

Awakening to the Highest Reaches of Integrity

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PROBLEMS ABOUND IN THE WORLD, which demand effective solutions. People often propose good-sounding solutions, which nevertheless make no difference. There is neither a scarcity of ideas nor a paucity of intelligence on this planet. Yet, when people start taking action to solve problems or to effect change, they experience difficulty in sustaining to the end the same commitment that they initially made. This is one of the primary reasons that good ideas fail to make any significant difference.

Rare are the individuals who are able to sustain their commitment through to the end to achieve the result they set out to achieve. Even when they fall short of achieving their purpose for reasons beyond their individual power or because their purpose is too far-reaching to be contained in one lifetime, their commitment stays alive and consistent. Their commitment perdures well beyond their lives, transmitted to and recreated by committed individuals of ensuing generations. What distinguishes these outstanding people from the rest of the population, who often meander in the maze of mediocrity? What is the mark of distinction that so significantly distinguishes them? The answer lies in the quality of being called integrity.

What is integrity? The term “integrity” can be defined on three levels: (1) being true to one’s principles; (2) being true to one’s word or commitment; and (3) being true to one’s self. Integrity means being true to one’s principle, one’s word, and one’s self, and true integrity involves the total accord between these three levels of being true. People who can sustain their commitment are those who say, “I am committed to making X happen,” and then follow through with the necessary stages of action that ensure that X happens. Such people have integrity. They sustain their commitment to the end. God is reported to have said, “Let there be light,” and immediately there was light. In the case of humans, it takes time for commitment to unfold, but the principle is the same. For example, we say, “Let there be peace on earth.” If the majority of us have true integrity, with which we are prepared to take sustained action, peace will surely prevail on earth.

Integrity and Self-Knowledge

When we observe individuals who sustain their commitment and achieve their objectives, we notice that their moral and philosophical principles, their commitment, and who and what they are, are all in accord. This implies that we can sustain only the kind of commitment that is in accord with who and what we are and with our principles and values. Therefore, unless it is an authentic expression of who we are and unless it is consistent with our principles, our commitment is inauthentic. If our commitment is inauthentic, regardless of how much willpower we may have, we will probably be unable to sustain it. Therefore, the essence of integrity is “to thine own self be true.”

Being “true to yourself” sounds as though there were a duality existing between *you* who were being true to your self and your *self* to whom you were being true. In truth, they are one and the same, and herein lies the secret of “to thine own self be true.” That is, being true to yourself means to be truly yourself. And being truly yourself means that you know your true self, that you truly know your true self. This means that you fulfill the Socratic injunction: “Know thyself.” This injunction does not say “know about yourself,” but “know yourself.” It is not a “knowing about” but a knowing that is being, wherein the knower is the known is the knowing. This is what the philosopher Franklin Merrell-Wolff calls “Knowledge through Identity.”

The kind of self-knowledge that the Socratic injunction commands can be attained only via knowledge through identity—a way of knowing in which the knower is the known is the knowing. To know yourself by knowledge through identity means that you dissolve the non-identity existing between you the questioner and the question that you ask. This implies that you be the question itself—that you be the question: Who am I? When plenary identity is consummated between the questioner and the question, when the questioner is the question and the question is the questioner, the questioner becomes the knower, the question the known, and the questioning the knowing. This plenary identity is what is meant by *satori*, the Japanese word for spiritual awakening, wherein *sa* means non-identity or difference and *tori* means dissolution or voidance.

Satori, self-knowledge through identity, is not knowledge about yourself that you reach through self-reflection or self-introspection in which you

objectify yourself and make you the object distinct from you the subject. *Satori* is a form of immediate, non-conceptual knowing. Therefore, you may not be able to conceptually articulate what you know, and yet you know, while your self-knowledge is articulated in your life through your thought and action. Since *satori* is non-conceptual and therefore requires no accumulation of information, it may occur at any time, at any age, and at any stage of emotional and intellectual development. In fact, children, if their innate genius is not suppressed, spontaneously experience a kind of *satori* and intuitively realize their true self. When such innate and inchoate *satori* unfolds along with the emotional, conational, and intellectual lines of development, in the process of maturation children and youth naturally evolve authentic self-knowledge and integrity into and through their adulthood.

