

Thoughts on Change and Integrity

C y n t h i a K n e e n



Stay in Nowness and Make Your Gesture from There

In order to mold your world according to a greater purpose and vision than usual, you have to do it from the inside out. If you come at it as someone who has superior knowledge, your arrogance only makes things worse. You get feedback from the world and from inside yourself to find a better way. The same is true in the natural world. When the sun invites plants to step out and blossom, the sun gives its energy as an open gift. If the sun wields its force, using its superior power and stature, the plants wither. First, *you* have to change the environment *you* project. Working for change is rugged and individual in this way. You have to stay in nowness and make your gesture from there.

Nowness is not a way of seeing the truth, as if the truth were outside you. *Nowness* is *being* true. Genuine change, leadership and vision happen *now*. You are being true and strong in *this* challenge, *this* moment, *this* change.

The magical thing about *nowness* is that when you open up, the level of reality you're in contact with changes. Think of the caterpillar that transforms itself into a butterfly. When inside the cocoon, the caterpillar may have an inkling of what might be ahead, but doesn't really know that the sun is always shining, and the sky is always vast. As it emerges from the cocoon, it finds itself in a larger world, and it can fly and fly. Like the caterpillar, before we open up our intellect and heart the level of reality we're in contact with may seem somewhat small and dim. And yet the sun's rays are always everywhere. The sun is shining all the time—just *we* are in the dark. As we open up, nothing has changed, except *we* perceive differently. *We* open up. And this makes all the difference. Now the reality we're in contact with is different, too.

Sometimes we think of change mechanically or mathematically. One state or entity is replaced by another. "A appears. B appears. B replaces A. A disappears. What's a person to do?" It's as if you say, "I used to be like that. Now I'm like this. I don't know how it happened. It's completely mysterious to me!" In fact, the mechanical model *is* mysterious. Where did A go? Where did B come from? This model of change is based on output rather than process. You add up all the outputs from specific points in time. "Result A" + "result B" + "result C." If the total results aren't good, "Hmmm, too bad for Ray. He's fired." If the total results are good, "Susie gets a star!" Instead of change as an organic process, productivity is the V. I.P.

In many situations this model of change is useful, yet our *experience* of change is different than this. Ice doesn't just disappear, and water suddenly appear. Health doesn't just disappear, and sickness suddenly appear. Our experience isn't mechanical like this. Experientially, the process of change doesn't really begin at some specific point, and it never really ends. It unfolds and unfolds, and along the way we make endless personal discoveries. Each time we make a personal discovery, we change. And each time we change, the reality we're in touch with changes, too. It's a mutual world.

Three Kinds of Change

I'd like to introduce three ways of looking at change. One way is change where the situation has clear rules. For example, you are building a fence in your yard, giving a presentation at your work, washing your car, cooking a meal, fixing a faulty rocket or pouring a cup of tea. It doesn't really matter what the project is. The situation you have is coherent. It has clear boundaries and a clear purpose. The rules are pretty much known, the time frame is somewhat short, and the process you are using is pretty well laid out. You feel you can operate in a manual, step-by-step way, because the causality in front of you is clear. "If I do A, B will happen, because that's what happened in the past." "If I don't check tomorrow's weather first, it doesn't make sense to paint the fence. It may snow or become too hot." "If I cook this meal, I'll need to buy special groceries." "If we don't check the weather first, it doesn't make sense to launch the rocket, because the O-rings might fail." As far as action is concerned, you feel you can make a plan, and if you follow the plan, you'll get the results you predict.

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This is *closed-ended change*. The cycle of learning is clear. You can run the process, look at the results it gives you, and learn what you need to learn for the next time. If it's too hot to paint the fence, next time start earlier in the day. If you need oriental sauce and you don't have it, change the recipe. If you want your boss to think about causal relationships so that the rocket doesn't launch, make the message from the data jump off the page. Each time you complete a closed-ended process—build a fence, cook a meal, launch a rocket—you have an opportunity to learn. The more often you run the process, the more you increase your knowledge of the process in different conditions, and the more opportunity you have to learn about how to get your desired results. In closed-ended change, you are a spectator of change. You look at the results, learn, and over time you become more proficient at what you do. This is clearly a way to benefit situations you are in. It is the basis of process improvement.

