

---

# Mind the Gap!

Saturday 6th April 2014

---

I take a lot of train journeys - almost inevitable when you live in West Cornwall! And many of them are long ones to London. And when I'm in London I usually travel by tube. There is a voice that re-occurs with considerable frequency during these these journeys, and it's this: Mind the gap when you're stepping off the train and onto the platform. There is the sense of great care needing to be taken, and potential danger from 'gaps'. It's 'gaps' that I want to explore with you today. And I'd like to suggest that in many ways, gaps are our way to life.

At the end of my 9 year illness, I discovered that I could, what I referred to as 'turn off my brain'. I wasn't really turning off my brain, of course! What I was doing was switching off my thinking. I'm not quite sure why I was able to do this: it might have been because I had taught myself to meditate during those 9 years - maybe that made it easier for me to do - or it might be that, feeling on the edge of existence with a strong desire for life, and believing that it would help me survive, gave me the strength to do this.

This was an interesting experience. What I discovered after a while of doing this, was that where there was no thought, there was no problem. There was no juicy problem for my mind to chew over, stress about or worry over. There was no problem, particularly interestingly, in my body. In other words, my symptoms, both physiological and emotional, subsided. Everything calmed down.

It was my first experiential introduction into absence and nothingness, and the gems that lay within. The realisation came to me like a thump on the back: your thoughts create your reality, your experience and your future. No thought; no problem. For many weeks and months I lay in the 'gap'.

The experiment of switching off my thoughts continued, and into the gap which was created, new life formed.

---

So I became well. Although I still maintained the experience of switching off my brain, human life rushed in. Relationships, which had been rather limited for many years, became part of my life. And all the joys and challenges they bring. I worked with clients and had/have the privilege of working with others to help them with their own journeys into wholeness. I learned and developed a whole range of skills and strategies that enabled people to change their lot.

And yet there was something missing; something on the edge of my awareness, which was nudging me to pay attention to it. And for a while, in the busy-ness of my much-loved and newly-discovered life, I didn't pay much attention.

Then, over a period of time, and with more attention given to reflection, I realised what it was. The clients I work with generally make good progress and I'm blessed with much lovely feedback from our work together. Initially I put this down to the work I do with them, the tools and strategies I use, the techniques etc. and there is some truth in this.

But a couple of clients gave me pause for thought. One, a lovely lady, desirous for change in her life, and particularly for tools and strategies, worked with me for a couple of sessions, where I did my best work, drawing from my, by now, extensive, toolkit. Yet she reported very little lasting shift. Ok. Everyone who works with clients finds that there are some they can help, and others they can't. This in itself is not unusual, but there was something about this particular client that intrigued me.

Then I reflected on some of the clients who do make significant shifts in their journeys, and the more I reflected, the more I came to realise that although the strategies are often really useful, sometimes I seem to do very little, and they still change! So what was going on?

There is something about holding the gap, the space, so that people can experience themselves in space, without any interference. Many people don't actually know what it feels like to experience themselves in a loving space.

Why? Well, it seems that, as I hear in the voice of the train manager, there is a mild fear of gaps. And my client was much more comfortable wielding a tool or strategy, than being in the gap.

---

A couple of weeks ago I was having my twice yearly dental check. All was well in my dental health - apart from my two front teeth, which, my dentist said, had now eroded to a worrying degree, probably a result of my decades-long habit of drinking hot water and lemon juice on rising. She said we needed to do something about it, before they disappeared. 'And,' she said, 'We can also do something about that gap. How long have you had that gap?' I explained I'd had the gap as long as I'd had the teeth, and that it was part of who I am. She looked unconvinced and went on to explain all the elaborate - and expensive - things we could do to sort what she regarded as a problem. 'And it's very ageing to have that size of gap...'. I was intrigued to notice her discomfort around me having a gap in my mouth. So often, we can feel uncomfortable around gaps, and want to fill them in so we don't have to confront them.

