



MOVING TOWARD THE CENTER

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....the balancing and harmonizing of the two opposites is as important to the transformation process as the activation and raising of the energy per se.

Ralph Metzner
Opening To Inner Light

I remember living on the Eastern Shore, where each year I watched as the swans arrived early in the spring. Their wings created a rhythmic humming sound, as they skidded onto the water, looking much like an airplane hitting the runway. As spring proceeded, I periodically observed on the female sitting on her nest, until around Memorial Day when the eggs hatched and the excitement of watching the new signets grew. Later in the spring I was entertained by the male swan teaching the signets how to fly. The joy of watching these, graceful, peaceful creatures protecting and playing with their young was immeasurable.

Then the problems started. It seemed that the swans were ruining the natural habitat for crabs and the fishermen were complaining. Swans feed on seaweed, and were thus destroying the crabs' breeding grounds. And, crabs are incredibly valuable. It seems that swans are not indigenous to the Eastern Shore, but once they were introduced they multiplied at a rapid rate. In response to people's fears, the swans and/or their eggs were destroyed – until there was an outcry from animal lovers. When I first arrived on the Eastern Shore I counted over fifty swans in our cove at one time. When I left maybe five would show up.

The question that hangs in the air is this: are these beautiful creatures a good thing or a bad thing? Of course the answer is that they are both. Yet when emotional/intellectual sides were taken about the swans, a division occurred, and destruction followed – as it often does. Then, effective solutions honoring both sides are hard to come by. Our world culture is filled with divisiveness. People tend to be judgmental and think in opposites, i.e. right/wrong, good/bad.

This article is about moving toward the emotional/intellectual center, by experiencing ourselves and the world around us from a non-dual perspective. (Much of this article is taken from Chapter 8 in my out-of-print book, *The Art of Awakening Spirit*.)

First, I would like to differentiate between the words “opposites” and “polarities”. The word “*opposites*” means that something is either one way or the other but can't be both. *With opposites a quality is seen as absolute.* For example, heavy and light are the opposite qualities of weight, hot and cold are the opposite qualities of temperature. Other opposites examples include: right/wrong, good/bad, masculine/ feminine, young/old, beautiful/ugly, thinking/ feeling, life/death, movement/stillness, and conscious/ unconscious, and so on.

The word “*polarities*” refers to two different qualities which are continuous, that is they exist at either end of a continuum but also include all points in between. *With polarities any quality is seen as relative.* For example, the polarity of hot and cold defines both extremes of the same continuum. However, we also know there is an in-between – in this case a whole range of temperatures. Thus, the quality of hot and cold is relative.

When we mentally move toward the center between two poles, by having an awareness of both sides as well as all the various possibilities in between, we are unifying the polarities. When we recognize polarities as relative and thus containing a multitude of possibilities, (as opposed to seeing just the opposite ends of the spectrum), we are experiencing unity. *Unity then, is the ability to hold an awareness of both sides of a polarity, along with the whole range of possibilities on the continuum.*

All qualities contain opposites, i.e. the swans are good/bad, constructive/destructive, as well as safe/dangerous. When we think of these qualities as having to be either/or, and are thus stuck at either end of the spectrum, we tend to judge. When we think of qualities in ourselves, or the world around us, as filled with opposite forces, qualities and opinions, we experience everything as competitive and conflictual. (There is an old expression that fits here – when we point a finger at someone else we are also pointing three fingers back at ourselves.) We are not holding an awareness of the whole truth and thus not the total reality. Instead, when we think of these qualities in terms of polarities, with a whole range of possibilities in the middle, we will be less apt to judge, as well as more able to achieve a common understanding.

Using ourselves as an example, we can measure our personal level of activity in two extremes – lazy and ambitious. At different times we can embody both of these qualities – that is, sometimes we feel lazy and at other times ambitious. Or, if we define ourselves as creative or not creative, we are not thinking of the continuum between the poles – for no person is totally one or the other. If we were to see ourselves as stupid, unattractive, or non-courageous this would be negating the times we display brilliance, beauty or courage. To fully develop love for ourselves and in turn experience unity within, we must remember that only rarely does one side of a quality embody the whole truth.

