

Inspired to Freedom

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Just having finished listening to Walter Isaacson's 550 page biography of Albert Einstein I am left, in Albert Einstein, a mentor to inspire me in my pursuit of my soul's longing for freedom and independence. He was unconventional, unbound from the accepted physics of his day, and later committed to the cause of independent thinking as the hallmark of the creative process not only in science but also in philosophy, religion, and politics. At times this made him an odd duck on the pond. But his commitment to curiosity in finding truth refused to be bound. He was quite comfortable being an odd duck. He even refused (or forgot) to wear socks on many occasions.

He was a Jew, but only ethnically, not religiously or dogmatically. He loathed rigid authority wherever he saw it, be that Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, McCarthy's America, or any authority-based religion or academic. Yet he was a humble and quiet man throughout his life, not at all caught up in the international fame he held. I am inspired by the man Einstein as he lived the 76 years of his amazingly independent and free life of persistent, even childlike, curiosity about the Cosmos.

The next audio book on my iPod is Jiddu Krishnamurti's *Freedom from the Known*. He builds on these words of freedom I carried from Einstein's biography. Krishnamurti challenges his readers to examine their epistemology. "Are you merely following authority? Are you a seeker? What then are you seeking but some outer authority in a person or teaching or dogma, or even the authority of what you 'knew' yesterday?" "Let go," he would say. "Be in the present experience and let that inform you about life." I smile at a subtlety here. Did you catch it? Is not Krishnamurti becoming an authority whose ideas I am tempted to adopt out of fear being wrong if I fail to understand or agree with him? Is he really encouraging me to be free rather than another Krishnamurti disciple?

My entire 11-year Pathwork experience has centered on helping me to find this freedom to be who I am – warts and all. The obstacles to this freedom are inner and outer and are manifold. The outer obstacles to freedom include the temptation to submit blindly to outside influences, those spoken about above – the authority of political leaders, religious leaders, academic leaders, and the like. But the inner obstacles are more insidious. They consist of my patterns, my wrong beliefs and conclusions about life, and the like. These seem to take a lifetime to uncover through various methods of inquiry. But uncovering, accepting, and transforming these blocks and distorted patterns is the path to freedom.

An example. This morning I conducted a 90-minute Pathwork Council meeting – the council being a team of six, each of us with varying (often strong) opinions and personalities. The issues we need to address are manifold: some strategic, some tactical, some administrative, some financial, some personnel, and all seemingly urgent. We have limited time to address all of this, and as chair of the group I feel the pressure of needing to decide things and take action. So, as usual, I was not looking forward to this meeting – wished I could do something else – like balance my checkbook, or you name it. But no, I had to grapple with my uncomfortable matters at hand, hoping they would all work out.

But there is more to this. I seem to hold the wrong belief that if I were spiritually mature, I would have no anxiety or feeling of disharmony about any of this. So the fact that I do hold anxiety compounds the anxiety by making me assess myself as spiritually immature. If I am spiritually immature, I shall die. OK, maybe not die, but at least not be respected. So to cover up this pain I deflect my feelings by getting a handful of almonds. This adds guilt to my feeling palette, guilt for my overindulging, compulsive out-of-control eating that certainly, I again wrongly believe, no spiritually mature person would ever experience, evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. So more needlessly beating up on my lack of spiritual maturity. And so better get some more almonds.

Well you get the picture of what in Pathwork is called the negative vortex, a vicious circle. I can be way down this negative spiral path before I catch myself, but thank God eventually I do catch myself, often with some help from Pat, my Coffee Time soul-mate. Listening to my plight this morning, for example, she remarked, “So you have to stay stable, you are the holder of it all. *You are to hold the unknown until the energies configure* [sounded wise to me!]. AND your are good at that!”

I jumped over the “and you are good at that,” fairly well dismissing it (Why dismiss it? Another point of inquiry for another time perhaps). Rather I say, “I may be good at this, but I am uncomfortable holding all this. I’d rather do something that wasn’t uncomfortable. I want Joy and Pleasure Supreme, not the uncomfortableness of this ambiguity intensified by a sense of urgency.”

But then an insight floated up. For the umpteenth time, I might add, perhaps, but always seemingly fresh and somehow new. My ego, living in duality, wants things good, not bad, pleasurable, not painful. This is the old 100/0 of Bert and Moira Shaw’s 50/50 Pathwork Program. But my discomfort is real. It stems from lack of trust in the Cosmos, a certain amount of laziness, and other distortions. But causes aside, this discomfort is what I am holding just now. Can I simply accept my discomfort and all in me that gives rise to discomfort? Just hold it all as part of the real me?

I am reminded of Moses who faced lots of frustration. Though a spiritual giant, his was not a life of all joy and no suffering. Yet he could hold it all. Eventually he accepted his call to lead the people of Israel and take on whatever that meant. Sure, he would have preferred to have stayed on the farm and to have continued being a shepherd rather than to have gotten caught up in the Exodus. But his Call was otherwise, and he accepted it. And boy did it bring frustration. Moses, the spiritual leader frustrated? While my intellect says “Of course!” my immature inner kid says “Not possible.” “Spiritual Giants are never weak!”

So here I am, holding my frustration and discomfort as part of life. My inner kid would prefer a life of perfect and permanent ease. But my mature adult can stand on the bridge of current reality and hold the truth that *right now* both pain and pleasure are here. Being uncomfortable does not mean I am not on the path, though often (and wrongly) I fear that this is precisely what pain means – **I seem to have the wrong but tenaciously-held-onto belief that if I were on the “right” path I would have either all bliss and no pain – or, in pain, that I would be able to welcome any pain without doubting its bringing meaning to my life.** What an image to hold, and hold strongly!

In point of fact, I notice that feeling, really feeling, my discomfort and frustration on the path is enlivening me rather than squashing me. Here in being with the pain-that-is **I am free to be me, frustrations and all.** I can be OK AND be in anxiety and frustration. This is the space of freedom to be me as I really am. I do not have to eat peanut butter crackers or run away to other activities to avoid the inevitable pains of life, or pretend the pains don’t exist, all just to pacify my inner kid.

Rather, I accept adult responsibility, feel my pain, and yet take time to comfort my inner kid with compassion as he grows up and matures. This is the freedom my soul seeks. Rather, this is the freedom my soul has and is whenever I awaken to what is true. When these moments of Truth and understanding come, my soul experiences its aha moment. And then, alas, for now at least, my soul forgets and starts over again. It is the spiral of growth perhaps of which the mystics speak. Day by day I have the opportunity to taste more of this freedom to be me, fully me. This is the freedom my soul aspires to Know and which it experience more and more as I wake up to my true Essence!

So for this journey, I find Einstein to be a mentor, one who inspires me to be fully me, the curious one that I am. Maybe he would even be OK with my ubiquitous Birks, though I always wear socks.