

From the Kitchen

17 December 2015



We are all different, unless you are the old bearded man in the crowd in *Life of Brian* who insisted he was the only one who was *not* an individual. None of us is identical to any other person – get used to it.

The problem we face is the result of chimeras: we are, it seems, wired to grouping people and then treating all members of a particular group as identical and to believing them to be fundamentally different from members of every other group, including our group. And then we start to fear the other and that fear leads to unhelpful, even destructive, behaviour. Next, we notice that some members of *our* group are not the same as us and they have to be re-grouped. Take that to its logical conclusion and each of us will belong to a group of one. Funny that!

Then there are the enlightened among us. You know the ones (you probably are one): they refuse to see the differences, be they gender, sexuality, skin colour, religion, ethnicity, disability. But what does that enlightened blindness do to those people? We do violence to them. We smudge their uniqueness – blur the edges of their identity, make them into something they are not. In doing this, we think we are being brave, when, in fact, we are displaying cowardice. It takes courage to see difference and accept it, embrace it and then celebrate it.

You will know when you have truly embraced difference in others when you don't tell your child that it is rude to ask someone they meet, "Why have you only got one leg?" In chastising the child, you are teaching her either to not notice difference or to notice it and then ignore it. Caucasian children in kindergarten will not usually remark on another child's ebony skin. However, in drawing themselves and their friends, the darker-skinned child will be depicted as such in the drawing. Awareness of difference and acceptance. Making something remarkable of difference has not yet been learned at that age. It is the same as the child drawing or painting their house and neighbouring houses – different shapes and colours, unremarked. The difference doesn't mean anything to the child, yet.

Courage is also required for us to embrace the apparent disparities within us. We can be uncomfortable with anything we see in ourselves that does not fit our self-definition – does not fit how we want others to see us.

Men can be frightened by their inner feminine; women of their inner male; older people of their inner child; pacifists of their anger; bigots of their suppressed compassion. In our religion (whichever religion that may be) we can feel threatened by those who worship *our* god in a different way, or, heaven forefend, believe in a different god or goddess, or none at all.

Most originating scriptures can be read as embracing and promoting acceptance of difference and they can be read in a way that confirms the reader's wish to make the difference a 'bad' thing. Apart from recipes for living a healthy (physical) life in the context

of the time the respective scriptures were written, the moral and spiritual messages are usually simple and, on the whole, are remarkably similar across scriptures.

Every way of being human is an expression of possibility. If we were all identical, possibility would not exist. That there are more than seven billion ways of being human should excite you, should fill you with joy, should have you shouting about your uniqueness. If you don't celebrate the other billions of unique expressions of humanity, this is borne out of fear.

The following may sound at odds with what I was saying about uniqueness. I believe that there is an underlying cause of the fear I mentioned; a fundamental reason we all act, or fail to act, more or less frequently, in many situations. It is our disconnectedness. It is our failure to understand and deeply feel our oneness with *all* of life on this planet and with the planet itself – *all* of it, from the centre of its core to beyond its atmosphere. We are not *part* of nature; we are inextricably in its weft and warp. We cannot be teased out of it, except in our imaginations and it is those imaginations that get us into trouble. They may also get us out of that trouble if exercised wisely.

We are each one and we are each many. We need to expand our imaginations to encompass that. We need to simultaneously live the one-ness and the unique individuality and recognise that every other human being can do the same. It is only from seeing oneself as a unique expression of all that is, that one can allow every other unique expression the room to be and to explore what that means.

This is a spiritual perspective and has nothing to do with any human-devised religion, although it is likely that every one of them had something akin to this in its founding wisdom.

Right now, each of you has two visual perspectives on the world (if you are sighted) and your brains can meld those into something you can work with – a consensus reached from the different sensory inputs. That melding is possible on larger and larger scales. Consensus in any group does not mean ignoring the differences; it is an expression of the willingness to work at something despite those differences. The consensus itself – the solution embodied in it – comes out of an acknowledgement of those very differences. While consensus on a global scale may need more effort than on a local level, it is only that: a matter of scale.

Because less effort is needed the smaller the group in which consensus is sought, the least effort exists in a group of one – you. It starts with you, not the other person. It starts with you asking, over and over, “What am I afraid of? What or who do I fear, and why? What can I do to overcome or allay that fear?” That takes courage. It is worth the effort. When it comes down to it, the survival of the entire world, and everything on and in it, depends on you and your courage. You *are* different, and so is every other person on the earth.

The healing of you and all of what you are a part of, starts from stillness. Inner fragmentation, which is a reflection of and feeds outer fragmentation, tends to disappear in the stillness, as it is also the child of the chatter in our minds and the currents in our emotions. In stillness we can re-member: gather the pieces and reassemble them – the task Isis had in bringing Osiris back; recomposing her dis-membered husband.

Healing is ‘making whole’. In the stillness, the healing takes place without your intervention. When your mind is not aware of fragmentation and your various emotions are not in conflict, there is wholeness and inner peace. That inner peace can be brought into the everyday, workaday world, along with the wholeness.

You can *be* cause, instead of being result. You can be a person whom others recognise as ‘being at peace’. They will want what you ‘have’, except you don't have *it* because you gave *it* up.

One fear that will come up is that you will be so different from all the people around you that you will be unable to connect with them. This is an understandable fear. To continue in the face of this fear will take courage for you to live your life as the unique expression of your at-one-ness.

To paraphrase Ghandi: to change how everyone around you lives, you need to *be* the change you want to see. However, the change is not a shift in the sense of stepping onto a different spot on the ground. It is a letting go followed by a letting go, followed by a letting go... and bringing the result of that back into your lived life, your day-to-day experience.

To misquote a wise fictional character – Oh, Be One, Kenobi – May the stillness be with you.

This is an edited version of a talk I gave to the Shifting Paradigms conference – “Changing the World One Step at a Time” – at Deakin University, Burwood, on 12 December 2015. The entire conference will be posted online in early 2016 at <http://www.thenewparadigm.tv/>