

# The Dragon and the Antidote

*Bill Isaacs:* What is your awareness of your purpose? How alive is it? There are many ways one could address this topic. It is an ever-expanding subject. It may not be something you spend much time on. However, if you have devoted time and energy towards this, you come to realize that to arrive at ever new levels of understanding takes work. Part of this work includes relinquishing well-rehearsed and perhaps reassuring formulations of your purpose. Our ideas about purpose, and indeed about any subject can easily become stale or obsolete. It takes something to ground one's experience in something that isn't merely an outdated mental perception. I have over the last 12 months made a measured effort, each day, to penetrate this question. I found that it was quite productive to spend a deliberate period of time each morning meditating on this. I think I have missed three or four days over the past year. I've been somewhat amazed to discover all the ways in which I have held an inherited or limited or conceptual view that didn't at first occur to be that at all. In fact, in many instances, I found that my view was quite self-inflated, even arrogant, or at times just reactive to the situation around me.

It's been very interesting to see how easy it is to fall into something other than the perspective that flows naturally from one's own true presence. We each have the ability to access a clear overview of our worlds, a tonally balanced take on the factors that we have in front of us to handle. The vantage point of the tone of life is always available. And yet it is often challenging not to get overly involved in outer factors, whether they have to do with one's work, politics, finances, health or relationships; or distracted by internal emotional reactions, that tend to cloud awareness and obscure the experience of one's own true presence and the right thing to express in the moment.

This meditation has taken on new significance over the past several months. There is a dragon raging around in the earth today, breathing fire, causing hearts everywhere to tremble in fear. Some people's reaction has been to do their best to ignore the dragon. What dragon? Others seek to wall themselves off from it; still others are working to slay it. The dragon, by one telling, is the Covid virus. But what is the virus? It is a catalyst that is causing the cluttered subconscious of human beings to be made more visible, making what was previously hidden in plain sight more evident. We can see the fragility of the systems that human beings have

created, the failures of human institutions, the confused narratives, and the deep hunger for something more. We have all been thrust into a cycle of uncertainty, a great reset, at many levels of experience.

This is also a moment where some people, who have a sense of awareness and responsibility, have become quite energized. Finally there seems to be space, and potentially an opportunity, to see things more clearly, have greater perspective, and open the possibility of making significant change, for example, in unequal and distorted social conditions that have festered for years. In many settings there has also been an acceleration in the pace of change, in ways that were not possible before. There has been a massive increase in the adoption of digitalization through a great increase in the number of virtual meetings and exchanges, at least for some people. Through this there is a galloping acceleration of connection among people across the world, even as there is increasing nationalism and divisiveness.

Speaking of purpose, we in the United States of America are celebrating July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend. America is on the ropes by some counts, as virus cases soar exponentially, leading the world. The US has become something of an object of pity in the world. The shining city on the hill isn't quite so shiny at the moment. Of course, America, and many other nations, have faced challenging times before. Our memories are short.

The United States was itself forged through a difficult period of history and emerged through the efforts of a visionary and courageous group of people with an inspired sense of purpose. The words of the founding fathers of this country are still quite inspirational. They include the notion that “all men are created equal,” and “that they are endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” These words carry an insight about the nature of freedom. There are certainly limitations to this way of framing things—they can easily be translated in quite self-centered ways, for instance. But it is also possible to listen beyond these limits to the spirit that was emerging at that time.

The implementation of these ideas also certainly wasn't perfect. It has become apparent that “all men” did not actually mean “all.” Women were excluded, as were non-white races. There were certainly cracks and imperfections in this narrative. However the seed of inspiration was present, and more significantly, it initiated a huge cycle that created the conditions that have brought all of us to this moment. It is very easy to condemn if one takes a

short-term perspective. The cycles in which we are participating now have been unfolding for a very long time, and our experiences now are the harvest of seeds planted a long time ago.

I have been thinking about this relative to my own purpose, and have been asking myself the question, “To what era do I belong?” I was given the gift of being exposed to great spiritual mentors. I have had a remarkable education— a remarkable intellectual education, and a remarkable spiritual education. While this is nice, one could say, so what? What am I doing with it? What are you doing with the education and experiences you have received? Are you actually delivering the fruits of whatever you were trained to do now? Really, what are you doing with it? I have been asking myself this question every day for the last 12 months, and I haven’t always been entirely impressed with my own answers.

There may well be some sort of resurgence in the US, and elsewhere, because of all that's been happening. But nothing will in fact change if what emerges comes out of the same patterns of thinking and the same sense of identity that produced the difficulties in the first place. What is needed now is in fact the same change that's always been needed, which is that human beings learn to operate from a different place within themselves.

