

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU IS THE STARTING POINT

By Richard Jones

In 1986, I began teaching radio broadcasting in Vancouver. I came to my new profession after a fairly successful 12-year career as a Radio and TV personality. I knew broadcasting. I knew little about teaching.

I remember believing that the most important thing I could do was to hold all of my students as able and competent, as willing to learn and improve. I focussed a lot on empowering and encouraging them, on validating their strengths, on assuring them that they too could become successful broadcasters if they only applied themselves and worked hard. I gave pep talks and filled my teaching sessions with positive thinking and optimism.

And it totally stunned me when a number of them failed to rise to my expectant and idealistic standards. To my amazement, some of my students actually sabotaged themselves in the face of all my cheerleading. Oh, they *wanted* to succeed I mean, they *said* they did and they consciously *tried* to accomplish the class assignments and meet the course requirements but still they failed. Some other process was going on deep inside them that over-rode their wishes for success. I think it's important to speak about this process, because I have come to see that it has been running for years like wild dogs through my life and the lives of those I know.

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A lot of people today are on a spiritual quest. You don't have to go far to find the evidence: The Celestine Prophecy on the NY Times Best Seller list for weeks, the dramatic rise in interest in Buddhism and other spiritual and religious practices, even the massive increase in alternative healing techniques. And no doubt 9-11 has served to drive home to many of us the massive problems facing us in the world today, and further spurring on our quest for answers to the great human questions: who are we and where do we fit in the universe?

Much of the literature and pop culture references point to our sacred essence, to the divine nature that is said sits inside all of us. Our way to true success and fulfillment, according to this view, lies in strengthening our awareness of and connection with this inner sacred essence, through meditation or affirmations or positive thinking or any number of other methodologies. This is honourable and well intentioned, of course. But I'd like to suggest respectfully that this orientation will actually lead us to alienation and fantasy. In short, it is dead wrong.

These are strong words I know, and lest I appear completely cold and disrespectful, let me take some time to explain myself.

First of all, this thought doesn't just come from my own head. I'm basing my ideas here on the extraordinary work conducted over the last 35 years by the brilliant Brazilian

psychotherapist Dr. Norberto Keppe. Keppe has noted, after years of clinical research with clients all over South America, Europe and the United States and after writing over 30 books on his findings, that one of the huge problems is that we human beings have very little awareness of human psychopathology. We have no idea of the depths of the psychological sickness that has infected the human species. And because our psychology is way more powerful and influential in terms of our actions and behaviours than our thoughts will ever be, we need to have some understanding of the motivations and drives that exist in our psyches if we are to answer the huge human questions. Our psyches rule the roost, it would appear.

Quite simply, we are not the people we think we are. Nor are we, by employing many of the self-realization techniques popular today, becoming the people we think we're becoming. Rather than focussing on our inner, sacred essence, Keppe has discovered that we need to spend almost all of our time focussed on mistakes and flaws and problems.

This isn't going to go down too well with Stuart Smalley or Norman Vincent Peale, but it is precisely its against-the-grain quality that should make us sit up and take notice. The fact that it's flying in the face of much of what we have read or heard coming out of the New Age community or shouting at us from impressive dust jackets for the past 20 years should cause us to pause in our busy days and take a closer look.

Because frankly, I don't know where all that New Age stuff has gotten any of us anyway. After years of this orientation, we are still sabotaging our lives and destroying the planet in spite of spending billions on becoming more self-realized. I mean, we've read all about habits and agreements and conversations and dark sides and spiritual laws of success, and we're conversant enough with our family patterns, our shadow beliefs, our wounded inner children that we can even talk about them at dinner parties and on blind dates. But most of us "searchers-for-meaning" are not much different than we ever were. We're just more skilful at masking it under better spiritual rhetoric.

First of all, we have a strong resistance to seeing problems especially if we've just spent thousands on the latest program designed to fix those problems. We either want to rationalize them away, ignore them by focusing on something more positive, send them away gently with the kiss of affirmations or the non-judgement of meditation, or see them as aberrations from our normal and decent nature.

