

Restraints & Observances, Part II

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Vedanta Center of Atlanta

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GOOD MORNING... ANNOUNCEMENTS

Coronavirus: Center is closed except for evening Arati and private practice of meditation. Classes and talks are being 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.

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 third talk in this series is:

Restraints and Observances of a don Juan Apprentice - Part 2

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."

As a young man, Juan Matus found life under those impositions unbearably painful. In time, someone he called his benefactor appeared; he learned the ways of a brujo and became free.

In turn, don Juan taught his apprentices how to overcome the limitations of their inherited, imposed description; he called this achievement "stopping the world." This idea is not new to 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.

Patanjali starts a yogi’s journey to *kaivalya* with *yamas* and *niyamas* (restraints and observances); they are the first two of his eight “limbs” of yoga. Don Juan’s apprentices also practiced a system of restraints and observances as they learned to “stop the world.”

Each apprentice trained differently, etc.

The principles and practices in common are those that the teacher applies to him or herself:

Swahananda — “*The only true measure of spiritual progress is change in behavior!*”

Here are the restraints — changes in behavior recommended by don Juan — that were summarized last Sunday:

Erase Your Personal History

“It is best to erase all personal history,” don Juan said ... “because that would make us free from the encumbering thoughts of other people.”

“That is the little secret I am going to give you today,” don Juan said “Nobody knows my personal history. Nobody knows who I am or what I do. Not even I.”

Losing Self-Importance

Don Juan ... stressed emphatically that if I wanted to learn, I had to remodel most of my behavior. “You take yourself too seriously,” he said slowly. “You are too damn important in your own mind. That must be changed! ... Self-importance is another thing that must dropped, just like personal history,” he said.

Death as An Adviser

Don Juan mentioned repeatedly ... that I had to be aware of the uselessness of my self-importance and of my personal history ... He told me to turn around casually and look at a boulder to my left. He said that my death was there staring at me and if I turned when he signaled me I might be capable of seeing it. He signaled me with his eyes.

I turned and I thought I saw a flickering movement over the boulder. A chill ran through my body,

the muscles of my abdomen contracted involuntarily and I experienced a jolt, a spasm.

“Death is our eternal companion,” don Juan said with a most serious air. “It is always to our left, at an arm’s length ... How can anyone feel so important when we know that death is stalking us?” he asked.

Assuming Responsibility

“Think of your death now,” don Juan said suddenly. “It is at arm’s length. It may tap you any moment, so really you have no time for crappy thoughts and moods. None of us have time for that. “ ... He said that the only thing that counted was action, acting instead of talking.

“... You don’t like to take responsibility for what you do,” he said ... “When a man decides to do something he must go all the way,” he said, “but he must take responsibility for what he does. No matter what he does, he must know first why he is doing it, and then he must proceed with his actions without having doubts or remorse about them.”

**This morning we continue with—
BECOMING A HUNTER**

“Your hunter’s spirit has returned to you,” don Juan said suddenly and with a serious face. “Now you’re hooked.”

“I beg your pardon? ... How am I hooked?” I asked.

“Hunters will always hunt,” he said. “I am a hunter myself.”

“Do you mean you hunt for a living?”

“I hunt in order to live. I can live off the land, anywhere.” He indicated the total surroundings with his head. “To be a hunter means that one knows a great deal,” he went on. “It means that one can see the world in different ways. In order to be a hunter one must be in perfect balance with everything else, otherwise hunting would become a meaningless chore.”

“I had never conceived a balance of that kind when I used to hunt,” I said.

“That’s not true. You didn’t just kill animals. You and your family all ate the game.”

“I really think that you have a touch for hunting,” he said ... Perhaps you will be willing to change your way of life in order to become a hunter.”

To be a hunter sounded very nice and romantic, but it was an absurdity to me, since I did not particularly care to hunt.

“You don’t have to care to hunt or to like it,” he replied to my complaint. “You have a natural inclination. I think the best hunters never like hunting; they do it well, that’s all.”

... “Hunters must be exceptionally tight individuals,” he continued. “A hunter leaves very little to chance. I have been trying all along to convince you that you must learn to live in a different way. ... Now it’s different. I have brought back your old hunter’s spirit, perhaps through it you will change.”

“I am a hunter,” he said... I think that once upon a time hunting was one of the greatest acts a man could perform,” he said. “All hunters were powerful men. In fact, a hunter had to be powerful to begin with in order to withstand the rigors of that life.” ...

“One day I found out that if I wanted to be a hunter worthy of self-respect I had to change my way of life. I used to whine and complain a great deal. I had good reasons to feel shortchanged. I am an Indian and Indians are treated like dogs.

There was nothing I could do to remedy that, so all I was left with was my sorrow. “But then my good fortune spared me and someone taught me to hunt. And I realized that the way I lived was not worth living . . . so I changed it.”

BEING INACCESSIBLE

“(Here is) the secret of great hunters. To be available and unavailable at the precise turn of the road.” I felt a bit confused ... Don Juan very patiently explained ... the crucial importance of the interplay between hiding and showing oneself.

