

# *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be*

by Michael Mendizza

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As Merlin was to young King Arthur, so every adult must become to every child. Intimate connection and authentic play are the teachers *and* the subject to be mastered.

Sitting across the table were three large natives, Maori from New Zealand, traditional healers. I asked about their roots, where they came from, about their ancestors, how they were trained, what spirit and soul meant to them. The oldest pointed to the stars, described a particular constellation. His roots were there, he said, and he has carried the essence of that constellation long before he was born. The actual place in the sky, I asked, or was he using this heavenly body as a metaphor, and if he was using metaphor, what was the metaphor pointing to? What was the essence or state of being that the metaphor represented? He smiled.

Six months earlier I sat with a Celt from Brittany. He, like the Maori, talked of multiple realities. What you and I think of as reality is just one of many, perhaps an infinite spectrum of realities, each very real while in them. Sane or healthy in one reality may be mad or dis-eased in another. Documented cases of multiple personalities have shown the body of one covered in hives. When the other personality takes over the rash disappears. We might rename this phenomena a multiple-reality disorder. Why a disorder? Because the switch from one personality or reality to the other did not appear to happen by choice. But what if it did? Would we consider this ability to switch realities a disorder or enlightenment?

Imagine having poor eyesight in one reality, but 20/20 in another. Imagine being afraid of public speaking in one personality or reality but in another you were brilliant in front of a group. Switching from one reality to another would be a spontaneous remission. It may be that our real disorder is not being sufficiently aware of the operating system of our spaceship, body and mind, to consciously and creatively surf realities.

Beliefs are realities. Beliefs predispose and organize the body and mind in predictable ways. In the Christian tradition being born again implies, does it not, shifting from one reality to another. Racial prejudice is a reality. The Nazis lived in a unique reality. Urban ghetto children have their reality. Politicians have theirs. All the categories we live our lives in are realities.

In *The Biology of Transcendence* friend and mentor Joseph Chilton Pearce describes how enculturation, parenting, religion, schooling, competition and other forces limit and constrain our vast potential into a tiny anxious self-centered cube we call ME, our self-image, what I call "the box." The box is a belief system. The category called ME, male, female, mother, father, black, brown, white, smart, PhD, dumb, CEO, are all realities, and while in them very real indeed. All realities are relative and each reality is real. After all, dreams are real while we are dreaming.

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Reality appears in consciousness the way the northern lights dance in the evening sky. The difference between what we call dreaming and waking consciousness is the quality of awareness and attention present as our dreams splash in and out of the body and mind. Each memory is a mini-reality. We have ecstatic experiences, pure pleasure, beyond orgasmic. And we have suffered excruciating sorrow. Each, the pleasure and the pain, imprint their pattern or state in the cells of our body, in our DNA and perhaps more deeply in the energetic ocean that surrounds us. The patterns of the pleasure and the pain are there, in the cells and in the energy.

Some associative trigger, a sight, smell, that song on the radio, causes a re-membering (a reconstruction) of the original experience, which was, at one point in time-space, very real. If we gave complete attention to that memory it would reincarnate in the present moment and again be real. But we don't usually give this complete attention. Most often our body and mind is preoccupied with the present reality while ghosts of projected past and futures ebb and flow throughout the system.

What we call normal reality is a composite of multiple realities, physical coming in through our senses, resonate feelings of present or past experiences, thoughts, stored memories and perhaps, if we have retained our childlike nature, we may still connect with realities beyond our personal conditioning, the transpersonal realm physicists and philosophers call insight and shamans call spirit.

The human brain evolved over billions of years. As different brain systems developed so did corresponding realities unique to each brain structure. The sensory motor brain came first, providing inner images of the outer environment, so we could eat it, run away from it or mate with it. Let's call the inner images provided by the sensory-motor brain reality number one. Millions and million of years later grew another reality, number two, generated by the limbic or mammalian brain. This brain system monitors inner state, how we feel about chasing after, running away from or mating. Millions and millions of years later emerged a symbolic and metaphoric reality created by the neocortex, allowing us to represent the chase and the mate in symbols. All three brain systems create images, realities, or more precisely "resonate representations" unique to its slice of the experiential pie. Each system creates images but the images created by each are different in form, as different as painting is to music and music is to sculpture.

What we call reality is a stream of resonate representations generated by the unique constitution of our different brain systems. Reality to a cat is very real and very different from that of a bat or fish. There are many realities, perhaps infinite variety, all relative and all very real.

