

A black and white portrait of Andrew Wallas, an older man with short, light-colored hair, smiling slightly. He is wearing a textured, possibly wool, jacket. The portrait is set against a dark, blurred background and is framed by a thick, solid gold border.

ANDREW WALLAS
AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY FOR
LIFE & WORK

REBIRTH

Discover a different way of being in the world

As we all know, each of us has one physical birth, from the womb out into the world. From my perspective, we also experience other significant rebirths - times in our lives when we feel we go through some sort of fundamental shift. We may end up on a different pathway or maybe we simply find ourselves being in the world in a different way. This is what I refer to when I talk about rebirth. In many religious traditions this shift is recognised. In Christianity we talk about being born again. In Hinduism and Buddhism, especially among the Sannyasins and in the Yogic tradition, individuals are often given a new name to signify a rebirth that they have experienced.

I believe that at this moment on the planet, there is an invitation to all of us to participate in a massive collective rebirth. Humanity needs to find a different pathway. We need to discover a different way of being in the world because the old way is not serving us. It's not serving us individually and it's not serving the community. As I've said many times before, for me, this is the sole reason for Covid-19. It could have been many other things but it happens to be a virus. The virus is an attempt to wake us up from our effective hypnosis, and to find a different pathway forward. If this is unsuccessful then we'll need something stronger, something louder to get our attention to create this much needed shift in direction.

I want to highlight five different aspects of the inner dynamic of birth. The first is that each of us has experienced a physical birth, and although we don't remember this cognitively, or consciously, we have a cellular memory of our own birth story. The particularity of this has a huge influence on our life. For example, over the last ten years there has been a lot of research

about those of us who were born with a C section and the effects that this experience has on us through our life. Some of us had straightforward births, some of us had complicated births and in my experience this birth story becomes a template which all subsequent births, or rebirths, in our lifetime tend to share. If we had a quick birth then we tend to move through subsequent births in a quick way. Whilst if we had complication, then again, we will experience complication in all subsequent rebirths.



IN MY EXPERIENCE, ALL REBIRTH FEELS LIFE THREATENING IN PARTICULAR MOMENTS. WE ARE LEAVING AN ENVIRONMENT WHICH IS EXTREMELY FAMILIAR AND WE DON'T KNOW WHERE WE ARE GOING.

The second thing is that birth is initiated by the baby not the mother. The importance of this is that the baby knows when it is ready. Obviously, if there's a medical intervention or something else is necessary, then this is not true, but the natural way of things is that the baby knows when to be born. A friend of mine, Kitty Hagenbach, works with mothers and children – her website is called Babies Know. Babies have this inner knowing and for me, the significance of this is that when we are ready, we can relax into an inner knowing that we are going to initiate whatever birth we go through. When there's an external authority, it often creates resistance. So, we can draw comfort from the fact that we will initiate any rebirth, like an inner impulse, just as the baby has through the physical birth, we have an inner drive to evolve through rebirth.

The third aspect I want to think about is that birth is life threatening, although infant mortality rates have gone down in virtually every country on the planet. We all have an awareness of this in our DNA, locked into our ancestral inheritance, both physically and subconsciously, that birth is life threatening. In my experience, all rebirth feels life threatening in particular moments. The old me needs to die, the old me needs to pass away, which can be scary. We are leaving an environment which is extremely familiar and comfortable, and we don't know where we are going. This is particularly true right now when we have no idea what comes next. Does a baby have any kind of idea of what the post womb experience might be? This is true of every rebirth.

The fourth point I want to make is that the energy of, and the reality of birth is extremely intense and exhausting. From the perspective of the one being born it's a long experience, not some quick event or quick fix. The endocrine system is on high alert and we are flooded with emotions; it's possible to experience intense fear, anger, joy, sadness, all within a very short period of time. This is true when we go through a rebirth - it doesn't happen in a moment, it's an iterative process, intense at times and exhausting. Just in the past week I've spoken to a

number of people who are experiencing immense exhaustion at the moment. This is a natural part of any rebirth and the most important thing when we feel exhausted is to lie down and rest, which many of us find difficult.

