



Embracing the Mystery of Uncertainty, by Alan Briskin

A Zen parable captures the mysterious connection between attending to our own consciousness and the external events that enfold us. A respected teacher was asked by members of a village if he could come and bring rain to their dry fields. They had tried many different approaches, including soliciting the help of a number of rainmakers, but still no rain came. When the teacher agreed to come, he asked only that he be given a small house and a garden he could tend. Day in, day out, he tended his small garden, neither performing incantations nor asking anything further of the villagers. After a while, rain began to fall on the parched earth.

When asked how he could achieve such a miracle, he answered humbly that when he came to the village, he sensed disharmony within himself. Each day by tending his garden, he returned a little more to himself. As to the rain falling, he could not say.

The garden is a wonderful metaphor because it suggests that if there is a safe place for something to grow, then harmony may be restored elsewhere. To care for the soul suggests a return to the self, but a self that interacts with the world around us. Every day we enter situations that are inherently uncertain but still marked by underlying patterns. These patterns may be emotional fields, dry because there is little nourishment or turbulent because of unresolved feelings of anger, disappointment or frenzy. When we come in contact with each other, some aspect of the underlying field affects us. Like the teacher in the story, we can come to recognize the disharmony in ourselves and begin to make a place where the particulars can be tended. Yet to embrace the idea that our own consciousness is influenced by and influences what is around us, we must honor the overlap of self and other. We must look for unity of what happens and how it happens as inseparable from each other, without forcing a causal link to explain the occurrence.

--Alan Briskin, in 'The Stirring of Soul in the Workplace'