



What Do We Really Know?

Do We Really Know Anything At All For Certain?

by Sudha Hamilton

You are at a party or out to dinner with friends and the conversation turns to something about a healing modality or type of self-development course, it may involve an acronym like NLP or EFT, and you think to yourself, "yes I know what that is," but if you stop and really ask yourself, "do I actually know what that is?" The chances are the real answer is "No" - you do not. You have most likely heard it mentioned in the context of other conversations, and other people's opinions about their experience of it, or you may have come across a reference to it in a magazine article or on the Internet, but you have most likely not studied whatever it actually is, or had direct experience of the healing or program.

It strikes me as an interesting phenomenon - that at this time of heightened communication across the globe, when we are inundated with vast amounts of information - that many of us have assumed this broad mantle of a superficial understanding of so many things. We have become storehouses of international linguistic gossip, stained skin deep by the branding of everything, and eager to master the next catchy acronym.

Mnemonics: the use of triggering codes to help our brains memorise and recall large amounts of information; and Richard Dawkin's Memes: units of cultural transmissions or imitations - are all means of approaching the understanding of this phenomenon.

**I remember the words of a mystic,
"I am but a finger pointing to the moon."**

The reality is that most of us experience, or truly know, very little in our lives, but we encounter linguistic references to an almost limitless amount of things. For example we conceptualise birth, death, love and almost everything in-between. We are all born but we have no real memory of this, which we can call upon. We watch our own children being born, often in utter amazement, but we cannot really fathom the direct experience of it inside our adult minds. Likewise we will all die and we may watch our parents pass away, but we will have no true knowledge of the experience, and no means with which to share it.

What we do and what we have always done however, is make up stories about what we imagine it to be like or the closest reference we can make. Our knowledge is that

of metaphor and allegory - it is but smoke and mirrors. We are like lighthouses endlessly looking out upon life and its many vicissitudes, blinking our simplistic understanding on - off - on - off and so on. I think it to be one of the great delusions of life that we, humanity, are at various times, considered to be these deep beings, full of wisdom and so different from the animals that we have evolved from. Our osmotic absorption of cultural knowledge is herd-like in the extreme and we flock together whenever possible, avoiding solitude at all costs.

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It is not, however, a bad situation, it is simply a misrepresentation of what we are - we are watchers, witnesses to life, with our filters of the five senses locked on - through which we process this cosmic dance of life.

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Meaning that, 'whatever I say cannot ever hope to truly bring this experience to you' - indeed words cannot bring any experience or real knowing to anyone. Language can only ever reference experience, it can never directly transmit true knowledge. It is, (at its best), poetry, painting word pictures in song; which may enchant an echo of experience. The rational scientist with his sensualist's grip on reality is ultimately kidding himself or herself - as our understanding of waves and particles blurs the fundamental duality of descriptive language, and leaves us with the honesty of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. Uncertain is probably a good place to be, in our sense of existence and our place in the scheme of things. Socrates said his only certainty was 'that he really knew nothing for certain'.

Which is why so many of us crowd our lives with beliefs - religious, patriotic, racial, class, gender, economic, metaphysical, spiritual and so on - to fill in the real emptiness of our existential uncertainty. The uncertain do not however, usually go to war and they do not generally have an investment in making everyone else wrong about things. The uncertain do not pride themselves on their uncertainty, or much else for that matter. They watch and witness the unfolding of each moment, aware, but a little uncertain... ☺