

# HOLDING SPACE

I am midway through a thought while speaking at the Spiritual Leadership Institute in Houston, Texas, when a man near the back stands up boldly and asks, "What does *holding space* mean?" I had used the term only seconds before.

His mannerism and tone conveys intrigue—an instant recognition that the expression is both familiar and foreign. And possibly has an importance for him worth standing up for!

I feel paralyzed. To try and capture *holding space* with words seems impossible in the moment. And any attempt to do so, the kind of reduction where the beauty and perfect wholeness of a thing is all but lost through the abstraction of words.



## HOLDING IMAGINAL SPACE

When we hold space for each other, we hold pure possibility. It is a gift of consciousness that recognizes something really beautiful is trying to emerge through another human being. And like the nature of the expression itself, this emergence sits at a level of truth that does not want to be reduced, or arranged, or understood.

When we ask somebody to hold space for us, we are invoking pure possibility

through their gift of consciousness. What we feel trying to move through us is not speakable, but has a power we can not turn away from. And we have a recognition that we need cooperation from the universe to birth it.

It is this dance with possibility that makes holding space a most precious gift.

## HOLDING ORGANIZATIONAL SPACE

Organizations, like people, need rich imaginal spaces for their becomingness.

And as good as our strategic vision is, there is also an exquisite possibility wanting to emerge that cannot be planned for, that cannot be seen. We can only hold space for its emergence.

But once it emerges, we recognize it was really there all the time. Already in fullness. Simply waiting for us to hold enough space to come into relationship with it.

Holding space for people, holding space for organizations—it is simply holding space for boundless, abundant creation. And through this act of radical creation, a return to our relationship with everything that already is—a return to wholeness.

## SEVEN SAVVY IDEAS

We can all learn from each other how to hold space more powerfully. Here are a few ideas that will help you explore the power of holding space.

1. **Learn to dance with mystery!** When you sense something big wants to happen, you do not have to know right away exactly what it is, only that it needs space to emerge. In big mystery is big possibility. If you reduce your mystery to something familiar, something you can get your hands around, you have limited its possibility.
2. **Create a community of space holders to support your becomingness.** When you start to touch an aspect of who you are trying to become, and that becomingness holds power, ask your friends to hold space for you. And if, like the man in Houston, they ask you "What does holding space mean?" share everything you can about holding space and then ask them again!
3. **Be a space alchemist.** The root of fear is separation. And when people move into fear, they cut themselves off from support. When you find yourself in a conversation, or in a meeting, or in an organization where fear is starving possibility, respond with love. Strong, proactive heart energies transmute a space that is starving into a space that is thriving. The foundation of love is unity—a loving space is connected to everything needed to support whatever is trying to happen.
4. **Create powerful home and work spaces.** As you change, the nature of your physical spaces needs to change to support you. Your home and your office should be full of art and other objects that connect you to archetypes that have resonance with your becomingness. To tap the full power of space, aesthetically pleasing decoration is no longer good enough. You need a mythic space—a space where the vibration of the symbols and art induce an aspect of the expanding, whole person you are about to become.
5. **Avoid toxic space.** Spaces that hold dissension, control, negative debate and other energies of fear rob you and other people of the power necessary to create in really big ways. You have the right to *not* engage in the practice of fear. When you feel your power dwindling, it is time step away.
6. **Visit positive space.** Spaces that hold the energies of joy, possibility, and abundance provide you and other people the power necessary to create in really big ways. Seek people and spaces that feel vibrant and supportive.
7. **Trust that you already know how to hold space.** Holding space is a birthright. You have always been able to do it, you simply forgot to do it. Use the power of imagination to help you remember how to powerfully hold space!

# SURRENDERING INTO POWER

On a crisp evening in Sedona, Arizona, a small group of adventurers gather in Oak Creek Canyon to experience a different kind of retreat—a retreat called BLISS! Just being there is an act of surrender, because this retreat has no agenda. And people have signed up for it without knowing anything about what *it* is.

BLISS is the creation of two young, charismatic teachers who have made a covenant with each other to completely surrender to what is trying to happen through them. To not get in the way by planning for something that cannot be planned for. To reverently and passionately *hold space* for what is trying to emerge.

## THE LAW OF SURRENDER

Surrender in the perennial wisdom was understood as an act of power—a giving *in* to possibility, not a giving up. A starting, not a stopping. It was an inner knowing that to have all, you must surrender all.

As we surrender into possibility, we step into a powerful flow of infinite potentials simply waiting for their moment—waiting for a person who is conscious enough to stop forcing and let something new slip through.

