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## THE MANY FACES OF TIME

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*Time is too slow for those who wait,  
too swift for those who fear,  
too long for those who grieve,  
too short for those who rejoice,  
but for those who love,  
time is eternity.*

– Henry Van Dyke

### Abstract

We have many perceptions of time, not only that of the clock ticking and the sands of time dwindling in a cosmic hourglass. Shamanic time, the sense of time in traditional healing, provides important alternative perspectives on ways in which time may be problematic or healing in our lives. Deeper understandings of time provide broader lessons for wholistic living.

Key Words: Time, healing, shamanism, planetary healing

### Introduction

Despite our feeling that we all know about time – from our everyday experiences of dealing with it – time is actually a very complex concept. The more we study it, the more mysterious it becomes.

### Personal experiences of time

Our clock time enables us to work in groups, large and small. We get up in time to join the family for breakfast and to get to our jobs so we can work together with others who have done the same.

*People of today relate to time in a way that is surely unique in our history. The technologies and economic forces unleashed by Industrial Growth Society radically alter our experience of time. It is like being trapped in an ever-shrinking box, in which we race on a treadmill. The economy and*

*its technologies depend on decisions made at lightning speed for short-term goals, cutting us off from nature's rhythms and from the past and future, as well. Marooned in the present, we are progressively blinded to the sheer ongoingness of time. Both the company of our ancestors and the claims of our descendants become less and less real to us....To make the transition to a life-sustaining society...we need to attune to longer, ecological rhythms and nourish a strong, felt connection with past and future generations...*

– Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown

Our inner sense of time may often vary considerably from clock time. Time passes quickly when we're enjoying ourselves but may seem to drag interminably when we are bored or uninterested in what is going on around us. We may have experienced being so immersed in a delicious conversation, a stroll through nature, a piece of music or other entertainment that we overlook or forget to connect with the outer world of clock time.

*When you are courting a nice girl an hour seems like a second. When you sit on a red-hot cinder a second seems like an hour. That's relativity.*

– Albert Einstein.

Different people may relate very differently to time. Some are very regular in their inner rhythms of timing. They wake, eat and sleep on personal schedules that match clock time very closely. Others have an inner rhythm that is widely variable, and may wake, eat and sleep at very different times each day. These characteristics are noticeable from the first month of life (Chess, 1968).

Our emotions may alter our sense of time. When we're happy, time passes quickly; when depressed or anxious, the sands of time ooze ever so slowly through our fingers.

Choosing our priorities for investing our time may vary between people and pressures in our lives that call for our attention.

The work will wait while you show your child the rainbow, but the rainbow won't wait while you do the work.

– Patricia Clafford

In longer time frames, we have lunar cycles – the waxing and waning of the moon. Research has shown that animals are sensitive to lunar cycles, so presumably humans probably are too – though in humans the awareness is so far outside of consciousness that it is mostly unconfirmed. Women are often more sensitive than men to lunar cycles, as they roughly correspond in length to their menstrual cycles

Dean Radin and Jannine Rebman (1994) review reports on lunar correlates with human behaviors at or near the full moon: research shows significant correlations with homicides (Geller/ Shannon), psychiatric hospital admissions (H. Friedman et al.; Weiskott/ Tipton), and various other crises (Snoyman/ Holdstock). Other studies show *inconsistent correlations* with madness (J. B. Chapman), homicides (Pokorn/ Jackimczyk), and other findings that could be simply coincidental, as in calls to fire and police stations (Frey et al). A meta-analysis in 1985 concluded there was insufficient evidence to support correlations of lunar phase with lunacy (Rotton/ Kelly), but a later reconsidered opinion suggested that an effect was present but was very small, on the order of 25.7% vs. the 25% expected by chance.

Radin and Rebman then summarize their study in Clark County, Nevada on the correlations of lunar phase with 37 variables related to human behaviors and weather conditions. Significant positive correlations were noted between lunar phases and psychotic behaviors; total deaths; death rate for motor vehicle accidents for men; and stock prices. significant correlations were noted with the full moon for crisis calls; strange behaviors; homicide overall (male homicide *increases*; female *decreases*); male deaths; female deaths; and female motor vehicle accidents. Abrupt changes were

also found in the rates of suicides (rising with the waxing moon, dropping sharply at the full moon); total deaths (dropping 7-9 days before and 2-6 days after the full moon); and crisis calls (rising sharply on the day of the full moon).

There are seasonal cycles of warmth and cold; rains and drought; leafing and flowering of the plant world and dying off of leaves and annual growths; and the planting and harvesting of cultivated crops.

Annual cycles of time are also associated with recurring shifts in positions of the planets and stars in the skies. Astrological lore has it that our lives may be influenced by these shifts of positions of heavenly bodies, relative to the date and time of our birth. I was surprised to find meticulous, replicated research confirming astrological predictions of success in people's professions as predicted by their date and time of birth (Gauquelin, 1969). More impressive yet is the finding that these predictions hold for natural births but not for Caesarian births.

