

“Not Doing” & the Gathering of Power

March 29, 2020

Vedanta Center of Atlanta

Br. Shankara

GOOD MORNING... ANNOUNCEMENTS

Coronavirus: Center is closed except for evening Arati and private practice of meditation. Classes and talks are live-streamed using the ZOOM app. See the Center’s website, or our e-newsletter of Facebook page; you will find instructions in how to download this free app to your phone, tablet or computer. It’s easy to use. New Saturday class.

CHANT • SONG • WELCOME • TOPIC

This month we are discussing a tradition of spiritual unfoldment taught by don Juan Matus. A Yaqui Indian, don Juan was a *brujo* of the Toltec lineage. Our fourth talk in this series is:

“Not-Doing” and the Gathering of Power

Don Juan Matus was a *brujo*. A *brujo* or *bruja* is a person who is in command of power. As a very great *brujo*, don Juan had many apprentices.

One of them was Carlos Castaneda, who wrote several books about his training by don Juan.

For these talks, we’re drawing from Castaneda’s *Journey to Ixtlan*.

Castaneda says a *brujo*’s basic premise is that the world of everyday life is not real, or out there, as you believe it is. A *brujo* explains that reality (the world as you know it) is only a description that was relentlessly taught to you in childhood, until the moment when you were capable of perceiving the world as it was described to you.

At that moment on you became “a *member*.” From then on, your day-to-day life was experienced as an endless flow of perceptual interpretations that, as a member, you knew how to make in common with the rest of us.

This point of view is familiar: In Sanskrit, the term for these perceptual interpretations is *Upadhi*, which means “imposition” or “limitation.”

Don Juan taught his apprentices how to overcome the limitations of their inherited, imposed description; he called this achievement “stopping the world.

This too is not a new idea for us. In the *Mandukya Upanishad* it is spoken of as the “cessation of all phenomena” (Mantra VIII). And in Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutra* the goal is *kaivalya* — independence, through detachment from all thought forms.

Don Juan's apprentices practiced a system of restraints and observances as they learned to "stop the world."

Each apprentice was trained differently, according to her or his traits and temperament. Principles and practices learned in common— changes in behavior don Juan insisted on — are those that don Juan had applied to himself.

Here are the restraints and observances that were summarized in the past two talks:

- 1. Erase Your Personal History**
- 2. Losing Self-Importance**
- 3. Death as An Adviser**
- 4. Assuming Responsibility**
- 5. BECOMING A HUNTER**
- 6. BEING INACCESSIBLE**

7. DISRUPTING THE ROUTINES OF LIFE

8. BECOMING ACCESSIBLE TO POWER

Castaneda asked, “What do you propose I should do?”“

Become accessible to power; tackle your dreams,” he replied. “You call them dreams because you have no power.

A warrior, being a man who seeks power, doesn’t call them dreams, he calls them real.”

“You mean he takes his dreams as being reality?”

“He doesn’t take anything as being anything else. What you call dreams are real for a warrior. You must understand that a warrior is not a fool.

A warrior is an immaculate hunter who hunts power; he’s not drunk, or crazed, and he has neither the time nor the

disposition to bluff, or to lie to himself, or to make a wrong move.

The stakes are too high for that. The stakes are his trimmed orderly life which he has taken so long to tighten and perfect. He is not going to throw that away by making some stupid miscalculation, by taking something for being something else.

“Dreaming is real for a warrior because in it he can act deliberately, he can choose and reject, he can select from a variety of items those which lead to power, and then he can manipulate them and use them, while in an ordinary dream he cannot act deliberately.”

“Do you mean then, don Juan, that dreaming is real?”

“Of course it is real.”

“As real as what we are doing now?”

“If you want to compare things, I can say that it is perhaps more real. In dreaming you have power; you can change things; you may find out countless concealed facts; you can control whatever you want.

**That’s where we stopped last week.
This morning, we’ll start here:**

“I really don’t know what power is,”
Castaneda said.

“Power is something a warrior deals with,” don Juan said. “At first it’s an incredible, far-fetched affair; it is hard to even think about it. This is what’s happening to you now.

Then power becomes a serious matter; one may not have it, or one may not even fully realize that it exists, yet one knows that something is there, something which was not noticeable before.

