

## Chapter 3

### A Psychological/ Philosophic Interlude

I am going to start this chapter with a story. It is a story based on current scientific understanding and it may even be objectionable to some because it is not a spiritual understanding but I think it is meaningful background in your meditative quest. Around 2 billion years ago in the soup of chemicals that covered much of the Earth a molecule formed. This molecule had an unusual property, it was self reproductive. It might have been like a simple form of RNA which randomly floated through the primordial ocean picking up chemicals until it had bonded a copy, or maybe a chemical mirror image, of itself and then this copy falls off and starts forming it's own copy, until there were many copies except these copies were not always identical, sometimes they were a little chemically different and maybe a bit more successful in forming copies. Once this molecule formed the logic of evolution is set into motion. Competition, and adaptation pushes a slow but unstoppable evolution of more and more complex forms of life.

Why this little lesson on evolution? Because, one of the most useful adaptations, in the evolution of life, is some sort of self protective behavior. We see this type of behavior in most forms of life from simple single cell forms of life through complex forms like us. Early and simple forms of life may act like individual beings but we can understand that they are complex molecular forms in a soup of chemicals involved in a natural process ruled by the laws of cause and effect. There is in effect no self just behavior that is a sort of an illusion of self. Consciousness nor self consciousness has developed.

As self reproductive life forms evolved from simple molecular forms to complex animals self protective behavior also evolved. What started as a simple adaptation eventually evolves into consciousness then self-consciousness. What started as behavior that acts as though there is an individual self evolves in us humans a strong sense of an individual self and a whole way of thinking based upon this individual self though we might ask if there is really any more of an individual self for a human than for a simple self reproductive molecule.

We humans are not isolated in time. We carry with us the history of our whole evolution not just as a single completed project but as a construction of layers. The many life forms that we humans passed through in the evolution to being humans are still with us in our sensations and in the way we react in our emotions and our thought, the whole way we relate to the physical world that we live in. The evolution of the idea of an individual self is the evolution of a self with many layers

What does this have to do with our practice of meditation? Because, through meditation we can work through the many layers of our consciousness, self consciousness, thoughts reactions, emotions, the whole way we construct our world view, and idea of a self. To take the project of meditation all the way to enlightenment this is exactly what must be done.

There is a phrase that is often heard in the Zen world, "beginning-less karma." First we must understand the how word karma as used here. Often karma is thought of as something like divine beneficance or retribution. The Universe will be good or bad to us depending on whether our actions are good or bad. If you believe in reincarnation then you might believe that karma functions through our many lifetimes. But this is not exactly an understanding of karma that is useful in meditation. Karma should be thought of more simply as the influence of our past on our present relationship to the world around us. Obviously our past as an individual strongly influences who we are in the present moment. But just as important the whole history of our evolution as humans effects who we are, the way we react, the way we think. This is beginning-less karma. I write this because I don't want anyone to think that the project of meditation is just a relaxing walk in a park. In some sense we have to truly undo all it is that makes us human and become something else that transcends being a human being.

Karma manifests as thoughts and emotions, not just individual thought and emotion but also the whole structure of our thoughts and emotion. It is often said that we live in a sort of dream. I think it would be wrong to believe that we live in a dream without any sort of deeper true reality but never the less we live in a sort of dream that is the making of our karma, our thought and emotions. The deeper reality is only minimally touched by the world we have created in our mind. We can never be fully free of this dream because even our raw sensations our window on the real is already distorted by our evolution our Karma. But on top of the this original distortion we have layered on further distortions.

Look at how your mind works and how it is constantly thinking, filled with desires and emotions and fantasies, For many of us we are rarely present, often walking through life on automatic pilot as we are lost in our own thoughts. We make connection to what is actually happening around us only when necessary or for what we deem important. Of course now this is all becoming exaggerated by our phones and computers which further draws our attention away from the present into a world of electronic connection.

Because our minds are almost constantly thinking we have little of what we might call bandwidth left to pay attention to the present. So even when we touch base in the present our focus is narrow and much is never experienced. We are like a blind person walking down the street swinging a stick periodically touching the ground and other objects giving an idea of the world around him so that he can proceed without stumbling. In the same way we form an idea of the world around us and then we spend most of our time living in these ideas.

This world we live in our head is the result of our beginning-less karma, our evolution as human life forms, and our life since birth as an individual life form, the environment we are raised in. We live in a human world. We see it with human eyes. We pay attention to only what has meaning for us as human beings. We experience and process our experiences through our very human thoughts and emotions. This is all karma. There is one particular fallacy to our normal world view that Buddhism calls to our attention. The fallacy is that we think of ourselves as individuals. Our emotions and thoughts center around the idea of an individual I. This is karma that goes back to that original molecule that acted like it was an individual

As meditators we learn how to cut through all this karma and be present in the real for more than a just a few moment at a time but rather as the Tibetans teach “to rest in presence,” and experience the truth of the now. The amazing thing is that letting go of all this karma is even possible. It is almost as though we have to become something other than human. Yet there seems to be something in human psychology that makes this whole process possible, that makes enlightenment possible.

