

Human Givens: Developing a New Lingua Franca for Conflict Resolution

"This new paradigm is the perfect antidote to many dilemmas facing diplomats today. Much else has been tried and failed. It's time to meet people's needs before they fall into the hands of extremists,"

Michael Bell, former Canadian Ambassador to Egypt, Israel and Jordan.

"I can attest to the "Human Givens" approach. Unless "Givens" are listened to and respected, you cannot truly help others. That's more than half that battle, and it all relates to the "Given" that people crave such intangibles as dignity and respect. I believe this approach is universally applicable."

James Larocco, former Head of Multinational Forces of Observers, Sinai, and former American Ambassador to Kuwait

Introduction

DIPLOMACY AND GEOPOLITICS are hitting a dead-end. The old premises for judging success, such as the primacy of the nation-state, are being eroded. Some of our basic assumptions, such as that we are primarily rational creatures, are either flawed, incomplete or mired in a political space that is shallow and confused.

Meanwhile, the international order grows ever more chaotic and less predictable. It is our contention that many international conflicts remain unresolved because a missing piece in the equation – innate emotional needs – is not consciously or adeptly taken into consideration. Most diplomacy works around the edge of these problems - there is a need to 'up our game', otherwise, tragically, future generations will suffer the consequences. Whether the refugee flows to Europe, or the threat of violent extremism across the globe, the threats are rising and require more effective actions.

The 'Human Givens Approach' offers a new way to help move our politics and international relations forward - an additional piece of the puzzle. Its base line is that it is innate physical and emotional needs that motivate human behaviour. A knowledge of these innate needs – which are 'givens' – and agreement about them, provide a route away from identity fixations and the drive for power or revenge, and set the stage for potential greater cooperation. This is especially the case in understanding the root causes of violent extremism: the search for meaning and purpose drives many of the individuals drawn to these destructive groups.

The contention is that people are operating at a basic level behind the complexities of politics, and that grasping what those motivations are can help in managing their political and cultural expression.

This approach, when applied to psychotherapy has already proved highly successful improving hundreds of thousands of individual lives in the UK and Ireland. Companies in the private sector that adopt it lower workplace stress, reduce absenteeism, raise

motivation at all levels and improve team efficiency, sales, productivity and profits.¹ Such a new approach can also help in reliably achieving successful breakthroughs when reaching for diplomatic solutions to conflicts.

This perspective can help negotiators interpret and manage difficult political and international situations more effectively because it provides a clear reference point for negotiators whenever confusion or a logjam arises. It can also assist policymakers in perceiving a context and political actions (e.g. of leaders or extremists) in fresh ways. By sharing knowledge about how people operate at a basic level, a common lingua franca can be developed and facilitate work.

Objective & Benefits

This three-day course is aimed at developing these ideas and investigating how they could inform the sphere of international relations and diplomacy. It will also take a look at how cultural factors and 'cult behaviour' can become impediments in moving forward, and how a focus on human needs can help managing these obstacles. It is a practical invitation only private workshop that will provide participants with hands on experience in developing policy and conducting international negotiations based on this new approach. The case studies presented emphasize the Middle East region because of the direct experience of one of the course facilitators. The applicability to other areas of the world, as well as global issues, will also be discussed.

What participants will gain from the event:

- A clear, in-depth understanding of the Human Givens approach and its applicability in international relations and conflict resolution.
- **Improved results in dealing with radicalization, policy development, and conflict resolution in these critical times.**
- The ability to better see through political and cultural assumptions, as well as the underlying emotional dynamics driving behaviour, so as to become more effective at finding peaceful ways to manage them.

This workshop is also an opportunity for governments to support a leading edge project and invest in a future paradigm at an early stage, and to send its diplomats and officials for participation in the symposium.

Day One

9:00 - 11:00

Session I: Introduction to the Human Givens

The human givens approach arose out of a solid basis of fundamental research and ever-increasing scientific knowledge about human biology, behaviour and psychology, coupled with an interest in how best to put such knowledge to practical use for the sake of both individuals and society in general. The approach derives from the understanding that

¹ See for example 'Taking it from the Top' in *Human Givens Journal*, Volume 19, No 2, 2012

innate needs, emotional and physical, have to be met well for anyone to flourish, and this is a prerequisite for avoiding conflict.

