

Pathways

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CONTENTS

Silence	1
Cutting the Story Adrift.....	3
What? More on Bob?.....	4



**Go confidently in the direction of your dreams!
Live the life you have imagined.**

Thoreau

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Silence

Well, it has certainly been a while since I write a newsletter, and for that I apologize....a bit.

For what it is worth, my life has changed in dramatic ways. I have retired as a university professor, sold the Starkville Martial Arts Academy and moved to Austin, TX, to begin a new chapter of my life.

It will not come as a surprise to you then, that this has been a time of reflection for me. It is a time of endings, transitions, beginnings, transformations and transmutations.

It is interesting to me how many of these words contain the prefix 'trans' from the Latin: across, beyond, to go beyond, on the far side.

For several months I was in a transitional state, not really retired, not really in a new life either. It was an odd sensation. It was as though all the things by which I had defined myself, no longer existed, and I asked myself a really neat question: "If I am not defined by the labels that I and society have given me, who am I?" More to the point... "What am I?"

O.K....so this has the potential to drop off into a metaphysical morass, and that is not my intent for today.

My intent here is to explore the prefix "trans", especially in the context of my three words here: transition, transformation, and transmutation. I am a great believer in the notion that we live in a fractal universe and that each of us is a microcosm of the larger world in which we move. Consequently, as humans, we are constantly learning, changing, growing, and exploring. Indeed, life is a journey of discovery...stepping boldly into the future with not the least notion of what it might hold.

We take with us into the future the sum of our experiences, complete with all the gifts and baggage that we have acquired.

Since we constantly refine our lives and learn, we are always in a state of transition...we are always here, now. We are not in the past, we are not in the future. We are in many ways on our way from the past and headed into the future, we are therefore constantly moving across, moving beyond, in transition.

The key here is not the transition, but what happens *during* the transition across our inherent time boundaries.

Each one of us is free to take into the future whatever it is that we wish to carry there. I can take my guilt, shame, fear, doubt. I can take my love, hope, faith. I can take my dreams, my visions.

The degree to which we are self-aware perhaps, governs the degree to which each of us chooses what things we wish to take through the transition.

But what would happen if you stopped for a moment and asked yourself "What do I want to take with me into the future?" Follow that with the question "What things that I have now, would best serve me in the future, what things act as a barrier to my growth, and what things nurture my growth?"

If we asked those questions, what would we take with us into the future? How would our lives be transformed? What things from our past would be transformed or transmuted into something new?

Take a few moments of silence, there's a future ahead of you...who do you want to be when you get there? Happy journeying. ☺

Cutting the Story Adrift

So the natural progression from the last article is an examination of “The Story.”

Each of us has a story, a history. Our story is a picture of our lives. It consists of all of our defining moments. It consists of our personal view of the events that shaped us as individuals. Some of those moments may have been moments of great achievement and joy, some of them may have been massively traumatic. Some of those events we might be inclined to label as “good”, others we might be tempted to label as “bad.” Some events we might be willing to look at and say “That was a mistake.” other events we “Wouldn’t change for anything.”

It really doesn’t matter the content of the story...it is just that: A story of Chris or Christina, Stephanie or Stephen, you and me. Each of us has a story. My story is not your story. Our individual stories, however, are our frame of reference to the world. The Story is the filter through which we contextualize everything that happens to us. The Story is the interpretational device through which we translate the events and words of our world into the code of our personal experience.

For instance, I might interpret a particular tone of voice as meaning something specific, when, in reality, the person who is speaking may be intending something else entirely. My experiences of life (my Story) will interfere with my ability to perceive the correct intent. What colors

my perception will be my own cultural, familial and personal lessons, and they are almost certainly going to be different from those of the person speaking to me.

What’s interesting to me is that the Story is how we meet new people. When a group of ‘strangers’ meet for the first time, the first thing they do is introduce themselves by name and context. In that moment of first contact we are looking for similarity, as sense of belonging, partnership.

I recently went through an orientation event, during which each of us gave a short introduction about ourselves...name, rank, story. It was amusing to me. Does any of it really matter? Of course it does. And of course it doesn’t.

Let’s say Bob stands up and says: “Hi, I’m Bob, I’m from Alaska and have a degree in biomedical engineering. I like to ski and paint, and have two kids who are now in university.”

So let’s try it again: “Hi, I’m Bob, I just hitch-hiked from Alaska to Texas, because I wanted to see America. I have a degree in biomedical engineering, but became disenchanted with corporate America and became a painter instead. I have two wonderful children, who really give me joy in life.”

What if he had this to share: “Hi I’m Bob, I’m here to learn.”

Look at each story. Could they be told by the same man? Would I perceive each one differently? In the first version, Bob presents a specific

image, in the second version Bob is telling essentially the same story but it comes across with a completely different flavor, because in each version Bob chose to tell you the things that he sees as important. In the third version Bob gives you virtually no information about his past....or does he?