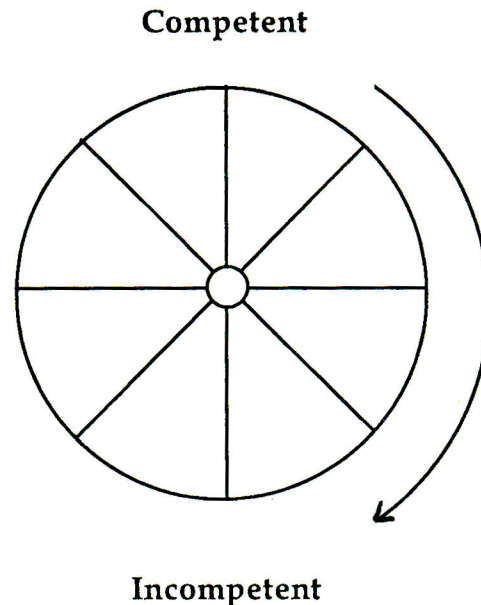
When we are not aware of the total reality, we are living in a state of denial. This false reality and denial is usually perceived by others. If we are angry and deny it, chances are others will feel our anger and experience our denial. If we are intelligent or ambitious and deny it, chances are others may be aware of our talents, but since we are not, we will not be able to take advantage of that trait. When we consistently acknowledge that our level of activity usually falls somewhere in the middle of the continuum, we will be unifying polarities. We will not be mentally or emotionally stuck at either extreme of the polarity. If we no longer see ourselves as existing on just one side of a polarity, but hold an awareness of both, both qualities will become unified in our hearts and minds.

On the surface unity seems like an easy mental/emotional function. And yet in reality, it is very difficult. This is partly because as children (particularly in this culture) we are raised to think in terms of opposites. Children are often labeled as good or bad, athletic or uncoordinated, popular or unpopular, smart or a slow learner, as well as shy or out-going. As adults we tend to continue that judgmental thinking, which we then project onto others. When we see only one aspect of a quality, within ourselves or others, we are being judgmental. Even seeing ourselves as totally fantastic is a form of judgment. If we hold onto our childhood perspective and define ourselves as we were defined as a child, i.e. unattractive, lazy or stupid we will feel shame and experience low self-esteem. On the other hand, if we flip to seeing ourselves as only embodying positive ends of the spectrum, such as courageous and brilliant, then we are in danger of becoming arrogant, narcissistic, or egotistical.

When we see ourselves and the world around us as filled with opposites and opposing forces, we feel internally cut off from parts of ourselves, and externally cut off from others. In turn we either judge ourselves or others (or both). When we judge, we are emotionally splitting ourselves from them, and then intimacy is difficult if not impossible to achieve. Divisions are created – both within ourselves and between ourselves and others. The result is a sense of

aloneness and separateness, which in turn creates shame, doubt, fear and longing. When we grasp and employ the concept of unity, we feel an enhanced sense of well-being, become more functional, and in turn are more able to sustain intimate relationships.

Thinking in terms of a continuum, not opposites, is difficult. To better understand it, it is helpful to picture a diagram in the form of a wheel.



Picture the extreme opposite qualities as being placed on one side of the wheel. Using the opposites of competent and incompetent, imagine that competent is on one side of the wheel and incompetent is on the other side. Depending on the feeling state of the moment we can picture ourselves sitting on one side of the rim or the other. (See diagram.)

First let's assume we mentally exist on the "competent" side of wheel – that is, on the top of the wheel. On this side of the wheel we feel totally competent. However, because we are human, we might make a mistake at work causing our boss to criticize us. When this happens, our emotional position moves and symbolically the wheel turns. Refer back to the diagram and see that if we are clinging to “competent” while time moves forward, we are in danger of being “rolled over” by the impact of the opposite side. When this happens we are forced to experience the opposite. If we stay stuck on the incompetent side of the polarity, we will lack self-esteem and when success again comes our way, we will have a hard time accepting, or trusting it. When we are able to unify these opposites within ourselves, we recognize that most of the time we are competent, and because we are human – and therefore by nature imperfect – we may also act in an incompetent manner. Symbolically, it is best to emotionally/mentally sit at the hub of the wheel – the centered spot – a position of balance and containment. *The center of the wheel is a symbolic position of unity. That is, it is from this perspective that we can mentally and emotionally acknowledge the existence of all aspects of a continuum. It is a place from which we can experience the non-dual.*

