



WHEN SOMETIMES IT SEEMS HOPELESS

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We can very roughly divide the information which reaches us daily into two gross categories: Those Which Make Me Happy & Excited To Be Alive, and Very Depressing Things. As a result, we tend to feel either optimistic or pessimistic, depending on what kind of info reaches us (or on our interpretation of that info). My real challenge—and I can see that others share this challenge—is how to incorporate such seemingly opposite polarities of ‘factual’ information in a healthy way. Can our brains operate on anything other than a good/bad switch? Is our world, the future and life in general either peachy keen or going to Hell in a handbasket? Should we just shut out all negative info?

After whining and bad-mouthing Facebook for a long time, I am now one of those who checks it five times a day (five however, not fifty—not a typo). I tell myself that I only use it for my business or as an email substitute, but I do scroll down my homepage to see what Facebook thinks I want to hear about and what it has decided to show me. I think I have subscribed to some pretty cool pages, see. They keep me plugged in to the type of news that matters to me. I’m no slave to the big news agencies like CNN and BBC and their filtered versions of this planet’s realities. No way, not me. I choose the news I receive, so there! I just, for example, chose to ignore the link to “Freakishly long eye-lashes in 7 Days!” and watched an inspiring video called *The Nature of The True Self*. See? We really do have control of the info we access on Facebook and Google. What a relief!

Yet links such as these lead me either to life-affirming proof that things are really improving in amazing, exciting ways on the planet or to those which suggest that we are in a devastating free fall and just don’t see it. On a down-to-earth level, most of us shift to some degree from days when all appears sunny and amazing to others when all seems bleak and hopeless. Therefore, such a dichotomy seems familiar, logical. And yet, as with every dichotomy, this one too will be proved false. We humans aren’t great at accommodating seemingly contradictory viewpoints, but we may have to develop this talent pretty quickly. If we don’t, we may find that either living in la-la land or in fatalistic apathy doesn’t necessarily produce the most beneficial results. Can’t both kinds of info spur us to positive action?

Sunshine and Angels

Exposing myself daily to a limited amount of ‘what’s happening out there’ (say, 15 to 30 minutes a day) inspires me with renewed vigor to play a part in this exciting

world we live in. I like being part of a world which encourages Free Hugs, where cute babies smile when hearing beautiful music, where nice people make nice videos about being nice to others and about how positive thinking has a different energetic frequency than negative thinking. I like hearing about Indigo children being born in the last decade or so who seem to be as if from other, wiser dimensions and may not have to sludge through the mud of ego-building in order to understand the fundamentals of life on this planet as humans.

I love reading the stories which seem to point to an awakening of our consciousness as a species, which emphasize a wider acceptance and understanding of the non-duality of Nature. There are now so many great sites (netinetimedia.com is but one) which seem to indicate that an understanding of our connection with a life source greater than ourselves is not the sole domain of scattered philosophers with suspect hairdos, arcane thinkers, hard-to-reach (or expensive to pay for) spiritual gurus or even that freaky acid-head down the street. People seem to be more conscious about what they put into their bodies, and about the consequences their actions have on the environment and others. This is the New Earth in its nascent form, during its beginning, awkward steps, and how exciting to be a tiny part of it!

I am also a believer that technology and science can play a large role in our development as a species, and while I have relatively little enthusiasm about technological advancement in my daily, private life, I do get giddy with excitement that our species has come up with, for example, a machine that paraplegics can control with their mind power alone. I love the fact that ‘our’ Voyager I has just exited our Solar System into interstellar space and has sent images like the famed ‘little blue dot’ which give us much-needed perspective on our existence. The human is a natural explorer, and technology at its best expands our ‘natural’ characteristics; going the opposite way from deep space, James Cameron recently became the first human to plunge to the deepest part of our ocean in a cool-looking machine, and likely saw creatures stranger than any residing in Voyager’s path.

It was a teary moment when I read about some experiments made by Chinese and American scientists which showed how plants like tomatoes and beanstalks ‘speak’ to each other via the fungi in their soil, to alert each other of attack, for example. Science can prove to our minds what our hearts already know about the symbiosis of all things. There’s room for that in our lives, not as a replacement for spiritual matters but as fellow travelers. Do we really need science to ‘prove’ what is deeply ‘obvious’ to sensitive beings



and meditators? Sometimes, yes. And technology can help turn into reality the best aspects of some spiritual realizations—check out the new technologies making it easier to build environmentally-friendly homes, for example. And there's no denying very simplistic 'cool factors' which just make life on the planet a bit neater and friendlier, like the machine in Moscow subways which dispenses free tickets to those who perform 30 squats in front of it!

