

Mind the Gap
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For something new to be created, there needs to be a space for it
to come into being.

For things to change, in relation to each other,
they need a space between them that lets them move.

For people to become what they are not yet, there needs to be a space
for transition, where they let go of the old, as they take hold of the new.

I like to call this space, the Gap.

The Gap occurs in many different sizes, from the smallest to the greatest:
between nerve cells and between stars;
between people and between cultures;
between ourselves and the great unknown that goes by many names.

To cross the Gap is risky, and it takes imagination.

To ignore it can be dangerous, but to acknowledge it brings freedom.

We create something new then, and reach a deeper sense of unity.

I don't mean to suggest that I have mastered Gap.

So please hear these words for what they are:

a meditation that embodies something of what it's reaching for.

When I visit a strange city, I like to take the subway.
It is a cheap and easy way to get around.
There's a kind of magic to the subway:
You descend into the ground, and then you come out later
in a different part of town.
In the London Underground, as a train comes to a stop,
there's a disembodied voice that warns you to "Mind the Gap".

There's a necessary Gap, between the train and the platform.
Without the Gap, the train could never move.
The train cars are straight, but the platform may be curved,
which creates a wider space between the two.
The space could be a hazard, unless you pay attention,
and *Mind the Gap*.

Life is *full* of necessary Gaps.

There is a necessary gap, within the human mind,
the gap we call self-awareness.
One day I had an insight – it may seem obvious, to you,
but it made a big difference to me:

My career was stagnating, my job became unsatisfying.
I knew that I'd be laid off, but I didn't know just when.
So I took refuge in a daydream, that gave me satisfaction.
I pictured myself just getting up and leaving my job.
I said to myself, "I'll show them! I'll up and quit, no matter what they say.
Then they'll know what jerks they are. Won't they be sorry!"

My brilliant insight was simply this: I'm feeling angry!
And because I'm feeling angry, I'm having these some angry thoughts!
And it's my decision whether to act on these angry thoughts or not!
I can act on them today, or tomorrow, or never.
Meanwhile it's nice to have a paycheck coming in...
When I recognized the Gap between the impulse and the action,
then, I was free to choose.

This insight may seem simple, even trivial.
But can you imagine how many people hurt themselves or hurt other people
because they don't *mind the Gap*
between a thought, and the necessity to act?

There is a necessary gap between two people,
which makes room for empathy.

If I'm to love my partner, love my friend, love my neighbor as myself,
I need to sense, and maybe identify with that other person's feelings.
But even as I'm feeling *with* that other person, I must avoid feeling *for* them.
I need to avoid confusing their needs and their feelings with my own.
Here's how the psychologist Carl Rogers described it: empathy is
to experience the world *as if* I were the other person,
without ever losing sight of the *as if* condition.

In a healthy relationship, we *mind the gap* between self and other.
We can be truly close, and still be ourselves.

To ignore the gap can be dangerous.
One spouse becomes an extension of the other's wishes.
The expectations of parents run roughshod
 over a child's own gifts and aspirations.
One person undermines the worth of another, and their dignity.

Love has been described as a creative tension
 between being two, and being one.
This space between us is holy ground.

There is a necessary gap between groups of people, of different cultures,
 which makes room for respect, and solidarity.

When Europeans came to this land, they saw the people here
 not as human beings but as savages, and obstacles to progress.
They projected their own agendas and their own worst fears, onto these people.
They did not understand or respect the differences between cultures,
 a respect that would have allowed them to live side by side and share the land.

The Native Americans, by contrast, had long experience in building alliances.
Consider the Haudenosaunee, also known as the Iroquois.
To the Europeans, who entered their land, they offered
 the Two-Row Wampum Belt, representing the following treaty:

*You say that you are our Father and we are your sons. We say:
We will not be like father and son, but like brothers.
These two rows symbolize two vessels, traveling down the same river together:
 one, for the Original People, their laws, their customs, their ways;
 the other, for the European people, their laws, their customs, their ways.
We shall travel the river together, side by side, but each in our own boat.
And neither of us will try to steer the other's vessel. ¹*

¹ Welch 36

Such a covenant requires imagination, and giving up some control.
To see the world through the other's eyes, as well as through our own
we sit down in fellowship, and listen to each other's stories;
we share visions without rushing to judge one another.

The apostle Paul once wrote:

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one.*

This is a powerful vision, but far from being accomplished.

In 2000 years we have only added to the list of divisions:

black or white, gay or straight, young or old,
rich or poor, Christian or Muslim –
the list keeps growing.

It is not enough to denounce prejudice, or to say it doesn't exist
or to say that we're color-blind, class-blind, or gender-blind.

To call these Gaps irrelevant is not enough.

To *make* them irrelevant requires imagination and taking risks
in order to cross them:
to see the world through the eyes of another,
to share some power, for the sake of justice
and possibly be changed in the process.

When we travel the river together, we may go places we never expected.

In the process a deeper unity is created; a new "us" is born.

The space between us is holy ground.

There is a necessary gap in our understanding of the ultimate truth,
the bedrock of being, which goes by so many names.

When we ignore the gap, we get into trouble.

We substitute a small idea for something greater.

We confuse the truth with our concepts about it,
our language and our images.

But these images are useful and even necessary,
to shine a light on the unknown.

The Hebrew Bible tells the story of Jacob, son of Isaac.
Sleeping by a river, Jacob has a vision of a ladder,
with angels climbing up and down it, to move between heaven and earth.

When we recognize our concepts and our images
as the creative product of our own minds,
they become like the rungs on Jacob's ladder.

We can use them to cross the gap of unknowing.

It takes imagination and courage to move from one rung to the next
letting go of this one, in order to reach out for the next one,
discarding ideas and rituals that no longer have meaning for us,
and embracing new ones that do, at least for now.

The distance from here to heaven isn't something we can quantify.
It could be more distant than the stars or as close as your next breath.
Consider the vision of Beloved Community, espoused by many of us here:
a vision of this world, in which the potential for love and justice
are fully realized.

We've seen glimpses of the Beloved Community in the here and now.

We've seen it in our dreams writ large.

But if we believe it's already accomplished, we're fooling ourselves.

We're called to continue reaching for this vision, and living into it.

To collaborate in a larger creative process
that may take us places we never expected to go.

There comes a deeper sense of unity:
between the seeker, and what is being sought,
between the lover, and the beloved,
between the dancer, and the dance.

In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson:

*As there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens,
so there is no bar or wall in the soul where we, the effect, cease,
and God, the cause, begins.*

As we complete this worship hour and return to our ordinary lives,
may we respect one other in our unique integrity.

May we come to see life's disconnects and its ambiguities
as places of transformation and new creation.

May we always remember to mind the gap! ...

And approach it with courage, creativity and a sense of reverence.