

Editor Note

Incomprehensible Instructions

Emails careened around the globe, checking in: Are you okay? your family? friends? anyone you know? People closer to the site, in NYC, sent word out, a quick wave hello: “I’m OK; we’re OK.” I live in western Massachusetts and have family in and around NYC, so I felt lucky to be able to report that we were all OK. But every time I began to type that message, I’d have to pause. It wasn’t true. “My family” was not OK, and neither was I.

As I watched the first tower, on TV, descend into itself, telescoping down into a burst of smoke and rubble, I received an imperative into my nervous system, and my soul. The image of the towers—replayed over and over, on TV, in my mind, added to every day with new particulars from people’s stories—is a reality that I must make sense of in some way. The ways are myriad and we’re all doing them—being outraged, worried, sad; trying to “go on with our lives”; analyzing, philosophizing, arguing, organizing; writing poetry & policies, dancing, trying to ignore, mourn, understand, activate, soothe, pray...

I’m reminded of a summer workshop in 1993 with Suprpto Suryodarmo, Indonesian movement and meditation master. His instructions that day were relatively simple: “Point of view. Line of view. Space of view. Time of view. Five people, please.” The students looked at each other and the teacher incredulously—Is that *it*? What does that mean? What are we supposed to *do*? One by one, hesitantly, five people got up and began to move—stepping out into the void of not understanding, shifting weight, lifting an arm, turning a head, looking out, looking in, trying to get a clue, trying to make sense of incomprehensible instructions.

Although I’ve largely managed to go on with my daily activities—making this issue of the magazine, planning spring and summer work, getting my car fixed—my nerves are raw. Usually Miss Look-for-the-bright-side, I’m instead seeing the suffering in every face, in every situation, including my own, feeling myself so close to beyond the limit, that any little turn of events—the computer acting dangerously weird just as we’re about to begin the biggest week of magazine production, or the leaf vacuum machine across the street making TOO MUCH NOISE—can put me screechingly up against the edge. Some crucial membrane in me has less flexibility, less margin these days; I feel it stretched, ready to burst. Even at the lovely formal blessing of my friends’ two little children last week, the peace



photo: Bill Arnold

and goodness that I experienced in that room moved me so deeply I couldn’t stop my eyes from filling with tears, my soul so desperately relieved to be relieved.

In the small sanctuary of my body, I find comfort in the simple sensation of release as I lie down on the studio floor and let gravity have my weight. I notice the sensation of surrender as I let go of holding myself up, hear and feel the sigh that comes out of my mouth, the sharp reflexive inhalation that follows, filling the lungs quickly and fully, then slowly emptying, the luscious stretching of limbs, the resting in the stretch, the breathing... and the moment of peace that comes.

I know that this small, personal peace alone is not enough to change the world, to put the towers back up, to make America’s relations with the rest of the world sane and enlightened, to make “the terrorists” go away, and return us to a sense of safety, freedom, and prosperity, however illusory. But it feels important now to touch peace wherever I can find it—whether in the studio moving, sitting still and listening, or taking an extra second to absorb the joy shining out at me from a small child’s face. Important to give up the struggle for a moment, the struggle to be OK, to help, to figure it out, to do the right thing—or do anything.

But it also feels important not to stay too small and self-centered in my peace, or my discomfort. To keep the lines open, moving both ways, in and out, small and large, between my body and the towers, between my personal sensation and the world; to keep the lens open, telescoping out and in, to both be able to feel myself and be ready to move out and take action in a larger context.

What was the imperative I felt watching the World Trade towers go down? What was it telling me to do? How will I make sense of these incomprehensible instructions?

Touching small moments of peace where I can find them may not save the world, but it might help me remember where I’m going when it’s too dark to see past the nose on my face, let alone what’s coming next.

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