

Fact & Fantasy

Zen is walk, don't wobble. — Richard Rose

Many of us go through life enamored of ourselves to the point of not really knowing where we are headed or why. We refuse to question our decisions in any meaningful way, and only after a severe shock or trauma will we ever admit we may not have been what we thought. One of the dominant features of many seekers of truth is a feeling of superiority, which tends to blind the student to his own true life pattern. In other words, we live in our heads, safely hidden from the facts of our real existence.

If we are lucky enough to be clobbered into wakefulness and the truth of our life through trauma or necessity (I have no interest in speaking to those who are convinced they are "ripe souls," needing only to wait in idleness for their coming release), we may find we have been blind to something Richard Rose called our "fact-status." For example, when I first entered university, I was so convinced of my own superiority that I never thought of cracking a book, never bothered to show up for class or take notice of the declining state of my health and mind. After flunking out my first semester, becoming hooked on drugs, and letting my teeth nearly rot, I was forced to re-evaluate my thinking. My fact-status could no longer be ignored, no matter how far I hid in inner fantasy.

The above pattern of self-conflict, while a bit extreme, illustrates the gap between our false image of ourselves and our fact-status. We are continually knocked off balance by this conflict, and instead of facing the truth about ourselves and acting accordingly, many of us simply re-group, re-invent, and continue to live *as if* the story in our heads were true. The ego refuses to see anything wrong about itself, thus denying that which asserts otherwise, fact or not. We continue to be lulled asleep. Falling off the log into the stream of unconsciousness, we are shocked awake and climb back up, only to succumb again to the ego's song of distraction and desire, wobble off balance, and again take the plunge. This continued stumbling between ego-fantasy and the shock of the facts eats up our time and energy. We can keep up the game when we are young, for a while, but sooner or later we tire, become isolated, defensive, and begin to crystallize. Any hope of finding something beyond the ego fades as the ego becomes all.

The above may sound hopeless. But balance can be obtained if we persevere, learning from our mistakes and those who have gone before us. Rose called the process of using what uses us "milk from thorns." By recognizing the ability of our own mind to delude itself, we can hopefully set up a system of checks and balances to insure that our idea of ourselves is, at least, somewhat related to the facts. This fact-checking can be brought about in many ways: through honest friends and family, co-workers and colleagues.

Another one is intuition, learning to listen to the small voice within. Most importantly, we can become more aware by learning to be honest in truly observing ourselves. This use of self-observation, which might be called the opposite of rationalization, is spoken of by every serious system of finding spiritual truth.

Now, there are some of us who say, "Why bother with observing myself, when the great teachers recommend inquiring directly within for the absolute?" To find the truth, or absolute, one needs to be a true vector of inquiry. The above examples of how we are not this true vector, or stable inquirer, show the myriad paths of fantasy in which we become entangled. Let us not presuppose ourselves to be something we are manifestly not. A quick check of our fact-status will show us how we are ready, willing, and able to be distracted from inner inquiry at the drop of a hat or wink of an eye. Learning to walk a straight line, upright and somewhat mentally sober, would be a good first step. Developing one-pointedness of mind first, we then turn this beam upon ourselves, now knowing the difference between fact and self-created fiction. We are beginning to have a sense of balance through wielding the sword of discernment.

By developing and using this power of discrimination on our own minds, we come to see how and where the ability to fool ourselves originates. We come to know our minds, and thus become objective or anterior to them. Through this process of separation from our former "self,"

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and through a growing acceptance of our fact-status (things as they are), we find we have been practicing what may be called a practical form of self-inquiry combined with surrender, and have made real progress. When we look back on the delusions we so readily accepted and projected, we have to laugh at ourselves and our previous stumblings about. The value of this progress is not in that we have found reality but in that we have become better able to discern the real from the unreal, and thus have increased our odds of knowing reality if we ever do happen to bump into it. In the words of Richard Rose, "We must desire the Truth, and have a capacity for it else we could not receive it even if it came to us by accident." By learning to walk, not wobble, we keep from continually falling off the log of discernment before we get to the other shore. We become painfully aware of the games we insist on playing, and the fears we harbor, and realize we might not desire the truth about ourselves as much as we thought. We begin to see our true inner motivations, hereto unconscious, and thus have the beginning possibility of real self-inquiry through a stable mind, and real surrender through acceptance of truth.