

Embracing Surrender

Surrender has two components. The first is a willingness to not know the answers right away—*being in the unknown*. The second is a willingness to give up preconceived outcomes—*letting go of control*.

Embracing all aspects of surrender and incorporating them into your life is one of the most difficult tasks of the journey—and holds the greatest potential for freedom. This skill allows for our greatest connection to a divine presence, as well as our greatest sense of joy, ease, flow, creativity, expression, and true place of service in the world. Surrender is a difficult yet easy and complex yet simple art. It is subtle and incorporates many paradoxes. I used to say to myself “how do I do not doing?” The answer is, you don’t. It’s not something you just do, yet if you sit back and do nothing—that is, do what you’ve always done—that doesn’t work either. It cannot be learned in an academic fashion. Although intellectual understanding is helpful, mastery of this fine art comes from a deep knowing acquired through consistent practice.

This realm embraces paradox and the unknown, things difficult for the linear, logical mind. The linear mind can often get in the way of learning the art of surrender because often what we are required to do challenges the logical point of view. From the perspective of feeling and heartfelt knowing, however, it makes all the sense in the world. For it is here in the middle ground, between black and white, this choice and that choice, that miracles are born. Here one can experience ease, peace, and deep rest.

However, since we have come to attach so much value to things of the known world, we do not have training or role models for surrendering in this unknown space. Our reactions are based on fear of the unknown. Often there exist beneath our conscious awareness, feelings of emptiness, worthlessness, or loneliness. It is our willingness to be in touch with these feelings that allows us to step into the world of the unknown and surrender—that place where our connection to all of life resides. In addition, practicing the other skills and arts in this book greatly enhances the ability to surrender and be in the great unknown.

Being in the Unknown

In his book *The Path to Love*, Deepak Chopra describes being in the unknown:

Reality is always on the move, shifting the known out from under us and bringing the unknown into view. Dying to the known brings knowledge that cannot be acquired any other way. The scriptures have called this “dying unto death.”²

When you let yourself be in the unknown, you are faced with the uncomfortable feelings often associated with not having answers right away. You are also faced with another kind of unknown—leaving your world of perceived safety and security behind. No matter how much pain or dissatisfaction your current reality may cause you, it is a known and therefore appears desirable because it feels secure. But life based on this type of security becomes a prison. Even though a maximum-security prison provides the basic needs for prisoners—food and shelter—it also represents the ultimate loss of freedom. Similarly, when our inner being tells us to let go of something or attempt something new, but we choose what appears to be security over the unknown, we give up our freedom and the ability to lead truly creative, fulfilling lives.

The ability to be comfortable with not knowing can be cultivated. You can begin by not coming up with solutions or answers to your own questions or challenges right away. Instead, wait in the unknown, giving new possibilities time to surface. Do the same thing with friends who share their problems. Instead of jumping in with solutions, just listen and be supportive. You can do this by feeding back what you sense they are feeling about a situation, with no attempt to solve the problem. For example, if a friend tells you she just lost her job and at the same time her car broke down and fixing it used up her cash reserves, instead of offering a plan to deal with the situation or telling your friend how she should feel, simply listen to the details and empathize. Reflect it back, saying “I imagine you must be feeling pretty scared right now.” This often has the magical effect of helping the person feel better. Trying to

offer a solution to the problem—playing “Dr. Fix-it”—often leaves the individual feeling more frustrated. Part of not offering solutions is coming to terms with your own feelings about just letting something be, without trying to solve or fix it. Our inability to fix a friend’s problems often taps into our own feelings of helplessness, but letting ourselves just be in this unknown place of our feelings and theirs is a step toward being able to be in the unknown.

Holding this non-fix-it attitude is a great way to be with yourself during times of challenges, questions, or decisions. Ironically, looking for immediate solutions or ruminating about the pros and cons of a possible choice will keep the answers from emerging. Answers usually become evident as an inner knowing that you cannot access if all your energy is focused on thinking and worrying. Let yourself acknowledge what you are feeling in response to a situation and give yourself the time and space to allow those feelings expression. It helps to ask yourself, “What am I feeling?” The feeling place is directly related to the unknown and is a source for our creativity.

