

The Human Experience Pt 5: Openness - the Lifebuoy Within

In the previous Massage Board we found Rose inviting her friend Frank (rather insistently) to join her for coffee. The invitation was sparked by Frank's rather puzzling behaviour - his apparent stress and his claim, some weeks earlier, to have had a deep insight into the nature of living a more contented life. The conversation, if you recall, began awkwardly. But later, there was a pivotal moment between them...

"Maybe I need to go on an inner hike. What do you reckon?" (to which Rose had replied that he already was! And that in fact we ALL are!)... adding "Maybe you're on the hot sweaty part of your hike and you'll come out of your tent, lay back on the cool damp grass and experience the unity of the cosmos once again. Maybe you'll realise what is real and what is illusory then."

AFTER a slight pause Rose asks "What do you mean by 'an inner hike'?"

"Well, right now I feel at ease and surprisingly pretty good, but only ten minutes ago I was angry that you'd forced me to have this coffee break. In fact, I resented the imposition but now; I feel less stressed and agitated. I've been agitated for weeks and it has been building up more and more each day. By day's end my head is ready to explode - full of stuff. I can't settle at night so I watch TV or play internet games long into the night; and when I do get to bed I toss and turn most of the night. The next morning I come into work by train, which should be the perfect opportunity to chill out for twenty minutes - but do I? NO!"

Frank continues with a half smile, "Even talking about it raises my temperature!"

They both grin, and Rose asks "So how does all this relate to the inner hike?"

With a playful smirk Frank replies "Hey Rose, I think you know the answer already. I need more coffee breaks. No! Just joking... I just forget that my inner hiking pace is too exhausting. I just don't notice the frenzied pace of my head and you and I know what that means. But really Rose, you can't keep inviting me out for coffee breaks every time you see me losing the plot. To tell you the truth, today nearly turned ugly."

"What do you mean; nearly?" she asks, as they look at one another. There seems to be a new understanding, and all is forgiven.

"As I'm talking about it with you now, it's all pretty simple. But in reality it is a very tough gig when you are lost" ponders Frank before realising the time. "Hell!" he says, "Look at the time. We'll both get the sack if we don't get back to work!"

With that he gently clasps her hands, his deep appreciation for their friendship clear in his eyes and face; saying quietly "Rose, thanks for the reminder. I'll remember to settle down more often."

They stand and embrace for a moment before walking towards the door.

Openness: Buoyancy Within

To have a friend or colleague like Rose is a godsend. People like her are able to see when we've 'lost the plot' and their relationship with us is such that they are able to remind us that we're stressing out. As Frank observes, 'coffee invitations' can turn ugly!

Why is it so easy for others to see that we are 'stressed out' while we ourselves are blind, oblivious to the growing inner distress. Perhaps it isn't so much that we are blind to the symptoms. Perhaps it is because we are blind to the cause. To some degree Frank is able to see that he needs to 'chill out'. He knows his head is 'full of stuff'. Indeed, the expectation that we need to calm down can add even more fuel to our stressful world. Our friends are able to see the cause AND the solution of our distress - just to calm down.

From the standpoint of our stressed mind it looks like the first step is to have an inner openness (awareness) to notice, without any expectation or desired outcome or performance judgements (e.g. I'm not getting calmer; It's not working) to contaminate our intention to be calm. This openness allows us to observe, while being thrown about by our agitated mind. It allows us to find an inner anchor and an interior place of buoyancy. A lifebuoy - an anchor in rough waters which does not prevent us from experiencing the overwhelming conditions (we can still find it hard to breath because of the turbulent swell crashing over our face). Yet, we are buoyant and safe.

Being open to our anxiety, stress and worry without being lost in the agitation provides us with the inner buoyancy required to anchor us, in full knowledge that the storm will pass. It is a form of faith. A knowing that we have an inner buoyancy AND the storm will pass. Coming to realise this more of the time seems to help us steer away from inner storms because we are more adept at reading the inner signs when the storm is brewing.



"The first step toward change is acceptance. Once you accept yourself, you open the door to change. That's all you have to do. Change is not something you do, it's something you allow."

Will Garcia (1877 - 1951) Track and field athlete who competed in 1904 Olympics of the USA.