

# Keeping things in Perspective

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by Nicholas de Castella

It is often said that it is not what happens to us that determines whether we are sad or happy, but our attitude to what happens. Our experiences are determined by what we focus on and our attitude to what we see. If we focus all the time on the things that are not how we want them to be then we will feel miserable. And: 'What ever we focus on expands'.

We can direct our attention consciously and cultivate positive ways of interpreting what we perceive to have more positive experiences. For instance if we look at our problems with a negative mind then they will be hard to endure. Alternatively, when we look at our problems as challenges - that are calling us to develop new skills and open our hearts, then we will handle them much better. Either way the problems are the same!

When you know the alternatives - then you have a choice!

A very useful way of developing positive attitudes is by maintaining the broadest perspective and putting things in their rightful place. Last Saturday was a New Moon (no Moon). The night was clear and I could see millions of stars spread across the sky - boy did that put my little troubles in perspective.

Similarly we can assess our attitudes in respect to the big picture to assist us to hold the highest (and most helpful) perspective.

Remember we can only consciously hold one thing in our mind and heart at any time. If we are holding a positive attitude then it excludes negative.

There are four states of consciousness we hold

1. Survival - Rat race consciousness - trying to get ahead and be comfortable
2. Cause and effect consciousness - What we sow, we reap.
3. Liberation - the Peace, Love, Happiness and Contentment Lies within.
4. Enlightenment - Giving back and being a being of service

1. Survival - Rat race consciousness - trying to get ahead and be comfortable

The first stage is where most of us are at, most of the time. We just try to get by as best we can. We try to organise our lives so that things go smoothly, and when they don't we get frustrated and anxious. As this is where most of our attention is, when things are not going so well it can seem that EVERYTHING is not going well.

Part of this stage is the myth that if I could just get everything how I want it to be - all the balls lined up in a row - then everything would be just fine - I'd be happy. Unfortunately that rarely is the case that we have everything the way we want it, and when we do it aint gonna last for long. It seems problems are part of our human life - because it is through mastering them that we grow.

Holding on and pushing away causes suffering

When we are constantly trying to experience happiness we tend to fall into the trap of trying to hold onto the happiness we have and resist anything that threatens what we have - both of which bind us in a state of fear and discomfort.

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### Becoming preoccupied with ourselves creates misery.

In this first stage we are the centre of the universe and it is easy to become pre-occupied with ourselves. When we are preoccupied with ourselves we consider 'my problems' as bigger than everyone else's: 'my needs' as more important and 'my opinions' as more right and important.

We often keep this lie alive by telling ourselves that no one understands.

In the first stage we want to be constantly happy by trying to make the world fit with our expectations.

### 2. Cause and effect consciousness - What we sow, we reap.

The second level of consciousness involves the idea that how we think and act affects our future. A longer term perspective is involved here. We see that the future is affected by the decisions we make today and that the point of power is in the choices we make each moment. We are willing to endure short term discomfort for long term gain.

As an athlete - I learnt to endure short term discomfort for long term goals. Now, as a father, there are many times when I have to take a longer term perspective on situations for the healthy development of my children's self confidence and self esteem - Like this morning when Alexander dropped 2 eggs and then another one shortly after! I take a deep breath and say: 'never mind, accidents happen'.

We get to see that the way we treat others is how we expect others (and the world) to treat us. If we are cruel and mean we will expect others to be cruel and mean to us. If we are kind and forgiving to others we will find it easier to be kind and forgiving to ourselves. (whether they are or not we will tend to interpret their behavior according to our expectations as a 'projection' of our state of mind onto them.

In the second stage of consciousness we start to purposefully sow seeds that will return positive experiences to us in the future. Generally speaking kindness, generosity and gratitude come returned with goodness and happiness. Holding on to resentment, anger, bitterness, jealousy, hurt and selfishness return to us negative experiences. This is why it is so important to complete past hurts, because it allows us to open our hearts, let the past go and sow more positive seeds.

