

Reflections on Emptiness and Form

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The Tao is like an empty container:
It can never be emptied and can never be filled.
Infinitely deep, it is the source of all things.

Tao Te Ching

O Sariputra, Form does not differ from Emptiness
And Emptiness does not differ from Form.
Form is Emptiness and Emptiness is Form.
The same is true for Feelings,
Perceptions, Volitions and Consciousness.

The Heart Sutra

Taoist energy practices (Qi Gong, Nei Gong and Tai Chi) have been a fundamental part of my path for more than 40 years. As a practitioner of these arts I am struck that when we do our practices, we call them *forms*. We spend countless hours perfecting our *forms*. There are seemingly endless levels to this. As a *form* becomes more realized, we unwind our energetic fixations and misalignments and our capacity to carry *chi* or life force increases. The better we get at this, the more we express a sense of freedom, joy and beauty in our movement. A central ideal is that we learn to move dynamically while simultaneously maintaining inner stillness. In essence, every *form* is a bridge to the *form-less*. It is a link between a concrete practical action and the essential energies of a unified field that is timeless, empty of manifestation and beyond duality. Physicists call this the quantum field (Dispenza, 2017).

A central dilemma for spiritual seekers, and perhaps for all human beings, is learning how to live with one part of our awareness rested into the profound stillness of the unconditioned mind, while simultaneously being fully engaged in the unique context of our lives. This is an art that requires years of practice. To accomplish this balance of *stillness* and *movement* we must be deeply rooted in the paradoxes of human existence. We must recognize ourselves as both *form*

and *formless*, as a unique event in time and space, and also a timeless essence that transcends physical, psychological and cultural conditions. We must understand ourselves as beings with biological, psychological and cultural conditioning, and also as timeless wells of *emptiness* from which creation has mysteriously sprung.

The 'chi' that flows through our bodies and minds ultimately has its roots in *emptiness*, or that level of energy that precedes the duality of yin and yang, subject and object. In Taoism this is called the "Wu Chi". The "Wu Chi" is the level of energy that exists prior to the birth of yin and yang, subject and object. As soon as there is yin and yang, there is creative dynamism, manifestation, time, and the "full catastrophe" of life in the world. As soon as there is any duality, any point that exists, any manifestation at all, there is the beginning of the "twoness" that ultimately gives birth to (as the Tao Te Ching says) "the ten thousand things".

The capacity to hold both the fundamental *emptiness* of the Wu Chi and at the same moment practice the exacting disciplines of our *forms* is a metaphor for life. In a sense any *form* is symbolic of our identity in the world of time and space. Anything that we do with impeccability can be a vehicle to practice the paradoxical unity of *emptiness* and *form*.

The moment of creation, when no "thing", no "one", and no "time", emerges into "something" and "someone", at a particular time, fascinates me. The capacity to truly dissolve into no "thing", and no "one", outside of "time", and then emerge from the blackness of the Void as a unique being in a particular moment, is an extraordinary experience. It requires that we dis-identify from all of the structures of our lives and then breathe life back into these structures from a place of non-attachment and impeccable artistry. A deep attainment on the path is that we become relaxed and open enough for there to be a continuous flow from *emptiness* into *form* and *form* into *emptiness*. To come back to the centrality of paradox again, it seems that it takes profound discipline and competence in the *forms* of our lives to be able to touch the *formless*.

The practitioners that I have known that have embodied this moment of creation when *emptiness* flows into *form* and *form* into *emptiness* have a particular kind of energy about them. They transmit a *timeless presence* and transcendent quality of *Being* while simultaneously being fully focused, clear and

deeply available in every moment. They are luminous, flowing, relaxed, fully present in the complexity of every context, and see the world with an admirable sense of objectivity. They are not “stuck”.

