



# THE ART OF SURRENDER

*How to stop seeing life as an  
opponent you need to resist*

Before this talk, I looked up in a dictionary the word 'surrender' and the definition was "to stop resisting an opponent." The word derives from a French word "surrendre" which is to give something up. In my experience what we need to give up is seeking to be in control. The price for peace is giving up the need for control, which we will come back to in due course. For me, all control is an illusion, so we are not actually giving up anything but an illusion or a delusion. Of course, many of us are clinging to our favourite delusions decade after decade and it is always much easier to see the delusions in others than in ourselves. I can see my wife's delusions very clearly, but I can not see my own quite so well. Most of us, if not all of us, have been conditioned to, if not educated to, seeing the word surrender as something negative, weak, or undesirable. Many personalities, perhaps more male than female to be stereotypical for a moment, are built around the cornerstone of never giving in.

Surrender is often viewed as a sort of passive resignation. Whereas true surrender, is actually an active awareness. True surrender is being receptive to what arises; being alert to how life develops.

To genuinely understand this topic we need to distinguish between the inner world and the outer world. Without that distinction, there is much confusion and misunderstanding about the idea of surrender. There are essentially only two aspects to a human life, one concerns the

outer world and one concerns the inner world. It doesn't really matter what we call them but the words that I use are achievement and fulfilment.

Achievement is to do with the outer world and achievement is very important. It is a crucial part of our human endeavour that we build businesses and create achievement in the outer world. But as many people have found, achievement without fulfilment is empty. I've been fortunate enough to meet many people with considerable wealth, people with gold medals, people with best sellers, people who have dedicated a life to outer achievement, and sooner or later they hit that time when they are faced with an inner emptiness. Their achievement never really lands. We can keep pursuing an outer achievement, but a sense of well-being is never sated.

It might be controversial, but I also maintain that fulfilment without achievement creates a certain lack. Some people who dedicate a whole life to fulfilment and leave without having left an imprint on the world, are also out of balance.



**LIFE SUPPORTS US, IT IS NOT AGAINST US. AS LONG AS WE SEE LIFE AS THE ENEMY WE WILL NEVER SURRENDER AND WE WILL NEVER KNOW PEACE.**

What we need between the inner and the outer is a balance. The world we live in probably concentrates almost exclusively on achievement, maybe about 90%. Probably less than 10% is on fulfilment. What leads to a sense of contentment and happiness is to bring these two back into alignment. Interestingly, all my work in the corporate world is to try to help individuals to understand that with a better balance their achievement will be so much greater. If you want to build bigger, greater companies, then focusing on fulfilment will do that, but most of the time people don't quite believe that, so they go back to the old ways of compulsively trying to achieve. Like many of us, we get back on the treadmill.

The importance of distinguishing between the outer and the inner is that the skills and talents that we need in the outer world are of absolutely no use when it comes to developing fulfilment in the inner world. In fact, often they are the greatest obstacle. For example, if we take the idea of control. In the outer world, if you are driving a motor car or you are working with heavy machinery, or you are flying an aeroplane, being in control and having control is a highly desirable thing. However, in the inner world control is really the antithesis of all fulfilment or spiritual well-being. It is the same with facts and knowledge. In the outer world if you want a good job, you read books, acquire knowledge, do a course, get a degree. When it comes to inner world inquiry or an inner world experience, probably the more knowledge you have, the

more difficult it is. We must unlearn an awful lot of things as the human mind is habitually and compulsively seeking to be in control.

For example, scientists tell us that every day we have approximately 60,000 thoughts and they have identified that there is one part of the brain where thoughts arise. Every thought arises in this part of the brain. However, there is another place in the brain that leads us to believe that we had the thought, so by the time we are having the thought we think we created it. Yet the evidence is to the contrary. It is the same for emotions and for many of us it is easier to understand when an emotion arises, for example when you get a bout of grief or anger it just rises in an uncontrollable way.

We like to convince ourselves that we control our thoughts. But we do not. We meet life as it arises throughout the day with the desire to control it, but we could spend a little bit of time thinking about why that is. I think most people would conclude that it is to do with some kind of survival fight or flight mechanism. That we have an extraordinarily strong survival instinct and we are looking out for danger, and when we see danger arising, we need to control it.

But essentially, many of us see life or reality as the enemy. If you think back to the definition that surrender is to stop resisting an opponent, we need to stop seeing life as an opponent that we need to resist. When life is flowing very easily, and is going our way, it is in alignment. The bus arrives, people do what we want them to do, life is pretty straight forward. When something happens, the bus doesn't turn up, someone says something we don't like, they act in a way we don't like, then we start arguing with reality. We want to control the situation or the people in front of us. None of us really want to give up that control but we need to switch our inner mode to really understand that life happens for us. Life supports us. It is not against us. This is a fundamental shift that takes time. We must begin to make that shift because as long as we see life as the enemy we will never surrender and we will never know peace.