The fifth point, which is in some ways the most important, is that in all births the mother needs to learn when to push and when to rest. The real value of a doula or a midwife is to coach the mother when to push and when to sit back and do nothing. And when a woman tears or suffers badly it's usually as a result of pushing at the wrong time. For all of us when we go through some form of rebirth it's difficult to know when do we act decisively? When do we push with every cell in our body and when do we sit back and wait? Human beings tend to have a waiting problem; we don't like to sit back and do nothing. But there are long periods in the birthing process when that's exactly what we need to do. We need to trust that the process is taking care of itself.



WHEN FACED WITH A SHIFT, WE OFTEN CLING ONTO THE OLD WAY OF BEING. WE KNOW THAT THE OLD WAYS ARE BROKEN, BUT WE FIND OURSELVES GOING BACK TO THE FAMILIAR WHICH CAUSES IMMENSE SUFFERING FOR US AND FOR OTHERS.

I now want to now talk a little bit about transition; the nature of transition and the energy of transition, as all our lives one way or another are spent confronting transition.

The first transition, or we'll take it as the first, is from the womb to the outer world. This is a radical change. We move from having spent our entire existence in a very contained space which is warm and dark, and we transit from that space into a huge outer space which is often very bright. It's difficult to imagine a more shocking or jarring change.

And thereafter we transition from baby to toddler, again, a big change. We transition from toddler to primary school, and the first experience of going to school is a massive transition in our lives. We transition from primary school to secondary school, from being prepubescent, through puberty, to adulthood. And again, in later life, many of us go through retirement, menopause, and other later transitions. All of these transitions have at least one thing in common, and that is you cannot go back. You know that you cannot go back to the womb, once you've come out of the womb. Once you've left primary school and gone to secondary school, you cannot go back to primary school, once you've gone through puberty you cannot go back to being prepubescent, and so it is with every transition. We have to leave the old behind. It sounds self-evident but as we go through each and every rebirth, we fight and we struggle. We

don't want to leave the old behind. And for me the most significant factor for the ease of travelling through any transition is our willingness to leave the old behind, to truly let go of what was. Our resistance to the new pathway, or the new unfolding, is what creates immeasurable suffering for us and those around us, even though intellectually we may welcome and encourage a new way; we might spend years going to workshops, talking to people and saying we want to find a new way.

When faced with a shift, we often cling onto the old way of being. To our old identity. A little bit like a drowning person might cling onto a life preserver. It's quite extraordinary the lengths that we'll go to, to hold on to old ways, to old habits, to old thinking. Right now, we are going through this big transition and as we emerge, it's going to be interesting to see individually and collectively how we get pulled back into the old familiar ways. It's rather like holding onto a form of self-harming. We know that the old ways are broken, we know they don't work, but we find ourselves going back to the familiar, which causes immense suffering for us and for others.

Let's look at what we are holding onto, what is it that we are not letting go of. First, and most importantly, we are holding onto our old identity. We looked a few weeks ago at how we create this identity and we think that's who we are, so we hold onto it for dear life. When in fact it has very little to do with who we are. We have to be prepared to let that go for the new me to emerge. Many of us struggle with this - it's not a one-day process. It happens over time. As we don't know what the new me looks like, we hold on to something that is outdated.

Secondly, we hold onto old habits. Habits can vary from many things, like criticising others, which becomes habitual and compulsive. Cynicism is a habit. Beating myself up is a habit. Putting myself down, complaining is a habit. If you spend a day looking at some of these old habits you'll find they're very compulsive, and they're very difficult to let go of.

Thirdly, we have stories about ourselves, stories about our lives which we need to give up but are extremely attached to. It might be that I'm not good enough, or I can never be good enough. It might be that men cannot be trusted or women cannot be trusted. It might be that the world is not safe, or that it's dangerous to dream. Whatever these stories are, they're not serving us, and we have to be prepared to let them go. But please don't underestimate how difficult it is to change some of these engrained stories that we've grown up with and reinforced time and again.



OFTEN WHEN WE LOOK BACK AT OUR REBIRTHS, NOTHING IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD MIGHT CHANGE THAT MUCH, BUT OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD IS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.

