

Self-Empowerment

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WAKING UP – HARD TO DO?

Is waking up really hard to do? Enjoy a giggle or a laugh at Scott Grace's high-consciousness parody of *Breaking Up is Hard to Do*. (See page 2) Hanging onto our victimhood sounds funny in a song, but unfortunately it is truly the ego's theme song! Who would I be without my problems and complaints? What would I talk about without my latest dramas?

It seems to me that there are those who offer a host of resources and techniques to awaken from the nightmare of suffering that we humans have been enduring for ages. So what's the holdup? What is stopping us from living blissfully ever after?

Letting Go

We've heard it many, many times: Let go of your attachments – Let go of your judgments – Let go of your grievances – Let go of your story – Let go of your false identity.

Yet, even when we experience an unbidden loss – such as the loss of a loved one, a financial crises, or an emotional shake-up – those experiences are not necessarily processed as letting go. It depends on how we relate to the experience.

When a loss of mine seems so horrible that I feel anxious about how I will live with the change, I am identifying with a false identity of myself. I am limiting how I see myself in the midst of life's changes.

Letting go is not denial of the change or loss. It allows for a broader view of myself and my feelings in relation to whatever I am experiencing in the moment. It is a more open awareness and being present with whatever is going on. It allows for whatever growth, insight, and inspiration may come.

Here are three examples of circumstances that come to mind: When my childhood schoolmate, Andye, passed away recently, did I focus on fear and loss or did I open my heart? When my washing machine flooded my basement, did I bemoan the unfairness or did I open to a solution from guidance? When I needed to clear the air with a family member who was triggering anger in me, did I pull all stops and blast him for his behavior or did I allow a new level of communication to nurture a deeper more respectful

connection between us?

When I went to Andye's funeral, I felt sadness and an awareness of mortality, but that's not all I felt. I also went with a commitment to being a loving presence for family and friends. I received an enthusiastic welcome from Andye's daughter and re-connections with childhood classmates. Waking up includes the willingness to allow feelings to come and go. The speakers at the funeral shared memories of a life well-lived, and I felt gratitude for the way in which we celebrated and honored Andye's life.

My basement troubles included several issues, so the broken washing machine was just one part of a larger organizational difficulty. Instead of repairing the machine, my husband and I were led to buying a new stackable front-loader washer and dryer set. They turned out to be superior machines that have cut down on my laundry time and created more floor space for organizing household items. By following an inner prompting to let go of the old machines, we have begun to tackle other basement design issues that are creating a much more efficient and beautiful use of the space.

The anger that I felt towards my family member dissipated by practicing NVC (Non-Violent Communication) skills of empathy, respect for the needs of myself and others, and compassionate presence. While emotions continued to rise and fall throughout the communication, my effort resulted in a respectful and caring communication that ended in hugs all around.

These are just a few examples of letting go and allowing everyday life experiences be in service to awakening.

Hard or Easy?

The hard part might be making the choice to think, say, or do something completely different from old established habits. It might be hard to look weird to others by expressing gratitude instead of the expected "poor me." It might be hard to stop and change focus from whatever reactions others are having.

On the other hand, it might be easy if I practice as often as possible to establish new positive habits. It might be easy if I release my attachment to others' judgments of me. It might be easy if my intention for

peace is strong and my commitment to freedom is unshakeable.

It is our intention and commitment that allows us to find a way of letting go, to be released from the thoughts and beliefs that hold us hostage. When we stay present with reality, instead of resisting what is, we allow something new to be revealed – a gift of healed perception. Something new can be born in an open mind and heart.

Peace, clarity, freedom, and joy emerge as we slow down, pay attention, and listen within.

Waking up does *not* have to be hard to do.

What is your intention right now? Are you willing to become conscious of the beliefs that stop you from living joyfully ever after? When I am willing to let go of the story I tell myself about how awful it is, whatever the circumstance, something new can happen for me. Through intention and commitment to practicing skills of letting go, I feel blessed, grateful, abundant, and free.

I recently read a book by Anne Tyler called *Digging to America*. One of the main characters is an Iranian widow living in Baltimore. When her son and daughter-in-law adopt a Korean baby, a friendship develops with another family who have also adopted a Korean baby. Through the years of friendship, various experiences lead this woman to becoming aware of the ways she was responsible for her own feelings of “not belonging.”