Then, there are geological frameworks of time. These are normally outside our awareness. However concerns over global heating ('warming' seems an unacceptable euphemism!) have made this a prominent item on our screens of current events. It is certain that our planet is endangered by human-generated carbon dioxide emissions. Worse yet will be the heating generated when methane starts to escape into the atmosphere from its frozen state in arctic permafrost, which will create an irreversible heating that will destroy life as we know it on our planet today (Barry, 2006). Gaia, our ecobiological system, will survive – as she has done for several billions of years. This has apparently included at least one period of global heating in which 98 percent of life forms then living became extinct. It took about 100 million years for life to evolve again into the diversities we are familiar with today.

We commonly remember time past as a river of experiences that have flowed downstream from where we are now. The more distant droplets of memory often become misty to our perceptions from being far away. However, there can be twigs or logs floating ever so far away in the stream of time that we still perceive with absolute clarity. Usually, these are items that were emotionally moving to us and therefore imprinted themselves on our awareness. Surprisingly, these also may be random items with no apparent logical or emotional significance.

Future time is built mostly out of our anticipations and imagination, based on past experiences, fantasy, wishful or fearful thinking. However, this is not the only source of awareness of future time.

Future time can be built on intuitive perceptions as well. Psychic, precognitive images may come to us as clear and vivid awarenesses or may be vague and sometimes even disguised in obscure images, in much the same manner as fantasies, dreams and nightmares come to us. There is a surprisingly robust body of research confirming that precognitive abilities are present in many people. Honorton and Ferrari (1989) identified all 'forced-choice' precognitive experiments in the period of 1935 to 1987, including 309 studies in 113 articles by 62 different investigators. There were nearly 2 million individual trials, with over 50,000 subjects. Methods ranged from cards used specifically to test psychic abilities to fully automated, computer-generated, randomly presented symbols. The intervals between guesses and generation of future targets ranged from milliseconds to a year. A meta-analysis of the 309 studies found the odds against chance in this series were ten million billion billion to one ( $10 \times 10^{22}$ ).

Intuitives, psychics and healers may regularly access information from the past and from the future. While their accuracy is never one hundred percent, it is high enough that their advice has been sought throughout recorded time (Inglis ; Shallis ).

*The future enters into us  
in order to transform itself in us  
long before it happens.*

– Rainer Maria Rilke

Moving down this list of personal experiences of time, we can see that what appeared at first to be a

firm concept begins to be fuzzy around the edges, at the least, as we delve deeper into its mysteries. The deeper we get the more complex and unclear the concept of time can become.

As we access intuitive awarenesses that go outside our ordinary conceptions of time, we enter domains where the rules for consciousness are different from our everyday consciousness. Meditative and spiritual experts tell us that there is no time other than the ever-present *Now* (Tolle). Whatever is past is just a memory; whatever is future is only our speculations.

The most impacting experience of time is the duration of a human life. We celebrate births and deaths as major events. We hope that the time allotted to us will suffice to complete the tasks we feel are important for us to achieve – personally and professionally.

*You cannot do a kindness too soon because you never know how soon it will be too late.*  
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

### **Time as a measure**

*And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.*

– Abraham Lincoln

In Western society, we assess some of our activities as more or less successful, measured within certain timeframes.

We have athletic contests to see who can run or swim a given distance in the shortest time. We then work hard to beat our own best times in these contests.

Academic performance and IQ are assessed in tests that allow a limited time for responding to sets of questions. Work performance is often linked to achieving certain production goals within a set time period.

Age is counted in years following birth. Anniversaries of family members' and friends' birthdates, graduations, engagement, marriage and deaths are celebrated and commemorated.

Costs of health, disability and retirement insurances are calculated according to the numbers of years we have survived, and the statistically estimated average numbers of years remaining in our lives.

### **Time in Newtonian and quantum physics**

Conventional, Newtonian physics includes time as measures of action and force. The speed of a billiard ball or automobile determines the impact it will have on another billiard ball, automobile or person.

Newtonian physics determined that the speed of light appears to be a constant. Light travels 186,000 miles per second. This was thought to be an absolutely firm constant number. Quantum physics found that there are varieties of apparent anomalies in the speed of light. For instance, if you were traveling at the speed of light and threw a baseball out ahead of you, you could not get it to go faster than the speed of light. If one of a pair of twins left earth in a spaceship that traveled at the speed of light, she would be younger than her twin sister upon her return to earth. Various experiments in quantum physics have validated aspects of these theories.

We thus have mathematical theories and objective evidence that time is not what we take it to be in our everyday world.

