

The Genius of Childhood Rediscovered

by Michael Mendizza

If intelligence is an action or relationship that connects, rather than a person, place or thing, how do we perceive or recognize intelligence in our daily lives? Is all the knowledge we have gathered, everything we know about ourselves, the world and others, intelligence? Does our I.Q. score measure intelligence? Is our report card or golf score a sign of our intelligence? Does our job awaken and reflect true intelligence? When we think and speak do these activities involve intelligence? In what way? Do our schools nurture intelligence? What place does intelligence have in our lives, in our relationships, especially with children?

How much of our twenty-four-seven lives express true intelligence? Are many, perhaps most of the challenges we face caused by a lack of intelligence in our day-to-day activities? This moment reincarnates as the next. If much of what we think and do this moment is not intelligent, what action can take place right here, right now, that will break the pattern that keep creating the problems that are crushing us? How do we access and gather the energy and attention necessary to transcend and transform the normal states in which we live?

Joseph Chilton Pearce once stood before a blackboard, as he often does, and described how living, moving experience, in this case a “dirty-nasty-old-dog,” is frozen as a memory. He described how the sensory motor brain generates an inner image of the physical sensations created by this dog-encounter. Simultaneously the limbic-emotional brain generates an inner image of how we relate to this encounter: warm-playful, slobbery-yuckee, big-teeth-growling-scared.

A third brain system, the neocortex, creates a word-symbol-name for the sensations and feeling generated by the other two systems. Like a library index card the word-symbol is used to trigger an instant replay of the original experience stored in memory. We call these inner “resonate representations” remembering. What we are remembering is the “state” of the original experience. And this recording-naming-remembering consumes enormous amounts of vital energy and attention, twenty-four-seven, all the days of our life.

Using a film metaphor we might say that life is moving at 24 frames per second. The memory we record of that movement is frozen, as if to freeze the sensory-feeling-symbolic “state” of the experience as a single frame. This difference between moving-intelligence-action and frozen-memory-object is reflected in our language. Nouns are static, people, places or things. Verbs describe the actions, movements that connect noun-objects. Symbolized by names, memory transforms living moving intelligence (verbs) into static mental objects (nouns) which are no longer moving or intelligent.

Memories are images. Memories are facsimiles of the original real experience. The original images stimulated by the experience are real. So are the images and sensation evoked by memories. Both “realities” are real. Both generate sensations and images in the body and mind, and yet, each reality is fundamentally different. We live in two realities, one generated by direct interaction with the environment, another generated by word-feelings and word-sensations. Sometimes, very often in fact, we mistake one reality for the other. It is easy to do. The images created by both realities are displayed on the same screen of perception.

The syntax of language, which is used to understand, classify and arrange the content of both realities, adds to our confusion. Like a fish in water the force of this organizing principle is transparent. The structure of a given language represents a unique lens that shapes how we see and relate to the world. The rules that organize the relationships between words, nouns and verbs, evoke a particular self-world-view that mirrors the syntax of that particular language. Different languages evoke different states in the body and mind, different self-world-views.

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This distinction was first described in dialogue by Leroy Little Bear. Leroy told how native languages are primarily verb based rather than noun, subject-object-thing based. The native word for “leaf” is “leafing.” Amethyst First Rider, also at the dialogue, explained how the English phrase, “the man is riding a horse,” creates a picture of a man riding a horse in her head. The same phrase in her native Blackfoot language does not create an image in her head; rather it evokes the feeling or sensation in her body of riding a horse. Native languages are body-centered and kinesthetic. The structure of the language gives emphasis to living process symbolized by verbs rather than things. This emphasis is reflected in the native-world-view that life is process, alive and sacred.

How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?...

We know that the white man does not understand our ways... He treats his mother, the earth, and his brother, the sky, as things to be bought, plundered, sold like sheep or bright beads. His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only a desert... This we know; the earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected. Chief Seattle, 1854

Like the hands of a potter, language shapes how we understand ourselves and the environment. Different languages evoke different states in the body and mind. A kinesthetic process-based language and self-world-view shines their light on connection. Our thing-based picture-in-the-head language emphasizes separate things. One language connects, the other separates. The new religion of materialism sweeping the world reflects this syntax of separateness. Our conversion of mind, body and spirit from honoring action-intelligence to worshipping subject-object-things is so complete that many are dying from over consumption.

On close examination we discover that the way we think is relative to the language we use. Once pointed out the distinctions between Native American languages and Indo-European, English, French, German, Russian, Latin, Greek and the others are obvious. What is not so obvious is when a wife explains one thing to her husband and he hears something completely different.

He of course assumes that his interpretation accurately matches her intent. She of course is outraged that her mate is so dense.

