

The stuff from which money is made

by Hari Heath

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Editor's Note: Mr. Heath has done it again. He has taken complex subject matter and simplified it to the point that we should all feel a little silly. A word of caution in reading "Stuff": Be careful to keep your mouth empty of food or beverage just in case your mirthfully introspective reaction to something in this piece makes you laugh out loud unexpectedly.

In the beginning was stuff and the stuff was good. Lots of good stuff. And we traded, for not everyone had the same stuff. We hunted for stuff and gathered stuff and made stuff. Life was good when we had stuff. In time, some collected more stuff than they could use. They had great piles of stuff and became merchants. They traded wisely until their piles of stuff grew too large.

They knew they had a problem of too much stuff, so they made special stuff that was smaller and easy to carry and didn't go bad in the sun. It was made out of rare metals so it wouldn't be easy to make too much of, thereby losing its value as special stuff. They made it round and shiny with pictures on it, so people would think it was beautiful and like it. Each of these coins were given a name and a value, so people would know just how special the stuff was. Then they gave a value, in the name of the special stuff, to all their other stuff.

In time, everything was given value in the name of the special stuff. Not just things you could hunt or gather or make, but your time, or even your ideas were given a value in special stuff. Eventually, people wanted the special stuff, even more than real stuff. They would do almost anything to get the special stuff.

The special stuff became so important to people that just a pocketful of it could buy a boat load of food, or an army of men for a day. This became important, because once we had all this special stuff, we forgot how to hunt and gather and make things. We needed boat loads of food and armies of men to protect our stuff, or to take other people's stuff.

After a time, the people who started out as merchants, with great piles of real stuff, discovered that they didn't need any real stuff any more. They could make special stuff turn into more special stuff by letting other people use it, if they paid a use tax called interest. Soon they had great piles of special stuff and built great houses just for their special stuff. They learned that many things could be controlled by those who really knew their stuff.

The people became so mesmerized by the special stuff that they only wanted more. They would go far from home and do things they never would do for themselves or their friends. The more special stuff they had, the more real stuff they could get with it, so they could live a life of ease with enough special stuff. Of course, it wasn't that easy to get all the special stuff they thought they needed.

The special stuff merchants learned how to make magic happen. The people performed great

wonders when they let them use their special stuff. People would make things beyond their wildest dreams, just to get more special stuff.

Not content with watching the piles of special stuff grow in their great houses from the tax on the use of their special stuff, they made a new special stuff. It wasn't real special stuff, for it was made of paper. But they made it pretty, with faces and names of the value they gave it. They kept the real special stuff in their great houses and gave the people the paper stuff, for it said it was redeemable in special stuff any time they wanted. The people believed the paper stuff was also special stuff for it could be traded in for the real thing. This was the beginning of the greatest magic trick of all.

Because the people believed in this new paper stuff they could use it instead of the special stuff. It was pretty and much lighter. They could carry much more of it, so it was even better. After awhile, the people liked the paper stuff even more than the special stuff, which was very good for the special stuff merchants. They could now have their own hidden tax called inflation because they could print more paper stuff to let people use, than they had special stuff to redeem it with. Since not everyone wanted the real thing at once, the printing presses rolled on.

There came a time, when there was so much paper that the people had enough. The paper stuff merchants learned that if there was too much paper stuff it wouldn't be special any more because people would notice that there was more paper stuff than there was stuff.

The paper merchants were very good at counting because they had to be. They learned to keep good track of all the real stuff that was made so they could adjust the amount of paper stuff in the peoples' pockets.

There were many ways to adjust the paper-to-stuff ratio. Sometimes they would just raise the interest tax which collected some of the paper stuff and brought it back to the paper stuff merchants. This was good for small adjustments.

Sometimes when they had too much paper stuff and there was also lots of stuff they gave away paper stuff to people who thought they were needy. Then the needy people could buy more stuff. They called this welfare. It got rid of the extra paper stuff and the extra stuff was consumed, making for a very good adjustment because everyone was happy. Sometimes they would use this welfare trick on poor people and sometimes they gave it to rich corporations. It didn't matter as long as both the extra paper stuff and the extra stuff was gone and they got an adjustment.

Another good adjustment was called the space program. Because the special stuff had made people learn to do things beyond their wildest dreams, some people learned how to go into outer space. This took lots of paper stuff and the stuff they made with it went into outer space, where it wouldn't count any more in the paper-to-stuff ratio.