As our authentic self-knowledge unfolds, we come to realize that self is always in reality self-Self as the fusional complementarity of the individual self and the Universal Self. The individual self arises within the relative mode of consciousness wherein there is a

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distinction between the self and the non-self or the subject and the object. The Universal Self is the Ground of Being of the individual self and is the mode of Transcendent Consciousness that is inclusive of the relative mode of consciousness. As our self-

knowledge deepens, we realize that to know the self is to know the Self and to know the Self is to know God—the Primordial Consciousness that is the Ground of Being of all beings. Our self is far vaster than the egological self as which our relative consciousness usually operates. In fact, we are held and upheld by the Infinite as the foundation of our being, and in and through this Infinite we are in unity with the rest of the Universe.

Integrity with this Infinite is implied in the first Commandment given to Moses: *Thou shalt have no other gods before me*. All of the Ten Commandments are implicit but categorical expostulations based on the logic of “thou shalt not because thou canst not.” They are stern but compassionate admonishments against the futility of attempting to do the impossible and against the foolishness of suffering the consequence. *Thou shalt have no other gods before me*. There is only one kind of the Infinite. Therefore, we can have no other infinities before this one Infinite. This one Infinite is the primordial Transcendent Consciousness, the groundless Ground of Being, and the beginningless

Beginning of Existence, to which many a designation has been given, of which "God" is but one. Unaware or forgetful of this truth, we delude ourselves into elevating our relative and finite ego to the status of a god and to place it before God the Infinite. This is to be inauthentic and to be out of integrity. Therefore, we have to bear the consequence of this nescience, of being inauthentic and out of integrity, which is human suffering in its myriad manifestations.

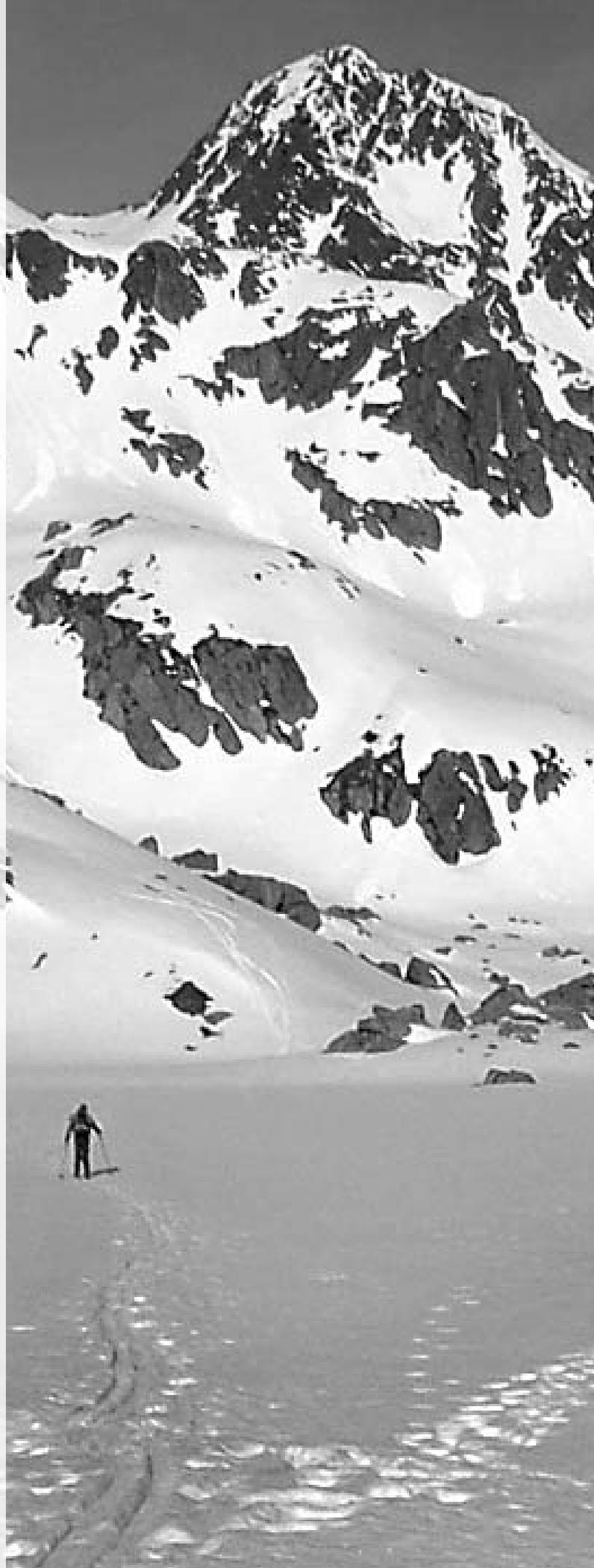
The human ego is an example of what Alfred North Whitehead calls "misplaced concreteness" and what Franklin Merrell-Wolff calls "false predication." The egological self is the object of consciousness that is mistakenly treated as the conscious subject. It is the false "I" in the forgetfulness of the authentic "I." As an object of consciousness, it is transitory and impermanent, existing only as the objectified or predicated self in the sentence structure "I am X (I am smart, I am beautiful, I am rich, etc.)" inside the symbolic space of language. The ego, in this sense, has no substance, no concreteness, and no permanent existence, and yet it is treated as though it has. Our authentic self-Self is not our ego but the cosmic locus of evolution and individuation of the Infinite. The first Commandment teaches that we cannot in reality place our ego ontologically prior to our authentic self-Self and that any egological attempt to have it otherwise is futile and foolish. This futile and foolish effort to have it otherwise is the fundamental cause of human suffering.

