



Sibella Circle Member & Visionary Leader

THE POWER OF AWARENESS

Liberate Your Inner Witness

By Catherine Dowling

I once told a client that I liked the jacket he wore to a therapy session. I expected a thank you or even an off-hand grunt of acknowledgment. Instead his whole body stiffened and he glared at me with fire in his eyes. When he finally spoke it was to unleash a torrent of anger. Only after he had spent some of his rage in words, did we get to the bottom of his reaction. This tall, handsome man went through life believing he was defective in every way so when I complimented him, he believed I was lying with the intention of making a fool of him.

This was the muddy filter through which he looked at the world; everything in his life was interpreted through his low self-esteem. He expected people to reject him so when someone sincerely reached out to him, he reacted with rage. The effect on his life was devastating: short-lived friendships, missed promotions, loneliness and depression. But until that moment he had no idea he operate this way.

We develop filters from the moment we're born—some would say from the moment we're conceived. Like the lenses opticians try out when we go for a sight test, our filters either blur or clarify our view of the world. And like my client, we often grow up unaware that we even have filters. We accept what we see as being an accurate assessment of the way things are and we action based on those assessments. Our precious lives are shaped by those actions.

Being able to stand back and recognize that we're seeing through filters is quite a skill, the skill of Awareness. I've often heard people use the title *Inner Witness* to describe the part of us that is aware, that can stand back and observe the other aspects of the self in action. The Inner Witness observes without judgment or self-criticism.

My client's Inner Witness sprang to life in that therapy session. For the first time he was able to see that his view of the world had been deeply colored by his life experience and was not necessarily an accurate picture of reality. His Inner Witness allowed him to glimpse the way he had shaped his own life and through making him aware of his filters, opened the possibility that he could sculpt his life differently in the future.

When I look back on life from the perspective of maturity and a now strong Inner Witness, regret beckons. I see all the misinterpretations, all the paths taken and more importantly, not taken, because my own muddy filters. But regret is not a characteristic of the Inner Witness who sees regret for what it is: yet another filter on Awareness. In my experience, Awareness has cleared my way forward and uses my past as an invaluable tool for learning.

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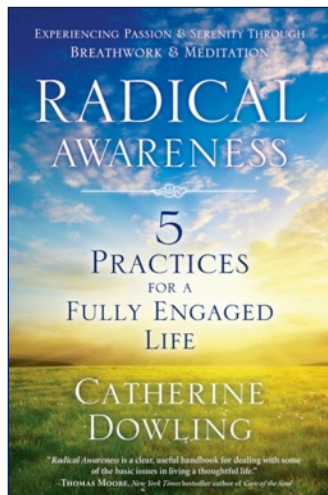
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