Although I don't want to eat GMOs, I'm thrilled that some genetically modified silkworms can spin a material stronger than steel and that worm farms may one day replace steel mills. I think it's great that psychedelics are being studied in the treatment of depression and addiction in major universities. I am grateful to the technological media which bring me news of how, say, thousands of meditators created measurable vibrational changes and which give me the freedom to publicly post about our local tea gatherings. And frankly, I do love seeing how the stars look like from the other side of the planet with my iPad Mini's Night Sky app., which I can turn on with its voice recognition program.

Sometimes things can seem so amazing on the burgeoning New Earth that if I listen to *Thinking of You* by Sister Sledge after pondering such things, the unfathomable bliss of being alive, today, on this planet is almost overwhelming and I'm driven to go out into the world and spread all the good news and tickle people! That very human part of me to continue, to go further, to push ahead in a very positive way becomes activated and I am energized. Everything is really and truly fine on Planet Earth.

Demons and Depression

Yet for every time Eckhart Tolle TV, as well as my teashop clients indicate to me that, wow, we really do seem to be in the midst of a consciousness awakening, all it takes is an open-eyed walk around the block, or a quick check-in to Fox News, or to read a few YouTube user comments to be reminded that, well, not everyone seems to be united in their consciousness with the source of all things and acting for the benefit of humankind. Including myself much of the time.

There are times when the same sources of info which point to our bettering as a species also bring other more 'sobering' news—the kind which makes one feel such a deep sadness for the future. Let's forget about all the Illuminati stuff, the Zeitgeist films, though those are sobering enough and likely truer than we'd prefer to believe. Yet if we focus only on one of the supposedly impending catastrophes on its way, things seem bleak indeed for our future. We can choose between staggering rises in sea levels, over-population (itself perhaps just a ruse used to perpetuate forced sterilization in the near future), and economic or environmental collapse. Take for example the conservative estimates about rising sea levels over the next decades or centuries. This could result in panic and disruption, social unrest and unfathomable expenditure on a scale that might arrest much of our 'advancement' in order to allocate resources to survival. Western humans have for many generations had the luxury of relative wealth, leisure and comfort to devote extra time to 'spiritual' matters. Many

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have wasted this luxury, this bonus time, on more self-serving activities. What if struggle for survival takes up time and effort to such an extent that such luxuries will no longer be an option?

Or we can consider the Fukushima nuclear reactor situation. Just this one factor could instigate massive social changes which will change life on Planet Earth as we know it. As I write, the News (which must be searched for, it is not covered so openly), even if exaggerated, reports that over 300 tons of radioactive water is dumped daily into the ocean. Many reports of heightened radiation levels on the entire west coast of North America have already been noted as well as hundreds of irregularities in the Pacific Ocean. There is very cogent talk of not only the abandonment of Tokyo, but also potentially of much of Japan, even the entire western coastline of North America and the eventual 'death' (for at least centuries or a few millennia) of the entire Pacific Ocean. Couple that with reports of staggering drops of fish stock in that ocean in the last decade alone from reckless and brutal over-fishing and pollution, plus some of the most heart-breaking images we could imagine coming from Midway Island, and we get an impossible-to-comprehend picture of a situation on our planet which might be catastrophic for hundreds of millions of people. That 'Mad Max scenario' of the future does not seem impossible at all, and it might take much less than we think to tip the balance irrevocably.

Even if a clean up of Fukushima will take place (which could take up to four decades to complete successfully and is up against staggering odds—just one more large earthquake and the resulting explosion from the crippled reactor as it implodes could change the way every human on earth lives), the contamination from what has already been released from there might have staggering consequences to our future as a species.

When one contemplates these (and many other very real socio-ecological dangers), it's hard to get excited about improved sales of Hybrids and the heart-chakra-opening seminar at the local Wellness Center. When I read about a future where chips are implanted into humans to inject the Internet into our bodies so we merge with machines in a way that we'll always be wired, it's hard to put a cosmological spin on what Alan Watts said about humans being, deep down, 'the fabric and structure of existence itself.' It's easier to believe what Alan Watt (no 's' this time) speaks about humans as ever-more controlled units of those in real power.

When we look around and see Big Brother coming to life every day a bit more vibrantly, and when we realize the injustice and lack of respect for life which continue on massive scales, it might seem like a denial of reality to hum along to Snam Kaur's lyrics or see the value in making a kind gesture to someone who has insulted you. Sometimes it seems that all those positive developments on Planet Earth might be coming too little too late: that just as humanity appears on some levels to be figuring things out, we might be swept into some kind of Dark Ages.