How do I respond to each story? Does Bob’s version of his story tell me about what Bob sees as important in his life, or does the story simply supply the pieces he wished to share? Do I judge Bob based upon what he tells me in his words or his manner?

Of course I do...in those first few moments, regardless of the version I hear, I might decide “I like Bob...he’s my kind of guy.” But if he gives me a different version of the story, I might think something different.

What is so important about all of this, is that the Story and its telling, is a reflection of how my past is going to impact my future. At some level, can I really say I *have* a Story? Certainly, I have a series of interpretations about what I think has happened to me...but are they accurate? Am I seeing the whole picture? Certainly the way I tell my story impacts how others perceive me.

But...if I am not even seeing the whole picture about my own Story, let alone expressing accurately the Story of my past, what would happen if I cut the people around me a little more slack for their own stories?

☺

“Venture nothing, and life is less than it should be”

Malcolm Forbes

What? More on Bob?

I knew he was going to Bob up again. We couldn't possibly be done. The Story is way too insidious for that.

I can tell you all about me, I can give you the potted history of who I am, and what I have done, but what happens when all of that goes away?

What happens when the identity of self becomes something other than the well-practiced story?

In the last article I asked you to give other people some leeway, to cut them some slack about their own stories. Now I am going to ask you to do the same for yourself.

I'll use my own recent past as an example:

So for thirty years I was university professor (story element), then I retired (story element), and now I am no longer a professor (story element).

If I *defined* my usefulness to society by my contributions as a professor, I have a challenge in my life right now. If, however, I used my skill set to serve society as a professor, then I have an opportunity to do something different with the same skill set, now that I have set aside the label of 'professor'.

You see, in the first interpretation, I am so tied to the labels within my story that once you take away an element, my facade collapses. In the second version the label does not define me as a person, it is merely a manifestation of how I used my skill set. In the second version once the label is gone, there is no real threat to my sense of personal identity and an opportunity opens.

This is no mere conjecture. I would sub-

mit to you that retirement is a critical moment in life when the loss of identity and the feeling of no longer being useful can lead to an early death. Have you ever heard of someone who has retired and died just a few short months thereafter because they thought their life was over?

The loss of identity is not just tied to events involving retirement either, and can occur at almost any age. Any moment of profound loss or change can create an identity crisis: Loss of a loved one, divorce, loss of a career through unemployment, overcoming an addiction...any of these can cause us to ask significant questions about our identity.

Here, in these highly charged transitional moments of life, transformation and transmutation can take place at very deep levels within us.

We emerge from such events as different people, with different insights and levels of personal awareness.

What we call an identity crisis, is a crucible for potential growth. In the crucible we are not just rewriting the labels we use to describe ourselves; in a very real sense we are rewriting the past and its significance. In the crucible of change we are writing a completely new text for the future, one that is less dependent upon the past labels that we gave ourselves and more intimately tied to the lessons that we are learning within the crucible.

At any moment in which our world collapses or changes around us and/or we face a loss of identity, we face two great choices: to withdraw, or to embrace.

Perhaps this is another lesson of Judo: When faced with a stronger opponent make his/her energy your own and use it to your advantage.

In moments of transformation we draw upon deep resources within us, we tap into our potential as humans being, and we dare to become something new...in essence we write a new story, a very different story.

Indeed, our bookstores are full of such stories, society is replete with icons of personal transformation.

O.K. so we get the transformed bit...what about the transmutation bit of the equation?

In transmutation we take something and re-make it into something different. Yin become yang and vice versa.

The transmutation that occurs in moments of decision that involve a loss of identity, frequently involves the transmutation of fear. Fear can create stasis. Fear can hold us in place, hold us back, and give warning of impending danger. Facing fear and moving into the thing that we fear causes the fear to transmute into something else.

When we move towards the thing we fear, the energy of the fear becomes the fuel for change. This is not to say we do not feel the fear, it is simply to say that we can see beyond it, and use the energy to move us in that direction. As we look back (after the event), we see that the fear did not have the power that we once ascribed to it, and we have transmuted the fear into a strength.

So, there you have it...what's your story now? ☺

Sixty years ago, I knew everything; now I know nothing. Education is the progressive discovery of our own ignorance

Will Durant

Chris is an iPEC Certified Professional Coach and an Energy Leadership Master Practitioner.

I am currently **accepting new coaching clients. You have read the newsletter, you know who I am and what I do. I offer you the chance to partner with someone who deeply cares about both the inner and the outer world of our lives.**

If the themes of the Pathways newsletter resonate with you, if you want to remove your personal blocks, catalyze the achievement of your potential and show up in the world as your highest self...I invite you to partner with me as your coach.

I have a couple of simple requests:

- You want to move forward with your life.**
- You accept the possibility that you are greater and wiser than you think you are.**

**For information about personal coaching opportunities, as well as books and/or seminars contact Chris at:
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