

The Still Point of the Turning World

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What is the Still Point in Your Turning World? Have you found it? Have you been there? Do you know where it is? Can you go there anytime you want? Is it inside or outside? If it is inside, -- does that place you outside of it?

I want to talk about how you got to where you find yourself now – and this is really about your journey out of stillness and into increasing turmoil. Examining this will reveal much about where you are headed – and why. (Verbal communication about this sounds contradictory, so you have to see/feel your way past the grammatical paradox of these words that falsely imply a non-existent dichotomy.)

My fundamental premise is that "the stillness" or "the silence" is all that there is – truly. And you came out of it even as a cloud emerges from the invisible ether in the sky – and you will return to it in like fashion. Consequently it is at the very core of your nature to want to abide there – for that which is essentially still cannot remain in motion. In truth, that motion is merely an appearance of motion and in reality you are not separate from that stillness or silence. Who – and what – you really are is at all times utterly still and absolutely silent.

Paradoxically, your seeking to satisfy this inner need expresses your striving to live in separation from your source – and simultaneously – expresses the source itself. Paradoxically, your seeking to satisfy this inner need is your greatest obstacle – but simultaneously – your way home. It is an obstacle because it is the project of the personal and validates the personal 'you.' But it is also your way home because the desire to seek is itself born from the inner being.

To most students of the esoteric sides of philosophy, religion and psychology, my words thus far may sound all-too-familiar, and that very fact brings us back to this question of how you got to where you find yourself now – to the 'you' to which these words sound all-too-familiar.

Be aware, as we pursue this dialog, that there are always two dialogs going on – not just between me and you, here and now, but always within your own self. There is the dialog of the inner being with the outer being and the dialog of the outer being with itself. The dialog of the outer drowns out the inner, yet it cannot silence it. The outer dialog is like an echo – onto which your attention has become so fixated, trying desperately not to lose track of it before it ages into oblivion, that you have completely overlooked and forgotten the original, crystal clear, loud and immediately present source of that echo – the inner dialog. This inner dialog is between that which is the real, still and silent being that you and I are in common, and the outer being. These words are merely the echo of that inner dialog – and an echo of a rapport – wherein the voice speaking now, and the ears hearing now, are of one being – else no worthwhile communication is occurring. This inner dialog is not a dialog of words. There is no outer being – only a seeming of

such, born of looking away. In the final analysis there is no dialog – only a seeming of such when the echo begins its journey home. The inner dialog is a beacon guiding the way. You have to listen – past the great rumbling generated by your quest to be – somebody and something. When the only thing you can hear is the still silence, then you have found what you are.

How do you find that truly still point? A Zen master once wrote, "There is only one way – you must abandon the egocentric position."

This egocentric position is so entrenched as our point of reference that it goes unnoticed despite all the books that you read about dropping egos. It goes unnoticed despite all the meditation disciplines you practice aimed at transcending thought and finding your real self. It goes unnoticed because somewhere along your journey it/you got the idea that defining yourself is achieved by addition (a dust cloud in a desert). All the great teachers tell us the path is through subtraction, but the egocentric position sees this as self-elimination. In truth this subtractive process is not self-elimination, it is the finding of the only thing that really is you.

The dawning of identity – experience is binding

A Zen master wrote that the ego projects an ego on which to work in order to preserve its own primacy i.e., so long as you are working at fixing this ego, or altering it in some way, you are firmly protected from looking in the mirror. All eyes are focused, so to speak, on ego2 while ego1 remains unnoticed.

Try this experiment. Close your eyes. Notice how you feel right now – present in the body. Go ahead and feel the complete sense of the position of your body and any sense of comfort or lack of comfort. Now notice the feeling of being your self – the feeling of having an identity. Notice the sense of self-awareness that is present. This sense of self surrounds all perception and experience. You are you. You feel – "I am." This sense of self is behind all thought. I want you to focus your attention – not with worded thought – but with direct feeling of this sense of being you.

Now there's just one problem with this – and that is – that entire sense-of-self, that whole feeling of being you, that lovable "I-ness" is not going to survive death. You need to remind yourself of this because you have it in your head that it is the body that's not going to survive. Where – pray tell – are you going to live without your body?

Since you don't really believe this, if you are still focused keenly on that sense of 'you' being here 'now,' ask yourself this question: From where does this sense of self arise? Where were you before your birth? Where will you be after your death?

Can you even put your finger on the essence of this sense-of-being, without placing it in a personal context? Can you separate awareness from yourself without taking ownership of it?

This self-identity is not your real being. This sense of self is the egocentric position that takes ownership of everything – even of awareness. Do not mistake the two as the same. That personal

identity is impermanent. Only the impersonal awareness that powers it is permanent. The self you feel yourself to be right now is impermanent. It is entirely dependent upon an impersonal awareness. Do not invert reality. That identity felt as the sense-of-self does not possess awareness. Awareness is entirely independent of it. When you hold to the notion that you possess awareness, you cannot imagine awareness absent your personal identity.

When that mortal self realizes and accepts this distinction, something profoundly magical occurs – what remains is awareness alone – and a sense of abiding in utter silent stillness – there is the sense that the entire world is but a reflection of an underlying absolute, silent, stillness. This awareness is referred to by Franklin Merrell-Wolff as "consciousness without an object," i.e., with no dependence upon physical perceptions and thoughts, indeed without that sense of personal identity which is itself a thought.

Richard Rose writes: "The task of the seeker of eternity is to die while living." The mortal seeker, in truly accepting his mortality, realizes that there is nothing to die and that only that which is eternal ever existed in the first place. So long as the seeker must live, then he must live in mortal separation from eternity.