If I allow myself time to stop, and just be, that can initially feel quite scary for many of us. If we're alone with our thoughts, without filling the gaps with noise and activity, what will I find? And so we find ways of filling in the gaps, just like my dentist wanted to do.

Apart from the classic way of avoiding a gap by being too busy, here are some other ways people can fill the gap.

Some people tune into inner radio stations which blast music into their ears all day, and sometimes all night. There's

Rush FM: there's not enough time, I'll never get it done, I can't stop now...

Victim MW: it's not fair, why is the happening to me again?

Disaster LW: oh my God! It's all going wrong! Help!

DAB Depression: my life sucks.

Classic Fantasy: one day I'll win the lottery THEN everything will be fine

Any of these familiar?

---

We don't always realise that we can tune out of these, and into a different one - or indeed, a gap of white space where there is no noise.

And spending time in therapy can be another way people avoid spending time simply being. 'I must sort this out before....'.

I had an e-mail from another client recently. We'd been doing some work using Byron Katie's approach, and she e-mailed me to say that she'd finally got it! It wasn't her mother-in-law and sister-in-law that were bossy, and controlling - it was her! She wrote with a sense of enlightenment. Then went on to say, but now I know they are just mirroring me, I feel dreadful to know that I'm all these things. And of course the next step for this lady's journey, is to see that this too, is simply a story. She is, actually none of these things either! All the thinking we create is simply a story. It's the story that obscures truth, and living in the gap that helps us see the truth.

When we live in a gap - no story exists at all. And we find the beauty of simple beingness, where all is well.

I've been challenged recently by a particularly busy schedule. My temptation is always to get my head down, and do a determined charge through. The result is usually that I get things done. But there is a price to doing this - it's often done with stress, is run by my ego-self, and can result in a rather dissatisfied feeling. Time to meditate reduces and 'doing' takes place of 'being'.

In recent years I've been intrigued by a paradox that I've discovered, yet am still in the process of fully living. It is this:

The more I take time out in the 'gap', the more I achieve. It's a sort of tardis effect. It makes no sense at all to my rational mind. And yet I'm not the only one to have noticed it.

---

Martin Luther said: I have so much scheduled for tomorrow I must pray for that I must arise an hour earlier to have an extra hour alone with God.

'Gaps' where we can enter into God, or the Isness of All That Is, is, in fact, not so much a luxury as a necessity. It is our life blood. It is what allows us to truly experience our own aliveness. In a purely functional way we could spend time in 'gaps' to get more done. But it is so much more than that.

Recently I've had the experience of creativity emerging during those 'gaps'. This doesn't happen because I do something to make it happen, or because I sit in silence in order for it to happen, but it CAN happen simply when I spend time in the gap. It's as if, when we move away from associating with our thinking, we open ourselves out to other ways of knowing. We're human, and the way our brains have developed mean that we all have a cognitive part of our brain that loves thinking. But when we associate ourselves with that thinking and think that 'we' are the thinking, and that the 'thinking' is going to lead to solutions, understanding etc, we can delude ourselves. Spending time in the 'gap' allows us to open to a much more expansive knowingness. Or maybe it doesn't. Even the story about 'gaps' can disappear within the 'gap'. Its mind-boggling stuff!

But this I know: minding the gap feels good, minding the gap allows any story I might be running to dissolve, minding the gap allows my body-mind to settle down and return to homeostasis, minding the gap sometimes enables me to experience bliss, minding the gap allows me - and those I work with - space to change and grow towards wholeness.

When you see me smile, which I hope is often, and you notice my two front teeth and the gap between them, remember to mind the gap.

(Lead others into a short experience of a 'gap', if time)

---

I'd like to finish with a short poem called Prayer by John Burnside, which arrived in our house just over a week ago, as this talk was trying to emerge through a gap, and felt like a gift to us:

John Burnside: Prayer

**Give me a little less  
With every dawn;  
Colour, a breath of wind,  
The perfection of shadows,**

**Till what I find, I find  
Because it's there,  
Gold in seams of my hands  
And the desk lamp, burning.**