

A COMPLIMENTARY EXTRACT

STOP TAKING THE PEACE

A Guide to Remembering What It Is to Be Free

CHAPTER ONE

Peace is Power

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Peace is Power

“The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of people when they realise their relationship, their oneness with the universe and all its powers, and when they realise that at the centre of the universe dwells the Great Spirit, and that this centre is really everywhere, it is within each of us.”

BLACK ELK

Up...

For someone who is frightened of heights, climbing is an interesting choice of pastime. And whenever I did climb, I was invariably frightened. At times, extremely so. Despite this, there were occasions when an inner calm allowed a pleasurable flow of physical movement, an ease and joy that was free of fear, the climb smooth and confident.

Then I fell. Actually, I'd fallen the week before, but that had only been a short drop. Although it wasn't far, when leading (climbing first), it's better not to fall at all, because all that is preventing a potentially disastrous landing are the pieces of

metal that the climber has been placing in gaps and cracks in the rock and which will hopefully arrest an unintended descent. To fall as the second climber is pretty much risk free, as they are kept safe by a tight rope from above, held by the person that climbed first, who is now secured to the ground or rock higher up.

Anyway, a week after that first fall, it seemed like a good idea to rebuild my confidence by leading a route that I'd climbed before as a second and had found straightforward – vertical but with nice big holds. However, it became evident after about 20 feet of climbing that the little confidence I had begun with was wafer thin, before it deserted me entirely. Upon its departure, all that remained was a raw and deepening fear. I became unsure of where and how to move; my placing of protective gear was slow and hesitant. The tension in my mind and body soon led to exhaustion in my hands and arms, resulting in a painfully slow rate of ascent. As I continued up, it all just got worse, particularly the fear of falling. This wasn't helped by the realisation that the protection I'd placed was not good, and if I fell, it was likely to fail. At about 85 feet, I was relieved to get in a good bit of gear – bombproof, I hoped. There was just 15 feet of climbing left to get to the top.

I don't know how I managed to summon the strength to make it up those last few feet, but somehow I found myself with just one last move to reach safety. For an unknown reason, a last great effort perhaps, I flung myself upward with both arms outstretched. True commitment, but not a great move, because as those exhausted hands took hold, the rock they grasped revealed its instability and wobbled. In that instant, I knew that I couldn't hold on and was going to fall. I shouted to warn my partner, who was belaying the rope from the bottom, and then, interestingly in hindsight, I consciously let go of the rock and allowed myself to fall.

The thief of peace

The human body – physically, mentally and emotionally – is extraordinary in many ways. However, it is not who we are. This is not to deny the importance, wonder and beauty of the body: it is to consciously embody the realisation that our true nature isn't born when the body is born, nor does it die when the body dies. For Greg, death is the end. However, within Greg, for the deeper reality that knows truth (that is Truth!), life is eternal and without the limitations that are perceived by Greg.

Our name is just a label that's been given to a physical form that will last for a certain period of time: from its birth until its death. An aspect of that form has come to identify itself with the label – I believe that I am 'Greg', a combination of thoughts, feelings, emotions, experiences, my age, gender, relationships, appearance, possessions, hopes, concerns, and the assumption that when this body dies, I will die with it. This is who 'I' believe myself to be: the individual identity that is often referred to as the ego or self.

This self-identity – as we shall see in the following chapter – is founded on fear and is disassociated from reality. A disassociation, a separation, from our true nature. Deeply within ourselves, beyond self, we know this. And so, we are searching. Searching for truth. To be whole again.

However, this search has become confused and misguided. We are not even sure what we are looking for, never mind where to find it. Because we have come to identify with being the physical body, we believe that we will find what we are looking for in the physical world: in what we do, what we have, in the people we know, in how we look, what we know – all the stuff that accumulates into being our self-identity. You may have noticed in your own life that this doesn't work. That whatever you have or do, no matter how great or small the achievement, other than offering a temporary sense of satisfaction or pleasure,

is not enough, and the search continues for that unknown something that we believe is missing from our lives.

