

Slowing Down

When I became ill enough that the end of my life came into focus, as interesting thing happened – I slowed down. Sure, my physical motor skills slowed, but that’s not particularly what I’m talking about – I mean I *slowed*.

I found that along with my slower movement came a slower way of seeing and thinking, creating in me the impression that the world had accommodated me by itself slowing to match my new “condition.”

Imagine a time-lapse movie in which you are an actor. The traffic zips by at incredible speeds – the taillights forming continuous red streaks into the distance. You are caught in the movie... running among the skyscrapers – an inextricable part of the rush of humanity that is ever hurrying, ever late... ever preoccupied with achieving more, and more... and more.

That had been me... and yet somehow, my illness had given me the uncanny ability to step outside that flow of traffic. And that’s when I began to realize a few things.

As I stood there, watching the rush of humanity, I began to hear a voice that had mostly been obscured before. People have different names for this voice – our “inner wisdom;” the “small, still voice” or “the voice of God;” among others. Whatever you choose to call it, it is the voice of wisdom, and you can only hear it when you slow down.

Think of two tuning forks. One of them is small, and it therefore vibrates at a high frequency – meaning it has a short wavelength – a high pitch. It is fast-paced, and it represents the vibration of humanity, going about its daily business – the business of social climbing and achieving and perceived success – the business of “business.” When you are tuned to this frequency, all of the practices of rushing about makes sense – the physical world is in sharp focus, as are its myriad issues of strife and war and all the struggles in which we as a species are engaged in order to obtain more and more. When we are tuned into this frequency, “bigger” looks better to us, and we feel compelled to engage in the perceived competition against others to win at the game of life.

The other tuning fork, however, is much larger – it’s resonant note deeper. Should we choose to strike it, we suddenly find ourselves tuned in to an entirely different universe. This is a universe of more spiritual matters... it is the universe of wisdom.

Thousands of books have been written on the subject of self-improvement. Everyone, it seems, wants you to follow their particular plan to better yourself – whether through exercise, religion, social skills, self-esteem or financial success, among other topics. I believe that we have, as our birthright, a direct connection with all the wisdom we need... if we will only listen to it... if we take the time to “tune in” to it, we have the ability to directly connect to all the wisdom in the universe.

Gradually, my health improved... the imminent end of my life receded from view.... Gradually, as simple things like breathing and sleeping became once again commonplace and therefore easier, my personal “frequency” began to return to old habits. Then, as I began to wake one morning, I realized I was missing something my illness had granted me before – I felt I had lost my “connection” with the eternal. I could no longer hear my “small, still voice.” A feeling of impending doom crept into my consciousness as my spiritual vision faded and I found myself once again facing the insurmountable

challenges of the never-ending race of humanity – where bigger is better and where enough is never enough.

So I began to wonder whether I might have the ability to consciously “re-connect” to that spiritual center – to re-establish by force of sheer will the connection that had previously been easily and unavoidably granted by the very fact that I had been near to death.

I slowed down.

This practice began at the moment I got out of bed in the morning, and ended each day as I lay my head on my pillow in the evening to sleep.

The effect was instantaneous. “Chores,” as simple as brushing my teeth or washing the dishes, became enjoyable “events” as I savored each moment of each experience. Drops of dew on the morning grass came back into focus, and – now that I had slowed my perception – the universal spiritual voice became audible once again.

One of the first perceptions I experienced was the letting go of my supposed responsibility to be in “control” of my environment. Rather than waking each day with the perception that my life is a game that must be won, I felt an awareness instead that life is a practice in which my goal was to do better than I had done before.

Have you ever noticed that the wisest of our spiritual leaders seem to be on a different “wavelength” than the lion’s share of humanity? At their best, leaders like Gandhi or Mother Theresa or Martin Luther King seemed, by virtue of their calm, methodical and thoughtful delivery, to be connected with an inner wisdom that transcends worldly understanding. This connection allowed them to see truths that are often obscured to those running at faster paces and therefore caught up in the traditional struggle for power.

Think of your consciousness as a tire, hydroplaning over a wet highway. “Faster” is not simply “quicker,” it is by nature less connected with the road.

There is an expression that goes something like this: “We only get one shot at life. There is no dress rehearsal, so you should always play to win.” This is a sentiment borne of a fast-paced world in which many must lose in order for a few to win. Winning is not only “the main thing,” it is the “only thing” visible to people operating under the high-pitched frequency of a fast-paced life. People operating at this level feel the need to control, and the subsequent stress when they fail to win. By slowing our pace and seeing life as a “practice” rather than a “game,” we not only treat others with more kindness and respect, but we also take all that pressure off of ourselves – the stresses associated with the need to “win” and the inevitable stress of failure. Likewise, our prejudices fall away as we realize the truth that we no longer feel the need to be in control of others. We don’t need to put others down in order to elevate ourselves. Our need to speak is replaced by a newfound interest in listening. We have re-established our connection to our own spiritual journey.

And all of this is a natural outcome of taking time to experience each moment of brushing our teeth! All of this raised consciousness comes from tuning in to a deeper note... a lower frequency. All of this because we slowed down.

These are all powerful reasons to consider slowing down, though it is nice to know about a few additional (and perhaps unforeseen) consequences. Foremost among these, it's useful to understand that the universe tends to favor those who proceed at a slower pace.

At first glance, many might think that "slowing down" is an option that is simply not available to them. When you are running as fast as you can, and still barely make it to the finish line each day, it's difficult to understand how "slowing down" is possible.

