

The Most Important Thing

In the beginning we were whole and perfect. Shit happened. Many difficult things that created stress and fear and caused us to shut down. We were wounded, invalidated, and abused in hundreds or thousands of ways. Good things happened too, but we will get there further on. A friend describes this pain as a tightening in her neck, choking her off from her body, her feelings, and her truth. I can relate. It seems like I moved out of my body and into my head when I was young and got stuck there.

A common saying in recovery programs is "don't talk, don't trust, don't feel" because it is so true for many us. What are recovery people working to recover from? Not talking, trusting, or feeling! This saying also explains how we are cut off from our bodies and our truth. Breath comes from the chest and carries our words, so choking stops both talking and truth.

Trust is as much, if not more a feeling as an idea, so also has its home in the body, and is lost as we live solely from intellect. Emotions are felt very powerfully in the body, so much of our feeling life is lost with our body connection. The situation engenders another recovery saying "think is our drink," for it is as if our minds swell up and become our whole world as the body withers away and dies out.

Compulsive thinking became my "go to", and "set point" like a thermostat setting, with habitual thinking pulling me back automatically. It can take a lot of hard work to move that setting, but it is well worth it. Thinking has been revered and glorified in many cultures for centuries. Rodin's sculpture "the Thinker" is also a good example as he peers down into the suffering through the gates of hell.

Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" expresses a similar reverence for cognition, but my favorite teacher Thich Nhat Hanh recognizes how we get lost in thinking and translates it to "I think, therefore I am not here"! Another way I understand this, is the mind can be brilliant and come up with nuclear power, or clever and come up with nuclear bombs.

Much more is lost than we realize, for in the body is our heart, and within the heart our often wounded inner child yearning for acceptance, attention, affection, approval, and appreciation. The inner child is also the home of our joy, love, beauty, energy, and creativity, which is also lost. This is part of our true self, so a false self is created to cope with the split and resulting denial, dysfunction, and loneliness.

Children live naturally in the moment, laughing to tears one moment, sobbing the next, and then laughing and smiling again moments later. Children are also very authentic, as they will often say just what they think and feel at anytime. They usually know their truth and express it without reserve. This is true unless spontaneity is squeezed out of them as evidenced by sayings such as "children should be seen and not heard" and "big boys don't cry".

Another problematic situation we all face is dependence on what others think. It is all too easy to rely on what others think we should do, be, and have. Ralph Waldo Emerson has a great understanding of this in his writing called Self Reliance; "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude."

Part of this is tendency towards separation is natural as we have two eyes and ears to separate one thing from another and create a world of forms and sounds distinctive from the self. The problem is when this goes too far and a selfish and egotistical reality arises. Perhaps this is worsened by the western cultures emphasis on taking care of ourselves, by ourselves. The breakdown of primary and extended families also plays a role as families are fractured by divorce and distance.

A tendency towards fear and negativity is also a part of our nature, as in ancient times those who were attuned to dangers and threats had a better chance for survival. However days in the jungle and on the savannah have passed for us now, so we are wiser to create communities rather than fortresses. It can seem as if others in the family, workplace, roads and other places are out to get us, but coming from a deeper place of peace we are better able to build bridges between us rather than burn them.

Fear can be a powerful motivator if we know punishment is imminent for certain behaviors. The problem is it also puts us into victim mode and throws a cloud of fear over whatever it is we are trying to accomplish. A racing buddy of mine said that you must look where you want to go, and not where you don't. If you focus on the obstacle it sucks you in. Rather look for the opening and opportunity and let that pull you through.

A popular quote by William Hutchison Murray states this as; "Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth that ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too.

All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."

Power is another subject that deserves note, as we often mistake power over others for real power, but real power is when we have control over our disparate selves and selfish desires. This *true* power, from a Higher Power, the power of the universe, "The Force", or whatever you prefer to call it, works with all the creativity, wisdom, and brilliance of creation, to synergistically and exponentially transform us and our world. We may then discover a "power with" rather than over.

