



Bob Marley

"Positive Vibration"

Rastaman Vibration

04/1976

Island / Tuff Gong

Ant the Five Foot Sage

Jon Johnson

"Fuckin A, man, how could we forget about the light bill? We can't get groceries now." I tossed the reusable bag on the couch.

Anthony was sitting on the floor, thumbing through a book on mandalas. "I know man, but it's gonna be okay. I'm teaching a yoga class today at 6, and I heard they were doing a vegan potluck; let's go there after."

"Can't. Supposed to meet with a kitchen manager at that place I was telling you about, we'll see how it goes." I plopped down next to him and started fidgeting with a lighter.

"Dude, that is awesome! That's what you wanted right?"

"I guess. Back into the system, but I gotta do something. I can't live like this."

Anthony had this hopelessly positive attitude. He just smiled and sighed, touching my shoulder. "We got this, man."

The day before we skipped breakfast, had rice for lunch, and went to bed for dinner. "Got this" isn't exactly the phrase I would use.

To add to this, I was running out of excuses why I couldn't see the woman I was dating. The other day I was "feeling sick". Then I said I couldn't take my dog on the train. We met up for a walk on the beach, and when she said she was getting hungry, I told her I had to go help Anthony with something. It was partly to save face, but also partly because I'm not her responsibility. Nothing like dating a full-grown manbaby to burn "Men Ain't Shit" into the back of your eyelids.

So I woke up one day, particularly hungry, pissed, and hopeless, and what is Anthony doing? Fucking meditating. Incense, yoga mat, the works. Like he is just gonna "transcend" his hunger and escape the Matrix with a quick jaunt into nirvana or something.

Something about it just pissed me off—like figure your shit out man, do something. I'm doing job interviews with conscious companies, finding new clients, fucking day labor, all this shit, and you are sitting here collecting an unemployment check and meditating that the fridge is full and your brother Rich has money for the bus today.

It was just like him. I would get a fat tip from a client and bring home groceries. He'd throw his smile around for hours. "See, the Universe always provides!"

Nah, man, I did that shit. Against all odds, with a big fuckin' middle finger to the economic oppressors, I did that. Because I got up off my ass and worked for it; but now he got to feel justified in his "just be" attitude for another day.

One day in November I did my stretches and drank water, and heard Anthony clicking away at his computer. A familiar voice sang an unfamiliar tune as he turned the speakers up. Anthony noticed the sour look on my face. "Come move with me man!"

He started swaying back and forth, snapping on the off-beats and singing with uncle Bob.

"Dread, natty dread now..."

I shook my head, but got up all the same. I was still stiff, still resenting this unfair existence.

"You gotta let it go, man," was Anthony's reply. "We think we have to do everything all the time. But that just makes us stress and fight over nothing. No one is willing to do something as simple as letting go and thinking positively."

It was coming up now; I had to let it out. I had been living with him for months after I lost my job and house, dealing with this same attitude. "Ant, you can't just 'think positively' and think the world will revolve around you and make everything okay. You have to go out there and do it."

Anthony gave me a little smile, "You mean like you are doing? Struggling, stressing, and worrying all the time man? I don't know if that's the way to go." He was still swaying back and forth. I had stopped.

"Maybe not, but at least I'm doing something. I'm not collecting unemployment checks and sitting on my ass all day."

He actually smiled. That disgusting, happy-against-all-odds smile. "People say that a lot. It's funny, I turned down a job offer last week. I'd be gone all day for a few extra bucks a month compared to my unemployment check. It wasn't worth it. It's more important for me to work on myself and take care of my brother. That means more to me than people calling me a mooch."

"Yea man, but don't you get tired of just surviving life? Just trudging through?"

"If you are trudging through, that is your mentality, dude. We are rich. House, electricity, running water, all of it. Most days we eat two meals; that is rich."

This was the sort of shit your parents would say when you wouldn't eat broccoli. It did nothing to actually alleviate the struggle you were having; it just made you feel guilty for struggling. The song was over, and Ant was back at the desk, clicking up a new song. He kept talking though.

"Look, I know it's not perfect man. And I know that just thinking good thoughts isn't going to create the world you want to live in. But it can change how you view the world, and that is everything. If you see the world as a decent place, you are probably going to act like it is."

The song was over. Despite Marley's best efforts, I was livid. Standing in the silence of this dirt-colored carpeted room, here was this little man and his stupid smile, regurgitating something out of *The Secret* at me. I wanted him to see how dumb he was, to see how wrong he was. I wanted to break him.

"Right, I'm sure all those kids getting bombs dropped on them in the Middle East just need to think positively and the bombs will disappear, right?"

The smile faded from his face for a split second. I was starting to win. Soon, he would feel just like I felt. *Let it in* I thought.

He straightened back up and looked at me sideways.

"Jon, did you put those kids there?"

"Where, in the Middle East? No, obviously."

