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[Blue Planet: An Alien's Guide to Living on Earth](#) - By Glenn Campbell

## Chapter 2

# Getting There

Most visitors arrive on Earth by insertion of consciousness into a host body. While the underlying mechanisms are not understood, the experience is generally painless and allows for a relatively smooth transition into the human environment. Individual activation is not an abrupt event; it is more of a gradual process in which one system after another is turned on and tested. If you are frightened by the thought of waking up in an alien body, you can rest assured that you will have plenty of time to get used to it before engaging in dangerous activities like crawling, walking or climbing stairs.

Your first memorable sensation on Earth may be one of confinement. You may find yourself caged like an animal, surrounded by vertical bars to restrain you and colorful dangling objects apparently intended to keep you quiet. The restriction of your movements is not intended as punishment; it is more for your own protection, as well as that of any fragile objects in your vicinity. At this stage, your neuromuscular skills and perceptive judgment are poor, and you need continuous attention to avoid self-inflicted harm.

Fortunately, most visitors are assigned to a host family upon arrival. Ideally, this unit consists of one or more adults and subordinate children who will provide for your needs during the long transition. In addition to providing food, shelter and routine maintenance during your vulnerable emergence, the host family should also offer you a variety of training services, from self-care to communications to basic morality and self-esteem. This training is supposed to make you feel more secure in your environment, although in some families it has the opposite effect.

It would be nice if we could assure you that all of your needs will be met during the first years of your stay, but this is not always the case. Owing to the random nature of the assignment process, it is impossible to predict the kind of host family you will receive or the quality of care they will provide. On Earth there is no required training program or accredited selection process for host families. Almost any adult female, no matter how ill-prepared, can choose to become a sponsor, using her own body as a temporary host. (The male genetic component is easy to obtain on any Saturday night, although male commitment and competence are not.) In the cultural ideal, a host family includes one female mother, one male father and a mixed assortment of doting relatives, together possessing adequate skills and resources for the many tasks of transitional support. The ideal, unfortunately, is not always the reality. In the libertarian environment of modern Earth, you will have to be satisfied with whatever dysfunctional family you get.

With so many young visitors improperly received and inadequately cared for, it seems senseless to invite still more newcomers here, but that is a current weakness of the species. The decision is made for the benefit of the hosts, not the visitor. Existing residents hope that by sponsoring a newcomer, a void can be filled in their lives. They are hoping for purpose and fulfillment where none previously existed. Whether sponsorship actually resolves those problems is debatable. What is certain is that sponsors suddenly become a whole lot busier after the arrival of a visitor and have much less time to think about any personal needs.

**====> When living with a host family, it is best to be polite, respect their customs and try not to point out their shortcomings.**

The limitations of your own host family will become evident as you get to know others. Your family, for example, may only get basic cable, while the one down the street has a satellite dish with all the channels. However, you should resist the temptation to criticize. Remember that this is a random assignment. For whatever reasons, your sponsors are now bearing enormous burdens for you, and tolerance is in order. You cannot change the decision they made, and it is not your responsibility to correct their delusions or childhood wounds. You can only take advantage of the opportunities they have given you -- including the mistakes they have intimately demonstrated -- and work progressively towards achieving your own independence.

## What is "Life"?

The mysteries surrounding initial insertion prompt many visitors to ask profound and ultimately useless questions like, "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" "What is consciousness?" and "What does it all mean?" Fortunately, it is not necessary to answer any of these questions to enjoy a satisfying tour. You just deal with the world as you see it and resolve whatever practical problems come your way. Is this life real or merely an illusion? Why does it matter? It is the best illusion you have at the moment.