The Law of Surrender reflects the way the universe is put together. And when we come into relationship with surrender, we have access to more of the universe.



## DOWNSIZING SURRENDER

Surrender in modern culture is often an act of weakness—a stepping away instead of a stepping in. We surrender by giving up.

When we surrender in this way, we step out of the flow of possibility and away from our bliss. When we give up on what is trying to emerge, we move out of relationship with every thing around us—we cut ourselves off from the world.

## PLANNING SURRENDER

Surrender is not a substitute for planning. Surrender is a willingness, or will-less-ness, to step out of our best plan and into something better. This *something better* cannot be planned for, because until its moment of emergence, it cannot exist.

Good planning and good surrender are perfect soulmates. Each makes the other more powerful. Surrender recognizes that good planning evokes in the physical what is trying to emerge through consciousness. And planning recognizes surrender as the first step in the birth of something miraculous that, by its nature, is unthinkable.

When planning and surrender dance with each other, each exquisitely conscious of when to hand the reins over to the other, great things start to happen at a great rate. It is a dance of high creation.

### SEVEN SAVVY IDEAS

Surrender is a simple wisdom that does not always seem simple to practice. Here are a few ideas that will help you tap the power of surrender.

1. **Surrender your assumptions.** No matter how much you know about something, always entertain the notion that it may be completely different than you think it is. You will discover that often it's your assumptions that are limiting you, not the world.
2. **Design open space into everything.** When you plan meetings or retreats, don't over design. If you plan too tightly, many of the most interesting possibilities have no space to emerge.
3. **Practice little surrenders.** Starting with small surrenders will prepare you for bigger surrenders. Try leading a meeting where there is no agenda and nothing planned. Give a speech without any traditional preparation. You will discover a lot of your genius emerges when you get out of the way.
4. **Be playful with fear.** You have nothing to fear. Fear is an emotion that separates you from your bliss. When you start moving into fear, watch it playfully. Surrender helps you move *through* your fears with a sense of humor.
5. **Move your energy out.** Surrendering is an expansion, not a contraction. Visualize yourself getting bigger and more powerful in the world as you surrender into possibility. As you visualize yourself expanding, you are building energy and increasing your resources.
6. **Detach from outcomes.** When we surrender into possibility, we are fully engaged in something and at the same time completely detached from the outcome. Without detachment from outcomes, we limit possibility.
7. **Have faith.** Faith is the releasing of any belief or assumption that limits possibility. It is a child-like openness to any possibility and the capacity to receive radical support. Have faith in the beauty you can create by coming into relationship with surrender.

# THE FAITH CONSCIOUSNESS

I am sitting next to a woman on an airplane when I experience an intense crisis of faith. The last year of her life has been a cascade of unforeseen events that have, at first appearance, coalesced around the disruption of her most closely held plans. Almost as if these events had a kind of intelligence that brought them into cooperation to openly oppose her.

At the end of her story, she looks at me and says, "The last year has been a real test of my faith." But I can tell from the tone in her voice that her *faith* is not about whether her plans will eventually work out—it's an anticipation and excitement for a plan she never knew was possible. A plan that is now emerging through an *intelligent* coalescing of events.

It is this moment that precipitates my own crisis of faith. A crisis that is not around a lack of faith, but my definition of faith.

## FAITH AND BELIEF

As a child I was part of a religious community that closely associated faith with belief. It was through our faith that we clung to our most precious beliefs. And it was the power of faith that saw us through the most intense assaults on our beliefs. Assaults that were sometimes generated internally by doubt and

sometimes generated externally by contrary evidence.

But there is another aspect of faith, a vertical aspect of faith, that requires a complete *suspension* of belief. A faith that recognizes that in our belief we make assumptions that blind us to possibilities that can only be seen in a moment of total surrender. A moment where, like the

woman on the airplane, we realize it is our most cherished beliefs, and our most cherished plans, that keep us from recognizing the miracle that is patiently waiting to happen.

## FAITH AND SURRENDER

Surrendering to the vertical dimension of faith creates an instantaneous opening to new possibilities. Possibilities that do not arise from the convergence of our best knowledge, but through

an emergence—a tiny expansion of consciousness—that makes us aware for the first time of something that until its emergence, was unbelievable.

A faith consciousness requires a child-like relationship with the world. A posture that claims the radical possibility of the most simple, unassuming moments. A consciousness that recognizes the perfect nature of *any* moment where we simply show up to dance with the world—without agenda, assumption, or judgment.

