You will not have enough, better take care of yourself, better protect yourself, better watch out. And not just money, the police system, the prison system, all these rules, and walls, and no trespassing. I mean the whole society is built around separation, competition, distrust.

So, how do you hold that epiphany? If you have gone through this cycle, it's not because you're too weak and you didn't try hard enough. That's not to say not to try. Yes, try. Hold that as precious, everything that comes from your accurate knowledge that that is precious is a good thing.

But the third ingredient is that we need help. We need other people to hold it with us, to hold it for us, and with us. And

for us to hold it for them also. That is the community that we're seeking. There's a lot of research about how community alleviates depression, how people are happier when they have robust social ties. And are unhappier and sicker, actually, when they're cut off from human connection, which is the irony of current health policy: seeking health by cutting us off from each other. Social distancing, lockdown, quarantine, stay away from me. That's not actually where health, mental or physical, comes from in the long run.

So the intense need for community has intensified in the last year as we speak. But it's not only like this animal, biological, social community that we need. It's also a spiritual community. If we were trying to move into another story, another reality, another self, the self is not a separate. We are relationship. You need to be in relationship to others who also understand this.

Really the essence of community is communication. So sharing material like this is a filament of community. It's no substitute for hugs and eye-to-eye conversations with somebody who loves you. But it's something, it's part of the mix. It's part of the larger community. It's part of the ways that we're holding each other. That we know that we're here for each other, that we're not alone.

So, it is okay to trust your attraction to information and to people who validate what you secretly know. Like when you say that rings true, is it that it confirms what you already believe? Or does it make your spine tingle? Is it sometimes even arresting, humbling.

Ben Stewart: It reminds me of when I was in the band and there needn't be any, like, explanation as to why something felt right when we were all in harmony, feeling the same thing. It felt bigger than us, and it felt effortless.

Charles Eisenstein: The Grateful Dead said it: And the music

played the band. That pretty much says it all.

Ben Stewart: Thank you, Charles.

Charles Eisenstein: Yeah, thank you, Ben.