As wonderful as language-thinking is, and it is truly wonderful, it is plain to see that the structure of *how we think*, in addition to *what we think*, is part of our problem. The thinking mind, like a paper sack, fills itself with a tiny portion of living, moving intelligence, gives what it caught a name, and with shameless hubris proclaims itself intelligent. The same mind then struts and boasts, justifying and defending its arrogance. The activity of strutting and boasting consumes vast amounts of energy, which if available, would have attended to the wind. This naming-remembering charade, however, prevents the mind from fully experiencing the wind because it is, more or less, stuck in a paper sack of its own creation. Multiply this day-after-day in several billion human brains, all strutting and defending, blinded by their self-absorption and it is no wonder the world, and we in it, are in such a mess. We can't think our way out of the paper sack because the *way we think* creates the paper sack that blinds us. Perhaps we have taken ourselves and the language that defines us too seriously.

Sages have been pointing this out for centuries. "The word is not the thing." "The name that can be named is not the eternal name" begins the Tao Te Ching. The absolute reality Buddhists speak of can not be put into words. Only our frozen facsimile relative reality can be spoken.

In the West we have the contemplative tradition of St. John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart, St. Teresa of Avila, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and others.

Like the Tao our western tradition recognizes a quality of attention that is free of the limitations imposed by words and memories. Two types of contemplation are described, active and infused.

Active contemplation is an act of will, a deliberate and conscious act of looking choicelessly with complete attention moment to moment. This complete choiceless attention, they say, "empties the cup." Infused contemplation fills the cup, not with conditioned memories, rather with a flash of something completely new, what Bohm and Krishnamurti call "insight." Christian contemplatives call this flash "Grace."

For thousands of years saints and sages in the east and west have cultivated this completely alive, choicelessly alert, fully present and yet empty, silent state. The essential quality of this state is complete attention, one-hundred percent. The math is simple. Total attention, moment to moment, equals no attention left over to reflect back and evaluate the experience that moment. In this state of complete attention there is no observer, no center, person, place or thing "doing." Perception is no longer defined by

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the potter's hands of language and memory, by all the cultural categories in which we live. Suddenly the system goes full spectrum, white light, insight, Grace, where anything and everything is possible. In such a state the mind reflects its authentic nature which is pure limitless intelligence. And from this state of authentic intelligence the movement that is the universe incarnates now as action.

Great! All the saints and sages move to the front of the class. Now, what about the rest of us? Throughout history there have been stories about seekers who travel the world looking for some mystery that will transform their lives, only to discover, after great hardship, that what they were looking for was waiting patiently in their own backyard. Dorothy was always wearing the Ruby Slippers. The mystery is here, now, and we are it. "Know thyself."

Sword tip to sword tip the Samurai's life depends on deliberate and conscious looking choicelessly with complete attention, moment to moment.

This complete choiceless attention "empties the cup" of language and culture and returns the body and mind to its natural order.

Rediscovering and "being" fully grounded in the Intelligence of Play, past experience, wisdom, language and culture fill the cup and are renewed, transformed into appropriate action by playful insight and grace.

Ashley Montagu described "genius of childhood recaptured" in *Growing Young*.

The truth about the human species is that in body, spirit, and conduct we are designed to grow and develop in ways that emphasize rather than minimize childlike traits. We are intended to remain in many ways childlike; we were never intended to grow "up" into the kind of adults most of us have become.

What, precisely, are those traits of childhood behavior that are so valuable and that tend to disappear gradually as human beings grow older? Imaginativeness; playfulness; open-mindedness; energy; willingness to experiment; flexibility; humor; honesty; receptiveness to new ideas; eagerness to learn; [trust, belonging] and perhaps the most pervasive and most valuable of all, the need to love.

Adults fail to understand that those childlike qualities constitute the most valuable possession of our species, to be cherished, nurtured and cultivated [all the days of our lives]. They fail to realize that the child surpasses the adult by the wealth of his possibilities. In a very real sense infants and children implicitly know a great deal more concerning many aspects of growing than adults; adults, therefore, have more to learn from them about such matters than the latter have to learn from adults....

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Each of these original qualities reflect a "state of relationship." Imaginativeness is a state. Honesty is a state. Trust is a state. None are nouns, people, places or things. The genius of our authentic nature are these "states" of relationship, what I call the *Intelligence of Play*.

Being our authentic nature these states operate at a deeper, more fundamental level than language and culture. The active expression of these state-qualities, right here, right now, creates the optimum environment for learning and performance, which is precisely Montagu's point. The mystery of self-discovery and mastery is to remain grounded in these optimum states as we unfold and develop greater and more complex capacities. Often, however, these optimum "states" are adulterated by the crushing force of language and culture.

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Enlightenment is play. Play is a verb and our lives depend on it.

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