

Liberation from the Small Self: Finding Identity in the Whole of Life

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Every human being holds within them the seed of greatness, the activation of which will lead to a life of fulfillment, meaning and purpose. The evidence of this comes every day, as unlikely heroes and remarkable personal stories are drawn to our attention in the media. This essay will look at some people who have tapped into deeper levels of power and intelligence, and point to experiences and attitudes which may open these doors for us all. It will touch upon ways to align with the *larger cycles of life* which continually operate in our individual spheres of activity, and which provide the avenues for our greater experience and expression. Beyond that, we'll see that as we cross these thresholds and awaken to our inherent personal power, we will naturally contribute more fully into all of life around us. With our greater contribution into life comes the realization that the vast power and intelligence which coordinates the entire universe is not "out there" somewhere, but is actually *with-in* us all. Even more remarkably, this greatness is not simply within us, it is who we are.

2. Overcoming Challenges Activates Deeper Intelligence

In the early 1980's I was hired by a research hospital and neurological sciences center to develop it as a resource for gifted adolescents in the surrounding area. Leading researchers specializing in emerging fields such as biofeedback and the sports science of mental practice were willing to share time with these bright students. Nurses in that hospital were pioneering in the art of healing touch (working with the energy patterns of the patients), so participants were exposed to this remarkable field as well. In lab sessions, they deepened their awareness of the amazing potential within their own physical bodies. They learned how to alter their heart rate and raise and lower their body temperature through biofeedback. They spent time with an amputee who was learning to *re-wire* his neuro-sensory system to operate a *bionic* arm. The impressionable students were totally intrigued! I could see that when people discover ways to activate innate mechanisms, pathways open in their awareness of *self* at deeper levels. Habitual, self-limiting views begin to recede.

What was happening was that the neuroscientists' tools were awakening more subtle levels of *proprioception*—which simply means body-awareness. Participating in such exercises, people come to realize that they have access to finer dimensions of control over themselves than they would have ever imagined. This is not merely mind over matter, but more a realization of the continuum that is matter fused with mind; the false separation dissolves as these ever-present dimensions of control become conscious. Usually we are

unaware of how we are present within ourselves, through all levels of our being. But major injuries and other intense physical challenges seem to enable people to discover this deeper realm of physical intelligence.

Two years after participating in the hospital program, a young girl survived when her school group was caught in a blizzard during a mountain hike and spent three days in an ice cave. The only other survivor of the ordeal lost both legs and had internal injuries, but this girl suffered no long term damage; a fact which was considered somewhat of a miracle at the time, certainly a mystery. Could this have been connected to her knowing a level of control over her body which she had glimpsed through participation in this program? Could those experiences have helped her to access a kind of wisdom she might have otherwise missed? Many world class athletes and special-forces soldiers—individuals focused on “high-end performance”—would not find it surprising that training in new levels of awareness led to a much higher degree of survivability or success in intense situations. Indeed this is precisely what they count on in their training.

Another example of intense experience activating finer levels of physical intelligence can be found in a brilliant book, And There Was Light: Autobiography of Jacques Lusseyran, Blind Hero of the French Resistance. After being blinded in an accident as a child, Lusseyran discovered new, deeper layers of *vision*. Here he describes his early discovery that he can, in fact, see:

At this point some instinct—I was almost about to say a hand laid on me—made me change course. I began to look more closely, not at things but at a world closer to myself, looking from an inner place to one further within, instead of clinging to the movement of sight toward the world outside. Immediately, the substance of the universe drew together, redefined and peopled itself anew. I was aware of a radiance emanating from a place I knew nothing about, a place which might as well have been outside me as within. But radiance was there, or, to put it more precisely, light. It was a fact, for light was there . . . I could feel light rising, spreading, resting on objects, giving them form, then leaving them . . .

Inside me every sound, every scent, and every shape was forever changing into light, and light itself changing into color to make a kaleidoscope of my blindness. . . . As I walked along a country road bordered by trees, I could point to each one of the trees by the road, even if they were not spaced at regular intervals . . . To see them like this I had to hold myself in a state so far removed from old habits that I could not keep it up for very long.