Philosophers ask if there is such thing as free will. The answer is, nothing is free; you have to work for it. You wake up in the morning and you seem to be here, in this body, in this bed, on this planet. You seem to be able to move your limbs and make decisions. Maybe you are really someplace else, like your brain is suspended in a bubbling vat in some alien laboratory and the environment you think you see around you is only a computer generated image. Like it or not, because you seem to wake up in the bed and not the laboratory, you are involved in the game. You can refuse to play and lie in bed all day -- or in your computer generated bed -- but that is not very satisfying. If you choose to get up, you are going to have to deal with the planet as it presents itself. There are certain pre-existing problems that you are going to have to solve today. You are going to have to fix breakfast. You might have to walk the dog. You will probably have to go to work. Whether or not you chose this life, it is yours now, and you are going to have to deal with it by its own rules until the game is over.

We agree that human perception is limited. When installed in a human body, you will only be able to detect a limited portion of the electromagnetic spectrum and maybe three or four of however many dimensions there are in the universe. (Humans can easily perceive length, width and height but have trouble understanding the dimension of time and the future consequences of their actions.) Although you can detect only a portion of what is going on in the universe around you, that does not mean that you should ignore what you can see. Life on Earth is as real as it gets, and if you think nothing matters here, try walking into a brick wall. If you could see it and didn't avoid it, then it's your own damn fault if the experience is unpleasant.

As you become conscious of your surroundings, you will see that objects have form and obey rules. For example, as a general observation, two solid objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time without one or both becoming severely damaged -- like your body and the brick wall, or a car and a telephone pole. Once you learn the rules about how objects behave, you can make intelligent predictions and judicious decisions about them that can save you a whole lot of grief later on. Your body seems to be real, as does the pain you experience when another solid object attempts to occupy the same space. By understanding how things work on Earth, you can better avoid unnecessary pain, both now and in the future. You don't have to answer any deep philosophical questions to do this, just avoid the obvious things that cause you damage.

You can lead a pretty good life on Earth just by avoiding pain. Once you recognize -- Eureka! -- that pain is something you don't want to experience, then you can think about avoiding it not just now but for the rest of your tour. This requires long-term planning and the exercise of some advanced intellectual skills. You will make predictions, create and defend investments, weigh the pros and cons of potential actions, and take calculated risks when warranted. Sometimes, you will deliberately initiate painful actions to avoid much greater pain in the future. You will see that pain is not just muscular but that your brain itself will send signals of discomfort -- commonly known as boredom and depression -- and that you must plan ahead to avoid them as well. Avoiding pain isn't easy. It requires that you thoroughly understand the needs of your psyche as well as the dangers of the environment around you.

## The Human Experience

What does it feel like to be human? The sensations are difficult to describe but easy to experience. You are "conscious," which means you have an inner life of thoughts and perceptions that seem to play out in front of you like a movie. The experience itself defies definition, but you will know it when it happens. Suddenly, you are "there." It feels like you are inside the head of a human creature, looking out through a window above the nose. The view is a three dimensional, wide-screen affair similar to the Omnimax theatres found near tourist attractions, but your version is more interactive. You can move the head to change the view and send out signals to interact with the characters on the screen.

If you look down, you will see that your head is attached to something, a broad cylinder called the trunk which houses the body's physical plant -- heart, lungs, digestive system, etc. On either side of the trunk are two appendages called arms, each ending with a fleshy pad and five flexible fingers. Unless your body is severely damaged, you can wiggle your fingers upon demand and make them do useful things, like changing channels or bringing popcorn to mouth. Extending from the bottom of the trunk are two other appendages called legs. Far down at their ends are two flat feet, used for support, each with five fingers that are much shorter and less flexible than those of the hand. From your perspective, the feet appear tiny compared to the hands, but this is only an optical illusion caused by their greater distance from the point of viewing.

You can send messages to your body's appendages, and they will usually respond by moving in the direction you instruct them to. Activating a combination of muscles in proper sequence allows your body to ambulate from place to place. You can instruct your hands to pick up interesting objects, and when they do, messages are relayed back by the fingers describing the object's weight, temperature, texture, etc. Managing all of this input and output may seem complicated at first, but you'll get used to it. Repeated tasks like walking and chewing gum will eventually be taken over by semi-automatic processes that require little interaction with consciousness.