In my last article I referred to Susan Boyle’s great accomplishment by singing brilliantly

during the “Britain’s Got Talent” show. Her presence on stage initially caused eyes to role. Yet, when he sang the first notes, wild applause broke out. Praise was heaped on her and she became an immediate internet and international celebrity. Once she was out in the world, people again taunted and shamed her. The pressure of fame and being in the critical public’s eye, and the disappointment of coming in second in the contest, caused her to have (as reported in the news) panic attacks. After the show she was hospitalized, with “mental exhaustion”. Emotional swings from one end of a polarity to another can cause a breakdown. (Have you ever noticed how when someone does something well, there are always critics ready to tear down the success? If it is believed that these critics are speaking the one and only “truth”, an internal, emotional struggle will ensue.)

When we unify polarities and remember that all aspects of a quality exist on the continuum, incidents driven by our external environment will not be as apt to emotionally and spiritually throw us. For example, external reactions to our performance will not carry so much weight and we will be able to hear both praise and criticism, without over reacting. Looking at the diagram, the ability to keep in mind both sides of a polarity puts us emotionally and spiritually in the symbolic center of the wheel. From the center of the wheel, we can hold an awareness of all points on the continuum.

The intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually *safe* place to be is in the center of the wheel, because it embraces all aspect of reality. The hub is a place of stability and symbolizes the middle between any two sides of a polarity. It is from the center of the wheel that we can best view both sides simultaneously. From the center we can acknowledge the fearful and secure, the happy and sad, lazy and ambitious, the beautiful and the ugly. From the vantage point of the center of the wheel, both states of the same quality *just are*. They exist simultaneously. By acknowledging and accepting these opposites within ourselves we can just let them be. Judgment of ourselves and others ceases.

To illustrate how the inability to unify polarities results in both personal and interpersonal problems, I’ll use the example of a dysfunctional marriage, and the polarity of masculine/feminine. For this example, it is important to remember that emotionally healthy men and women are able to experience *both* the masculine and feminine qualities within themselves.

I am thinking of a marriage that was in trouble because each partner was only able to experience one side of the polarity of masculine/feminine. The husband, an attorney, was very “left brained”. He experienced his power through aggression, and his self-esteem through accomplishments. He saw himself as being entitled to whatever he wanted. He had little awareness of his feelings or his nurturing self, and only had a minor capacity for empathy or compassion. His wife was very “right-brained” and saw herself primarily as a caretaker, nurturer and sexual being. She experienced herself as dependent, ruled by the masculine and saw her unique abilities only as it related to her children and home. These tasks she handled brilliantly, however, she felt emotionally empty and longed for something more in her life. Yet, she felt hopeless about her ability to affect changes in herself or her marriage.

In the beginning of their relationship their opposite personalities were the source of attraction. He loved being taken care of, and she loved being needed and financially supported.

However as time passed, the attraction to their opposite natures became the source of their frustration and judgmentalness. Their criticism of each other's personalities increased and eventually their marriage was in crisis. These two undeveloped beings were like two half-circles coming together, trying to create a whole. Because that was impossible, they became like two opposite forces colliding. Finally they sought help, "for the sake of the children".

In therapy they both realized that neither of them had achieved unity within themselves. He had not developed his feminine side and thus was stuck on one side of the wheel. The woman saw that she had not developed her masculine side and was therefore stuck on the opposite side. Each judged the other for what they lacked. To make this marriage work they each needed to become more complete by incorporating both sides of the opposites within themselves – albeit in differing proportions. The man needed to understand and develop his feminine side while the woman needed to experience her masculine side. They both needed to move toward the center.

As I described earlier, when we alienate a part of ourselves, we judge ourselves, and in turn we judge others. This judging creates a division between us and the people around us, as it did in the marriage I just described. Each judged the other for what they themselves could not do or be. As they became aware of these problems, they began to make their marriage better. The wife became stronger, developed interests external to the home and was able to confront her husband. The husband worked on developing his softer, empathetic side and was more able to express some feelings, particularly those of love.