Our given physical needs are fairly obvious: as animals we need air to breathe, water to drink, nutritious food and sufficient sleep. We also instinctively seek sufficient and secure shelter where we can grow and reproduce ourselves and bring up our young.

These physical needs are intimately bound up with our emotional needs — the main focus of human givens psychology (see Appendix).

Emotions create distinctive psychobiological states in us and exist to make us take action of some kind. They mainly seek their fulfilment through the way we interact with other people and the environment. Consequently, when these needs are not met, nature ensures we suffer considerable distress — anxiety, anger, depression etc. — and our expression of distress, in whatever form it takes, impacts on those around us, sometimes violently.

In short, it is by meeting our physical and emotional needs that we survive and develop as individuals, families, collectives, and as a species. There is no doubt these needs are expressed in varying ways depending on cultural and historical context, and that the pathways for their political expression vary over time.

The human givens approach is a new organising idea that focuses on mutual needs satisfaction. When fully understood and absorbed, it can serve to help guide our perceptions and actions. Part of the purpose of this session will also be to see how this takes place. If it comes to serve as a basis for their work, this approach can assist diplomats and others in solving conflict.

11:00 - 13:00 Session II: Human Givens and Politics - Case studies from the Middle East

A. Israel-Palestine - The reasons for intractability

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is understood in terms of a discourse involving rights or historical claims, and basic needs are often translated directly into demands from the other such as security arrangements, recognition of historical wrongs and restitution. Behind these demands – and this 'language' of politics – lie the innate needs. Can a new look at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, through the lens of basic needs, help shed light on it, loosen up its apparent intractability, and calm the region down?

The conflict will be looked at from the perspective that the 'givens' of human nature cannot be gainsaid. We cannot avoid them any more than we can avoid breathing. Therefore, recognising this, and working to ensure that people's innate needs are met, ought to supersede lesser efforts that derive from conditioning, grabbing power, ideologies and biases based on race, religion, territory, revenge, habit, wealth or any political system.

It may well be that this painful and bloody conflict will never be resolved until there is a genuine acceptance *by all parties* that neither side can win and that peace depends upon the innate needs for security, autonomy and status – which are human givens –

being met for both communities.

The consequences of the widespread ignorance of this is that ideologies fill the knowledge gap and infect the body politic, which further corrupts institutions. Indeed, political institutions and actors in conflicts, including this one, often seem to work actively to stop people getting their needs met in healthy ways, which means they are working *against* nature. In the case of Israel-Palestine, the result is an intractable conflict that is, as yet, without resolution.

Case: Examination of political expression of needs by each side. How can their mutual needs be bridged? What are the current barriers to doing so?

B. The Iran Nuclear Talks – An example of success

The talks between the USA and other world powers and Iran over the nuclear issue have already borne fruit. Accommodations were found and the needs of both sides met to some degree – certainly enough to permit agreement and a new political space between longstanding enemies. Unlike the question of Israel-Palestine, this negotiation offers a window of how addressing needs from the beginning of a process can lead to success in diplomacy.

This case study will look at how this process can be seen through the prism of Human Givens, beyond the political language used. It is also a point of comparison with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In one case, attending to human needs helped matters forward, in the other, the lack of elucidation and attending to these needs has ensured intractability.

Throughout these case study discussions, other factors whether the effect of larger context and 'ripeness' or readiness to deal or political habits and assumptions will be examined. The interplay between current political factors and cutting deeper towards 'human needs' and how it can be done, if possible, will be discussed.

Case: How did each side begin the process through basic recognition of needs? How did that facilitate the negotiations and success? What does it mean for the future?

13:00 - 15:00 Lunch

15:00 - 1700 Session III: Dealing with radicalisation: The role of the innate human need for meaning in extremism

Violent extremism is becoming more prevalent and preoccupies people across the globe, but especially in the Middle East, and now it is seeping over into Europe. The security response is the primary weapon in the hands of governments. Necessary as this may be

in the short term and in some cases, upping security does not address the fundamental issues: the causes behind this growing and dangerous trend.

