

# Introduction: A Personal Revolution

What if everything you'd ever learned about how reality worked was just wrong?

In 2007, I thought I was at the top of my game. My coaching practice was thriving, I was well respected in my particular field of applied psychology, my first book had been a bestseller, and my second book was just about to come out in America. My wife, Nina, and I were in our twentieth year together and our three kids were everything we could have hoped for and more.

About the only difficulty I had in my life was that Nina and I were in the middle of an ongoing debate about whether or not we should move to a new house. It was certainly what might be called a 'high-quality problem,' but that didn't stop me from complaining about it to anyone who would listen.

A friend of mine grew tired of my whining and sent me a copy of *The Relationship Handbook* by Dr. George Pransky, which I fully intended to ignore completely. I'm not a fan of relationship books at the best of times, as I find they're generally filled with wonderful advice which works great if you happen to be the author. But I opened the book to read the first chapter and became fascinated by Dr. Pransky's descriptions of 'high mood therapy' and 'maintenance-free relationships.'

By the end of the day I'd read the whole book and resolved to be more open-minded the next time someone suggested I read something that might be good for me.

I thought no more about it until my friend asked how things were going with Nina.

I said, 'What do you mean?'

'Well, how are you getting on?'

'Great. Why do you ask?'

It took him a half-dozen more questions before I remembered that less than a week earlier we'd been in the thick of one of the worst arguments we'd had in years. At that moment, I felt a cold shiver up the back of my spine. Something in that book had led to amnesia about the biggest problem I'd thought I had. To my surprise, even after I remembered it, I couldn't get worked up about it anymore. Oddly, it seemed to stop being a big problem for Nina as well, without our even talking about it. The house situation wound up resolving itself in due course, and I was hooked. I needed to learn more.

## Curiouser and Curiouser

When I went online to do some research about the basis for the book, I was amazed to find scattered artifacts of a field of psychology that was new to me. It had begun appearing in the literature in the late 1970s under an eclectic set of names, ranging from 'Psychology of Mind' to 'Health Realization' to 'The Three Principles.' Richard Carlson, author of the bestselling Don't Sweat the Small Stuff series, had been by far its most famous practitioner, but as far as I could tell he'd drifted away from the community around the time he'd started to become successful.

As I looked into it more deeply, I discovered that the primary influence behind the field was a Scottish welder named Syd Banks, who had had an enlightenment experience and been transformed from an uneducated worker in a Canadian pulp mill into a world-renowned guru and teacher. Everyone I spoke with in the field had a story about how meeting Syd or reading his books had been a transformative moment in their life, and I grew more and more intrigued by the fact that despite nearly 20 years of studying psychology and personal development, I'd never heard of him or the fields he'd inspired.

To make matters even more confusing, each person I spoke with confided that there was no 'technique' behind their transformation – you simply listened to Syd or one of the people trained in his work speak about three simple principles, and at some point a transformation happened and your life was never the same again.

The list of claims made by practitioners in the field beggared belief. Former gang members became positive role models within their communities. Alcoholics kicked their addiction without years of struggle or therapy. Two housing projects with the highest murder rates in America became crime free within three years of the residents being exposed to these principles.

I spoke with a CEO who had taken his company from millions to billions of dollars in revenue by teaching the inside-out understanding to his workforce and letting the numbers take care of themselves. And unlike the 'experts' in most other fields of psychology I'd come across, nearly everyone I met with was happily married, had good relationships with their children, and was still inspired by their work after more than 30 years in the field.

I decided that I needed to abandon objectivity and flew out to a small town near the Canadian border to explore this approach for myself.

What I experienced there turned my life inside out, my career upside-down, and changed the way I saw the world.

And it all came about not through a special technique or magic pill, but simply through participating in a very particular kind of conversation. That conversation is now the basis of all the work I do with my clients, and it's the conversation that you and I will be having together over the course of this book.

## **A Preview of Coming Attractions**

During our time together, I'll be sharing a new understanding that turns most of psychology on its head. By recognizing three fundamental principles at play behind every human experience, it becomes possible to tap into a deeper intelligence behind life that informs our mental health, supplies us with ongoing wisdom and guidance, and allows us to unleash incredible creative power into the world. We'll look at making a return to 'original grace,' and explore how the inside-out understanding allows us to handle life's challenges with ease and power, play the game of life full out and fearless, and go beyond empowerment to find our place in the larger unfolding of the world.

