

THE POINT

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Uncovering blind spots

When I'm oblivious to my shortcomings, neither do I see my beauty and goodness, the part that God sees

FOUR DECADES ago, spiritual seeker Charles Hogg and a fellow Australian had a spiritual mentor at the Brahma Kumaris Center in London. The teacher tended to praise Hogg's friend more often and he started to get jealous. So he stood back and observed his thoughts and behavior as though watching a scene from a play, and one day he stopped getting affected by it.

At that light-bulb moment, Hogg realized that on his spiritual journey, the aim should be to reinforce the experience of the original beauty of the soul. Call it eliminating spiritual blind spots; it lifted the veil of denial and eradicated the virus of self-deception.

"I need to be an honest observer," Hogg says. "How well do I know who I am? How clearly do I know my strengths my weaknesses? How sure am I about my role? Do I have an objective or emotional picture of myself? Do I have illusions about myself? God has taught me the method to see the truth with clarity."

Four windows

Hogg, now national coordinator for Brahma Kumaris Australia, cites what he calls four windows, or states of awareness, of the self:

SHOP WINDOW. People can see who I am, and I am open to that.

FAÇADE. There are aspects of myself that everyone can see, but also one part that I want to hide. I have secrets.

SUBCONSCIOUS. The story of my past is sitting in my subconscious, constantly influencing my perceptions and my behavior.

BLIND SPOTS. There is a part of my personality that is totally unknown to me. I can't see but everyone else does—my preferences, dislikes, habits, prejudices. Eliminating these blind spots is possible through spiritual knowledge and meditation. Another effective method is getting honest feedback from people I trust.

The "blindness" manifests when I become vulnerable by being sensitive or defensive. I can also be unhappy or afraid, but unable to determine the root cause or how I contribute to that negative feeling.

Hogg explains, "Something in me sits just below the surface and I can't put a finger on it. But I can be razor-sharp when seeing what's wrong with others. This is a complete state of blindness and the ultimate form of ego: 'I'm fine; you're the problem.' I'm disconnected from any sense of self awareness."

The blind spot deepens when I habitually act like a victim, blaming others for my misery.

Religion and psychology

Religious conditioning may have contributed to this blind spot, Hogg notes. "Religions teach what we should be without acknowledging the dark side of the human soul. It's been suppressed, pushed down to the point that, sometimes, it's like we have two personalities. One is that which show the world—friendly, sweet—and the other is not fit to be seen by others, so it's kept inside. It could be a lack of confidence, or fears, passive anger, lust, guilt, shame."

Psychology may have developed the study of that dark side of the soul. However, the treatment it prescribes usually focuses on what's wrong as a means to lift the blindness.

Blind spots are manifested chronic behavioral and thought patterns that often surface in relationship dynamics.

Hogg explains: "I'm in the workplace and the same things emerge in my relationships, but I don't put two and two together. It has become a blind spot within myself. I have a perception of who I am that is different from others' perception, and God has a third percep-

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PROGRAMS

Inner Peace, Inner Power, June 29-July 1, 4pm fri to 3pm Sun

Cooking for Peace, July 8, 9am to 4pm Sunday

Inner Peace, Inner Power, July 20-22, 4pm fri to 3pm Sun

The Joy of Parenting, July 7, 2-5pm Sat

Camp for Joy Children's Program, July 21, 2-5pm Sat

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tion. For example, I may think that I have an inclusive nature, but others feel that I am dominating and controlling. Or I think I listen, but others feel ignored. There is this disconnect that is perhaps showing me my blind spots.”

Blind spots develop when I perform a wrong action many times, “If I lie, for instance, I will continue to lie,” Hogg says. “And after a while, I won’t even realize that I’m lying. When others point it out, I will get offended. Ego does not allow I, the soul, to see my shortcomings and lack of self-respect refuses to acknowledge my innate good-

ness. It’s the ego’s work to accept hurt and disrespect.

This, Hogg describes as double-blindness. “I’m not just blind to my weakness; I’m even more blind to my beauty and goodness, the part of me that God sees.”

Change happens when I allow others to give honest feedback and don’t get defensive. “Close friends or a spiritual family make a wonderful mirror,” adds Hogg. “And when, at last, I find the courage to see my blind spots, my weaknesses, I start to see more of my beauty as well.”