Therefore, the attainment of true integrity is conterminous with the attainment of true self-knowledge, which is the knowledge through identity of the Self-self. Once we attain this knowledge, our relative, subject-object mode of consciousness begins to function within its own domain without the egological entrapment of self-enclosure, misplaced concreteness, and false predication. Our self arises as the Authentic Self and our being evolves inside the higher order of being that is integrity. As authentic self-knowledge begins to unfold, our principles, thoughts, commitments, and actions rise up to be in accord with who we truly are. We then become those rare individuals who are able to sustain their commitment to the end, because our commitment is now an authentic expression of our Authentic Self and is based on authentic Self-knowledge.

Therefore, know thyself and to thine own self be true.

Integrity and the Challenge of Change

A distinct mark of the presence of integrity is the absence of suffering. When we are in integrity, when



we are true to our Self-self, suffering essentially disappears. The first Noble Truth of the Buddha's initial teaching is known to be that "life is suffering." This means that human beings are disposed to be out of integrity. The original Pali term, of which "suffering" is the most common English translation, is *dukkha*, which came from a root word meaning "too narrow to breathe." Therefore, *dukkha* is suffering in the sense of suffocation. It is the state of self-enclosure and existential suffocation. It is the state of the Infinite delusionally imprisoned in the finite that manifests as human suffering.

That *dukkha* is a state of being out of integrity becomes clear when we contrast *dukkha* with another key Buddhist concept in Sanskrit—*sunya* (adjective) or *sunyata* (noun). *Sunyata*, whose root word means "to swell," though it is traditionally translated as emptiness or void, phenomenologically or experientially expresses utter openness. It is the dynamic openness that ceaselessly opens. *Sunyata* is the substantial reality of the Infinite, which appears "empty" or "void" from the perspective of the finite. In itself, it is Fullness. And it is Freedom or Creativity as the ceaseless opening. This dynamic openness is Being or Self that transcendentally and immanently underlies our being or self.

Therefore, being in integrity, being true to our Self, means to be this openness which ceaselessly opens. Thus, *dukkha* is the suppressive countermovement against the nature of our being which is *sunya*.

When we are in integrity, when we are being true to our Self-self, we are an open system, without self-enclosure, without self-delimiting, and without self-suffocation. This is to emancipate our self from suffering. It is to return to the heart of Freedom that we truly are. When we are thus in integrity with our Self-self, we enter the evolutionary stream of our own creating. We experience our self-Self as the evolutionary thrust for self-optimization—for self-realization through self-transcendence. Evolution is a non-linear, dynamic, and open-ended process of learning, and *satori* is seen only as a step in our conscious participation in the unending process of evolution.

When I was studying in a Japanese Zen Buddhist seminary in my early twenties, I observed many people coming to meditate in order to release themselves from their suffering and attain a measure of *satori*. After some years of observation, however, I

realized that suffering is very often the very last thing that people ever give up. Some years later, while I was studying in India, I read P.D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*, in which his remarkable teacher George Gurdjieff shares exactly the same observation. Gurdjieff states: "A man will renounce any pleasure you like but he will not give up his suffering. Man is made in such a way that he is never so much attached to anything as he is to his suffering."