Carl Jung described this concept when he talked about the need to develop our "shadow sides". The "shadow side" is not negative, but those parts of ourselves which are neither seen, nor acknowledged. For this man and woman, their shadow sides were the masculine and feminine aspects of their true nature. The husband's shadow side was his right-brain – the feeling, compassionate, nurturing side. The wife's shadow side was her left-brain – the logical, concrete, thinking side.

When we unify polarities we are aware of our wholeness and our ability to achieve inner wisdom which truly reflects reality. Then, we will be able to make choices based on true inner awareness and knowledge. Experiencing unity does not mean we negate the fact that opposite sides of a polarity exist. But that we can achieve a simultaneous awareness of both sides. For example, while in the midst of an argument we can experience love and hate for someone at the same time. We can also, in the same moment, be aware of both our masculine and feminine sides. Simultaneously we can experience acceptance (and in fact, gratitude) that we have work to go to, while at the same time experience resistance.

A symbolic expression of the power embodied when combining opposites – in this case the masculine and feminine – occurred when the female horse Rachel Alexandra, ridden by the male jockey Calvin Borel won the Preakness. Symbolically, the act of combining masculine and feminine energy won the race. When we acknowledge and utilize all parts of ourselves, we hold the power to become winners.

When we can simultaneously see and experience both sides of a polarity we feel wise. Wisdom is achieved by developing our ability to detach from the moment-to-moment reality and

to allow ourselves to rise above any one feeling or situation and view our life with a broader perspective. On the other hand, if we exist in a constant struggle to eradicate one side of a polarity from our lives, we waste a tremendous amount of time as well as a significant amount of emotional and spiritual energy. We will be trying to “prove” that a quality either does or does not exist. If we feel we are lazy, as a defense we will spend useless hours trying to convince others, and perhaps ourselves, that we are not. If we are only aware of our fear, lack of courage, or our tendency to procrastinate, we will forever be afraid of being “found out” and go through life presenting a false half-self to the world.

Presenting a false self feels temporarily safe because it allows us to hide. However, we know that we can hide for only so long. When we exist in the state of opposites, the “proving” never stops. Remember, *it is impossible to totally eradicate one side of a polarity because, try as we might, both sides will always exist, even if in different proportions. If we attempt to ignore this fact, it will haunt us even more.*

Barbara was an example of someone who tried to hide a part of herself. She claimed to be totally content and never angry and always agreeable. To maintain this agreeable stance, she avoided all conflict. As her resentments or feelings of anger began to surface, she would leave the situation – emotionally, physically or both. The more she ignored her anger the larger it became. Eventually the anger inside her became so powerful that she "rebelled" and suddenly left her job and husband. After a period of being totally alone in the world, she was forced to face her denial. She entered into therapy and can now embrace her anger as a part of herself, and use energy from it effectively. Barbara is now beginning to acknowledge and accept all sides of herself as a valuable part of her humanness

In the most extreme cases when people exist on one side of a polarity, such as controller/controlled, there is always the possibility that conflict, destruction and war may be caused. For example, people in power embodying one extreme side of this polarity often become political zealots, war mongers, abusers of individuals or groups of people. Examples of this include some of the most destructive people in history such as the people responsible for the slaughter of the Native Americans, the treatment of the gay population, and mass murderers such as Charles Manson. One horrific example was described in Jean Shinoda Bolen's book *Crossing To Avalon*. She states that during the Inquisition more women were burned at the stake, due to prejudices, fears, and judgments than all of the females who were destroyed in the Holocaust during World War II. Even in our communities we know of children, who have been victimized by the family member in charge, and in turn become victimizers of their own children. People who feel insecure and as though they are the victim, will either allow themselves to be victimized by others, or will become victimizers as a defense.

When we ignore the continuum of a polarity and emotionally exist on either end of the opposite poles, there is always the chance that we will emotionally flip to the other side, as a defense. When we see the world as filled with opposites – such as controller, victimizer, abuser – there is always the chance that this stance will cause us to end up in an emotional, physical or spiritual battle. There is always the chance that someone will become the scapegoat or be subjugated.

