

Meeting with Jim Burns September 30, 1983

Question. What about this "living in the now"? Always now, no more tomorrow, no more yesterday, just the present, not projecting, always going with your feelings and intuitions.

BURNS: That's the ideal state. That's a very desirable state. You've got to remember that I'm all screwed up, but the thing that is different about me, sick or well, is that through effort over the years I got to the point where I was generally never in conflict with myself. This is the essence of being current, or living in the moment.

When you're not living in the moment it's because something inside of you is unsatisfied and is either hammering at you, which is the past working on you, or it's that the future is the only motivational method your system can come up with -- you're dissatisfied with the present so you're living for tomorrow. But when you're not in one of those two states you're in a middle ground, where you're much more at ease and much less under distress and so on.

See -- you try to express things, but there are things left unsaid; you have to be careful of exactly what you're saying. You say that you're living in the moment, but if you take that statement down fine enough it becomes a classical mistake. You can't possibly try to escape from what you've learned, which is the past, and you can't possibly escape from some view of the future -- consciousness simply won't function without it. But it's a matter of the degree to which you're involved in these things that matters.

Q. Are you talking about multi-dimensional states of consciousness, that we're always on three or four different levels simultaneously?

BURNS: Well, that's another aspect of it. Very few people are able to be conscious of the reality of that, in the ordinary sense. Then there's another sense of it that's very practical, that again is not at all common with people. When you're in good shape -- when I'm in really good shape, I'm capable of being conscious of about fifteen things simultaneously, under certain conditions.

If you're, say, racing an automobile or a motorcycle, and you're going to be alive, for one thing. And two, [if you're] any good at it, you develop a capacity to be directly in a stream of consciousness, perceptive of about fifteen factors simultaneously, all the while maintaining a single overriding frame of mind. Now until you've experienced something like that it sounds like it's just complete nonsense -- but it isn't.

I'm not saying I think anybody ever gets to the point where they have that kind of mainstream, just unbelievable, stream of concentration going. But if you're racing and anything breaks that concentration, if you've got any brains at all, you'll just stop and get

out, because if you don't you're going to be a dead S.O.B. very quick. That's what happens when somebody gets in over their head with driving.

Q. I've noticed that some musicians can maintain that concentration. They will be playing something very difficult in a group with eight or ten other people, and they hear.

BURNS: Every note. That's absolutely true. They not only hear every note, but they know exactly the frame of mind the others are in that day and everything about them.

But you've got to remember that no matter what you can say about it, it's never for a very long time. Nobody's doing that walking the street eighteen hours a day. It's a unique situation, but it is possible.

The reason I bring it up is that when I finally became successful with deep meditation, I came into a frame of mind that was identical to that; you had the capacity to be on stream totally in all levels of capacity to perceive in any sense, from physical sense right down to the most abstract aspect of comprehension.

Q. Would you call that cosmic consciousness?

BURNS: Because I've never heard anybody expand on what they meant by the word, I simply don't know. I wouldn't know what to call it. All I know is the experience I had; I've only had the inside experience of the thing, and I've only had it once. But when you try to talk to somebody about it, you're strapped to express it. The only reason this corollary of driving came up in my mind is that it's the only thing in the ordinary experience of the world that is even similar. It's like that, but it's about a thousand times stronger.

But it's basically the same function -- this capacity; it's as though your comprehension were a pinpoint in space, and in all directions around that point you are perceiving totally. That's the only way I know how to describe it. And in the visualization aspect of that experience, that's what happens. You visualize in the complete -- you can't say 360 degrees because that presumes a plane -- I just don't know what word would describe this spherical type of perception.

Another point about this is it seemed to me to answer to a specific, designed-in desire of my being. In other words: Why would your being pursue this at all? In all of these things that I've done, learned, I have had no conception whatever of what my system was trying to achieve. I was just hopeless to control it. I had to go along with what was going on, there was nothing else I could do.

You've got to realize something about the way ego -- which is a very phony and tricky and slippery S.O.B. -- operates. The most important thing you can say about ego is everything is "I did". And the truth is -- you don't do anything. You're the victim of your circumstances. But at a certain point your need for identity takes over and you say, "I did, I thought, I this I that." And if you really examine the thing, all you're doing is sitting

in a theater, all of this is taking place, and you're where it happened. And that's about all you had to do with it, if you really get strict about it.

Most of the things that we say, will only suffer so much examination. If you get really close on any of them the whole thing comes apart. And you have to learn to accept the fact that you can really get in trouble going too far with things. Because our comprehension is only designed to operate in a certain range, and we have to have it going that way or we simply won't survive.

Q. If that's the truth, what's the point in even trying?

BURNS: Well, it's just a peculiar thing. In philosophy, religion, and everything else down the road people have given it different comments, trying to explain that phenomena. They call it the divine insult -- that's one of the comments you hear.

We go along in an ordinary world -- your comprehension goes along and you don't think too much about it -- and unless something really happens, we never have any cause to notice one thing:

Just for a minute assume that your comprehension had to be involved in any way with the simplest kind of natural law that your body exhibits -- suppose you had to be conscious of digestion. That's what I mean by the limits of comprehension. It's designed to do a certain thing within certain limits.

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James J. Burns III is author of the book, *At Home with the Inner Self*. If you like the insightful and direct style of Jim Burns, visit the TAT Forum Index on the TAT Foundation's website at <http://www.tatfoundation.org/>