Eco Shanti Retreat: How to make peace with nature

By MARIDES GARDIOLA

EVA FELT compelled to do something. She had been attending regular programs at the Center for Spiritual Learning for quite some time and wanted to step up her experience of peace.

During the one-day “Eco Shanti Retreat” to celebrate Earth Day, she easily connected with like-minded participants who wished to restore peace (*shanti*) in their relationship with the natural world (*eco*). They had come from diverse backgrounds, but concern for the

environment brought them together in a discovery of the inextricable link between consciousness and nature.

The facilitator told them that Brahma Kumaris demonstrates—both on the ground and in policy discourse on climate change—disaster response and sustainable development. Through these platforms, this UN-accredited organization has been able to bring spiritual values to the awareness of environmental issues.

Promptly confirmed

The first “aha” moment came as the participants reflected on the qualities of an element of nature, like the sun, river or tree; the resonance between inner and outer ecology was promptly confirmed. A few questions were posed to dig deeper into the context through “Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream,” a multi-media learning process. Produced in tandem with Pachamama Alliance, a global symposium for environmental action, “Awakening” invited the participants to ponder: 1) Where are we now? 2) How did we get here? 3) What is possible now? and, 4) Where do we go from here?

Listening with the heart was key. Most of the things the participants heard were familiar, they said. Still, they were asked to spend time in silence, to check how they felt. Thus, they went beyond the usual plethora of explanations into essential thoughts that could lead to change. In that sense, the retreat combined empirical thinking with intuitive sensibility.

For social activists, the integration of environmental sustainability, social justice and spiritual fulfilment as retreat goals was a “eureka” experience.

Vital realizations

Vital realizations were summed up in salient points:

“*Tipping points and extreme disturbances (both inner and outer climates) are turbulently rocking the boat of those who have always had the privileged right ‘not to know’ and it is becoming more and more painful not to be noticed.*”

“*The unexamined assumption that we are separate is being unmasked as an illusion and people now realize, ‘What I do to the earth, I am doing to myself.’*”



Retreat center coordinator Sushila shows how rain is harvested from the eaves.

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“Our efforts to do something must come from a recognition that spiritual alienation has sent people kneeling at the altar of consumerism and materialism.”

“It is from a space of love, which is also where our collective pain comes from, that all our actions should emanate if we want to restore the balance that has been lost in our relationship with the self and the world around us.”

BK initiatives

News of BK environment initiatives were shared with the participants. They watched the video on “Solar One” and the solar-powered, water recycling, yogic farming-based Academy for a Better World in Mt. Abu, Rajasthan, India.

To illustrate local BK practices, CSL center coordinator Sister Sushila, led a tour around the retreat center showing replicable steps towards achieving peace with nature. Urban container gardening has produced herbs in bamboo receptacles. Plastic bottles used to store

sachet wrappers will later be used as “bricks” for future constructions. The rainwater collection system at the laundry area has generated enough water for toilet flushing and watering of plants. Solar lights have reduced dependence on commercial electric sources. Donation envelopes have been made out of recycled paper. The use of plastic cups and straws in the center is a thing of the past.

On top of these, witnessing a lifestyle of simplicity, vegetarian diet, mind-body work-out routines, non-violent communication and nurturing of inner virtues through meditation at the retreat center kept the participants attuned to gentler themes of peace, love, contentment and power during the retreat.

Motivated thus by a deep spiritual perspective, each participant wrote down commitments on fruit-shaped paper. They were hung on a symbolic tree signifying a holistic approach—combining inner and outer transformation and peace with nature. A communication loop was created for the group to monitor and support one another’s efforts.

This quiet place that I now call home

Bidding the concrete jungle goodbye felt like exiting the gates of hell

By LETI Z. BONIOL

I WAS LIVING complacently in a rented single-bedroom condominium unit in Manila when, one day, all tenants were asked to produce occupancy lease contracts. The building administration was trying to flush out illegal occupants.

I had stayed in that condo for 13 years and was used to even the most unpleasant things about it: long lines to the elevator that conked out too many times; news that some thieves had broken into a unit; someone running amok, or being murdered, or committing suicide—on top of roaches and rats that crawled in and out of holes in the walls.

The building was more than 20 years old and had seen many tenants come and go, as well as owners complaining of poor maintenance. As I was just a renter (and rent was low), I coped just fine with all that abomination. Besides, I was out 13 hours a day; the unit was just a place for me to sleep.

