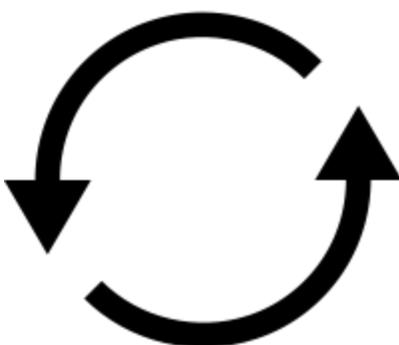


Awakening and Responsibility, a Short Primer



by Soryu Forall



When I was four years old, I was standing in the kitchen near the wastebasket looking up at the bottom of the kitchen counter at my mother while she made dinner. And I told her very clearly, **“we must do something right now.”** I was referring to the human destruction of life on earth and the fact that we need to do something about it, we need to stop people from destroying life. This moment of clarity as a four year-old became a highly significant event in my life. I think that this sort of experience happens to all of us; the extraordinary thing isn't that it happened to me, the extraordinary thing is that I'm telling that story right now. It's not that that happened, and therefore it changed my life; it's not that I live this life because that happened; it's not that that story is significant because it changed my life; it's that **I made that story significant by telling it, and telling it, and telling it again. And in that way I made my identity, and I made my life.** Since then, there have been about one hundred million ten-second spans that have occurred in my life, in my waking hours; why did I choose that ten-second span to remember and to talk about? This is one of the deepest questions that we can ask of ourselves and of the stories that we tell about ourselves.

The purpose of this life is to go beyond our own perspectives. If we have a human perspective, if we identify as a human being, then our goal must be to escape from a human perspective, to escape from being a human being. The purpose, you could say, of life is to die.

The purpose of our identity is to come to the end of that identity. And by coming to the end of that identity, we become more capable of seeing others in their identities. By coming to the end of our story, we become more able to experience other people's stories as valid. And in doing that, we're able to care for others; and in caring for others, we become even more truly ourselves; we tell a story that we can even more truly believe in. We can have an identity we can be even more proud of. And then we begin that loop again, escaping from that identity, escaping from that perspective, to care for others even better, and in so doing becoming ourselves more fully.

This loop is the essence of the structure of spirituality. We create positive feedback loops that end themselves; create a positive feedback loop between the way we perceive and the way we behave, so that we perceive certain things and therefore we behave in certain ways, perceive ourselves as being someone who cares for others and therefore we behave in that way and therefore that's what we perceive. And we create a loop in that way.

Loops grow exponentially, and exponential growth is the most fundamental aspect of growth in nature. Exponential growth, growth creating even more growth; in order to allow this to continue there need to be unlimited resources, but **there aren't unlimited resources in the objective world. There are unlimited resources within our minds**, and this isn't a mystical perspective, this is very practical.

What do I mean by that? I mean that the number of times I could be four and say something like that to my mother is very limited. But within my mind I can repeat that story again and again, and in fact, I can repeat it to other people so that they repeat that story, so that they see me as that kind of a person, and they're given permission also to care. And then that story, **I care for life on earth**, spreads and spreads, and because it can spread without limit, it can grow in its power, so that our behavior is changed along with it, so that we don't need to have certain experiences altogether. We can share our experiences, and in so doing, those experiences become a story, a shared fiction that we live by, and by living by it, we change the

world. Exponential growth ultimately requires resources and more resources to grow; we can share subjective resources, and they'll grow more powerfully than any other component of human life and therefore change how we live, and change the world that we create.

But in order for it to be truly unlimited, this has to be an automatic loop; it has to be a loop that happens in our subconscious. We have to tell this story until it become subconscious. And when subjective stories are shared so fully that they enter the collective subconscious, the collective set of assumptions, the world changes accordingly.

But we need a place outside of all of these relative created stories, from which we can look at the stories and find out if they're the right stories. Which stories do we want to tell? In order to do that, we have to go beyond what we want, because what we want is determined by the stories that we tell. We have to go beyond what we want, we have to go beyond the stories, so that we can see what stories we want to tell, from a place that's independent of them. And that is the end of stories; that's the end of identity. The stories are, in one way or another, fabrications, and fabrications contain lies. But that which is completely independent of stories, that which is completely independent of fabrications, is independent of lies. Therefore, it can be trusted.

Every loop ends at some point; every story ends at some point; every positive feedback loop producing exponential growth at some point collapses. **The greatest skill is the construction of stories that loop back on themselves and then completely end, allowing us to be free even from them.** We in our society believe in certain things very deeply, so deeply that we may not believe that they are beliefs. They've completely entered our subconscious set of assumptions. **Capitalism is a paradigm that we believe in and act according to; science is a paradigm that we believe in and act according to; but these are loops, these are stories, shared fictions, they're constructions, and they will end. The question is, will they end in suffering or in freedom? Will they end with the elimination of life on earth or will they end in the unhindered flow of life on earth? A good story ends by freeing us even from itself.**

Writing this story is the greatest skill of a human being. This story is written with two aspects: the Awakening aspect and the Responsibility aspect.

Awakening is awakening to Wisdom, and Wisdom is the experience of holding to no perspective whatsoever. Nothing is perceived, and nothing is achieved. There's nothing held onto, everything is gone. But this isn't just what we imagine nothing to be; it's vibrant, and clear, and shining, and brilliant.