"Did you drop bombs on them?"

"No but this war-machine tyrannical govern—"

He put his hand up, and something about it actually stopped me. "That's not what we are talking about. But say that is what we were talking about, what could you do about it?"

"Obviously, tear down the government, rebuild it from the ground up."

"Okay, so how do we start?"

"Well we spread the word, we educate the ignorant, we set up protests, we send letters to Congress—we fight back."

"Fight back?"

"Yea, we can't just lie down and take it. It's like everything in life—we have to take action."

"You just called them the 'War Machine'...and you wanna...fight them?...They're gonna win..."

He started laughing. It irritated me that it was just semantics, but I admit I laughed a bit too.

He clicked the next song and continued. "Look man, I'm just saying that maybe the greatest impact you can have is by changing what's inside you. And maybe changing that will change how you deal with people outside of you. And maybe changing how you deal with people outside of you will make their day better, make them feel a little less alone, make them feel a little bit of that belonging they are always searching for. And maybe they will treat someone nice in return."

I rolled my eyes, He was at least consistently naïve; I'd give him that.

He continued on. "I've been to a thousand rallies. I was part of Occupy, G20, Bilderberg, all that. The only thing I found there was another thing to hate. We were only together so long as we had a common enemy, and that is just the basis of a shitty relationship."

"It's better than nothing!" I almost shouted. Anthony shook his head and sighed.

"Why do people always equate dealing with your own bullshit to 'doing nothing'? You are the most important person in your life. Period. You are the only person you have to deal with all the time, the only one looking out at you from that mirror. You better be the best version of you possible. Be selfish for once, shit." At least I was getting to him. He was irritated, his smile was gone. We sat in silence while he browsed Youtube and I passed a now-empty cup between my hands.

He found what he was looking for apparently. "Look, man, I can't change you. It's not mine or anyone else's job. Only you can do that." He clicked play and turned the speakers up a bit more.

"I'll make you a deal. This song is like 8 minutes. We will listen to it once every day, and for those 8 minutes, nothing but positivity is allowed. You roll your eyes, but would you do that? Please? The rest of the day you can shout against the corporate elite until your

gums bleed, and I won't say shit. But just do me a favor and give me 8 minutes a day of happy Jon."

It sounded idiotic. But the guy was fucking perpetually happy, and eight minutes of that ignorant bliss would probably do me some good, so I agreed.

In reality, the first time I gave him like 5 minutes. It took me about a minute to shake the shitty feeling of our conversation, and another to get over my own pride. But the whole time he was here, bobbing and swaying, singing along.

*If you get down and you quarrel every day,
You're saying prayers to the devils, I say
Why not help one another on the way?
Make it much easier.*

At the end of the song he laughed and slapped me on the back. My pride was back. "You happy?" I said, leaving the room.

But every day after I stretched, I went back to that song with him. And more and more, I gave myself over, gave myself free space to be happy.

Past the guilt I was supposed to feel for existing, beyond the issues my parents had handed me at birth, through my own insecurities, and over my own mental blocks, I gave myself one song a day to feel nothing but beaming positivity.

I wish I could say it didn't work. I wish I could say I left Anthony's place with my Marxist fist as tight as it was when I first got there. But something in me changed. I remember the day too. It was December, a week before Christmas. We had been doing this little positivity thing for a few weeks now, but for some reason, this time was different. I heard Bob singing, I saw Ant dancing, I smelled the neighbors' cooking tortillas, I felt the carpet on my feet, and I tasted my own tears.

For the first time in a long time, since before everything fell apart really, I felt something move in me. Something had gotten in, it had broken the eggshell barrier I wear out in the world and started to wrap itself around the yolk of whatever was inside this skin-bag I carry around all day. Where before I was soft-boiled at least, something in the song was turning back time, liquefying the center before it was too late.

And I just stood there crying. Not in my usual, self-pitying, "my life should be better than this" way either. I was just...crying. For no reason other than to cry. I was still dancing, still looking at Anthony.

He just smiled back, eyes loaded with some since-forgotten secret he had just shared with me.

Within a month, I got the job, found a place, and said goodbye to that dirty ass carpet for good. I'd never say our little experiment did that.

Our routine didn't change objective reality. But no one exists in objective reality, do they? Perception changes everything. From then on, I focused all my energy on changing the only things I can control: myself and my perception. And that perception has shaped how I interact with the world around me. And who knows, maybe that rubs off on one person a day? I'm consistently naive, I know.

I have plenty of people tell me I'm blind for not seeing the world as a "realist" (which is the code name for a pessimist). And that's fine. At the same time I watch them struggle and fight and suffer and long for something externally that can only be found within. And that's fine too.

Every now and again some nihilistic go-getter will ask me what I have to smile about in this meaningless existence. If I'm feeling particularly self-righteous, I might laugh, slap them on the back, and say, "I'll make you a deal. I know this song that's like 8 minutes long..."