



## Miscellaneous Observations

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### Don't Should Them, Show Them

A major premise of mine is that we shouldn't tell anyone else what they should do unless we can show them how to do it. 🌸

### Reality

Reality is consensual and consensus is incredibly important

People fight about power and reality. She says it's black and he says it's white is the typical issue between couples. I first observed the importance of consensus in determining reality when my twin daughters were about 2 years old. We were driving through the Colorado countryside and these girls, in the back seat, were looking out of opposite side windows when one said "horsy" and almost simultaneously the other said "cow". They really lit into each other with anger. It instantly dawned on me that I was observing something that was really important. Having our own perception of reality be "right", and unchangeable, seems necessary for our own sense of security.

However, what is exactly taking place or has taken place depends is, at least in part, actually unknowable. All statements we make about reality are provisional and simply represent our own point of view (POV). This was beautifully presented in Kurasawa's film Rashomon

When other people have a reality that is different from our own, (perceived and interperated from their own POV), it can be frustrating and for us, even threatening. In reality though how could they have our POV?

What we tend to look for in friends, significant others, and lovers is someone that we imagine will be supportive of our POV relative to the world and who we also imagine will see us in a way that we would like to be seen.

Learning to tolerate the fact that everyone actually has a reality that is different from our own and then to allow them to have it without being threatened or pressured them for consensus is a principle work of maturation and involves the development of ego strength.

Ego strength in western psychology is the same as detachment in Eastern psychology and field independence in experimental psychology.

Ego strength means that you can navigate fairly well through life using your own internal guidance system without being unduly swayed by outside influences. In other words outside events don't rattle your cage too much.

To illustrate the concept of field independence we can look at how it is evaluated. One way to measure your field independence is to place you in a pitch black room. A luminous framework or grid work, which can be adjusted to different angles, is placed then at the far end of the room. At your end of the room you would be given a luminous vertical rod . The luminous frame would then be rotated to some random position and your rod put at some angle off of vertical. Your ability to bring your rod back to vertical again, uninfluenced by the position of the frame, is a measure of field independence. 🌸



### **There's Always Something Wrong**

If you are waiting for everything to be ok before you'll let yourself be happy you'll never be happy.

How can I be happy when I didn't get what I want? 🌸

### **The Mathematics of Perfection**

It's mathematically impossible for there not to be something wrong at all times. A brief primer on probability: If we flip a coin the odds are 50% that it will come up heads. If we flip two coins the odds that they will both come up heads is the product of the probability for each coin or  $.50 \times .50$  or 25%. For three coins the odds of all three being heads is  $.50 \times .50 \times .50$  or 13%. Extending this to our life, if the odds of one thing turning out OK is 90% that is pretty good. And if a second is also 90%, and a third, and so on by the time we get to 10 events in our life, each of which have a probability of 90% for turning out OK, the odds that all 10 will turn out OK is only 34%. While the odds of 20 events, each with that 90% probability, would be only 12%. Casual inspections reveal, of course, hundreds or thousands of events each day (in our lives or our bodies) and that the likely hood of there being something wrong is certain.

If I spent \$100,000 fixing up my house will I still be able to find something wrong? Of course. If I increase the expenditure to \$500,000 will I still be able to find something wrong? Yes! But do I have to be dissatisfied? Maybe not. 🌸

### **Ignorance Grows Faster than Knowledge**

If I learn one new thing, usually in the process of learning I uncover 7-12 things that I didn't know. So learning can bring me more and more in touch with my ignorance. Whew! 🌸

### **Conceptual Structures**

Communicating and thinking conceptually is fraught with difficulty because concepts are like sticks. When you pick up a stick both ends come with it. Concepts are polar. For example there is no concept of good without a complimentary idea of bad or evil. If we struggle trying to get others to recognize us as significant (our concept) we are left with only one place to be - at the other end of the conceptual stick - ie feeling insignificant. From that place we cannot see our own significance even though others have no problem recognizing it. Giving up trying changes some of the elements of that experiential aggregate and allows us, perhaps, to free ourselves of the concept. While actually trying to be insignificant will practically guarantee that we will shuttle to the other end of the concept and in-dwell the polar experiential aggregate labeled significance, trying to get to insignificance. This kind of observation has led to the famous saying "Feelings that we run from chase us while feelings that we chase run from us."