On either side of the head are two holes, which seem to let sounds flow inside. They and the visual input from the eyes may lead a visitor to believe that their consciousness is located inside the head. While it is clear that raw perceptions are sorted and processed in the physical brain, consciousness is something different. Neurology may account for how the machine works, but it does not explain how you got stuck in the middle of it. The actual site of your own consciousness -- the main processing center, if you will -- could be located a million light years away in that alien laboratory, or somewhere in another dimension, or inside an old coffee can in the basement for all you know. You are a ghost of sorts, communicating through this body at this particular time, but not knowing where you came from or where you will be going when the body expires.

The first impression of consciousness is that you are the unmoving center of the universe. You cry, and your servants come to attend you. People entertain you, feed you and change your diapers upon demand. You are the king of all that you survey. From time to time, the scene changes, from bedroom, to kitchen to lawn, but it feels like the world is moving, not you. As you learn to stand upright, you find that the whole planet can be shifted below you just by moving your feet.

That is one theory of the universe: the egocentric view. It is the position we all start from. Gradually, you learn to accept a more useful theory: It is the physical universe that is constant, and you are one small, temporary body traveling through it. This is the global view. The world does not exist merely for your benefit, the theory goes, but obeys its own independent rules that are the same whether or not you are there to watch.

A further intellectual leap is to theorize that other humans around you have their own consciousness and internal sensations similar to your own. You have no proof that this is true, but it is a more useful theory than the egocentric one, which demands that everyone conform to your desires. If you treat your servants like they have no feelings, then they will eventually stop serving you. If you try to understand how the world looks and feels through another person's window -- a process called empathy -- you are more likely to get what you want from that person by giving them what they want.

While most humans agree with the global theory in principle, implementing it is much more difficult than it seems. The egocentric perspective exerts a powerful influence on human behavior. Each person is still the center of his universe, more attached to his own emotions and perceptions than those of others. His self-centered sensations may warn him of immediate danger, but they usually don't capture the broader scope of what is going on. A naive visitor can't help but interpret random events as somehow meant for him. When good things happen, it is a gift from the gods; when painful sensations are felt, it's a conspiracy. Everyone is capable of making simple decisions based on the global view -- playing sports, for example, requires knowledge that you are the one who is moving, not the field -- but in times of stress, people withdraw into themselves, start believing in magic and stop being able to see their circumstances from afar.

## Control

After you arrive, you will quickly discover that you have a degree of control over your environment. You send signals to your limbs, and they move. You make requests to your servants, and they modify their behavior to accommodate you. By the actions you take now, you can manipulate the future, but your control is not absolute. Often your demands for entertainment are cruelly ignored, while your goal-directed actions sometimes yield the opposite effect from what you intended (e.g., to bed without supper instead of the cookies you wanted). In the beginning, the events around you seem mostly random, with little to distinguish the successful actions from the unsuccessful ones. With time, the chaos settles, and you begin to see the patterns and rules of the many systems that surround you. In general, the better you understand your environment, the more accurately you can predict its responses, and the more successful your actions will be.

But you can never completely get rid of randomness. No matter how much you know, systems interact with systems in complicated ways that make perfect predictions impossible. Lightning could strike you or a careening car could mow you down, wiping out your best laid plans. While we cannot say what disasters may befall you on your tour, you can rest assured that some will happen. You may be travelling blithely from Point A to Point B when -- Wham! -- something happens to knock you way the hell over to Point T with no way to get back. A pessimist may argue, after several such failures, that all planning is useless. Why bother building anything on Earth when an earthquake could happen tomorrow to knock it all down?

