

CobaltSaffron

A FREE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Inside out

In an effort to apply my own New Year ritual of catching up on unfinished communication, below are some responses to questions we've received here at CobaltSaffron over the last months.

“Who came up with the title CobaltSaffron? And why that particular title for this newsletter?”

The name *CobaltSaffron* was explained in the first paragraph of the first issue (“Choose any two things...”). I chose cobalt and saffron mainly because I like them a lot. I'm intrigued by the natural contrast between them in color, texture and quality, which is a nice range of masculinity/femininity. They're both very difficult to collect and manipulate, for different reasons, yet each is fully abundant on the planet. Even the musicality of the words, particularly the contrasting three-consonant tones, is beautifully precise as representation of the substances themselves. Lastly, they have no prefabricated “spiritual” meaning; that is, they're completely untainted and whole—a worthy ideal to strive for in this newsletter.

“In terms of passionate curiosity, there seems to be a fork in the road; one path pursues understanding and the other is consumed in knowing. The pat argument is that understanding leads to knowing but is that really true? Do our attempts at understanding really just make things worse? It seems like I have to choose even though I'm curious about both paths.”

My job here is to give insight and support for true passionate curiosity, not to give answers that limit or deconstruct your own questioning. So, here are just a couple of observations to aid in your research...

Obviously, we need some understanding in life to handle basic needs, and to fit well within relationships and society in general. Beyond that, though, yes, there is a big difference between understanding and knowing. All Oriental and most Occidental schools of thought frequently refer to a higher knowledge—direct perception that transcends intellectual understanding—as the exclusive resolution to our primary personal and spiritual yearning. Some things you can't understand, but you can know.

In my experience, and in listening to those who seem to have some skill with this subject, understanding is mostly about collecting or assimilating information, whereas knowledge is what happens through the release of ignorance (presumptions, preferences and prejudices). To know is to trump understanding. That is, knowledge is immediate and permanent; understanding is abstract and temporal.

The easiest example of this dynamic is in the effect of a good joke. Someone who understands the idea and construction of a joke may not find it funny. You either “get it” or you don’t. Explaining what it means won’t make that happen. But if you really look at what’s occurring in humor, you find that almost all of it is some version of what we might call bad news—something gone wrong. What you already understand and accept is trumped. Why would that be funny?

“I appreciate your intellectual virtuosity and your obvious mastery of the subjects in your newsletter, but I can’t get behind your mystical references. It seems as though you frequently come to a point at which you give up and claim, ‘And then something happens.’ You lose me there.”

See above response. There is a point where one has to give up, or perhaps *give in*, to make the shift to a deeper resolution (or comprehension, if you prefer). In terms of language as the means to such an experience, there are all kinds of obstacles and limits. I try to describe and, to some degree, create a dynamic to deeper resolution in what I write here. Some persons follow it; others less so. I’ve set the default level of my writing in this newsletter to a general audience with some familiarity with the subjects we’re taking on, while still trying to keep it accessible for anyone. Every month, I receive complaints that the newsletter is either too esoteric or not enough so. As long as these contrasting complaints are pretty much even, I figure we’re fairly well balanced given our audience.

“There is a point where one has to give up, or perhaps give in”

“I feel overwhelmed in my life, but also feel a definite connection to your ideas and honest manner. Could you point me towards a direction or someone who could help me in my personal evolution?”

Don’t take a pill and call yourself in the morning.

“If I understand correctly, your newsletter is really talking about intuition, no?”

Basically, yes, while still avoiding the word and therefore the presumed meaning. Or rather, the newsletter is basically about what would need to take place for what you could call intuition to kick in.

“You continually mention things like questioning, curiosity and all that, yet you seem to be like so many personal development teachers who just sit back and give out their advice and answers. Don’t you find that hypocritical? Why don’t you ask some questions yourself?”

The concept of our newsletter is to provoke original insight on perception and

engagement in daily life. Part of that involves acting as a supportive go-between in the process of questioning stereotyped, typical beliefs and opinions. The origin of the idea came from those who had asked me to write public articles of this nature on a frequent basis. I try to follow the questioning and interests of our readers, providing an ongoing source of education both ways. Although my sentences may lack question marks at their ends, the entire process is meant to care for the journey, not the destination (the questions, not the answers). I don't claim to have all the answers, but I have some skill at guiding perception away from the commonly mediocre toward original insight, or at least that's what I'm told. If you can do that better than I can, you're welcome to take over. Are you up for that?

“Why don't you address more pertinent issues, such as political and social conflicts or world events? It seems like you have things to say and we could use some insight on world problems.”

I'm a big fan of the idea that any kind of transformation or change takes place more so at the core than in the manipulation of external variables. If the larger issues you mention are to change, that will come from how the individuals involved perceive and engage them. We are trying to address the issues you suggest, from the inside out. That starts with a qualitative shift, such as being in the midst of conflict and finding a different way to see or experience it. For that to truly happen, one must have some skill at what I call true passionate curiosity, which is the foundation of our newsletter. Obviously, it's up to each individual how or where that may be applied.

“We are trying to address the issues you suggest, from the inside out.”

“Why don't you include in your newsletter quotes or writings from others? I always enjoy insightful observations from a wide range of thinkers.”

Here are two I received in the last couple of weeks that I like:

“If you bring out what is inside you, what is inside you will save you. If you do not bring out what is inside you, it will destroy you.” Gnostic Gospel of Thomas.

“We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploration will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” T.S. Eliot.

Darrell Calkins
January 2006

Comments

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

“To the Team... Thank you for a year full of beautiful gifts—for your time and energy in them—to the loved ones and your other loves who had to share you with this project. May your work and care be well nurtured in the New Year.”

G. A., *Alaska*.

“Since my eye is not trained to see the intricacies of the masterful play displayed in the movements of Number 13 of the Phoenix Suns, his mastery would be invisible to me. I might be able to recognize that I had witnessed good basketball being played, but if I attempted to relate to you that I had witnessed his mastery, I would be quickly tagged as belonging to that part of the audience that didn't completely recognize what was going on. Thankfully, I'm aware of it. While I too may be fed up with the phony, cute, depressing, ridiculous, and esoteric references that you made, watching Steve Nash isn't going to do it for me. Being aware that *you* have attained that state of enlightenment, though, excites me, for I absolutely love being in the presence of anyone who is insightful, possesses great knowledge and exudes a genuine youthful joie de vivre. May I be in *your* presence for their next game? I would stand a better chance of appreciating genius.”

T.R., *Texas*.

“Thank you again, thanks a thousand times for the newsletters translated into French... The texts arrived at the right time. I was in an absolute chaos, a moment of stress, of doubt and turbulence, and reading the newsletters was like a balm on a burn, relieving my doubts and anguish, calming me, comforting and immediately, instantaneously and through time allowing me to see things differently and above all to advance, to evolve. So, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you.”

C.R., *France*.

Upcoming event:

Back on Track

February 11 & 12, 2006, San Francisco - USA

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We welcome questions, comments and complaints.

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