The perceptual aspects of conceptual thought are illustrated by the Zen expression "From thought instant to thought instant; heaven or hell". Traveling that far and that fast is a unique aspect of figure/ground reversals. The face/vase reversal is a good example. The shift in perception from face to vase happens in an instant. And, significantly the line that makes the face is the line that makes the vase. What is equally important is which aspects of experience we make figure and which we make ground. Concepts always draw this line.

And then there's all of the structures attendant to the idea of self. Am I the same person that I was when I was 5 years old? I'm clearly not the same in so many ways but I'm not totally a different person either.



How's a poor guy supposed to handle these conceptual structures while at the same time dealing with attendant memories, feelings, fantasies and urges from our other sources of information. 🌸

### **Anecdotes with Buddhist Flavor**

One day Thien-An told the following story. "Ah! Dr Wortz", he said, "Happiness is like a butterfly. Very beautiful flying in the garden. But", he said making a grabbing gesture in the air, "when we grab it what we get is Bug", His tone indicating disgust as he brushed the imaginary corpse of the palm of his hand.

During a meditation retreat, I was sitting in the garden of the International Buddhist Meditation Center, Thien An came by and said "Oh Dr Wortz there's nothing to do". I was stunned as the statement really hit home. It was some time before I could digest his meaning. What do you think he meant?

One of his favorite sayings was "All people have red blood and salty tears".

One of the symbols of Buddhism is the lotus flower which represents our own true nature. The reasons for this are that the lotus grows from the mud and yet none of the mud sticks to the flower. The lotus flower of course can only grow from the mud. In a similar way our Buddha nature is unstained by life. A good example of this idea of unstainable is found in our visual awareness. As we look around us the contents of our visual fields are continually and effortlessly changing. As we look from point A to point B we find that the elements of the visual field change completely. The visual elements at point A disappear and are replaced completely by the elements at point B. In other words the elements at point A left no stain to obscure the view of B. However, if we try to hold on to the items of point A when we shift to point B our ability to see B will be degraded. (When does our own holding on interfere with our ability to perceive current reality?)

I seemed to learn more from Thien An being in his presence during the course of daily life than from things that he said.

My friend, Dr. David Nowlis, and I were studying Buddhist texts together and then going in for a weekly lesson with Thien An. We would come in with a lot of questions prepared. However, in the course of our discussions Thien An would answer all of our questions before we had a chance to ask them. When queried on this he got a puzzled expression on his face, scratched his head and said "How does the teacher know what to teach the student anyway?" 🌸

### **Miscellaneous**

Our minds are incessant pattern makers. We attempt to make patterns out of our experiential data, internal or external, even when no pattern exists. For example, when we're in a pine forest and we hear wind blowing through the pine needles it may begin to sound like voices whispering or people singing as our mind tries to organize the random information. This is an extremely important thing to know about ourselves.

A lot of people like the saying "the whole is more than the sum of its parts". Perhaps it is, but clearly the whole is more simple than the sum of its parts.

We are really good at structuring wholes and detecting differences. Our problems happen when we make perceptual and psychological structures that are not only not viable but can even be destructive to our best interests.

Just like everyone else, I have problems but nothing destroys the underlying joy.



I used to wonder why sometimes we can have a thought pattern or fantasy and not take it seriously while at other times the same idea can become the focus of great worry and anxiety. It seems to me that the difference is made by the presence of tension or some kind of physical discomfort. My hypothesis is that the presence of some bodily discomfort lends "authenticity of reality", to the idea. Let me give an example. One of my clients came in one day and said "Ed I've got it. My stomach is in charge. If my kids take food into the living room and my stomach is comfortable or relaxed the kids are OK. But! if my stomach is tense then they are bad kids". In a similar manner if I have some negative fantasy of the future I can bet that I'm tense somewhere. I have no other way of experiencing the fantasy as negative without discomfort somewhere in my body.