What is the real antidote to this great Dragon? How is the Dragon slain? How are the ill conditions healed? Through the expression of true character, a true tone of Being that emerges because I am thinking *now* about what I am meant to do and meant to bring to my circumstances as they are now, not as they were, and then living and acting consistently from this awareness. The antidote is the strengthening of the immune system, the “co-immunity system” that emerges because there begin to be people who are living from a different pattern of Being, something real. The real identity. In this experience there is no condemnation of anybody, no separation from anybody.

From a human perspective the task is truly daunting. So it is tempting to assure oneself that one is doing one’s job, because to confront the possibility that one isn’t is a bit depressing. Nevertheless we have the quality of awareness, substance and presence that we do, and we have the ongoing responsibility to refine our expression and continuously allow ourselves to rise to new levels of understanding and effectiveness. The background and history of one’s experience, and association with others, can be reassuring, providing a sense of belonging. But our backgrounds are not really the point. The quality of space we hold, what we are able to bring to focus, the accuracy of our expression now, are all that matters.

Over the last few months some colleagues and I have been holding a series of dialogues with people from around the world, reflecting on the current situation, to encourage this kind of reflection.. These conversations have been characterized by a remarkable sense of presence, openness, and authenticity. At one point a fellow from Argentina spoke up in the dialogue and said, “Look, you Americans think you're in a crisis. We have had 70 years of crisis. It is all we have ever known.” He was inviting people to have a larger sense of perspective about their situation, wherever they were; it was a contribution that was typical of the quality of expression emerging from the people in this dialogue.

There is certainly widely reported confusion and difficulty around the world, which could easily lead one to think things are going from bad to worse. But then there are examples of something else, for instance, these dialogues I mentioned. We have had about 80 people participating each time, people from New Zealand, India, Africa, Europe, as well as North and South America. It is been remarkable to see how much self-responsibility has been present. The participants come from many different backgrounds and training, but the fundamental tone has been focused on how each one could deliver more exactly a greater expression of responsibility. It occurred to me that there is no way that this group of people are the only ones on the whole planet who are seeking to move in this way. In other words it is not a stretch to recognize that whatever else one is hearing, there must be many others—millions perhaps—whose hearts and minds are moving in this direction, whether this is ever to be reported on any newscast or not.

The work of freeing oneself from trapped patterns of experience, of old habits, and outdated mindsets, remains in the forefront. We are part of the broader pattern which has been layered under with thousands of years of muck. And it isn't going to dissolve just like that. So it comes up, in me. You may have noticed. The patterns of trauma and difficulty come up in everyone; the question becomes, what are you doing about it? The transformation that is required comes to point in my handling of what emerges in me.

I have been thinking about this in terms of the crystallization of substance. Some patterns have an odd combination of resilience and stickiness as well as a sense of comfort and familiarity. If you take it upon yourself to examine these factors I am sure you would find as I have that they aren't actually fully revealing of the truth of yourself. Now none of this is a cause for condemnation of anything. In fact the antidote and healing begins by taking a stance of open heartedness towards all of these factors, not superiority, and not avoidance, but

compassion—particularly towards the factors in oneself—forgiveness. But even that term can have a certain kind of distancing and baggage attached to it. What is needed is to let the factors be seen for what they are, which invariably reveals dimensions that were both previously hidden from view, and that often leads to significant rearrangements of understanding and experience. As space is actually made, reality swiftly fills in the voids.

As we intensify this kind of work it becomes obvious that what is really doing the work is the radiation of our own being, not our intellects, not our determination, just the fact of the precise radiation of our being through each factor as it appears. This radiation emerges through our thinking. Thinking is usually considered to be an abstract activity. But it is not really that. Thinking is creating. Our thinking can enable us to participate more profoundly with the essences of being. It rightly does not separate us but deepens our ability to receive and experience Life. To rethink is to re-create.

It is quite helpful to realize that the most apparently unassailable and permanent factors that might present themselves are nothing more than the result of human thinking, and are therefore available to change. No exceptions. No “I’m too old for this,” no “I don’t have enough training for this.” When we let these shifts happen, miracles occur. Rapid shifts, swift healing—perhaps subtle, or not so subtle. I think we are in an age of miracles. The word miracle has an ancient root that means “to smile.” Miracles are the revelation of the lightness of being, and the natural result of the flow of life.

*Postscript:* The reader is encouraged, as a follow up, to reflect on the following questions, and then have a conversation with someone about what you have discovered. The questions:

- What aspect or dimension of your expression do you know needs refinement and change?
- What is the broader and deeper potential of the group of people that for you are at the innermost core of your spiritual practice, that has yet to be fully realized?

The conversation you have could be reciprocal—that is, find someone who would also answer these questions for themselves, and would be willing to share their insights with you.

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