A friend of mine who is an advanced practitioner of meditation and Qi Gong recently reminded me that too much higher cortical activity, i.e. over-thinking, blocks chi flow. (Ken Bichel, personal communication, 2019) Therefore, a first step on the path towards an unimpeded flow between *emptiness* and *form* is to develop our capacity to notice our identification with thoughts and develop a capacity to dissolve attachment to discursive thinking. Or, to paraphrase the words of A.H. Almaas, (Almaas, 2002, p. 393 -395) ‘true autonomy is autonomy from our own minds’.

It may be important to clarify that we never lose the knowledge and information that is held in our discursive minds, it is simply that we learn how to reflect on this information with non-attachment, and objectivity. We do not confuse the information in our thinking with the fundamental, contentless, emptiness of Being.

To dis-identify from the conditioning of our minds requires that we study the structure, the drives and motivations, the compulsions and traumas that keep our attention fixated inside a particular structure or point of view. When the Taoists and other mystics talk about the conditioned mind, they are also talking about the *conditioned body* and the neural pathways that have been etched into our nervous system by our physical, psychological and cultural experiences. Dissolving these fixations in our “mind/body”, in our energy, thought patterns, beliefs and behaviors is the first stage of spiritual practice in most of the spiritual disciplines that I have studied. From this perspective we could define this stage of practice as any form we use to illuminate and disidentify from our conditioning. Qi Gong, Yoga, Psychotherapy, Spiritual Inquiry are all examples of methods to address energetic and emotional fixations at different levels. Ultimately, the goal is to be able to live more consistently in a state of flow between *emptiness* and *form*, *form* and *emptiness*.

As a psychotherapist, I remember what Freud said – we must make what is unconscious conscious. In spiritual practice, this means that we must make the unconscious patterns of energy flow, tension, fixated chi, etc. in the body/mind

conscious. The work of dissolving these energetic blockages and fixations at every level is essential for a student to sustain an authentic experience of emptiness.

There are some ways that spiritual teachings and teachers have thought about developing our capacity to hold both the timeless *emptiness* of the transcendent, and the engaged focus of attention in the immanent moment, that I think are very useful to anyone on a spiritual path. At least they have been for me. I offer three of them here in the hopes that they may also be useful to you. Some of these ideas have strong implications for the nitty gritty of spiritual practice that you may not have thought of before. Hopefully they can help you track the flow between *emptiness* and *form* in a way that helps you to integrate the paradox of human existence more fully. Fundamentally, I believe that the capacity to simultaneously hold both emptiness and form is a natural human potential that is available to all of us with guidance and practice.

The three approaches that I would like to explore are 1) the perspective of Taoist Energy Practices, 2) Big Mind and Relative Mind, and 3) Non-Doing meditation.

Taoist Energy practice: Balancing the Vertical and the Horizontal – Strengthening the Belly Center and the Central Channel

The Taoists were at once very practical and profoundly mystical in their approach to *emptiness*. From a Taoist perspective, before a student can even begin to approach a deep level of *emptiness*, she must do a tremendous amount of preliminary energetic work to create a balanced, coherent and stable flow of chi through the body/mind. Although there are many, perhaps even hundreds of practices in the Taoist Canon that can help a student to achieve this, I would like to focus on two central dimensions that integrate the intentions and understandings of many of these methods. These dimensions are strengthening and balancing the Dan Tien of the belly center and opening the Central Channel or the vertical energy route that runs through the center of our bodies from the perineum to the crown of our heads. The Central Channel also continues into the spaces below and above our physical body.

In the world view of Taoism, we are a continuously pulsing, vibrant field of energy embedded in ever increasingly complex and subtle fields which extend like

a series of Russian nesting dolls from the smallest atoms of our bodies to the cosmos itself. In this hierarchy of energy fields, every part is interconnected, and affecting each other. The larger fields contain the smaller ones and have a relatively larger impact. Although there is a hierarchy of smaller and bigger fields of complexity, every level also mirrors every other level holographically. The microcosm reflects the macrocosm. So, in our mind/body we literally have access to all of the elements of the universe.