Perhaps the worst part is we also lose our connection with the infinite love, and wisdom of a Higher Power and presence that resides in the seat of the soul, pre-verbally at a gut level as intuition and ultimate truth. This all important connection was lost as we put others first, ourselves second, and Higher Power last. How lonely, frightening, defeating, and exhausting that can become many of us know intimately. Others live in denial, rarely if ever acknowledging the depth of this vital and empowering relationship and union.

When people or things over power and hurt us we unfortunately tend to either overlay our image of God as our abuser, or become angry with God for not saving us from pain and suffering. I have seen this many times in people that were seriously abused and is usually very hard to overcome and re-imagine. I somehow fell into this trap as a teenager. I used to say I believed in good rather than God. I later learned the word God is actually derived from the word good.

It seemed I had somehow lost God, but it was actually me that was lost. I found God again through nature. In particular through the book *Original Blessing*, that told how in ancient times everything was sacred; the sun, moon, and stars, the sky, earth, and waters, and all plants, animals, and other life. Everything was and is holy. Life is the most magnificent and incredible blessing, and its abundance, diversity, and tenacity simply amazing. This was my first homecoming. I now see God's beauty through nature in particular, but also in buildings, planes, boats, cars and all of our other inspired creations. The arts of course are a prime example, as divine beauty is obvious in songs, dances, symphonies, paintings, sculptures, literature, and other artistic endeavors.

Kyle Cease teaches that powerless people say that things happen "to" them. Others take credit and say things are done "by" them. The wisest realize that things happen "through" them, from a Higher Power and presence. This is the key to divine inspiration. When we finally manage to get plugged into Higher Power and become a conduit for all of its power, presence, intelligence, and love, peace, joy, and beauty to let its light shine through us.

Again I must quote the great master Ralph Waldo Emerson, this time from *The Over-Soul*; "The Supreme Critic on the errors of the past and the present, and the only prophet of that which must be, is that great nature in which we rest, as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere; that Unity, that Over-soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart, of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission; that overpowering reality which confutes our tricks and talents, and constrains everyone to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character, and not from his tongue, and which evermore tends to pass into our thought and hand, and become wisdom, and virtue, and power, and beauty. We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE."

As mentioned earlier a Higher Power gives us access to a higher calling and law, and own higher powers. In eastern traditions these are the "Infinite Qualities" of loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, equanimity, and the "Perfections" of generosity, morality, patience, diligence, awareness, wisdom, skillful means, determination, spiritual power, knowledge, honesty, and discipline. Christian thinking names these as wisdom, fairness, discipline, courage, faith, hope, and love. I like to call these "Super Powers", as western super heroes are often embodiments of these most worthy virtues, and worthy of heroic attempts to live them through our individual and collective lives.

These virtues allow us to see and give the best of ourselves to others, our world, and to ourselves. Self care is so very important but so easily forgotten. Not a selfish focus at the expense of others, rather building a loving, caring, and kind disposition from the inside out. It is all too easy to berate and belittle ourselves, especially if that is what we heard growing up. That critical voice can become internalized until we believe it is the truth. It may take years to change, but it is time well spent. Pema Chodron the "rock star nun" says "There is nothing more important on our spiritual path than developing gentleness towards oneself".

The sad truth is that the job of advertising is to make us feel "less than." Only then will we believe we need more, better, faster, stronger, prettier, and on, and on, and on. If we are whole and perfect as is, we are inoculated against rampant consumerism and all that that entails. As an older American I have seen this play out over decades in my life and in others lives near and far. We are the fattest, sickest, most stressed out nation on earth despite and because of our wealth. Thank God, times *are* changing.

