

Advanced Seminar Letter #1

Dear Gang,

I want to reflect a bit on a topic which rises from our talk about presence and aliveness and soul-embodiment at the first Advanced Seminar. It has to do with complexity and simplicity as principles in this work.

I remember ,when I went to work with Assagioli, I spoke to him at one point about how complicated this whole process of Self-realization was and he looked at me, young man that I was, and said very lovingly and with humor, "my dear, it is not complicated-- cancel that word from your vocabulary-- it is simple, in truth, not complicated at all".

Of course, I did not understand what he meant, for I was trying to figure it all out and understand it all with my mind, and to my mind it seemed very complicated. In recent years, however, I have begun to understand a little better what he meant and to draw a distinction between "complicated" and "complex". The distinction is in perspective, not content-- from the personality's point of view, life is very complicated, from the soul's it is both simple and complex. The complexity is, in fact, incomprehensible, i.e. mysterious, and yet it can be held in a spiritual context which renders it, in experience, simple. This is the experience of simplicity you can sense behind what Suzuki Roshi is saying in his lectures on the Sandokai, and it is the simplicity we touch when we are simply and fully present to "things-as-it-is", to use his term. The more fully present we are, the both simpler and more complex life becomes. When we are identified with our personality, then we experience how complicated life is, often overwhelmingly so. Of course, life is both and more, but this shift of perspective is something we can cultivate as an aspect of the practice of presence and to generate an healing field in which very complex work proceeds.

One way to think about this is that, as consciousness matures, we move from polarization, with splitting/ projection/ repression as ways to control life's complexity, to polarity, with our growing capacity to "hold both", which allows more complexity to exist, and differences to co-exist, to a state of consciousness in which everything is included and interdependent-- what Suzuki Roshi terms "indepency". No detail is overlooked in this state of consciousness, and there is incredible intricacy of relationship between details, yet the overriding experience is one of simplicity and flow of experience in synchronous and often miraculous ways. We have all had all of these levels of experience, and it is interesting to think that, through the practice of presence, we can cultivate the one that is the context and

container for the others, while at the same time being very much unique in itself. In this state of simplicity, nothing is reduced to less than it is, and no detail is lost in our hurry to get somewhere else, to fix anything, to understand anything, or to reduce the complexity of the experience itself. Yet at the same time we are in touch with the whole of life, and are embedded in it--ours and all others' on earth. Also, the simpler we become in this way by cultivating this state of consciousness, paradoxically, the more complexity we can hold and work with without reacting and limiting our consciousness to deal with it. Conversely, when we think, or feel, life is complicated, and we try to split, reduce, polarize, project, repress, understand, control, in order to make it simpler, we lose touch with presence and our embodiment and aliveness and become pre-occupied, distracted, and separate from the flow of life within and around us. And life becomes very complicated.

Again, as we shift to spiritual presence and this unbroken flow of consciousness/experience, the details of experience--both ours and others'--become vivid, for, as time/space expands to eternity/infinity, you experience more clearly and precisely just where you are, and no details are skipped over, generalized, repressed, etc, for there is no where, or when, to go. You are simply in the incredibly complex Now. In this state, or flow, you get the full "truth of your experience" which is healing and illuminating and which is necessary, as we have said before, for spiritual development. Note that it makes no difference what the experience is-- positive or negative, high or low--what is important is that it is true in that moment. That truth is what is healing-- that, and its seamless interrelationship with everything else that is going on at that moment, whether, or not, we are aware of it

In terms of aliveness and soul-embodiment, you can say that presence is the experience of maximum human aliveness in that nothing is excluded from it and the incredible and mysterious complexity of life is lived moment to moment, just as it comes. The soul, then, can be thought of as your, or anyone's, capacity to do this, and, in fact, the soul is doing this all the time, just as we said in the seminar that it is holding us in unconditional love steadily, and it is we as personalities who fall away from this perspective and settle for less. When we do this-- and we all do, again and again-- we lose our aliveness and our own wisdom, power, and love.

Conversely, as presence grows and this perspective emerges more steadily and strongly, then the healing field coheres and we are able to touch, in ourselves, or with the people we are working with, the experiences that are needed to help the soul incarnate and the human life be fully lived. Suzuki Roshi is very, very good at sustaining this coherent, simple/complex

state, or flow, of consciousness, and so he generates a field, to use my term, that others can grow in spiritually. You see in the dialogues the students struggling with this from their various identifications, and he simply stays steady in the flow of presence and wholeness--a true master.

Learning to be present, then, is learning to see through the soul's eyes and to live more and more fully the simple complexity of the truth of our experience. It is learning to cancel that word "complicated" from our vocabulary, as I now realize, so that we can see and live from this fuller, more inclusive perspective and be present to "things-as-it-is", as they come.

Easy to say, a life-time to do, but here we are. See you in two weeks and, meanwhile,

much love Tom