Since stumbling across this revolutionary new understanding in my own life, I've introduced it to thousands of people around the world and personally coached hundreds to shift their foundations, learn how to thrive, and live from the inside out. My clients and students have made positive and sometimes dramatic changes in their relationships, finances, mental and physical health, and well-being. They've become happier, more secure in themselves, and more compassionate with others.

But many of them have also come face to face with challenging circumstances. Some of them have lost their jobs, gone bankrupt, become ill, and dealt with family crises that bring tears to my eyes just thinking about them. Almost without fail, they've found deep reserves of resilience and creativity that have allowed them to handle these difficult circumstances with a level of ease and grace they would previously never have imagined possible.

If you were to talk with them, you'd find them to be as different from one another as people can be – male and female, young and old, rich and poor. But from the time they had the inside-out understanding for themselves, chances are you'd notice two things they all had in common: a twinkle in their eye and a lovely feeling in their presence.

Some people describe this transformative shift as moving from riding a roller coaster to floating in a river; others as the gift of meeting themselves for the first time. 'It's as if I've been plugged back into the mains,' one client said to me. By far the most common description is some variation on the feeling of coming home after a long time away. While your experience will be unique to you, the awakening of your inner spark and a feeling of reconnection with the energy of life are part of the promise and purpose of our time together.

While the nature of a book is that I'll be doing most of the talking, your job is equally important – to listen with an open mind, do your best to look in the direction I'm pointing, and above all to stay in the conversation to the very end. In fact, the only way I know for someone not to get something of value from this conversation is to drop out of it before they've seen what there is to see on the other side of the rainbow.

There are no techniques anywhere in this book – there's nothing for you to learn, remember, practice, or do. I'm simply going to point us toward some fundamental truths about life and we'll see what we can see. Sometimes it may feel as though we're getting nowhere, or even going backward. Other times new insights will be coming through you so quickly that you may struggle to keep up.

But if you keep reading with an open mind and a hopeful heart, I promise you that your life will not only change for the better, it will also begin to impact the lives of those around you in ways that you can only now imagine.

Here's a letter I received from a young woman who participated in my Living from the Inside Out online program at a time when her life circumstances couldn't have been much worse:

*'When I first learned about the principles behind the inside-out understanding, I was looking into ways of how I could go about ending my life. Within just a few short days, through your teaching, I had gained so much clarity and peace. Inspiration came to me and where I thought that I would never experience feelings of love ever again, my whole being became love, and vibrant. I find myself living in a state of tranquility, despite some quite difficult circumstances. I face arguments with gentleness and give my replies directly from my inner sense of well-being. Because I am no longer trapped in my own thinking, I can look inside other people and see how they're feeling. It's almost as if this has opened up some kind of sixth sense. I see the world with renewed sight, not all day every day, but almost. And best of all, these simple ideas have allowed me to tap into who I really am, so that no matter what happens around me, I always have that security and sense of freedom. It may waver at times but it always comes back. And I am a person who no longer looks into ways of how I can end my life.'*

What allowed her to experience that kind of clarity, peace, and freedom in the middle of her worst nightmare is what we'll be exploring together in this book. Are you ready to begin?

# Chapter 1: The Transformative Conversation

*'We have the most wonderful job in the world.  
We find people in various stages of sleep.  
And then we get to tap them on the shoulder  
and be with them as they wake up to the full  
magnificence of life.'*

**Syd Banks**

Imagine that a man comes to you for coaching. He's about to turn 30 and he's decided that it's time to 'grow up' and take over the family carpentry business. He wants you to share innovative marketing techniques, work with him on how to make better personnel decisions, and coach him to incorporate technology to bring the business into 'at least the new millennium.'

But even as you're speaking together, something's bothering you about the conversation. He's saying all the right things and seems willing to do all the right things, and yet something still feels out of alignment. Following your intuition, you go back and review the client intake form he filled out when he first came to you, and to your surprise you see that his name is Jesus and he's from a small town in the Galilean region of Israel called Nazareth.

Here's the question:

***Do you really want to work with him on becoming more successful in his carpentry business?***

What if every man, woman, and child you meet has the seeds within them to become who they truly are?

What if that includes you?

## **GOING DEEPER**

When people ask me to tell them more about the transformative conversation, I tend to explain it like this:

*'It's a meaningful conversation about the nature of the human experience.'*

When we look to the 'nature' of something, we're looking to see it not as it appears through our own eyes but as it is before being seen. Or, to put it in considerably simpler terms, we're looking to see the truth of it, even as we recognize the inevitability of distorting that truth the moment we attempt to describe it in words. And the deeper we look in the direction of the truth behind the human experience, the more we're likely to see.

