

The Alchemy of Adaptation

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How should we be able to forget about those ancient myths that are at the beginning of all peoples, the myths about dragons that at the last moment turn into princesses; perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

From the instant we first draw breath, freedom is our imperative. This urge, which I like to call joy, sings in our blood even before we are born. It manifests as a goad to escape the bounds of the womb, followed by the constrictions of our nuclear family and on into the world of school, relationships, and work, where yet again we chafe at enforced limits and rules. Are we merely prisoners of the circumstances in our lives, or have we permitted a kind of negative magic to take hold in the form of an inverted comprehension of our true role in the cosmic play?

Did you ever consider what magic really is? There are countless blossoms on this tree, so many versions of the truth. To me, magic is something beyond the ordinary, whether it is in the way we think, see, believe, or live. Always there is the sense of a presence outside of ourselves and of time and space. Nikos Kazantzakis provides an elegantly simple formula in his novel *Zorba the Greek*: “Since we cannot change reality, let us change the eyes which see reality.” How might this unusual transformation come about?

When I was in my early thirties, I had a numinous encounter. Up until that point, the material, sense-oriented version of life here on earth clouded my thinking. Despite my comprehensive study of sages, saints, poets, philosophers, and esoteric systems, I often felt myself, particularly during difficult times, to be an insignificant piece on Somebody’s chessboard. How exasperating to be tossed about and battered by circum-

stances over which there appeared to be no control! Yet such irksome situations forced me unwittingly to learn and grow, bringing me by grace to this transformative event.

I was not blinded by the light of my mystical experience; on the contrary, I was finally allowed to see with new eyes, if only for that ecstatic interlude. The Light I knew then as Love offered the gift of freedom from the fallacy of separation. For me, this moment qualified as magic: clear, conscious self-identification with the One Life and thus with everything in existence. Even though this perception-altering event was fleeting, it became a beacon for all further work toward spiritual development. Much like alchemists of old who searched, step by step, in an attempt to turn “metal” (think human personality) into gold, I determined to continue in-depth experiments in this remarkable way of perceiving and participating in reality. I just did not yet know how to proceed.

A few days after this happened, feeling rather deflated and confused, I realized I had very little food in the house. The last thing I wanted to do then was visit the local market, but even newly minted mystics have to eat. The place was crowded and noisy. Being highly sensitive to both these conditions, I hurried to complete my chores. Out of the corner of my eye, a stack of purple leaflets near the checkout caught my attention. Without much thought, I serendipitously picked one up and stuffed it in a bag with the carrots and lettuce.

At home, relaxing with a cup of chamomile tea, I began to read. A woman was offering a yoga class several blocks away from where I lived. This was rather remarkable in my small suburb back in the early ’70s. Little did I know that the purple paper would be my introduction to another step toward enlightenment. Although it escaped me at the time, the English word *union* is the precise translation of the Sanskrit noun *yoga*. Soon yoga and all it encompassed became an important part of my process. Daily practice through meditation, breath, and

bodywork advanced a slow but steady adaptation toward knowledge of my own true nature.

No longer could I accept old beliefs based on control and fear. I had encountered firsthand something entirely *other*, and the path of yoga confirmed this. Yes, there would always be trials to overcome. Now, however, I knew I was not alone or being manipulated by some arbitrary taskmaster. The real power that had opened my heart chakra with the golden Light of Love would provide both tests and the help needed to evolve.

Many artists speak of allowing “the brush to paint,” “the fingers to play the notes,” or “the words to arrive.” Is this magic? I believe so. They are really referring to a skill they have developed, through conscious receptivity, to become clear vehicles for Universal Will. Over time, maybe over countless lives, we can gradually learn to let the “little me” step out of the way “for the performance of the miracles of the One Thing” as the Hermetic text *The Emerald Tablet* puts it. Only then may we experience the magic of true freedom. ■

Something Is There

not really you and yet . . .
Something exists beyond
all those bits and pieces creating
whom you imagine you are,
more enigmatic than the mortal
looking back at your face
in the mirror every day.
It is the One gazing at you
from the inside, peaceful,
old as forever and younger
even than tomorrow.

When the you that you know,
perhaps falling short of how
you wish you could have been,
is no longer here, something,
that other boundless, soundless
Light made of Love who is and is not you,
will still be waiting,
an open hand inviting you to
the magnificence of its Mystery
once again . . .



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