It might be just as likely, however, were such cataclysms to occur, that humanity would be pushed onto the fast-track towards (sorry to use this much-abused term) enlightenment. If we really had to choose between keeping our species alive or just maintaining personal safety and comfort, I'd like to think we'd do the right thing. We all know how easy it is to just laze around in Comfort Zones until some "crisis" occurs which kicks our butts into motion and gets us to do some pretty cool stuff. Similarly, if we were collectively pushed into a corner, we might be less likely to check our Facebooks, tweet, waste a potentially intimate moment with a friend talking about nonsense or worrying about how we look, or putting off Stepping Up To The Plate and dancing the dance that the Universe would like from us.

Plunge or Hide?

So is 'depressing' news just worth switching off all the time? If you're overly sensitive or prone to apathy, then yes. While I in general agree that one should limit one's exposure to 'news' and depressing doomsday reports, I can't advocate slipping into willful blindness or ignorance and never reading any news source, blocking exposure to what's happening outside of our little bubbles—unless you are unsure how to incorporate that emotionally into your daily reality. I am 100% for surrounding oneself with positivity in the form of persons, music and actions, and think it's beneficial to keep one's spirits oriented positively by exposing oneself to more hopeful or fun stimulation. Yet it's not the news sources themselves which are to blame. As with anything, it is never the thing (in this case technology, or news) but how one uses it.

If one follows Fukushima reports daily to feed a dark, pessimistic or fearful part of one's self, or to look for some conviction that we're all doomed, then that's unlikely to help make you a better listener to your lover when he/she needs it. If you can handle it, though, that same news might make you appreciate the preciousness of our lives and a much deeper listener for your beloved. Moreover, were everyone to live in rose-colored versions of the world, where everything is just peachy, we'd possibly be missing some practical muscle-power and determination to see where there are real issues to improve—face the facts and get to work.

If even some of that "depressing stuff" is true, isn't that better reason to act in a way that really counts? Isn't that the perfect reason to treat your ego like a snotty-nosed, whining little kid and wipe it clean, dress it up and tell it to behave? If we're on the verge of becoming a human-techno species which can effect a right click with a wink of an eye or call our friends by doing an *udiyana banda*, isn't today the perfect day to bring a little gift to a friend or call someone and sing them your rendition of *Thank You For Being A Friend*? If we're all going to be controlled by corporations one day, force-fed GMOs, and dealing with mass extinc-



tions or exterminations, is that any reason for hunching one's shoulders and burying one's head? It's indeed more reason to go out and add value today, right now!

Happy Chinese New Year

No news is objectively negative, even the really bad stuff. As Joni Mitchell sagely intimated in her brilliant song *Bad Dreams*, we could remind ourselves as we think despondently about the spectacular mess we have made of our home, that “Bad dreams are good in the great plan.” Impossible, even when it seems so blatant, to label something—anything—as “good” or “bad”. Today's nightmares may turn out to be tomorrow's saviors. It may be through the bleakness that we find our salvation.

When I read about the more depressing (many would say realistic) prognoses for our species, far from eliciting hopeless inaction in me it actually spurs me on to more positive action, even limited action on a tiny scale. It has made me, in recent days for example, call someone over to share some tea, send notes and texts of open-hearted love and thanks, to give extra attention to those in need at our teashop, to infuse extra enthusiasm into organizing tea gatherings and meetings, etc. Coming to terms with some at least potential scenarios for our civilization can spur us into action, similar to finding out that we have only a year left to live. Lives and priorities could be reorganized pretty quickly then. Yet the truth is always thus: Do we ever have time to waste?

Sure, no sense in forcing things to happen before their time—all things in their own time and place—but we also know our tendency to delay, put off, be lazy or blind.

Funny how some cold water to the face can instantly wash away complacency or the belief that one must wait for that ever-elusive “right time” to do this or that. Reading about Fukushima might make me not feel like piddling around at home so long today, but instead stop in to see the *babushkas* downstairs and say a friendly, “Hello!”

The truth is none of us have that much time left, no matter how much time we have left—as individuals or as a species. Sobering reminders of this do not have to drag us down into negative apathy; if that happens it's our choice to let it happen, not the fault of the messenger. Instead, we can take a cue from the classic song *Is That All There Is* by Peggy Lee (yes, my last pop cultural reference for this article): “For if that's all there is, then let's keep dancing...” There's sleep enough in the grave, let's use whatever time left to make the best of it, to make a difference, to add value—dance a bit...

So, my ultimately not-so-bleak-after-all Year of the Horse message is to continue doing good in whatever way you do best. For many readers of this newsletter, it will mean not putting off calling people over for a nice tea session, be it a silent one or punctuated by laughs. All of us by now know how to offer the gift of space, time and attention to others through our tea habits. We're tea people (*Chajin*), we spread good via tea. We've all seen the small miracles and know that most of those miracles are not restricted to the tea space but spread out far beyond it. We can keep exposing ourselves to what's going on this planet of ours, the “good” and the “bad”, and let both fuel our desire to help make the situation better!