Taoism encourages us to look at everything in life, the food we eat, our intimate relations, our culture, the weather, the seasons and even the movements of the planets and stars, in terms of creating a sense of harmony, order and coherence between all these fields of energy. All Taoist practices and philosophy (Acupuncture, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, Feng Shui, the I Ching, Nei Gong, Five Element cooking, etc.) have the goal of creating a sense of harmony and balance between all levels of existence, from the personal to the cosmic. Some practices focus on the details of life, like what we eat and the flow of energy through our living spaces, while others, such as Taoist Alchemy, focus on harmonizing our lives with more cosmic fields of energy. When we are living a life that is in balance, we have a sense of order and rightness. We are exactly where we are, at peace with ourselves, in harmony with the changing world. One could spend lifetimes studying all of the wisdom that is available in Taoism about these principles and the practices that flow from understanding them.

But Taoism, like all authentic spiritual paths, goes further than this. It is also a methodology through which we can experience the *empty*, non-dual state of the unified field, the *Tao*, directly, beyond the relative, conditioned world of manifestation.

The Taoists are very practical about this. They noticed that approaching *emptiness* is not a benign activity. If a practitioner is not well prepared, it can have serious negative effects. It can fry a student's nervous system, exacerbate energy imbalances in the mind/body, create serious insomnia, and even drive someone to madness. Before any responsible teacher in the Taoist tradition is willing to teach a student practices that connect them to these higher fields of energy, they want to be sure that the student's nervous system and mind is rock solid. A central understanding of Taoist practice is that this sense of balanced, mature,

resilience is connected with developing the Dan Tien of the belly center and balancing the energies of the internal organs.*

* There are actually three Dan Tiens that we develop in Qi Gong practice, the belly, the chest and the head. As we develop, we learn to connect and balance all three centers in the context of the energies of earth and heaven. However, the belly Dan Tien is almost always addressed first. Because balancing, relaxing, and strengthening the belly Dan Tien is so essential in my experience, in this article I am only going to focus on it.

In Eastern cultures, even in popular culture, there is an emphasis on strengthening and protecting one's belly center. The Dan Tien (belly center), is the center that controls our physical vitality, health, emotional balance, and power in time and space. All accomplished internal martial artists have a very developed Dan Tien. When the belly center is open, we express a quality of profound *presence*. It is our center of gravity physically and also our center of gravity psychologically. In our belly center is seated our unique expression inside of the particular conditions of every moment. It is profoundly imminent. Internal martial arts, Qi Gong schools, and Yoga schools, all pay deep attention to developing a strong, coherent belly center. An example of the reverence for a healthy belly center in eastern culture that I noticed when I was living in Japan is that even people with no conscious spiritual practice were concerned about keeping their bellies warm and healthy by wearing something called a "hara-maki".

One Taoist master I studied with compared the Dan Tien to the "command central" that helped navigate humankind's first journey to the moon (Mantak Chia, class notes, 1990). Journeying into *formless emptiness* was considered like taking a rocket into space. Without a strong "command central" to guide you, a student could get lost, confused, ungrounded, or spaced out, or even go crazy. Energetically, all of these symptoms are manifestations of a loss of ones' root in the earth and an imbalance in energies of the internal organs and the Dan Tien, i.e. the belly center.

The consequences of opening up deep states of emptiness by doing extreme practices which catapult a students' consciousness into *emptiness* without a strong, stable nervous system and psychological base can be profound. One example of this is a dear friend of mine who was doing some very deep practices involving strong changes in her diet and intensive Yoga and meditation

in preparation for a retreat in India. At some point in this process, she stopped being able to sleep. As her insomnia worsened, she was plagued by anxiety and material from early childhood traumas persistently intruded on her consciousness. In short, she was totally dysregulated. Ultimately, she had to be hospitalized until she could regain her balance. From a Taoist perspective, one might say that she had prematurely opened her Central Channel and without a strong enough base to contain the energy. This has sometimes been called a “kundalini syndrome” (Chia, 1983).

