

What if it is all just a crazy dream?

Do you believe in Father Christmas? When I was in my early teens, my slightly crazy adoptive mother kept insisting to me that Father Christmas was real even though this really annoyed me. But now of course, I love it when little ones totally believe in make-believe characters such as Santa Claus. By the way, there is an incredibly uplifting video on You Tube of a father sitting with his very young daughter who is watching a video of Elmo saying 'Hi! I am very happy to see you!' Her face just lights up with joy when Elmo says 'Hi' to her. My face also lights up with joy every time I watch her being so happy and excited at this make-believe character talking directly to her.

So in this month of make believe and magic, I wonder whether we could all lighten up a little and approach everything we hear and see, particularly in the news, as though it is all just a crazy dream of no eternal consequence whatsoever. Now when I say this, I certainly do not mean to deny the threat of say climate change or the threat of another world war. I am simply trying to point to an ultimate truth that lies way beyond all the scary scenarios playing out in our world at the moment.

So many spiritual teachers have pointed out that what we experience as our day to day reality is basically a passing dream. The Buddhists, for example, talk about awakening from the illusion that we are all separate personality-selves living in a world of endless conflict and suffering. A Course in Miracles states that *'the bible says that a deep sleep fell upon Adam and nowhere is there any reference to his waking up. The world has not yet experienced any comprehensive reawakening or rebirth.'*

Basically, according to several spiritual traditions, our perception of a threatening world all around us is, from a much higher perspective, a passing nightmare with no real substance to it. Even our own personality-self is - in one sense - just a temporary dream figure stuck in the middle of endless nightmares of lack, heartbreak, insecurity, ill health, ageing and death.

Now when I first heard this core spiritual teaching, it did not make much sense to me. How could all the terrible suffering in this world possibly be just a bad dream? However, after over 30 years of spiritual practice, I can now see that

what we think of as reality is more like an ever-changing, magical display rather than any kind of solid reality. For example, if I think back to the early 1970s, virtually everyone I spent time with all those years ago have completely disappeared from my world. I can also now look back on my life and see that experiences which seemed unbearable at the time have faded away to nothing of any importance whatsoever.

I can also now see – at least some of the time- that other personalities who sometime annoy the heck out of me are not that real. How come? Well firstly, my perception of other people is totally subjective. This means that another person might view the individual whom I find really annoying as a wonderful companion. Secondly, I now believe that at our very core, we are all made of nothing but unconditional love and light. It is just that in some individuals this inner love/light is totally covered over by a thick, dark layer of anger, resentment or narcissism.

Thirdly, my perception of what is happening in the world is so different from other people's perceptions that we might as well be living on completely different planets. For example, I might feel heartbroken at the results of a particular election whilst others are clearly elated by exactly the same result. I might find a particular person incredibly irritating whilst someone else thinks they are quite delightful.

So this month, maybe you would like to lighten up whenever someone or something in your world begins to annoy you or to depress you. As soon as you notice you are becoming annoyed with someone for example, you could pause and say to yourself, 'My perception of this person does not reflect the absolute truth about them. I may find them arrogant and rude, but no doubt their mother loves them to bits' Or you could try this: 'This person may be acting in an unskilled way right now, but just like me, they long to avoid suffering and to find lasting happiness. On those grounds alone, I can take a deep breath and wish them well from the depths of my compassionate heart.

The other side of this kind of practice, is to keep turning our attention to all the wonderfully kind and helpful individuals – seen and unseen – who support us in so many ways in our everyday life. For example, I am always so grateful at this time of year for the wonderful staff at Sainsbury's Fallowfield who

somehow manage to stay so helpful and cheerful despite non-stop Christmas music bombarding them for weeks on end.

Now to conclude this December message, I would like to leave you with the gift of a really funny true story that does incidentally reflect one of the deepest of spiritual truths: we really cannot tell the difference between ultimate truth about life and egoic make-believe!

This Halloween, Gloria - being a true American - went all in and dressed up as a witch with a black pointed hat, a black cloak, and big spider-web earrings. Whilst she was in full black witch costume mode, a package came for next door and she popped around to their house to deliver it. Our lovely neighbour Anne opened her door and there was her adorable 2 year old grandson, Archer. He did look rather scared when he saw Gloria, but we did not think much more about it until about a week later. We were driving home in the car and saw Anne and Archer walking along the pavement. We stopped, opened the car window, and said 'Hello!' Anne then told us that Archer now thinks that Gloria and I are *real* witches who live next door to his Grandma!!

So, now that I am - allegedly - a witch, I would love to put a spell on you as you read the end of this December message:

Double, double, toil and trouble

This December, may joy bubble.

May you and yours be bathed in love

And may peace descend on you from heaven above.

(with apologies to William Shakespeare)

Peggy Foster
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