We often mistakenly assume that a rebirth or a transition is going to turn our life upside down, and by that we think that our outer life is going to change. We are going to leave the corporate world and become a yoga teacher. We are going to give up a particular way of life and go live in a mud hut in Africa. Of course, it's possible for the outer life to change, but it's not really what we are talking about. I've met a lot of people in my life that worked in a corporate world that they left behind to become a yoga teacher and they carried on in exactly the same way. Being driven or being split in many different ways. So, it's really about an inner shift. It's about being in the world in a different way. Often when we look back at our rebirths nothing in the outside world might change that much, but our experience of the world is completely different.

Finally let's look at what we can do to navigate transition, because my sense, and I know other people share this, is that the transition we went through from relative freedom to house arrest seemed to be much easier than the transition that we are now going to have to face ahead of us. We have to sort out this rather bizarre life that we have constructed for ourselves, back to socialising and going back to work. The transition going into the current state had a novelty value to begin with, and there was a strong level of acquiescence and a sense of it being for the greater good. And now I think people are experiencing a bit of shock around that. We are all trying to work out what does life mean post Coronavirus? It's like every other transition, we can never go back to the world before this happened. So, what I want to suggest is that the five different aspects of rebirth that we touched on can support us and help us create more understanding in terms of negotiating this transition.

The first one is to have some idea of our own birth story, and the reason for that is it can help us develop compassion and a self-love which is allowing ourselves to just go through our natural rhythm of birth in this lifetime.

Secondly, I think it's really important for us to affirm on a daily basis that we are initiating this rebirth. When we live our lives thinking that some dangerous virus is whirling around and is imposing itself upon us, then it's a very scary world. But this is something that we are initiating from an inner impulse, aligned to the natural evolution to be who we are.

Thirdly, I think acknowledging that it's a very intense process is important. We think we might die from this - it's life threatening. There are moments when we feel emotional; when primitive

and old emotions surface and again, it's easy to make this wrong. It's simplistic to think that I shouldn't be like this or that other people aren't experiencing this. But the intensity and the emotion is part of a natural birthing process.

Fourthly, it can be exhausting, and I touched on that earlier. Everybody has their own rhythm, but if you are exhausted it is a natural and understandable phenomena of any kind of birth or rebirth. So, rest, just like a new mother needs to rest.



**WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER,
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Finally, one of the things we need to bring awareness to on a daily basis is “do I need to push forward?”, “do I need to act decisively?”, or “do I need to sit back?” As many of us have found ourselves more frenetic in this lockdown period, while others have found ways to relax and just be, we need to learn to negotiate this polarity.

As many of us have experienced on a regular basis, we get to a point where we are sick and tired of certain patterns and stories that we keep recreating. The time that we are in now is a very specific opportunity for us to let go of these. Now is the time for us to find a new way forward and a different way of being in the world. As with everything there are three elements to change.

You have to have awareness, so we start by bringing in awareness of some of the things that I've talked about earlier. Without awareness, you can't get off the starting block.

After you've had the awareness, you need a decision. Are we really fed up with the old way? Do we genuinely want to find a new way of being in the world? This applies individually and collectively.

Finally, the third way is discipline. Daily discipline during those moments when we are sucked back into the old habits and the old stories. This is when we need to fundamentally choose something different. We are all in this together; transition is not easy and birth is not easy. It's not a pretty process but at the end of it you get this amazing new life. That's what's on offer for us here if we are prepared to ride the natural wave of this birth, trusting that there is something better coming. We don't know what it looks like, we cannot control it or manipulate it, but there's

a basic trust that something new will emerge. This is inherent in any transition. If you go from primary school to secondary school full of fear, expecting the older people to beat you up, it's not going to be a great experience and so it is with every transition.

We need to navigate this time by bringing awareness to what's actually happening. Fears arise and it can be scary and intense, but we can return to a place of trust that we are initiating change, which is leading to a better way forwards.

Q & A

Q: I would like you to talk about the ways you have taught us to re-centre each time we feel completely off balance. Sometimes we have awareness of what we need to do to change the habit in order to have a different result, yet we are often caught in a kind of panic or feeling that is very uncomfortable. Is meditation one of the ways to go back and re-centre, or do you have a specific tool or gift that you can give us?

