

Quenching the Fire Within

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*There in the lucky dark,
None to observe me, darkness far and wide.
No sign for me to mark –
No other light, no guide --
Except for my heart, the fire, the fire inside.*

St. John of the Cross

What do you want?

What do you really want?

There is a fire that burns inside each of us – a fire that can't be quenched with knowledge (of the intellectual sort), that can only be satisfied by resolving deep within our being the Big Question: Who/ What am I? What is Real/ True? Why am I here?

“Life is suffering” is one translation of the first of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths. We are all suffering. We all want things we don't have and we all have things we don't want. This is the cause of our suffering.

So, if this is the simple truth, why can't we simply end our suffering by fully concurring with our lives – having what we have and wanting nothing more or less?

Believe it or not, the answer to this question is that we have lost touch with what we really want, and have substituted a whole lot of other things for what we most deeply yearn. We go around thinking that if only we had enough money, sex, power, drugs and alcohol, knowledge, etc., we would finally be happy. But no amount of any of these things will satisfy us because this is not what we really want. (By the time you have gotten around to reading this book, you have probably figured this out for yourself.) The more of these things we get, the more we want. And we can never be fully satisfied – can never find the peace and fulfillment we are longing for.

One reason none of these things bring us happiness is that all of these longings are outward/ future focused. They are all predicated on attaining something that we don't



already have. And happiness can only HAPPEN now, in this very moment. One cannot be happy in the future! And as long as we are focused on achieving something greater in the future which will finally satisfy our longing, we can never be happy.

But the main reason none of these things bring us peace and happiness is that they're not what we really hunger for. What we really long for is our True Selves – our wholeness, in and of ourselves, and our connectedness, with others and the Universe/God. And these things we already have; we don't have to go searching for them outside ourselves. The problem is that we don't know – that is, we have forgotten – that we already have these treasures, that we already are whole and complete and connected to all life.

So, how then do we remember/ wake up to the Truth of ourselves? The journey begins with the acknowledgement of the suffering/ dissatisfaction of your life. What is not working in your life? What do you want that you don't have? Is it a love relationship, your health, enough money to feel secure, peace of mind, a feeling of aliveness/ joy, a feeling of wholeness/ connectedness? And what do you have that you don't want?

Can you feel that sense of dissatisfaction right where it lives within your body/ mind? Where in your body do you experience the discomfort/ ache/ blockage?

What does it feel like?

And how do you relate to this uncomfortable sensation? Do you hate it/ ignore it/ push it away/ fight it? Or do you embrace it?

There's a saying that I often use, "The only way out is through." Whatever you are looking for in life, whatever the source of your dissatisfaction and suffering, paradoxically is to be found right in the center of the very thing you are avoiding within yourself.

So I'd like to invite you to end the fight within and against yourself and begin the journey homeward – the yellow brick road back home to your True Nature – by allowing yourself to begin to move towards, instead of away from, this aching/ yearning that you have just come into contact with in yourself. In truth, the journey back to your True Self is accomplished by making direct contact with this inner longing– this fire within – and then simply (but not necessarily easily) surrendering/ letting go – with awareness – into the yearning itself.

The journey both requires the personal qualities of patience, perseverance, determination, courage, self-forgiveness and compassion, discriminating wisdom, willingness, vulnerability, intuition, power and strength, and it also develops these qualities in the process of undertaking the journey, itself.

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So what is this place inside you really like? Where, exactly, is it alive in your body? How deep inside you? How large is it? What is its shape? Color? Surface texture?

Can you get close enough to it with your consciousness/ awareness/ attention to feel the kind of energy that is coming out of it? (Kind of like when you walk past a hot stove you feel the heat coming off of it.) What is coming out of this place inside you that you have spent most of your life avoiding?

Can you get close enough to this thing inside yourself to actually “touch” the surface of it with your awareness? What is it like? How does it feel?

Can you now find a way to enter into the surface layer of this thing, to get inside it, to become one with it, to experience what this surface layer that splits you in two is like from the inside, to get to know exactly what it is made of – what, indeed, it actually is? Take your time with this. You want to get to fully experience every step of this most incredible journey so that you will begin to see exactly how you work/ who you really are – beyond all your ideas/ beliefs/ images of who/ what you are – to see clearly and directly this human mind in all its machinations and in all its glory.

Pause here for a minute or two. Feel what this surface layer is like – what it’s made of. Get to know it well so that you can enter into it at will and not have to avoid it in the future.

And when you’re ready, see if you can let go one more level down into this yearning so that you are still in touch with the surface layer, but now from inside the yearning space rather than from outside it. What is it like to be inside it for the first time? How does it feel? What do you sense in this space? Rest here for a few minutes and let yourself be. Let whatever wants to come into your consciousness to arise there – any thoughts, feelings, images, memories, sensations, etc.

And when you’re ready, let yourself let go of your grip on the surface layer and let yourself be drawn inwards/ downwards/ towards the center/ bottom/ other end of this yearning space – much like a magnet is drawing you towards something. Let yourself go – slowly and with great awareness, allowing whatever wants to be revealed to you to come into consciousness. Let yourself go until you hit some kind of a barrier and can’t go any further. And then just hang out there, right where you are – “lean into it” as Pema Chodron puts it in her wonderful book, [When Things Fall Apart](#), until you can enter into the surface layer of this next barrier that keeps you separate from what’s deepest inside yourself.

Many people are afraid to make this journey because they believe that what is deepest inside themselves is bad – some “original sin” – and they don’t want their belief to be confirmed. (I distinguish between “belief” and “faith” in that faith is based on direct, personal experience, while belief is merely a thought. For a number of years after my

son was born, I lived in fear that he was going to die in childhood. I mentioned this to someone one time and she asked me, “Do you Know he’s going to die, or are you just afraid he is?” I looked inside myself and saw that I was only afraid, that I didn’t really know. That brought my fear to an abrupt end!) How could one live with oneself if one knew that their True nature was really awful. So they don’t ever look deeply enough to uncover the Truth of Who/ What they really are, which is absolutely the antithesis of awful (but it is awe full!). An ex-aunt-in-law used to say, “Don’t look too deep!” I guess that says it the way it is for most people in this culture.

Keep letting go, through layer after layer, until you get all the way to the center/ bottom/ other end of the yearning place, or until you have gone as far as you possible can for now. Rest here for a while. Let yourself remember what you went through to get here, so that you can find your way back here whenever you want to. And from this place, look back at where you began this journey – at the surface of your funnel – and see how you created the suffering for yourself, exactly how you moved out this place of relative (or absolute, as the case may be) wholeness/ connectedness/ peace/ fulfillment, forgot your deepest Truth, and became lost in fear, confusion, and self-(and other) delusion. And let yourself know that you can always return to this place whenever you are willing to take however long it takes to come back again.

Now, if the above process didn’t work for you, there is yet another way to work with this longing inside you: instead of letting go into it, let it expand inside your body until you are completely filled with it. Do this by making contact with the yearning where it is alive within your body and then allowing it to expand beyond it’s current boundaries – one millimeter at-a-time – until it’s energy fills every cell of, every space within your body/ mind. Do this at your own pace, but don’t stop anywhere until you are completely filled. At that moment, you will have found the very thing you have been looking for/ yearning for your whole life. It really is that simple!

Because the fire within is created by separating oneself from what is deepest within oneself, it can only be extinguished/ resolved by taking the journey all the way to the center of the fire, where the peace we all long for exists – exactly like the calm in the center of a hurricane.

Albert Einstein said, “Discipline is remembering what you really want.” So – **WHAT DO YOU REALLY WANT?**