

Standing Up for Humanity: The Backbone of Creativity

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In our culture of practical realism, the idea of a two-legged stool may seem ludicrous. But, Mike Arons (student of Ricoeur and Maslow and founder of West Georgia's humanistic psychology program) challenges, we already own one whether we acknowledge it or not. As human beings, we are the only species to stand on two legs. Unlike the horse who begins sleeping on his feet early on, it takes us years to learn even to walk. This raises issues as to why we would do anything so absurd. At his 22 January colloquium entitled Standing Up For Humanity: The Backbone of Creativity, Mike offered some suggestions.

Our two-leggedness is one of the most taken-for-granted's around, Mike asserts – it's mentioned not even in the Bible. But with our upright posture, we have gained a few advantages. Our lived geometry reflects our relationship to gravity, which in turn has affected the development of some of the vital characteristics that make us human: our nakedness, our intelligence, our ability to speak, to construct language and culture. As human beings, we have only one solid reference point: Down.

With gravity as our friendly enemy, we humans have developed a forward-moving consciousness. It is easy to see the amalgamation of our time/space perception and our value systems in our vocabulary: we have our up/front terms like heaven, life, future, progress, and destiny, along with their backward counterparts - past, regression, death, fate, downward. We may take a stand to protect our standards as we stand firm on our principles. This trend prevails across all languages, from English to French to Chinese. It is also evident in our mythology; The riddle of the Sphinx involves a creature evolving from 4 to 2 to 3 legs: the human who crawls as a baby, walks as an adult, and is supported by a crutch in his/her later years.

But as humans we have also developed symbols like the Fountain of Youth that venerate the ability to remain standing. There are serious problems with our pushing like crazy to remain standing, Mike contends. The story of the Tower of Babel reminds us of how God split us up, only to begin developing different languages for our psychobabble.

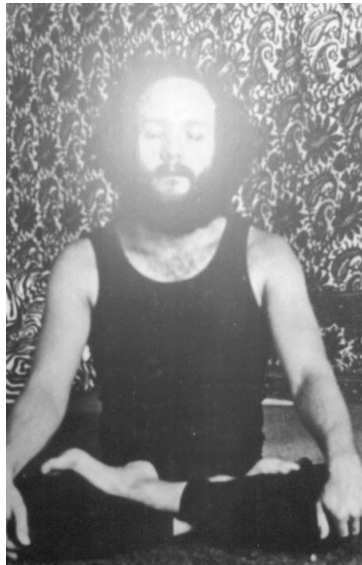
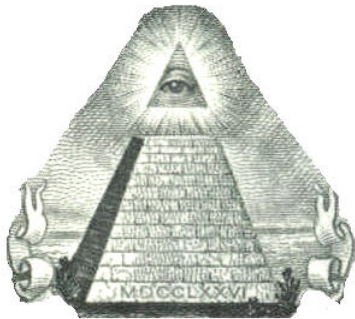
Fragmentation has transpired on several levels, and this relative perception reveals itself in our heavy use of prepositions and side/around terms like "Over and farther from, below and to the right of." These, he says, are the not quites. In turn, our frights are revealed in "back" language like "Cover your ass," our dark nights through mysterious "inside" language, and our forward-casting lights are referenced by the "visions" and insight of our front-facing eyesight.

Mike reminds us that while we have five sense perceptions, it is generally the distal ones (sight and hearing) that are given the most credence. Unlike the proximal ones (smell, touch, taste) that require closeness and heart-felt gut feelings in our bones, the distal senses both require and allow for more distance (i.e., must we not hold a book or radio away from us in order to receive the message?). While in the back of our minds we think that this promotes better objectivity, it

also detaches us from the things that are closest to us, and in turn it is those things we know the least. "How can our language be different from the body that lives it?" he asks.

It is this contradiction and contrast, he argues, that fuels our creativity. While some may choose neurotic ambivalence and vacillation ("to be or not to be"), the creative person is tolerant of ambiguity so as to create something new to be. The ensuing platforms are extensions of ourselves, ways to see the universe - and ourselves - in new and different ways.

"Smell like pathology?" Mike challenges, "Perhaps, but one must go through the hell of dissociation in order to discover a new unity." Just as the king's reality is not broken up by his jester, we must also be open to all of our domains. To surrender the ego is to render tolerance of chaos in the interest of generating order. Deficiency needs may invoke slavery to depression, but faith allows the creative person to necessarily bottom out, to lie on the ground waiting for inspiration, for ecstasy to re-emerge in its most ecstatic form. "Nothing will simply move on its own," Mike offers, acknowledging the reality of ecological consciousness, "We must let go of the upright, uptight view to become grounded in our common human threads. This existential leap is prerequisite for progress."



Mike demonstrates this process by

turning our attention to the back of the dollar bill. The eye on the pyramid is not merely a pinnacle, but an opening. Compare it to our human gift to gravity in the lotus position. As we reach down into the non-separateness that converges across the ground of all human life, we are also drawn upward and forward toward a greater whole, opening to an understanding of the personal nature of transpersonal Godhead so to create new forms and platforms for ourselves.

... "Creativity and discovery are two sides of the same coin," Mike concluded, "Instead of spinning new webs like a spider, why not venture to spin a new tale? That is, sometimes it's wiser not to cover your tail, or get rid of it as we humans did. Still, maybe at our best and wisest we traded that balancing body part in for the ability to create and the Wisdom of Insecurity - Not a simple back and forth or sideways balance, but one that balances by pushing forward and deeper in."