The answer lies in a concept called probability, which is difficult for egocentric humans to grasp. No future event on Earth is certain; instead, each event has a relative likelihood of occurring. The actions you take today cannot guarantee an outcome tomorrow, but they can raise or lower the chances of it happening. Your life on Earth is a series of wagers, like games of chance in a casino. Every day, you make predictions about the future, place your bets on the table, then throw the dice. You can't say for certain how the dice will fall, but you can improve your odds by substituting your own dice and weighting them in your favor.

Although the outcome of any one trial is uncertain, your life is a cumulation of many different trials, which overall tend to match the risk profile that you have set up for yourself. For example, if you travel in a car today, your chances of being involved in a serious accident are very low. Knowing this, you may decline to wear your seat belt and will probably suffer no ill effect from that decision. However, if you travel in a car every day for 50 years, your chances of having a serious accident are much higher -- 18,262 times higher, to be precise. Failing to wear your seat belt once or twice probably won't put you at great risk, but a policy of not wearing your seat belt could be deadly, since the probability of a serious accident is very high of the course of a lifetime.

Overall success in life does not depend on individual wagers as much as the policies of behavior that you establish for yourself and choose to follow. If you have a policy of avoiding senseless risks, you could still be struck by some randomly falling piano that you did not anticipate, but over the full course of your tour you will almost certainly suffer fewer injuries than the person of who has had a policy of recklessness. Likewise, you can have a policy of thorough

research and careful thought before making important decisions. It may not win you anything right away -- You can still make mistakes. -- but over the long run it will earn you greater rewards than a policy of impulsiveness or blind trust.

Since your arrival on Earth, the most important thing you should be learning is, What are the right policies? You learn your policies by observation, experience and thought. You see the accidents that have happened to other people, and you vow to avoid them yourself. You remember your own awful mistakes and try to figure out what went wrong. You remember your successes, too, and you endeavor not just to repeat them, but to figure out what it was about them that made them personally satisfying and seek that instead. Your policies, if obeyed, should minimize risk while increasing the probability of whatever goal you seek. Good policies will smooth your long-term interaction with this planet, even if they occasionally lead to painful or unpopular decisions in the near term.

## Rules to Live By

Policies are rules for behavior, similar to the written laws of a country. Given a certain dilemma, there are rules to tell you what to do, and the art lies in deciding which one takes precedence when several seem to conflict with each other. When a begger asks you for money on the street, should you give it to him? Some rules say yes, others no. The difference between your personal policies and those of a country is that your rules can be more subtle and sensitive to context. While the laws of a country can only ban beggars altogether, you have the freedom to ask intelligent questions -- like, "What do you want the money for?" -- and translate the data you receive into an equation of probability. (Written laws cannot deal with probabilities, only absolutes.) What is the likelihood that the money you give this person now will benefit him in the long run, and is this the best use for your limited resources? Your thoughtful comparison of the available options will yield a course of action.

Since the overall success and satisfaction of your experience on Earth depends on the policies you choose, we will discuss them frequently in this guide. Here is one that we will often refer to:

**====> Your time on Earth is limited, so each minute must be used for the most important task currently available.**

We call this the Priority Rule.

You may not know where you came from before insertion or where you will go when your host expires, but you seem to be here now, and the total length of your earthly interaction will probably be less than a century. One hundred years is 36,525 days, which seem like a lot at first, but the number dwindles quickly when you realize how many days are already spoken for. The first decades are used to acquire basic skills, while your last years may be considerably slowed by the weakening of your host body. Most of the remaining days will be used for maintenance, as you work, raise children and maintain your home. If you are reading this guide after your arrival, many years of your tour have already expired, leaving you with an unknown number of days left. The number given above is only the upper end of a probability curve; no tour is guaranteed. Because of the uncertainties, you have to live each day both (A) as though it will be your last, and (B) as though it will not be your last and you'll have to live for years with the consequences of today's actions.