For example, I have no way of knowing that I dislike you without being uncomfortable. In other words, in order to dislike you I have to make myself uncomfortable and blame you for the discomfort. (Do we judge the truth of our thoughts and fantasies bodily with our feeling display system? 🌸)

### **Rejection or What'sa matta me, what'sa matta you?**

Feeling rejected is something that we do not something that is done to us. If someone in my office were to grab up their belongings and stomp out yelling that I was absolutely worthless as a therapist I could (out of my own insecurities and knowledge of my weaknesses) feel badly, judge myself and label my experience as "being rejected" or I might say to my self "Well, what was all that about - what's the matter with them". Could it be that feeling rejected is a decision that we make; "whatsa matta me or whatsa matta you"? 🌸

### **Acceptance**

Acceptance is one of those things that people tell you that you should do but then omit telling you how to do it. Acceptance is, largely, "not tensing against". In other words when we are not accepting we are doing bodily tensing somewhere and incorporating that tension into the experiential aggregate of that which we are "not accepting".

Ways of releasing the tension include:

Focusing on the actual tension by making it the object of a concentration meditation.  
(see concentration meditation)

Exercising the tension by alternating increasing the tension and then decreasing it. Playing a scale of tension. For example, if the tension is a level 6 on a 10 point scale of intensity we can attempt to increase it to 7 and then decrease it to 5. Increase to 6.5 then to 7.5 then decrease it to 5.5. Working this way one eventually, over a period of a few weeks, becomes the master of that tension. 🌸

### **Analogy**

Men are to relationships as women are to automobiles:

they're totally dependent upon them

they don't know how they work

And they can't fix them if they break down

ECW '88

In our lives we are neither helpless nor completely in control. We roil around somewhere between these



conceptual states.

Going with the flow of life does not mean that we give up control. It's just that when we are going down stream and with the torrent of life that we have the possibility of steering a little. Fighting against the flow simply exhausts our energy while getting no where.

"Deja vu" is a really fun experience that you can replicate. Just remember how a deja vu feels and try to replicate that feeling of familiarity. Oh I've done this before, been here before, said this before. It's usually a feeling of open, comfortable recognition. After a few days, of 2 or 3 tries a day you will gradually become more skilled at producing your own dejavu. 🌸

### **The Varieties of Feeling Badly**

I have found that everyone has their own unique ways of doing (displaying) emotions and feelings. Guilt is an excellent example of a feeling that has a wide range of personal display. Typical feelings that people do when displaying guilt include various forms of stomach ache, nausea, headaches, neck tension, closed throats, heaviness, and so on. We are trained to feel badly. Parents or others will say to a young child, when caught in some misbehavior, "you should feel badly about what you did" or "you're bad and you should feel badly" and we all dutifully made a bad feeling. We do this because it's "important" to learn to feel the right way. Also during the stress of the encounter with the parent, the statement "feel badly about that!" is a powerful hypnotic induction technique. (These imprinted commands may last a life time.) Since the actual bad feeling is usually unspecified by the parent the child can easily remember any recent bad feeling and try doing that. A child making the statement "I feel so badly about that" is usually rewarded. I am so impressed by the unique and idiosyncratic nature of these displays that I really don't know what clients are actually doing when they say they're feeling guilty, anxious or sad until we examine the elements of the feeling display together.

From thought instants to thought instant - heaven or hell!