The human point of view rests on the essential fallacy of our individuality. This sense of our individuality rests in our emotions and our thoughts. We are constantly reinforcing our idea of our individuality in our thoughts almost moment by moment. If we are somehow to break through this essential fallacy we must end this whole process of reinforcing the idea of our individuality. Meditation is the tool which allows us to quiet our minds stop all the thoughts and emotions reifying our individuality and allow us to see through the fallacy of individuality.

Many people think that meditation is a way to find relaxation in both mind and body, to put aside the worries of our lives. This is a possible benefit to meditation but if we really want to see through our individuality, and experience a world without duality then meditation becomes hard work. To really practice meditation correctly we must have the intention to really quiet the mind, to stop thought and emotion and put in the effort necessary to make this happen.

There is a mantra at the end of the Heart Sutra that goes Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha. This mantra lays out the path of meditation. Gate Gate is translated as Gone Gone. This Gone is the gone of stopping self reifying thoughts and emotions and for a few moments forgetting our selves. This forgetting our selves happens when for a moment we are fully absorbed in our meditative object of attention like counting breaths or just the breath or a mantra or a visualization. This Gone can also happen in other activities of life like sports or playing music or doing art where it is even a bit

common, but it can also happen in more common activities like just walking down the street as long as self-reifying thought is dropped. We call this samadhi. Meditation is a seamless activity on and off the cushion. We work towards and then practice being Gone in all activities of life. This is nothing more than being present and fully engaged with whatever you are doing. Sometimes this is also called mindfulness.

We all experience moments of being gone but it is just that, moments, that we are not even aware of. They are just the fractions of time between our thoughts. Through the diligent practice of meditation Gone may go from unnoticed moments in time to a prolonged period of total absorption. This is the stage of Paragate. Paragate translates as gone with extra emphasis but I think it is better translated as D.T Suzuki does "gone to the other shore." The "other shore" is a Buddhist metaphor for that state of mind without suffering also called Nirvana. Again there are many terms for this state of mind, samadhi, kensho, satori. When this happens it is a powerful experience. It is joyous and energetic and maybe, but not necessarily, it will open one up to a deep understanding. For that special insight one might need a special push. That push might be a loud noise or a hit from the kiasaku stick or that confrontation you are about to have with your teacher in koan practice. That push can be anything. That moment of insight happens at the boundary of the totally quiet absorbed mind and our thinking mind. For just a moment the individual reflects on the experience of total absorption and understands the implications of this experience on the idea of an individual self or the idea of Oneness, or Emptiness, or the essence of a Koan and all the pieces come together in one's understanding and there is a revolution in one's thinking. To get to this point is not easy. We have deeply instilled a habit of thinking a certain way. Again and again we might go into total absorption for a few moments and come out and nothing seemingly has changed but in fact the habit of our constant thinking has dissipated just a little bit and so we work on reentering total absorption again and again until the power of our habitual thinking is lessened and we can see through our normal, deluded, dualistic, way of thinking.

This type of insight is not yet full enlightenment. It is just a moment of touching the other shore and looking at the view. It may not even be getting out of the boat and walking around. In stepping off the boat and planting one's feet firmly on the other shore, in entering the stage of parasam gate, something else must happen. One must go from the narrow view of one-pointed total absorption to the wide open view of an unbounded quiet mind. To go from the one-pointed mind to the unbounded mind sometimes all you need to do is open your eyes.

When this next experience happens it is quite dramatic. All of a sudden the internal dialogue has stopped and yet you are still functional. You will feel like you are filled with a strange intense energy. And the mind will be unimpeded in going from intense one-pointed concentration to a completely open state where all your sensations will be open at once. And at the same time you will experience the world not as a multiplicity but as a single un-bounded thing which you will identify with your true-self.

Bodhi Svaha, Wisdom Awakes. We might think that the insight into no-self and non-duality is the wisdom that this meditation practice has to offer but that is only the beginning of wisdom. Real wisdom is the quiet mind that sees the world clearly without prejudicial ideas, and functions with compassion and love and a non-dual understanding. The Sixth Patriarch of Zen Hui Neng, would always say that samadhi, being the state of deep meditation, and prajna, another word for wisdom, are one and the same. Samadhi is the substance and wisdom is the function.

It is not that the quiet mind of the deeply practiced meditator is completely without verbal or emotional thought but that it is not caught by thought. Thoughts arise when the circumstances call for thought. Emotion arises when circumstances bring out emotions. But also thoughts and emotions drop when the situation changes. Concentration is focused when the circumstances need concentration but then concentration can be relaxed and it all can be taken in in appreciation of the immense beauty of the world. And all the time the completely quiet mind is available as a rest state. This is an ideal that takes a lifetime of practice to approach. But even that is a miracle considering the beginning-less karma and delusions in which we all begin our ephemeral lives.