I know this seems impossible, but if everyone could mentally and emotionally move to the center and exist on the symbolic hub of the wheel, acknowledging both sides of the polarities and all the possibilities in between, there would be no abusers, nor victimizers. No one would be controlled or the controller. There would be no need, for it would mean that all perspectives would be taken into account and choices would be based on jointly expressed spiritual/emotional values. If this could happen, battles over stem cell research, gay marriages, or abortion would be dealt with through constructive dialogue. What would hopefully emerge is a newfound wisdom embracing the best of both sides.

It serves us well to remember that unity does not negate diversity. Unity accepts, appreciates and welcomes diversity. Through diversity we experience fresh ideas and creativity. Embracing each other's differences allows creative solutions, new ideas, and fresh understandings – in general, wisdom. For example, there was a couple who continually fought about money. Joe needed immediate gratification and Liz was fearful of poverty. They saw their relationship to money as existing on two ends of the spectrum. They were so far apart in their perspectives, that they couldn't discuss the issue. Each expenditure became a fight. Finally they met with a financial planner and set up a system where they could each have a bit of both. They now divide all incoming money into four parts: joint savings, joint household expenses, his money, and her money. Acknowledging and respecting each others views allowed them to independently achieve some financial freedom, while also finding a solution that was best for their marriage in both the short and long term.

Diversity is enriching. Diversity is beautiful. It challenges us to grow and expand our thinking as well as enhance our ability to be compassionate. Unity acknowledges the diversity in all and yet accepts the concept that at the very core of our beings we are all the same. We are all humans with a mind, body, and personality. We all have a spirit and a soul. Francis Vaughan, author of *Inward Arc*, states:

“By perceiving the unity of opposites we may begin to envision a world in which all beings may recognize their oneness in Spirit and their capacity for love and compassion, while respecting and appreciating differences.”

When we recognize the unity in everything, while also appreciating each person's uniqueness, then our capacity for love and compassion will grow stronger. With this compassion and love, the world will become a more peaceful unified place.

Though some say this is impossible, we will *all* eventually move from the point of duality to one of unity – if only through our death. As author Gary Zukav states:

“We are destined to evolve beyond the nature of duality. Duality is that which is understood in time and space. As you evolve beyond that, and also when you leave your physical body and journey home to your nonphysical plane of reality, you will not exist in dualism, and that sense of wrathful, or sorrowful, or fearful self that you think of as present to you now will evaporate.”

We might as well begin to experience the joy and spirit in unity during this lifetime.

When we are able to do this, we will be on the road of personal transformation. In Bernardo Bertolucci's film *Little Buddha*, the young man who becomes the Buddha, or Enlightened One, is described as having been transformed by hearing a man say, "When you tighten the strings of an instrument too tightly, they break. When they are too loose, they will not play. However, when they are just right, you can play beautiful music." So it is with all forms of unity. When we spiritually exist in the middle, a transformation will occur, and we can hear all forms of "music."

When we exist in a state of unity a transformational process occurs, creating an alchemical change. Traditionally and scientifically an *alchemical process* occurs when two different elements are combined to create something new, something of greater value or significance – such as turning common metals into gold. Alchemy refers to a transformational process. In the psyche, in matters of the spirit, it is the transforming of the everyday, the mundane, and the human into the mystical, the spiritual -- into something greater than either individual part. In *The Wake of Jung*, author Molly Tuby states: “...the unifying of the opposites in a single entity means bringing the qualities of both conflicting poles into a unique "mixture" which becomes more than the simple sum of both.”

This alchemical process gives us access to wisdom and simply put, we feel complete and more powerful because this unification enhances the inner spirit. Tuby also states:

“This alchemical process creates a union within one's self, between ourselves and others and the Infinite Spirit. Through this unification we can achieve enlightenment. Through this alchemical process, we can achieve universal unity.”

This is a very exciting prospect. Alchemy is a protest against dualism. Alchemy asserts the unity of matter and the possibility of transmuting matter into spirit and spirit into matter.

We are entering (or have entered, depending on the reference) a new age – the Age of Aquarius, a time of transformation. During this transformative time, I hope we can move toward unity, both within ourselves and with the world around us. And, in doing so embrace the wisdom that unity embodies.

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