

Cultural Conditioning -
when you give up your truth

There are always cracks or, ways out in the cosmic egg of our culture. A crack might take the form of an uncanny event, something for which you have no conditioned categories for explanation. When you experience such an event, however, the cultural pressures, both from others and from the internalized structures (beliefs, stories and the like) built up within you, will probably force you to forget it, or to explain it away. If you experience something everybody knows cannot happen, well, you must be crazy; but if you do not tell anyone and forget about it yourself, you will be just fine.

Here's one of my favorite Sufi stories that explains this dynamic.

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When the Waters Were Changed  
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Once upon a time Khidr, the teacher of Moses, called upon mankind with a warning. At a certain date, he said, all the water in the world which had not been specially hoarded, would disappear. It would then be renewed, with different water, which would drive men mad.

Only one man listened to the meaning of this advice. He collected water and went to a secure place where he stored it, and waited for the water to change its character.

On the appointed date the streams stopped running, the wells went dry, and the man who had listened, seeing this happening, went to his retreat and drank his preserved water.

When he saw, from his security, the waterfalls again beginning to flow, this man descended among the other sons of men. He found that they were thinking and talking in an entirely different way from before; yet they had no memory of what had happened, nor of having been warned. When he tried to talk to them, he realized that they thought that he was mad, and they showed hostility or compassion, not understanding.

At first, he drank none of the new water, but went back to his concealment, to draw on his supplies, every day. Finally, however, he took the decision to drink the new water because he could not bear the loneliness of living, behaving and thinking in a different way from everyone else. He drank the new water, and became like the rest. Then he forgot all about his own store of special water, and his fellows began to look upon him as a madman who had miraculously been restored to sanity.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- When you were young, an adolescent, a teenager, or a young, middle-age or mature adult, has anyone ever said your thoughts, beliefs or ideas were "crazy" or "insane?" Have you ever said as much about another's thoughts, beliefs or ideas?

- Do you ever sacrifice or deny your True and Real Self, your values or your principles in order to "fit in," or to be liked, acknowledged or loved by someone else? Do you ever go along to get along? If so, why?
- Have you experienced "changed waters" in your life at work, at home or ay play?
- Do you find it hard to see your own deficiencies while finding it easy to point out those of others?
- What's it like living among the "crazy" or "insane" without becoming "crazy" or "insane" yourself?
- How do you deal with peer pressure? With change?
- Do you ever question consensus reality?
- Do you generally go about your days drinking your own water? What's that like?
- Are you dependent on others for your self-worth, self-esteem or identity?

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