Through this surrendering we remember what has always been our true story—a



story of wholeness where we radically receive and give to the world in ways that are always unexpected, in the best sense of the word.

This faith consciousness creates a resilience and spirit of exploration that does everything possible to follow our best plan, recognizing that at any moment, an entirely new plan, seemingly unthinkable, may peek around the corner, begging our attention to simply notice it.

#### FIVE SAVVY IDEAS

Here are a few ideas that will help you harness the power of a faith consciousness.

- 1. Recognize belief as a bridge.** A faith consciousness recognizes belief as a bridge to knowing. This recognition entertains the simultaneous possibility that belief is both the pathway and the barrier to knowing.
- 2. Harness the Power of Surrender.** Faith consciousness recognizes surrender as an act of power—a stepping in-to, not a stepping out-of. Through surrender, we transcend the structures that limit our emergence. A faith conscious recognizes the beauty of structure to support us long enough to make possible something entirely new. And in this moment, as valuable as our old structures were, they are simply unnecessary in the new, expanded story of our life.
- 3. Be careful about making assumptions.** A faith consciousness makes very few assumptions. It recognizes that events and people that are seemingly about resisting the movement of our life are possibly generous partners in the creation of the new possibilities for our life. Movement that is only possible through the new awareness created as we partner with resistance.
- 4. Remember your purpose.** Chaos is sometimes the best way the universe has to wake us up! When we get distracted by the allure of power, prestige, and money, the universe gives us a little gift in the form of a nudge. A faith consciousness recognizes difficult circumstances as a chance to wake up and step into more wholeness—a wholeness that is only possible when we are following our path—our purpose.
- 5. Recognize faith as connection.** The vertical dimension of faith is not secluded, secretive, and defensive. It's powerful, playful, and in the middle of all the action! A faith consciousness creates a sense of belong and connection to everything around it—a connection that provides access to high creativity, radical support, and abundant resources.

# THE VERTICAL NATURE OF LEARNING

One of the most powerful symbols found across cultures since the beginning of humankind is the universal cross. Its equal-length arms and perfect symmetry are a symbol of perfect balance. And at the center, where the vertical and horizontal meet, a perfect point of creation.

The horizontal dimension of the cross symbolizes our *doing*—how we create with physical things in the world. It represents our *capability*. This is our material nature.

The vertical dimension of the cross symbolizes our *being*—why we are in the world. It represents our *capacity*. This is our spiritual nature.

Our horizontal nature wants to explore the best questions we are capable of asking. Our vertical nature simply asks, "What are we *incapable* of asking?"

When our being and doing natures are in balance, something extraordinary happens—we touch the high point of creation. And from this point, anything is possible.

## HORIZONTAL-CENTRIC CULTURES

In our evolution as a planet, we have moved through agricultural, industrial, technological, and informational revolutions. We are now coupling high-

technology with human ingenuity to create extraordinary things at an extraordinary rate.

But somewhere in all of our excitement about all of our new capabilities, we moved out of balance and created a horizontal-centric culture, a culture that feels more comfortable with doing questions than being questions. And in this shift to *do* more in the world, a shift away from our capacity to *be* more in the world.

## ORGANIZATIONS IN HIGH CREATION

Organizations operating in the high point of creation ask as many *why* questions as *how* questions. And are just as interested in who they are as what they do.

When an organization in balance goes through the ups and downs of financial prosperity, it is just as interested in why it is happening as how it is happening. And doesn't immediately assume that a small turn up or down is intrinsically good or bad, but possibly part of a larger cycle of learning where there is an opportunity to move in the world more meaningfully and more powerfully than ever before.

The high creativity and agility of an organization in balance comes from the awareness that perfect doing flows *naturally* from perfect being.



## VERTICAL LEARNING

Have you ever had a peak vertical experience at a retreat or conference where you are so inspired you know your life is going to be different, but in that moment are struck by the realization that you have absolutely no idea what to *do* next? This disconnect is a natural outgrowth of a culture obsessed with doing. And in that obsession, your opportunity to forever *be* different in the world slowly fades as you struggle with your next step.

Vertical learning requires a tolerance for the ethereal—for those things that are not easily reducible to a series of next steps, or a plan of action.

Vertical learning is about planting consciousness seeds. And once planted, these seeds grow as they come into resonance with people, events, and environments in the world that have like qualities—eventually exploding as new life within us. And with this new life comes new being in the world. And from this new being flows new doing in the world—a doing that until its moment, was undoable.

## FIVE SAVVY IDEAS

Here are a few ideas that will help you be a better vertical learner.