This Zen expression illustrates how fast and how far our feelings can change. If we attend to how feelings come into existence and how they disappear it soon becomes clear how this can happen. Feelings and emotions are analogous to my fist. I can make a fist in an instant and it disappears the instant that I open my fingers. Open fingers no fist. A hand with tightly closed fingers makes a fist. When the fingers open where does the fist go? Some psychological perspective might suspect that the fist is repressed. On the other hand perhaps it is "open handedness" that is repressed when the fist is present? 🌸

### **Frustration**

How is frustration made? More specifically how do you make your own form of frustration? Tense jaw? Tense shoulders? Wanting someone to be different than they are? Frustration is a compound experience and includes tensions at various places in our body. When wanting something to be different than it is, memories, specific thoughts and images may all be employed as the ingredients in our own construction of the experience of frustration. If we are aware of an interest that something be different, together with the same thoughts, images and memories as before but without the tension would we have an experience called frustration? 🌸



### **Options and Actions**

Many people run their lives to preserve options. This is well and good except that preserving options can get in the way of acting even on ones' own behalf.

Options are important to people even if they are unused. For example, for many people, the Metropolitan Opera is a very important reason for living in New York, even though they may not have attended an opera in the last 10 years.

The function of wealth seems to be in providing people with more options than they can exercise. There may be 30 movies showing but you can only see them one at a time. A person who is aware of the options that they have available we might consider wealthy. A government that wants to promote a sense of well being in the populace might do so, inexpensively, by finding ways to help people be aware of the options that they have for their lives and behavior.

Options may be extensive but life is not. Actual options for life and experience may be vast and the ideas and fantasies about what could be are even more vast but living is mutually exclusive. Mutually exclusive means that when you actualize any option you obviate all other possibilities for that moment. For example, you have the option of being here in my office talking to me or enjoying being on the beach. But you can't be both places at the same time. You can be wealthy and have seven automobiles and yet you can only drive one at a time.

When you marry you eliminate the possibility of having that experience with all the many others. It's a tough discrimination. If I hold out longer perhaps a better person will come along. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that "falling madly in love" is so highly valued. 🌸

### **Sign for Michael's Wall**

"You can do anything  
BUT  
you can't do everything" 🌸

### **Freedom of Choice**

One Saturday morning I was sitting on the couch with my children and stepchildren watching some indifferent movie on television. We were all bundled up in blankets and having a wonderful time. In the movie a woman came home from shopping at the market all loaded down with many bags of groceries. As she unloaded the bags she commented about the contents. "tomato soup, celery, apples, tomato soup, baking soda, bread, tomato soup, scouring pads, salt, cookies, tomato soup." Then she looked at the group of tomato soup cans and remarked "hmm ones' freedom of choice is severely limited by ones' preferences". I practically jumped off of the couch. Play it back. What was it she said. Did I hear it right? It was a zinger and it certainly nailed me. Thank you, who ever you were, for that observation. In the face of all the options that we have in this world we certainly develop preferences. Preferences for foods, people, life styles etc. And these preferences do limit the range of our experience. 🌸

### **Preferences, a Matter of Balance**

Getting stuck attempting to preserve preferences at all cost or attempts at maintaining options at all cost are each pathological. However, from moment to moment, we always do what we prefer considering the



contingencies of a situation. For example, at the age of 45 I may really desire to live on my own rather than stay at home taking care of my mother. However, if I moved out she might disapprove. So I might prefer to view my self as a "good boy" and not experience the discomfort of self imposed feelings of guilt. My mother certainly would reward this decision. Thus I live at home, complain, and feel badly that I can't have what I want even though I am doing what I prefer. It can be very confusing. 🌸

### **Contingencies Do Matter**

The teen age daughter of one of my friends was in really big trouble. She lived in Texas, with her mother, and was really acting out. She was in trouble with law, failing at school, using drugs, staying out all night. Everyone was frightened for her and rightfully so. Therapy didn't work, punishment didn't work and of course arguing didn't work. So in desperation she was sent to California to live with her father. An experiment at best. Living in her fathers house, with no special consideration, no therapy, she was as good as gold. Went to school, studied, didn't initiate fights. You wouldn't want a better teenager living in your house. After two and a half years it was decided that she could return to Texas for a brief visit of one week. Three days after she arrived in Texas she was using drugs again and disappeared. 🌸