We are existing in a state of lack: we believe that we are not good enough, that we don't have enough. Therefore, we spend our life trying to become... something. If only I had more money, a better job, a new home, more time, were younger (or at least looked it), were more confident, less anxious, better at what is important to me, had a partner, or a different partner... the list goes on.

In other words, we are trapped in the belief that to be happy, something needs to be different. And so, when we achieve a goal, we soon set another one. The unknown something that we seek remains forever in the future. This is desire, and it is insatiable: always out of reach, the perpetual carrot on a stick.

To live this way is the thief of peace: the thief of our innate awareness of the wonder and joy of who we are and what it is to be truly alive.

... and down

I have since realised that in that moment of letting go of the rock, there was complete acceptance of the situation, of *what is*. The inner conflict to reach the top and the fear of falling was over, and with that, my perception of the world, of life, transformed. The fear that I had been gripped by for the duration of the climb completely dissolved in that instant. Everything slowed extraordinarily: I watched the rock passing before me as if in slow motion, aware of every minute detail of its face as I went by. I realised that if that last piece of gear didn't hold, the others were very unlikely to, and that I would almost certainly die. And yet, despite having what seemed like all the time in the world to ponder it, dying was of no concern. Inwardly, I was still and at peace, free of emotion and thought, free of time, free of fear – free! It wasn't an escape, a disassociation or a denial of what

was happening – the degree of presence, of awareness, of reality was astonishingly acute, unlike anything I had ever experienced before.

I could hear the rope singing its song as it ran through the protection and realised, given how far I'd fallen, that it should have stopped running if the top piece of gear had held, and that the rope ought to be getting tight and slowing down the fall. As I had been about fifteen feet above the last protection, if it held, I would fall the fifteen feet to it, fifteen feet past it, and then some more as the stretch in the rope arrested the descent. I was, however, falling considerably further than this.

In my haste to start climbing, I had neglected to secure my inexperienced climbing partner to the ground. As they were substantially lighter than me, as soon as the rope became tight (that last piece of gear did hold!), the laws of physics resulted in their rapid ascent to a point of equilibrium – both of us dangling in mid-air. In addition to that, they were unable to immediately lock off the rope and stop it from continuing to pay out, which meant that I fell further and they received rope burns to their hands – the only injury to either of us from the whole escapade. I can't remember getting down to the ground from this point, but by the time I got there, all that awareness and inner peace had been replaced by an adrenaline rush that sent me almost manic.

Had I been able to hold on, I would have achieved my goal, reached the top and been happy, despite all the fear and drama to get there. But it wouldn't have lasted, and within the hour I would have been struggling up another route. Although you may not have climbed, you are likely to have similar patterns of behaviour: just a little further, some more of this, a bit less of that, and it will be enough. I'll be happy. But for the self, it is never enough.

To give that meaning, you could try completing the following sentence: "I would be happy if..." More than one answer is OK.

To experience life in this way is to be in conflict with *what is*. In conflict with reality, with the money, job, home, amount of time, years under our belt, level of confidence and so on that we have at this moment. It is the perpetual conflict of the self, that something isn't as we want it to be or believe that it should be, and we experience that conflict in many ways. Some of the most familiar terms used to describe it include stress, anxiety, worry, anger, vulnerability, panic, depression, envy and boredom. Not only are they unpleasant, but it's also quite possible that we experience one or more of them every day. Perhaps for much of the day, thereby greatly diminishing our enjoyment of life and adversely affecting our physical, mental and emotional well-being.

Once we realise that we have been banging our head against a wall, we can stop. We do not have to continue to suffer.

Freedom

We suffer – we are in conflict with *what is*, with reality, with truth – because of the identity we believe ourselves to be. An identity whose existence is dependent upon that conflict. Therefore, in the acceptance of *what is*, we free ourselves of conflict and this self-identity, which is to let go of our identification with being the body – of the belief that the human experience is who we are – and awaken to that which is having the experience. It is the realisation that our body is an aspect of life, not its totality: a costume that is worn for a while and, ideally, not taken too seriously. To realise this for ourselves is quite a journey, an adventure of revelation and understanding, as we deepen further and further into the mystery of ourself and of life. A journey of awakening that is the demise, the death, of self. Hence, resurrection is freedom in death. Freedom from the perception that we are the body, that who we are is separate from all else.

