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INTRODUCTION



When something is real, it is as clear and raw as it gets. It is bottom-line, unequivocal, and not up for debate. It has both punch and promise. It often comes at the end of a long inner struggle, sometimes in the shower, sometimes driving in stop-and-go traffic, and always when we have consciously stopped thinking about it. What is real delivers peace.

But if we think of peace as a state of euphoria, we will be missing the key to what is probably the most misunderstood concept in spirituality. Peace is the result of clarity, a rock solid feeling that is stark and without embellishment of any kind. It is a place where, if only for the moment, there are no more questions. It has nothing to do with pleasure or pain. As a matter of fact, sometimes in the midst of horrific pain, with defenses dismantled and raw, we may suddenly “get it.”

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But touching our vulnerability frightens us so we quickly retreat to a well-known safe place, rationalizing whatever doesn't fit into our preprogrammed, hard-wired agenda. A button has been pushed and before we know it, we are riding a wave of momentum, a chain reaction of our stuff that closes our expanded heart. To support this delusion, we seek consensus for our opinion, asking others for their opinions until we get the answers we want. But just because two people have the same opinion of reality doesn't make it so, and we are once again left feeling confused and disconnected.

We will continue this way, perhaps for our whole life, until we consciously surrender thinking—our need to understand everything with the mind—and willingly open to *feeling*. In order to get even a glimpse of what is real and true, to “see” reality, we must be able to intimately touch our humanness, without rationalization or apology. We cannot indefinitely sanitize and sugarcoat this process simply because it scares us.

We may be able to fool ourselves for a while, but not forever. Regardless of how clever we are, reality is. There is no way around it. We can dress it up to appear more palpable, but it is, always and forever, human. It is only through our humanness that we can know our divinity, not the other way around. Only through the gutsy, messy stuff can we touch our essence. The dark places we run from—those are the places we need to go. What we are most afraid of sets us free.

As we endlessly discuss this bitter sweet nature and publicly celebrate the dual yet equal qualities of the yin/yang, joy, beauty, and success always win out, leaving as distant stepchildren sorrow, ugliness, and failure. We have been so conditioned to want only what is easy and initially makes us feel good that we have neglected the soft

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underbelly, that part of life that is difficult and makes us uncomfortable, but in the end has the ability to connect us to our core and make us whole.

It takes tremendous ego strength and internal fortitude to delve into unknown territory, hidden places with secrets we have so long avoided. In order to do this, we need to have a sense of Self that is strong enough to withstand scrutiny, criticism, and, finally, change. What is unknown is outside our conscious mind. It produces chaos, a feeling of being out of control. The more we are able to relinquish control and move out of our comfort zone, the more we are able to shift our distorted view to something that makes sense. If we are willing to sit with no safety net, squarely in the midst of our demons, what ostensibly appeared to be chaos becomes the energy that moves us out of that stuck place and provides us with the opportunity to grow. What initially is uncomfortable ultimately nourishes our soul.

When we are brave, the face of spirit reveals itself. It is a naked face, and its pristine beauty glows with the light of the Inner Self. It demands our recognition and offers us joy. If we are willing to stay in the moment and all that it offers, something unique happens. In a flash, we are catapulted into a new state of consciousness, a fresh way of seeing. Rather than feeling betrayed by this ever-changing universe, we delight in it and in wherever it might lead us. When we trust our feelings, we watch reality work and let it happen.

The essence of spirituality is this process—a human adventure that has the power to transform each and every one of us. When T. S. Eliot said, “It is ending up where you began but knowing the place for the first time,” he took a very complicated concept and reduced it to something simple, yet elegant. His stripped-to-the-

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bone statement has the ability to transform us in an instant if we let it.

But to feel the power of his words, we must hear the words and not think about them. The minute we think, we lose the gestalt. What is real has nothing to do with thinking. It is intuitive, trusting, ever-changing. We must be willing to suspend the inner critic who is constantly trying to be in control, and just let go. It is only when we lose our self-consciousness, our need to make things happen, that things finally do begin to happen in a way that has both ease and grace.

What follows is my way of looking at the world. Although it is in my voice, it is my hope that the voice is real and deep enough to touch each of you in a place that resonates true for you. The various forms of experience may appear accidental, but they are never random and metaphorically always hold the key to deeper understanding of one's Self and how the universe unfolds. No one can tell us what something means. Only we know what it means for us.

Our moment of truth is exhilarating. Positioned solidly in the present, we are not confused. We are absolutely clear because we are congruent—our opinion of reality and how it really works are the same. With quiet mind, we let it happen; knowing the rhythm of the universe is in perfect harmony with our open heart.

This is what makes our life work.

IF YOU'RE BORED WITH YOUR STORY, IT'S TIME TO CHANGE



There is nothing worse than hearing the same old story over and over again, and yet most of us have no trouble repeating *our* story. For some reason, we think our tale of woe is different and proceed to share the intimate details with all who will listen. We are oblivious to the blank stares and veiled yawns, and talk long after all interest has waned.

Friends and family mistakenly think they are providing a valuable service when they sit hour after hour feigning interest in what we have to say. They think this is what they are supposed to do, even though they have long since tired of hearing the same litany. They give us similar suggestions over and over again and in the process commiserate with our plight. The pattern is set for talks that go nowhere into the night.

So we keep on talking because no one tells us to be quiet.

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One day, telling our story, we actually hear the words. What once had drama and seriousness now sounds narcissistic and funny. A crucial shift has taken place—we have gone from being victims to assuming responsibility for whatever happens in our lives. This change has allowed us to truly hear our words for the first time.