This brings us to a critical, pragmatic direction in practice. For the first many years of practice, it is recommended that a student focus on the downward flowing energy currents in the body. This is essential to calm the nervous system and get the noise and reactivity out of the mind/body. (Frantzis, 1998) A calm, relaxed mind, in Taoist practice, is equivalent to a calm, relaxed belly that is grounded through our legs into the earth. Without a balanced, strong belly center, it will be impossible for a student to achieve a healthy nervous system, which in the words of neurobiologist Dan Siegel is *flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized and stable*. (Siegel, 2012)

Dissolving the patterns of dysregulation that we have accumulated due to the impressions of our environment is a big task that takes extraordinary perseverance, ruthless honesty with oneself, and deep courage. Facing one’s demons and their innumerable manifestations is not for the faint of heart! From both my own spiritual practice and from 35 years of practice as a psychotherapist I can personally attest to this!

There are many practices that achieve a balanced and grounded Dan Tien. Because this is a complex process that involves physical, emotional and psychological work uniquely tailored to correct the particular imbalances that a student is struggling with, I recommend finding a competent teacher that has achieved some mastery in his or her particular discipline and staying with them for as long as it takes. Creating a balanced belly Dan Tien, in my experience, is a necessary and essential stage on the path to becoming an emotionally and energetically mature human.

In Taoist teachings, the vertical energy current of the Central Channel is only approached after this preliminary work is done. This channel starts at the

perineum and runs through the center of the body, a little forward of the spine up to the crown. It also extends past the body from the perineum deep into the earth, and upwards from the crown high into heaven.

In the beginning when a student opens to *emptiness*, particularly if she is working with practices to open the Central Channel, she often will discover it in the space above her head. This is connected with opening the Ba Hui point at the top of the head and with activating the pineal gland. The first experience of this is a boundless sense of spaciousness and freedom. When Ba Hui opens, and the pineal gland is activated, a gateway in consciousness opens into boundless dimensions of space. This may deepen into the experience of *emptiness*. Over time a student may learn how to bring the sense of emptiness, (a relaxed, agenda-less, contentless and neutral energy) through the entire Central Channel. When this happens, she might experience her energy body as a geometric form called a “Torus”, empty in the center with light and magnetism cascading in 360 degrees all around her. This is like a very elongated, luminous donut. Alex Grey has some beautiful paintings of this energy form as it develops through different stages. (Grey, 1990, “Psychic Energy System”, “Spiritual Energy System”, “Universal Mind Lattice”, “Void/Clear Light”.)

There are many detailed and specific Taoist practices that are helpful for our energetic and psycho-physiological development. A master teacher can create a curriculum for each specific student to guide her unfoldment in a safe and orderly way. The essential point is that we must first be energetically grounded in a solid structure before we approach *emptiness*. This means developing energetic, neurobiological, and emotional maturity. From a Taoist perspective, an essential stage in this process is this developing a strong and balanced belly Dan Tien and a feeling of being grounded and connected to the magnetic field of the earth. It is only then that we can approach the energies of *emptiness* safely without creating energetic or psychological imbalance.

Big Mind and Relative Mind

“Big Mind” refers to *formless emptiness* and “Relative Mind” to the conditioned mind of *form*. Big Mind is an idea that I was first introduced to by Zen

master Genpo Merzel. (Merzel, 2008) I have adapted his ideas for the purposes of this essay.

At the first, most accessible level of Big Mind, we are simply deeply relaxed and not fixated into any role, agenda, point of view, or position. We are present, available, with free attention, energy and clarity. There is a quality of spaciousness, like we are enjoying the best, most relaxing vacation of our lives. The energy in our bodies is flowing from above our head through our brain, chest, belly and legs, into the earth below our feet without fixation or impediment. We are open to whatever emerges in the moment and we greet it with a sense joyful alertness. All of this is effortless, we are not “trying” to attain this state, it just “is”. We are “awake”, undistracted, quiet internally, and available for our life.

