**The Crucifixion of the Ego**

I find that my mind has the potential be my greatest asset, but more often than not it has been the crux of problems. Most mornings I used to wake up and hear the same recurring voices echoing in my mind "You're not good enough. You won't make it. You'll fail. You're ugly. People don't like you. You don't fit in. You're alone in this world. You'll never achieve what you want. What's the point? Just go back to sleep." Not the most glamorous of alarm clocks, these thoughts generally set the tone of my day and my life. For years I tried to twist the volume as high as I could to overpower these notions, using every trick I could think of. The most prevalent medication I used to wash away these thoughts was drugs, alcohol and relationships. I found that enough dopamine could numb any crumpled mood.

The problem was that no matter how desperately I tried to mask these feelings, they were still present and I wasn't. I autonomously slept walk through life grasping at everything and anything I could find to build up a wall between how I wanted to view myself and how I actually did. I dove head first into relationships yearning for the constant reassurance and praise that I was worth the dependency of another individual. I consumed drugs like it was the 60's. I daydreamed fantastic plots where incredible things would happen and then I would finally be alright. I started living fully consumed with intention rather than action and started to even believe these self-proclaimed prophesies as facts. I built up an existence reliant on delusional expectations and when those inevitably crumbled, so did I.

At 24 years old, I found myself collapsed in my bed staring blankly out my bedroom window. I surrendered to these aforementioned thoughts and accepted their validity. I felt that I had moved myself into checkmate and that I was doomed to live the rest of my miserable existence fully believing that I was a worthless, unattractive person inside and out. One of my good friends had always harped on the importance of meditation and highly recommended that I listen to Echart Tolle. A self proclaimed Freudian, I scoffed at the idea that I originate anywhere beyond my mind. After all, "I think therefore I am." I decided to read up on Echart to amuse my skepticism. That's when I was posed with a question that changed everything forever.

Echart described how he arrived at a crossroads in his life where he felt that he couldn't live with himself any longer. I felt the same way; I could relate to this man. What was revolutionary to my narrow minded perception was that he then questioned who was the "I" that he couldn't live with anymore. That’s when the wheels started turning. Who was the "I" that I was so dreadful of living with? I couldn't answer that question. I knew I thought I was a lot of things. That's when I honed in on the word thought. Everything I associated myself with had come from a thought. Most of these thoughts evolved into physically manifested feelings, of which I tricked myself into believing were tangible building blocks of who I am. But none of this was true, I had been lying to myself all along.

I wish I could say it got immediately easier upon experiencing this revelation, but it did not. Just as all other thoughts come and go, so did this. In fact, I think I only believed it for a split second. But that split second lingered long enough however for me to turn just one intention into an action. I made a call, got on a plane and left drugs and alcohol in my rear mirror. When I woke up the next day with a sober mind, I fully realized the gravity of my situation I had gotten myself in when those same self-pitying thoughts of worthlessness were all I could think.

The next nine days were the most demoralizing I have ever spent. All I could do was cling to the idea that these thoughts weren't me; they comprised what I labeled my ego. The full-scale destruction of my sense of self had begun. For the first time in my life I had fully accepted the existence of these thoughts and consented that I had no control over them. The majority of this time was spent hysterically in tears. Everything I thought I was, I wasn't. Even the few areas of my ego where self-esteem actually resided had to be lost too. For this lost cause, I couldn't pick and choose between the good parts of myself and the bad. The entirety of my self-image had to begin to implode if I was to start seeing life for what it was.

I had once read that you have to allow yourself to fully break before you can be properly put back together. I don't know a better way of describing how I felt. I couldn't even look in the mirror and recognize the goofy asshole staring back. I questioned everything and had no answers. A double major in business and computer science, having no answers was not something I was normally accustomed to. I spent a lot of the time between tears in meditation. I had no idea what meditation truly was so like any intellectual, I had to read up on it and overcomplicate the matter. For days I grew frustrated that nothing was changing and everything was just getting worse. I even kept a chart, noting how much time I had spent in meditation and strove to surpass my previous time everyday.

This wasn't working at all. I was growing weary of the process and had begun to lose faith in the theory that I wasn't all these terrible notions that I believed whole-heartedly. One night I was speaking to a gentleman about my practices and he burst out laughing. Anxiously pent up, with an already fragile mentality I asked him what I was doing wrong. He laughed again and told me, "there's no right or wrong in meditation. Just be." Just be? That sounded like some pretty absurd advice. It reminded me when I used to pitch in baseball and after walking six batters in a row the coach would just tell me to throw strikes like it was some great revelation or unheard of advice. It's like what the hell do you think I'm trying to do? You think I like walking six kids and pegging the seventh in the earlobe? But okay, I will try and throw strikes. I digress.

Okay so here I sit; cross-legged like a Gandhi wannabe with palm trees blowing in the wind thinking as hard to myself as I possibly can, "Just be. Just Be. JUST BE!" After fifteen minutes of frustration, my surgery-ridden knees started cramping and I decide to lay down.

No sooner did I gaze up at the sky than I saw a shooting star streaking so far that my head had to turn to follow. As I kept looking the stars kept getting brighter and brighter. I could hear the silence in the night and feel the breeze melt into my face. I felt the warmth in my heart and the coolness in my breath. I bent my head back and followed my outstretched arm until it met my hand. Wiggling my fingertips I noticed the slightest tingling run down my arm. It felt the space around my body and my place in it. For the first time in my life I felt connected.

As soon as I thought how wonderful this felt, the feeling dissipated. Thoughts started to drift back into consciousness, but that was okay. They seemed to race with less velocity, and hold less weight. I laughed out loud, questioning my sanity. But that was also okay. I felt for the first time in my life that I wasn't alone. I am in life and life is in me. A silent understanding that I can't express nor think, but felt. Just by being present and nothing else, my thoughts for once were nonexistent. That’s when I learned that meditation is nothing more than a label describing the entrance of the present moment.

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A little while has past, but I have found that becoming present is the only method I have found to curb my racing thoughts. Everyday when I wake up, I am still presented with a plethora of absurd thoughts riddled with self-pity and worthlessness. Some days are better than others, and I will have a bad streak now and then. That being said, the one thing that has remained steady throughout this time is that now I have the chance to set back the clock and restart my day. By taking a few minutes to center myself in the morning I can allow this mind storm to pass and feel presence in life. Whether its just a couple minutes sitting outside or an hour of yoga, anything and everything that focuses on the present moment brings me out of my head and into life.

Along this journey and through the practice of meditation my life has become much simpler. I still get anxious, but I now have the ability to dissect these feelings. The one constant I've found from anxiety and low self-esteem, is that one way or another these foreboding feelings always stem from fear. This can range from assuming nobody I meet will like me to fearing that if I put my full effort into a career path that I will inevitably fail and be back right where I started. Most of the time I fear that future events will play out poorly and that I will be embarrassed or hurt. Sometimes I fear how I acted in the past, and what someone may or may not have thought of me. I've started to learn that just like all other thoughts, this fear is self-produced, self-inflicting and self-centered.

Everyday I now wake up in fear is just another opportunity to practice growing out of it. To get better and make progress. To embrace the presence of life. I've learned that thinking in fear is something that I can't leave behind at once, but living in fear is something I can change one day at a time.