Like that character, each of us can find evidence outside of ourselves for how others “make us feel.” But an essential component of waking up is the recognition that nobody else can ever be responsible for our feelings. We have a personal history, a set of beliefs, and a filter through which we select data, interpret, and emotionally react to our perceptions.

Remembering that fact and choosing to stop, slowing down, and taking responsibility for our own feelings, and utilizing whatever resource we are inspired to use – this is how we find the opening for the “Let Go” that leads to awakening.

May the offerings in this issue help you to experience who you really are. May you find inspiration, healing, and joy.

Peace and Blessings.

Your fellow traveler,

Rev. Jill

Waking Up Is Hard To Do

By Scott Kalechstein Grace

You tell me to keep breathing,
that you're love will guide my way
Then why does my little ego want to say

Don't take my pain away from me
Don't leave me here without my misery
Cause if I let go then what would I do?
This waking up is hard to do!

Remember when I loved to fight
Got so much pleasure just from being right
Now pointing fingers just makes me blue
This waking up is hard to do!

They say that waking up is hard to do
So many lifetimes of sleeping through
Don't say maybe I could
Instead of waking up
I think I'll hang on to my victimhood!

Well Jesus says only love can heal
My therapist tells me to feel, feel, feel
Seems every year there's more issues
This waking up is hard to do!

They say that waking up is hard to do
It's hard enough to turn off the tube
Don't say maybe I can
Instead of waking up I think
I'll stay in couch potato land!

My challenges, they make me wiser
They help me grow just like some fertilizer
Wish I could grow without doo-doo
This waking up is hard to do
Waking up is hard to do

Scott Kalechstein Grace is the author of Teach Me How To Love. He is also a counselor and coach, a modern day troubadour and inspirational speaker. He lives with his partner and daughter in Marin, California and loves presenting at conferences, giving talks, concerts and workshops. In his phone counseling practice, he is a relationship specialist, helping both individuals and couples enjoy more conscious relationships. You can visit www.scottsongs.com to read more about his work, to hear his talks, or to sample songs from his nine CD's. Send him an email to receive his muse-letter on a semi-occasional basis.

Some Thoughts for Yom Kippur, 2011

by Mark Goodman

Keeping with tradition, today is a day of forgiveness. We ask forgiveness of those we have offended or hurt with our words or acts. If we're religious, we ask God to forgive us.

And we forgive ourselves for our moments of carelessness, insensitivity, or mean-spiritedness.

We also practice forgiveness by forgiving those who have caused us pain by their comments or actions. In doing this, we recognize that we are just as capable as anyone else of being hurtful.

When we recognize our similar humanness with others, we participate in the other major aspect of today - atonement. If we look carefully at the word, we see at-one-ment.

By experiencing this at-one-ment with others, we can begin to really feel that we're all in this experience of life together. And in those moments of awareness, we are no longer individuals but part of a larger body of humanity, connected by our similarities, rather than separated by our differences.

It's easier to start with friends and family. It's a little harder to extend this feeling to neighbors and co-workers. Harder still is including strangers. And the most difficult of all is recognizing the common humanity of those we see as "enemies."

Let this be a day when we begin to deepen our feelings of forgiveness, and to expand our scope of who we include in our at-one-ment.

Mark Goodman is a teacher, a landscaper, and a spiritual being. He is a student of "A Course in Miracles."



The Art of Teaching and Flowing With the Tao

By Joseph Anthony

The Tao nourishes by not forcing.

By not dominating, the Master leads.

From section 81 of the Tao Te Ching

Education cannot be forced. The minds of children are not empty waiting to be filled. They come to us already full—full of dreams and imaginations, fears and hopes, wacky inventions and little songs. They are brimming with wisdom. The art of teaching consists in drawing out the loveliness of children and weaving it with what you want them to learn. Trying to stuff in facts, most of which are out of context, is futile. It might make for people who can play trivia games, but it doesn't engender citizens of the world who are filled with character, understanding, and compassion.

If we aren't meant to cram random facts into the heads of children how do we teach them? The key is in two of the words from this passage from Lao Tsu: *Nourish* and *Lead*. True education nourishes the minds, heart, and bodies of children. True educators lead, they do not compel.

