

Wobbling Without Falling Over

Recently, I have gone through quite a big wobble, as my mind became rather manic for quite some time after coming home from yet another intense retreat in Assisi. I kept watching my mind racing away, but whilst part of me was clearly stressed and out of sorts, another part of me was simply sitting back and watching the manic part of me run out of control. Then, after about two weeks of this, I went on a training weekend with Jason Chan, and at the end of it, I noticed that when I tuned into my mind, it was much calmer with far less crazy obsessive thoughts racing through it.

I seemed to have gone through quite a big wobble but who exactly was wobbling? Who was the 'me' that wobbled and who was the 'me' that just watched all that wobbling occurring? Thinking like this for too long or too hard does my head in! But I am still fascinated by a search for the deepest meaning of life and so I keep pondering on questions like this. Of course, I still do not have any definitive answers to the fundamental question of what life is really all about, but my last bout of wobbling did bring about one or two insights on how to cope with all the incredibly complex challenges of a life on Planet Earth which I would love to share with you this month.

The first insight I had was that if I fully accepted that my brain was racing rather manically for a while, there was nothing much to worry about. I could see that my racing mind was like a big, stormy wave on the top of the ocean, but I could still simply float in the ocean and just let the stormy waves wash over me without coming to any real harm. Well truth be told, I could not just 'float in the ocean' because I have always had quite a deep fear of drowning and would certainly never contemplate getting out of my depth in the sea at any point in my life. So I changed the analogy to my racing thoughts being like stormy dark clouds arising and disappearing in an infinite blue sky because this image happens to work much better for me than any image of being submerged in water.

So, whenever I sat to meditate during my 'wobbled' phase, I tuned into my breath and then observed thoughts racing through my mind, whilst simultaneously expanding my awareness into an infinite, calm sky. I can't say that I could sit still for very long during this episode of speediness, but even short periods of meditating with an expanded, calm awareness seemed to reassure me that fundamentally all was well, despite all the storm clouds on the surface of my mind.

The other practice I used throughout my rather long, sustained wobble was to keep bathing my personality-self in loving kindness and compassion. At times, I used the mantra 'I am love, I love you.' At other times, I connected to Jesus, because to me, he represents unconditional higher compassion and love at its most powerful. Bringing unconditional love and compassion to my agitated personality-self did not immediately stop her wobbling, but again, I did feel much more reassured that all was well and that all would be well in the future. This felt like a significant breakthrough for me, because 20 years ago, I was

hospitalised with mania, and ever since that time, I have had a fear in the back of my mind of going quite mad once again.

So there you have it! I suppose the main idea I want to share with you this month is that it is perfectly OK to lose the plot from time to time. Many of us who believe that we are on some kind of spiritual path, may like to think that the more we meditate and practise, the less likely we will be to get caught up in any kind of crazy obsessive thinking or any sort of dark emotions. For example, we want to believe that the more we meditate, the less likely we will be overwhelmed by fear, desire, anger, jealousy, grief or any other human emotion. But several incredibly wise spiritual teachers, including Jeff Foster (no relation) have stated categorically that this is not true. Jeff Foster is particularly good at reminding spiritual seekers that they need to accept all thoughts and feelings that arise and then disperse in their mind and body. We should not try to deny or suppress any thoughts or feelings that we may tend to label as 'non-spiritual', or we will simply go on suffering indefinitely. For example, he writes:

Taking your stance as the vast space in which everything happens, and knowing yourself as the capacity for this moment, notice all feelings – good and bad, positive and negative – are already deeply allowed into what you are. They have been appearing all throughout your life, which is all the proof you need. This total embrace of all waves of experience is the love you have always been seeking. (Jeff Foster, The Deepest Acceptance).

I find this approach to all of my many challenges in life so comforting. Yes, I feel afraid from time to time. Yes, I feel angry, upset, depressed, bored and generally fed-up now and then. But the more I embrace all these 'waves of experience', the more I find that I can return home much more quickly to a much deeper, vaster, love, peace and joy and just rest there, even in the midst of endless worldly - and personal - chaos and confusion.

Please do not think that I am claiming any special powers or spiritual prowess here. I am simply becoming very gradually more aware – after 3 decades of practising various types of mindfulness – that despite all my fearful thoughts to the contrary, Life Itself is always on my side and Love Itself is always surrounding me waiting on welcome. Yes, I still sometimes wobble big time, but I never totally collapse. I never quite fall all the way over and smash myself to bits, and even if that were to happen, I am now convinced that on some deep, mystical level, I would still be totally safe and perfectly whole.

I sincerely hope that November will prove to be a wonderful month in your life, but if perchance you should notice that you are wobbling at any point, please remember that however far you fall, Life Itself will always catch you and keep you perfectly safe - even in the midst of a truly fearful nightmare.

Waves of peace and joy flooding through us are so often followed by waves of chaos and sadness aren't they? Yet the ocean that represents our true, eternal self is still there - deep and mysterious, powerful, graceful and oh so beautiful!

Peggy Foster
November 2019