### **Feeling Badly Because**

One of my own ways of sorting things out, for myself, is to discriminate between "feeling badly" and "feeling badly because". This distinction helps me discriminate between ordinary feelings and conceptually based feelings. Conceptually based feelings are those that I produce specifically for the purpose of maintaining the meaning of things. For example I know that if I don't get what I want I'm supposed to feel badly. If I love you and you don't do what I want you to do then I'm supposed to feel very badly. And if I don't feel badly then I might doubt that I love you. So I have learned when and what kind of feelings I'm supposed to have in order to be a regular guy and have "normal feelings" and/or to manipulate you. On the other hand if I wake up in the morning with a flu, experience the pangs of hunger, have a stomach ache, a tense neck from sleeping jammed up on my pillow, miss my old dog I'm just feeling badly. On the other hand if I'm "feeling badly because" I know that it's quite likely that I'm running some number on my self and I may be suffering needlessly. 🌸

### **Is This How It All Starts?**

As every parent knows, infants are born into the world making very dramatic displays of distress. These displays really work to get the infants' needs met. We pick up the crying child and try to find a way to relieve its' distress. Patting, feeding, burping or changing the diapers are always the parents best first shot. If, however, we are not immediately successful in finding the right answer, the infant's level of distress will increase and so does the discomfort of the parent. So, for the infant, the business of making a good distress display has real survival value.

The lesson learned, by the infant, is that you can get what you want if you become very uncomfortable and make a good distress display. With a really good distress display someone else will go to work to get, for you, what you want or need. It's not surprising that the terrible twos occur as the young child puts this information together and gives it his best shot to control those around him. We call this form of "feeling bad in order to get what you want" a temper tantrum. I was really good at it. Apparently I was so stubborn in attempting to put this method to work that I would hold my breath, not breathe and turn purple. My frightened parents had to put me in a bath tub of cold water in order to get me to breathe once again. You can, I think, begin to see where this is going. Once we learn the power of feeling badly do we actually



make uncomfortable feelings in order to manipulate others, get what we want, or establish value meanings to events and situations? Apparently so. For example, how are you supposed to feel if you don't get what you want? Badly of course. If we don't get a raise, a promotion, the love of our life, children, etc. how are we supposed to feel. Badly! If someone that we know has a favorite object stolen and they don't feel badly we will assume that the loss "doesn't mean anything to them". Or if I love you and you leave me for someone else and I don't carry on in despair we might both assume that I really didn't love you all that much. We demonstrate the value of events and things in terms of how badly we will make ourselves feel at their loss. Of course we might be fortunate enough to not get what we wanted without the additional "feeling badly about it".

Using discomfort in our attempts to get something is a process that we call frustration.

Frustration is basically a mini temper tantrum.

What other uses do you have for unpleasant feelings? 🌸

### **Holding a Grudge**

One of my clients was telling me about a grudge that he had with his Uncle Harry. I asked him how the grudge felt. What was it like to experience this grudge. He replied that he felt congested and all tightened up whenever he thought about Uncle Harry or the incident when his uncle treated him badly. "It's not at all a pleasant feeling" "But" he also replied defensively. "I have every right to feel this way". After further discussion it turned out that his feeling badly was essentially a way of punishing his Uncle. He'd show him by not feeling good about him any more, feeling badly and blaming his Uncle for the bad feelings.

Having to feel badly in order to punish someone else for treating us poorly seems like adding insult to injury. However, holding a grudge does establish a meaning of Uncle Harry and may help us to remember not to trust him again. On the other hand, forgiving Uncle Harry would truly free us from grudging, from the fixed images of Uncle Harry, from our own knee jerk response but at what risk? Should we take the time and effort check out whether Uncle Harry is somehow now trustable? Do we need to keep feeling grudge? Should we just give up feeling badly about Harry? It all depends. And it all depends on the outcome which is difficult to know before the fact. 🌸

### **Control**

Control is a really curious concept. Control is highly valued. We attempt to achieve control or feel that we should be in control (before we do some things) and yet control is only determined after the fact. If I shoot an arrow at a target and hit the bull's eye we say that I have control of the bow and arrow. However, control cannot be determined until the arrow arrives.

