

“good” and “bad,” order and disorder. The “meaning” of people’s lives is usually associated with what they term the “good,” but the good is continually threatened by collapse, breakdown, disorder; threatened by meaninglessness and the “bad,” when explanations fail and life ceases to make sense. Sooner or later, disorder will irrupt into everyone’s life no matter how many insurance policies he or she has. It may come in the form of loss or accident, sickness, disability, old age, death. However, the irruption of disorder into a person’s life, and the resultant collapse of a mentally defined meaning, can become the opening into a higher order.

“The wisdom of this world is folly with God,” says the Bible.<sup>3</sup> What is the wisdom of this world? The movement of thought, and meaning that is defined exclusively by thought.

Thinking isolates a situation or event and calls it good or bad, as if it had a separate existence. Through excessive reliance on thinking, reality becomes fragmented. This fragmentation is an illusion, but it seems very real while you are trapped in it. And yet the universe is an indivisible whole in which all things are interconnected, in which nothing exists in isolation.

The deeper interconnectedness of all things and events implies that the mental labels of “good” and “bad” are ultimately illusory. They always imply a limited perspective and so are true only relatively and temporarily. This is illustrated

in the story of a wise man who won an expensive car in a lottery. His family and friends were very happy for him and came to celebrate. “Isn’t it great!” they said. “You are so lucky.” The man smiled and said, “Maybe.” For a few weeks he enjoyed driving the car. Then one day a drunken driver crashed into his new car at an intersection and he ended up in the hospital, with multiple injuries. His family and friends came to see him and said, “That was really unfortunate.” Again the man smiled and said, “Maybe.” While he was still in the hospital, one night there was a landslide and his house fell into the sea. Again his friends came the next day and said, “Weren’t you lucky to have been here in hospital.” Again he said, “Maybe.”

The wise man’s “maybe” signifies a refusal to judge anything that happens. Instead of judging what is, he accepts it and so enters into conscious alignment with the higher order. He knows that often it is impossible for the mind to understand what place or purpose a seemingly random event has in the tapestry of the whole. But there are no random events, nor are there events or things that exist by and for themselves, in isolation. The atoms that make up your body were once forged inside stars, and the causes of even the smallest event are virtually infinite and connected with the whole in incomprehensible ways. If you wanted to trace back the cause of any event, you would have to go back all the way to the beginning of creation. The cosmos is not chaotic. The very word *cosmos* means order. But this

is not an order the human mind can ever comprehend, although it can sometimes glimpse it.

#### NOT MINDING WHAT HAPPENS

J. Krishnamurti, the great Indian philosopher and spiritual teacher, spoke and traveled almost continuously all over the world for more than fifty years attempting to convey through words—which are content—that which is beyond words, beyond content. At one of his talks in the later part of his life, he surprised his audience by asking, “Do you want to know my secret?” Everyone became very alert. Many people in the audience had been coming to listen to him for twenty or thirty years and still failed to grasp the essence of his teaching. Finally, after all these years, the master would give them the key to understanding. “This is my secret,” he said. “I don’t mind what happens.”

He did not elaborate, and so I suspect most of his audience were even more perplexed than before. The implications of this simple statement, however, are profound.

When I don’t mind what happens, what does that imply? It implies that internally I am in alignment with what happens. “What happens,” of course, refers to the suchness of this moment, which always already is as it is. It refers to content, the form that this moment—the only moment there ever is—takes. To be in alignment with *what is* means to be in a relationship of inner nonresistance with what

happens. It means not to label it mentally as good or bad, but to let it be. Does this mean you can no longer take action to bring about change in your life? On the contrary. When the basis for your actions is inner alignment with the present moment, your actions become empowered by the intelligence of Life itself.

#### IS THAT SO?

The Zen Master Hakuin lived in a town in Japan. He was held in high regard and many people came to him for spiritual teaching. Then it happened that the teenage daughter of his next-door neighbor became pregnant. When being questioned by her angry and scolding parents as to the identity of the father, she finally told them that he was Hakuin, the Zen Master. In great anger the parents rushed over to Hakuin and told him with much shouting and accusing that their daughter had confessed that he was the father. All he replied was, “Is that so?”

News of the scandal spread throughout the town and beyond. The Master lost his reputation. This did not trouble him. Nobody came to see him anymore. He remained unmoved. When the child was born, the parents brought the baby to Hakuin. “You are the father, so you look after him.” The Master took loving care of the child. A year later, the mother remorsefully confessed to her parents that the real father of the child was the young man who worked

at the butcher shop. In great distress they went to see Hakuin to apologize and ask for forgiveness. "We are really sorry. We have come to take the baby back. Our daughter confessed that you are not the father." "Is that so?" is all he would say as he handed the baby over to them.