In the past I ran myself ragged trying to build up the perfect little kingdom of what I thought I "should" do, have, and be. I worked and played too hard, smoked and drank, drove too fast, ate a bad diet, and didn't get enough rest. Does this sound familiar? I wasn't my own worst enemy, but I wasn't much of a friend to myself either. Nowadays I take lots of naps, eat well, get regular exercise and good rest, and take vacations and days off to relax and recharge. The key is to consider how you would treat a family member, friend or pet. Is that how you treat yourself, or do you deserve better?

The benevolence that brought the cosmos into being and brought life to appear in its amazing complexity, abundance, and beauty, and the incredible drama of human events to unfold is a blessing beyond belief. Considering this, it seems obvious to me that there is an undercurrent and over-riding sense of basic goodness. Some will disagree and say that creation, life, and people are basically flawed and "bad" with original sin etc., but I disagree. I find the ground of being is extremely favorable.

This basic goodness however, is also easy to overlook and forget. Daily life can be irritating, annoying, and downright difficult even on good days. Besides, at times we all must face loss, illness, and death for ourselves and others. Yet if we really take the time to count our blessings, we find they far outnumber and outweigh our "curses". Another of my teachers, Chogyam Trungpa, considers basic goodness to be the most important of all aspects of life and consciousness, and practicing it is the best use of our energies and efforts.

Practicing basic good can be very fulfilling and rewarding as we look for the good in life, and all the things we can be thankful for. Taking this to task and to heart we can make playlists of moving music, create photo albums of beauty, passions, favorite places and things, as well as family and friends to refer to at any time. The key is to choose the direction of our focus. Do we want to be downcast and heavy-hearted, or upbeat and light hearted? The choice is ours, and basic goodness is always a good way to get there.

Images can be very helpful to understand what may be somewhat foreign concepts like these. The inner or spiritual aspect can be seen as the alternative to outer physical or worldly position. There is a great saying for this; "living from the inside out". Eckhart Tolle clarifies this simply by advising "Inner reality is primary, outer is secondary". Another image from Thich Nhat Hanh is of a tree swaying and twisting in a great storm, yet the trunk and the roots stand firm and still. This depth, this stillness is always available to us, should we have the presence of mind and body to realize and manifest it.

We may also imagine this as our conscious and unconscious, as the depths of the True Self goes deep past what we could ever fully realize or express. Eastern wisdom calls it store consciousness, a vast storehouse of seeds ready to arise and flourish given the nurturing of our attention. In this depth are also seeds we might consider negative such as fear, anger, and others, yet these also hold very valuable information and energy.

Fear tells us there is danger we need to be aware of, or perhaps there is old business coming up such as physical or mental sufferings. Anger may tell us injustices or abuse are present or coming and empower us to speak up and act. Jealousy can indicate where we have hidden or denied desires so that we may acknowledge and accept them. Depression often hides other deep emotions such as abandonment, rage, lack of affection, or other pain.

Recognizing the power and potential of these "bad" feelings and emotions we may become inspired to investigate and explore them that they may be held up to the light of awareness and understanding to undergo transcendence and transformation. If we use attention on these difficulties to further entrench our opinions and grievances our situation is worsened. We must find the right balance of attention, compassion, and understanding to overcome and transform them.

Thich Nhat Hanh also says we need good circulation, that if we lock these energies out like unwanted guests in the basement (or in the attic or outside) they will fester, gain power, and break in other, yet worse ways like (*or as*) festering illnesses. We must let them in and hold them, as a parent would a sick, hurt, or tired child by cradling and comforting them so they know they are cared for and important. My image for this is a bus, and everyone gets to ride, but there are two to a seat, and each one cares for its mate however virtuous or difficult.

Consider this poem by Rumi; "This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor. Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight. The dark thought, the shame, the malice, meet them at the door laughing and invite them in. Be grateful for whatever comes. Because each has been sent as a guide from beyond".

The image of a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other is also somewhat accurate. Unfortunately the "still small voice" of our better self can be hard to hear over the clamor and confusion of modern life. We do need to listen to both, as both have valuable information and energy for us. Unfortunately taking the time to rest, relax, and listen to the still, small voice is a skill many have lost, and at great cost. We are very wise to nurture this quieter, kinder, gentler side and cultivate its input.