“You must learn to become deliberately available and unavailable,” he said. “As your life goes now, you are unwittingly available at all times.”

I protested. My feeling was that my life was becoming increasingly more and more secretive. He said I had not understood his point, and that to be unavailable did not mean to hide or to be secretive but to be inaccessible.

“Let me put it in another way,” he proceeded patiently. “It makes no difference to hide if everyone knows that you are hiding. “Your problems right now stem from that.

When you are hiding, everyone knows that you are hiding, and when you are not, you are available for everyone to take a poke at you.”

I ... tried to defend myself. “Don’t explain yourself,” don Juan said dryly. “There is no need. We are fools, all of us, and you cannot be different. At one time in my life I, like you, made myself available over and over again until there was nothing of me left for anything except perhaps crying. And that I did, just like yourself ... Let’s say that one day, when I was becoming a hunter, I learned the secret of being available and unavailable.”

“You must take yourself away,” he explained. “You must retrieve yourself from the middle of a (busy street). Your whole being is there, thus it is of no use to hide; you would only imagine that you are hidden. Being in the middle of the road means that everyone passing by watches your comings and goings.”

“To be unavailable means that you deliberately avoid exhausting yourself and others,” he continued. “It means that you are not hungry and desperate, like the poor bastard that feels he will never eat again and devours all the food he can...!”

Don Juan was definitely hitting me below the belt. I laughed and that seemed to please him. He touched my back lightly.

“A hunter knows he will lure game into his traps over and over again, so he doesn’t worry. To worry is to become accessible, unwittingly accessible. And once you worry you cling to anything out of desperation; and once you cling you are bound to get exhausted or to exhaust whoever or whatever you are clinging to.”

DISRUPTING THE ROUTINES OF LIFE

“What are my routines?” I asked.

“Everything you do is a routine.”

“Aren’t we all that way?”

“Not all of us. I don’t do things out of routine.”

“What prompted all this, don Juan? What did I do or what did I say that made you act the way you did?”

“You were worrying about lunch.”

“I did not say anything to you; how did you know that I was worrying about lunch?”

“You worry about eating every day around noontime, and around six in the evening, and

around eight in the morning,” he said with a malicious grin.

“You worry about eating at those times even if you’re not hungry.

“All I had to do to show your routine spirit was to blow my whistle. Your spirit is trained to work with a signal.” He stared at me with a question in his eyes. I could not defend myself.

“Now you’re getting ready to make hunting into a routine,” he went on. “You have already set your pace in hunting; you talk at a certain time, eat at a certain time, and fall asleep at a certain time.”

I had nothing to say. The way don Juan had described my eating habits was the pattern I used for everything in my life. ...

“You know a great deal about hunting now,” don Juan continued. “It’ll be easy for you to realize that a good hunter knows one thing above all—he knows the routines of his prey. That’s what makes him a good hunter.

“First I taught you how to make and set up your traps, then I taught you the routines of the game you were after, and then we tested the traps against their routines. Those parts are the outside forms of hunting.

“Now I have to teach you the final, and by far the most difficult, part. Perhaps years will pass before you can say that you understand it and that you’re a hunter.”

Don Juan paused as if to give me time. “To be a hunter is not just to trap game,” he went on. “A hunter that is worth his salt does not catch game because he sets his traps, or because he knows the routines of his prey, but because he himself has no routines. This is his advantage. He is not at all like the animals he is after, fixed by heavy routines and predictable quirks; he is free, fluid, unpredictable.”

(I) could not conceive of a life without routines. I wanted to be very honest with him and not just agree or disagree with him. I felt that what he had in mind was not possible to accomplish by me or by anyone. “I don’t care how you feel,” he said. “In order to be a hunter you must disrupt the routines of your life.”

BECOMING ACCESSIBLE TO POWER

Don Juan said, “Now it’s time for you to become accessible to power, and you are going to begin by tackling *dreaming*.” The tone of voice he used when he said “dreaming” made me think that he was using the word in a very particular fashion. ...

“I’ve never told you about dreaming, because until now I was only concerned with teaching you how to be a hunter,” he said.

“A hunter is not concerned with the manipulation of power, therefore his dreams are only dreams. They might be poignant but they are not *dreaming*.

“A warrior, on the other hand, seeks power, and one of the avenues to power is dreaming. You may say that the difference between a hunter and a warrior is that a warrior is on his way to power, while a hunter knows nothing or very little about it.

“The decision as to who can be a warrior and who can only be a hunter is not up to us. That decision is in the realm of the powers that guide men. That’s why your playing with Mescalito was such an important omen.

Those forces guided you to me; they took you to that bus depot, remember? ...So, I taught you how to be a hunter. And then the other perfect omen, Mescalito himself playing with you. See what I mean?”

His weird logic was overwhelming. His words created visions of myself succumbing to something awesome and unknown, something

which I had not bargained for, and which I had not conceived existed, even in my wildest fantasies.

“What do you propose I should do?” I asked.

“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.”

Next week’s talk:

“Not-Doing” and the Gathering of Power

DISCUSSION AND COMMENTS

Regular Closing prayer