



## **Lessons from Rivers and Rocks**

by

**Barry Austin Goodfield, Ph. D., DABFM**

I guess that most of us, at one time or another, have sat by a riverbank and dangled our feet into rushing waters or a babbling brook. The cool river flow, the cold rocks under our feet, coupled with the soothing sounds of moving water brings calm and relaxation.

Those precious moments are times of reflection or simply just relaxation. I recently had the opportunity to experience such a marvelous moment while doing a seminar in Switzerland.

Some time has passed since that moment but somehow there is a message that lingers. What is that message and what does it say to me about the lessons to be learned from rivers, rocks and rushing water?

The water and the rocks are both natural in nature's plan. There is a kind of coexistence that is present when we experience the elements around us, sometimes rocks serve as a necessary barrier so that our lands do not flood.

As I reflected on the relationship I could not help but think about the power of both.

The rocks with their strength and hard durable surface seemingly withstand the rushing water.

The water has its strength in a fluid flexibility with constant degrees of intensity appearing endless and adaptable.

It is an example of the irresistible force meeting an immovable object. Sometimes it becomes a fight involving life and death when rivers overflow their banks. Other times it provides us with an opportunity to rest, relax and reflect. Circumstances and motivation define the difference.

Perhaps the lesson we can learn from the “rocks and water“ is as simple as they are themselves. As a young boy I used to enjoy feeling the sands disappear under my feet as rushing water eroded the foundation upon which I stood.

To me the lesson is the power of process. What was, and seemed to be, a solid foundation was no match for the speed, volume and versatility of my young boy's weight and pressure on the sand beneath my feet.

Does power and the force of change win out over strength and substance? Not necessarily, be it human motivation or nature's natural driving force. Balance is a natural quest for animate and inanimate objects alike.

What time teaches us is that there is little time. What time teaches us is that there are moments when we must be the rock, and there are moments when we must be the water seeking the solutions to that which seems unyielding, immovable and relentless.

The ultimate resistance a person has in their life is the resistance to seeing their own resistance to fully experiencing the fleeting moments we have to live open and free.

If this is true, and I am convinced it is, then why do we avoid the majesty of the moment? Why do the sands that both literally and symbolically disappear under our feet with the rushing water - bring anxiety to so many of us?

The answer is our profound anxiety about letting go of our past. It keeps us from being a part of all that goes on around us. We need to open our eyes to the awareness that our eyes are closed much of the time.

We sometimes play the game that children do by closing our eyes thinking that others cannot see us. When we do this we lock in that which we closed our eyes to and we deny the moment. The more we live in the moment, with all that implies, the more we must confront those “blindness” built in the past that obstruct our vision of that which goes on around us now.

Simply put, fears from the past get projected into the future and wipe out here and now.

When this happens to us we no longer can experience the moment as we take harbor in a sheltered past that restricts our ability to experience the joys and sometime sorrows of now. However, being in the "here and now" does not mean ignoring all the lessons we have learnt in the past.

Like so many questions in life about life, the answer lies in the question itself. “What do I need to do to live in the moment and feel the water rush by and over the cool rocks?”

Again the answer is both simple and hard, or more people would do it. Let life in, or end up building bigger and stronger barriers to the world around you.

When we think of doing that on an *intra psychic level* it means opening our mind to the idea that we need to open our mind more.

When we think about ourselves on a *psycho-physiological level* it means not disregarding the constant messages that our body sends us about tension, tightness or the “stress messages” we so regularly deny.

When we think about ourselves on an *interpersonal level*, it means being open to the messages of those around us who help us to see how we see. It means being open to what we say about the “reality” we create with our words and aware of the impact it has on others.

When we think about ourselves on a *national level*, it means creating an openness to those around us who are as Dr. Bill Pemberton used to say.. “shockingly

different” from ourselves. It means realizing that Republicans or Democrats do not have horns. They simply sometimes blow them in ways that irritate us.

When we think about ourselves on an *international level*, it means to see the similarity and differences in others in a way that makes us curious and not defensive or violent in our reactions to those who also inhabit our earth.

S.I. Hayakawa used to say to me, “When tempted to fight fire with fire, it is good to remember that most of the time firemen use water.”

When we think about ourselves on a *spiritual level*, it means instilling in our hearts and minds a kind of “creative curiosity” that allows us to find the openness and love often hidden behind fears and irrational, negative fantasies of those unlike ourselves. It means to truly "let in" before we "let out". It means to be creative in our responses and to hold off judgment to the last possible moment, thereby letting in more information.

It means to realize that insight without action is anxiety and that action without insight is chaos. It simply means to live here and now, and feel the cool rocks and moving water with equal awareness and joy. It also means to realize that the sand, upon which I stood as a boy, was at one time a pebble and perhaps even a large seemingly immovable rock.

To me that is the message of the river and the rocks.



©August 2012 Goodfield Institute LLC