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## ALTRUISM

### Are You Living in an "I" World or a "We" World?

We live in a world tilting towards selflessness.

By Ben Barresi, PhD | Last updated: October 10, 2019

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- Are you thinking about others or only yourself?
- The world benefits from giving.
- What guides your actions? The highest value is to serve.



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There is an old story about a very elderly man planting a tree. A young man passing by stopped and asked, "What are you doing?"

"I am planting a fruit tree," the old man replied.

"How long before it bears fruit?" the young man asked.

"Maybe 40 years," said the old man.

The young man was perplexed. "But you won't live that long. You won't eat the fruit. Why waste your time and energy?"

The old man smiled. "Oh no, but just as I found a fruitless world, so I will plant for those who come after me. I have hope that they will be here to enjoy the fruit."

This simple story holds profound wisdom about why we are here—not just in a literal sense but in a deeply psychological and spiritual sense. It asks us to consider: What is our role in the grand scheme of life? What is our responsibility to the future?

At its core, the story challenges us with a fundamental question: Are you living in an "I" world or a "We" world?

#### The "I" World vs. the "We" World

So much of modern life encourages an "I" mentality:

- What do I get out of this?
- How does this benefit me?
- Will I see immediate results?

The young man in the story was thinking in this way. If the old man wouldn't personally enjoy the fruit, then why bother? It was a short-sighted view, one that sees value only in immediate, personal gain.

But the elderly man was living in a "We" world. He understood something that the young man did not: what we take but what we give. The "We" mindset is rooted in connection, responsibility, and legacy. It asks:

- How will this help others?
- What impact will my actions have beyond me?
- How can I leave something better than I found it?

**Accept, Grow, Serve**

Through my work, I have identified three essential stages of human fulfillment. I call it "The Path to Optimal Living." The three stages are Accept, Grow and Serve. In this movement model,

Accept is the first movement model.

Acceptance is toward

the present moment.

version.  
We see this in the great leaders, thinkers, and visionaries of history, but we also see it in everyday life:

- The teacher who inspires students, knowing the results may not be seen for years.
- The parent who nurtures a child, investing in their character and values.
- The artist who creates something enduring, leaving beauty for future generations.
- The entrepreneur who builds a company that provides jobs long after they are gone.

All of them are planting trees. All of them are living in a "W" world.

#### Why Are We Here?

The answer is not found in finding pleasure or material success alone. The elderly man in the story understood that his life was part of something greater, that he was connected to the people before him and those who would come after. So he planted the tree.

And now, the question comes to us:

Why are we here?

I think it can be only for one purpose:

To make this world better than we found it for the generations to come.



#### About the Author



**Ben Bernstein, Ph.D.**, is a clinical Psychologist who works with CEOs, entrepreneurs, stage performers, healthcare professionals, and test-takers to do their best.

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