I, victim

I was working in a newspaper outfit at the time, an hour away by taxi or two jeepney rides. Thrice during those years of commuting to the office or to the Brahma Kumaris meditation center, I had fallen prey to thieves, who took my cell phone while I was asleep, texting inside a jeepney, or simply seated next to a pickpocket. I reported this last incident to the police, not really expecting them to solve it. They didn’t.

One day, I was on my way to work at 10 a.m. when a knife-wielding skinny man in shorts hopped in as soon as the jeepney stopped at a red traffic light. He had his sights on a young girl who was texting



After living in the urban jungle, the tree-hugging author has more time to commune with nature.

away on a red mobile phone, white headset covering her ears. There were only three of us female passengers. As the man moved towards the girl, I jumped out of the vehicle and started to run as far away from there as possible. The third girl had jumped right after me and we almost fell into a creek if not for a tree that thankfully broke our momentum. It was all I could do to pray for that poor girl whose last

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words I heard were, "Huwag po (please don't)!"

As if crime was not enough, I had to endure floods during the rainy season, when the streets around my office building unfaithfully turned into a grey sea of stinking sewage water.

Amid these aggravations, my attitude was to let go and not allow fears and losses to get the better of me. Through all those 13 years, I was learning about staying cool and easy; that helped me to not take any adverse circumstance with a heavy heart for too long.

Time to go

When I was asked for an occupancy lease contract, the house that was waiting for me to occupy, some 66 kilometers away, flashed in my mind. Why was I suffering at the gates of hell when I could live peacefully south of Manila? It was time to go.

The place is an hour-and-a half bus ride away from the Brahma Kumaris main center in Makati without traffic jams, and two hours from the retreat center in Tagaytay City. I retired from regular employment in January 2016 and moved south in November of that year.

I can now devote my time to gardening or experimenting on my cooking using locally available ingredients, or visiting nearby organic and botanical gardens or hot springs. I can take dips in a thermal pool to heal my frozen shoulder, every day if I wish, or have coffee and catch up with friends, or attend seminars that continue to broaden my knowledge of this cosmic existence.

I have early morning meditation in my balcony and watch the dawning of each new day. And while the sky is still changing hues, I

jog around the subdivision (stopping awhile to say hello to a cow sitting by its lonesome on a nearby vacant lot).

Minute details

I can now attend to the minute details of daily existence, like segregating things that I really need from those I can give away or throw out, with the end in view of simplifying my life. No more buying unnecessary stuff or shopping just because there's a big sale going on. No more "malling," in fact. I buy only foodstuff that I need, and home repair and maintenance items.

I have more time to talk with My Companion, My Friend, My Father and My Mother, the Highest-on-High who is also the Ocean of Love, Remover of Sorrow and Bestower of Happiness. I consult my Eternal Surgeon at will about making things easier: Should I carry on with a repetitive job that strains my eyes in exchange for, as they say, "small change/" Should I involve myself in a venture that is sensitive but new and relevant? Should I join political movements that challenge government?

With retirement and less stress from the external environment, I also have more time to dig into the real me. And to really examine my life: How can I make up for past misdeeds? When I do this or that, am I being true to myself and to my aim and objective? Am I really happy?

I am finding out, even where I am now, away from the concrete jungle, that time is not enough. I need to free myself from all the waste inside and outside that are holding back the best me. I need to race to achieve this at the soonest time possible.

On the bright side, I know I have the best fighting chance in this place that I now call home.

Solitude

by Feliz Ruiz

In solitude i watch slowly the flow of my thoughts parading in the sky of my mind like cloud on a bright day

In solitude, I hear my heart throbs dub dub dub
As my pulse rate runs fast when my emotions get intense tip tap tip tap

In solitude I smell the fragrance of the fresh cool breeze passing through my nostrils then I inhale and exhale in unrestrained breathing

Life seems standing still in the ocean of solitude while the waters make their silent yelling as I go walking on the sandy beach feeling breathing

Solitude is the decoration of silence
A garland that strokes one's sensitivity
A soft touch that erases all the past hurts leaving no scar behind

Like heavy rain in June,
deep immersion in solitude washes what binds
Leaving no ill memories, no mark, no trace to look back
Enabling the soul to soar and make an outstanding flight
To a brand new start
TODAY and NOW!