We seem to have an innate desire to know ourselves at deeper and deeper levels. For most of us, this journey begins with an exploration of our own individual psychology. This kind of self-analysis can reveal an extraordinary amount of data and distinctions, as we discover we're introverted or extroverted, have high or low self-esteem, and are more or less honest with ourselves than we'd hoped or feared.

But self-awareness can quickly turn to self-consciousness, as each new observation is coupled with a judgment and an attempt to fix our 'faults' and improve our 'virtues.'

Before long, we become hopelessly entangled in a struggle against our own psyche, spending countless hours and endless effort trying to 'become the person we think we ought to be.'

By way of contrast, when we look away from our own unique peccadilloes and consider the nature of the human experience, we discover a very interesting thing: that most of what we thought was wrong with us is simply a part of the human condition.

Everybody has moods. Everybody does things that seem like a good idea at the time and then regrets them later.

Everybody fails at some things and succeeds at others, and the ratio is usually more a function of what they choose to attempt than any personal genius or lack of potential.

When we stop asking, 'What's true about me?' and begin asking, 'What's true about human beings in general?' we discover things about our incredible capacity for resilience, creativity and hope.

People are amazing – a fact that's much easier to see when we aren't looking at 'them' in some kind of judgmental comparison with 'us.'

The human experience is that which is true for all human beings. So, when I speak with people, we begin by having a conversation about some aspect of their life – money, career, performance, relationships, etc. – and it inevitably evolves into a conversation about the nature of life in general. And as a result of that conversation, their lives transform.

Now I know that sounds like a big promise to make, but I've seen it happen so many times that I no longer shy away from saying it. When people see something fundamental about the nature of their experience, their relationship to that experience shifts. And as a result of that shift, life begins to change, seemingly without effort – all by itself.

## **ELEMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION**

There are two elements that always seem to be present in any genuinely transformative conversation. The first is what I would call 'a deeper feeling.' Describing what exactly this is like has been both the inspiration and bane of every spiritual teacher throughout the ages. I imagine it's like trying to describe a sunset to a blind person – you can be accurate down to the tiniest detail, but no matter how close you get, it's still a million miles away from the real thing. Over the years,

I've heard the world of deeper feeling inside us called everything from 'the unconditioned mind' to 'nirvana' to 'innate mental health' and 'innate wellbeing.' I call it 'the space where miracles happen.' And I've discovered that, like many things worth having, it seems to run away the moment you begin chasing it.

It's not that it really goes anywhere; it's just that when the thoughts in our head get revved up, they seem so much more important and real than something as 'trivial' as a deeper feeling. This has been true in my own life to the point where at times I've chalked all my experiences of that deeper feeling up to imagination and self-delusion. Yet the moment I drop back into it, I know the exact opposite to be true. My thoughts are clearly the impostors, creating the illusion of reality all around me while the truth is right here inside.

In the transformative conversation, we slow things down enough to notice that this world of deeper feeling is always available to us. It becomes both our companion and our guide, keeping us warm in the midst of cold circumstances, lending fire to our own inspiration, and letting us know when we're on or off track by its presence or absence.

The second thing that all truly transformative conversations seem to have in common is that instead of looking at the details of our life to make sense of our experience, they direct us inward toward the source and nature of that experience.

By way of example, I had a conversation with a client recently who was going through a difficult divorce. When I asked her how it was all unfolding, she said that despite a delay in the proceedings, things had been 'very up and down.' I then asked her what she made of the fact that her experience was fluctuating much more quickly than her circumstances were changing.

This led us into a beautiful exploration of how experience always follows thought, regardless of what's going on around us. She got quiet and, as almost inevitably happens, she was struck by an insight that left her feeling much stronger and more capable than before. She expressed her gratitude for all the things in her life that were still wonderful, including her relationships with her children and her relative state of well-being considering everything she was going through.

Because she was able to see that her experience was being created from the inside out, she was less frightened of what might happen next – which gave her immediate access to the resources and common sense we all have to guide us when we're on our game.

Will she lose her bearings again and have more 'up and down' weeks? Of course she will. But each time it happens it will be easier for her to see that all that's going on is some insecure thinking, and that the moment it passes, what to do – if there's anything to be done – will once again become clear.

And this is the gift of a deeper understanding: it frees us from having to try to control our experience, avoid anything we don't want to have happen or never feel down again.

With that freedom comes so much energy and lightness that we reconnect to the world of deeper feeling. And life once again feels like the gift it was always meant to be.

