

Coming into the Edge

By Mel Schwartz

I was in the middle of a challenging stretch in a yoga class recently, when the instructor encouraged us to come into the edge. Move beyond the boundary of our comfort zone, was how I interpreted her coaxing. She was suggesting that moving to the edge of what our muscle memory was comfortable with, would propel us into physical if not spiritual growth. Coming to the edge in yoga provides the body with a new or forgotten experience. As we age our bodies tend to mold into habit and conformity which leads to a constriction of our physical being. Clearly, stretching into some new flexibility seemed wise. I reflected that this was also precisely what we need with our thinking.

As true as this rigidity may be for us physically, it is equally problematic for our thoughts and emotions. Our thoughts tend to replicate themselves into a never ending cascade of similarity as they evoke more and more of the same emotional reactions. As our thoughts become more habituated they create a literal groove in our thinking, which after a time may become very difficult to escape. The deeper the groove the greater the effort required to break into new territory. This is why we struggle with change. If we continue to become enslaved by old thought, change remains elusive. Choosing not to carry the encumbrance of tired, old thought is the key to self-actualized change.

A number of years ago Hurricane Floyd caused major road damage in the town I lived and my ordinary route home from my office was detoured. Yet, time and time again I came face to face with the same roadblock. I wondered what it would require for me to come out of my trance and not turn down the same street that ended in a roadblock. I was literally in a zone. I needed to awaken from the slumber and become mindful. I reflected that this is exactly what occurs with thought. It gets into a groove, much the way my driving habits did. In order to achieve this breakthrough it's necessary to invite in the disquiet of new thinking and new experience. If we stay in our comfort zone, we're stuck in the groove.

Freedom from the known

Coming into new territory often induces what people refer to as fear of the unknown. I'd think it more apt to call it freedom from the known. After all, it's the comfort of the known, which has lulled us into sleep walking for so much of our lives. What we know is truly only the continual self-referencing of our memory. If our thoughts self-replicate they will create a replay of these memories and also create new experiences that conform to the old memories. In other words, our thoughts and expectations create the conforming experiences, which then serve to further cement our beliefs.

The fear that arises about the unknown or uncertainty is exactly where we need to shift our perspective. Rather than looking at the ensuing anxiety as a problem, we need to embrace it. So often I hear people protest about not feeling comfortable with change, no matter how badly they may proclaim that they want it. The discomfort that you feel when you approach the edge must serve as your ally. Rather than resisting or avoiding the fear, invite it in. The problem isn't with the fear, it's with the relationship we choose to have with fear. It's really a guidepost that you're

on the right path and about to break into new territory. When you do so, new thinking emerges and you create opportunities for yourself to actualize and emerge more fully. The distance between your current reality and the vision that you may wish to achieve is navigated by embracing the discomfort and coming into the edge. It's therein that your emergence is to be found.

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