Many people have pointed out that the original Latin roots of the word *education* mean *to bring forth, to draw out*. The Latin, *educere*, is also related to the word, *dux*, which is where we get the word *duke*—a leader. In other words we want to educate children in such a way as to make them leaders instead of followers; leaders of themselves, savvy to the whims of advertising executives and shady politicians. We want to draw out and nourish the fruits of the Divinity within them. And this takes gentleness, not force.

Watch gardeners work. They give the keys to good teaching. See how they tend the soil. See how they water the crops. See how they ensure the leaves have adequate light and space. Never will you see a gardener reach down and pull out a plant in an attempt to make it grow faster.

We tend the soil of a child's intellect by using the gifts they already have within them and merge them with activities that help awaken their interests in the world around them and in the things we want them to learn. When we couch facts in stories, songs, poems, movement games, and dramatizations we are using the gold already within the minds of children. These

activities nourish the child and allows for the things we want them to learn to take root.

We water their minds with the sweat of our brow and the tears of our love. Memorizing songs, poems, stories; writing plays, learning and leading in active learning games—all of this takes work. It is much easier to simply read the scripted teacher's edition of a textbook. The cost is grave, however, to both the soul of the teacher and the student.

We give children adequate light and space by protecting their need for outdoor time. We get them outside at least twice a day for at least a half an hour each time. We begin the day with active learning games that are both fun and invigorating. Some people object and say that will wind the kids up and make it impossible for them to sit still. I say you just haven't gotten them moving long enough and with the proper age-appropriate activities. How long am I talking about? For young children 6-8ish, an hour of active, poetic, musical movement will probably do the trick.

An hour?! I can just hear it now: "That's too much time taken away from learning time! This isn't Romper Room!" Fill the activities with things you want the children to learn—anything from times tables to grammar rules and make it active and fun, and they will learn far more, in lasting ways, than if you sat them down and tried to force the knowledge in by a lecture or movie. Once children get into the rhythm of activity first thing in the morning they will welcome desk work, provided it is appropriate and meaningful and creative.

Sunlight, open windows, outdoor play is crucial to the development of young minds and bodies. Taking children on nature walks is a lost art in itself, lost amidst fears of lawsuits and too much urban sprawl. There are ways to bring nature to children and to get children outside. Do you run the risk of children getting scraped knees? Yes, but scraped knees are good for the soul ("Remember that time I fell and my leg started bleeding and you picked me up and put that Sponge-Bob band aid on my cut and sang me a song?"—Children remember their wounds, and how we tended them, and how they healed).

Lastly, let the children blossom at their own rate. Any significant organic learning issues will become apparent with ample time to address them. In general, every child is different, just as every stalk of corn is different, just as every species of plant is different. Draw them out with compassion, ease, and

understanding. The moment we get nervous that a student hasn't learned something in the time we think they should have then that student picks up on our anxiety. Yes, I realize modern public education builds on itself—layering facts upon facts (largely simply expanding on the same tired facts year after year with bigger and bigger words), and so some teachers worry students will fall behind if they don't meet the objectives you are required to write on the board. The task of the teachers is to honor their students not the objectives thought up by someone who doesn't know your class.

In short, help your students become leaders by guiding, planting seeds, nourishing them, and tending the gardens of their intellects with active, creative, and imaginative activities.

Joseph Anthony is a former Waldorf teacher turned writer and musician. He is also an artist, husband, father, and explorer of all things spiritual and related to personal growth. blog.thewonderchildblog.com.

Contemplation, Beyond the Inner Clatter

In Martin Laird's book, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation*, the author shares a tale of a young man who decided to enter a monastery. He settled into the novitiate with relative ease and found that he liked his fellow novices and monks, so he felt sure that he wanted to make his profession and stay there for the rest of his life. When the abbot asked him why he felt ready to make his profession, the young man told him how much he had come to like it there. The abbot recommended he should return to the novitiate for a while longer. After his initial disappointment, the young man applied himself to more study, deepening in self-knowledge and the monastic life. When another year had passed, he once again saw the abbot about making his profession. Instead of the previously shared superficial reasons of his comfort, he told the abbot that he was convinced that the monastic life was what God was asking of him, and that he wanted to answer the call. Once again, the abbot recommended he return to the novitiate. Emotionally shattered, the man returned to the novitiate, and thought that "he belonged more in the monastery than half of those other wretched monks."