Many people, and especially younger ones, are drawn to extremist groups for reasons that all involve them trying to get some of their fundamental emotional needs met but in a skewed and destructive fashion: status, connection to a community (belonging to a group), competence (being trained to fight and kill). However, the primary missing need may in fact be the pursuit of greater meaning as expressed through these groups, including through 'religious' ends. The pursuit of meaning propels these individuals blindly towards their goals at the expense of much around them, including through the violent annihilation of all perceived as the enemy.

The Human Givens paradigm is used to better understand this critical behaviour and therefore begin the process of adjusting societal and political goals towards the mitigation of extremism. (It may also help in identifying or detecting those with an inclination towards these trends). A look at extremist groups in various Middle Eastern countries will shed light on this issue.

The excellent work of American anthropologist Scott Atran in identifying the specific behaviour patterns and motivations of extremists will also be used in this session.

Case: ISIS as an example of meaning gone wrong. What are the motivations of those from the outside vs. locals joining ISIS? How does the organization practically use this in their dark efforts? How can it be combated at the source, particularly among the young?

Day Two

9:00 - 11:00

Session IV - The role of group hypnosis plays in politics

The manipulation of masses, whether by subtle or grotesque means, is a critical factor in politics. Leaders and parties endow themselves with power by moving large groups to follow them; publics are often satisfied at some level by blindly doing so.

Although as old as civilization, this type of manipulation needs to be better understood in an age of significant interaction between diverse groups, political unease and the facilitating growth of technology.

Hypnosis is the word used to describe any artificial means of accessing the REM state (where attention is focused in the imaginative mind). Because people's minds read context in order to process their expectations more realistically, when they select a particular possibility and focus attention on it, an emotion is generated, ready to fuel an action of some sort. That is why it is impossible to separate expectations from emotions.

Emotional arousal developed through hypnosis prevents clear thought and shrinks a person's ability to see a larger context, creating political conflicts, and obviating the more open and reflective state of mind necessary for cooperation. It makes us less than human. Sometimes without conscious knowledge, some leaders and public figures are

generating hypnotic states that influence the thinking and behaviour of citizens, and coerce them into pursuing often-destructive ends.

Can understanding the role of hypnosis and fostering groupthink has in manipulating populations, through speeches, propaganda or social media, help us to understand this phenomenon and minimize its effects? The case of Hitler and modern parallels, including many leaders in the Middle East or Trump, will be used to demonstrate this key problem, and what kind of public education is required to minimize the deleterious effects at play today.

Case: The speeches of Hassan Nasrallah. How do they impact his audience? How can awareness be created to lessen their impact?

11:00 - 13:00 Session V - The effect of culture

As we all know, the effect of cultural factors on politics cannot be underestimated. Cultural habits and traditions are the prism through which political actors perceive the world, and communicate and manage their publics. Cultural connectivity is essential for stimulating useful communication and actions for the common good; however, it can also limit our ability to deal with those from another culture when we cannot see our own blind spots.

It is necessary to make a special effort to step outside from what we have been conditioned to believe is appropriate behaviour by our culture. Without making that effort, we can never make progress in our understanding of how and why ideologies are affirmed and heightened by the emotions generated by the hypnotic influences that are compelling people into common mass actions, such that they behave like a shoal of fish.

Once we can see the bigger picture we are in the same position as the crab that sat on a rock in the ocean to tell fish about his adventures when he left the water to explore an island. As the fishes gathered around him he eloquently explained about how different life on dry land was compared to their life in water. After giving a vivid description of his travels on dry land, and the wonders he experienced there, he asked the fishes if they had any questions. "Yes," they said. "What is water?"

To one degree or another, due to our particular cultural influences, we all suffer from 'context blindness'. We emphasize certain methods and values over others leading to miscommunication and 'missed targets' in international relations and negotiations. The use of technology, the need for personal contact, the degree of trust between individuals vs. a target oriented process - all vary from culture to culture. Without realizing how these are impacting on our talks, failure can sometimes result despite the conscious intention of all parties to succeed. Our limited cultural perceptions impact our capacity to come to agreement or cooperate.

