

Eckhart Tolle and Oprah: What does life want with us?

by Alice Gardner

When I was a youngster, John F. Kennedy said “ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country”. This inspired a generation into a more creative approach to life—a movement from an attitude of entitlement into one of service to something greater than our own personal well being. On last Monday night, in a web-cast with Oprah Winfrey and Eckhart Tolle (which has, 6 days later, already been listened to by 1.5 million people) we were asked to expand this inspiration beyond nationalism, beyond looking out for the good of our country above other countries. This naturally follows in a world where one of the main forms of conflict is between countries. Our world is now being brought together through technology and communications, and by individuals noticing a unity in which we are all connected. In this web-cast, and in his book *A New Earth*, Eckhart Tolle specifically is suggesting “Rather than asking, ‘What do *I* want from Life?’, a more powerful question to ask is, ‘Life, what do *you* want from me?’”

It is a crucial time in the human history where we are confronting a world situation that has the possibility of causing at least mass destruction if not self-annihilation in the long run. It seems that maybe life is experimenting in the way it is developing the human race. It seems that for some reason it has been important that life include the amazing cognitive abilities that humans have developed and continue to develop, as a part of itself. The risks of this experiment are the intractable issues that we see all around us in the modern world. Our cognitive abilities are running amok in a sense. Our ability to conceptualize, to have thoughts and ideas as we know them, has created in each of us a false sense of self as being someone separate from all other lives. This in turn creates self-centered behaviors that happen, often out of fear, and without reference to what is good for the whole. If each of us stays simply looking out for our separate personal selves in the way that we have been doing for thousands of years (relating to life as the mind-constructed version of ourselves), we may not have much of a future any more.

The world situation and all the intractable problems that modern society is presenting us with are wonderful pointers towards the possibility and necessity of

awakening out of this bundle of ideas about who we are and into living a life that is an expression of what Life wants, not what we personally want. This is also so beautifully expressed in the Christian tradition as “letting go and letting God”. Whether we use Christian or other religious terminology or not, this shift is an essential step that needs to be taken, if we value our survival as a species and the survival of our beautiful and precious planet. Religions have been pointing to this for a long time, and it is our generation for whom it is now becoming the critical issue behind all of the other issues that plague our world and disturb our personal lives by doing so. In these circumstances life seems to be saying to us, “awaken now”. This is the time to come finally into the fruit of the religious teachings of the many traditions, and to stand in the radiance of the one life that shines through them all and through each of us.

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