These rare skills served him well as he went on to become a hero in the French Resistance, and later transcended the horrors of a concentration camp and led others to do the same. His story is dramatic. But most human beings can relate to his story because we all have had some experience of sensing and responding to invisible energies around us through levels of perception not fully understood. Our culture doesn't particularly nurture or emphasize these inherent abilities which are often more fully developed by indigenous peoples. Moving past the threshold of habitual ways of seeing and knowing seems to provide access to deeper levels of perception. But simply becoming more aware of these potentials within our *larger* selves can open us up to a greater range of personal possibilities.

For several years I trained educators across the U.S. and Canada to implement a remarkable problem-solving competition called Odyssey of the Mind. The program extends creative challenges in engineering, robotics, and the arts to teams of students who work on them over a period of months. (An example: design and build a car based on a sketch Leonardo da Vinci drew of a vehicle powered by the kinetic energy of springs!) One of the most unique aspects of OM is that the problems, like real-life situations, have no pre-determined correct answer! When participants present solutions at tournaments after working on them for months, they are sometimes brilliant in their originality. Even the judges are astonished by the resourcefulness, versatility and innovation demonstrated by finalists.

Odyssey of the Mind unleashes these breakthroughs in creativity, in part by encouraging the completely unprecedented and unthinkable. The training establishes a context where nothing is out of bounds. Educators seeking to implement OM need to embrace certain principles to establish an atmosphere ripe for creative problem solving: a) challenge assumptions; b) see in new ways; c) tolerate ambiguity; d) approach the problem from different points of view; and e) defer judgment. Since much in our educational system is based on finding the “right answer”, this openness in thinking doesn’t just happen; it takes practice. The coveted Renatra Fusca Award (Latin for water spider, based upon design by engineering students which was ingenious in concept even if it failed the task!)) is the highest honor the judges give out, and it goes to teams or to individuals who exhibit tremendous originality, even if their proposed “solution” ultimately fails. Like the neuroscientists, OM clearly establishes the context for accessing new ranges of intelligence. Throughout the process new pathways are forged, and out of these come remarkable levels of performance.

Some of the same principles taught in creative problem solving can be seen in the genius levels of insight demonstrated by our greatest thinkers. We’ve all heard the story of Albert Einstein’s deceptively simple question, “What would I see if I rode on a beam of light?” at the age of sixteen. This question permeated his consciousness for ten years as he explored the universe from an entirely radical *point of view*. Abraham Lincoln raised the nation into a new era of greatness when, in a flash of insight, he *saw the slave issue in a completely new way*, unveiling the groundbreaking Emancipation Proclamation at the perfect moment. The thirteen days surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis have been well documented. Through this record we can see that Jack and Robert Kennedy demonstrated several of these same principles--*challenging the assumptions* of the powerful military hawks in the room, *tolerating an excruciating level of ambiguity* as days dragged by and pressures mounted, and considering the crisis from many *perspectives*--as they courageously formed an approach which brought the world back from the brink of nuclear disaster.

These legendary moments and historic figures may feel far removed from our lives. But they provide us a glimpse into powerful processes which consistently access deeper levels of insight and intelligence, levels available to each of us through our larger selves. Current pressures and cycles of intensification underway now require each one of us to break through old habits of thought and action which can never take us where we need to go. The call to individual and collective greatness has never been louder.

3. Larger Cycles of Life Provide the Natural Order of Fulfillment

We may envision the perfect scenario through which to reveal our true greatness (!!), but the practical way to actually do this is to become more aligned with the *larger cycles of life* all around us. We do this naturally to a certain extent or we wouldn't be able to function at all in life. But we can explore ways to make better use of these powerful dynamics which are constantly present. One such dynamic we may recognize occurs when we apply our own *personal best* to a challenge, often in seemingly insignificant circumstances, and discover that it opens the door to a cycle of personal expansion.

Here is a simple illustration from my own experience. In my early days as a teacher, my superintendent invited me to give a seminar on creative thinking for the other teachers in the district. I had attended some training courses so was given the opportunity (through the *larger cycles of life*) to share what I had learned. This was not a big deal and I wasn't being paid for it, but for some reason I found myself preparing for this seminar as though my life depended on it! In other words, pressure moving within me generated the intensity needed to align with the larger cycle and take this opportunity into another level. I didn't see it then, but this seemingly insignificant seminar became the springboard for the next phase of my career; larger events, national speaking engagements and consulting opportunities. Some sort of pulsation, almost an electrical charge or *current*, moved in me, without my consciously understanding why, to use this moment as a gateway through which to step into a much larger cycle of contribution.

