

What is Time For?

Can you imagine what it means to have no cares, no worries, no anxieties, but merely to be perfectly calm and quiet all the time? Yet this is what time is for; to learn just that and nothing more. (A Course in Miracles Text: Ch.15:1:1)

Oh no! It's already April. Now spring is my absolute favourite time of year, but April is also my birthday month, and at my age, I definitely do not welcome getting one year older. But there is nothing I can do about it, and at least it has got me thinking about my use of time, because this is a pretty important topic, especially in the second half of our life when we have less and less time to lose. So here are some thoughts about how we can perhaps use what time we have left here a little more wisely.

Our Normal Use of Time

Have you ever paused to wonder 'What is time for? What am I supposed to do with all the days, weeks, months and years that make up one lifetime?' Well, in our modern world, we tend to think of time primarily as an opportunity to reach our own personal goals in life.

Most of us spent a great deal of our time when we were young working away making money so that we could buy ourselves a happy, worldly dream, such as a house with a garden and a new car in the garage. Many of us spent loads of time and energy in our teens and twenties looking for the perfect partner with whom we could make babies, and then some of us spent even more time in our thirties and forties looking after those babies. Sometimes, we took a week or two out of our busy, busy lives to lie on a beach doing virtually nothing, but these breaks from hyperactivity were few and far between.

We also inevitably spent so much of our time in the first half of our lives frantically trying to bolster our fragile sense of self: 'I work 24/7 because my colleagues just could not manage without me.' 'Being a mother takes up all my time and energy, but I am determined to give my children an exceptionally good start in life.' But just underneath all this trying to make something of ourselves we still felt time ticking away. Then suddenly, some of us reached retirement age and began to realise just how short is one lifetime, and how closely death now looms over us.

What to do? Well in the second half of our life, maybe it would be really helpful to search for a deeper meaning to life than making money, having luxury vacations or perpetuating the species?

The egoic thought system that at heart is all about 'me' and 'mine' always trying to convince us that if we try hard enough, work hard enough and think positively enough, the future will be better than the past. We will push and push ourselves until finally, we will be so happy and so fulfilled. But as we get older, we begin to realise that this perfect future is probably never going to arrive. Yet we still addictively keep pursuing our egoic dreams. We still keep telling ourselves, 'I will be happy when...I would be happy if only' However, sooner or later, we begin to wonder whether 'happy ever after' is ever going to come, and meanwhile time seems to run faster and faster through our fingers.

A Course in Miracles radically cuts through our belief that when we pursue fame or fortune or even romantic love in this world we are using time for a good purpose. What we are really doing is trying to build our house on sand rather than rock because fame, fortune and romantic love last for no time at all.

Moreover, *A Course in Miracles* states that we all secretly, or not so secretly, use time to accumulate grievances against one another and guilt-tripping one another. We keep doing this instinctively so that we can play the role of an innocent victim in a wicked world, even though we do not consciously know that this is our key goal:

There is no escape from fear in the ego's use of time. For time, according to its teachings is nothing but a teaching device for compounding guilt until it becomes all-encompassing, demanding vengeance forever. (Text:Ch.15:I:7)

Now when I first read this, I did not really understand it. But after studying *A Course in Miracles* for over 20 years, it finally begins to make some sense to me. For example, I can now see that we all instinctively hold onto past grievances for decades. Moreover, we all tend to label others as the guilty ones, and then deep down, we want those guilty individuals to suffer for the pain they have caused us.

You can easily test this claim out for yourself. When, as a young adult, you met up with your mother or father, for example, did you really see them as they were then, or did you still hold grievances from your childhood against them and thus see them through a dark lens of at least a twinge of resentment? Did you not long for your parents to feel just a little bad for all the pain they caused you as you were growing up? I know I did and it took me a lot of time and effort to finally let go of my intense grievances against my loving and generous adoptive parents.

