

## EXPERIENCES WITH THE PRINCIPLES, ESPECIALLY No. 7

***“If you pursue an end, you enchain yourself. If everything you do you realize as an end in itself, you liberate yourself.”***

I don't really understand why I'm doing so well.

I can certainly write out my experience and my thinking behind it all (and that is what this document is), but I'm still not sure how all of that adds up to what I feel is going on within me now. I'm interested in trying to understand because we know that states of inspiration tend to dwindle over time, and when that eventually happens and I find myself in my daily life more like before, I would like to be able to re-read this write-up and perhaps be able to follow the path back to inspiration. That may not be possible, and who knows, perhaps I won't lose the entire thread of this state, either. But no matter what happens, I think it's worth trying to better understand how these kinds of changes come about.

First off, I have to consider that after a long period of unemployment, I now have a contract for a few months of work, and that's great. That no doubt helps. But these changes started months before this job appeared. So while having an income again certainly affords me more mental peace, there's more going on within me than what a new job could account for.

I think it all started in July. Or perhaps it started in April, while I was speaking with a friend. He was a bit despairing of the state of the world, and I was agreeing that things were pretty awful all around. He asked me, “So, what can we do?” and I didn't know what to say. But I started speaking, and out of reflex I said that all we could really do was to try to treat others as we want to be treated, even if it seemed like a small thing that made no difference on a larger scale, because that kind of behaviour was really the only path forward of any evolutionary consequence. And as I was saying all that, at the same time I was struck by what I was hearing coming out of my mouth. Because it was really true! And I think that experience stayed simmering within me somehow.

In July, in my Message meetings with Danny, we were studying Principle No. 7, the Principle of Immediate Action. I had been really enjoying studying one Principle a month as they have done in that community for many years (I had joined them the year before after my little community fell apart). And I was especially looking forward to this Principle, because I had always identified it as being the most difficult one for me to live by, and also as the one which I felt would most benefit my life if I could. Imagine being able to attend to what you were doing, to always be in theme, and not always be thinking about what's next, or calculating how this activity is getting in the way of other, better things. To just enjoy what you are doing and find the interesting angle of every activity—it would be so great.

But it seemed impossible! In my life I had the sensation that much of my day was spent trying to get things done and out of the way so that, perhaps, after everything was done, I could have some time for myself. In essence, I was always pursuing the end of “time for myself” and finding that most of the day's activities opposed this end. Not that everything I did in my day was awful, but very often there was this background tension of, “Get this all done and then I can finally have time for myself.” I think it's a pretty familiar sensation.

The revelation for me came about thanks to the bathroom sink. The sink was clogged, and I needed to fix it. This happened on a Saturday, a day when I was supposed to have a bit more

“time for myself,” but instead I found that I was going to spend a good part of the day taking apart the cabinet and the drain and then clearing out a thick mass of hair and who-knows-what.

“Okay,” I thought, “I’m going to treat this plumbing job as an end in itself. I’m going to try to get into the work, try to learn about plumbing, try to do things with care and attention and a good tone, and... enjoy the activity of resolving a problem. I am not going to rush through this thing, getting all frustrated and cursing when I encounter my first difficulty because in fact what I really want to do is go read a book. No, I am not going to think about reading that book. I’m going to unclog this drain and unclogging this drain will be an end in itself.”

The problem, of course, was that the “end” of reading a book was far more attractive than the “end” of unclogging a drain. (Yes, really!) So, try as I might to make resolving a plumbing problem an end in itself, all I really wanted to do was finish the stupid job so I could go read.

I mentioned this experience in our Message meeting, and people recognized the situation. Being divided between duties and desires is familiar to us all. Danny mentioned though, that perhaps the greater “end” that I really desire, more than reading a book, is to live a life of unity. And if that is the case, then fixing the sink with a good tone really could be an end in itself, because being conflicted about it would certainly be contrary to my aim of living with unity.

It was a simple little statement, but that higher point of view, that re-framing of the conflict as not one of “sink versus book” but rather of unity and contradiction, changed everything. It was strange, but I felt like my basic disposition towards the activities of my daily life had been completely refocused, like I now had a point of view that cut straight through all the fog of my daily tension. It was almost like magic: *ta-dah!*, and the pursuit of “time for myself” that I had been enchained to for so long simply disappeared! (Of course, I still desire time for myself, sure, but the fact is that I will get there whether I do what I need to do with tension or without. So why not enjoy things along the way?)

All week, and throughout the month, I began living according to the Principle of Immediate Action. “This is what I’m doing right now,” became a kind of mantra. “This is the theme now; we are doing laundry, that’s it.” Or, “we are waiting for the bus that is late.” Or whatever. All those things that had earlier been chores or duties or unpleasant became enjoyable because they all became *opportunities*. Opportunities to live with unity, to live according to the Principles.

It’s ridiculous how simple it became, and how easy it has been to convert so much tension and frustration into joy and possibility. And because it seems to have happened so simply, triggered by one wise comment of Danny’s—that is why I’m not sure I really understand how it came about. Certainly, the idea that one could learn from one’s difficulties and that living with unity was what was important—these are not new ideas to us. I had also heard Danny say many times that it was possible to work with the Principles as a kind of discipline to be practiced at all moments of the day, to allow one to use everything that happened as “food” for inner growth. But now it seems that all of that has suddenly sunk in deeper.