Yet, we fear dying. Not just of dying physically, but also of the psychological death, the letting go of self. And so, although we

seek truth, we fear truth, because the realisation of truth means the end of what is false, and we currently identify with that!

Fear is key to this conundrum. It is the opportunity for its resolution, because fear is the essence of self and, therefore, the gatekeeper that stands between falsehood and truth, between suffering and liberation, between inner conflict and inner peace. To face fear with awareness is to understand fear – whether that fear is expressed as anxiety, stress, anger or any of its other manifestations, such as guilt, shame or unending ambition. In understanding fear, we become open to the reality within ourselves where fear does not exist. And where fear does not exist, neither do conflict or the identification with the body as a separate self.

To be at peace, therefore, is not just a pause in the conflict, it is the reality that lies beyond conflict that is free of like and dislike, of good and bad, of seeking and avoiding – free of judgement, and so, free of conflict.

Even in a state of mental-emotional turmoil, peace is still there. We may have become unaware of it, but it hasn't gone anywhere. It is always residing within us, just as the sun continually shines, even though we may not be able to see it.

And so, fear isn't an enemy to be fought against, ignored or indeed avoided. It is our guide to peace. Not a guide to overcome our fears (or any other inner disturbance) or to push through them, but in awakening to truth, the joyful mystery of the acceptance of *what is*: the realisation that acceptance of the journey is the destination we seek.

That we already are what we have been searching for. Now!

This realisation happens naturally when we are aware of relationship, of our reactions to people and circumstances from moment to moment. When we allow free inner expression while remaining conscious of the thoughts, emotions, sense perceptions, feelings and actions of that expression as they

occur. In doing so, we see clearly, and in that clarity we penetrate and dissolve the layers of the illusion (that we are separate) and realise the truth (that we are as one with all life).

That is straightforward enough to explain, but the implementation requires effort. To let go of the layers of illusion is to let go of who we believe we are – an identity that we have spent considerable time and effort creating, which we are totally invested in, and are very likely, therefore, to resist letting go of. To do so, however, is to realise the truth of who we are. And it is in truth that we know peace, that we are truly happy.

This, I believe, is the ‘first peace’ that Black Elk is speaking of in his quote at the beginning of this chapter. Perhaps you have experienced this peace from time to time: quietly blissful, inwardly still, the mind silent – an emptiness that is whole and desires nothing? A quiet, joyful peace that is not dependent on someone else or on circumstances being to your liking. A deep and clear sense of being inherently complete, a gentle smile throughout your whole being – happy without a cause. The conditions of life no different to the day before, or even from a few moments before, and yet, your sense of reality transformed. It may have lasted for a while or just a minute or two, but it was there. It happened.

This is our true, natural way of being. It’s who we are. So, what is preventing us from experiencing more, or even all, of life this way? It is to that end that this book has been written: to be a practical guide in assisting you to awaken to the truth of who you are.

However, it is not ‘The Way’. That will, and can only, be determined by you.

It was the self-identity, Greg, that was terrifying himself (on one level, somewhat pointlessly) by climbing up that rock face. Yet, the intensity of the fear, together with the present-moment awareness required to climb, followed by acceptance and letting

go, allowed the conscious realisation that the truth of who Greg is does not fear dying, has a completely different perspective of time and space, and is peaceful, still, empty and complete in a way that is difficult to explain, but could be described as being free.

Free of fear, free of thought, free of expectation, free of the instinct to survive, free of the belief that I am Greg. Basically, free of all identification with the physical body.

I didn't get any better at climbing as a consequence of this. In fact, I stopped not long after, perhaps having reached what I was climbing for. And I remained frightened of heights. I had, however, realised something within myself that was very different to what is generally considered to be reality, certainly by me up until then, and it was wondrous and liberating. Nothing would ever be quite the same again: something had awakened within me, and an unstoppable journey of inner discovery began. Not through extremes like climbing, but with the growing recognition of the wonder and joy that exists in every moment.

“What I am looking for is not out there, it is in me.”

HELEN KELLER

CONTINUE READING

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