Next power is manifested as something uncontrollable that comes to oneself. It is not possible for me to say how it comes or what it really is. It is nothing and yet it makes marvels appear before your very eyes.

And finally power is something in oneself, something that controls one's acts and yet obeys one's command."

To illustrate his teaching about power, don Juan takes Castaneda on an adventure. The climax of their dramatic encounter with power took place at dusk — "the crack between the worlds" ...

Don Juan pointed out that after I had run up the hill for dear life I was in a perfect state for "stopping the world." Combined in that state were fear, awe, power and death; he said that such a state would be pretty hard to repeat.

I whispered in his ear, “What do you mean by ‘stopping the world’?” He gave me a ferocious look before he answered that it was a technique practiced by those who were hunting for power, a technique by virtue of which the world as we know it was made to collapse.

Reminder: The world as we know it is the habitual world of our “membership.” To collapse, or stop that world, even for a few moments, offers us an experience of freedom — a release that, at first, is very disorienting, frightening.

EXPOUND — contrast with the Bhakta’s path.

THE MOOD OF A WARRIOR

“Who is a man of knowledge, don Juan?”

“Any warrior could become a man of knowledge. As I told you, a warrior is an impeccable hunter that hunts power. If he

succeeds in his hunting he can be a man of knowledge.”

“What do you . . .” He stopped my question with a movement of his hand. He stood up, signaled me to follow, and began descending on the steep east side of the bluff. There was a definite trail in the almost perpendicular face, leading to the round area. We slowly worked our way down the perilous path, and when we reached the bottom, don Juan, without stopping at all, led me through the thick chaparral to the middle of the circle. There he used some thick dry branches to sweep a clean spot for us to sit.

The spot was also perfectly round.

“I intended to bury you here all night,” he said. “But I know now that it is not time yet. You don’t have power. I’m going to bury you only for a short while.”

I became very nervous with the idea of being enclosed and asked how he was planning to bury me.

He giggled like a child and began collecting dry branches. He did not let me help him and said I should sit down and wait. He threw the branches he was collecting inside the clean circle. Then he made me lie down with my head towards the east, put my jacket under my head, and made a cage around my body.

He constructed it by sticking pieces of branches about two and a half feet in length in the soft dirt; the branches, which ended in forks, served as supports for some long sticks that gave the cage a frame and the appearance of an open coffin. He closed the boxlike cage by placing small branches and leaves over the long sticks, encasing me from the shoulders down.

He let my head stick out with my jacket as a pillow. He then took a thick piece of dry wood and, using it as a digging stick, he loosened the dirt around me and covered the cage with it.

The frame was so solid and the leaves were so well placed that no dirt came inside. I could move my legs freely and could actually slide in and out.

Don Juan said that ordinarily a warrior would construct the cage and then slip into it and seal it from the inside.

“How about the animals?” I asked. “Can they scratch the surface dirt and sneak into the cage and hurt the man?”

“No, that’s not a worry for a warrior. It’s a worry for you because you have no power. A warrior, on the other hand, is guided by his unbending purpose and can fend off anything.

No rat, or snake, or mountain lion could bother him.”

“What do they bury themselves for, don Juan?”

“For enlightenment and for power.”

I experienced an extremely pleasant feeling of peace and satisfaction; the world at that moment seemed at ease. The quietness was exquisite and at the same time unnerving. I was not accustomed to that kind of silence. I tried to talk but he hushed me.

After a while the tranquility of the place affected my mood. I began to think of my life and my personal history and experienced a familiar sensation of sadness and remorse.

I told him that I did not deserve to be there, that his world was strong and fair and I was weak, and that my spirit had

been distorted by the circumstances of my life.

He laughed and threatened to cover my head with dirt if I kept on talking in that vein. He said that I was a man. And like any man I deserved everything that was a man's lot—joy, pain, sadness and struggle—and that the nature of one's acts was unimportant as long as one acted as a warrior.

Lowering his voice to almost a whisper, he said that if I really felt that my spirit was distorted distorted I should simply fix it—purge it, make it perfect—because there was no other task in our entire lives which was more worthwhile. Not to fix the spirit was to seek death, and that was the same as to seek nothing, since death was going to overtake us regardless of anything.

