
CobaltSaffron

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ISSUE #2

A FREE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Coffee beans in the fire

"I read your first newsletter and don't understand curiosity and 'piercing peripheral vision' as a means toward harmony. Are you referring to intuition? Doesn't this kind of oblique curiosity conflict with other spiritual ideas? What about devoted concentration as the path toward transcendence and resolution?"

The universal curiosity I'm talking about is one of the primary impulses of every living being. Any baby or young child in any culture naturally has a strong sense of it. The rate of speed a child learns, many times faster than an adult, is directly proportionate to his level of passionate curiosity. As a baby, this is a need, not an option, so the passion is absolute or very close to it. So is the necessity to look beyond the things he knows he already wants. He looks to assemble an experiential knowledge of all the variables present in any moment. The impulse to do that is driven by a fascination for mystery, that which he doesn't already know.

So, I'm not really throwing another idea into the competitive marketplace of spirituality. I'm suggesting an underlying "tone" of engagement applicable to anyone, including those uninterested in things spiritual. It is not an idea that implies opposition to a belief system or to not believing at all. Evolution and resolution, of anything, always require some kind of creative leap. To produce a result we don't already know, we have to have curiosity for the unknown, and that has to be real and passionate enough to motivate exploration and cause discovery.

That's not really intuition; it's an essential wonderment for life. From there, yes, one perceives possibilities and options that would otherwise be ignored, and that can include brilliant spontaneous insight.

To find this depth of wonderment, we simply have to turn away from the mirror, meaning, we have to find something more attractive than our own obsessions and ambitions. The easiest way to do that is to notice and invest in whatever it is that provokes wonderment. You could call this coming back to mysticism as a way of life. We were all already there as children. This doesn't have to oppose whatever else we are doing or in pursuit of.

This kind of playful acknowledgement of natural curiosity directly fuels creativity in our chosen endeavors and existing challenges. The curiosity is in us for a reason, however peripheral it may appear to be. That is, whatever provokes it is a clue to something specific within us; we have a relationship with it already.

This also happens to be fun. One could almost define fun, and even happiness, as what happens when we forget about ourselves. Big-time fun—love, valued creative work, producing resolution or joy for another—is all about losing ourselves precisely because something else is more fascinating. Something compelling pulled our attention away from the mirror. The clues to such experience, the threads that lead to them, aren't in the mirror.

Noticing something that pulls us away from the mirror can only happen if there's some peripheral vision in place already. I'm not talking about being distracted by any pretty little thing that saunters by. The experience is more an appreciative sense that the elements present right now have meaning and beauty in being assembled exactly as they are. One senses a pattern, a harmony, even if it isn't clearly logical. There's a tremendous relief in falling into place within that pattern. Not controlling the elements or ignoring them, but looking for a way to integrate within them. That is subtle. But it can only happen if we're curious enough to notice it.

*“The elements
present right now
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This is an art, not a science. Meaning, it takes a lot of imagination to assemble things that appear to have no direct relationship, or that seem to have nothing in it for us. This is also what makes passionate curiosity true: it's not about what we know is in it for us. Most often, we miss the point and the experience because we can't figure out how to funnel what we're intrigued or compelled by into our own existing ambitions and obsessions. We can't find a way to own it. As if meaning is only about what we already know we want. So, we end up seeing only what we believe we might personally gain from, or the opposition to it. Pre-set ambitions and assumptions work like blinders: “I'm looking for a cookie, I'm looking for a cookie...”

Imagine someone sitting under a tree with a cup of water in front of a fire some hundreds of years ago. He's thinking about all the things he wants and is trying to construct a plan of action to get those, but he's tired, cynical and a little bored, mainly because the same problems and opposition to what he wants are always in the way. He starts to recall a lot of ideas in the way-back seat of his mind, like, “God is everywhere,” “Seize the moment,” “Keep an open mind and heart,” and things like that. This makes him even more tired.