Watching what turns up in my reality and asking what is the state of my heart and mind can be quite illuminating around witnessing the connection between what we are putting out and what we are getting back

### 3. Liberation - the Peace, Love, Happiness and Contentment Lies within.

The third stage of our growth involves seeking happiness, not from everyday things outside us, in the world, but from within. We live in a consumer culture, based on the idea that happiness comes from the acquisition of 'things' to make us happy. We all know that nothing outside of us is going to give us lasting happiness, but that doesn't stop us hoping that our next relationship, weight loss, sexual experience, new CD/DVD, pay rise or recognition is finally going to make us feel fulfilled.

Here we are aware that if our ultimate aim is LIBERATION then we need to turn our attention inside and practice connecting with the peace, love, happiness and contentment that is accessible through our heart. This is what we do in our Heart Centring Meditations and it also happens spontaneously as we practice heart opening exercises such as Breathworks.

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An important distinction here is the difference between joy (from getting what we want) and true happiness (from connecting inside with the wellspring of happiness that is already within).

#### 4. Enlightenment - Giving back and being a being of service

Enlightenment is the full and direct realisation of the truth of who we are. It arises in the feeling connection of our deepest truth, our essential nature. Many people describe the doorway to such experiences as the direct experience of emptiness. Once we know that we are not our body, thoughts or emotions we become very wise because our decisions are not primarily based upon trying to protect or sustain something that does not ultimately exist. We realise nothingness and oneness together and surrender and open to ALL THAT IS. Compassion and happiness are natural outcomes of making such a profound connection to truth.

At this level of being we are naturally focused on assisting others to find the peace, love, happiness and contentment within. Our own heart opening is shared with others as an overflow from within.

When we are holding this vision in our awareness we make caring for others a priority. A classic example of this is when we do something for someone we love because we know that it will be of assistance to them, even though we may not feel particularly enthused about it ourselves.

Our heart is not just a pump. It is where we feel our sense of connection - to ourselves, each other and the universe. Through our heart connection we realise that we are all one. A consequence of this is that as we treat others, we are treating ourselves. In our heads we think we are separate, but in our hearts we can feel connections with people across space and time - alive and dead, physically near and in other countries. The more in touch we are with our heart, the more these connections become evident. Yesterday morning I had an impulse to ring our old tenants Mel and Michael to see how they were going. They moved out at Christmas time. At the time she was pregnant and we had not spoken since. I rang, but no-one answered. I left a message that we were thinking of them and hoping things were going well. Michael rang back later that afternoon to say that they were in hospital and Mel had given birth (caesarian) that morning to a baby girl. I am sure you have had times when you felt moved to do something that turned out to be just amazing timing. To me it points to the fact that we are all connected. We access that connection through our hearts.

#### What do we take from all this?

If most of our energy is being spent focusing on survival (the just get by level) then 'MY' problems seem quite big and even overwhelming. However if we spread our awareness across all four levels of consciousness then there is a much smaller emphasis given to 'my' problems and a fuller experience of love, gratitude and lightness that puts things in perspective. 'My' problems actually feel smaller.

#### Looking for Perspective - Look up!

Sometimes we can be put all our attention into what is happening right now and taking it all so seriously and personally and not take the broader perspective on things. This can cause us to feel quite distressed about things that are only temporarily present. Like for instance when we go through times of despair. More often than not despairing times are a temporary stage in a cycle of completion. If we allow our feelings to be fully present, they pass reasonably quickly. If we resist what is happening for fear that we may go

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down and never come up again - then this drags out the duration we are despairing and makes it much more difficult to journey through.

With very little family support available, Susan and I decided six years ago that our business may suffer a little because we wanted to be as fully present and enjoy our two boys as much possible before they go to school. Charles started school this year and Alexander goes next year. If we keep perspective, we can accept that things are a bit tight at the moment, but will ease up in due course.

It is often said that it is not what happens to us that determines whether we are sad or happy, but our attitude to what happens. Including the broader perspective of all four levels of consciousness can help us to feel more positive and inspired, particularly when we are going through challenging times.

What's your perspective?

I'd love to hear from you.

Much love to you

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