

# What a Wonderful World

## A Message for a Time of Change

At a recent concert I was given a shopping bag highlighting the words "Live Musically." Exuberantly, Harmoniously. Thoughtfully. Passionately. I can feel this spirit when I hear Louis Armstrong's rendition of the song...A Wonderful World. The tune's lyrics capture the experience of a life seen through the eyes of beauty and gratitude. The jazzman's voice opens my heart.

It's easy to see our life experience in this way when things are going well. But what happens when life is painful and not to our liking, when things seem neither beautiful nor graceful? Do we close down? Is it possible to keep the heart open in the face of *this*? As I begin my 28th year in practice I see that the greatest doorway to healing is the willingness to be present to our experience, whatever it is. What if you did not take a position on whether your experience was good or bad?...asks Byron Brown in his book *Soul without Shame*. What if you could just let your experience be what it is without needing to change it? For the (inner) judge, this is inconceivable, but there is an aspect of your true nature that supports such a possibility.

As we stay with our experience it changes. Sometimes as we soften, our weakness and vulnerability reveals our strength; our discomfort and even pain informs us about our courage and our resilience. It points to a true nature that goes beyond all of our fixed ideas and perceptions. *Gate, Gate* (pronounced gah-tay) are the opening words of the Heart Sutra. It means gone, gone. The Heart Sutra continues: *Paragate*: gone beyond. *Parasamgate*: gone completely beyond. *Bodhi, Svaha!*: awake, we celebrate!

The essential message of the Heart Sutra is that what exists is way beyond what we perceive and often judge. And way beyond that. It's actually a description of a journey we're all on. It may seem paradoxical that we can contact this vast reality by simply going nowhere. By being present to our own experience in the moment. Without judgment, without evaluation, without a story.

As we begin to accept our experience just as it is we treat ourselves and all of life with less judgment and more compassion. With this open and flexible mind and heart we learn a lot. This kind of openness serves as a doorway to healing because we relate directly to our bodies. We have access to what we really feel, even if it is painful or uncomfortable. It gives us and the practitioners who are helping us the opportunity to see what's really going on.

In the midst of this we can experience what Louis Armstrong sings about: this is a wonderful world. As we pay attention and soften, the world softens around us.  
Best, Dr. Bruce

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