



# To Your Own Self Be True

Short Story

Ray Melnik

## **To Your Own Self Be True**

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I was working in the experimental physics lab at Scilabs, on a method to accelerate atoms using a circular shaft with a diameter of only twenty five feet. For my purpose I needed to accelerate the atom to only one, one thousandth of the speed of light. I designed what I called a large scale bias generator; I believed could create a stable wormhole. It used a field to guide the atom up a coiled shaft, twenty five feet high, until it reached a chamber at the top. From there it was guided down again in a symmetrical coil. The center of the unit housed a magnetic bottle containing trapped protons, acting as the catalyst.

As the guidance and acceleration fields began to synchronize I saw what looked to be the very event I was looking for, but only for a moment. I was so incredibly close. It seems I just need to rework the formula between the acceleration and guidance fields. I needed to clear my head, get a good night sleep, so I reached behind me to turn off the lights and I left.

In the car I stopped at the guard booth and waited for Chris to finish writing on his chart before raising the gate. As he turned my way I could see he looked a bit run down.

“Oh, hi Dr. Trace,” he said. Working late as usual I see.”

“Well I was having a good night. You look a little tired, Chris. What’s up?”

“To tell you the truth, Doc, I have another job that I go to at midnight and it’s been a little hard adjusting. Dawn and I have another baby on the way and I’ve

just got to make ends meet while she is off from work. At her store, she's lucky she's not fired for taking a few weeks leave."

"I hope you can get some rest, Chris."

"You know, I could have been a welder. I bet they make good money. I should have learned welding when I had the chance years ago, but I ended up buying a car with the money I had put aside for the course. It's funny, isn't it Dr. Trace, how things go? And the reasons why we do the things we do."

"Perhaps there is no reason, Chris. And please, call me Kyle."

"Thanks Dr, uh, Kyle. You have a good evening sir."

I tried to read for a while when I got home, but I was picturing graphs with ratios. It bothered me a little about Chris as well, that he needed to work two jobs just to get by. I felt guilty having done well enough to buy this large house on Croton Hill. The salary is good, but it was the stock I opted into when Scilabs went public that really paid off. And here Chris was just trying to keep food on the table.

He has been an exemplary employee and I planned to ask Jack to give him a raise. I decided I would also buy a card, collect money from the lab folks and give it as a gift for the new addition to their family.

I soon grabbed a notepad and stretched out on the couch, trying to find my error in the mix ratio. A little over an hour later I fell asleep right there with pad in hand.

I woke suddenly and saw it was still dark outside the window. The clock read 3:33 am. I realized I had been working on the problem in my sleep and stumbled on what I believed to be the answer. I was compelled to know if it would work, but as much as I wanted to just jump into the car, I took the time to shower, shave and change clothes.

It didn't take me long to get there. The roads on the way were empty at this early hour. I approached the gates at Scilabs and I was fumbling to find my ID. I rarely came here during the night so I had not yet met the guard on duty. I pulled up to the booth slowly.

“Hi, I'm Dr. Kyle Trace. Just give me a moment to locate my ID.”

“I know who you are, Dr. Trace.” He said. I see your photo all the time in the company newsletter. You can go right in.”

As I drove to the lab up the road I was happy to see one of Scilabs latest products at work. The light posts, 33 meters apart each sensing the cars presence, turning on the light ahead and the light behind, off. The bulbs were a new Scilabs innovation as well, producing the light of 400 Watt sodium bulbs, but using only 50 Watts. I'm proud to be part of a company dedicated to solving some of the greatest problems facing mankind today. Even when it

comes to power, the whole South side of the high hill on the complex grounds is coated with solar panels and power storage pods are dotting the base.

I felt a little nervous as I swiped my finally located ID in the sensor to open the door. So many scientists have worked a lifetime, never realizing the fruits of their work. Some worked until death with nothing they did having made any difference. Could it be that I would escape that fate?

The equipment was powering up with all the screens reflecting the systems diagnostics occurring. Everything was checking out OK, with the screens finally flashing rows of green. It was good to go, but was I ready considering I was convinced the ratio was right this time?

After reviewing the hardware start up logs, I began to enter in all the new software computations. This time the math seemed to flow. I could see symmetry in the numbers. As I clicked the link to start the sequence, it felt right this time.

