

# The Big Picture

I think of life as being on a spectrum, a line from one extreme to the other. One coin with two sides. This is because life is filled with paradox, and as my eastern teachers say, good rests on bad, bad rests on good, happiness on sorrow, sorrow on happiness, and so on for everything. It all depends on our point of view. A lion attacking someone walking in the mall downtown somehow seems tragic, but if they were walking alone in a deep jungle we might say they were asking for it. Also it's like the story of the man who loses his horse (boo!), but it comes back with others (yay!), his son breaks his leg training them (boo!), but doesn't have to go to war because of it (yay!), and so on. There is always a bigger picture and a longer story.

This spectrum covers the full range of possibilities from a fully functioning healthy loving connected life on one end to absolute misery, sickness, suffering, and isolation on the other. Where we are on this spectrum is due to hundreds, thousands, perhaps millions of small and large events and interactions that shaped our essential self. But where we are is where we tend to stay. It is as if there is a rubber band pulling us back to that point, or the continuum has a dip at our set point so we slide back into it over time.

This "set point" is our comfort zone. It is what we are used to, and gravitate towards through-out our lives. On our homes thermostat this is referred to as the "dead zone" as neither the heater nor air conditioner are needed. In our lives it is in fact a very comfortable place for us, so hard to break out of, even if it is not in our best interest. An obvious example is addiction, as it can kill us slowly or quickly, but we may have a very hard time making significant change.

Personally, our character and personality have a broad expanse as well. We may be somewhat cranky, critical, even dishonest, angry, jealous, and punishing, with a host of difficulties on one end, and a be really awesome, loving, giving, kind, and helpful person on the other end. Which one is true? I consider the wise one the "true self". It doesn't mean we don't get totally caught up and lost in the false self of a wounded inner child and critical inner parent and Higher Power at times, but it means a wonder child, loving inner parent, and Higher Power are always there too, however buried in bullshit. These are our better selves, our best selves, our *perfect* selves.

I now recognize this spectrum also goes up and down, with the bottom being the pit of suffering, sorrow, and despair. There is a gravity to that damn hole, like a black hole in space sucking up everything in its grasp, so powerful even light can't escape its pull. It really sucks in so many ways! Unfortunately if that is what we grew up with, or spent a lot of time with, it becomes "the new normal" and we become so used to it that it feels like home and will fight to stay there.

Now imagine someone fortunate enough to get off to a good start with a loving family, a safe and pleasant environment, good health, and a sharp mind. As babes we all start out like this filled with possibilities and potential. Yet even those with the best of beginnings eventually must suffer pain, sickness, loss, and death of loved ones. The fortunate aren't pressed upon too badly, so are able to stay above the strife and woe and live happily. What of the others who suffer greatly, the walking wounded? Without a viable support system to help they must bandage their wounds and carry on as best as they can.

Because life has its difficulties, or we could say storms, conflicts, or even wars in our lives and communities, we run for cover and safety. Where do we run to? Home perhaps, but

what if home and family is the source of our distress? Some run away to other possibly more dangerous places, some fight back as best as they can, still others turn inward, shutting down and shutting out their broken world. This hiding place is like a foxhole we crawl into to avoid getting hurt.

To avoid further injuries both physical and mental, we cover and bind ourselves up. Imagine boots, leather leggings, padded vests, and thick gloves. Over this goes the armor, head to toe. Some use whatever is available, scrounged from junkyards and garbage heaps, others use the finest metals inlaid with precious stones but a formidable and foreboding barrier none the less. Then comes all the shields and weapons, and finally the mask, the more frightening the better, yet some with a smile painted on like a clown, pretending all is well.

At the center of our problems, the heart of the matter, *is* our heart. The pressure and pain cause it to be crushed and harden into stone or steel. It can come to resemble a clenched fist in many ways as we run away, fight back, or shut down in survival mode. The pain of the world and others has infected us and we become a conduit for it as it begins to emanate from us and create a field and cycle of negative energy.

We all have problems, often due to the actions of others, so we might say "NO! It's not my fault! My fathermothersisterbrotheruncleauntgrandparentsbossteacherpastorpriestfriend, etc pushed me down, and is holding me there"! There is some truth to this. When we were children in particular, and "adult children" later on as we were witness to and victims of the dysfunctions, disease, and insanity of others.

We may see their faces clearly or they may be vague from the distant past or amorphous entities like cultures and societies. Yet each of these wears a mask. For individuals, behind the mask are many other faces, those of the ones who hurt and abused them stretching back for years, decades, or generations. For the masks of cultures and societies that are abusive and cruel there are thousands of faces within, and each with their own story of pain and woe.

Next we build our protective walls, each brick an abuse, injustice, or abandonment, the physical and psychic wounds heaped one upon one another. One brick may be "My parents abused me," another, "My teacher shamed me in front of the class and my girlfriend," yet another "My wife is distant and depressed". How many of us got all the help we really needed to fully mature and succeed in matters of relationships, education, emotions, finances, sexuality, and other areas of life? Few I would guess.

For those mired in sickness and dysfunction the walls are dark and frightening, and more than enough to keep others wary and at a distance. For some it becomes a castle and the picture of perfection with just the right house, car, clothes, furnishings, and so on, but still a formidable barrier if used to keep ourselves above others, or to live in falsity and isolation, or bolster a shaky self esteem. Those unable to afford such comforts and luxuries often become bitter and cold, turning to a myriad of addictions to soothe the aching desperation.