During all this, a few beans have fallen out of the tree into the fire. They're roasting there. He doesn't notice them because he's tired and they have nothing to do with him. The beans are from a coffee tree. Within a few feet of each other, we have a tired man, a cup of water and roasting coffee beans. What's missing? And why?

Concerning spirituality, since you brought it up, *spirit* means vital essence, or life-giving force. Religions, sciences, philosophies and coffee makers have each tried to show what that is and how to get to it. The totality of that search, and whatever successes have come as a result of it, was born from true passionate curiosity. Spirituality, when one finds it in a human being, is mainly a state of fascinated questioning, particularly as it relates to assembling disconnected parts into a whole. If we can find that fascination, sustain it and explore it well, happiness, love, salvation, a good cup of coffee and all the rest fall into place.

Religions, the organizations that have given us definitions of spirituality, are in place to do basically one thing: assemble disparate parts into unified harmony. They seem, for the most part, to have failed to ignite the imagination or intentions of their followers enough to create social harmony on a large scale. An honest tour of the human race in 2005 would reveal that deep and habitual reactions in general have not been successfully reduced or refined over the last, say, 3,000 years. Fear, ignorance, prejudice, hubris and violent reaction—the opposition to true passionate curiosity—are at least as strong as they have been. What we're staring at, and how we're going about it, isn't all that impressive. As a species, we certainly have the worst record on the planet with regard to selfish imposition, blatant disregard and abusive self-indulgence. And we're not having much fun anyway. It seems like someone's not noticing the coffee beans roasting in the fire.

The foundational qualities of ethical and moral behavior and of spirituality itself as defined by almost all religions—humility, compassion, integrity, generous sacrifice—are not really demonstrated beyond the walls of personal gain by their apparent promoters. These qualities are already difficult to find in response to ourselves, our own family or club members. With the majority of the world's problems caused by an inability to enact these qualities toward those *outside* of our own families and clubs, and the religions as organizations not demonstrating any true capacity to do that themselves, where are we to learn this from? If we cannot come up with enough genuine passionate curiosity about the essential workings of what we don't understand and don't like, "the unknown" and "the enemy," where will the shift of dynamic come from?

It's not the ambition of this newsletter to try to solve large social problems, although change and evolution on any level require the same methods. The spirit is the same. We are all born with that spirit. It's at the core of the impulse and intuition to look beyond that which we already know. The opposition to rediscovering this spirit is most often our own existing set of answers and presumptions, held tight with fear, cynicism, prejudice and arrogance. It takes courage to let those down long enough to sense and perceive something else. It does take courage to have fun. The clues are all there, though, sitting just off to the side, like coffee beans in the fire.

Darrell Calkins
February 2005

"Spirituality, when one finds it in a human being, is mainly a state of fascinated questioning"

Comments

Thank you for your comments about the January issue of CobaltSaffron. Excerpts from a few we received:

“Interesting Newsletter. Naked facts and deep contact to the core of life. You might be describing the quality of life fabrics.”

G.M., France.

“As I see it, curiosity [is] a step down from compellingness, is that what you want?”

D.M., Belgium.

“I just read your January newsletter article and it touched me very much. You have a way to put into words that which is just not said anywhere else like this. I feel this sense of a fresh stream of running water outside the window on a clear summer night.”

B.F., California.

“Honestly, you and your newsletter are full of bullshit. Drivel about hidden truths and secrets over there somewhere is an easy con to spot. Obviously, you're having problems seeing what is in front of you, like how to articulate clearly what you mean.”

D.J., France.

“As someone who's only moderately familiar with your thinking, I definitely had my work cut out for me. It's not that I mind the challenge; I'd expect nothing less from you. At times, your writing has an unusual kind of opacity to it: although the words themselves aren't so complex, they don't yield their freight readily to the casual observer. It definitely becomes an act of conscious (and conscientious) devotion.... yes, true passionate curiosity.”

K.K., California.

Upcoming event:

RETREAT TO THE SOURCE

17 - 24 April 2005, Gascony - France

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We welcome questions, comments and complaints.

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