What I am advocating is that we need to proceed cautiously, building trust and testing the idea that life is acting for us. In my experience, and I've been doing this for some time, if we are genuinely prepared to suspend our prior beliefs and approach life as if what is happening might be for our better good, then the process gets easier and easier. When we adopt that view, life does indeed support us and there is much more flow around us.



**BEING WILLING TO SURRENDER MEANS TO PAUSE AND TO GIVE UP OUR PRE-JUDGEMENT ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE THAT IS HAPPENING.**

Let us take two different ways in which we can surrender because there are two quite different events that many of us have experienced. The first is some sort of sudden shift where we give up control; we collapse. This is often associated with a crisis which psychologists call a collapse of ego boundaries. There is an instantaneous shift and suddenly our experience of life changes. The second experience is what I call an educational shift. It's a slow educational and iterative process based on a daily practise of discipline.

In the various 12 step communities they often talk about a need to hit rock bottom, a need to get to a moment of complete surrender. In that moment something shifts within the individual, and it's true that probably the greatest catalyst for change among the human species is crisis. Whenever there is crisis, inner or outer, then there is a very sudden shift. I often use the example of the Mumbai floods where thousands of people were killed as they were the worst floods in the history of India. At that time, there were people of different castes who started talking to each other, inviting people into their homes. They fed them, they stayed in each other's houses, despite this being forbidden within their culture. This went on for five or six weeks and when the floods receded and life got back to normal, they went back to not speaking with each other which is a great sadness.

The second category of surrender is a daily practise; it is a daily discipline of being willing to give up our prejudice, our pre-judgment with reality. We all operate with a filter that we project on to reality and we come to life with various ancestral patterns, which in the East they call Samskaras. Being willing to surrender means to pause and to give up our pre-judgment about the experience that is happening. All through life, experiences happen and sometimes we react very badly because we don't think it suits us. In that moment it's being willing to pause and to ask the question "What if this was happening for my benefit?" All of us have had multiple experiences of having a disappointment, then weeks, months or years later, coming to the awareness that it is was one of the best things that has ever happened to us.



**IT'S ABOUT HAVING A WILLINGNESS TO SEE LIFE FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE, SO THAT WHEN AN EVENT OCCURS, WE DON'T LABEL IT GOOD OR BAD.**

It is important to understand that we are very quick to pre-judge an experience, to pre-judge life as it arises. Surrender of the educational variety is really being willing to wait and see what life gives us. It is the alternative to trying to get something from life, which we often consciously or unconsciously do through the mode of control. We need to be willing to pause, to literally suspend judgement and see what life is giving us. It is basically an acceptance of what is.

Eckhart Tolle, amongst many others, talks about acceptance of what is. The fascinating thing is that everyday events occur and many of us spend hours fighting with and arguing about something that has already happened and we try to change that. This is pure insanity and yet we all spend a lot of our lives doing it. The alternative is to surrender to what is happening, to approach life with a natural, innate curiosity. Of course, many young children and many animal species have that approach to life - they have curiosity to see what is occurring in each moment. It's about having a willingness to see life from that perspective so that when an event occurs, we don't label it good or bad, because in that moment we have no idea whether an experience is good or bad.

Often, in relationships, when somebody says something that triggers us, we think it is what that person said, but in all reality, it has nothing to do with it. All that's happened is that what has been said has caused an old pattern, an old experience to rise up. Life in that moment is supporting us to change that pattern, to heal it and to move through it. If we could surrender to the possibility, that life is working with us, not against us, then we could have a different experience. As the title suggests, this is an art, not an exact science and it's something we need to practise in an imperfect way.

I want to cover one last item. Lara often says that people want to hear something about 'grace', which is probably my favourite word in the English language. Whether we understand it to mean some form of divine energy, or life energy, or universal energy, it really doesn't matter. We can even suspend a belief about whether it exists or not, but if it does exist, it seems to me that two things must be true about grace.

The first is that it must be available 24 hours, 7 days a week. Just think about that for a moment, because if it's only available between 3pm and 5.30pm or between 8am and 9am, then it's not grace, it's not freely available all the time.

The second thing that needs to be true is that it's available to everyone equally. If it was more available to Lara than to me, or it was more available to people in Europe or Africa or wherever, it just doesn't make sense.

So, if we want to believe in grace then the only thing that is stopping us receiving grace throughout the day is us. The only thing that gets in the way is our desire to be in control, our pre-judgment of reality.

I experience grace daily, but probably about four or five per cent of what I could experience. The thing that gets in our way is our inability or our unwillingness to surrender to the moment. When we are in the moment, and we are willing to meet life with curiosity, that is when we

encounter grace.