Another strength of mind over heart is how clever, smart, and convincing it is, even when it is not really in our best interests. The logic and reasoning can be very powerful and talk us into, or out of, many things. The book "The War of Art" lists more than thirty ways the mind tries to play tricks on us to kill our muse and defeat our goodness. The power of the heart is too often overlooked and scoffed at in modern times as the powers of the intellect took precedence and became over-rated.

Tolle also illuminates the power of this shift by imagining stepping out of ourselves, our lives, and our thoughts, beliefs, and opinions as an observer. We then can see how we usually take ourselves and our life situation so seriously, so personally, and may instead laugh at ourselves as we would observing the antics of a child. It is hard to illuminate just how powerful this concept can be, except to say it is, all by itself a life changer.

Relationships easily become poisoned and dysfunctional due to the split from our deep and true selves, as we try time and again to communicate and bond with others through false and wounded selves. We are in fact doomed to try and repair this rift by choosing people and situations the least likely and capable of healing until we make the shift first from within to reintegrate our disparate selves, and Higher Power. Only then can we come from a better place and find the true love, joy, peace, and beauty we all need and deserve.

This story started with truth, and with our loss of our truth, inner child, loving inner parent/adult, and Higher Power. We lost ourselves, our True Self. I capitalize the name as it is our *proper* name and proper *self*. A false self was created to deal with the split, stress, and denial that we have been struggling with ever since. Call it ego, insanity, dysfunction, or pain body, it is the same, and is *not* who we *really* are. The real person in us is all of these and much more. It is all creation, all intelligence, all power and presence integrated into one whole and complete being.

I can imagine no better way to express this than a quote from Maryanne Williamson: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others".

The dis-ease of separation effected by the split within ourselves between body and mind, head, heart, and soul, and the differing aspects of our true nature (child/adult, true/false, etc) and our connection with others, nature, and Higher Power shatters us like glass, or perhaps more accurately a puzzle, as there is always the promise of becoming whole again. The need becomes obvious when we see that the words health and holiness are also expressions of the word wholeness, for when our brokenness and isolation get the best of us illness and suffering are sure to follow.

Perhaps the image of a puzzle may come up short as some parts may seem to be lost forever, and some we don't want back. Instead our life can become a quilt, as we take the pieces of our lives, some brightly colored and new, others with patterns and images, some tattered and faded, and stitch them together into a new creation ever more beautiful and interesting than its separate parts. We can wrap it around ourselves and hold it tight for warmth and comfort in times of trouble.

Another way I imagine this mix up of life priorities, is by writing the word "ME" on a piece of glass. If you turn the glass upside down and then flip it around backwards it says "WE". That's how I was living; upside down and backwards. "WE" is where we all started, one with our parents, and all creation. Our lives got messed up in a thousand ways, and the survival skills we learned got us through, but it is time for changes, and time to turn this life around.

All of these aspects of reclaiming our bodies, feelings, and emotions, and inner child, adult, True Self, Higher Power, and other disparate selves are long overdue. In fact we have been hiding from them, denying them, and running away from them most of our lives. Beyond that we develop a multitude of distractions and addictions to cope with the losses. We shop, work, exercise, eat, smoke, drink, to numb the pain and fool ourselves. Obsessing on sports, entertainment, video games, television and the internet are a few ways we avoid looking at the wounds and working to heal them.

It is natural for us to want to hold onto our old, familiar, comfortable ways. Unfortunately, even if those ways are not really good for us, perhaps dysfunctional, painful, and sick. Even people who are actively and aggressively abused cling to their abusers physically and emotional when freedom is given. Change can be very difficult, even when it is for the better.

