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By DoKwang Augenblick

We should beware of spiritual leaders without a sense of humor. And I suppose spiritual teachers should beware of students without a sense of humor, too. I'm glad we're starting out with humor. That means we're getting enlightened already.

So we begin on time, despite my tardiness. How is everyone today other than perfect?  
Great! Yes, Talon, time is a construct too.

Time is a function of the ego. In being present you allow ego to dissolve, and there is no time. Many spiritual teachers in the past have said our task is to kill the ego, and yet the first of the five precepts is "don't kill". So why would we want to kill the ego? We don't want to kill anything! We don't want to kill the ego because it is a tool we have created to deal with reality. Sometimes it's an efficient tool, but when we adopt a defensive posture in order to create more feeling of separation, or immerse ourselves in negative reactions to events around us, it becomes the proverbial double-edged sword that can cut those around us but cut us just as easily.

We don't want to kill ego, only put it in its place. Remember it is just a tool. Time is one of those tools that the ego uses to help us create order and make sense of things, but can also be used against us. One spiritual teacher (I forget who) once said, "enlightenment is when the passage of time is with you rather than against you." That's a very true statement. When you become present - which is all that enlightenment is, the state we just entered and entertained with our ABC exercise - when we do that, focus away from thoughts, from the separative defensive mechanisms of the ego, and focus on what's right here, right now - A) the phenomena in our immediate experience, without label or judgment; B) the breath; and C) the body, the unified field of conscious energy that we are - that's it! It is always now.

Our job is not to kill the ego, but to simply to transcend the ego, to take a higher perspective, not allowing our ourselves to be immersed in the ego, allowing it to dictate our state of consciousness and our emotional reactions, but to put it back in the tool box, for use when needed. Understanding that we are the carpenters and the ego is the tool, not the boss. Transcending the ego is a tricky business, because the ego does not want to be transcended. We can verify that resistance based on our own practice, our struggles, doubts, confusion occurring on whatever is your spiritual path.

The ego is slippery customer, because its prime directive is Control! The ego is "maintaining the world", and we have to follow the Yaqui sorcerer Don Juan's directive to his student, Carlos Castaneda, the task of "stopping the world." How do we stop the world? By entering the nagual, which is the opposite of the tonal. The tonal is our ego mind, everything that we know and everything that we don't know. The other state, the nagual, is everything that we don't know we don't know. It is outside the world, outside the ego, outside of normal waking consciousness, outside of our "normal world".

We live in an imperfect world, but a perfect universe, and we inhabit both simultaneously. The Heart Sutra describes it when it says "Form is emptiness and emptiness is form". All we need to do

to stop the imperfect world and enter the perfect universe is to in each moment transcend the ego, moving beyond and overcoming thought-based consciousness and dwelling in the “space between the thoughts.

Many business trainers and success coaches exhort their listeners to learn how to “think outside the box”. That is faulty advice. That is not the answer, because the problem is that thinking IS the box. What you need to do is to get out of the box that is thinking. Get out of the sense of separateness and need for control that is the ego's prime directive.

We may use many different means, but most of them just keep us inside the box, these means that are thought or conceptually based. Herein lies the difference between conversion and transformation. Transformation is not staying same level. Conversion is simply trading one set of thoughts for another. If a Buddhist or a Christian holds a certain set of beliefs, adheres to a dogma, and then through meditative practice understands how to get out of the box, how to expand consciousness beyond ego and beyond belief, that is the transformation. This is accomplished not by destroying a set of beliefs, not by destroying anything; it's simply changing the way one relates to beliefs. It's like climbing a little higher on the mountain, getting a higher perspective so as to see more and more, moving to a higher more expansive more inclusive level, a level where beliefs are transcended and yet still included in the vista.

Who would think that a caterpillar could be transformed into a butterfly who had not seen it oneself? Even the caterpillar has no idea that when it follows its instincts, and spins its chrysalis it will emerge as a butterfly. Except for those of us who do have this sense that a transformational process and state do exist and are simply dormant inside us, most humans go around like those caterpillars, not aware of what is latent within them, and most actively resisting that process. If you told those people, or if you could talk to the caterpillar, like Dr. Doolittle in their language and say “Hey! I know you think you are caterpillar now, but look at this butterfly, this is who you really are”, they would think you are crazy. If you said “you are just like the Buddha or Jesus, you ARE the Buddha, the Christ”, they'd say “are you nuts?” It's a tough sell to convince a person of their “god”ness

We who have committed to a spiritual path are the lucky ones who have opened our consciousness to admit and acknowledge that we are more than skin and bones, more than a separate entity among billions of separate entities and objects. Why are people held back by fear of the most miraculous transformation possible? They don't like changes? It's the ego. The ego has developed and set itself up to be the controlling boss. Its greatest fear is not that it's going to go out of existence. Lots of egos that, when they feel that there's no control left, jump off a bridge, take an overdose of drugs, hang or shoot themselves. The ego is more afraid of losing control. The ego's loss of control is a “fate worse than death”. The ego would rather kill its owner than lose control. That is self-imprisonment, but we also have the key to that prison. The key is allowing. Helping the ego to feel comfortable enough to let go of the control it is compulsively exercising that keeps us separate, craving, attached, believing that only things from the “outside” are going to make us happy.