It is endless, and there are an infinite number of ways in which we can scare ourselves or lose our centre. I think there are two points to consider.

The first is you talked about panic, and many people have experienced the phenomena of a panic attack. When a panic attack, or even anxiety arises, the first thing we want to do is push it away. As it arises, we sense it coming up through our body and we go: "no, no, not now". We try to negotiate and push it away. The irony is that the more we push it away, the more we strengthen it. That's true of any emotion. So, the first thing to do is to try to just welcome what it is, whether it's anger, or sadness, or panic, or anxiety. Just try to accept it in that moment, and if we can let it wash over us without resistance, without fighting it, then it passes through quickly. As people have said emotion is just E-Motion - energy in motion. By blocking it and fighting it we prolong the difficulty.

The second thing is that what we tend to do, through resistance and avoidance, is create frenetic activity. Even if we are sitting in a chair, frenetic activity might be in our mind. We are constantly thinking, over-analysing or just playing ping pong back and forth. The prerequisite for coming back to our centre is some form of stillness and some form of spaciousness. How people get there varies. It might be through gardening, a hobby, listening to music, meditation, yoga, reading a classic book. Put basically, what we need

to do is step out of that arena of frenetic activity. The only way to get off is to try to short circuit it by pausing and by coming back to ourselves. Breath is another simple way to do that. Sit down and take half a dozen deep breaths to come back into your body. It all takes discipline.

Q: Can you explain more about the necessary discipline?

There are two parts. One is behaviour modification, so you could say a different action. So quite a useful example is you take an alcoholic, or someone with a drink problem. There are two things that need to happen; the first is that they need to have a behaviour modification. Instead of drinking they need to become a non-drinker, or the same with smoking. But there's also an inner shift where you arrive at a place where you no longer want to be a smoker, you no longer want to be a drinker, you no longer want to criticise others, you no longer want to be cynical about everything, and that takes time. And it takes a certain discipline. It's the discipline to say: "I'm not going to enter into that." It's about changing your patterns and saying: "I'm actually going to find another conversation." Take small steps, the opportunities for this arise every day of our lives. We might feel like saying something nasty to our spouse, instead of that you say something kind. It takes discipline to do that.

Q: Andrew, would you call yourself a midwife style coach? Helping your clients recognise when to push and when to rest? How would you advise us to maybe help others in this same way? Rather than thinking your way into a new way of behaving you behave your way into a new way of thinking?

We are all in this together, and nobody is superior or inferior to anyone else. What we need to do at the moment is to model a different way. As Gandhi said, be the change you want to see. We need to take proper breaks, to live our lives at a slower pace. One of the things I've developed over the past six years is that every six months I take myself away for two weeks without a phone or computer and I do a lot of sleeping, walking and meditation. I don't talk to anyone outside, not even my wife, during those two weeks. Most people would find it very difficult to be without a phone. I'm not advocating that for everyone, that's just the way I found. And then in any 24 hour period I make sure I have quiet time.

As we are all in leadership roles in one form or another, we need to consider what kind of leadership we are modelling to others? We need to bring in an alignment where we start finding the new pathway together. We act in a different way, we collaborate. The systems we have created are essentially based on competition. Capitalism is built on competition, and competition arises out of the assumption of lack, that there's not enough for everyone. And if we start behaving with co-operation and collaboration, as if there's enough for everyone then people notice that and behave differently.

Q: With any goal that I want to achieve, I always have frustration, going back and forth and when it comes to discipline, its hard to implement the steps I need to take on a daily basis. I know discipline is very important to reach any kind of goal but what are practical ways that we could use every day, for us to take that leap of faith, to cross that difficult phase when we fall back into old patterns?

Everyone on the call resonates with what you're talking about because it's not easy – if it was easy then everyone would be doing it. We need to surround ourselves with people who support the new vision. First of all, we need to hold that vision that I need to see myself; to be fit, to be a non-smoker, that I don't want to spend my time criticising and running other people down. It's really important that we hold that image of ourselves, and then connect with people.