Being in the unknown requires letting go of knowing answers, surrendering to feelings or emotions, relinquishing ideas of security, what seems like the “right” thing to do, or trying to fix problems. When we allow ourselves to be in the unknown, problems will work themselves out over time, or unforeseen solutions will arise. Although being in the unknown and letting go is not always easy to do, once these abilities are acquired they allow life to flow with much more ease and grace.

Letting Go of Control

Letting go of control includes letting go of expected outcomes. You know you are attached to an outcome when you have a sense of urgency or tension about things turning out a certain way. For a moment consider this: how do you react when things do not happen the way you want them to or the flow of your life is interrupted with unexpected change? Notice how you react when others don't respond to you as you would like them to or don't do what you think they should. Think about monetary or material loss. When these things occur what emotions emerge? What do you feel in your body—tightness in your chest, a churning in your belly? What you feel is an indication of how “in control” you are trying to be. Different circumstances trigger different reactions in various people. For some, issues of money may have more potential for upset; for others, the inability to elicit a certain behavior or emotional response from someone may cause anxiety; for others, issues of organization are very important.

The *controller* is that part of us or aspect of our behavior that responds to external circumstances or internal feelings by attempting to control them. All this controlling is futile and a great waste of creative life force because feelings, other individuals, and life in general are impossible to control. The more we try, the farther we stray from our essence. We can guide the direction we want it to go, but actually control it we cannot do.

There are keys to help you notice when you are trying to be “in control,” whether it is in response to something particular or just as a general modus operandi. Look for these clues in your body: changes in breathing (higher, faster, or not at all), faster movements, feelings of anxiety, frowning, voice tone changes (usually higher, faster, or louder), an emotional charge building up, or stomach tension. Look for these clues in your behavior: emotional eating, upset with others, focusing attention on and judging others' behavior, self-righteousness, being demanding or defensive, blaming others, or complaining.

Here is a list of more words and qualities that can be associated with being in control versus being in a place of surrender. The degree to which you experience these in your life will help you know

whether you live your life trying to be in control or have opened to surrender.

- *Control*: rigidity, limiting, fixed, hard, confining, dominating, fitting in, expectations, attachment, manipulative, defensive, reactive, intolerant
- *Surrender*: flexibility, allowing, flowing, spontaneity, aliveness, radiance, forgiveness, empathy, compassion, creative, softness, openness, playfulness, out of the norm.

For years I didn't see myself as controlling, at least I didn't think I was trying to push people around or control their behavior. However as I achieved a greater understanding of how the controller operates, I started to recognize that I *did* act to control things. I exhibited controlling behavior with external circumstances by exhibiting tense and anxious responses to the twists and turns of life. When things didn't go as I expected, I became upset. When my daughter acted obnoxious, I behaved in kind. When sudden financial crises occurred, I became exceedingly tense. In my relationships with others, I was often defensive. Outwardly, many of these reactions were not apparent, I appeared cheerful and friendly. But inwardly I was experiencing anxiety. Often I expressed that anxiety by going a hundred miles an hour. In fact, I had my life set up with so much to do that I had very little time or energy left to stop and feel what was really going on. Do-aholism creates so many distractions that one no longer experiences one's true feelings.

When the controller is trying to keep circumstances or people under control, it is doing its job of "external controlling." When it tries to protect us from experiencing our uncomfortable feelings, those of anger, sadness, hurt, fear, loneliness, helplessness, dissatisfaction, or not wanting to be here, it is doing its job of "internal" controlling.

Experiencing feelings is basically a nonlinear, out-of-control activity. It is necessary to be out of control to really feel.

The controller has countless ways to protect us from painful feelings. This might be advantageous except for the fact that with this intense first line of defense against experiencing "bad" feelings comes a blocking of our more desired feelings such as joy, spon-

taneity, and love. In doing this, the controller limits our connection with Spirit as well as access to our creativity and guidance. It does this by: 1) not letting us express our feelings that help us create our sense of aliveness, and 2) not allowing us to be spontaneous, which inhibits our free co-creative flow with the universe. By accepting what life brings us, good or bad, allowing ourselves to feel deeply and then move on, we open our lives to flow, a sense of ease, and inner peace.

The normal *modus operandi* of our culture, that is, everything in control, breeds struggle, stress, illness, and suffering. Learning to live with this new way of thinking, which embraces surrender, in the midst of our modern active lives, is, I believe, a key to turning our world around—not only our inner world and its resulting outer manifestations but also our planet.