Physicist David Bohm observed that complex systems imply or embody less complex systems. The more complex the brain the wider the spectrum of resonate representations or different realities that brain system may produce.

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Recall how Merlin, in the Shamanic tradition, taught young King Arthur to soar with the falcon, not as an observer, but to share the falcon's reality and in that sharing cultivate deep empathic rapport with the spectrum of life we call falcon. Much of Merlin's magic involved surfing realities and historically all of the realities were grounded in nature, plants, animals, human beings, rivers, the stars, but not any more. Fish can't experience the rich diversity of human perception but human beings embody the stage of evolution called fish and because of this embodiment can experience that stage, now. It was from this perspective that J. Krishnamurti observed that "we are the world."

Fast forward to today's young Kings Arthurs. Who are their Merlins? And what realities are they sharing - animal, mineral, or technology? It took nature billions of years to create the sensory motor system, and what a marvel it is. Only with a firm and clear grasp of our sensory-motor reality can proper functioning of reality two, emotional intelligence, emerge. Improper development of the primary system distorts the reality generated by that system causing false or misleading messages to flow upstream. Responding to often misinformation, the mid-brain gets all excited and sends its distorted reality to the neocortex. How can we possibly expect thought, belief, society and culture to operate sanely if our physical and emotional systems are poorly developed or confused by their own processes?

The Buddhists proclaim an absolute, transpersonal reality uncontaminated by individual conditioning. They also describe a relative reality filled with all the images produced by past experience, memory and thought. In low states of attention the automatic, reflexive nature of the conditioned relative reality occupies our awareness. The critical question is: are we completely taken in by this conditioned reality or is there some energy, some awareness and attention that abides beyond the dream, what many traditions call "the witness" or mindfulness? Without this extra energy and attention we are enchanted, lost in an endless stream of dreams, floating in a bucket, heading for the Niagara Falls of our own creation, unaware that we are the river, the falls and the bucket. Our normal state is to be completely taken in by the image. It is quite another state to be aware that the image or reality we are responding to is of our own creation.

The message is very old, "Know thy self." The self referred to is not the nervous egocentric self-image we have accepted. Using computer terms we might say "knowing our self" means gaining an understanding of the basic operating system, as a skilled car mechanic might know the design of an engine.

Many of us have skilled knowledge about our physical bodies. Eating vegetables is good. Smoking is bad. Regular vigorous exercise is good. Sitting too long in front of a video or computer screen is bad. So we walk, job, ride bicycles, play golf or at least know we should. But what about emotional fitness? In what ways are we nurturing and developing our emotional capacity?

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What does the emotional gymnasium look like? What experiences do we find there? And what about imagination, reason, ratio, the critical and abstract capacities of the neocortex? We expect that school is the gymnasium for developing symbolic and metaphoric processes. But is this really what is taking place in our schools? More abstract yet is attention. Attention is the critical capacity upon which all other capacities depend. Without attention our physical, emotional, and intellectual engines have no juice, no energy, no power.

We have different grades of gasoline for our cars. The same is true of attention, very low, low, medium, above average, high, premium and turbo. The quality of attention we bring to the present moment provides fuel for our physical, emotional and intellectual systems. The development of each system plus the quality of attention or fuel we deliver to that system, moment by moment, produces the ever changing display of resonate representations we call reality.

So called spiritual traditions have known this for centuries. In these traditions are found all sorts of exercises for gathering attention, using imagination, understanding the emotions and moving the body. Most people, however, are so enchanted by the images they are producing that they walk by gigantic billboards like the sphinx, obelisks, pyramids, temples, churches, all forms of sacred geometry, completely unaware that these are invitations and gymnasiums for cultivating attention. Certainly not invitations to get lost in the imagery painted on their walls.

For regular folk the images on the walls, mythology and story (all images) were ancient ways of helping us to know ourselves. Being stuck in images, sages used images to help us out. The field of psychology, of which I am no expert, gave this important task a new, often confusing, twist. Myth, story and very often psychology dealt with the images generated by the system. Rarely did these traditions deal with the image making process. Contemplation, meditation and a few other practices came close. The developmental goal of these practices is first to have an insight into the various ways our brains create images and second, to cultivate a quality of attention that is not totally consumed by these images. Only then do we have the capacity to see beyond our own images and experience directly the face of God, as was so beautifully described in the 15th century by St. John of the Cross.

