

## SOLAR FLARES AND DEPRESSION May 20, 2013

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Odd as it sounds, but understandable enough, some of you appear to be still having difficulty focusing on how to identify inner change when it is present. I have pointed out that it does little good to look outside in the world for it. I suggested that you look within, but I see that even though you are now looking within, you still are looking for something OUTSIDE yourself. I fear you miss the point, so let me be more graphic.

You may be looking for change as if change were something unusual or strange to find, when it is just the opposite. Remember that the wisdom of the ages declares that change is the only constant. Therefore, it is something you are only too familiar with, not something different from yourself. In other words, even when you are looking within, don't look outside yourself for change in there, but rather look at how you (yourself) are changing. I know, it is hard to see because it is you that is changing. It is difficult both to change and witness your own change at the same time. This is not news.

In life, we are used to experiencing change, and then evaluating it, figuring out what happened after the experience. However, with change and the self, this is more difficult because the observer and what we are observing are the same thing. If we have fallen into the habit of identifying with ourself as who we are, then the subject and its object we are looking at are identical. So how can we tell the difference?

In my experience, it is easier to develop awareness when the self has been somewhat vacated due to intense change, especially when there is some life-changing event or shock. At those times the self tends to shrink way back or goes more-or-less void. We come up feeling empty and we find ourselves at a loss as to what to do, which way to go or turn, and so on. This is a short-term loss, because it is the nature of the self to pull itself back together as fast as it can, so I try to make good use of these times when I am empty of myself, when the tide of "me, me, me" has run out for the moment. I look around and take notes.

In particular I pay attention to what I feel (or do not feel) like doing. When the self does not have it all together is the best time to take an inventory of what you love and do not love... "I love me, I love me not, I love me..." Find out what you really care about and feel like doing plus what you no longer feel like doing. And give it some time. When solar change impacts us, time can seem like it is in slow motion.

At these times of change, when what we remember and thought we knew life was suddenly comes up empty, it is tempting to slip into depression. This is all too common. Depression is just another way to ignore what is happening and hide our heads until our self comes back to full strength.

The self is a bit like that old oracle-game, the "Magic 8-Ball," where you turn the ball over and see what message floats to the top. When change shakes the foundation of the self, our real feelings begin to float up. And change can be so confusing. In the beginning we may not feel like doing anything at all. Nothing comes up. It can be depressing. But over time, as the self starts to pull itself together, but while there are still gaps in the closure of the self, we can begin to glimpse what is going on.

As most of us know from experience, the self is easily upset. Changes are not so much something we can see as they are something we can feel. How do you feel? Do you feel like doing anything at all? Are you depressed? A standard sign of sudden inner change is the loss of feeling, the loss of direction, and often depression. We just draw a blank and assume the worst.

I believe that the connection between the sun and the self is much closer than we imagine, almost like an intravenous pulse-feed from the sun. Before the effect of these solar flares can really be useful to us, we have to find some way of identifying with the change in our life, otherwise we are just carried along by it. We are told to look for solar change and we tend to look for it to be something different in us, something perhaps weird, strange, or "otherworldly," when in fact it is too close to identify easily.

When the self is eclipsed by the sun, overrun by intense solar flux, or otherwise challenged it gets confused. A sure sign in my life of this is when I wake up one morning and don't feel like doing anything or I am depressed. When I went to bed, I had a to-do list a yard long, but the next morning I am listless. Suddenly, there is nothing I want to do, including nothing. It can be scary.

I am just not comfortable anywhere and can't think of anything I actually want to do. I have to be very careful not let myself become depressed at these times. This kind of reaction is, for me, very unusual and marks a disruption of the self. And as often as not, I just can't seem to get comfortable, no matter how much I try to relax. There I am, just present (like a sore thumb), but not much moved to do this or to do that. I am aware that I am there, but that's about it.

The world around me continues to beckon, and the day may be bright, the flowers blooming, a warm breeze in the air, and so on. But I remain unmoved. I am compass-less. No direction whatsoever seems inviting. And this can go on for a long time, like days. Eventually time somehow fills in all these missing empty gaps until the self-center of me appears solid enough to depend on and I gradually go back into orbit around myself. Things are back to normal or at least to a new normal.

When the sense of our self gets zapped by a solar flare, things can go flat fast. What was the bustling metropolis of my busy self is suddenly like a ghost town, just emptied out into a moonscape.

And where am I? I guess it depends on who I think I am? We are not used to being without the companion of our self or with having that self greatly diminished. Therefore we wait for the tide of who we are to come back in, for all the gaps in the self to be plugged, and for the sense of being someone once again to return.

And then there is the time factor. When the self goes south it takes time for the tides of the self to come back in. We have to wait it out and this can take days, so try to put your feet up and just kick back. At least that's what I tell myself. Easier said than done.

There are some problems that only time can heal, and this loss of self is one of them. The self more-or-less runs on friction and attachment. It takes time to build up the kind of static that keeps us buzzin' around 24x7. When the self gets zapped, things go flat and they can stay there for a while. Our speedometer hugs the zero mark. However, this actually can be a good thing.

We learn much more during a time when the self is vacated than we ever do when it is pumped

and pointing at itself all the time. I am learning to use this down-time to kind of look around a bit in the mind, to see past the obvious emptiness I feel, and make out the skyline of what else there is in life besides just "me." Yes, it can be a wee bit terrifying at first, but if I don't panic and don't get depressed, I can learn a great deal.

I would have to do a lot of dharma practice to have the same opportunities that a strong solar flare provides effortlessly, like emptying out the self. Yes, I kind of freak that I have no real drive or urge (at these times) to do anything at all. I even lose my taste for entertainment. And I find myself looking around for permission from myself to just sit there and do almost nothing. I am sure we all have pastimes that can get us through the time it takes for the self to re-charge.

Sometimes when the self goes vacant I will watch movies, and not just one, but perhaps several. Of course, I have a special relationship with watching almost anything that flickers on the silver screen. To my mind, watching TV is the most common form of meditation training. Put the content aside and consider how else can you get folks to sit and stare at one point on a wall for two hours. I know, it's just entertainment, but I feel that it is as close to meditating as many of us ever get.

And in that fixed couch-potato gaze, aside from the movie action, the mind somehow holds still and we can review whatever we are too busy otherwise to notice from the current day, like what's really on our mind. In my case, aside from just watching the movie, whole continents of submerged material float up, like the lost city of Atlantis rising into view from beneath the waters of the self. In the course of a single movie, my mind can go through a lot. In fact that is one of the great benefits of TV, the messages (and creativity) that somehow seep through to me. While the self is entertained by the movie, another part of me is taking this internal stuff in and contemplating it.

And this is especially true at times of solar flare inundation. When the self gets deflated, I am perfectly poised (like the hummingbird in midair) to remain motionless for a time. There is nothing I want to do and I do that. So don't be surprised if you just want to hold very still and do almost nothing at all. Give yourself that permission. And don't give in to depression.

Your thoughts please?

Here is a poem I wrote about the experience I am trying to convey here.

## WATER AND THE WELL

The rare times,  
When nothing moves me,  
And I don't feel,  
Like doing anything.

Perhaps this is some kind of,  
Natural meditation,  
An effortless detachment,  
From my day-to-day world.

All that is missing,  
From just being lazy,

Is this awareness,  
Of my own condition.

I don't waste time,  
Pretending to be busy,  
But just sit there,  
And for a long time.

Nothing is missing.

Watch a movie,  
Read a book,  
Sit, or not,  
It makes no difference.

I am right here.

The mind is at rest,  
The water back in the well.

