

My intent with this paper is to discuss “How Meister Eckhart and Buddha affect my life and work.” This was a challenge offered to us by Matthew Fox toward the end of our Intensive.

My life and work now include sharing services at Unitarian Universalist churches as a “circuit rider” in the tradition of Ralph Waldo Emerson, a circuit rider at my first UU congregation in Concord, New Hampshire. Most of my presentations address a similar theme, the need for more compassion in the world, and include offering each person an original contemplative brush painting, as well as use of haiku poetry in the service.

A notion that runs through each of these activities is the need to be “in the moment” as it were, because only then am I able to, as Matthew Fox described to us, “**live out my interrelatedness**” with the cosmos.

Quotes in bold are direct quotes from Matthew Fox (MF) and Tsomo (T) taken from our Intensive.

Also included is a page of recent haiku. One of my practices is writing one haiku every day.

Across a wide stream
dawn sings above silent hills,
revealing a path.

Clicking my malla,
mountain moon fills my window...
I chant a sutra.

My soul will follow
clouds trailing across blue sky
through a mountain pass...

In the world to come,
empty space comes to an end.
It sits there... silent.

I walk this dark night.
Clear notes of ancient flutes
fill my heart with joy...

In gathering clouds,
moonlight on a hazy night...
Temple bell sounds clear.

Quiet afternoon,
seated on tatami floor
as shadows deepen...

Outside my window
the silence of a wind chime
this snowy morning.

Winter seclusion,
I have nothing on my mind,
reciting sutras...

Become a Buddha.
Now all things have a balance,
heart peaceful and still...

Given the varied range of meditative disciplines in which I am currently involved, I find that limiting my discussion to contemplative brush painting and poetry better enables me to relate the experience of

being “in the moment” with regard to both my practice and my creative endeavors. Incorporating my painting and poetry in services I prepare for Unitarian Universalist churches is a spiritual exercise.

It is when you are really living in the present—working, thinking, lost, absorbed in something you care about very much, that you are living spiritually.¹

My attraction to contemplative practices is that they are, in a sense, both endless and permanent. One is engaging in a moment to moment unfolding of life, and in each moment it is not our purpose to worry about “finding the best ingredients to make a meal,” but to determine, mindfully, what ingredients we have in front of us, what their “essence” is, and how we can use them to make the best meal. And this meal has already been prepared, and seeing the ingredients as separate entities are merely illusions. In the words of Trungpa Rinpoche,

According to Buddhist tradition, the spiritual path is the process of cutting through our confusion, of uncovering the awakened state of mind... it is not a matter of building up awakened state of mind, but rather burning out the confusions which obstruct it. Enlightenment is permanent because we have not produced it; we have merely discovered it.²

One must train oneself to be “in the moment” because one needs to relate with some semblance of immediacy to one’s environment as it unfolds. A concept I have been working with for many years, drawn from my study of Buddhism and quantum physics, is the non-synchronization

hypothesis of the manifestation of phenomena with regard to the senses' perception of substance as reality, the "illusion of reality" as it were. It manifests when we allow ourselves to believe we are separated from the circle of God and infinite Compassion.

A person divided from God is thereby divided from being, which is from God alone. To exist outside the circle of being that is God is not to exist at all. For one and being are interchangeable. To divide is to destroy.³

I believe that many artists and poets, on occasion, lack the ability to be present with their creative pursuits while they are engaged in these pursuits. My non-synchronization hypothesis developed when I found my work suffering from a lack of immediacy. I believed at the time, early 1974, that my problem was linked to a preoccupation with thoughts regarding death.

I noted with particular interest a conversation with one of my teachers, who explained how the mind and body often remain constantly in motion to avoid acknowledgement of the existence and inevitability of death. He reminded me that one must move beyond experiencing time in a conceptual manner.

Eckhart discusses "... the moment of breakthrough and resurrection when he discusses the new experience of time—in eternity there is no before and no after, we are told to rise beyond time, to be resurrected from a time consciousness that thinks in terms of before and after, since that is the kind

*of time framework in which our own birthing takes place.*⁴

*...intelligence is not like a seed you must nurture. It is like the sun that shines through gaps in the clouds. When we allow a gap, intuitive understanding of how to proceed on the path suddenly, automatically comes to us.*⁵

It became possible to engage in an “eternally fresh present.”

With regard to contemplative brush painting, one must be “in the moment” because of the elements of composition, ink or paint and paper. Contemplative brush is unlike other forms of painting in that there are only two strokes in one’s repertoire, the horizontal and the vertical. And only after practicing a sufficient quantity of the two strokes is the artist ready to approach blank canvas or paper. The key is to not perceive a blank sheet of paper or a blank canvas in front of you at all. The whole picture is already painted. So you have nothing to paint, nothing to go beyond, and nothing further to create.