I spent hours and hours of introspection trying to ascertain how I control my index finger. It seems perfectly in my control. It straightens on command, curls on command, wiggles and so on. However, I can not find the control linkage between my command and my finger. And in addition, it can, perversely enough, seem to be able to remain still in the presence of my verbal command to move! I can truly say that I cannot find the control between my mind and my finger. However, my finger usually cooperates with me.

Is there control? Could what you think about control and what you can know about it be two different things.

I'm not in direct control of my body is a strange state of affairs in the light of the fact that it is both trainable and cooperative. 🌸



### **Women Count Years**

One of the interesting things is that for many people the duration of a relationship may be highly valued regardless of the quality of the relationship. For example, "It's been hell the whole time but at least we've made it for 30 years". We do seem to value things based on the amount of effort that we've put into them. 🌸

### **Thien An's Story: Good luck/Bad luck?**

This story, a favorite of Thien An, and one that I've told to many clients and groups, is set in a valley in ancient China. The inhabitants of this valley were very poor. Each year none of them managed to store away more than just enough grain and other food stuff to make it through the winter. One of the families consisted of just a farmer, his wife and son, and they each worked very hard just to maintain this subsistence level. One night, at harvest time a herd of wild horses found an opening in a fence and broke into this family's field. They ate much of the grain and trampled and ruined a lot of what they didn't eat. The next morning the family was really bummed out about this turn of events and neighbors added to mood by saying things such as; "Oh my!" "you poor people", "what will you do", "we all have so little to eat and there is none to spare!" , "we have our own mouths to feed", thank the gods this didn't happen to me", "we can't be of much help to you", "You will certainly starve to death this winter", "we cant imagine what awful deeds you must have done in your past lives to warrant such an awful fate!"

The farmer shook his head and said "It really does look bad but good luck or bad luck you never know!"

The next day the farmer and his son were working in the fields trying to recover what they could when the herd of wild horses, lured by their memories of the good grain, came back into the field. Well the farmer and his son, seeing this, hastily put up the fence rails and effectively corralled the entire herd.

The family was of course delighted. And the neighbors, hearing of their good fortune, came by and said: "what lucky people you are", we thought that certainly you were going to die this coming winter", "this is the most amazing turn of events in our memory", "you have certainly beaten the fates", "now you are the most wealthy family in the entire valley", we can't imagine what wonderful deeds you must have done in countless past lives to deserve such a reversal of fortune".

The farmer listened to them all, shook his head and said again, "well good luck - bad luck you never know.

The farmer and his son, being good business men, decided to break the horses before they took them to market and thus make a larger sum. The son was riding the wild horses, in an attempt to gentle them, when the horse he was on, reared into the air, fell over on his side and crushed the young man's leg. The damaged leg was so bad that it had to be amputated.

Well, when the neighbors heard of this additional turn of events they were truly concerned and distraught. They came to the farmers house and offered their condolences "You unfortunate man", "What a truly terrible thing to have happen", "your only son"! Who will take care of you in your old age", "we can't even begin to imagine the awful things you must have done in countless past lives to have your apparent good fortune marred by this truly catastrophic event".

The farmer said in response to their concerns, "It really seems like a tragedy but good luck - bad luck you never know".



Well, hardly a month passed before young man was up on his one leg with a crutch serving for the second when the army of the Khan came through the valley and took away all the young men, never to return, except one.

So good luck - bad luck you never know. 🌸

**Personally in my own life it seems to take me at least ten years or even longer to assess the significance of major life events. 🌸**