My suggestion is that over the summer we find our own way to practise the art of surrender daily. That we practise accepting moments in life exactly as they are, on the understanding that they are supporting us, and to see how our lives evolve or develop in a different way.

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## Q & A

**Q:** How do we manifest actively, seek things whether they are internal or external. How do we achieve these through surrendering? We can surrender through the acknowledgment that life is happening for us rather than to us, but that is after an event has happened. How can we actively pursue things, create things through surrender?

*It is interesting that there are a lot of active verbs being used in that question - pursuing, seeking, creating. We spend our lives seeking, we spend our lives trying to make something happen and at the heart of the idea of surrender is trusting what is happening without us having to make it happen. Trusting what life is delivering through our letter box. This is the fundamental difference that none of us are really conditioned into or educated about and it takes practise. I am not saying that we become passive and sit cross-legged and naval gaze, or stop going to work or stop seeking or creating. It is about trusting what is happening rather than trying to make something else happen.*

*I don't know if the questioner can see that, but there was something about the way the question was asked, it was all about us needing to make something happen and that of course, is all around us. I can see that people might say, "well we need to get up in the morning, we need to give our children breakfast, we need to take them to school". Of course, that is true, but the emphasis on so much of our lives is us needing to make life happen and that is the biggest problem of all. Surrender is about trusting that what life will deliver to us is better than anything we can make happen.*

*We have all had days and weeks where this is effortless. I have days when I float through life and just accept it and then there are other days where it's like wading through treacle and I think there is so much resistance in me - I'm tense and fighting life. It is in these periods that the transformation is happening. When life is effortless, we don't grow much,*

*we don't learn much. It is through the tricky periods where we practise this. It's a little bit like yoga or meditation or any discipline that we do on a regular basis. You just show up and you work through it and it is that which finally heals the old patterns and then new patterns come up for healing.*

**Q: Is there a fine line between surrender and apathy, like indifference, lack of enthusiasm or numbness because you are deferring to the universe?**

*It is a great question and I think we all struggle with that on a regular basis. The answer is yes and no. In one sense there is a fine line and in another sense it's like oil and water because they are two completely different things, but it is very easy to be confused between the two things.*

*For example, I find one of the ways to access this debate is that in the Buddhist tradition one of the things they talk about a lot is the art of non-attachment. We don't attach to any particular outcome and a lot of what I've talked about tonight in terms of control and trying to make things happen is the opposite of non-attachment.*

*What we all do, and I in particular do this and I'm better at spotting it in other people than myself, is practise detachment. It's not apathy, we withdraw into a kind of numbness and that has nothing to do with non-attachment.*

*What we are practising is no attachment to outcome, no attachment to life as it arises, we are not attached as to whether the bus arrives or doesn't arrive; or to whether there's heavy or light traffic. To detach from life and to withdraw is not helpful to anyone, it is like a form of passive aggression.*

*I hope that distinction makes sense because it's a really important one. Often when people are talking about love and hate, there is a real repulsion about hate. Hate is remarkably close to love, it has a sort of intensity about it. The opposite of love for me is indifference. It is the antithesis of love, a horrible sort of feeling. I would much rather people hated me than were indifferent towards me.*

### **A recommendation from Anna...**

*I would like to say, that when you practise surrender it is actually an incredible relief for the control freaks among us. I really recommend everybody to listen to Michael A Singer's series of eight lectures on 'Living from a Place of Surrender'<sup>[1]</sup> which I found absolutely fascinating. It has really helped me to give up control over things like not being attached to an outcome and to just watch and see where the energy is. I find myself living my life in a different way now. Instead of thinking "what do I want?", I think, "I wonder what life wants for me."*

*Once you can achieve a kind of flick of the switch in the brain, the whole concept of surrender becomes utterly liberating.*

## Andrew...

*A great recommendation and I have seen the difference in Anna. It is so liberating, you think that you will feel vulnerable and weak, but actually, you feel empowered.*

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[1] [https://www.audible.co.uk/pd/Living-from-a-Place-of-Surrender-Audiobook/1683645863?qid=1597071216&sr=1-3&ref=a\\_search\\_c3\\_lProduct\\_1\\_3&pf\\_rd\\_p=c6e316b8-14da-418d-8f91-b3cad83c5183&pf\\_rd\\_r=47JRSCHT4YY16Q34WNYK](https://www.audible.co.uk/pd/Living-from-a-Place-of-Surrender-Audiobook/1683645863?qid=1597071216&sr=1-3&ref=a_search_c3_lProduct_1_3&pf_rd_p=c6e316b8-14da-418d-8f91-b3cad83c5183&pf_rd_r=47JRSCHT4YY16Q34WNYK)