Case: How have cultural assumptions and limitations affected the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations? Have the inadvertent errors of the American mediators made matters worse? How do the cultural habits of each side affect progress?

13:00 - 15:00 Lunch

15:00 - 17:00 Session VI: Our nations, our tribes – the increasing global trend towards identity obsessions

One of the effects of globalization is for groups to adhere more to their traditional identities as a response to new and rising economic and social challenges. Whether due to migration, global interaction or social diversity, we are increasingly mixing together and yet often reacting to this pressure by clinging more tightly to our group identity. In some cases, this is the direct result of political manipulation by cynical leaders exploiting the fact that we are social creatures.

Behind it all is a natural yet dangerous human tendency: to coalesce into 'cults' of one sort or another. A cult involves unquestioned reliance on authority, devaluing outsiders and, overall, developing a diminished sense of realism in favour of the 'in group'. In other terms, 'identity' can become highly exclusive and damaging. Nowhere is this more the case today than in the Middle East, where group identity is becoming simultaneously the instrument of survival, of conflict, and of destruction.

Humans will enter into groupthink cult behaviour, including accepting brazenly presented ideological traps and the allure of extremists, if there are no better choices available, and if their basic needs are not otherwise met.

By looking at specific cases from the Middle East, this session will see how meeting human needs in more balanced and constructive ways can lower the risk of cult behaviour developing and therefore diminish the likelihood of conflict between groups in any society. We will also examine how, even if it can never be completely eliminated, cult behaviour can be undermined.

Case: How has cult thinking affected the politics of Egypt? How has this dynamic limited the potential for political evolution? Are there ways to mitigate its effects?

General Discussion: This session will also end with a roundup of how Human Givens penetrate the above sessions, from directly dealing with the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Iran nuclear agreement, to mitigation of extremism, cult behaviour, and vulnerability to the deleterious effects of hypnosis.

Day Three

9:00 - 11:00 Session VII: A diversity of cases

For this session, participants will have been asked before the course to prepare case studies that they believe represent or can be attended to through the Human Givens approach. Guidelines and preparatory readings will be provided and the contribution of cases from new settings, and from their experiences, will be an opportunity to learn

about the relevance of this approach, how it can be applied, and what challenges will naturally arise in this process.

11:00 - 13:00 Session VIII: Applying Human Givens to larger global challenges

Many political and diplomatic challenges today, from disease prevention, to corruption, to greater economic equality, are global by nature and require multilateral answers involving many nations, and many sectors within nations. A greater degree of cooperation than ever will be required to effectively manage such issues - the traditional approach of multilateral negotiations is slow and often results in narrow compromises between national interests that may not be to the greatest benefit of the whole.

This session will be an effort to 'raise group intelligence' by looking at particular examples and global challenges and exploring how a new organizing paradigm such as Human Givens can provide a useful framework for achieving better conclusions and agreements internationally.

13:00 - 15:00 Lunch

15:00 - 17:00 Session IX: Moving forward - How Human Givens can serve as a new reference

This session will serve as a point for summary and articulating gains from the event and raising useful questions about raising group intelligence so this paradigm could be applied in the living political world. A roundup of what has been discussed will take place and some hard nosed challenges can be discussed – such as the relationship with rights based discourses and assumptions, as well as the often overriding factor: the pursuit of power. How do we penetrate political spheres and use and disseminate these ideas given the conventional assumptions today?

The discussion can also focus on why it may be unaffordable not to pursue the Human Givens paradigm. Can we move forward politically and diplomatically without a sounder foundation rooted in human reality? The advantages of finding a new way forward with this paradigm will be discussed so we can develop the next practical steps that could be taken.

The Facilitators

Ivan Tyrrell has worked for many years as a psychotherapist (specialising in brief therapy for depression and anxiety) and now spends most of his time lecturing and writing. He is a Director of Human Givens College, editorial director of the [Human Givens Journal](#), and board member of the Human Givens Institute.