As the experience of Big Mind deepens, we open to recognizing ourselves as a field of energy that is one with the unified or quantum field of energy that connects all things together. This is a deeper level of energy flow that we access when we have more completely dissolved our blockages. As this awareness of our unity with all things deepens, we start to open to experiences that are beyond *Time* and *Space*. At the deepest level we *become* this unified field of formless energy itself. We might even dissolve to such an extent that we experience a cessation of our identity. This is a difficult level to talk about because, when we touch this level, our personal identity ceases to exist. If we no longer exist – then who is left to report on experiences of this state? This is another one of those paradoxes. In my experience, I only “know” I have touched something close to this experience in a meditation because I emerge feeling totally refreshed, as if the windows of my perception have been washed clean and I can see the world with fresh eyes. This experience gifts me with a profound experience of what Suzuki Roshi calls “Beginners Mind”. (Suzuki, 2011)

As Big Mind becomes more integrated into our lives, we can begin to track the flow from the empty, timeless place of unconditioned unity, beyond the subject and object split, down through the conditioned layers of density and information into the particular circumstance that we are focusing on. Because we are starting from a very high level, close to the unified field of *All That Is*, the range of information that we can access is vast. For some people it appears that they have access to the collective wisdom and information of the ages. An

example of this is the psychic Edgar Cayce. (Sugrue, 1989) But this can take decades, or perhaps lifetimes, of sincere practice.

We might also notice that *emptiness* is not “empty”. It is full of the primal potential of life before it has come into manifestation. It is an *empty/fullness*. “The Tao is like an empty container: It can never be emptied and can never be filled. Infinitely deep, it is the source of all things.” (Tao Te Ching)

Emptiness has absolutely no judgements. It has no agenda, no position, no opinions at all. It simply *is*. In fact, as best as I can tell, in its’ essence it has no relationship to the world of change and impermanence at all. It is like the empty page that holds the many stories of our lives. Can you imagine the empty page having an opinion about what is written on it? How absurd! The empty page is just empty space!

Relative Mind on the other hand is the mind that emerges as a response to the world of subjects and objects. It is the mind that helps us to navigate the world of conditions. In it are all of the strategies, roles, opinions and positions that contain our very best wisdom to date as to how to navigate the world that we find ourselves in. The job of the *relative mind* is to develop a coherent narrative of our “self” and the world. When *relative mind* is healthy, it is flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized and stable (Siegel, 2012). When our minds have achieved this level of balance it is well prepared to begin to approach *emptiness*.

Studying the world of the *relative mind* and understanding the fixations, fears, compulsions and traumas that are frozen inside the mind stream of the *relative mind* is the work of all healing methods. As mentioned before, from my perspective this is the first stage of all responsible spiritual practice. Every healing method and practice looks at this great project from the vantage point of its particular expertise. Every method (biological, psychological, social, economic, environmental) has value and a contribution to make to our development towards an unimpeded flow from *emptiness* to *form* to *emptiness*. Ultimately, this healing is not just for individuals, it is also for the collective traumas, suffering and energetic fixations, that are stuck in the body of humanity as a whole. When healing reaches the level of the collective, society as a whole takes steps towards living in a harmonious, balanced flow of energy between all human beings, and between human beings, the planet and the universe.

Non-Doing Meditation

Non-Doing meditation is perhaps the ultimate *emptiness* practice. It is deceptively simple and yet profound. One way to think about it is that non-doing meditation is a deep vacation from *everything*. Most importantly it is a break from ourselves!

Buddhist meditation Master, Pema Chodron, notices that the mind is like a wheel that is continuously turning. (Chodron, 2005) Like a potter's wheel, it is continually being 'kicked' by the information and stress of our lives. Our minds are a continual inner dialogue of thoughts and emotions. The momentum of this wheel is complex! It began with the early impressions and pressures of the familial environment we were born into. It was further developed by our education and career choices. It is colored by the cultural and economic conditions of our lives. And by the language that we speak, in which are embedded certain assumptions about the nature of reality. Our biological constitution and innate talents also play a part. Stopping this wheel takes enormous discipline and self-examination.

