



## Uncomfortable Place Of Uncertainty, by Margaret Wheatley

We weren't trained to admit we don't know. Most of us were taught to sound certain and confident, to state our opinion as if it were true. We haven't been rewarded for being confused. Or for asking more questions rather than giving quick answers. We've also spent many years listening to others mainly to determine whether we agree with them or not. We don't have time or interest to sit and listen to those who think differently than we do.

It is very difficult to give up our certainties -- our positions, our beliefs, our explanations. These help define us; they lie at the heart of our personal identity. Yet I believe we will succeed in changing this world only if we can think and work together in new ways.

Curiosity is what we need. We don't have to let go of what we believe, but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes. We do need to acknowledge that their way of interpreting the world might be essential to our survival. To be curious about how someone else interprets things, we have to be willing to admit that we're not capable of figuring things out alone.

Lately, I've been listening for what surprises me. What did I just hear that startled me? This isn't easy -- I'm accustomed to sitting there nodding my head to those saying things I agree with. But when I notice what surprises me, I'm able to see my own views more dearly, including my beliefs and assumptions.

Noticing what surprises and disturbs me has been a very useful way to see invisible beliefs. If what you say surprises me, I must have been assuming something else was true. If what you say disturbs me, I must believe something contrary to you. My shock at your position exposes my own position. When I hear myself saying, "How could anyone believe something like that?" a light comes on for me to see my own beliefs. These moments are great gifts. If I can see my beliefs and assumptions, I can decide whether I still value them.

Sometimes we hesitate to listen for differences because we don't want to change. We're comfortable with our lives, and if we listened to anyone who raised questions, we'd have to get engaged in changing things. If we don't listen, things can stay as they are and we won't have to expend any energy. But most of us do see things in our life or in the world that we would like to be different. If that's

true, we have to listen more, not less. And we have to be willing to move into the very uncomfortable place of uncertainty.

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*Published at [www.awakin.org](http://www.awakin.org) on May 20, 2019*