The Master responds to falsehood and truth, bad news and good news, in exactly the same way: "Is that so?" He allows the form of the moment, good or bad, to be as it is and so does not become a participant in human drama. To him there is only this moment, and this moment is as it is. Events are not personalized. He is nobody's victim. He is so completely at one with what happens that what happens has no power over him anymore. Only if you resist what happens are you at the mercy of what happens, and the world will determine your happiness and unhappiness.

The baby is looked after with loving care. Bad turns into good through the power of nonresistance. Always responding to what the present moment requires, he lets go of the baby when it is time to do so.

Imagine briefly how the ego would have reacted during the various stages of the unfolding of these events.

#### THE EGO AND THE PRESENT MOMENT

The most important, the primordial relationship in your life is your relationship with the Now, or rather with whatever form the Now takes, that is to say, what is or what

happens. If your relationship with the Now is dysfunctional, that dysfunction will be reflected in every relationship and every situation you encounter. The ego could be defined simply in this way: a dysfunctional relationship with the present moment. It is at this moment that you can decide what kind of relationship you want to have with the present moment.

Once you have reached a certain level of consciousness, (and if you are reading this, you almost certainly have), you are able to decide what kind of a relationship you want to have with the present moment. Do I want the present moment to be my friend or my enemy? The present moment is inseparable from life, so you are really deciding what kind of a relationship you want to have with life. Once you have decided you want the present moment to be your friend, it is up to you to make the first move: Become friendly toward it, welcome it no matter in what disguise it comes, and soon you will see the results. Life becomes friendly toward you; people become helpful, circumstances cooperative. One decision changes your entire reality. But that one decision you have to make again and again and again—until it becomes natural to live in such a way.

The decision to make the present moment into your friend is the end of the ego. The ego can never be in alignment with the present moment, which is to say, aligned with life, since its very nature compels it to ignore, resist, or devalue the Now. Time is what the ego lives on. The



## *The Discovery of Inner Space*

According to an ancient Sufi story, there lived a king in some Middle Eastern land who was continuously torn between happiness and despondency. The slightest thing would cause him great upset or provoke an intense reaction, and his happiness would quickly turn into disappointment and despair. A time came when the king finally got tired of himself and of life, and he began to seek a way out. He sent for a wise man who lived in his kingdom and who was reputed to be enlightened. When the wise man came, the king said to him, "I want to be like you. Can you give me something that will bring balance, serenity, and wisdom into my life? I will pay any price you ask."

The wise man said, "I may be able to help you. But the

price is so great that your entire kingdom would not be sufficient payment for it. Therefore it will be a gift to you if you will honor it." The king gave his assurances, and the wise man left.

A few weeks later, he returned and handed the king an ornate box carved in jade. The king opened the box and found a simple gold ring inside. Some letters were inscribed on the ring. The inscription read: *This, too, will pass*. "What is the meaning of this?" asked the king. The wise man said, "Wear this ring always. Whatever happens, before you call it good or bad, touch this ring and read the inscription. That way, you will always be at peace."

*This, too, will pass*. What is it about these simple words that makes them so powerful? Looking at it superficially, it would seem while those words may provide some comfort in a bad situation, they would also diminish the enjoyment of the good things in life. "Don't be too happy, because it won't last." This seems to be what they are saying when applied in a situation that is perceived as good.

The full import of these words becomes clear when we consider them in the context of two other stories that we encountered earlier. The story of the Zen Master whose only response was always "Is that so?" shows the good that comes through inner nonresistance to events, that is to say, being at one with what happens. The story of the man whose comment was invariably a laconic "Maybe" illustrates the wisdom of nonjudgment, and the story of the

ring points to the fact of impermanence which, when recognized, leads to nonattachment. Nonresistance, nonjudgment, and nonattachment are the three aspects of true freedom and enlightened living.

Those words inscribed on the ring are not telling you that you should not enjoy the good in your life, nor are they merely meant to provide some comfort in times of suffering. They have a deeper purpose: to make you aware of the fleetingness of every situation, which is due to the transience of all forms—good or bad. When you become aware of the transience of all forms, your attachment to them lessens, and you disidentify from them to some extent. Being detached does not mean that you cannot enjoy the good that the world has to offer. In fact, you enjoy it more. Once you see and accept the transience of all things and the inevitability of change, you can enjoy the pleasures of the world while they last without fear of loss or anxiety about the future. When you are detached, you gain a higher vantage point from which to view the events in your life instead of being trapped inside them. You become like an astronaut who sees the planet Earth surrounded by the vastness of space and realizes a paradoxical truth: The earth is precious and at the same time insignificant. The recognition that *This, too, will pass* brings detachment and with detachment another dimension comes into your life—inner space. Through detachment, as well as nonjudgment and inner nonresistance, you gain access to that dimension.