



Time: A Mystery & Problem, by Jacob Needleman

The question of our relationship to time is both a mystery and a problem. It calls to us from the deepest recesses of the human heart. And it bedevils us on all the surfaces of our everyday life. At the deeper levels, in front of the mystery of time, we are mortal beings solemnly aware of our finitude -- longing, perhaps, for that in ourselves which partakes of the eternal. But at the surface levels of ourselves, in front of the problem of time, we are like frantic puppets trying to manage the influences of the past, the threats and promises of the future and the tense demands of the ever-diminishing present moment. The mystery of time has the power to call us quietly back to ourselves and toward our essential freedom and humanness.

The problem of time, on the other hand, agitates us and "lays waste our powers." Five years ago (...) the uniquely modern form of the problem of time -- the astonishing fact that the conditions of contemporary life are bleeding meaningful time out of our lives -- had already begun to assume epidemic proportions. Almost all of us -- including even young children -- were being afflicted by this new poverty, this time-poverty. [...] In the world as in oneself, time is vanishing because we have lost the practice of consciously inhabiting our life, the practice of bringing conscious attention to ourselves as we go about our lives. All clichés about "be here, now" aside, the fundamental fact is that, in ways we cannot imagine, the key to living the values we prize -- freedom, moral will, compassion, common sense and far-seeing wisdom -- depend on the exercise and development of the

uniquely human capacity to free our attention from its "capture" by the impulses of the body and the imaginings and automatisms of the mind and emotions. In the world as in oneself, everything depends of the presence of humanness -- in oneself it depends on the presence, even if only to a relative degree, of the Self, the real I am, -- and in the life of the world it depends on the presence of people who have and can manifest this capacity to be, or even only who wish for it and who come together to learn from each other and to help each other for that purpose. --Jacob Needleman