Suffering persists in the world essentially because human beings are addicted to suffering. We tell ourselves and one another that we want to be free from suffering or that we want to eradicate suffering from the world. This is patently untrue for the great majority of humanity, because the self as which people live is the ego, which cannot exist in the absence of suffering. The ego cannot exist in the absence of suffering because the ego by nature requires suffering for its existence. The ego requires suffering for its existence because its existence is

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based fundamentally on doing the impossible, against which the Ten Commandments sternly expostulate. *Thou shalt have no other gods before me*, for thou canst have no other gods before me. Yet, the ego exists, or rather subsists, in open defiance of this and

the other expostulations in the Commandments.

That which is impossible in reality can only be done in unreality. The ego subsists by making possible in unreality that which is impossible in reality. The ego subsists by conjuring a world of unreality through false predications, which then becomes its own "reality." In unreality, it self-encloses and self-delimits the true self—the dynamic openness that ceaselessly opens. The ego substantiates the insubstantial, absolutizes the relative, subjectivizes the objective, and makes permanent that which is impermanent. This is what is termed the making of a graven image, which is impossible in reality because the Infinite that is formless cannot be made into an image, except for the image of an ego graven on the monolith of unreality. This is what suffering is: to suffer the consequence of doing in unreality that which is impossible in reality by superimposing unreality over reality by way of enclosing the openness and delimiting the illimitable.

When we are out of integrity, suffering is inevitable. When we exist in the egological mode of being, suffering is inevitable. No amount of worldly success or

pleasure is amusing enough to make us forget the deep pain of our suffering. We must stop lying to ourselves and others that we want to be free from suffering or that we want to eradicate suffering from the world, because the truth is contrary: we are attached to our egological existence and hence willing to live with our suffering. Between the existential package deals of ego and suffering and of no ego and joy, a vast majority of humanity would choose the former. The world we see around us, and the life most of us live, unequivocally prove this.

Nonetheless, if we are so committed, we can indeed emancipate ourselves from suffering, even as our torturous nightmare at once disappears as soon as we awaken from our nightly slumber. The moment of awakening from our spiritual slumber is the moment of awakening to integrity. The question is: Are we ready and willing to give up our suffering, all of our suffering, including our favorite, long-cherished suffering that gives us the sense of being “me?” If we are to embark upon a journey of transforming the planet but are not willing to give up our own suffering, then we are not qualified for the task. We are still addicted to suffering and thus we are out of integrity with our original Self and our professed commitment.

For example, intelligent and competent people dedicate many years of their lives to earning advanced degrees. In contrast, virtually anyone can become a peace activist without earning the requisite qualification. We must ask: Are you a peaceful person yourself? Are you in integrity with your professed commitment to peace? Have you earned the right and privilege to be a peace activist by first attaining a high measure of inner peace?

There is no peace where there is suffering. Peace is a consequential value that arises when integrity is present and thus suffering is absent. In order to bring about peace in the world, we must first attain inner peace. We must first sacrifice suffering and incarnate integrity.

There can be no authentic transformation of the world without an effort at self-transformation on the part of those who are engaged in the act of transformation. If we are committed to the transformation of the world, we must be open and ready to be transformed in the process of transforming the world. Therefore, the challenge of change is, first and foremost, the challenge of self-transformation, of inner revolution and evolution. The questions we must ask ourselves are: Are you willing to give up suffering

and rise up to integrity? Are you ready to transform your self to change the world?

To live a life of integrity is not easy, yet a life of integrity includes a constant elevating current of joy. To live a life of mediocrity is not difficult, though a life of mediocrity includes a constant lowering current of suffering. To live a life of integrity and joy requires a great deal of wisdom, while to live a life of mediocrity and suffering requires little or no wisdom. For this reason, the path of integrity is the road least traveled, while the path of mediocrity is the road most traveled.

On the road of integrity, you will find yourself often alone, but never lonely. On the road of mediocrity, you will find yourself never alone, but often lonely. The world, more than ever, awaits you who choose to travel the road least traveled, ready to travel alone but always with arms open in joy. In integrity a new evolution begins.

Therefore, know thyself and to thine own self be true. ▼

Book references available upon request.