In 1967 he was introduced to [Idries Shah](#), the foremost modern authority on Sufism, who was demonstrating at the time that the discoveries made by today's psychologists appeared to be the same as those that, when stripped of cultural and religious overtones, were pioneered by Sufis centuries earlier. He worked with Shah on a variety of projects.

He joined The Institute for Cultural Research in 1970. Then, in the late 1980s, he decided to build on his interest in psychology and train as a psychotherapist. But he soon became disillusioned with the sorry state of much of the psychotherapy training he encountered. This is because he could see that many tutors were uninformed about what scientists and psychologists had discovered about human behaviour, or that they ignored what didn't suit their doctrine. Schools of psychotherapy often appeared to him to be cult-like. So, in 1993, he founded the journal that was to become [Human Givens](#) as a platform for clear thinking about emotional health, education and social issues.

The human givens approach to psychotherapy and psychology developed out of the work and research of this group as they endeavoured to bring greater clarity to the way people who become depressed, anxious, traumatised or addicted are helped, as well as making such help more reliably effective.

Ivan is also co-author with Joe Griffin of numerous, influential titles, including:

- [Human Givens: the new approach to emotional health and clear thinking](#)
- [How to lift depression... fast](#)
- [Why we dream: the definitive answer](#)
- [Freedom from Addiction: The secret behind successful addiction busting](#)
- [How to Master Anxiety](#)
- [An Idea in Practice: Using the human givens approach](#)
- [Release from Anger: Practical help for controlling unreasonable rage](#)
- [Godhead: The Brain's Big Bang – the explosive origin of creativity, mysticism and mental illness](#)

and five ground-breaking monographs on psychology and counselling including *The APET model: patterns in the brain*, which brings cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and SFBT approaches into line with new scientific discoveries about how the brain works, and *The Shackled Brain: how to release locked-in patterns of trauma and Hypnosis and Trance States* which gave the first psychobiological explanation for hypnosis.

His other titles include: *The Survival Option*, published by Jonathan Cape and *Back from the Brink: Coping with stress*, published by Virgin Books, which he co-wrote with Nick Leeson.

John Bell has worked for over two decades on Middle East politics, policy development and mediation. He has worked and lived in Cairo, Beirut, Gaza and Jerusalem and has had extensive experience on the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as political developments in the Arab world and the Middle East. His interest in the intangible and psychological basis of conflict has informed his work.

He is today Director of the Middle East and Mediterranean Programme at the Toledo International Centre for Peace (CITpax) in Madrid; Senior Advisor for the Middle East and North Africa at Crisis Management Initiative in Helsinki, Finland; Senior Advisor at Search for Common Ground on the question of Syria; and he was formerly Middle East Director in Jerusalem for Search for Common Ground, a global conflict resolution organization.

At CITpax, John is involved in various discrete Track II mediation efforts between conflicted parties in the Middle East, as well as policy development initiatives at the regional and sub-regional level. In 2007, he was key in the organization and convening of a significant international meeting to mark the 15th anniversary of the 1991 Middle East Peace Process launched in Madrid. This was an event that involved delegations from the countries involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as a large civil society contingent from the region. The event was aimed at rebuilding trust at the regional level after the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon.

He is also a former United Nations and Canadian diplomat who served as a political officer at Canada's embassy in Cairo, a member of Canada's delegation to the Refugee Working Group in the peace process, Political Advisor to the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for southern Lebanon, advisor to the Canadian Government during the Iraq crisis in 2002-03, and consultant to International Crisis Group on developments in Jerusalem in 2004.

John is a founding member of the "Jerusalem Old City Initiative" (University of Windsor, Canada), an effort to find creative options for this contentious issue. He also has extensive experience in communications as spokesperson for the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and Communications Coordinator for the Signing Conference for the International Treaty to Ban Landmines in Ottawa, 1997.

He has lectured extensively on Middle East issues at universities in Canada and Europe, as well as the Canadian Foreign Service Institute and has written many articles on these matters in newspapers across the globe. Today, he also has a cultural blog on the region: <http://albabblog.blogspot.com>. John is fluent in English, Arabic and French.

