

Seed Time: Grow a Good Future

WHERE IS THE FUTURE ANYWAY? Ask your average speaker of English and he'll say, "Oh, it's *out there ahead* of us still." Or perhaps, "Well, it's not *here* just yet." You will also hear folks saying things like, "You've got your whole life in front of you," or else, of a bad experience, "Don't worry, that's all *behind* you now."

Notice the pattern here? In all these statements, the future is thought of as existing in space, and being located "in front" of us, just as the past is located "behind us." And either we are moving towards where the future is, or else we are holding still and it is moving towards us. "What kind of future are we *heading towards*?" you ask people.

In fact, almost all the ways we have of thinking about time involve "space" concepts we have transferred, by analogy, to the time domain. When measured, times are, are--you guessed it--"long," and "short." Voila! It's space language once again.

Well, fine--you may say. But so what? However interesting that may be, it's certainly got little to do with my spiritual life, my sense of fulfillment, my happiness here in this body. To which I will answer--hang on! Give me just a "very short time" and perhaps I can change your mind. How can you "be here now," if "now" it not any "where"? Maybe there's a much better way to say that.

To begin with, let's slip off our polarized linguistic sunglasses and take a fresh look at things. Time is obviously not literally any-*where*. We might say it's happening everywhere, because it is a process of change, or unfolding, that is universal in the plane of being we inhabit. But let's begin to see this "the future's in front of me" thing for the metaphor it is. Like all metaphors, which are thought-tools, it might be very useful for some purposes while nevertheless being downright lousy for others. So the future's not really "in front of you." That's just one kind of image we use.

Indeed, linguists have found out that, in languages not related to English, speakers commonly refer to the future as being *behind them*, or *backwards over their left shoulder*. Why? Well, obviously, because you can SEE the past, IT has to be in front of you. Whereas you are blind to the future, which naturally then ends up being behind you. Once again, this whole "time as metaphorical space" thing is a thought tool, not an aspect of reality.

Let's do an anthropological fantasy. Going way "back in time" (or is it forward?), we discover two distinct races of people, whose languages have been shaped by very different ways of life. The nomads, we shall imagine, are seasonal hunter-gatherers,

constantly migrating between uplands and lowlands. The subtropical farmers, on the other hand, stay put. Year in, year out, planting a couple of carefully rotated crops per year, they till the same beloved soil.

Now we might predict that the nomads will have the "future-in-front" and "past-in-back" thought-tool embedded in their speech. After all, when their Winter tour of the lowlands ends, and summer's heat is coming on, they look longingly at the mountain--and they are literally looking at where they will be tomorrow. Constantly in motion, their future is indeed "out ahead of them." But what about the farmers? Where are they likely to see their future?

Well there is a different thought-tool, one that some claim has influenced the Hopi Indian language. And it's a pattern that is much closer to the literal truth that time is a process of unfolding going on everywhere. The farmers see their future every time they look at their fields. If those plants unfold, if they grow and blossom, the farmers will live. Otherwise they won't. In this view, the future is *inside of everything*, emerging ever outward, like stem and leaves growing from the seed. In fact, let's call this pattern "seed time."

Things look very different in this view. For the nomads, the mountain (or whatever is out ahead) is already what it is. It's "in place," relatively fixed. Minor changes can be expected, yes, but it won't for instance become an ocean before they get there. But the emergence of plant from seed is different. Profound, organic change takes place. The tiny round ball is nothing like the emerged plant.

Seed time highlights, not merely motion, but real transformation. "Be here now," Ram Dass told us. In the nomadic time of modern day English, that translates into existing on the thin, ever sliding line between future and past.

No wonder we get strung out. In seed time, on the other hand, "be here now," becomes "watch what's emerging," "water your garden," or "nurture whatever is around you"--because your future, like the plant, emerges constantly from all this.

Love your living room now, and who knows what will unfold in it tomorrow. Give it the "water of life" now and watch what happens. Whenever you are caught up in future thought obsession, try calming it with this simple affirmation:

At home in this moment, cutting all other strings, I grow a great future by loving all things. ▲