Listening, we hear repetitive themes and familiar complaints. Initially, we thought it was okay because the names, places, and faces were different. But if we are honest with ourselves, we know the truth—it is really the same old story. Nothing has changed.

Finally, we are bored.

So bored, we don't even bother to create a new story. We realize that they are all basically the same—none any better or worse than the other—just that mine is mine and yours is yours.

The simplicity of our realization is astounding. Not realizing that we were carrying around tons of garbage, we suddenly feel lighter. We take a moment to remember all the friends who sat through countless hours listening to this stuff, and we smile.

Would we do it for someone else? I don't think so.

Having let go of the drama, we embrace the adventure.

THE SPACE BETWEEN
THE OLD WAY NOT WORKING
AND THE NEW WAY NOT YET FOUND
IS WHERE CONSCIOUSNESS EXPANDS—
STAY IN THE GAP!



The Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree for forty years and asked himself the quintessential question, “Who am I?” His patience was infinite and his resolve unyielding. He knew his old way of looking at the world had brought him pain and suffering; he also knew that there must be another way. As he asked himself the all-important question about essence, and heard the answers, he rejected them by saying, “Not this, not this, not this.”

I imagine those forty years were fairly treacherous. From the time he sat down to the time he got up forty years later, a lot must have happened. I’m sure there were times that he just wanted to get up and leave. But he somehow knew the truth would take him to another place, and he was willing to go through it all to get there. Imagine the power that was at work. He had no idea where he was going. All he knew was that where he had been was not the answer. Through confusion, fear, anxiety, and darkness, he sat. Never

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knowing if there would be an end to his quest, he resolved to stay in the gap.

The gap between the old way no longer working and the new way not yet found is the only place that consciousness expands. To stay in that space takes tremendous courage and discipline. As familiar forms shift and mutate, what once was capable of making us feel secure and comfortable becomes a distant memory. It simply doesn't bring us happiness anymore. The energy is changing. We make a conscious choice to go with the energy rather than cling to the form. Something inside us is letting us know that if we want something more, we have to be something more. It is only when we move from the known to the unknown that energy has a place to stretch and expand and create new ways for us to express ourselves.

The space in between is always uncomfortable. The old forms have dropped away and have not been replaced. There is nothing to hang on to other than the romanticized remembrance of an exotic adventure. Like the Buddha, when we say, "Not this, not this, not this . . ." we are making an implicit commitment to accept only the truth and nothing else. When we tell the universe that we are not willing to do it the old way anymore, what we are actually doing is withdrawing our energy from that way.

As we withdraw the energy, we can instantly see the forms change. The relationship we thought we would die without suddenly loses its allure, and the job we were so scared to quit is something we no longer want. As we surrender to that place, a movement of new energy is at work. Although nothing has yet come to fruition, that doesn't mean things aren't changing. The darkness we are experiencing is a necessary prelude to a whole new way of doing things, and we stay in the gap until another door opens.

YOU ARE ONLY ALLOWED TO THINK WHEN YOU CAN FEEL



Can we ever really know anything with our intellect? We can analyze, dissect, and reassemble thoughts to create an acceptable reason that something is the way it is, but in order to touch the essence of something, we must be willing to bypass the mind and rest in the heart.

What we are talking about here is not the romantic or emotional heart, but that spot in the chest that resonates the truth. This is the home of the inner voice, the intuitive place that stretches far beyond the intellect into the caves of mystery and longing. To get there, we must pull the energy from above the neck to below it. This movement takes concerted effort, but it is worth it. As our point of concentration shifts and we become more comfortable with feeling rather than thinking, we enter the rarified zone of knowing.

Most people pride themselves on their ability to think and value a high I.Q. as though it were capable of delivering peace and con-

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tentment. But intellectual capacity is just that—it will never permit us to see to the core of things. It will always stop just short of the big banana—it simply doesn't have the power to pierce the illusion.

This is because it's not supposed to. The function of the mind is to operate in the world of dualities, and the intellect willingly obliges. Like the *Tao* says, when we find one thing beautiful, we automatically find another ugly. Only by dismissing one idea as worthless, does the intellect accept another as ideal.

But to really know something, we have to experience it unconditionally. And for that to happen, we have to step outside the mind. This process is not just devoid of thinking, it is beyond thinking. Even if all our thoughts line up and make perfect sense, that is not truth's final resting place.

To test the “realness” of something, we must feel it. When we feel, we end up in the body, not the mind. As the energy descends, it wells in the chest and expands. Suddenly we are aware of our body. This physical realization snaps us back and instantly makes us present. We are no longer one step away from the action, we are the action. Rather than thinking about our life, we are living it.

It is only from this place of feeling that our thinking has any real power. When we ask ourselves how we really feel and the answers are strong and clear, we know we are on the right path. Armed with this solid knowing, we are not looking for the mind to make us comfortable. We already know who we are and what will work for us.

In a spirit of confidence and playfulness, we offer this feeling of certainty to the mind. We are curious to see the various forms it will take and delight in the way the universe manifests our desires. Staying centered in the body, we allow the mind to freely develop the appropriate arenas. After all, this is what the mind does best.

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Going from one form to another, it tests possible matches. And when the fit is right, we know it.

At last, all the pieces fit. No longer are we trying to whip the mind into submission or demand that it give us clarity. Our experience of clarity comes from the heart. The sequence is finally correct—first we feel, and then we think. This is the natural order of things.