In non-doing meditation, we stop kicking the wheel and little by little the momentum of all these forces slow down until they finally stop. We become aware of awareness itself. We become the space rather than the information of our lives. We experience ourselves as the empty page rather than the narrative that is written on it. We become "nobody". We dissolve the narrative of our lives into the eternal moment. We finally stop our inner dialogue and allow our being to dissolve back into space. Time stops.

Non-doing is a profound state of acceptance and allowing. It is Emptiness practice par excellence. The deeper we go with it the more paradoxical we discover it is. For example, if we are really rested into non-doing, we allow the mind and the body to do whatever they do without influencing them in any way. Not because we are "trying" not to influence them. It is more like we simply realize at the deepest level that we are "not that". Any "trying" is a form of doing.

Non-doing means simply *Being Space*, allowing whatever is to be, without any agenda or goal at all. As the wheel slows down more and more, we simply observe, without any interference, our personality and our conditioned mind and body. In the depth of non-doing, one releases any intention to dissolve the blockages and simply observes them from a place of non-judgemental openness and acceptance. Maintaining openness and non-judgemental equanimity also regarding our judgments is essential! More paradox! We accept our histories, our impulses, our faults and our strengths. We live in the paradoxical moment that we are all of these conflicting impulses and instincts and none of them. We allow for the radical totality of our experience. We are fully human, personal, conditioned, and unique, and also fully formless, empty, spacious, and agenda-less. We are outside of time and inside of time. We are something and nothing. We exist and we don't exist. Language can only point to this state, it can never fully express it.

Perhaps the best way to point towards the depth of non-doing meditation is poetry. While I was visiting Kyoto, Japan I wrote the following poem. The atmosphere of Kyoto was drenched with the intentions of countless monks and Buddhist masters. I am sure that the context of this collective field was impacting my consciousness when I wrote this poem. I think that it speaks to some of the essential paradoxes of non-doing meditation. See if you can feel the quality of awareness behind the words.

Zen Door

Somewhere in every temple
is a door

that a master has cut
with a subtle knife.

If you stand very still
it will appear.

Think without thinking,

and it will grow luminous.

Walk without walking,
and you will enter.

Talk without talking,
and it will reveal its secrets.

Meditate without meditating,
and that master will live again.

Some Concluding Thoughts and Questions

1. Why is there anything at all?

One of the biggest mysteries which mystics and philosophers have contemplated for ages is why there is anything at all. At some point, the unified field moved and there was creation. Out of *emptiness* emerged *form*. That is a fact. Understanding more than that seems hidden from us. Some traditions say that it was God's longing for company. That is one hypothesis. There are others. To me it is an unanswerable enigma. I don't think that we can really know for sure *why* the first movement, the big bang, the first creation of "Some-thing", occurred. What we can know is that at some point out of *No-thing*, there emerged *Some-thing*. This moment of mystery, in its most profound inexplicability, is not simply the subject of scientific inquiry, it is also a moment in consciousness that is the birthplace of innovation and creativity.

2. Attention and Intention

There seems to be a great clue in the treasure hunt called life in understanding the phenomena of "*attention*" and "*intention*".

One way to look at identity is that is simply a "*habit of attention*". From one perspective, who we are, is simply a collection of familiar ways of being and responding to our environment. From the moment of our birth our attention has been captured by the impressions of our environment and we have responded in ways that have been adaptive to the conditions we have been thrown into. These

strategies of response are so deeply ingrained that they become the background noise through which we filter all of the information of our lives. It is as if a sled has been going down a certain path on a snowy hill so many times that it has dug a deep groove that it literally cannot escape. This is the way our identity has captured our attention.

