

## Getting Back Into Dodge

William Faulkner was a fascinating person, personality and American author. He won the Nobel Prize and two Pulitzer Prizes for his works.

(Here is a link where you can read more about him: [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Faulkner](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Faulkner) )

Probably best known for his novels “The Sound and the Fury” and “As I Lay Dying,” he also wrote poetry, this is how he started, and he wrote several other novels and many short stories.

One of his short stories is chilling. It is “A Rose for Emily.” In this tale Faulkner slowly unfolds the story of a woman who murders her fiancé rather than facing her fear of being jilted by him. Then, after killing him, she sleeps with his corpse every night for the rest of her life.

It is a horrifying image is it not?

When I was studying psychology in the university and we were getting into clinical issues, our professor, in order I believe to get our attention, began his first lecture with a disorder called “necrophilia” or “thanatophilia.” “Necrophilia” is where someone is sexually attracted to a corpse. “Necrophilia” - love of the dead.

This is actually the operative metaphor in the teaching from the Gospel of Thomas we are going to explore today on our ongoing journey from death to life, from darkness to light, from bondage to freedom.

Here us the teaching:

Those who make knowledge  
Of the cosmos their speciality  
Have made friends with a corpse,  
But the cosmos is not worthy  
Of those who know it to be so.

The word “knowledge” or “know” in the first line of this teaching is the biblical word for sexual knowledge or “love-making.” For example, in the King James Version of the Hebrew Scriptures where it says, “David went into Bathsheba’s tent and knew her,” that means “they had sex or made love.” So to “know” the cosmos - the “cosmos” is the word Thomas uses for “the world” is to “make love to a corpse.”

To be clear: the words “cosmos” or “world” have a specialized meaning and usage in the mystical tradition. They don’t mean our beautiful, fragile, living planet earth or even the cosmos as Iliia Delio redefines it for us as this expanding, evolving, creative and entangled mass of energy. These words refer to the horizontal axis as taken as an end in itself. You see this reflected clearly in the religion of our culture, consumerism, where one of the most well known scripture verses is: “the one who dies with the most toys wins.”

When Jesus teaches us to leave home, as we looked at last week, to “hate” father and mother, he is not asking us to dishonor anyone or to dismiss and withdraw from the physical universe. That would be a basic and fundamental contradiction of the principle of incarnation. Rather, he is calling us to awaken, to re-member - which is the opposite of dis-member, to regain a vertical perspective. Making love to a corpse is about as horizontal as it gets.

The only way we can really be of use to the planet and to each other is if we develop the capacity and the willingness to assume personal responsibility and “stand to our feet.”

The vivid, if not repulsive, metaphor of “making love to a corpse” is Thomas’ way of describing the condition of falling asleep, of being seduced by the trivialities of this world; of being on that dead end street. To do this work is, I believe, fulfilling another teaching of Jesus of learning how consciously to “be in the world but not of it.”

I’m calling this talk today, “Getting Back into Dodge.”

I'm sure you've heard the phrase, in one form or another, "Get the hell outta Dodge."

The first reference I could find of this is from movies, Westerns, in the late 19th to early mid 20th century. Most memorably, the phrase was made famous by the TV show "Gunsmoke," in which villains were often commanded to "get the hell out of Dodge."

The "Dodge" in question is Dodge City Kansas and it was picked because Dodge City became a gateway to history that began with the opening of the Santa Fe Railway system in 1821. Thousands of wagons trailed the Mountain Branch of the trail which went west from Dodge City to the north bank of the Arkansas River into Colorado.

Spiritually and psychologically, and for a variety of reasons, it seems that we spend the first half of our lives getting out of Dodge, getting away from our true Self and true Source. The work I'm trying to promote in these talks is getting back into Dodge.

I have had a couple of requests to elaborate more on a couple of things from last week.

From time to time, someone new to these talks, either in person or on-line will ask me, "What do you mean by non-dual mind?"