Although one can visualize a particular brushstroke painting, particularly one done with a single stroke where the brush never leaves paper, it is difficult to transfer visualization to final product unless the mind, too, is blank at the moment that brush first touches paper. One cannot “make” the brush do something, the brush must flow across paper intuitively, without interference from the thought process.

One must be fully “synchronized” in the contemplative brush discipline. One must be connected with an elemental quality of reality, and synchronize oneself with the phenomenal world. When one has

completely synchronized this connection, the creative process flows forth from Dharmakaya. ***“We are experiences shining forth from emptiness of dharmakaya. Emptiness predates luminosity, emptiness pours forth into luminosity.” (T)***

Poetry is another discipline to of mine, and again one must be “in the moment” to successfully transfer one’s thoughts to the written word. Again I find it difficult to decide what I will write and then write it. As with contemplative brush, I believe one must face the blank page like a blank canvas, without a predisposition as to what one expects to write. This is particularly important with haiku.

Much has been written about the length of haiku, seventeen syllables with three alternating lines of five, seven, and five syllables being the traditional format. A little known fact derived from Buddhist scripture offers a possible source for our seventeen syllable structure:

According to the Abhidhamma, or metaphysical section of the Pali Canon, the longest process of consciousness caused by sense perceptions consists of seventeen thought instants (cittakkhana) each briefer than a lightning-flash. Is it not significant in the light of this that a haiku should be composed of exactly seventeen syllables?⁶

, we need only heed the advice of Trungpa Rinpoche, "One’s whole practice should be based on the relationship between you and nowness."⁷

Our mind, our "Buddha mind" can realize all aspects of existence simultaneously, in an eternal moment of time, at an infinite point in space.

Yogachara, a Mahayana philosophical school, attempted to eliminate this mystery (of life) of finding a union of mystery and the phenomenal world. The Yogacharans solved the mystery by positing the indivisible union of intelligence and phenomena. Thus there is no individual knower; Rather everything is "self-known." There is only "one mind," which the Yogacharans called "self-luminous cognition."⁸

And each "haiku moment," though a part of the infinite cosmos, offers a feeling of the whole even when we know we are only dealing with what seems to be but a small portion of our world. All our aesthetic and ethical pleasure should be spontaneous, grasped without searching for meaning or gain, in our "illusion" of reality as it were.

A writer of haiku has nothing of his own to share with a reader, nothing but a moment to be related without commentary. When someone asks why I don't write many longer poems, I offer this reflection from Rumi regarding my fascination with haiku:

*I have no more words,
Let the soul speak
With the silent articulation
Of a face.⁹*

With my creative pursuits, my goal is to slow other people down so they may better appreciate their world. In our fast paced, cellular and digital society, many people would be hard pressed to allow time for

casual excursions away from their hectic schedules. That is one reason I find contemplative brush and poetry, especially haiku, valuable tools. They do not require hours of participation on the part of an audience. My work captures glimpses of the world, and allows others to hopefully have a sense of what I have experienced.

And once others have experienced my “glimpses,” maybe they will look at their world a little differently, knowing that each moment provides a plethora of images which could be experienced or ignored. And maybe I can discuss my non-synchronization hypothesis with them, in an attempt to explain how necessary it is to be in communion with the Godhead.

One needs to maintain an instant by instant relationship with the Godhead, and understand our role in the cosmos. In the words of Allen Ginsberg, from a conversation we had at Naropa, *“every place is the center of the universe,”* and as Matthew Fox reminds us...

“The most excellent thing in the universe is not human beings, most excellent thing is the Universe, and we are all here to serve the Universe.” (MF)

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- ¹ Tolliver, G., Ed. (2004). Secrets of Serenity. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Courage Books, p. 10.
- ² Trungpa, C. (1973). Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism. Boston, Massachusetts, Shambala Publications, Inc., p. 4.
- ³ Fox, M. (1980, 2000). Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart. Rochester, Vermont, Inner Traditions International, p. 538.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 468.
- ⁵ Trungpa, p. 160.
- ⁶ Harold Stewart, *A Net of Fireflies*. Rutland. Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1960, p. 123.
- ⁷ Trungpa, p. 156.
- ⁸ Trungpa, p. 194.
- ⁹ Barks, C. (1997). The Illuminated Rumi. New York, New York, Broadway Books, p. 128.

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