

## A spiritual Treasure Hunt by Didier Weiss

Among all the “stories” we love to tell ourselves and each other all day long, and often all life long, there is one in particular we never seem to be tired of: “my” story.

How fascinating to go on and on about our human condition, filled to the brim with countless satisfactions and miseries, achievements and failures, hopes and regrets, pleasures and pains, traumas and fears, expectations and worries and so on and so forth. “My” story is one day, a “poor me” story, another day a “great me” story as Life unrolls its script.

Sometimes we wonder: “ Why does it have to be spiralling up and down and swinging around and can't just stay still at the top of the shaft of the pendulum of Life? A first answer is that we actually love it: “ What would we be without our stories? ”

One story, even more compelling to the 'miserable seekers' that we are, is this one: the story of 'our' spiritual search, which somehow makes us special... feeling of “déjà vu” perhaps?

*"The perpetual longing for happiness – which can, by definition, never be fulfilled because it denies the very happiness that is present in our own being now – condemns us to an endless search in the future and thus perpetuates unhappiness. — Rupert Spira"*

### The beginning of the search

Our search generally begins this way, like all tales: "Once upon a time, there was this seeker looking for a treasure which would vanish the very moment he could make it his. "Happiness", you guessed well, is the coveted treasure. Mind you, not just any happiness: an ever lasting feeling of happiness, coupled with an uninterrupted sense of peace of course ! After all, isn't a legitimate birth right?

A vast range of means, resources and methods are available to seekers to put their hands on the longed for treasure: consumer goods, human relationships, social networks, outings and travels, sports, philosophies of life, knowledge accumulation, religious rituals, drugs and altered states of consciousness, and many more.

All these have the potential to fulfil a seeker's thirst for happiness in bouts. But the relief is rather short-lived. They may offer a momentary source of plenitude through a “rush” of happiness, one satisfied desire at a time. However, this thirst seems unquenchable and the fateful hour of incompleteness inevitably comes back. Parched again, the seeker returns back to square one, in other words to his fragmented experience, known as "me and my life", “me and others”, “me and the world” and discouragement sets in. Never for too long and the treasure hunt resumes sooner or later, sooner than later in fact...

Due to the discontinuity of experience, existence seems somehow fleeting and life does become uncomfortable. This felt sense of fragmentation generates a feeling of unease, even at times psychological or emotional suffering - which is not to be confused with pain, the opposite of pleasure. An insidious question emerges: "Do I keep on existing when I am not acting or thinking? Hence a feeling of existence lived in tiny instalments?"

If he is lucky enough, the utter foolishness of this constricted and suffocating human condition will bother the seeker so terribly that an intuition will emerge: “Yes, it is possible to regain vitality and spaciousness.” Just this intuition and he will already breathe better, without really knowing why...

Then there might be a “wake up call”; an eye opener reading, an encounter, a video or podcast that will come with a fleeting moment of awakening, what Ramesh Balsekar liked to call a “free sample”. This will be a catalyst which will set in motion an inexorable process of discovery, and will offer a unique opportunity to bluntly ask the dizzying question: "Who am I really beyond what I believe that I am?" Or more simply, but just as poignantly, "Who or what is this “me”?"

### **Doing, the will to find truth**

Within this tale, a drive then appears, an apparent will to solve this discomfort once and for all, this uneasy and profound feeling of not really existing and to find Truth. It comes from the depths of Life and appears as a triad: the seeker - the seeking - the sought.

This is when the seeker enters the path of “*sādhanā*” trying out all kinds of practices and renowned techniques of Awakening. His determination will be matched by his very own expectations to find Truth. The serious and disciplined seeker will be very diligent and most dedicated: sacred texts, inspiring mantras, amazing postures, alienating meditations, silent retreats; and so many other possibilities which may bring in their wake either frustration, and... more often than not, one or more profound "spiritual experiences"!

Such experiences can be very subtle glimpses or astonishing breakthroughs of a sense of Oneness. But these are time and space bound. Soon enough, they turn into faint or vivid memories the seeker will cling to, like the drunk to his bottle. Nevertheless, this is a major step taken that qualifies the seeker as 'advanced'. The all beginner base camp is down below and the goal is near. The coveted mountain top, whose contours are now well defined, now seems ever so close.

### **Undoing**

Success may be instantaneous or may take years. If there is enough sincerity and earnestness, the stars may align for something to morph. Exhaustion can happen and the “doing” turns into an "undoing"... without any seeker doing it!