I can't tell you. Not directly at any rate. Non-dual mind is the ability to comfortably embrace contradiction and paradox. In Eastern religions it is represented by the Ying-Yang principle. Zen Koans attempt to communicate it in sayings like, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

Occasionally a figure in the public spotlight will say something that makes your brain knot-up, you know?

Brooke Shields during an interview when she became a spokesperson for a federal anti-smoking campaign said, "Smoking kills. If you're killed, you've lost a very important part of your life."

Winston Bennet, University of Kentucky basketball forward said about a medical procedure he was to undergo, "I've never had major knee surgery on any other part of my body."

When he was mayor of Washington, D.C. Marion Barry said, "Outside of the killings, Washington has one of the lowest crime rates in the country."

I love this one. A congressional candidate in this wonderful state said, "That lowdown scoundrel deserves to be kicked to death by a jackass, and I'm just the one to do it."

When he was Philadelphia Phillies manager, Danny Ozark said, "Half of this game in ninety percent mental."

Optical illusions can also jar us out of duality because they force us to see two true things as one or in one picture.

Puns do this. I don't know why puns have gotten such a bad rap. A pun is simply a joke that is fully groan.

Occasionally the Chronicle will publish one of my puns. They published this: The workers at the Kleenex factory went on strike. Now they have to picket.

Two cannibals were eating a clown and one said to the other, "Does this taste funny to you?"

One cannibal said to the other, "I hate my mother-in-law." The other cannibal said, "Well, try the vegetables."

Good cartoons can do it.

Jesus was a genius at telling stories that virtually kicked the listener into a non-dual mind state. Perhaps the best one goes like this:

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He told his next story to some who were complacently pleased with themselves over their moral performance and looked down their noses at the common people:

Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax man. The Pharisee posed and prayed like this: “Oh, God, I thank you that I am not like other people - robbers, crooks, adulterers, or, heaven forbid, like this tax man. I fast twice a week and tithe on all my income.”

Meanwhile the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, “God, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.”

Jesus commented, “This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you’re going to end up flat on your face, but if you’re content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself.”

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The moment we identify with either one of these characters, we are “guilty of the sin of the other one.”

I’ll endeavor to keep trying to find ways to say what cannot be said. One way is to say that non-dual mind is a shift in both position and perspective that causes us to be constantly moving further out and deeper within at the same time. It is standing firmly and comfortably on the ground of knowing that there is no place to stand. Or, to flip that metaphor on its head, it is knowing with Archimedes of Syracuse that given a lever and a place to stand, we can move the world. Of course, we can’t stand in this world and do that. That is to say, we can’t make love to this world and do that.

That is what this teaching in Thomas is about. It is about being present to “what is” and to each other. If we could recapture this, the desirability and usefulness of this, we could experience a monumental leap forward. We could start being present to each other and contribute this presence as a gift to the world.

The problem is that our culture and our religion has not taught us how to be present. We have been taught how to get out of Dodge. Rather than presence being

our highest goal, taking positions has been. That's what you see going on all over the world today both in politics and in religious organizations. People take positions. People will die for their positions. People will kill for positions. The positions we take allow us to vilify other people.

The Jesus story I read to you a few minutes ago is trying to get the hearer, that's us, not to trust our status, our achievements or our possessions. We are simply to trust God.

Like you I use my dualistic mind to get here every week. My ego is really working at the beginning of our time together. Will you come? If you do, will you find it helpful? Will you like me? I don't want you to be disappointed, to think you've wasted your time. I don't want you to leave thinking you haven't learned something. I want you to think this is so valuable you'll come back next week.

Then, if we are both lucky, my ego will get out of the way and go stand over there somewhere and my Self shows up. Then another fear kicks in: that you will leave here thinking you have learned something. I do and I don't want this to be about learning something.

I do want to contribute to religious and spiritual literacy. I am astounded, both in the political and religious arena, how much ignorance there is out there. I got interviewed by the Houston Chronicle this week about the growing trend for people to say they are spiritual but not religious. I said I completely understood and sympathized with that. And, said something similar to what I just said about people taking position. When I did, the reporter said, "You've been listening to the political debates haven't you?"