This demonstrated to me that windows of opportunity naturally open in the ecology of our worlds that have more to do with what is large and within us, and less with the requirements of a given situation. People and circumstances do not come to us in some random fashion, but move in a vast, coordinated design. (Incidents of synchronicity and serendipity provide tantalizing evidence of this fact.) Whenever we feel charged by the factors coming to us in the current of life to actually do our best and invest ourselves fully, that effort is not wasted. We have *generated new substance*, become more substantial people. Our participation, our *generation*, is connected to something vast, and has been elicited by factors resonant with our innate talents, abilities, and even life purpose. We've been conditioned to weigh our efforts with the prospect of a tangible reward, but that approach to life can be backwards and counterproductive. As we fully engage to our highest vision with the resonant opportunities that do present themselves, rewards and increased responsibilities will return to us in many forms and on many levels through the ongoing *larger cycles of life*. Through increasingly accurate participation with these pulsations, we give voice to our deeper intelligence, extend a greater contribution into all of life around us, and more accurately prepare for upcoming cycles. As anyone reviews phases of expansion in his/her own life, they will see that this process has been operational throughout.

We are all perfectly designed and equipped to move with the larger cycles of life which would bring us fulfillment. Core factors within us perceive a vibrational factor or tone moving in people and situations which come our way, which we resonate with and are drawn toward. We all do this, sometimes consciously, often unconsciously. Why do we notice what we notice? Surrounded by infinite stimuli in the environment, we actually pay attention to a very few, yet our movement through life will always be in the direction of our attention. (Note: if we don't feel the right situations and people are appearing in our lives, we might wish to fine tune the focus of our attention!) We may recall pivotal events and "chance" meetings with key people which changed the course of our lives and couldn't have

been planned by our intellects. These events came to us through these currents which operate continuously to sustain us and move us in the most creative direction.

This line of thought may feel unfamiliar, but we've seen this impulse to align, move with, and find fulfillment through life's cycles mirrored in nature, often in remarkable ways. Robins, for example, migrate just ahead of warm fronts and arrive just as the rains begin pouring down--when their favorite food, earthworms, happen to be coming up out of their tunnels to avoid drowning. Emperor Penguins travel 90 kilometers to the sea in the dark, and over ice, to gather food for their young. They then return, finding that the melting of the ice makes the essential trip survivable. Other species travel thousands of miles to arrive at a particular spot at the precise time when their primary food source is hatching in the midst of a once-yearly tide. These fantastic phenomena provide a glimpse into the true beauty and intricacy of the web of life. The mechanisms that give rise to these instincts are built in, providing clear evidence of meticulous arrangements for fulfillment inherent in all life forms. We tend not to realize that these same meticulous arrangements are available in the human world as well. In the operational design of life the provision for fulfillment is always present. Life-sustaining currents are moving constantly, at visible and invisible levels, bringing exactly what is needed.

Yet clearly there are distortions present in the earth and its life-forms now, caused by distortions in the consciousness--and therefore destructive actions--of mankind, which in many ways disrupt the manifestation of this design. Therefore we see famine, disease, cruelty and pain which seem to contradict this natural order of fulfillment I have described. Even within one's own life we may question whether the optimum opportunities have appeared. Distortions in consciousness have impacted all of our lives. However, the ever-present life currents continue to move, providing new starting points for the activation and realization of our true potential. The underlying impulses of life would have all its forms thrive so that they may be enabled to make their unique contribution into the greater world. These ongoing opportunities are available not merely for personal benefit and gratification, but so that avenues are present for the extension of our genuine gifts and talents into the whole of life! As our gifts are offered into our worlds, not only do we experience greater meaning and purpose, but we know the immeasurable joy of aiding in the fulfillment of others. So we are, and always will be, immersed in a creative field rich with possibilities for us to sense these life currents and cycles in operation. In fact each moment and situation in which we find ourselves offers a fresh opportunity to align with the currents of life rather than struggle against them. Each time we transcend our own limiting reactions and attitudes to the people and situations we encounter, we are entrusted with an ever-expanding scope for our expression. In this way we begin to function more fully in the richness of life.