Who knows? Maybe it really was just that other point of view, that reframing of my tensions as a matter of unity and contradiction, and not of “my time vs demands-upon-my-time.” Maybe it helped me to finally get the idea that liberation (or meaningful activity) wasn’t something I could attend to *after* I got all the dumb crap of daily life out of the way; it was something that happened in the midst of daily life, dumb crap or not. (And of course, most of the “dumb crap” I refer to is really just a consequence of living in the world, having a body, having a place to live, etc. So it’s rather disproportionate to think it could be avoidable.)

## Being in Theme

Another thing that I've noticed as a result of integrating Principle No.7 more deeply is that my attention has improved. This occurs mainly as a reflex, because every time I start to get tense about "my time being wasted," I can catch myself and realize that this is an opportunity to get centred once again. And with that, I can begin to simply attend to what I am doing, instead of trying to get it out of the way in pursuit of a more valued end.

This happened regularly and as a result I began to consider that what the Principle of Immediate Action is referring to, in a way, is "being in theme." When you are pursuing an end and not attending to what you are doing in the moment (that is, not treating it as an end in itself), you are, in essence, out of theme. Because now the theme, for example, is doing the laundry. The theme is not "wanting to read a book." So, do the laundry, be in theme, and then when that is done, then attend to the next theme, which may be (or not), "read a book." I mentioned this to Danny and he told me that Negro had recommended that the best way to practice paying attention was simply to try to be in theme.

So it seems that my grappling with and integrating of Principle 7 has been very fruitful. Not only am I lessening a great deal of tension (a general background of conflict regarding "my time"), I have also stumbled upon a new way of improving how I practice paying attention—one that I also happen to enjoy very much. And I think this is really key, too. Because falling into account that I am pursuing an end, and then the realization that I can choose a different response produces a register of freedom and joy.

Over time, this attitude is also producing a wonderful detachment from many things of daily life. 'Detachment' is perhaps not the best word because it has connotations of being cold and removed from the world. Really, we're talking about a detachment from suffering, because this attitude is rooted in a quiet contentment with life as it is (even, quite possibly, with life no matter how it is). The register is one of a gentle Force, a solidity before daily life, with its various ups and downs.

I was struck by this a few times when I found myself feeling that I couldn't really ask for a better life than the one I had. This struck me as very strange because, from the outside, there is not much in my life that anyone would point to and say, "Yes, that is the ideal life!" But that's the feeling I'm having.

Of course, there are irritating things in my life, things that can be better, no doubt. But these now appear as interesting opportunities to learn more about myself or about human relations, to grow, to learn to let go more profoundly, etc. The only thing I feel that I want is to be able to continue to strengthen this internal... muscle? A look. An internal look that seeks to use the contents of one's life as nourishment for the project of living with unity.

To quote Danny as he writes in his weekly comments on the Principles: *"When you live with your interest fixed on how each of your actions can integrate the contents of your mind, creating greater unity or contradiction, you have discovered a very deep form of meditation. ... I think that the most important meditation is the one you carry out through your daily actions, in the midst of life. This is the discipline of the Principles."*

And as Silo explained in *Valid Action*,

“All of you here know the difference between those actions that we call *cathartic* and those that we call *transferential*. Cathartic actions refer basically to the discharge of tensions and go no further than that. Transferential actions, in contrast, allow us to transfer internal charges, to integrate contents, and to facilitate healthy psychic functioning. ...

“It is not, then, a matter of indifference which actions one carries out in the world. There are actions that give one a register of unity, and there are other actions that give one a register of contradiction and dis-integration. If we study this carefully, in light of what we know about cathartic and transferential phenomena, the matter of one’s actions in the world with respect to the effect of those actions on the integration and development of one’s contents, will be much clearer.”  
(Silo Speaks, 11-12)

### **A Little Effort to Evolve**

If I think about what lies behind these experiences, or rather, what makes them possible, I think it is the aspiration to live with unity. That has to be there. Otherwise, I think it would be difficult to have the attitude that sees problems as opportunities – it would be more natural to run away from them, or blame others, or to fight with oneself.

Well, who knows? I don’t. I am just trying to figure out what I will rely on when things get difficult and I feel like I can’t quite recall this look. I’m not entirely sure. But I think it will help me to recall that this work requires effort.

What happened was that I had been working with Principle 10, on treating others as I want to be treated, but I reached a point when I felt like I was acting with a lot of kindness and care, and all this kindness on my part was not being noticed. Why hadn’t he responded in kind? Why hadn’t they said something about how thoughtful I was being? Etc. But the Principle doesn’t say, “Treat others as you want to be treated so that people will think you are a wonderful person.” It says, do this and, “you liberate yourself.”

At that moment I realized I had to make an intentional effort to go further. (Nothing dramatic, but a bit of *effort*, for sure.) And I started to think that it’s perhaps in those kinds of moments that our *Homo sapiens* nature is being stretched. Because as we are now, we seem to really need feedback—but what does feedback have to do with the rightness or wrongness of an action? So perhaps it is there that we need to push in order to evolve into something a little more interesting. Perhaps the human being of the future will not need so much external recognition, will not need to be patted on the back for “doing a good deed.” Perhaps the human being of the future will have her own internal “reward system” based simply on the joy that accompanies the register of valid action; an internal motor that works without need of an external fuel source. Perhaps, with a little bit of effort, we could bring that future human being into the present a little sooner. Certainly, no extreme efforts are needed—daily life is already full of little irritants, so the possibilities for growth are tremendous. The efforts required are more along the lines of the effort assumed by all of us “who carefully meditate in humble search.”

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