You know if I make that decision and then I hang around with people that have three pints of beer every night, are three stone overweight and have no interest in getting fit it's unlikely that I'm going to get fit. If I want to be a non-smoker, and I hang around every night with people who are smoking it's going to become much more difficult. So, we need to align with people who share our vision to some extent for what it is we are trying to achieve. The other thing that is really important and we all do is, let's just take smoking as an example, if you decide to stop smoking and you have that initial surge to stop, and you don't smoke for 28 days, and then something happens, and you get angry and you think "fuck it, I'm going to have a cigarette" and you smoke compulsively for three days. What we then do is we say: "I knew that you couldn't do it, you're no good, you're a smoker. You might as well carry on smoking." Out of 31 days 28 were not smoking and three were smoking. It's actually at that point where we can celebrate and say that's amazing, 28/31 is better than I've ever done, let's start again tomorrow. Yet we tend to undermine ourselves quickly in any change process, instead of saying actually I'm on the right path, I've had a setback, now I want to start again. And that's what friends are for, you know, we all come together because we need support, I need support, I need reminding of this. And that's what friendship is for, not to dictate to other people but to come along side and support, and say yeah, you've had three bad days, so what? Let's start again tomorrow morning.

Often we want change to be magical and we want to have a eureka moment. It's not that we can't have these but a lot of change is ordinary and we need to persevere. For most of my life, I hated the word discipline. In modern parlance discipline often comes to mean a wagging finger, or you will not, and for a rebel like me, it's not an easy term. But discipline actually comes from a Latin word, discipulus, which means student, it means we are learning. We are just teaching ourselves a new way, a better way.

Q: How can you help us stay focused on listening to our intuition, when there are

so many conflicting authority voices and positions at the moment. How do we go about re-entering the world? And making decisions that are not based on fear?

I've been saying for at least ten years, that one of the aspects of this transition is that we have to learn to detach from external authority. We have to learn to stop living our lives based on external authority and the external perception. This is a compulsion that has developed in human beings and we have to learn to listen to our inner wisdom. People have been talking about this for thousands of years, yet we still tend to look for an answer outside. We look for the latest medical expert, legal expert, the latest guru, yet we will never find the answer outside ourselves.

Whether it's sending your kids back to school, or going back to the workplace, or getting on a train, each of us needs to be still enough to ask inside: "am I ready to go back to school?" As a parent we have a responsibility to our children, so we ask ourselves: "do I think it's right for my children to go back to school?" I would always say whatever you find inside, trust it. It's not the same for everyone, so why should we tell everyone what they have to do? The level of acquiescence over the last two months has been absolutely stunning.

We are all currently in this position of learning to trust ourselves and having the courage to stand up and speak our truth. For example, when the tennis player, Novak Djokovic, came out and said he will never have the vaccine, that he would rather quit the tennis circuit, he didn't say to anyone else "don't have the vaccine." He just said: "I will not". I admired him hugely but he came under huge criticism. What we need to do over the next weeks and months, particularly the next couple of years, is to take the time to discover our inner truth and to have the courage to express it.

Q: What happens if you strongly disagree with someone else's truth?

If you look around the world, all major conflicts arise from one group trying to impose their views on another group. It's ridiculous, and yet we are all trying to impose one argument or one point of view - because it's only one point of view - on another group. This is particularly true in the domain of religion which continues to create huge suffering. The idea that I should want everyone to agree with me is absurd.

There is also this constant backdrop of thinking that we know a lot of stuff we don't know, so there is a certain humility to falling back into not knowing. There are all sorts of competing narratives. Over the next two years there is going to be an intense struggle between different narratives for what this virus is, what it isn't, what we should do, what we shouldn't do, who's behind it, who's not behind it, where did it arise, was it in a laboratory, was it China, was it deliberate, was it not? Everyone gets into a competition as to which is the valid story. The point is that they are all stories, none of us know. When

we get attached to a particular story, then we get into that place of dominance and wanting other people to agree with us. This is a dangerous place to be in.

Freedom of different points of view is a very healthy place to be. Instead, what we tend to do is to say "I want to make you wrong to make myself right". This is because we have a strong need to be right in our reptilian brain. We need to learn to move out of that. To drop from our heads to our hearts because the heart doesn't need to make anybody wrong.