The ego wants to convince you that it is right so as not let go of control. Loss of control means there is nothing left, life is not worth living. That's despair. So our job, the purpose of spiritual practice, is not to *attain* enlightenment, because the Buddha says we are already enlightened. Our purpose is simply to comfort and encourage and coax and cajole the ego by whatever means we can to gradually give up the control it doesn't want to give up, to drop illusory boundaries, the sense of

separation, and wake up to who we really are. That is all. Prayer, meditation, ascetic practice, reading spiritual books, are all about the same thing - getting the ego to relax, to surrender.

There is a difference between resignation and surrender. If the ego is still in control and something happens that it can't abide by, that the ego simply cannot control somehow, the emotional reaction is resignation, despair. "It's all over!" But, if you can get the ego to relax, and instead of resignation, it surrenders its need for control, that is the gateway for transformation. Once the ego surrenders, and admits that there's nothing more that it can do, well, hallelujah! It's been screwing up things from the beginning. Finally, things can go right!

Out of that seeming emptiness of surrender, once you get out that box through skillful means, and make it palatable to others, you are free. But it seems difficult.

Most of the so-called personal growth and success "gurus" are talking about conversion. Here we are talking about transformation. Getting ourselves out of the box, and then, in alignment with the bodhisattva ideal and our sense of compassion, we want to share that transformation with as many people as we can. The first Bodhisattva vow is "Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them all" because they are us and we are them.

When the Buddha attained enlightenment, he didn't have to start teaching. He had it made. He had moved to higher perspective, saw how his mind had been working before he woke up, understood how everyone's minds worked, and realized that everyone else could look from same perspective he had just attained. But those minds are boxed in and closed off. How do you convince them? How do you convince the caterpillar that it is a butterfly?

We are all at different levels of readiness, readiness to let go of the defense mechanisms of the ego that stand in the way of our self realization, because the ego is a psychic mechanism that we ourselves have built. We have to be aware of the need to deconstruct it and then have the courage to go beyond the resistances of what we have constructed ourselves. We have created this monster, granted for the right reasons at the time. At the time, we were confronted with painful or uncomfortable circumstances, but even after those circumstances were gone, we kept it in place and it became firmly established, took on a life of its own. And now we are telling it that we want it to go away? It is going to have different ideas.

So we need to work diligently and intelligently to tell it to let go of control. The ego's level of control and resistance is inversely proportional to our expansiveness. The teacher is always there shining up within you. Willingness, acceptance, expansion. The Course in Miracles, that wonderful Christian-oriented transformational practice curriculum, talks about that "little willingness" - making that little opening in the ego's armor, questioning the ego's need for control. And your own inner teacher, your true nature, the universal oneness will be able to shine through and guide you more and more to your own transformation. Willingness is the beginning. In my aikido classes I sometimes ask my students "what is the most important belt that you can wear?" Even though most say "a black belt", I tell them it is the white belt. The beginner's belt. Putting on a white belt on your first day of class means that you have taken the first step, you have opened your mind, you have a willingness to learn. On the spiritual path, the most important step is to open up, allow that willingness. Accepting at least the idea that this experience you are having now is not all that there is, is not all you are capable of.

In the Zen tradition they say there are three things you need to practice Zen. Great Faith – willingness, accepting and trusting that transformation is possible. Great Doubt -not accepting anything on the level of ideas or what anybody tells you, not accepting anything you haven't experienced through your own effort and consciousness. Great Courage -persisting even in the face of resistance of your own ego to its own dissolution. The ego is essentially a psychic spoiled child that you are holding on to in your consciousness that perceives everything through that filter of that spoiled child. We don't want to punish or restrain the child, but rather to say "relax I've got you covered" so both of you can go hand in hand up to next level. Basically you need to love it. The ego is like a little child throwing tantrums. He wants the attention that he was wrongfully deprived of, and to understand that we have to go into a whole other talk on the continuum concept

But that is why we feel this sense of separation and that our early needs were unmet. The way to help that "ego kid" to heal is to love it, to give it the attention it needs, but not allowing it to continue to direct our moods or behaviors - that's where mindfulness and attention and meditation come in. Even in the face of the ego's tantrums, we let it be, we hold it in our loving attention until it understands that you are there for it. We give it what it has cried for our whole life - our attention. Just love it.

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