

## Huffing and Puffing

I was listening to a wonderful talk by Eckhart Tolle the other day during which he referred to our strong tendency to complain about the world around us all the time as 'huffing and puffing' which was both spot on and funny. So this month, I thought I would share with you some ideas about why we love to huff and puff and how we can train ourselves to stop doing it, in order to spend more and more of our days on earth dwelling in nothing but love, peace and joy.

We all love to huff and puff because we all instinctively try to project our own deep sense of unworthiness and existential guilt out onto others. Kenneth Wapnick the late, great *A Course in Miracles* teacher used to say that we all went around the world collecting a long list of sinners so that when we finally got to the Pearly Gates, we could say to Saint Peter, 'They are the sinners, not me!'

If we watch our mind closely for even a short space of time, we can usually notice that there is a grumpy voice in our head that is constantly complaining about others. 'That driver is so selfish!' 'My son is so thoughtless!' 'Why was that shop assistant so rude and inattentive?' 'How can our government be so useless!' Need I go on? I am sure you already get the picture. Now clearly, we all get a big pay-off from doing this 24/7 or we would stop. Again, if you watch yourself carefully, you may notice that huffing and puffing seems to have a lot of benefits. For example, it helps us let off steam. It seems to counteract the stress of living in a crowded hyperactive crazy world. It seems to bolster our own self-esteem in relation to others.

But - and it is a big but –we can also notice that constantly complaining about others does not create a sense of deep inner peace and joy, and it certainly does not assist us to feel harmoniously at one with all those around us. Last, but by no means least, huffing and puffing pulls us out of dwelling in love into a dark energy field of irritation and even aggression.

Once we begin to see the damage that our irritable judging of others does to our own mind and heart, we have at least one incentive to stop doing it. But the tendency to blame others for all the endless suffering in our world is so embedded in us that we need more help than this to overcome it.

I have been studying *A Course in Miracles* for over 20 years now, as well as going on many, many spiritual retreats and workshops, and although I am a slow learner, I think I am finally getting a handle on how to resist the urge to blame those around me for my inner discomfort. So I would like to share with you what helps me to resist this ultimately self-destructive egoic habit.

First, I have learnt that human beings are never really bad or even evil. The core problem is that our minds have all been programmed by an evil programmer called 'the ego' to react

aggressively whenever our personal interests seem to be threatened, even in the most trivial of ways. Ironically, many of us who see ourselves as always on the side of the angels, are now tempted to use social media platforms to attack those in the public eye who do not share our beliefs about how to make the world a better place.

But just because someone does not share our beliefs about our troubled world and how to fix it does not make them a bad person! They have just been programmed differently. A Marxist for example has been programmed to believe that communism is a far better form of economics and government than capitalism, whilst a Conservative has been programmed to believe that communism is disastrous and relatively unfettered capitalism is the best way forwards to a better world for everyone. But these diametrically opposed political views are simply programming. In ultimate reality, there is no truth in any political or economic perspective.

Once I really began to see that all our strongly held beliefs about ourselves and the world are just egoic programming, I found that I was far quicker to forgive others for holding beliefs that were antithetical to my own.

The other insight that I have found helpful when struggling with my own deeply engrained tendency to complain about others' stupidity or arrogance (note to self: What you spot in others is what you are denying about yourself!) is that in reality, we are all waves of energy, rather than solid personalities in solid bodies. Scientists now know that at heart, we are all waves of energy operating on different frequencies.

When we bump into someone operating at a similar frequency to our own, we tend to feel wonderful. But when we are stuck in the presence of someone operating on a much lower frequency than our own, we can start to feel awful. This fact of life was vigorously demonstrated to me the other week when Gloria's sister and niece came to stay with us from the States. Her sister is an absolutely lovely person and her niece is also a sweetheart, but she had never been out of the USA before and was totally out of her comfort zone all week. She clearly did not like any of the food we cooked for her, she even hated the lack of darkness in the evenings, and seemed to find comfort only in watching American TV from dawn to dusk.

After a few days of this, I began feeling that our beautiful home had been invaded by aliens and then I started to feel quite aggressive toward the 'alien invaders'. However, I just about managed to hold it together by retreating to my bedroom to contemplate on what was going on inside me. I then realised that Gloria's niece and I were just operating on completely different wave lengths. She was Radio 1 and I was Radio 3, but that definitely did not mean that one station was in any way better than the other. There was absolutely no point in huffing and puffing about the discordant sounds that were occurring as these two frequencies clashed with one another.

This different view of a challenging situation really enabled me to feel genuine compassion towards Gloria's lovely, but horribly homesick niece – rather than wanting to strangle her. I cannot claim that my ego suddenly stopped judging her, but at least I was now watching my ego huff and puff without totally believing that I was in any way superior to that beautiful soul who's programmed personality-self clearly prefers everything American to anything British.

To conclude: I am definitely not asking you to suddenly stop huffing and puffing for the whole of the lovely month of July. I know that we will all instinctively let off steam by complaining about the world from time to time. I am simply suggesting that this might be a wonderful month to notice your habit of constantly putting others down in some way or another and then to examine whether it really brings you the benefits that your ego tries to tell you it does. You might like to remind yourself as you do this:

Huffing and puffing temporarily helps my personality-self to feel less stressed and less inadequate.

But in the long run, huffing and puffing fills all my cells with dark, aggressive energy that will eventually weaken and destroy me. Do I really want to go on doing this to myself?

The first step to rising above my constant complaining about the world is simply to notice how much I do it, and then to notice that when I do it, I am not dwelling in love, peace and joy.

Although ceasing all huffing and puffing is an incredibly challenging spiritual practice, I have all the inner strength and wisdom I need to keep perfecting the spiritual art of letting go of this ancient, ingrained egoic habit. I am now determined to do this so that my consciousness can finally soar upwards to dwell in peace, joy and love at all times.

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