Since he had completed his formal studies, he began to help in the garden and serving in the infirmary. Even though he was seen to work quietly, internally he was anxious and full of chaotic and fearful thoughts. At last he became aware that he needed help. To whom could

he turn? One by one he eliminated possibilities until he thought of Fr. Alypius, who was the cobbler, a bit of a maverick, rarely spoke to anyone, and lived in his little shop down at the bottom of the garden. It was said that he could read people's hearts, so most people avoided him. The young man sought him out and asked for help. He rattled on and on, telling Fr. Alypius his entire life story up to the abbot's refusal for profession. The whole time the young man chattered on with his story, Fr. Alypius worked on the repair of a shoe. When the young man finished his story, Fr. Alypius said, "I have just one question for you – Who are you?" The young man said, "I just told you."

Here is part of what Fr. Alypius said to this young man, "No, you told me about the clothes you wear. You told me your name, where you're from, what you've done, the things you've studied. Your problem is, you don't know who you are. Let me tell you who you are. You are a ray of God's own light. You say you seek God, but a ray of light doesn't seek the sun; it's coming from the sun. A wave doesn't look for the ocean; it's already full of ocean. Because you don't know that who you are is one with God, you believe all these labels about yourself: I'm a sinner, I'm a saint, I'm a wretch, I'm a monk, I'm a nurse. These are all labels, clothing. They serve a purpose, but they are not who you are. To the extent that you believe these labels, you believe a lie, and you add anguish upon anguish. It's what most of us do for most of our lives. In the secular world we call it our career. In monastic terms, we call it our vocation."

Fr. Alypius went on to help the young man experience the silence beyond the inner chatter.

THE WORK OF BYRON KATIE

The Work of Byron Katie is a simple yet powerful way of identifying and questioning the thoughts that cause all the fear, violence, depression, frustration, and suffering in the world. When you experience the happiness of undoing those thoughts through The Work, you allow your mind to return to its true, awakened, peaceful, creative nature.

On Facebook there is a page called "The Work of Byron Katie" where there are posted daily messages. These short statements can be experienced as powerful koans. A koan is a verbal puzzle, anecdote, or riddle used in Zen Buddhism as a means to enlightenment by demonstrating the inadequacy of logical ego-based reasoning. A well-known example of a Zen koan is "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" In Christianity there are koans such as "Love your enemies."

Following are some of the koans of Byron Katie. For more info visit TheWork.com.

When you question your stressful thoughts, you come to see that everything that has been troubling you is just a misunderstanding.

Through inquiry, we discover how attachment to a belief or story causes suffering. Before the story there is peace. Then a thought enters, we believe it, and the peace seems to disappear.

When you believe that your problem is caused by someone else, then you are your own victim, and the situations appear to be hopeless.

Self-realization is the sweetest thing. It shows us we're fully responsible for ourselves, & that is where we find freedom.

Arguing with reality is like trying to teach a cat to bark - hopeless.

When we love what is, it becomes so simple to live in the world. The world is exactly as it should be.

Your true nature? The one you didn't make!"

I don't let go of my thoughts—I meet them with understanding, then they let go of me.

Stress is an alarm clock that lets you know you're attached to something not true for you.

If you just understand "three kinds of business" enough to stay in your own business, it could free your life in ways you can't imagine. [My business, Your business, God's business]

The world is your perception of it. Inside & outside match—they're reflections of each other. The world is the mirror image of your mind.

I'm a lover of what is, not because I have to be, but because it hurts when I argue with reality.

When they attack you and you notice that you love them with all your heart, your Work is done.

We are perfection in process.



Daily Word

*Spirit within me is expressing in wise
and wonderful ways.*

I recognize that worry-thoughts are stumbling blocks on my way toward achievement. Consequently, if I worry that something is going to be difficult, it likely will be. So I open to the underlying potential in what might seem to be a difficulty. I know that all matters can be handled with ease as I let Spirit within express as me in wise and wonderful ways. I can do what is mine to do and do it well.

I am neither timid nor boastful. A feeling of ease – fortified by my awareness of my innate divinity – nudges me along, from thinking to planning to doing. From my inner, sacred reservoir, I call on wisdom and understanding, life and vigor to move me forward in both simple and complex activities.

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Love

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