3. Liberation from the Small Self: Identity in the Whole

to see the world in a grain of sand . . . William Blake

Throughout the ages, poets, sages and visionaries have revealed their insights about the underlying intelligence of life and its unfathomable coordinating power. Their words have found resonance because all human beings live their lives in the midst of this powerful whole, so fundamentally sense the awesome wonder of its nature. Key intuitive leaps in consciousness have transpired in recent decades, reflecting a growing recognition of the oneness of this vast whole. One such leap occurred thirty-five years ago when British earth

scientist James Lovelock proposed that the best explanation for the consistency of the earth's ecosystem is that it is, in fact, a single organism rather than separate systems. He termed this organism "Gaia." This stands out as one giant step forward in the expanding awareness of the interconnectedness of life.

There are those who now suggest that we human beings are all cells in an integrated, seven-billion cell *body*, and that this Body is in the process of awakening to its inherent oneness. This is part of an emerging cosmology which points to a larger shared identity which writers and thinkers of the past few decades have begun to refer to as the *collective consciousness of mankind, the One, the Whole, our God-essence, the Authentic Self*, to name a few. But it is not only through the spiritual and ecological communities that this consciousness of the Whole is building. In the past few decades, scientists have been exploring the *holographic paradigm*, which proposes that separateness is an illusion based upon the fact that we see only a portion of reality, and that at a deeper level of reality we are part of one thing. Einstein's protégé, physicist David Bohm, laid the groundwork for this theory that the entire universe is holographic in nature. Clearly, the notion of our place within a holographic universe is becoming established in the consciousness of mankind.

This has profound implications for the basic question of identity—Who do we think we really are? The typical self-centered identity we have all assumed—I am my thoughts, my feelings, my opinions, my problems, my beliefs, my body, my job, my family—makes no sense within the context of a holographic universe. One remarkable feature of a hologram is that each part of the three-dimensional photograph contains all the information present *with-in* the whole: through the tiniest snippet, the whole image can be seen. *With-in* a holographic universe, the information of the whole is present *with-in* every part--*to see the world in a grain of sand*. From our own point of view, as a facet *with-in* what could be called *the whole design of life*, we each contain all the essences of this greater Whole. This would ultimately lead to the conclusion that, not only are we connected to the Whole, We Are It! It is Who We Are. And from this position, it is not merely a platitude to say that what we do in our own lives has an effect upon the whole body of mankind. It is our Body!

Through the lens of this new paradigm, we may view certain universal experiences in a different light. For example, it seems quite normal to celebrate, and even feel moved by, the triumph of a brilliant athlete we've never met, or by the magnificence of a stranger's noble or courageous deed. (Billions of viewers watch the Olympics, for example.) We relate to it, perhaps feeling, *this is me--this is my spirit!* Skillful advertisements capitalize on the power of this universal human connection, bringing us to tears through 30-second commercials about somebody calling their mother! Conscious of it or not, we are one with all that *the Whole* is doing, and through this web of connection we experience resonance, vicarious fulfillment, and deep joy in the creative impulses and actions of others.

And at the same time, we also are connected to the cruelty and destruction we see throughout this larger body. We may feel shame when we see other *cells* within *our* body acting in certain ways. Our intrinsic oneness with these distorted elements may even be a contributing factor in the growing unease and anxiety felt by many in the world now, even by those who seem to be comfortable in their external circumstances. We sense, at some profound level, that these distortions must pass away. Human beings, individually and collectively, have performed badly in our fragmented identity, creating a mess on a planetary scale. In the false identity of separateness we have exploited the Earth, trampling

over other people and all living forms in the process. We may sense the inevitability of a reckoning over the horizon.

