



The primary cause of unhappiness is never the situation but your thoughts about it.

Be aware of the thoughts you are thinking. Separate them from the situation, which is always neutral, which always is as it is. There is the situation or the fact, and here are my thoughts about it. Instead of making up stories, stay with the facts. For example, "I am ruined" is a story. It limits you and prevents you from taking effective action. "I have fifty cents left in my bank account" is a fact. Facing facts is always empowering. Be aware that what you think, to a large extent, creates the emotions that you feel. See the link between your thinking and your emotions. Rather than being your thoughts and emotions, be the awareness behind them.

ECKHART TOLLE

A New Earth

The Question Holds The Lantern



JOHN O'DONOHUE

John O'Donohue was an Irish poet, philosopher, and former priest. He wrote books that celebrated the imagination and the human spirit from Irish Celtic perspectives, including Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom and Beauty: The Invisible Embrace (both HarperCollins). His last book, To Bless the Space Between Us (Doubleday), was released in 2008, a few months after he passed away in his sleep at the age of fifty-three. "The Question Holds the Lantern" appears here by permission of his estate. © by John O'Donohue. All rights reserved. (www.johndonohue.com)

Humans have an uncanny ability to domesticate everything they touch. Eventually, even the strangest things become absorbed into the routine of the daily mind with its steady geographies of endurance, anxiety, and contentment. Only seldom does the haze lift, and we glimpse for a second the amazing plenitude of being here. Sometimes, unfortunately, it is suffering or threat that awakens us. It could happen that one evening you are busy with many things, netted into your role, and the phone rings: Someone you love is suddenly in the grip of an illness that could end their life within hours. It only takes a few seconds to receive that news. Yet, when you put the phone down, you are already standing in a different world. All you know has just been rendered unsure and dangerous. You realize that the ground has turned into quicksand. Now it seems to you that even mountains are suspended on strings.

If you could imagine the most incredible story ever, it would be less incredible than the story of being here. And the ironic thing is, that story is not a story; it is true. It takes us so long to see where we are. It takes us even longer to see who we are. This is why the greatest gift you could ever dream is a gift that you can only receive from one person. And that person is yourself. Therefore, the most subversive invitation you could ever accept is the invitation to awaken to who you are and where you have landed. Plato says in the *Symposium* that one of the greatest privileges of a human life is to become midwife to the birth of the soul in another. When your soul awakens, you begin to truly inherit your life. You leave the kingdom of fake surfaces, repetitive talk, and weary roles and slip deeper into the true adventure of who you are and who you are called to become. The greatest friend of the soul is the unknown. Yet we are afraid of the unknown because it lies outside our vision and our control. We avoid it or quell it by filtering it through

our protective barriers of domestication and control. The normal way never leads home.

Once you start to awaken, no one can ever claim you again for the old patterns. Now you realize how precious your time here is. You are no longer willing to squander your essence on undertakings that do not nourish your true self; your patience grows thin with tired talk and dead language. You see through the rosters of expectation which promise you safety and the confirmation of your outer identity. Now you are impatient for growth, willing to put yourself in the direction of change. You want your work to become an expression of your gift. You want your relationship to voyage beyond the pallid frontiers to where the danger of transformation dwells. You want your God to be wild and to call you to where your destiny awaits.

You have come out of Plato's Cave of Images into the sunlight and the mystery of color and imagination. When you begin to sense that your imagination is the place where you are most divine, you feel called to clean out of your mind all the worn and shabby furniture of thought. You wish to refurbish yourself with living thought so that you can begin to see. As Meister Eckhart says, thoughts are our "inner senses." When the inner senses are dull and blurred, you can see nothing in or of yourself; you become a respectable prisoner of received images. Now you realize that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," and you undertake the difficult but beautiful path to freedom. On this journey you begin to see how the sides of your heart that seemed awkward, contradictory, and uneven are the places where the treasure lies hidden. You begin to become true to yourself. And as Shakespeare says in *Hamlet*: "To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

The journey shows you that from this inner dedication you can reconstruct your own values and action. You develop from your own self-compassion a great compassion for others. You are no longer caught in the false game of judgment, comparison, and assumption. More naked now than ever, you begin to feel truly alive. You begin to trust the music of your own soul; you have inherited treasure that no one will ever be able to take from you. At the deepest level, this adventure of growth is in fact a transfigurative conversation with your own death. And when the time comes for you to leave, the view from your deathbed will show a life of growth that gladdens the heart and takes away all fear.