Change is rarely fast, easy, or painless, as it could take decades of hard painful work to make significant progress, but it is well worth it. *You* are worth it. I believe the survival of humanity and much of life on earth are at stake, but I truly believe our only chance to turn the tide is through this process of reclaiming our whole and true selves first and foremost. Otherwise all our efforts and actions will be poisoned by our dysfunctional personal thinking and actions.

Hopefully these images and ideas have illuminated and empowered the *why* of going inward and getting back into our bodies. Actually it can take years to truly understand and feel the immense value of inner child, true self, and loving inner parent/adult and Higher Power, but it is time well spent. I can certainly tell you that for me, it has been the most important thing. I was shut down emotionally and developed many dysfunctional survival traits, and unable to establish intimate and loving relationships. I now live a full and abundant life, peacefully, lovingly, joyfully, and beautifully.

If this is resonating for you and stirring up feelings and emotions lost long ago, it begs the question of how we may come back to our inner child, true self, and loving inner parent or adult and Higher Power? The answer is simple, but may not be easy, depending on how entrenched we are in our storyline, pain, and loss. The miracle and magic is that they are just a breath away; preferably a long, deep belly breath, as breath comes from the head and goes to the heart, as well as to our center, wherein lies our real center, source, and soul.

Yes, it is possible to breathe life back into our heart and soul, and inspire the body to feel again. Inspiration is in fact defined as inhaling, to stimulate, and to feel something, especially something creative. It is not only possible, but the most important thing we ever do because it is not possible to *experience* inner child, true self, or loving inner parent/adult and Higher Power only through the mind. For without the body, heart and soul, and the infinite wisdom, power, and presence of true love, peace, joy, beauty, and all the other immeasurable qualities we are flying on autopilot, virtual zombies.

What is the *how* of this epiphany and transformation, this breath of life? The first step is a shift back from brain to body, and from mind to soul as we move from thinking to feeling, and to *perceiving*, as perception is also pre-verbal like the body, inner child, and Higher Power. The breath is an *experience* and although thoughts *about* it may follow, it is not a thought. Other experiences such as sounds, sight, a breeze, or the weight of our body can aid us as well.

The bottom line and instruction is to bore the mind into submission as perception overcomes thought. I often use a mantra of "rest" on one breath, and "ing" on the next to give a very simple cue to the mind where I want go. This not only refers to the body resting, but the mind and all the cares and concerns wrapped up with it. Work worries? "Rest-ing". Money problems,? "Rest-ing". Future? Past? "Rest-ing". I get back to those soon enough. This is the time for resting and communion with the ultimate, the infinite, the immeasurable.

I do often take a few minutes to let the cacophony of chaos that goes on in my head die down before I try to make the shift, but even those thoughts I gently let go. It may take quite some time dropping the thoughts that come up and focusing on perception of breath and other sensations before the shift occurs for you, but you will know. Many believe that this should be done sitting upright so as not to fall asleep, and that is good advice as we learn to " just be" and to take the world less seriously. I also use this method to fall asleep, as it works great for that too.

Another valuable aspect of meditation is understanding the phases or levels. One is "calm abiding" where we let thoughts go and tune into perception as outlined briefly above, and the other is "insight" meditation where we sit with feelings, emotions, ideas, opinions, and beliefs and so on. Here we see what lessons we might learn from simply being with them non-judgmentally, in full acceptance, caring, and concern. Here we seek to not hold tightly, or too loosely, yet close enough to hear them out.

This time spent in prayer and meditation with our perfect inner child, loving inner parent and adult, true self, Higher Power, and super powers of love, compassion, forgiveness, joy, beauty and many others is important, perhaps the *most* important thing we do. I like to imagine these and all the "super powers" with letters in bold italics thousands of feet high across the horizon just to remind myself how important they are. This is infinite and absolute safety, happiness, and comfort unavailable in any other way. For my lost boy, my prodigal son, this is my homecoming, my freedom, and my salvation. it can be yours too. Welcome back! Welcome home!