APPENDIX

The human givens approach

THE APPROACH derives from the universal law of all living organisms: that, to survive, each living thing must continually maintain and rebuild itself by taking in appropriate nourishment from the environment. The existence and survival of all forms of life depend on this process. The specific needs of each species' are genetically programmed in so that every member of each species has innate knowledge of what nutriment it must look for in the environment if it is to fulfil its potential. And when its innate needs are met well by the environment it flourishes.

We all experience this innate knowledge as *feelings*: we *feel* hungry, we *feel* thirsty; we *feel* tired, we *feel* threatened, and so on. These feelings are universal 'givens' – part of the operating system that drives us to survive by seeking the appropriate nourishment from the environment so as to ensure, not only our physical growth, but also our mental, spiritual and emotional health. Whenever a need is met a fulfilling pattern-match takes place as the need is satisfied and we are rewarded with 'good' feelings.

None of us can escape this universal law and, ideally, we should take account of its truth in everything we do. We should recognise that these are the motivations of all parties in any dispute. Every policy and plan should be underpinned by this principle because it ensures fair and wholesome management of human affairs. The Human Givens approach asserts that all human beings are born with and the recognition that we are all striving to get these needs met in whatever ways the environment and culture we are raised in allows us to.

The prime purpose of government, including its diplomatic arm, ought therefore be ensuring that the innate physical and emotional needs of the people it serves are met well.

It follows that the quality of leaders at all levels is paramount the quality of politicians and civil servants individually, not their policies, that our attention should be focused on first. Great leaders should have the spare capacity to work disinterestedly for the whole community, be able to self-reflect and have sufficient humility to draw upon the expertise of others. If individuals are sufficiently advanced and wise enough to be in tune with reality, they will harmonise easily with what needs to be done, as happens in any successful business enterprise that benefits all involved in it; customers, suppliers, staff, owners and the wider society.

Our current problem is one of an abundance of unsound, even mad, people in positions of power: parasitic accretions on the body politic made possible by the universal climate of corruption. These are the individuals and groups preventing the emotional needs of millions from being met in balanced ways and thereby driving many either into the hands of fundamentalist cults or terrorist groups, or, in order to survive, get sucked into the kleptocratic community.

Our innate motivations

Our given physical needs are fairly obvious: as animals we need air to breathe, water to drink, nutritious food and sufficient sleep. These are the paramount because when they are not met we quickly die. In addition we also need the freedom to stimulate our senses and exercise our muscles. We instinctively seek sufficient and secure shelter where we can grow and reproduce ourselves and bring up our young.

While we live none of us can escape this universal law. It is the key to emotional health and clear thinking and, as such, we must take account of its truth in everything we do. Ideally, every policy and plan should derive from being underpinned by this principle. It ensures fair and wholesome management of human affairs. The prime purpose of government, including its diplomatic arm, should therefore be to ensure that the innate physical and emotional needs of the people it serves are met well.

Although physical nutrition takes priority – because without air, food, water we would quickly die – human emotional needs, although more subtle, are also critical to our wellbeing and it follows that we need to understand what emotional nutriment nature has determined that people need.

Emotional nutrition include the needs for:

- **Security** – safe territory: an environment that enables us to lead our lives without experiencing excessive or undue fear and allows us to develop fully.
- **Autonomy** – a reasonable degree of control over what happens around and to us. Exercising volition gives us a form of feedback from the universe that we exist.
- **Attention** – receiving it from others, but also giving it: good quality attention fuels the development of each individual, family and culture.
- **Emotional connection to others** – friendship, close relationships, intimacy.
- **Connection to the wider community** – being part of social groupings beyond our immediate family (we are a social animal).
- **Status** – a sense that we are accepted by, and valued in, the various social groups we belong to.
- **Privacy** – time and space enough to quietly reflect on and consolidate our experiences.
- **A sense of our own competence and achievements** – which ensures we feel confident and have sufficient self-esteem.
- **Meaning** – which comes from being stretched in what we do and how we think. Meaning makes suffering tolerable. It is through ‘stretching’ ourselves mentally or physically – by service to others, learning new skills or being connected to ideas or philosophies bigger than ourselves – that our lives feel purposeful and full of meaning.