

## **What to do When You Don't Know What to do**

**The Story:** After almost two years of cancelled retreats and seminars, we were thrilled to be going on our European teaching tour. With two events in Switzerland, one in Austria and one in Germany and our vaccination certificates in hand, we were ready to go.

We entered Boston Logan Airport and made our way to the ticket counter with our bags:

Airline Ticket Counter: *"Sorry sir, your passport is expired and there is no way you can get on this flight"*.

Russell: *"No, that's impossible"*.

A moment of SHOCK passed between us.

Linda: *"I will go, the students are waiting."*

Linda was recovering from three operations due to a facial melanoma, as well as a torn medial meniscus in her knee. The plan was for me to be the "mule", carrying all luggage and guiding the way; life had other plans.

### **The Process:**

Linda and I say hurried good-byes as we begin our separate journeys. Linda flies to Zurich and begins our planned journey, a few days rest with friends and then on to teach the first group.

How can we fulfill our rather densely scheduled teaching tour?  
Many people are counting on me, what can I do to make this right?  
ARGGHH

A jolt of desperation arrives after being told it would take eight to twelve weeks for a passport. At first - a tight belly, erratic breathing, many concerned thoughts and an overall sense of "oh no, this can't be happening".

I am so grateful for the potent methods that we practice and teach. For most of us, in a moment of shock, the breathing becomes dis-regulated and the

energy in the body shoots up to the head (thinking, thinking) and the chest (panic feelings).

- Breathing practices help to regulate heart rhythms and the autonomic nervous system.
- Grounding practices, through bringing one's attention down through the body and into the support of the earth, help to stabilize the organism.
- Consciously acknowledging, naming and taking care of the various inner voices and feelings radically changes one's state.
- A less obvious, yet for me essential inner movement, is ASKING into the great unknown for help. By "great unknown", I refer to the un-nameable Source of life. Some call this God, the great Mystery, the Absolute, Life or simply the Source. When we know in our bones that we are part of a larger system, that we are cells in a greater body, then ASKING from the deepest part of our being for help feels both natural and essential.

Trusting the moment comes from calming one's reactive states and placing the reality of the situation above one's desires. Putting "what is" above "what I want" is the open door to harmony with life. This "saying 'yes' to reality" liberates mind and body.

Often, this is not easy, but it is learnable and doable, with practice. A powerful, and I would say universal awareness – *when what one wants is not possible, after doing all one can to effect the outcome, including self-regulation and asking for help, the next step is to bow with authentic, whole-hearted and deep acceptance to reality*. Sometimes this can come immediately, sometimes it takes time.

### **End of Story:**

After many frustrating phone calls, I found an apparently legitimate company that, for about \$2000, could get me a passport in about one week. This would mean missing only two of the four teaching events. I said "yes" and spent the day filling out the forms and transferring the money. At the same time, my nephew had a long-shot idea: "contact your U.S. Congressional representative and see if his office could expedite anything". I made true peace with the fact that, if all went well, I might arrive in time for

the last two events but the first ones were likely impossible and even that was not certain..

Remarkably, after many obstacles, some very close to derailing the whole project, through my Congressman, I received the passport in two days (and the company returned my money). This was luck, grace and I don't know what else. Numerous people, known and unknown came to my rescue, many prayers answered. Even at the passport office in Boston, the workers were shocked that this happened so quickly- "unheard of" said the woman processing my application.

I arrived in Switzerland mid-way through day-one of the first seminar. Linda, though happy to see me, did not really need me, she was doing fine on her own. Her resilience and "can-do" energy is another important part of the story.

When there seemed no way forward, I reluctantly and wholeheartedly accepted the reality, even as I kept inviting support. Gratefully, I could sense my whole body letting go. As someone who has been working with these practices for more than fifty years, I can say this – *no one I know is immune from reactive physical and mental patterns, including anxiety, disappointment and/or despair, when confronted with sufficiently challenging circumstances.* We do our awareness practices partially to give us fortitude, perspective and deep acceptance in times like these.

When in such a moment, when we don't know what to do, perhaps the best we can do is breathe, bring awareness and care to all the inner reactive states, trust in the moment and ask for help from known and unknown sources. For some of us, a piece of excellent chocolate or a glass of good wine might help also.