Albert Einstein saw all of this coming a half a century ago when he spoke of the need for a shift in identity:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive. (1954)

Liberation from the small *self* which we have thought ourselves to be is currently underway on a massive scale, making this a very exciting time to be alive. (Maybe the insanity of celebrity culture, endemic consumerism, and escalating violence give evidence of the last gasp of this small *self*.) When we all stop trying to make the world around us conform to our personal comforts, desires, and bright ideas, genuine solutions to the myriad challenges we face will be found. Earlier in this essay I described some of the pressures and challenges which enable individuals to break through habitual ways of seeing and thinking, allowing them to tap into deeper levels of creative potential and intelligence. I also described how we can individually sense the movement of life and its larger cycles all around us, and intensify our own alignment with, and contribution into it. This is now happening collectively throughout the body of mankind. The larger cycles of life moving throughout the Whole are intensifying the pressure on every distorted and destructive aspect of human activity, and every distorted and destructive element within each of us. This intensification is creating opportunities for us all to step up into greater awareness, and more accurate expression, of this larger creative Self, who we truly Are. This process is inexorable. Conscious, creative function in this vast Identity is critical now.

Since Lovelock's intuitive leap and Einstein's prescient words half a century ago, mankind has become aware of the delicate balance required within the physical ecology of the planet. But in this day, we are awakening to other ecological levels in which we also operate: our thoughts, attitudes, feelings and actions have an ecological impact *with-in* the entire body of mankind. In a holographic universe, my thoughts are not solely my thoughts. My feelings, my attitudes, my actions are not merely mine, but reverberate into this vast Whole. The quality of my attitude in any moment, the way I handle the feelings that arise within me, and my personal, seemingly insignificant actions ripple on out. The small *self* is no more. Becoming more conscious of our unique focal point within the Whole, we are no longer helpless in the face of mounting challenges. We step over a threshold, take greater responsibility for all that we see unfolding around us, and arrive at the inescapable conclusion that we, each one, have a point of access and creative input into the direction of the whole body of mankind. If I see greed wreaking havoc with the natural systems, I have a point of contact through any impulses of greed within me. When I see violence run amok in the far reaches of the globe, my point of contact is through any anger or ill feeling I hold toward another. This is a wonderful realization! Solutions to our greatest challenges are

present within the collective intelligence of this Whole, and will come to light through our increasingly conscious, creative function together.

The World Wide Web has connected the world in an historic instant, a superficial reflection of our underlying oneness. Kevin Kelly wrote in the August 2005 issue of Wired, “Three thousand years from now, when keen minds review the past, I believe that our ancient time, here at the cusp of the third millennium, will be seen as [the start of a major new historical epoch.] In the years roughly coincidental with the Netscape IPO, humans began animating inert objects with tiny slivers of intelligence, connecting them into a global field, and linking their own minds into a single thing. This will be recognized as the largest, most complex, and most surprising event on the planet. Weaving nerves out of glass and radio waves, our species began wiring up all regions, all processes, all facts and notions into a grand network. From this embryonic neural net was born a collaborative interface for our civilization.” (Quoted from *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, Thomas L. Friedman.)

With lightning speed this *body* is connecting its Self, externally through the web of cyberspace, internally through the larger currents of life moving in less visible dimensions. For better or worse, more of what is present *with-in* our larger body is coming into view. In the blink of an eye any individual *cell* can be seen by the whole, becoming a player on this world stage. Reflecting this phenomenon, TIME Magazine stuck a mirror on the cover of their “Person of The Year” 2006 edition, saying in effect, *the person of the year is YOU*. Well, who are you? Who am I? Without the increasing presence of the more illumined consciousness, the larger Identity described by Einstein, the path ahead will be one of escalating destruction by the small self. We are not merely observers or victims of forces beyond our influence. We have immeasurable power to actually be the corrective mechanism, to alter the course of mankind. Our individual creative activity is One with the Whole. We each have this golden moment of opportunity, and might even sense that we came on Earth at this juncture for this purpose: to restore the consciousness of mankind to its true Identity so that it may properly function as steward for the planet and all life forms present with us. This is the magnificent reward for the liberation of the small *self*.

After several years of teaching, Kristy Clark pioneered programs for gifted and talented students in Oregon. She went on to become a consultant and speaker to school districts and organizations throughout the western United States, focusing on giftedness, creativity and problem solving. She co-founded and was president of an international non-profit organization which supported educators in the development of their own character and maturity, thereby increasing their effectiveness. More recently she enjoyed a seven year career as a Realtor in Colorado, where she now lives. Kristy creates art quilts and enjoys working out. Her top priority now, however, is assisting others in the ultimate fulfillment: the awareness and expression of true Identity.