The Latin root of the word intelligence is to "read or see between the lines." The lines to read between are images, thoughts, concepts, beliefs generated by the body and brain. Intelligence is a state of energy and attention which abides outside the lines created by these images. The closer we focus on the present moment the less attention we give to images and the more our attention focuses on the state of the body and mind creating the image. We begin to see that images are resonate representations of "states of being" this present moment. This shift from image to state opens us to a breathtaking new reality.

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Our disorder is a lack of development. We have not cultivated the attention and awareness needed to understand our own mental and physical process. And then to creatively use our vast innate creative power to surf image-realities and manifest in our lives health, wholeness and deep empathy for all of nature. How do we, and by implication our children, cultivate this energy and attention, especially in an era flooded by commercial images, a formidable challenge indeed?

Is the experience of watching an animated fantasy of Merlin pulsing on a plasma screen the same as the experience of a living mentor? Are Disney's computer images of a soaring falcon's reality the same as holding a falcon, watching it fly? What perceptual systems are involved sitting by the stream, holding the falcon, listening to Merlin weave a story that evokes a deep resonate representation of that amazing bird as it soars? What perceptual systems are involved watching a computer image of the same? As wonderful and real as the counterfeit is, it is a counterfeit designed to produce the illusion of being real and in this act, by design, is stunting and retarding, on a mass scale, the development of true capacity.

Flooding the many brain systems with counterfeit realities, especially those delivered through concrete imagery, is like feeding a developing body junk food, sugar filled sodas, empty calories. Empty calories create the illusion of nurturing nutrition when in truth the experience is empty of exactly what the brain and body need to grow whole, sane, holy.

In the film, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a native, pretending to be retarded, breaks his silence and describes his father, an alcoholic. It appeared to most that the father was sucking life out of the bottle. The Indian flipped the image and described how the bottle was sucking life out of his father. The same is true of video based technology, especially for young children. Image based technologies deliver pre-fabricated substitutes or counterfeits of images the child would naturally create internally.

Failing to develop fully their own image making capacity children become addicted to image producing technologies. What we fail to appreciate is that the act of generating and playing with mental images, realities really, matures into an insight of the image making structure and function of the brain. And it is this insight, knowing ourselves, free of any image, that the Buddhists speak of as liberation, true freedom of the mind.

Adding insult to injury these same image producing technologies displace intimate empathic connection with living mentors, like Merlin, falcons, plants, rivers, and celestial constellations, the ancestral home of the Maori sitting across the table. Lacking intimate contact with the resonate representations shimmering in these living mentors the child's emotional intelligence remains undeveloped, often retarded.

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In place of this intimate empathic sensory and emotional foundation we drill and test young children in premature intellectual constructs like the A, B, Cs. What use are abstract symbols if what they represent is powered by retarded physical and emotional systems? Isn't this what, in 1813, Mary Shelley prophesized in her classic tale of the mad scientist, Dr. Frankenstein?

Each of our reality centers, sensory, emotional, symbolic, and others, require different experiences to grow and develop. The sensory system needs physical sensations to grow. The emotional system needs to experience safe playful intimate relationships to grow. The intellectual system needs a rich diet of symbols and metaphors to grow. Lifting weights, riding a bicycle or Pilates are great for the sensory-motor system but do little for the emotional and symbolic systems. Math drills or even great literature does little for the biceps or cardio vascular system. We all know that the physical body needs a balanced diet to grow. What we fail to realize is that a rich diet of emotional relationships, symbols and metaphors are essential nutrients for mid brain development and the neocortex.

Each brain system must be nurtured and nourished by the appropriate experience unique to that system. If this balanced experiential diet is not maintained, the reality produced by the various systems will be unbalanced, distorted by the malformed structures that give rise to the images we call reality. When the forces of change blow we will wobble and rattle like an unbalanced washing machine rather than spin like a gyroscope.

A new mind is emerging and with it a new reality. Our challenge is to recognize that balanced nutrition implies nurturing each perceptual system with developmentally appropriate experiences, physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual, the unseen aspects of being alive and sentient. This can only take place when we as adults cultivate a quality of attention that lies beyond the images we produce.

If adults don't have this intelligent attention, how will children recognize and value it in themselves? We can't solve problems at the level of the problem. If a problem is being created by a misuse of our image making structures, we can't use those structures to solve the problems these structures create. Something beyond the image is required to bring the system to order. And this precious something, the attention Merlin cultivated in Arthur and the Maori elders evoked by their incantations will never be found gazing at a video or computer screen. It will be found looking into the eyes and feeling the hearts of people who see beyond the images and then we, like learning how to ride a bicycle, will discover this mindful attention in ourselves, moment by moment, as we live our daily life in relationship.