The ego basically stores up every little grievance from the past and brings them all forward into the present. It then projects its past into the future. Since our brains cannot imagine anything that we have not actually experienced in some way, all our fantasies about a better future are tainted by our painful, past experiences.

For example, someone who, as a child, experienced their mother or father as very distant or cold, falls madly in love with a partner who later turns out to be, surprise, surprise, distant and cold! Then they say to themselves 'Why am I so unlucky in love?' or 'Why can't men be more affectionate?' They have no idea that they are subconsciously recreating their painful past.

But by subconsciously hanging on to all our past grievances like this, we have no real chance of creating a better future for ourselves. When we cannot let our painful past go, we live primarily in fear and resentment rather than true love. I can certainly now see how this was true for me in early adulthood. At that time in my life, I deeply resented my adoptive father for being needily clingy around me, and at the same time, I still resented my adoptive mother who by then had died, for being pretty cold and controlling when I was little. My resentments fuelled my chronic depression and then lo and behold, I then found myself having really unhappy relationships with neurotic men, whilst having no idea that I was somehow energetically attracting these troubled men into my life.

The Only Real Purpose for Time

A Course in Miracles tells us that there is only one true purpose of time: healing:

Accept only the function of healing in time, because that is what time is for.
(Text:Ch.9:III:8)

When *A Course in Miracles* talks about using time for healing, it is not talking about trying to heal any physical illness or physical pain. It is talking about a much deeper form of self-healing that is linked to the spiritual art of radical forgiveness. We bravely decide to face our buried emotional pain head on so that we can release it into 'the light' through some kind of healing process. In my experience, we do not need to know exactly how to heal our stored emotional pain and hurt. We

simply have to pray sincerely, 'OK I am ready to heal my childhood pain/the pain of my failed marriage/the pain of being made redundant (or whatever) and the whole universe will conspire to send us just the right person, book or video to show us the way.

As we let go of some deeply stored past emotional pain, we will find that we can much more easily forgive others for any hurt they may have inadvertently inflicted on us in the past. We will also tend to end up being much less judgemental about our own mistakes and more prepared to hold ourselves as well as others in the healing energy of self-compassion whenever we make any kind of mistake in life, even one that hurts someone we love.

This has definitely been my experience of this wonderful healing process. The more I let go of stored emotional pain from way back, the more often I found myself feeling genuine compassion for myself and others, including, amazingly, human beings who behave in incredibly violent or even genocidal ways.

A Course in Miracles claims that practising true forgiveness by seeing others as totally innocent children of God is a really quick way to return home to heaven or wholeness. It tells us that we do not need to meditate for prolonged periods of time in order to reach enlightenment or salvation. We do not even need to give up those possessions and activities that we imagine will bring us pleasure such as sex or chocolate. But we do have to practise radical forgiveness, which involves letting go of all our grievances against other people and the world as a whole. If we want to stop wasting our time in endless, unnecessary suffering, we have to keep deliberately thinking forgiving rather than unloving or attacking thoughts, until forgiveness is second nature to us.

This radical spiritual practice does not have to take up much of our time, but it does require us to be diligent in noticing all of our grievances so that we can surrender all of them without exception to the light. We then gently replace grievances with unconditional gratitude, love and compassion for all sentient beings.

The more we constantly replace grievances with gratitude the happier we will become. I am absolutely sure about this. Moreover, this daily practice does not have to be onerous. Each time we notice a resentful thought passing through our mind, we can simply pause for a moment or two and replace it with a grateful or compassionate thought. I now try to do this every day of my life because I know that I still need to heal myself on the deepest of levels by replacing all fearful thoughts with loving thoughts.

Each instant that we dwell in love rather than fear or resentment is an instant of perfect healing and release from suffering. What worldly activity or pursuit deserves our time and attention more than this? I for one certainly cannot think of any passing pleasure in this world that is better than dwelling in a radiant field of infinite love and light. Can you?

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