I could hear two low sounds winding up in pitch as the guidance and acceleration fields attempted to synchronize. The fields reached the programmed levels and the center burst into light, but with a dark grey hole almost fifteen feet in diameter. It quickly flashed off and I could hear it attempting to synchronize once again. I jumped into the chair and punched away at a few adjustments.

It suddenly came to me that the sound I was hearing as it was winding up might be the clue. Just as a piano string has an additional string or strings for

creating harmonics, perhaps a low additional harmonic wave would stabilize the wormhole. I pressed in the last setting just before it reached the intended level and it burst once again into the large dark hole surrounded by intense light. This time it was stable.

It was absolutely beautiful and as I approached to take a closer look, the dark hole gave way to what looked like a reflection of the lab and me. But I shuttered when I noticed that the other me wore different clothes and moved in a way I did not. That was no reflection.

“Amazing,” The voice from inside said. Who are you?”

“Dr. Kyle Trace,” I told him. Who are you?”

“Ditto,” he said and stared into my lab as if he were looking into a storefront window. This didn’t happen last time.”

“Last time,” I questioned? This was the first time for me.”

“I succeeded last year in opening the hole on my side, but it seems it took both of us to complete the tunnel,” he told me.

“You’re right,” I said. This is amazing. It’s obvious that we are a lot alike, both hold our scientific positions, but there are obviously differences. I was just finalizing my work one year ago as construction of the generator was beginning. You were ready a year ago. This is great, what we could learn from one another. I can not wait to show the other scientists, and the world.”

“Check your metal integrity setting,” he said. If yours is like mine, I’m afraid the shaft is disintegrating as it did for me a year ago. It took me an entire year to rebuild the unit. I thought I had that part solved, but evidently I did not. Based on the rate of deterioration we have about 43 minutes left before the hole destabilizes.”

“Shit! You’re right,” I told him. But what a great 43 minutes it will be recording data that will keep an army of scientists working for years. We can examine the data later as well. Let’s talk. Do you live on Croton Hill like I do?”

“No I live in New Windsor, on Little Britain Road. You have to be super rich to live on Croton Hill. You have that kind of money,” he asked?

“Well yes, the Scilabs stock offering,” I said. I made a killing on my shares.”

“I never opted in,” he said. I needed the money I had saved to buy our home when Max was born. What was left over I used to start his college fund”

“You’re married,” I asked. You have a son?”

“Yes, Max is the best thing that ever happened to Danielle and me.”

“Danielle,” I asked? Danielle Shaw?”

“Yes. We met in London when I went to the conference on alternative energy. I lived in London for a year to be with her.”

“She was in my life as well,” I told him. But she got the offer to work in Zurich, and I got the offer from Scilabs”

“I couldn’t let her leave,” He said. I loved her too much. She came to the states with me and took a position in the media production facility here at Scilabs. She loves it. You would love Max too. He’s a great kid. He’s only two years old and already dismantling everything in our home.”

“He sounds like a great kid,” I said. I loved Danielle as well, but I hesitated when I had the chance, and I lost her.”

“Well, go find her. Maybe she’s not married yet. Every day we get closer. I can’t tell you how much she means to me. You missed out on a great thing good buddy.”

“Perhaps I will,” I told him. You do look really happy.”

“I am,” He said as he backed up to the table and sat.

I felt compelled to do the same and I sat staring at him for a moment, seeing for the first time how others truly saw me. There was no more sobering a moment that I could recall.

“So what is it like to be rich,” he asked?

“It’s OK. I don’t have money problems to worry about. The house is great too, but empty. I really don’t know any of the neighbors. Up on the hill, the houses are very far apart. There are about ten acres before you see the next house. Let me ask you. After I left London I just concentrated on my work. I worked as hard as I could and in a way, I’m you, so how did you achieve a stable wormhole a year earlier than I did?”

“I think it’s because Danielle and Max keep me balanced. I have been able to separate my home life from work most of the time and it makes me more productive when I’m here. She was a little annoyed however when I got up at half past three to get here. I wired up the last of the circuits last night and I couldn’t wait for the first new test.”

“So do you like living in New Windsor,” I asked?

“Yes, we do. The neighbors are great. Most of them any way,” he said. You know our jobs pay well enough. It’s a nice area. We own a modest home, but we’re building great memories there.”

“You make me regret some of the roads I’ve taken. Well, what about the war, I asked? In your world did you have a 911?”