There is no more room for looking back. The overall transformation sees the dropping of the layers of all identities from the most mundane to the most sophisticated, from the most superficial to the deepest, but also of the values and beliefs, from the most cherished to the most believed, which so far defined the seeker's identity. This is the well-known “*neti-neti*” investigation of the Vedic tradition through elimination: “not this, not that”. It is an analytical process which aims at seeing our true nature by setting aside all that we are not: our name, our profession, our age, our gender, our profession, our bank account, our beliefs, etc. In brief, all that defines us!

In the absence of identifications and attachments, this ruthless and methodical exposure may take the seeker to what we could call: a state of "not-knowing", for he no longer thinks and conceptualises. The intellect is ousted out.

### **Not-doing**

With a bit of luck, at some point, this "un-doing" will present a form of live understanding that is non conceptual: a seeing/knowing beyond and prior words.

To the question "Am I really the author of my actions, my emotions, my thoughts, that is to say of everything that has always defined "me and my life"? ", a vivid - but still illusory - answer appears with its devastating conclusion: “Despite all appearances, I am not the author/actor of anything. Moreover "I have never been the author/actor of anything."

This piece of news can come as a shock to the "control freak" the seeker has always believed he was. Here comes the time to let the guard down and review all events and decisions of daily life and acknowledge: "I do not control and I have never controlled anything that I thought was entirely mine, whatever its nature - emotions, feelings, thoughts, judgments, actions, and so forth and so on". All these are now surprisingly experienced as "objects outside myself"!

Everything now seems to work on automatic pilot. Worse still, the seeker realises that this has always been the case, despite his might and gesticulating in all directions. Nothing the seeker thought he did, including his own spiritual search – this is the last straw !- this very intimate and personal activity did not appear to be "my" doing, or indeed "my" un-doing. This will have never been mine and thus seems to come ... from outside myself!??

## **Witnessing**

A specific experience often follows, commonly described as the "state of witness": "I am THAT which knows the world, the manifestation, this specific history. But THAT which I am, is in no way engaged in this world, nor even belongs to it. This state by definition generates a form of subtle, transparent but extremely powerful duality: (me) / (not-me = the world, the manifestation), which can vary from seeker to seeker in intensity and side-effects.

For some seekers, the "witnessing state" is a very welcomed moment of calm and rest, of non-identification with the character of yesteryear, of distancing oneself from the vagaries of existence: "I am invulnerable to all the vicissitudes of all sorts inherent to Life". "From my new position up here, I feel detached from what is going there down below".

For other seekers, it is a place of potential unhappiness, even deep depression, of numerous wanderings and frequent return trips to their Life prior to the "state of witness".

It may also be the beginning of another form of "non-doing" which has its own flavour and its own reason, leading the now simple "witness" to fall into the great abyss of the Unknowable, almost in spite of himself: marvelling at the ordinary; joy without an object; gratitude without a cause...

Due to a newly felt and intense feeling of solitude, witnessing has the potential to let surface a high degree of discomfort, and can even - possibly but not always - lead to an unusual attitude of coldness of expression, at times to no expression at all, disconcerting for family members or peers at work.

It can also sometimes lead to the complete stop of this spiritual adventure, for it is understandably very tempting to breathe at leisure, after so many years of dedicated search, this perfume of happiness, even if it is sometimes temporary lost. Many a seeker stops his quest here, as the witness is contented by living "peace and harmony in daily living". The math of One adds up!

## **The loss of the witness**

*"Your head is already in the tiger's mouth and there is no escape. "* Ramana Maharshi

If it is written in the stars - what Ramesh Balsekar called "the will of God" – there is a way out of the witness state: the complete understanding that a spiritual seeker - therefore also a witness - who cannot be defined and who has no power whatsoever in all domains simply cannot "have an existence of his own".

Wouldn't it be like creating a real subject for the phrase "It's raining", or "It should"? Who would this "he" be? Can't we see that it is only a grammatical form?

This subject - seeker, witness, whatever name we call him - does not exist as an independent autonomous entity in its own right. He has always been a conceptual tool, a character in a tale of treasure hunt. Deductions abound: "The seeker is a figment of imagination, the witness is yet another form of metaphysical fraud... and the spiritual quest itself has never been anything but a purely mental construct. "

This is the quantum leap from "I am not the author/actor of my actions" to "there is NO author/actor to these actions". This is a shocking, stunning, mind-blowing discovery made by ... no one! It doesn't seem to make any sense, either grammatically or spiritually, but yet at that very moment all seems quite obvious, lived, deep and unshakable: there has never been a "me".