Probability suggests that you won't depart tomorrow, but even if it did, that should not significantly change your behavior today. You still have a limited number of hours left and need to make the most of them. What is the most important task to be doing at the present? Should you watch TV, read a book, do your laundry, brush your teeth, or lie in bed staring at the ceiling? Under the appropriate circumstances, any of these activities can be most important at the moment. Basic bodily maintenance is one of the essentials. Since your body is your vehicle for all activities on Earth, you have to take time to clean it, feed it and monitor its health. This kind of activity may seem mundane, but it rises in value when you think about the losses if your body breaks down.

The Priority Rule means that you can't afford to be perfect, though. Your body should function well, but once it does it loses its priority. You don't need to be a fashion model or Adonis, because that level of maintenance wastes too much precious time. Likewise, your home should be moderately clean and well-maintained -- enough that you can find what you need and are safely and comfortably housed -- but it does not have to be a Martha Stewart showpiece. If it is, it may

mean you have been sidetracked. Humans are easily diverted into unimportant activities, often for a whole lifetime. You could call it the official disease of the species. People will repeat comfortable, self-insulating activities over and over, even when they don't gain anything from them. Almost any form of popular entertainment is unimportant if you have done it before and have already learned most of its meaningful lessons. Solving the immediate and long-term problems of real life is Most Important. Diversions may relax your mind, but they also eat up your limited time on Earth and leave you with nothing to show for it.

## Scope of Control

As you exercise control over the probabilities of your environment, patterns will emerge. You will find that you have substantial influence over the actions of your own body and the conditions of your immediate environment. You have moderate control over the events in your surrounding neighborhood, but less influence over what happens in your city, state or country. (You can vote in public elections, but the resulting change in probabilities will be very small.) You have virtually no control over events in a neighborhood on the other side of the planet, and absolutely no control over what happens on some distant planet you never heard of.

**====> In general, your influence is greater over objects and events you are closest to and have the most connections with.**

We call this the Proximity Rule.

"Influence" is composed of two elements: being able to change the probability of future events, and obtaining the results you intend from that change. For example, if you had the hardware, you could fire a missile from your house to a neighborhood in some distant country, where it blows up, kills people and causes damage. Although you are not close to that place, you have triggered changes there. The trouble is, you don't know what the long-term effect of those changes will be -- whether the missile will cause a war or bring people together, destabilize a regime or give it something to rally against. Since you have little information about that distant neighborhood, it is hard to make predictions about the effects of your actions. Your good intentions -- to kill an evil dictator, for instance -- have a low probability of achieving the ultimate freedom you intend, because you are not there to fully understand the situation and monitor the results.

By contrast, the decisions you make about your own body and local environment have a much higher probability of success. Because you are intimately involved in the situation and are constantly collecting data, you are highly qualified to make predictions. This suggests that most of your limited resources should be spent close to home, on projects that you are personally invested in and know a lot about. While this may sound obvious, there is a human inclination to do the opposite -- to focus on national and international concerns while the more basic problems of your local environment remain unsolved. The opposite of egocentrism is excessive globalism, where you fail to recognize personal opportunities because they haven't been reported on CNN.

You may not be happy with your body, host family or local environment, but for the time being, this is where you have your greatest influence. Because they are imperfect and not of your choosing, it is tempting to blow them off and focus instead on quixotic quests for perfect beauty, higher knowledge and global reformation. Embarrassment is a common reaction when thinking about the reality of your current circumstances. Perhaps you would rather not be here but instead want to be a movie star living in a mansion in Bel Aire. If that is what you really want, you might eventually achieve it, but you need to start from someplace, even if it is a run-down shack on the wrong side of the tracks.

The fates have dealt you certain starting circumstances, which can't help but become part of your personality and tend to dictate the goals you later pursue. Why, exactly, do you want to be a movie star? Is it to regain some of that respect your sponsors never gave you? You can run away from your host family, but something of them will always be carried with you, to reemerge as soon as you settle down. It is possible to become a completely functional human entity in spite of any deficiencies in your transitional environment, but you must thoroughly understand and feel comfortable with your past to truly be liberated from it.

**Next Chapter: [Food and Lodging](#)**

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