He paused for a long time and then he said with a tone of profound conviction, “To seek the perfection of the warrior’s spirit is the only task worthy of our manhood.”

Not Doing

In a dramatic tone don Juan stated that well-being was a condition one had to groom, a condition one had to become acquainted with in order to seek it.

“You don’t know what well-being is, because you have never experienced it.” he said.

I disagreed with him. But he continued arguing that well-being was an achievement one had to deliberately seek. He said that the only thing I knew how to seek was a sense of disorientation, ill-being, and confusion.

He laughed mockingly and assured me that in order to accomplish the feat of making myself miserable I had to work in a most intense fashion, and that it was absurd I had never realized I could work just the same in making myself complete and strong.

“The trick is in what one emphasizes,” he said. “We either make ourselves miserable, or we make ourselves strong. The amount of work is the same.”

“Watch the way the sunlight changes,” he said. His voice was clear. I thought it was like water, fluid and warm. The sky was totally free of clouds towards the west and the sunlight was spectacular.

Perhaps the fact that don Juan was cuing me made the yellowish glow of the afternoon sun truly magnificent. “Let that glow kindle you,” don Juan said.

“Before the sun goes down today you must be perfectly calm and restored, because tomorrow or the day after, you are going to learn not-doing.”

I was jotting down my impressions of the surroundings when don Juan, after a long silence, suddenly spoke in a dramatic tone.

“I have brought you here to teach you one thing,” he said and paused. “You are going to learn not-doing. We might as well talk about it because there is no other way for you to proceed. I thought you might catch on to not-doing without my having to say anything. I was wrong.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, don Juan.” “It doesn’t matter,” he said.

“I am going to tell you about something that is very simple but very difficult to perform;

I am going to talk to you about not-doing, in spite of the fact that there is no way to talk about it, because it is the body that does it.”

He stared at me in glances and then said that I had to pay the utmost attention to what he was going to say. I closed my notebook, but to my amazement amazement he insisted that I should keep on writing.

“Not-doing is so difficult and so powerful that you should not mention it,” he went on. “Not until you have stopped the world; only then can you talk about it freely, if that’s what you’d want to do.”

Don Juan looked around and then pointed to a large rock. “That rock over there is a rock because of doing,” he said. We looked at each other and he smiled. I waited for an explanation but he

remained silent. Finally I had to say that I had not understood what he meant.

“That’s doing!” he exclaimed.

“Pardon me?”

“That’s also doing.”

“What are you talking about, don Juan?”

“Doing is what makes that rock a rock and that bush a bush. Doing is what makes you yourself and me myself.”

I told him that his explanation did not explain anything.

He laughed and scratched his temples.

“That’s the problem with talking,” he said.

“It always makes one confuse the issues.

If one starts talking about doing, one always ends up talking about something else. It is better to just act.

“Take that rock for instance. To look at it is doing, but to see it is not-doing.”

I had to confess that his words were not making sense to me.

“Oh yes they do!” he exclaimed. “But you are convinced that they don’t because that is your doing. That is the way you act towards me and the world.”

He again pointed to the rock. “That rock is a rock because of all the things you know how to do to it,” he said. “I call that doing. A man of knowledge, for instance, knows that the rock is a rock only because of doing, so if he doesn’t want the rock to be a rock all he has to do is not-doing. See what I mean?”

I did not understand him at all.

He laughed and made another attempt at explaining. “The world is the world because you know the doing involved in making it so,” he said. “If you didn’t know

its doing, the world would be different.”
He examined me with curiosity.

I stopped writing. I just wanted to listen to him. He went on explaining that without that certain “doing” there would be nothing familiar in the surroundings.

He leaned over and picked up a small rock between the thumb and index of his left hand and held it in front of my eyes.

“This is a pebble because you know the doing involved in making it into a pebble,” he said.

“What are you saying?” I asked with a feeling of bona fide confusion.

Don Juan smiled. He seemed to be trying to hide a mischievous delight. “I don’t know why you are so confused,” he said.

“Words are your predilection. You should be in heaven.”

EXPOUND doing and not-doing as a way of stopping the world.

Next week's talk:

**“Stopping the World”
and the Journey to Ixtlan**

DISCUSSION AND COMMENTS

Regular Closing prayer