What about the seeker? What about the will to research? The researcher and the research seem to fall back into the nothingness from which they had emerged. The conclusions come abruptly, without warning: not only have this researcher and this will to research disappeared, but at this very moment, it is seen that they have never really existed, except in imagination.

It is the end of an illusion, a form of hallucination. It is the end of a dream or a nightmare, hence the traditional name of awakening - or rather Awakening with a capital A to differentiate this major reversal of Consciousness from the daily morning awakening.

Now comes up a happiness and a peace which is no longer relative and temporary, depending on a "me and my life" ... but which emanates of the ineffable.

There is no longer a question of "doing", "un-doing", even "not-doing". In an instant, the defined, limited and separate individual who needed all these to simply validate its *raison d'être* is gone, vanished into thin air. And there is a Recognition of our true nature.

### **Unthinkable conclusions**

At this stage, the full implications of this Seeing/Knowing may not be fathomed and might take a while to reveal all their ordinary splendour. The true findings may remain low way as if there were stuck far below the insane discovery: "How can I possibly allow myself to accept that the totality of 'my existence', this specific and momentary appearance, is not not different from Life itself, and in some traditions said to be "GOD"! " This life = myself = God

The supposed "external" world which seemed to be unfolding "out there" turns into a modulation of this Life stream. And there remains only: "I am THAT" or "THAT".

THAT is testing itself: "Is there still work to be done? Choices and decisions to be made? Actions to be taken? Yes, there is! And that's all there is! Is there a centre of control? NO, there is none. Or rather, everything is centre, ACTIVE, LIVE, in every now. "

This is strange, to say the least, isn't it? How could there be choices and decisions made, actions being taken, with no independent subject ruling the show? And yet, Life knows itself DIRECTLY, without needing a middleman.

### **The return of the individual**

Within the "me" story, in order for it to seem real, this will to find Truth apparently goes through a separate entity. How can this be possible? The answer is by magic!

It is a magic trick whereas "me" comes back AS this outpouring of Life, and no longer in a central position. The earthly side is indeed a "me" who seems to live somewhere within the manifestation and apparently makes choices and decisions through his will.

This "supposed life" now is a source of neither anguish nor suffering, for the heavenly side is always there, as both the most absolute "void" – this unconditional welcoming space - and as the most total Life.

*"All you have to do is to live your life AS IF you were the author/actor of your actions. "Ramesh Balsekar*

The tale of the treasure hunt comes to its final chapter! How do we now live this Understanding in this human story? The answer is very simple: by acting AS IF you were the author/actor of your actions... There follows a deep relaxation that lets the choices take care of themselves. They appear in this story as if there were an independent author/actor when there is actually none.

### **The doing, the will, the actions, all are OK :-)**

Actions remain, a seemingly sense of will survives, which is the impetus for the next action; or the forerunner of the next action. One forerunner always precedes the next. There is also the forerunner or the forerunner, and so on. And so we could go back to the time of the dinosaurs, or to the Big Bang... now! Nothing is the cause of nothing. We could compare this to the Russian set of doll of decreasing sizes placed one inside another which includes an infinite number of “matriochkas”, all present in the last one seen, here and now.

In that new light and lightness, in this dance which alternates pleasure and pain, disappears the hallucinatory part made up of feelings of pride, arrogance, shame, guilt, frustration, hatred, malice, or anxiety, expectations and fear of the future, which all go hand in hand with related sufferings that felt so personal and which now are completely seen as unreal.

These feelings no longer have any ground to grow in, because they are all rooted in the belief in a separate, fragmented author/actor who appeared as "me" throughout a lifetime. But the author/actor said his goodbyes and is gone!

Stripped of the cumbersome and painful superimposed addition of an independent 'me', Life goes on, ever fresh and daring with its uninterrupted flow of "decisions" on an uncluttered path. There is only one "will" left, that of the Source which can never run dry.

In the end, there is no room for the slightest viewpoint away from Life itself, or the tiniest observation about Life, for it is lived at “zero distance”, ever so near to the emerging Source. The priceless treasure the apparent seeker seemed to go after is revealed in all its simple magnificence. Will and actions are the visible, dynamic, manifested aspect of the potential of Totality, of this welcoming spaciousness, of this unmanifested Presence.

There are "no two" here; just two attempts to describe the Ineffable. Thus it is the end of the treasure hunt tale, and it was just one tale among many others...