“Yes, we did,” he said

“We lose over a hundred of our brave soldiers every month in the war, with no end in sight, I told him. I could use up all of our time with examples so I will just say that our president has damaged our nation so much it will take years to correct all the blunders. He turned the entire world against us.”

“OK, well that’s different,” he said. Once we found Bin Laden and they put him on trial in the world court, the country began to heal. In my world, the other nations were saddened by our loss. They have all been helpful in rooting out terrorists. And Afghanistan is now a fairly stable country. Our soldiers began coming home a few months ago and very few have been killed in the last year.”

“But what about Iraq,” I asked?

“Iraq,” he said looking puzzled. What about Iraq?”

“That’s where we are losing all our kids. After 911 we went into Afghanistan, but never finished the job. We never caught Bin Laden. Most of the troops were redeployed to start a war in Iraq,” I said.

“But what did Iraq have to do with 911?” he asked.

“Nothing,” I told him. Many of us believe now that they were just itching to invade Iraq for the oil. Bush just needed an excuse.”

“Hell, so you got the cowboy. Go figure,” he said. Here, President Gore, sent us into Afghanistan to get Bin Laden, but at the same time he engaged the

countries of the Middle East through diplomacy. It's a tough road but we're attempting to work together in an effort to stop the religious extremists."

"What about global warming," I asked?

"After 911, Gore challenged the scientific community to develop alternative fuels and make America energy independent within ten years by developing carbon neutral bio fuels. He also put federal money where his mouth was. Not only are we on track, but the side effects are beginning to revitalize rural America through the revival of the farming communities. All those billions that went to the Middle East are now beginning to enrich America."

"Man your world is in better shape," I said. It's great that we are getting the data regarding the tunnel, but I would have loved it if we could have recorded each others history and science."

"We need to both rebuild," he said with a smile and a look of great excitement. Let's agree to connect one year from today. Compile some science and history and we should both add a standard optical interface next time so we can exchange what we have."

"I was just going to say that," I said.

"Of course you were," he said laughing. One of us has got to work out the shaft disintegration problem, but maybe we both will."

We talked for some time about some of the history further in the past and I was surprised that most of it was the same. I wondered where the timelines first split, or why. Could there be even more universes? At least there was the data about the tunnel we were recording. Some of it may just hold the key to unlocking the very essence of existence.

“Time is running out,” I said. My display shows six minutes remaining.”

“This has been better than I could have ever imagined. It’s been great talking with you,” he said.

“You know that sounds a little vain,” I told him, and smiled.

“Kyle, I want to be honest with you,” he said. I know myself and I can see the sadness in you. Don’t get me wrong. It seems you’re doing well for yourself, but I know you’re lonely. You can’t hide that from me.”

“Only when I think about it,” I told him. Since I came back from London I just immersed myself in work.”

He watched as I tried to explain my disinterest in a life outside of the lab, using every excuse I could. Perhaps I had gone on too long, but saying nothing of value.

He walked up close and said, “You need to get out. Find Someone. Being with Danielle makes me realize that I would be only living half a life without

her. What is a life, even with your achievements, if you have no one to share it with?”

“One minute to go,” I said. You have made me think, Kyle. How strange it is to be lectured by oneself.”

The wormhole became unsteady and we could see there were only moments left.

Remember what Carl Sagan said,” he offered. For small creatures such as we the vastness is bearable only through love.”

The wormhole faded before I could say thank you. I sat stunned

The excitement permeated the building when I gathered the others to show them the data and explain the event. Minutes after explaining what I experienced and answering their questions, all of the others were copying off parts of the data for study. And within days the complex was buzzing with activity and discussions about what they were finding.

I knew I needed to attempt to correct the issue with the degeneration of the shaft, but the early work could still proceed. Professor Brian Greene was in charge of finances and offered all the money and help I needed. Given what I achieved, he was surprised to hear that I was willing to wait for a look at the data myself. I told him I was taking a month off once the work was underway. “Kyle, we are so proud of what you have accomplished.” Professor Greene told me. It will change, forever, the nature of the cosmos as we know it.”

“Thank you Brian,” I told him. The data collected is unprecedented, but imagine as well, what it’s like to see oneself with such clarity.

“The details you told us are incredible and I look forward to meeting your counterpart in a year.” He said. I already processed the paperwork for your time off. I hope you enjoy your time away. Are you planning to go anywhere?”

“Yes,” I told him. Zurich.”