1. **Always ask *why*.** Some of the most import movements of our lives are a part of large patterns that are not so easily recognized in the moment. People and events that appear to resist our

forward movement are often essential to our growth. When we simply ask why things are happening, we often learn lessons essential to our path.

2. **Embrace expansive learning.** Pursue learning that expands your ring of awareness—even if you don't know what to do with it! Expanding consciousness always increases capacity.
3. **Be careful about summarizing.** Our best vertical moments are not easily describable. And when we try to summarize them, we run the risk of mistaking the summary for the thing that happened—our epiphanies fade.
4. **Create vertically intelligent teams.** Spending as much time learning vertically as horizontally increases both the capability and the capacity of a team. Examples of vertical learning areas include: intuition, conscious leadership, the power of the heart, subtle energies, and a broad range of spiritual practices.
5. **Create vertically intelligent organizations.** An organization moves into power when the people within it have equal opportunities to learn why they are in the world *and* what they do for the organization. An equal focus on the vertical dimension evokes the sense of purpose in people and the sense of purpose for the organization.

# HOW TO LEARN ABOUT WEIRD THINGS!

Halfway into Edwin Abbott's classic book, *Flatland*, we find the hero of the story encountering something *really* weird—a creature from another world.

This otherworldly character is from SphereLand, a place of three dimensions: length, width, and depth. Which to us is rather ordinary, but not to our hero.

Flatland is a place that is, well, flat! It's a world of only two dimensions: length and width. So a creature that drops in from above, produces a lot of anomalies from the perspective of a Flatlander—anomalies that are unexplainable using the best Flatland science. That is until the hero of our story simply looks up for the first time.



## OTHERWORLDLINESS

If you've not had your own encounters with otherworldliness lately, you've not been paying attention. Frontier areas like mind-matter interaction, perception at a distance, and non-local consciousness are creating a lot of really interesting conversations between people who *experience* weird things and people who *study* weird things.

But there is an increasing disconnect between these two groups, because we are studying consciousness anomalies from the perspective of a Flatlander. And from this

limited perspective, we are missing most of what, from a more expansive perspective, is obvious.

## THE 3-PILE METHOD

Part of what keeps us from simply looking up is the misperception that the otherworldly isn't real. We don't look up, because we assume nothing is there.

One way to expand your perspective is to embrace 3-pile learning. Using this method, one pile contains all of the ideas you are 100% sure are right. Another pile contains all of the ideas you are 100% sure are wrong. The third pile is for all of the other stuff, including weird stuff.

Some of the ideas on the third pile you may be *almost* certain are right—some of the ideas on the third pile you may be *almost* certain are wrong. But in this third pile lurks the possibility of sweeping discovery—the possibility that one of the things you are almost certain of may actually be completely different than you think.

## OPEN INQUIRY

Another way to expand your perspective is to practice open inquiry—inquiry that is open-ended and inexhaustible. In contrast to other types of inquiry, like scientific inquiry, open inquiry tends to ask many more questions and draws far fewer conclusions. Where scientific inquiry consolidates information within slowly

expanding boundaries, open inquiry pursues questions within radically expanding boundaries. It assumes that we can rely on nothing to be as it appears.

In our pursuit of learning about weird stuff, open inquiry helps us recognize mystery as the *inexhaustible* nature of the universe, not the *indeterminable* nature of the universe. And in this moment of recognition, we suddenly have access to the impossible, the irrational, and the unreasonable—to mystery.

#### SEVEN SAWY IDEAS

Here are a few ideas that will help you accelerate your capacity to learn about really weird things.

- 1. Take the back roads.** The best weird stuff doesn't usually show up in the mainstream. It's written and taught by individuals who are far enough outside the norm that they are, for the most part, unnoticed. It takes a bit of sleuthing to find the most intriguing weird stuff.
- 2. Be prepared to meet weird people.** There is a fine line between genius and madness. In the pursuit of weird stuff, prepare to meet some really unusual people—the kind of people where the line may be *very* fine indeed.
- 3. Don't make assumptions.** No matter how unlikely a weird idea seems, don't assume it's more or less likely because it *feels* foreign. Any assumption you make
- limits your ability to learn about weird things.
- 4. Share weird stuff with discretion.** Not everyone wants to learn about weird stuff. If you share wild ideas with people and feel them pulling back, stop.
- 5. Be neutral.** At the extremes, people can assume the posture of a rigid skeptic *or* a true believer. Both postures slow you down on your way to learning about weird stuff. A position of neutrality allows you to simply watch as a child does—no judgments, no assumptions, no expectations.
- 6. Learn from someone who can do it.** Learning from people who are researching weird stuff is a lot of fun, but there's no substitute for a teacher who can actually do something. Beware though, not everyone who claims to be able to do something actually can.
- 7. Build a tolerance for ambiguity.** You don't always have to choose between two things that seem contradictory. Sometimes more than one thing is true. As your awareness expands, you will discover even more weird stuff that requires an even greater tolerance for ambiguity.