Here's the way I see it: Imagine two people with identical stacks of dirty plates encrusted with dried-on macaroni leftovers. The goal is to wash the dishes before going to bed. The first person furiously scrubs the dishes... laboriously scraping with an abrasive pad. It is unpleasant work, but after rushing as fast as he could, the man finishes his stack in 30 minutes....

The other person uses a sponge, rather than an abrasive pad. Rather than scrubbing, she gently daubs the encrusted plates, gradually re-hydrating the bits of macaroni... after which they are easily wiped off. Her dishwashing experience also took thirty minutes, but was enjoyable, since it gave her a chance to think through a problem she's been trying to resolve.

In other words, by going slower, the woman actually created time that would have otherwise been unavailable to her.

I know a woman who is always in a rush to finish every item on her "list." She is so furiously preoccupied with this endeavor, that she makes frequent mistakes, causing her much grief and "re-work." One day, she complained to me that she realized that every item on her "to do" list that day was "un-doing" mistakes she had made the previous day!

So we see that some jobs are better performed slowly, and we see that slowing down can reduce our errors and the need for "re-work," but what about the times when a high-frequency, fast-paced life seems to pay off? Let's consider the simple example of a line to a popular play or movie... how could being slow possibly have a payoff in a case like that?

Firstly, taking a slower, more contemplative approach to getting into and waiting in a cue behind a crowd of people is not likely going to keep you from seeing the show. Secondly, by not shoving your way into, or rushing to get at the head of the line, you have also not added to other peoples' frustration and anger and even hatred. Thirdly, by taking a gentler approach, you are more likely to notice another's distress – the elderly person who needs help over the curb, or the child who dropped his ticket or wallet on the ground. By taking it slower, you're more likely to notice these things... and it is more likely that you'll be interested in being helpful. Not only are you no longer adding to the frustration in the world, but you are adding to the love and feeling of hope and confidence in human nature itself. People who are always in a hurry lose the ability to sense the things that are truly important – their priorities are always skewed toward being first or best or more powerful... but we can be so much more than that!

Finally, even after we understand these benefits of slowing our personal processes in order to better “tune in” to a deeper and more profound wisdom, there are many of us who may be reluctant to choose such a path... imagining ourselves traveling in slow motion through a world set at a hyper-fast and break-neck speed. To these individuals I would point out one of the most remarkable features “built in” to an unhurried existence – as we thankfully discover that, in all the ways that truly matter, the universe slows down to accommodate those who take the step to slow themselves.

Imagine once again seeing yourself as part of the rushing crowd, when suddenly, you step aside. Amazingly, the entire universe instantaneously shifts into low gear to accommodate your new speed!

In practical terms, you might imagine yourself screaming at the universe, demanding to get your just rewards and get them now! This may describe a lifetime of ineffective behavior, as you contemplate how seldomly the universe seems to respond to such urgent requests. Yet once you step back and make the request calmly, less urgently... in a more measured manner, the universe immediately responds, and your request is granted. Think about it. If two children are asking you for a cookie -- one demanding it now, and the other calmly and patiently asking – which one is more likely to get their cookie first?

While this may seem like an absurdly obvious example, I know many adults who have not yet grasped the benefits of a slow, measured approach. Even though they are grown, they remain as angry children, cutting off others in traffic and in business, falsely believing the “dog eat dog” world only takes care of those who take care of themselves.

You have met people like this. They tend to be the people who are always breaking things; who seem constantly frustrated. One young woman I know is always running late, and feels it necessary, time and time again, to park in no-parking zones. She is always frustrated and complaining about her mounting parking tickets, yet she seems incapable of making the connection between her fast pace and her problems.

“Slowing down” is hardly a revolutionary new technique for connecting to our collective inner wisdom. It is rather an ancient and time-honored methodology. Many morality tales, such as the story of the three pigs, teach children that “faster” is not always “better,” as we find that the house more methodically constructed out of brick is actually easier to build in the long run, since it is the only one that doesn’t need to be built again. And then, of course, there’s the tale of the hare and the turtle... and we all remember who won that race! In another way, the familiar meditation mantra, “aaahhhmm” is typically uttered at a low frequency – a frequency that is commonly believed to “tune” the subject in to more ethereal or spiritual matters.

Not surprisingly, those who take the “slower road,” tend to find themselves in excellent company -- and once you are tuned in to your deeper wisdom, you tend to notice them. For some reason, people who are similarly “tuned” tend to congregate, because they are eager to share and learn. I have found, for example, most of the people in my church to be on the same “wavelength.”

In or out of church, I've found that those who are tuned in to their inner wisdom tend to speak in softer tones... their voices more gentle. Ironically, even though they are more quiet than others, their opinions tend to be more valued and (not coincidentally) more valuable.

If you're considering trying this slower approach to life, you've chosen a great time in history as well, since I'm seeing a gradual spiritual "awakening" around the planet... where more and more people are beginning to see beyond the limited horizon provided by the high-frequency consciousness.

The best part -- and the only way you know this technique is safe -- is that it doesn't involve internalizing any one person's agenda.... Instead, it allows you to better hear and therefore understand your own voice. As more people learn the technique, the human condition will undoubtedly improve.

"Happiness is a butterfly, which, when pursued, is always just beyond your grasp, but which, if you sit down quietly, may alight upon you."

– Nathaniel Hawthorne

-- Troy Carlyle
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