Another kind of change is like standing on a beach, looking at the open horizon. The situation you perceive is more open-ended. You are still a spectator of change, only now you're not so focused on results alone. Your task is to be open moment-to-moment in order to learn what you need to know to accomplish what you intend. Examples are figuring out a murder mystery, exploring a trend in the market, trying to understand a pattern in your teenager's behavior, planning the attendee list for a negotiation, or brainstorming a new product, process or system at work. Because you are investigating, inventing, innovating or trying to understand something new or unknown, the causality is less certain. "If I do A, I'm not sure what B will be." The opportunity to learn is more pervasive, and the consequences of your actions are less predictable. This is a more creative situation, because the rules of change are more questionable. It is *open-ended change*, and there are different ways to deal with it. In addition to the desired results, your objective is to be flexible, strengthen your capacity to learn, and give your intelligence room to improvise as you do what you do. This is also a way to create benefit. It is the basis for innovation.

A third way of looking at change is more personal. Now you are in the middle of the change, and it's more penetrating to the heart. Your point of view is still objective like being a spectator of change in the examples above, but it's also subjective at the same time, because now you realize you are at the center of what's happening. You have change happening at the level of events, change happening at the level of patterns of events, change happening at the level of the whole system, and now on top of everything there is change happening at the level of *you*. "Holy Cow, I'm in the *middle* of this. What's *happening*? And what should I *do*?"

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This change is more like being parachuted out of a space ship. Here change isn't an option, because it's happening already. You are floating in space, and you can't cultivate or prevent anything. The change is happening to you, but so what? Who cares? It's choiceless. There's nowhere to go, no one to praise, and no one to blame. Things are what they are, like it or not. Whether your parachute opens or not is not the point. Even when it opens, you're still floating in space. Like it or not, you are alone with it. Now your *heart* has to work hard and not purely your brain. This kind of change is personal. Depending on your point of view, the situation is either cause for celebration or a bad joke.

I call this third kind of change *profoundly open-ended change*. It is a very penetrating experience. Now the change is at the level of raw reality, where the environment isn't separate from you, and you don't control anything, not in the mechanical sense anyway. This is change you are *in*. The causality is irrelevant, because so what? What's happening is happening beyond cause and effect. No matter what you do, all you get out of the situation is yourself. In profoundly open-ended change your only choice is to be real, open and courageous, and to stay in touch with real reality. In this kind of change you become completely pragmatic. When change is personal, finally you are free, and equally you are trapped. You are free because there is no fake reality taking place in you. And you are trapped because you are open. Your mind is awake. Your heart is open. You can project your warmth and clarity fearlessly, because you have nothing to gain or lose. You can be brave, relax and expand. And that's it. This kind of change underlies all benefit. It is the basis for integrity.

Making a Home in Profoundly Open-ended Change

When we come into *nowness*, we don't know what the outcome will be. Our learning is heightened, because now our actions are more in the context of reality. I had a boss who counseled me, "Be confident, optimistic and superior. That's what will help people." But how do we do this? On what basis? Gimmicks don't last, and waiting for wisdom doesn't work. Ultimately all you can do is extend as you are. How open you are depends on how much openness you can handle. The advice really is, "Be confident, optimistic and superior *on the spot, as you are*—that's what will help people." It will pare you down to genuineness. Now you're on solid ground to begin to be of help.

At Tassajara, the zen mountain retreat center started by Suzuki Roshi, there was a cook who was a very good zen practitioner and very fierce. While living in a meditation center, the taste and value of food become very important, so if the food isn't satisfying, people steal into the kitchen at night to see what they can get. I heard a story about how this cook used to sit on top of the refrigerator at night with a baseball bat, waiting to catch hungry practitioner-thieves. One day the cook said to Suzuki Roshi, "Roshi, the kitchen's a mess!" And Roshi said, "If you want to clean up the kitchen, first you have

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to clean up your mind.” Serpico, the famous New York City policeman who blew the whistle on police department corruption years ago and later was the subject of a major Hollywood movie, was interviewed on the radio. The interviewer asked Serpico what it felt like to change the New York City Police Department. He said, “I didn’t change the police department. I changed myself!” My refrigerator art used to include a newspaper photo of an African American lady from Detroit, a city with a long history of prejudice, conflict and extremes of wealth and poverty, power and powerlessness. She wore a sweatshirt that said, “The health of my community is up to me.”

The person you are at the beginning of your journey isn’t the one you are at the end. Your confusion becomes wisdom. Your fear becomes courage. Your vision becomes pragmatic. The alchemy is personal.

As each of us makes a personal journey, we are not blossoming inward so much as we are blossoming out. Our inner authority grows, and this has an outer effect. Do what you do for its own sake. Make a home in profoundly open-ended change. Then whether you are alone, talking with your child, working with a team or speaking to the press, your actions have meaning and stature, because everything you do has unshakeable integrity.

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