# THE FADING EPIPHANY

Have you ever awakened from a dream knowing something really amazing just happened? The kind of dream where you are in the world more powerfully and more beautifully than you have ever been before?

And possibly you touched, for the first time, a way of being *with* the world where you were giving and receiving with absolute abundance—expressing gifts that you have never been able to express before, but have always known were waiting for you just beneath the surface.

This rich relationship between you and the world produces a perfect moment of bliss! A moment that if extended through eternity *is* the whole and perfect life.

This is epiphany! It is a moment of expansion where you are reaching for the world, and the world is reaching for you in a bigger way than ever before. Through your epiphany you are simply holding more of yourself than you have ever held before.

But then in the fleeting seconds just after you awake, something unthinkable starts to happen. All of the sensations, images, and emotions of your dream start to fade away. And as your body is waking up, your perfect life is slipping away. And suddenly you are struck with the realization that you may be *waking out of your life!*

## EVERYDAY EPIPHANY

The fading epiphany is not only a common experience for people skilled in dream work, but also a common experience of being in the world overall. Most of us have light-bulb moments, when we are suddenly swept away by a really powerful idea. But this idea is more than a thought—it is a moment of rapid expansion, when we are able to synthesize our experiences, skills and intuitions a little better than usual. It is a moment of peak functioning that tends to be quick and fleeting.

And just like the sense of waking out of your life after a dream, many of us start to wake out of our epiphanies by reducing them to something more familiar and more describable. By explaining them. By languaging them. By containing them.

But by their nature, epiphanies are too big to hold and share in normal ways. And the more we try to reduce them to something shareable, something buildable, something speakable, the more they fade. And eventually what started as an exciting and powerful idea begins to fade into something ordinary and familiar. And eventually we are not even sure what we were so excited about in the first place.

## GROUP EPIPHANY

Perhaps you've witnessed this all-too-common group dynamic. You are in the midst of a group process when somebody suddenly lights up, leaps out of their chair, and proclaims, "I have a really



good idea!" But the group does not give the person's epiphany enough time, enough nutrients or enough space to gestate. Instead, they immediately want to know what it is, how they can understand it, how it fits with other familiar things, and whether it's actually possible.

And just like other epiphanies, the person and their great idea start to fade out of power and possibility—eventually getting reduced to something, although knowable by everyone in the group, rather unlike the original.

#### FIVE SAVVY IDEAS

Here are a few ideas that will help you, and the people around you, foster and nurture epiphany.

- 1. Create good initial conditions for epiphany.** Epiphany is more likely when we are accessing expanded states of consciousness. Dream work, breath work and meditation are all good ways of learning to expand. Epiphany is something that happens *between* thoughts, *not through* them. Too much thinking can produce too little epiphany!
- 2. Protect dream epiphanies.** Powerful dreams have a high vibration. When we wake up too abruptly, we are not as likely to span states of consciousness and remember epiphany. Many people use the Zen Alarm Clock, a clock with a gentle chime, to nudge themselves from the dream state to the awake state. Whether using a special clock or waking up naturally, hold on to any sense you have of what just happened in your dreams before getting out of bed. That sense holds an energy. And that energy is connected to your dreams.
- 3. Protect your waking epiphanies.** When you have a waking epiphany, give it a lot of space! Don't reduce it too quickly—there is plenty of time to do that later. If you have an epiphany while around another person, and they start to reduce your epiphany by grilling you with questions so they can relate to it, just stop. Be silent. Hold on to the sense of it as long as you can. There is plenty of time to give it more form later on.
- 4. Protect other people's epiphanies.** When you are around someone *else* who has an epiphany, give him or her a lot of space. Be silent for a while. And if you eventually say anything at all, ask what it *feels* like. In that *feeling* is the energy signature of their epiphany. If you can feel that signature, you are sharing in their epiphany. And nothing needs to be said.
- 5. Set the conditions for group epiphany.** Epiphanies are most likely with the least structure. Tight agendas are not conducive to epiphany. Groups have to learn how to recognize moments of epiphany, so they can foster them and not smother them. Group breath work, meditation, visualization and creative art are all good ways to help create the initial conditions for big possibility.