I do want you to learn things. I want to learn things. Learning is so exciting to and for me. However, this gathering isn't ultimately about learning. It is about knowing. If we stop at the learning level, at the knowledge level, we are trapped in and by religion.

I'm sure you've heard speakers say, and this is usually said at high school or college commencement services, "If you remember only one thing I have said today, remember this . . . " And we can't remember it.

But if you remember only one thing I ever say to you, this is what I'd like you to remember: God is not out there! God is not out there to be managed by us and our ego's beliefs. We are inside Sacred Mystery and our goal is to be "managed," if you will, by that relationship in which we live and move and have our being.

We have to figure out ways, personally and corporately, to get back into Dodge. To be present. To stop loving and making love to that which does not give us life.

Believing is not about believing. Believing is useful at the dualistic level. Our spiritual work is to move us more and more into non-dual mind. Not non-dual thinking. That's dualistic thinking about non-dual mind.

How do we do that? How do we get back into Dodge?

The easiest way, though it is not easy, is to have a spiritual practice. The fact that it isn't easy is reflected in the fact that it is difficult for you to have a self-consciously chosen practice.

There are a couple of websites I can direct you to for help with this.

Spirituality and Practice is one of my favorites. I have known the people behind this site since way before there was an internet. They have a rich menu of matters that can help you along this path. (<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com> )

The other site I recommend is Spirituality and Health. (<http://spiritualityhealth.com> )

A few months ago while on their site I spotted an advertisement that was intriguing. The website I went to was called "Meaning to Pause." Here is what is on their home page: (<http://www.meaningtopause.com> )

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Today we move too fast – we are all so very busy trying to get it all done. Try as we might we may not be consciously in control of our thoughts. Our heads are filled with lists, errands, work, family and the chaos of everyday life...

Our intentions are good, we want to add gratitude, awareness and meaningful moments to our days...but time slips away – the evening comes and most of us have not fully lived in the present moment or reflected on our greater purpose.

The experts have told us that pausing several times during the day to reframe our thoughts will truly allow us to live our best life. The challenge is that we don't know HOW to do this. How can we remember to remember?

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They have a product for sale and I bought one. You can customize it. Mine is a set of prayer beads and a medallion which is inscribed with the word "Mindful." Every hour it gently vibrates to remind me: What's happening now? Am I here? What am I grateful for? Am I present? What am I learning? Am I in Dodge? Or, have I left?

I also said last week that in the beginning, and for centuries, what became Christianity and what we refer to as mysticism were one and the same. Not in all places and ways, to be sure. Just like now anybody can go back and dig up a lot not to like about organized religion.

At the same time, however, there is a tradition of perennial truth that matters and can be found in all traditions. You can see "contemplative mind" being taught in Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. There you find a long tradition of teaching of non-dual mind. They called it contemplation.

You can see this clearly in the writings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, the tradition that the Gospel of Thomas was part of. They called it contemplation and it produced things like the famous mystical book "The Cloud of Unknowing."

We know that non-dual consciousness was systematically taught in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Benedictine and Cistercians monasteries. The early



Franciscans benefited from this ancient understanding. The Dominicans beautifully exemplified it. The Carmelites gathered teachings from it in their ancient history in Palestine at Mount Carmel. Mystic Meister Eckhart would write of it in his books, especially "Ascent of Mount Carmel." Two of the contemplative movement's most brilliant lights were Teresa of Avila ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teresa\\_of\\_Ávila](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teresa_of_Ávila)) and John of the Cross. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_of\\_the\\_Cross](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_of_the_Cross))

Jesus taught the contemplative way only reluctantly. That is, he taught it verbally only reluctantly. The only thing, as far as the record shows, that Jesus' disciples ever asked him to teach them was how to pray. He taught it, like most mystics did, by example.