But any technique that helps us avoid seeing the problems actually obscures the consciousness that those problems are trying to give to us. For example, if I believe deep down that I'm an effective and efficient worker, I'm going to resist any problem that arises that shows me the contrary. I'll explain it away I'm having an off day. Or I'll blame circumstances or someone else. Or I'll rationalize it as an aberration from my normal effective and efficient nature. And I'll miss the consciousness, the reality, that the problem may be trying to give me. Maybe I'm not as effective and efficient as I think I am. It would be helpful to me to see that. And it will be a great disservice to cover that up with an affirmation, to obscure the reality with a positive thought to replace the uncomfortable realization I may just have received.

Anything that leads us away from our problems, leads us away from consciousness and consciousness is precisely the thing we most need. The challenge is that acceptance of consciousness brings us considerable awareness of our mistakes, our limited thinking and our problems. As Keppe puts it,

*We have therefore created tremendous opposition to wisdom and understanding, with the result that human beings and the society they have built have become sick and riddled with flaws because of faults they are unwilling to see. I can say without a shadow of a doubt that pathology illness is the attitude of opposing consciousness.<sup>1</sup>*

Because what we don't become conscious of will rule us, as I discovered with my Radio students back in the '80s. What we don't know *will* harm us. As Keppe puts it, "The human being is what he doesn't want to know."<sup>2</sup> What we try to hide from, what we try to keep from our awareness, rules. The more you try to hide problems from yourself, even with "good" techniques, the more they appear in your life. Only they'll be buried so deep you won't be able to see them anymore. Rest assured though, you will see the effects. And we *do* see them all around us, individually and collectively, in increased obesity, drug and alcohol addiction, divorce, pollution, greed, terrorism, and on and on.

There *is* a good and true basic internal structure to us. But here's the thing ... **we don't need to spend any time thinking or meditating on that.** It can't be improved, since it's perfect already. It can't be added to. It can't be strengthened. But, and here's the rub, it *can* be prevented from appearing. **That** we human beings are experts at. In fact, it is precisely this tendency to stop our beautiful inner structure from emerging that we need to see. This is a deep pathology that we all have to varying degrees. Our myriad and nefarious methods of stopping the emergence of our perfect structure are what need 100% of our attention. Here's Keppe again:

*You can't do anything with pathology. You can't solve it. You just need to accept it. And by accepting it, you will of course have a better life, because you will be able to correct lots of things that result from your particular pathology. So what the person **has** to see is exactly the problems that they have. Because what they have of good inside, they don't need to see this. So the biggest asset the human being can have is to see that which he doesn't like. The bad things."*<sup>3</sup>

A big requirement. And a big challenge. Imagine that ... self-awareness and fulfillment through focussing on problems and issues and difficulties. It'd make a provocative book title. Although I don't think it would sell many copies. Not enough fantasy in it. Because fantasy is what the escape from consciousness is. An attempt to create a different reality than that which already exists. As Keppe says:

*You don't need to bolster people, to pump them up, because the ego of the person is already too elevated. He's already up there, flying around. So the more you put a person on a pedestal, the more you encourage his own deliriums and fantasies.<sup>4</sup>*

We don't need any more books or techniques leading us away from consciousness, specifically the consciousness of our errors. We need a heavy dose of consciousness. And not consciousness of our angelic, true essence either. But consciousness about how we are in reality, in practice. This may be quite different than what we think we are in our fantasies. Isn't that perfect?

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References:

1. *The Origin of Illness*, Norberto M. Keppe, Proton Editora Ltda. 2000, São Paulo, Brazil
2. *The Human Being is What He Doesn't Want to Know*, Norberto R. Keppe, Trilogia Newsletter, January, 2002
3. Interview with Dr. Norberto Keppe, January 13, 2002
4. Ibid