

How Change Happens in the Story of Interbeing

Transcript of Charles Eisenstein's Talk

<https://charleseisenstein.org/video/how-change-happens-in-the-story-of-interbeing/>

What we're talking about here is a different approach. The cosmology that we are absorbing in this conference, the understanding not only of the cosmos but of the self. It feeds a different story--ultimately, it feeds different tactics and strategies for the activist that understand that this othered person, this othered executive or politician or whoever it is--they're a mirror of myself. This is part of the new and ancient story that self and world are not fundamentally separate. This person is a mirror of myself. All of my shadow, all of my glory, is mirrored in this person, including my love of this planet. And that this person's deep yearnings are the same as mine.

I'm not gonna go into too much detail, or maybe any detail, about how to translate that into activist strategy and tactics, but when we see the world through those eyes, different approaches to solving problems suggest themselves.

Okay. So that's not it for the despair, though, but for one thing--yeah, just to recognize that the despair comes from the same place that our crisis comes from. That's important. Another piece of the despair comes from another plank, another thread of the old story which casts us as separate individuals in a world of other. Casts us as, you know, skin-encapsulated egos or little bubbles of psychology bouncing around, and there's another bubble of psychology [gestures as if meeting] "Hello". [Laughter from audience]

So, in that perception, you're just one little individual, so nothing you do matters very much. You can recycle all of your whiskey bottles or throw them in the landfill. Which do you do, with your whiskey bottles? You can do it either way--that was supposed to be a joke-- [laughter from audience]--you can do it either way, but it doesn't really matter that much, because even if you ride your bicycle everywhere and take thirty second showers in cold water and eat roots and berries and dumpster-dive--even if you do that diligently, if no one else does that, if no one else changes, it doesn't matter. And, if you live a profligate lifestyle like Donald Trump and have gold fixtures on your yacht and fly first class everywhere and are ecologically insensitive as possible--that won't matter either if everybody else wakes up. So what you do doesn't matter.

And how do we grapple with this? Well, one way is to say, okay, yes, but I am *ethical*. So I must live *as if* it matters. I must live in a way such that, if everybody lived in that way, we would have a more beautiful world. But there's still that secret knowledge, from the stance of separation, from the story of separation, there's still that secret knowledge, "Well, guess what? I'm not everybody. I'm not everybody--I'm just me. So what does it matter?" There's a sense of futility that often morphs, then, into indignation, anger, resentment, and sanctimoniousness. Sanctimoniousness, whereas the word sanctimony, self-righteousness, that is detectable. It gives off an odor that repels those who might otherwise be drawn in.

And again we can see how this plays out in the environmental movement and the social justice movements. And really the motivation then becomes--when really underneath that, that kind of ethical stance, is, "If I do this, if I recycle my whiskey bottles, if I go to the protest march, if I do these things, then I am a good person, 'cause I'm on the right side. I'm doing something about it. And I get to like myself." And that is also coming from one of the wounds of the old story, the wound of self-rejection. Acting from the old story, are we going to create anything other than more of the old story?

What we will create, and okay, I'm painting a pretty extreme picture here. I don't think any actual activist is primarily motivated by wanting to like themselves and look good. But to the extent that that motivation is present, and I know that it's been present for me in my work, to the extent that it's present, then guess what we will achieve? We will achieve the self-image of being a good person. What we will not achieve is any actual change in the world. To achieve that, perhaps we need to offer a sacrifice. The sacrifice--to sacrifice being right. To sacrifice being good.

Being right is a very strongly-ingrained habit. I learned it in school, that if I produce the correct answer, things change. Good things happen. So here we can come to a conference and get up on stage and produce the correct answer. Provide the correct information. Offer a template or a map: here's how to do it. A plan. And, again, that draws from that Newtonian understanding of how change happens, but I think we are now entering a phase--Drew referred to it in Thomas Berry's words. I call it a "space between stories", where we do not know how change happens, really. And we see that it's a mystery. And that tiny actions--invisible, private choices--have a strange way of kind of tugging a subterranean thread of causality that causes big changes in a totally unexpected way in the future. Whereas the big things somehow don't have the effects that we anticipated or that we hoped for. And that there is perhaps a larger intelligence that's in charge here.