Intention on the other hand, embodies our capacity to consciously focus our *attention*. It is through our *intention* that we can begin to consciously dissolve the energy fixations and patterns of *attention* that limit our freedom. As anyone who has engaged in any form of spiritual practice can tell you, it takes tremendous *intention* to hold your *attention* inside the particular practice that you have committed to doing. You can prove this to yourself by simply attempting to hold your attention in an unbroken stream on your breath for 10 minutes! All authentic spiritual practices are intentional forms that challenge our unconscious structures. Returning to paradox, it is through the intentional practice of the *form* of a spiritual discipline, that we cut a path to *formless*.

3. A question about identity:

Emptiness practice seems to suggest that our fundamental, unconditioned Being is without qualities, agendas, positions, or content. On the other hand, there does seem to be something essential in each human being that is separate and distinct from the constructed self. Something that cannot be explained by biological constitution or conditioning of any kind. Sometimes I have called this a person's "energetic signature". How do we understand the individual soul in the light of the teachings on *emptiness*? Many teachings talk about, and many people have experienced an individual soul that has an evolutionary path with unique challenges, karma, gifts and strengths. How do we hold the evolution of some sort of personal unique essence in the light of something as universal and impersonal as *emptiness*?

4. Impermanence. **Every-thing** changes, **No -thing** stays the same

This year I have been learning the lessons of impermanence. Since January, both of my beloved parents were in the hospital with potentially life-threatening health challenges for 6 weeks each. My Mom is 86 and my Dad is 90. Currently

they are both medically stable and I am deeply grateful to still have them in my life. But I spent much of the Winter and Spring going back and forth between Boston where I live and New York City to be by their side at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital.

Then two members of a spiritual group I am in died of cancer. Then my best friend's sister died of cancer. And then my brother-in-law's sister died from the complications of diabetes.

It was as if the universe was really trying to drive home a point. Life is an impermanent state! Our bodies have an expiration date!

Death is the big *unknown*. The ultimate release of our form. The ultimate dissolving of the threads that we have so carefully woven together into a life. Although the past 8 months have been very challenging, they were also deeply instructive. These experiences very directly challenged my attachments to the people that I love. They illuminated the incredible strength of the instinctual programs in my mind/body that cling to survival at all costs! I discovered just how much I love my life in form! And just how much I love other peoples' forms as well!!

Meditating on death can be a very productive. It can be a doorway into *emptiness* in a way that few events are. Death is a threshold moment that paradoxically releases a lot of energy into the manifest world if we really pay attention to it. It can be experienced as an opening, a gateway into the No-thingness that borders our lives. Once we get past the grief, in the light of death, we can become clearer about what is truly important to us. I remember as a teenager, reading the books of Carlos Castaneda, (Castaneda, 1972) and his teacher Don Juan's admonishment to carry death on your left shoulder and consult with it regularly. When I can do this, it really cuts through the noise of my relative, conditioned mind! It stops the nonsense of my obsessive, worried thinking like nothing else. When I am stuck in an anxious loop, sometimes this is the only medicine that works!

Every-thing changes, No-thing stays the same. This is a great sword of discrimination that we can use in our practice of *emptiness*. All things, all states, all emotions, all thoughts, all peak experiences, all creative moments, all

moments of despair, all anxieties, all love makings, all planets, all galaxies, in fact anything that we can think of, will eventually change and pass away. Every-thing is impermanent. "Trying" to hold onto any of these states is a kind of idolatry. It is a fool's errand. But *No-Thing*, i.e. that layer of existence that is beyond subjects and objects, the unified field beyond *Time* and *Space* which has no content, the *void, emptiness, formlessness*, whatever we call it, stays the same. It was never born, so how can it die?

For me, touching this state of *No-Thing, No-body, No-time* and then, the creative moment when I become *Some-Thing and Some-Body* in *Time* is a moment that is shot full of creativity and the juicy essence of life. Meditating on the paradox of this moment, is a doorway into freedom and a liberated life.

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