I'm sure you've had teachers say to you at some point, "Now put your thinking cap on." Non-duality is reached by taking your "thinking cap" off and putting the "contemplative mind" on. They are two entirely different kinds of software. One is called "the egoic operating system." The other is called "the contemplative mind."

But then we got out of Dodge. After the fights of the Reformation, after the over-rationalization of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, after the Enlightenment, after all sorts of "wars of religion" - (They are even called that! See - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French\\_Wars\\_of\\_Religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Wars_of_Religion) and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_wars\\_of\\_religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_wars_of_religion)) the religious thing to do was to get out of Dodge and become defensive and circle the wagons around rational arguments. Spiritual truths and principles became rigid doctrines about which people could not only be right or wrong but also over which people would fight and die. John Calvin had one of his opponents come to hear him preach one day, had him arrested - Calvin was also mayor the city - and had him burned at the stake. The path to the Sacred, except it was no path at all!, was no longer non-dual mind but dualistic thinking about correct beliefs which, frankly, offers no inspiration whatsoever and only drives many away from Jesus and his teachings.

If we are going to get back into Dodge, we have to find or be found, by ways that destabilize the self-referential ego. How sad it is that we have identified all knowing with the top three inches of our body. One of the things I love about the Enneagram is that it emphasizes the importance of the head, the heart and the gut.

Our spiritual work is to get all three aspects of us completely back into Dodge. That is to say, completely here. Truth is not something we say. Truth is someone we become, something we are, the way we live.

Because we have not been teaching this, we have created a lot of neurotic and angry people who are unable to deal with the growing complexities of our global becoming. There is something insane about people coming out of mosques and churches ready to kill. The “egoic” mind sees everything through the lens of its own private needs and hurts, angers and memories. It is too small a lens to see truthfully or wisely or deeply.

With the “egoic operating system” we put ourselves at the center: our hurts, our needs, our perspectives.

With the “contemplative mind” we work to empty the mind and fill the heart.

Believing in Jesus has been substituted for sharing the faith of Jesus. Faith in Jesus is not the same as the Faith of Jesus.

Stories are one of the ways we can move from the “egoic” operating system to the contemplative state. Here is one of my favorite stories of all time. It comes from a book titled "How Can I Help."

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The train clanked and rattled through the suburbs of Tokyo on a drowsy spring afternoon. Our car was comparatively empty - a few housewives with their kids in tow, some old folks going shopping. I gazed absently at the drab houses and dusty hedgerows.

At one station the doors opened, and suddenly the afternoon quiet was shattered by a man bellowing violent, incomprehensible curses. The man staggered into our car. He wore laborer's clothing, and he was big, drunk, and dirty. Screaming, he swung at a woman holding a baby. The blow sent her spinning into the laps of an elderly couple. It was a miracle that the baby was unharmed.

Terrified, the couple jumped up and scrambled toward the other end of the car. The laborer aimed a kick at the retreating back of the old woman but missed as she scuttled to safety. This so enraged the drunk that he grabbed the metal pole in the center of the car and tried to wrench it out of its stanchion. I could see that one of his hands was cut and bleeding. The train lurched ahead, the passengers frozen with fear. I stood up.

I was young then, some twenty years ago, and in pretty good shape. I'd been putting in a solid eight hours of Aikido training nearly every day for the past three years. I liked to throw and grapple. I thought I was tough. The trouble was, my martial skill was untested in actual combat. As students of Aikido, we were not allowed to fight.

“Aikido,” my teacher had said again and again, “is the art of reconciliation. Whoever has the mind to fight has broken his connection to the universe. If you try to dominate people, you are already defeated. We study how to resolve conflict, not how to start it.”

I listened to his words. I tried hard. I even went so far as to cross the street to avoid the pinball punks who lounged around the train stations. My forbearance exalted me. I felt both tough and holy. In my heart, however, I wanted an absolutely legitimate opportunity whereby I might save the innocent by destroying the guilty.

“This is it!” I said to myself as I got to my feet. “People are in danger. If I don’t do something fast, somebody will probably get hurt.”