When they had way too much stuff, and too much paper stuff, they needed a big adjustment. The best way to get a big adjustment was to start a war. War was always a good way to get an adjustment because it took lots of paper stuff and the people wrecked each others stuff. Wars could last for years which made for a real good adjustment. Of course, it wasn't always the best kind of adjustment, because war rarely made people happy. War did make people get excited and think up some of the wildest things. They would make these things just for the special stuff which nowadays was only paper stuff. Some of the best stuff was made up, because they needed

it to make a better war.

One time a president named Reagan tried to get an adjustment using both war and the space program. He had lowered the taxes on the people which caused them to be more productive and have more stuff. There was also lots of extra paper then too. This can happen when you have your own printing press.

Anyway, President Reagan came up with the Star Wars Strategic Defense Initiative to save us from the Russians. The Russians were really the friends of the paper stuff merchants too, and weren't gonna hurt us, but it was a good story that the people believed for a while. President Reagan threw lots of paper stuff at his Star Wars initiative which got rid of the paper stuff and they bought lots of stuff with it that they never really used because they didn't end up having a war in space. Stuff that you can't really use doesn't count in the paper-to-stuff ratio, except when you first make it. It was a really good adjustment. Everyone was happy because they didn't have another war.

These merchants in the great houses of paper stuff can control nations with their paper. Their paper world was getting to hot to handle lately, and was about to implode from the sheer weight of all the extra paper stuff they made up. So they pulled off a big magic trick right before our eyes and called it Kosovo. First they knew where some very valuable stuff was under the ground. They also knew the people who lived there were mad at each other so they could easily make them fight each other. Then they gave lots of paper stuff to the media, so they would only tell one side of the story (like they usually do). This worked great, because people believed the media, and thought the Serbs were the only real bad guys this time. So we needed a war to teach them a lesson. We bombed and wrecked their stuff until they didn't have very much left. Then after we used up a whole bunch of our stuff to wreck their stuff, we stopped and had a peace. This was a great adjustment for the paper stuff merchants.

Now, since winter is coming and the Serbian people don't have much stuff to eat or stay warm with, they will need more paper stuff to get by. So the paper stuff merchants and the governments they bought along time ago made an offer to the Serbian people. Get rid of your leader, because he was a really bad guy, and replace him with someone we like and we'll give you lots of paper stuff to buy food and fuel, and all that good stuff. Just get a new leader we like and we'll fix all the roads and bridges we wrecked and build you new towns to live in.

But the part the media doesn't tell you is that the paper stuff merchants will also get to own Kosovo, which has lots coal and special metals in the mines underneath it. That's the real stuff they wanted in the first place. And how will they get it mined? With people who will do anything for paper stuff. Do you see how this paper stuff magic happens?

Prisons are another kind of adjustment. That's why the law-making people have invented so many new crimes. It's become a very big business for government. If they put you in prison, then you don't get to have very much stuff. And they can take your stuff, because they said you were bad, and should give them your stuff. It also takes lots of paper stuff to keep you in prison. Everyone has to pay out some of their paper stuff to lock you up. This helps the paper-to-stuff ratio by using up paper stuff on the cost of building and running prisons. And it gets rid of your stuff and keeps you from making more stuff to upset the ratio.

Unless of course, you work in one of the new prison labor programs, where you work real cheap. This is a tricky little adjustment because you make real stuff for very little paper stuff which helps out the paper stuff merchants when they have too much paper stuff. This one also works good in third world countries.

Sometimes the paper stuff merchants get an adjustment by just letting the markets collapse. This changes the paper-to-stuff ratio by changing the value of the paper. Sometimes they call it inflation and sometimes they call it deflation. It doesn't really matter, because in the end, the paper stuff is worth less. Smart people already know the paper stuff is worthless, not just worth less, but most people aren't that smart. Their whole lives are spent chasing worthless paper instead of making their own real stuff. They have forgotten how to hunt and gather and make stuff, so their lives have become as worthless as the paper they chase.

This is what happens when people forget the important things in life and get tricked by the paper stuff merchants. If you believe in something, that's made up from nothing, then eventually your life, that could have been something, may end up as nothing.

Just like that old song says, "we're living in a land of make believe, and trying not to let it show..."

That is the kind of stuff from which money is made.

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