

Glimpses of Possibility: The Pain and the Power

Transcript of Charles Eisenstein's talk

<https://charleseisenstein.org/video/glimpses-of-possibility-the-pain-and-power/>

OK, so one thing I want to make clear is that it's not like a new story that we in the West are going to invent and then bring out to the world and show everybody, "Here's the new way to do it! You know, we've been telling you here's the way to do it for a long time, and well, we were wrong, but now we know what the thing is." So if it is new, it's new for us, meaning the dominant culture of this planet, or the culture that dominates the planet. It's new in that context, but it also draws on ancient roots and incorporates ways of being, ways of seeing, ways of thinking that older cultures that are still around have preserved, with varying degrees of fidelity, and that they can offer to us, right now, if we approached them with humility, rather than trying to appropriate what those cultures offer to fit it into our own attempt to construct an identity.

So that's one thing I'd like to clarify, that "new story" may be useful shorthand, but I want to explain that it's not something new on the face of the earth. It's rather more to bring something very ancient on this earth, and to say, what would a mass civilization look like if it was in touch with these ancient ways? Because I'm not advocating going back to the past either.

So yeah, the new story is not something that we can articulate. I'm tempted to quote the famous Einstein quote that our problems will not be solved from the same level of thinking that created them. Coming from the story of separation, the story of control, the story of domination, the story of ascent over nature, that so deeply infuses the thoughts and perceptions of anyone who's grown up in this culture - from there, we cannot even tell, we cannot produce a new story that is not actually some retelling of the old story. That's not how it works. We're not going to sit down in a group and say, "OK, let's think of what the new story is," and then impose it on everybody else. That's not where it comes from.

The first thing to understand is that this story exists outside of ourselves. It's not something that we create. It is a being or an archetype or a god that wants to be born on this earth and is calling us into service of it and revealing its face in little, tiny glimpses. These glimpses, these revelations, take the form of an experience that you have that is just so amazing: it's an experience of such deep connection, an experience of cooperation, an experience of participating in the regeneration of soil or of water, the healing of land, the healing of species, the healing of each other. It could be a deep spiritual experience, or any reconnection with a layer of reality that's outside the current story. And you have that experience and you think, this isn't just some trick, some diversion from grim reality. This is a promise.

And it gives you hope, hope being the premonition of a future. I won't say "the" future, as if there was one fixed future. But it's a premonition of something that in a sense already exists, outside of the linear time stream. So once you've seen it, then you can maybe describe it a little bit. And you might try to weave a whole utopian society based on that principle or something like that, but you're going to get most of it wrong. But what your treasure is, is that glimpse. You've seen it and you know it's real. And maybe you meet somebody else who's seen it too, and they say,

yeah, you're not deluding yourself. I know that this can happen. I know that there's a path from A to B. I know that there's a way to this beautiful world that I've caught a glimpse of. I don't know what it is, but I don't have to know. All I need to know is the next step. How do I know the next step? The next step comes through what calls to my care.

And maybe somebody else has seen another glimpse of it, that's something different, and tells you their experience of being in that medicine ceremony or of being on that permaculture design course or whatever it was, or of doing activism in prison, or doing embodiment work. It might seem like something totally unrelated, but this possibility that they've seen, you recognize as yep, that's part of the same thing. That's part of the same story. You may not be able to explain how you know that. You may not be able to explain why you feel such a deep sense of alliance with this person whose work it is to liberate dolphins, while your work is to, I don't know, practice acupuncture. They seem so unrelated. Or maybe your work is to find housing for homeless people. What do these two things have to do with each other? But we sense that we're all devoted to the same thing.

So that's how we come to know what I might call the new story, or the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible. That's another way I like to say it. We get glimpses of it, we get called into its service, and with each step of service we may be given more glimpses of it, which come in the form of more experiences that say yeah, you were right. You're not crazy for following this path. You're not crazy for thinking that if you just give your gifts in the most beautiful way that you'll somehow be taken care of. It's OK to do that. You're not being irresponsible. You'll get confirmation. And it doesn't mean that all of a sudden it's peaches and cream, and that because you've stepped into the gift you will be showered with monetary riches. I mean, no. It may not be that. But you will get confirmation in some form. And you will also go through continued initiations that demolish the illusions that you took into it.

So the story reveals itself like this gigantic angelic being coming through the fog and sometimes the fog clears just enough to see one facet of its wing or one little patch of its face, and it's so beautiful that maybe if you saw the whole thing, you would die or something. Or actually what would happen is that if you saw the whole thing, you'd have to turn away. Because it's painful, a little bit, to see what could be, to see something that beautiful, and then to know that the world is so far from that, and to be aware of just how much suffering there is, how much wrongness there is, how many children are being abused right now as we speak. And the ones we don't even recognize their abuse: they're being locked into classrooms, subject to behavior management techniques, and standardized tests, and minimum wage jobs and the whole thing. And not to mention the ecological world. So in contrast to that ugliness, the beauty is almost too much to take.

So we're given as big a glimpse as we can handle, and then that sustains us. And we sustain each other by confirming that we're not crazy, and by sharing the stories that showed us what was possible.