Seeing me stand up, the drunk recognized a chance to focus his rage. “Aha!” he roared. “A foreigner! You need a lesson in Japanese manners!”

I held on lightly to the commuter strap overhead and gave him a slow look of disgust and dismissal. I planned to take this turkey apart, but he had to make the first move. I wanted him mad, so I pursed my lips and blew him an insolent kiss.

“All right!” he hollered. “You’re gonna get a lesson.” He gathered himself for a rush at me.

A fraction of a second before he could move, someone shouted “Hey!” It was earsplitting. I remember the strangely joyous, lilting quality of it - as though you and a friend had been searching diligently for something, and he had suddenly stumbled upon it. “Hey!”

I wheeled to my left; the drunk to his right. We both stared down at a little, old Japanese man. He must have been well into his seventies, this tiny gentleman, sitting there immaculate in his kimono. He took no notice of me, but beamed delightedly at the laborer, as though he had a most important, most welcome secret to share.

“C’mere,” the old man said in an easy vernacular, beckoning to the drunk. “C’mere and talk with me.” He waved his hand lightly.

The big man followed, as if on a string. He planted his feet belligerently in front of the old gentleman, and roared above the clacking wheels, “”Why the hell should I talk to you?” The drunk now had his back to me. If his elbow moved so much as a millimeter, I’d drop him in his socks.

The old man continued to beam at the laborer. “What’cha been drinkin’?” he asked, his eyes sparkling with interest. “I been drinkin’ sake,” the laborer bellowed back, “and it’s none of your business!” Flecks of spittle spattered the old man.

“Oh, that’s wonderful,” the old man said, “absolutely wonderful! You see, I love sake too. Every night, me and my wife (she’s seventy-six, you know), we warm up a little bottle of sake and take it out into the garden, and we sit on an old wooden bench. We watch the sun go down, and we look to see how our persimmon tree is doing. My great-grandfather planted that tree, and we worry about whether it will recover from those ice storms we had last winter. Our tree has done better than I expected, though, especially when you consider the poor quality of the soil. It is gratifying to watch when we take our sake and go out to enjoy the evening - even when it rains!” He looked up at the laborer, eyes twinkling.

As he struggled to follow the old man’s conversation, the drunk’s face began to soften. His fists slowly unclenched. “Yeah,” he said. “I love persimmons, too . . .” His voice trailed off.

“Yes,” said the old man, smiling, “and I'm sure you have a wonderful wife.”

“No,” replied the laborer. “My wife died.” Very gently, swaying with the motion of the train, the big man began to sob. “I don't got no wife, I don't got no home, I don't got no job. I'm so ashamed of myself.” Tears rolled down his cheeks, a spasm of despair rippled through his body.

Now it was my turn. Standing there in my well-scrubbed youthful innocence, my make-this-world-safe-for-democracy righteousness, I suddenly felt dirtier than he was.

Then the train arrived at my stop. As the doors opened, I heard the old man cluck sympathetically. “My, my,” he said, “that is a difficult predicament, indeed. Sit down here and tell me about it.”

I turned my head for one last look. The laborer was sprawled on the seat, his head in the old man's lap. The old man was softly stroking the filthy, matted hair. As the train pulled away, I sat down on a bench. What I wanted to do with muscle had been accomplished with kind words. I had just seen Aikido tried in combat, and the essence of it was love. I would have to practice the art with an entirely different spirit. It would be a long time before I could speak about the resolution of conflict.

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Our world is hurting from the results of our addiction to thoughts and opinions and from exercise of force and power and blindness. What people are trying to do with all sorts of shows of strength won't work. The essence of the teaching of Jesus is love and if we are to follow his way, we will have to practice life with an entirely different spirit. I hope - for our sakes, for the world's sake, for God's sake - we can do that.

I hope we can get back into Dodge.

No matter where you go this week, no matter what happens, remember this: you carry precious cargo. So, watch your step.