The sense of self-as-identity is the focus in awareness on experience brought about by the body experience – and it overlays the focus on the ever present, silent stillness in which this sense of self occurs. The sense of self-identity, occurring in awareness, is entirely dependent upon experience. Your entire sense of self is merely an experience! The body/mind is an experience machine. You think to yourself, "Ah, but that experience must be happening to somebody – and that somebody is me!" Once again the egocentric point of reference has got it backwards. It is the body/mind experiences that give rise to the sense of self-identity. The body will die and be dissipated. The mind is at all times one with the body and will likewise be dissipated. When that happens what will remain of "he-who-experiences"? Answer: Nothing of you will remain.

The story of a man's life in a very real sense is the story of this character reconciling itself to this immutable fact – which it knows in its heart of hearts to be true. Each individual's life's story is the story of coping with and comforting oneself – while dying a slow death. We are – all of us – dying a slow death.

The building of identity – striving to define oneself

You are born into this world as an individual body and just as that body does not contain air so much as it is immersed in an ocean of air, so too is it immersed in the all-pervasive Silent Stillness – the Living Awareness.

It is this background of Awareness in which the process of experience occurs and gives rise to separate individual consciousness. The physical body is a sense perception machine. The first perceptual experience simultaneously gives rise to the subject "having" the experience. Experience builds on experience and identity builds on identity.

You experience individuality and until proven otherwise know only that you exist as an individual. To exist as an individual – and consequently, to feel the compulsion from a source unknown – to be that individual – while at the same time not knowing just what exactly that individuality is, or is supposed to be – means that you have no choice but to define yourself to yourself. (Identity spins identity.) That is your nature, period. That is the direction of all your thoughts and actions. This imperative is itself an expression of, or an echo of, that Being, from which all arises, when manifested as individualized forms – a dust funnel in a desert.

When you think you are looking inward, you are in fact looking outward. You can never really see yourself. The instant that such seeing occurs will be the same instant that the self you take yourself to be will cease to exist. The direction of your looking is to define, build, magnify and preserve this self – generated by experience.

This is a hopeless endeavor since by definition that self doesn't know what it is and therefore what to preserve. The method of preservation is to possess all in its field of vision and by association with the "real" out there infer its own reality. All the poignant pathos in your life is the story of this process.

Identity spins identity

Here's your predicament.

Childhood launched you on a journey of creating your individuality. You were the center of the universe, and the universe existed to satisfy you. The world had to conform to you. You create the world in your own image and likeness.

Adolescence launched you on a journey to find your relationship to the world – further defining your individuality. By now the world had also become a threat to that individuality and fear became entrenched. You now also had to conform to the world.

In young adulthood you seek to find your role in that world and your possibilities seem endless. Now cautious that the world can also be your enemy, you still see the purpose of the world as serving your needs. The only problem is how – what pathway are you supposed to take. It gradually becomes more and more apparent that you have little control over the outcome. It's starting to look like the world is stronger than you are. You steel – or resign – yourself and determine to forge ahead to live your life – to continue the process of building your individuality – albeit with some level of doubt.

But before you can commit, a terrible indecision begins to arise like a worm eating away from the inside. There is the fear of taking the wrong path. There is the hesitation in lack of conviction that any given direction is the way you are supposed to go. Why? What is this fear?

So long as your possibilities were endless and the purpose of the world was to serve you, you were safe. But now the world is recognized as much, much bigger than yourself and you must somehow find your place in it.

Your cannot dispel the doubt that the quest to build your individuality ultimately cannot succeed because it won't make your individuality bigger and longer lasting than the world. In fact the world itself might swallow you up. You are threatened from within and from without.

Your indecision and uncertainty stems from the recognition somewhere deep inside of your own mortality. Your whole life you have managed to look away from the fact of your own mortality. You fear that your time is limited and that you will not be able to go back. But it is also the awareness that you're not even sure of what it is you are trying to build and protect.

A conscious life-long commitment, such as raising a family, is difficult to make because once made it fixes the end-point. Death becomes real enough that it is no longer as completely out of your consciousness.

So the outer dialog says, "Choose wisely. You have one shot at crossing the chasm."

But the inner dialog says, "All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

The denial of death

It's a fact, you can lie to everyone around you, but you cannot lie to yourself. The only thing you can do is look away from whatever you don't want to face.

Therefore the only thing to do is to face everything squarely – and it is the looking away from the ever-present fact of death that is the fundamental problem.

Our life's story is really about our journey of learning how to reconcile ourselves with, and accept, our own death.

The Path

Use the "Who am I?"

Focus the attention on sensation and feeling, not on thoughts. Do not focus the attention on emotions per se, but on the sensation of having the feeling – both the sensation of having the feeling and the source of the feeling.

Thoughts generated by this attempt are the reaction to this "direct looking," and the "looking away" is experienced as a rush of ensuing thoughts.

How did you get to where you find yourself right now?

This is an exercise in trying to see and feel, not think.

What is the earliest memory that occurs to you now of "you as a child"?

What is the circumstance?

What is the feeling?

Can you see what your thoughts were then?

What memory occurs to you now of "you as an adolescent"?

What is the circumstance?

What is the feeling?

Can you see what your thoughts were then?

What memory occurs to you now of "you as a young adult"?

What is the circumstance?

What is the feeling?

Can you see what your thoughts were then?

What memory is most prominent of "you last year"?

What is the circumstance?

What is the feeling?

Can you see what your thoughts were then?