## **DANCING BETWEEN THE SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL**

At the physicist David Bohm's funeral, one of his favorite passages from his own work was read aloud:

*The field of the finite is all that we can see, hear, touch, remember, and describe. This field is basically that which is manifest, or tangible. The essential quality of the infinite, by contrast, is its subtlety, its intangibility. This quality is conveyed in the word 'spirit,' whose root meaning is 'wind or breath.' This suggests an invisible but pervasive energy, to which the manifest world of the finite responds. This energy, or spirit, infuses all living things, and without it any organism must fall apart into its constituent elements. That which is truly alive in living systems is this energy of spirit, and this is never born and never dies.*

In other words, we live in a world of spirit (the infinite) made manifest in a world of form (the finite). Which means that everything is made of spirit and nothing (literally 'no thing') is the essence of spirit. In the same way, the transformative conversation is, by nature, both psychological and spiritual. After all, if we're to look more deeply into what it is to be alive, aware, and creative, we must consider both the workings of the human mind and the larger context in which we as human beings function.

The French Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin famously said, 'We are not human beings having a spiritual experience – we are spiritual beings having a human experience.' And if this is true, we ignore either of those facts at our peril.

People who attempt to live purely in the material world and ignore the spiritual tend, in my experience, to ride the roller coaster of life's ups and downs and arrive at the end of the ride feeling – accurately – that they haven't actually gotten anywhere and wondering why those spiritual people seem so calm and peaceful.

People who emphasize the spiritual world at the cost of the material tend, in my experience, to fluctuate between moments of pure bliss/awe/wonder and moments of frustration, wondering why, if they're so spiritual, God/Life/the Universe has forsaken them to a life of poverty and struggle while those material people get to have all the nice stuff.

To attempt to choose between the spiritual and the material is like trying to choose between two cars, one without an engine and one without a steering wheel – you won't be arriving anywhere worthwhile in either of them.

This isn't to say we need to attempt to balance the two – worship on the weekends and work in the week is more of a cultural norm than a life strategy. But when we begin to see how the two worlds are really one, it becomes possible to experience the best of both.

The upside of a focus on the spiritual is a deeper sense of connection with ourselves, with others, and with life itself.

The world of deeper feelings that we begin to inhabit – feelings like gratitude, love, humility, wonder, and awe – is its own reward.

The upside of a focus on the material is a life of greater comfort, ease, and possibility. Money may not be able to buy happiness or love, but it's the best tool I know for feeding children, building new homes, buying plane tickets to a tropical island, and having a romantic dinner for two on the beach once you're there.

The difficulty comes if we start to treat the formless world of spirit as if it's subject to the same rules as the world of form. Most of us are familiar with what happens when we're consumed with the pursuit of success in the material world. Stress and pressure become our constant companions, and more is somehow not only better but also never enough. If we win the game, our ex-husbands, wives, and children get to read our epitaph in the morning headlines:

***'Here lies the fastest runner on the treadmill.'***

If we approach the world of spirit in the same way, we set ourselves up for yet another lifetime of struggle. We strive for 'spiritual success,' setting enlightenment or union with the divine as our goal and determining that we will outmeditate, out-pray, and outlast our fellow seekers until we get voted 'most likely to sit at the right hand of God' in our high-school yearbooks.

In both cases, our endless pursuit of 'not this' is driven by our deepest fear: that there's something wrong with us and we're not enough. That until we achieve sufficient levels of spiritual wealth, material success, or both, we won't be worthy of love. And that without something tangible to show for it, we'll have wasted our life. Ironically, what we're seeking is all around us all the time. Right where you're sitting now is the infinite whole made manifest in the divine specific. You could no sooner be 'not enough' than a tree could be the wrong color. And you don't have to become worthy of love, because love is what you're made of.

When we see that truth, or indeed any truth about the human condition, it can set us free. There are millions of theories out there, and I've added a few dozen of my own to the list over the years. But, as Syd Banks used to say:

*'You only need to see one spiritual fact and it will change your life forever.'*

## **PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

In the next chapter I'm going to be sharing three spiritual facts – three 'principles,' or foundational elements, of the human experience. But before we move forward, here are a few of the key insights from this chapter to reflect upon:

- We cannot even begin to guess at the full scope of the human potential, including our own.
- What is truly transformative is seeing what's still there even when we're not looking.
- There is a world of deeper feeling which is always available to us.
- If we are truly spiritual beings having a human experience, we ignore either of those facts at our peril.
- We don't have to become worthy of love, because love is what we're made of.
- You only need to see one spiritual fact to change your life forever.