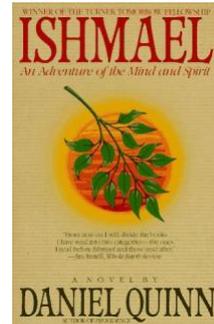


ISHMAEL

An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit

by Daniel Quinn (1992)

Synopsis of ISHMAEL



This fictional novel can seriously alter your view of humankind - for the good of us all.

The story starts with an intelligent ape that 'talks' telepathically to a human. The ape becomes the man's teacher. The teaching takes place primarily through questions - in the Socratic tradition.

- **What do you have to teach?**
Captivity. It is what I know. But I will show you how humankind is captive, right now.
- **How is humankind a captive?**
Humans are captive to their *story*.
- **What is their story?**
That they are superior to all of the rest of nature.
That they are the end of evolution.
That they deserve any part of the earth for habitats.
That they deserve any food the earth offers.
- **How does this make them captive?**
Since their story is, "The world was made for us," they do what they want with it. Therefore there will be no end to their hunger.
- **But where is the captivity?**
In constantly **taking**, they will never be satisfied. They will be captive to a kind of thirst. In trying to quench it they will consume resources and seek pleasures until they destroy themselves or all of the rest of nature - whichever comes first.
- **Was humankind always like this?**
No.
- **When were they not?**
For over a million years, they were not **takers**.
- **What were they?**
They were **leavers**.
- **What are leavers?**
Any form of life that only takes as much food as it needs is a **leaver**.
Any form of life that only takes as much habitat as it needs is a **leaver**.
Any form of life that does not destroy others' food sources is a **leaver**.
Any form of life that does not destroy others' habitats is a **leaver**.
Basically, **leavers** are not at war - they leave well enough alone.
- **When did humans change from leavers to takers?**
About 10,000 years ago.
- **Why?**
They started to think in a way that they thought they knew better than that which created them.
- **So?**
So, this caused them to make their own *creation myth*.
- **What is their creation myth?**
10 or 15 billion years ago, the universe started with a big bang.
6 or 7 billion years ago, our solar system separated out of the big bang.

3 or 4 billion years ago, life started on earth.

1/4 billion years ago mammals started.

A few million years ago, humans started.

----- But here comes the problem. -----

Leavers = *Primitive* Human. **Takers** = *Civilized* Human.

Humankind was the end of evolution.

The earth was made for them.

They deserve anything the earth has to offer.

Exclusively.

- **What happened then?**

Humankind started agriculture.

They grew more food than they needed.

They stored up their extra food.

They guarded their crops and storages.

They killed species that took their food.

They expanded their habitat - this blocked other species' habitats and food sources.

They eliminated competitor species.

They expanded their family - this restarted all of the above in an exaggerated manner.

Perhaps most importantly - they stopped relying on nature to provide - they became what they thought (and still think) is **self sufficient!**

- **You seem to be saying that humankind - in all of it's advanced technology is not self sufficient?**

Correct. It is an illusion that they are self sufficient. They are not living in a sustainable manner.

They are using up our resources, eliminating other species, and acting in a manner that considers every other part of nature as their enemy. This can lead to only one end - humankind against nature, including even being against its own kind. This will end up in the opposite of self sufficient.

- **Is there no respect for the early version of humankind?**

Not really. The old world is seen as in chaos and modern humankind as destined to have come along to rule it.

- **But doesn't this put humankind *against* the rest of nature?**

It does. It does not have to. But so far, it has convinced humans that they were made to **conquer** nature.

- **Conquer?**

Humankind is at war with life.

They *battle* the elements.

They *protect* against the wind and sleet and snow.

They *achieve their destiny* by taming the wilderness.

They *fight* micro-organisms.

- **But hasn't this resulted in a cleaner planet?**

Yes. But what has been cleaned out is the diversity of many species.

Basically, humankind has been exterminating species of living organisms through their expansion.

As humankind has exploded in population from hunter gatherer tribes to densely populated agricultural communities, many species have been eliminated.

- **Is this bad?**

Yes. The checks and balances of one species on another keeps the planet healthy. If the food source for one species diminishes, then everything adjusts. This worked for a long time (millions of years). But in the last 10,000 years - a very short time by comparison - many imbalances have occurred. There used to be peace on the planet. Humankind has broken the *Peacekeeping Laws*.

- **What are the Peacekeeping Laws?**

There are three.

1. You may not **hunt down your competitors** in order to eliminate them.
2. You may not **destroy their food**.

3. You may not **deny them their food** by taking over their places.
- **Ok. I get it. Here's the BIG QUESTION, Teacher. Do you think we can make it?**
Yes. If you obey the Peacekeeping Laws, you can make it.
Just don't wage war.
Promote diversity.
You may compete - but just take what you need.
Don't grow extra. This leads to over population.
Don't store up too much - this leads to not leaving yourselves in the hands of others.
Don't be entitled - this leads to disrespect of others.
Don't exempt yourselves from the rules of competition - this ends up in destroying the community in order to support your own expansion.

Yes, you can be civilized and also at peace.

References

Quinn, D. (1992). *Ishmael: A novel*. New York: Bantam/Turner Book.