The Responsibility aspect has two sides: on the one side, Love. We hold to other people's perspectives. Not like Wisdom, in which we hold to no perspective at all; we hold to others' perspectives. By learning to hold to others' perspectives, we become more capable of letting go of our own perspectives. And by letting go of all perspectives, we become more open to receiving others' perspectives. We come to the point when we enjoy seeing the views of others. We enjoy that. We enjoy seeing things from other people's perspectives so fully that we act accordingly, and those actions are Love.

There's another side of this, however. We let go of all perspectives; we open up to others' perspectives, but we also open up to our own perspective. We hold to our own perspective. And we go further, we compel others to see according to my perspective, so fully that they do what I want them to do. Power is also important, and Power is the ability to get people to do what we want them to do. This isn't good or bad in itself. Power on its own, unconnected to Love, is simply selfishness. Power connected with Love, that is a Power that is of the greatest service. To link Love and Power together, the ability to hold to other people's perspectives, and the ability to hold to my own perspective: this is what we call Responsibility.

We link this Responsibility to Awakening, so that we have a stable place, a clear place, from which we can judge ourselves. Ourselves, me, this person, this identity, this is a story. To commit that story to the highest good, to commit ourselves to fulfilling our purpose, to tell the

story that is my truest life, that is realizing my vow. Our vow is our most authentic and kind life. And this we must realize before we die. We must realize the purpose of our lives before we die. We must put that at first priority, and be willing to sacrifice everything else for the sake of this vow. To realize it, we must see from our own perspective and from others' perspectives equally. Our purpose in life isn't just what we want to do; our purpose in life isn't just what others need us to do. Our purpose in life is the place where what we want to and what others need us to do meet, where there's no conflict between the two. To live from that place gives us the opportunity to live our vow. But it isn't sufficient; we also need to gather the skills needed to achieve it.

Our vow is our life, but the loss of our life: this is Wisdom. **We tell our story; that's our life; we lose our story; that's our death.** This death is safety, it's peace, it's joy. And it's necessary in order to realize our vow. **Because as long as we are wrapped up in stories, in dishonesty, we'll protect those stories and that dishonesty; but when we've let go of everything, when we've lost everything, there will be nothing left to protect, nothing that could push us away from achieving that vow, there will be nothing that can compel us to ignore what we know is right. In order to experience each of these components, we need to have discipline, of course; we need to use our conscious attention in order to cultivate a path that we might call "Mindfulness."**

But we all know how limited our resources are in terms of willpower, in terms of conscious attention. And so we make use of the most foundational tool in the practical methods of achieving our vow, going beyond ourselves, and that is community. We connect with a community, and we make use of a community, caring for others and allowing others to care for us. Sometimes caring for us means making us comfortable, giving us certain opportunities; but sometimes it means something much deeper. A deeper kind of caring is the caring needed in order for us to fulfill our potential. That others see us, are inspired by us, and see in us what we can achieve, expect us to do it, and don't give us the opportunity to make excuses for why we can't. In this way, we can go beyond ourselves, we can go beyond our limitations, because there

are others who are supporting us, even if that support is uncomfortable. And when it is comfortable, we have a relationship that we can truly depend on.

We have both sides: the comfortable side, when we become more and more intimate with others, and what may be the uncomfortable side, when we use that intimacy to go beyond ourselves. To truly go beyond ourselves is to die. And we fulfill our potential so that we die. And for others to support us in doing that is the greatest love. We often think that love means that people support us, but we know that ultimately, we need to go beyond this. And so **there's a kind of love that asks us to go beyond our own identity.**

As we move through this path, we may experience challenges, and we may experience suffering. But that suffering, if we experience it skillfully, is what enables us to do what must be done. It's what enables us to achieve our vow. Because when we experience suffering for ourselves, we know "I can't wait to resolve this." **It doesn't make sense to think "I'll deal with this tomorrow." We know this has to be dealt with right now. We have a sense of urgency, and that urgency is what allows us to fulfill our vow.**

The more deeply we experience a sense of suffering that we cannot avoid, the more deeply we are able to connect with others when they do. And the more deeply we experience that, the more deeply we can transcend it. There's no need to aim for suffering, but when we receive it, we accept it, we learn from it, and **we know that this vow must be achieved right now. We must do something right now.**



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Glossary

Awakening is going beyond our own perspective, identity, and story, so that we can attain the wisdom of having no perspective at all. This can be accomplished with the help of mindfulness.

Love is being aware of and acting on others' perspectives.

Mindfulness is the practice of embodying wisdom, love, and power through meditation.

Power is compelling others to see from your perspective, so that they do what you want them to do.

Responsibility is the union of love and power through the act of service. With power, we hold to and use our own perspective; with love, we see others' perspectives.

Stories are fictions which we live by. Stories are often but not always shared with others. They are the lenses through which we perceive the world and thus they determine our actions.

A vow is our deepest commitment to be of service to all living beings and the world, to excel in a way that helps all living beings, or, more playfully, to "dance the dance that only we can dance." When we live our vow, we are acting from a place where do both we want to do and what the world needs us to do. In this space, there is no conflict between our personal motivation and the world's well-being. This is our most authentic, kind, and true life.

Wisdom is holding to no perspective at all.