



Photo: Kazi Mizan

The Conversation

The battle of life, the hero's journey, the path of destiny... these are all matters of an essentially interior nature. We've been telling ourselves stories about these as-if they take place in the "real" world. For some reason we can only talk about these matters through the elaborate metaphor of physical acts. It doesn't seem to translate any other way into our various languages.

The real challenge of the human existence is to learn to engage in this interior drama while, at the same time, live out a life in the real, physical, external world. What we do most of the time is focus exclusively on the later realm and to let the former play out more or less unconsciously. What the mystics, the philosophers and the depth psychologists have been trying to tell us to do is almost exactly the opposite. The interior battle should be our primary focus and the exterior more of an afterthought or just a thing we have to contend with.

I think the truth is in the middle. We have to do both. There's a sort of conversation between the interior path and the exterior. The one guides and informs the other and vice versa. You can never just focus on one because the other provides

you crucial information, messages, signs and interpretations. It's almost as-if you ask your questions in one realm but have to get your answers from the other. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna doesn't tell Arjuna "Renounce the world and live as a monk." Not at all. He tells him to go and fight this battle and kill these evil men, but do it as an offering to God. This story is the metaphysical apotheosis of the Middle Way.

God is everywhere and thus cannot be found. God isn't hiding and doesn't have any reason to hide from us! It is we who are the ones with reasons to hide.

At the threshold of this conversation between our interior and exterior lives/selves there exists a mode of perception that actually enables us to communicate with God. It is such a sacred mode that it is only available to the most serious and disciplined individual.

To understand this connection between the interior and the exterior you must learn to pay complete attention to your life. You must awaken fully and reawaken again and again as the fogs of maya descend upon you, like the

never-ending waves of the seas. It's a strange thing to say but, in short, you need to be wherever your attention is. For some reason, we've been made in a way where the two don't always stick together. Our minds can wander. We can be absent-minded. Distracted. We can also be fully focused. The key is that whatever part of you that is actually you—your fully conscious self—that needs to be exactly where your attention is. Awakening is the process of establishing this connection. Being is the process of maintaining it.

The quality of your interior life can be dramatically impacted by the choices you make in your exterior life. There is a vast difference, for example, between how you feel meditating after a night of excess in eating and drinking then how you feel after a night of great sleep. More seriously, if you do anything in the world that is injurious to your soul—something evil or selfish or otherwise against the will of God—a sickness will develop in your mind. And if it's bad enough, this mental sickness will start manifesting physical consequences. You'll feel anxious and afraid or start having panic attacks or develop one or another of the myriad of psychological disorders we find in the world.

So goes the conversation, the back and forth dialogue between the interior and the exterior.

The good thing is that this process works constructively as well. There is this sense in which we become like whatever we think about. So if we wake-up every morning and start praying to God, our behavior in the world starts to change. And then the world responds in kind. Good things start to emerge in our lives. If we keep at it long enough we can

even change our personalities. This all happens without any feeling of effort. It's all a result of spontaneous being, informed and guided by the quality of your interior devotion.

One of the ways in which the conversational nature of reality¹ works is through challenge and response. Reality asks questions of you via circumstance. You answer back with your thoughts, words and deeds. Then there is a new circumstance. So it goes.

Just as in normal conversation you can tell how it's going by paying attention to body language so in this conversation you can consult your own consciousness as a barometer of sorts. If you are contending with reality in the right ways, you will feel peace and tranquility. If not, you will feel some version of "bad"—fear, anxiety or anger.

The way you can tell that you are making progress is by paying attention to the nature and quality of the challenges posed to you by circumstance. They will evolve as you evolve. If you find yourself stuck in any way, if you see yourself facing again and again the same challenge, that's the clearest sign that what you need to do is change! The conversation is very direct and transparent in this way.

As you change and evolve on the inside, as you get better, the challenges of your external reality will change as well. You will find yourself facing situations of a distinctly different qualitative nature. While challenge and struggle will never go away, you will find at least that life is getting better.

¹ I want to give credit where credit is due with this phrase. This is an idea I originally came across in the work of one of my favorite poets, David Whyte, who's been featured in prior issues of Profit.