Around the fortress a moat, often filled with food, drugs, alcohol or other substances to use in an effort to insulate us from the misery. The walls, fortress and towers tall enough to keep us above and separate from others. The stronghold also goes deep below ground to dungeons for skeletons and demons, and has hidden passages and rooms in which to keep

our secrets and make our escapes. Sentries prowl the walls ever watchful and ready to sound the alarm and defend or fight.

These unfortunate souls may eat, smoke, drink, drug, work, sex, exercise, or spend themselves to death slowly or quickly. Sadly, many, perhaps most of these people will never know why their life is going so miserably as the causes of their dysfunctions are buried deep within their subconscious from years or decades past.

If we are fortunate we may find kind family, friends, counselors, therapists, recovery programs, spiritual and other leaders to help us that we might gather strength to look up and out beyond our isolation. Even then the night, storm, or war may go on for years. Through our efforts and those of others the clouds eventually clear, the stars show brightly, the moon reflecting light and life in through the cracks. The storm and war will pass and night will turn to day, the light beaming in to warm heart and soul. We may peer through the cracks in our walls to see a better world on the other side.

As the dark energies subside and are subdued, we may again see the green of growth, blossoming, and blooming beyond the fortress walls. We also may also hear kind, and caring voices talking, singing, and laughing, as well as birds singing, as soft breezes blow. Can you see the life beyond your walls? A world of joy, cooperation, and play? Can you hear the voices, the laughing, the symphony, the songs?

What of our abusers, the masked ones who were often the cause of our suffering? If we can really look deeply into their eyes, hold their hands, and feel their suffering our hearts soften and return to flesh and blood, the fist relaxing, opening, and reaching out to others in pain, suffering, and need. Our journey seeks not to acquiesce to their bad behavior, but to accept the reality of it and how they were carrying forward the pain of their past. We do seek to find forgiveness, that all of us may move on to positive feelings and actions.

We can choose again. Over and over and over and over until we are healed. Until we can tear down the walls and pull ourselves out of our prison, sometimes hell, for longer and longer times. Look up! See your wonder child, your loving inner parent, and true self coaxing you out. Know that a loving Higher Power that created the cosmos and all of life, and sustains them in billions of ways over billions of years is looking out from their eyes, calling out to you with their words, and pulling you out with their hands.

A loving Higher Power and true father, mother, sister, brother, uncle, aunt, grandparents, boss, teacher, pastor, priest, friend is there too. And no matter how fast or far, or how many times you fall, they will be ready and willing to give you a hand. We can't go it alone, it takes a village and community of healing to really heal and thrive. We must risk being vulnerable by reaching out and building a support group of kind and caring individuals through health care, hobbies, family, friends, or others.

It isn't fast, easy, or painless, as it may take countless encounters and years of hard work to make significant headway, but we are worth it! Even if we knock down the walls, we are often still in the pit. We may try to climb out again and again only to fall back down. Remember this is first on the external level of what is going on in the world good and bad, but more importantly what goes on inside, how we think of ourselves.

The blocks of fears, abuse, suffering, and pain are transformed into courage, compassion, kindness, and caring for ourselves and others. We may then use the blocks as stepping stones, a stairway to freedom and healthy living. Even if the walls are down, the sun is shining, and it is safe to escape we may be stuck for a time. Like prisoners, we may need time to process what has occurred and build the confidence to venture out to live again.

We may then also swing open the windows, doors, and gates of our kingdoms to let in the light, air, and freshness of the day. We may call out to others, that they may join with us sweeping out the cobwebs and dust of years of neglect and misuse. Our dark, cold, lonely halls and rooms may now come alive with the sounds of song and celebration. We can find ways to grieve our past and enjoy our present in healthy alternation.

How is this possible? What will it take? Surrender. To a power greater than ourselves. That means taking up with helpful, compassionate communities in the name of greater good and higher law and turning inward to a personal, loving Higher Power and presence and working out from there to find like minds, and wise and kind companions along the path.

What is it like to live out there in the big and bright world? What is it like to live in connection with our community, friends, family, and intimates? For those climbing out from the depths of months, years, or decades of isolation and despair this is just the beginning of life, of really living. This is something each of us has to discover for ourselves. If we didn't get the important lessons we needed growing up, or they were crushed in dysfunction, trauma, neglect, and abuse, we can yet learn a deep and rich self care and share it with others.

All is not lost. It is possible to break the don't talk, don't trust, don't feel and don't look, don't listen, don't heal rules and move from hurting, to healing, and helping. It is possible to find safe and caring people with whom we can be vulnerable enough to begin to lay down our weapons, remove our masks, armor, bindings, and bandages and at last address, clean, and dress the wounds properly. It may hurt like hell, and much more than leaving them be, but with the help of a loving Higher Power we are strong enough, smart enough, and above all worthy of all the healing, beauty, and joy life has to offer.

It is never too late. We have a Higher Power of a million second chances. Again, we may go to safe, kind, and loving family, friends, counselors, therapists, or recovery programs for help. Rumi said "Why stay at the bottom of the well when there is a strong rope in your hand?", These people and groups are that strong rope. Find it in the dark. Hold on! Don't let go! And don't just sit there, pull with everything you've got!

Where do you want to be on the continuum? And it doesn't matter where you are as much as where you are going. What is your direction? Back into the pit or out into a world of wonder and beauty? We have a God of a million second chances, be a friend of a million second chances to yourself and others if you can. Grab a hold of that rope and pull yourself up from the bottom, and out from the top! And when you get out, take some time now and then to look back into the hole, into the eyes of those still suffering, call out to them, throw your rope in, and help them out too.

This is our only hope. For if we continue as is our own selfish nature and that of others will spell our doom. It is up to us, and there is no time to lose. We must find ways to work with others who understand the situation, the one we share with all other people, all other life, and our dear mother earth.