## Shamanic healing time

Heloisa Porto, a shamanic counselor who went to Peru to study with a shaman, returned with a lovely observation: Life flows much more gently and naturally when we are living in life's rhythms rather than in units of time arbitrarily cut out of the fabric our lives. The Peruvian shaman would offer lessons when the time was right. He might invite the students to gather the next day after breakfast for a lesson, but then be unavailable because he was napping till noon or otherwise engaged well into the afternoon. The time was right when he showed up for the teaching (Porto 2007).

Heloisa found it unsettling at first, but came to understand that his timing was not based on whim or issues of ego or control. She came to sense that the healing lessons were convened when the flow of energies and participants' consciousness were optimal. Sometimes it became apparent that the waiting would heighten expectations and sharpen appetites for what occurred, which might have lacked sufficient intensity without the buildup of spiritual intangibles during the period of waiting. On other occasions, there were no obvious reasons for the timings of healing lessons.

I call this "shamanic healing time." It has parallels in other healing traditions as well.

- Acupuncture and its related practices (Traditional Chinese Medicine, Applied Kinesiology, etc.) recommend that treatments be given at particular times of day – as related to the meridians (bioenergy lines) being addressed. Each of the twelve major meridians has specific times of day when they are maximally active and therefore most subject to therapeutic interventions.
- In Russia, researchers determined that there were optimal times of day for different healers' healing powers – as demonstrated in giving healing to promote growth of a series of separate pots of plants. That is, any one healer would produce the greatest growth at a particular time of day (Benor, 2007).
- Wholistic nutritionists advise that it is healthiest to eat foods that are grown in the concurrent season. Globalizing our food economy has given us options to eat summer fruits and vegetables year-round. This puts our bodies out of synchrony with the flow of collective energies. Some also suggest that eating out of season foods may be weakening our immune systems and contributing to allergies and other illnesses.
- The body holds memories of traumatic stress from the past, particularly when there has been a physical injury, but also when that part of the body tenses up and somehow imprints the memory without direct injury to that part of the body. These are injuries that are frozen in time, locked into the unconscious bodymind, waiting for the opportunity to stir awareness in a person so that they can be released. Though such releases may occur spontaneously, far more often they are observed in bodymind and bioenergetic therapies such as spiritual healing, energy psychology, craniosacral osteopathy and massage (Benor, 2004).
- Allowing the body its own time to heal, rather than rushing in with interventions, may be one of the wisest forms of healing (Shem, 2003).
- Past life therapy (PLT) extends our appreciation of consciousness that transcends a given lifetime. PLT can release traumatic psychological residues and karmic relationships that contribute to emotional distress, stressful relationships and illnesses. This is a common element in many shamanic traditions, and is growing slowly in acceptance in Western culture. This apparent transcending of time has no accepted explanations and raises many fascinating questions about our Western concepts of time (Benor, 2006).
- Spiritual teachings tell us that all time is in the eternal *Now*. The only thing we can truly know is what IS in the present moment. Anything past is just a memory; anything future is just a thought, fantasy or wish. This is not just a theory; not a teaching that one learns *about* the nature of our participation in the universe. It is a fact that anyone who meditates long enough or who reaches

enlightenment in some other manner knows to be true, as an absolute reality. This is an experiential knowing that carries with it a deep sense of self-validation (Tolle, 1999).

All of these traditions, therapies and practices have evidence from personal reports of countless spiritual seekers; some of these therapies extending over several thousands of years. It is encouraging to see that some also have modern research to validate them.

### **Implications from deeper understandings of the flow of time**

*Time and space are modes by which we think, not conditions under which we live.*  
– Albert Einstein

Time is a mythical concept. It exists in our minds. In everyday, sensory reality, clock time helps us to organize our social interactions. Many have come to assume that this is the only way to experience time. They find it difficult to consider, much less to comprehend that there may be other frameworks of reference for time. To a great extent, they have become prisoners within the walls of the structure of time as constructed in the world of sensory reality. It is difficult for them to conceive of other possible frameworks for experiencing and understanding time.

Myths are collective stories that inform and guide social groups so that they can maintain their cohesiveness. Myths provide common forms of reference that enable and facilitate cooperative, collective actions.

Myths come to take on greater structure in people's minds than is warranted. People in any given culture presume that their myths represent firmer explanations than are scientifically warranted; in many cases presuming that their explanations are the only valid ones. We have only to study cross-cultural explanations of mythic explanations of the cosmologies around time to see that any one of these myths is unlikely to contain the whole truth.

Western focus on linear time has led to rejection of healing approaches that include shamanic time. This is a loss to people on the receiving end of Western medical care.

Here are some ways that you might enhance and enrich your medical care with awareness of Shamanic time:

- Insist on scheduling elective surgery outside the days of the full moon. This will enhance your chances that you will not have excessive bleeding.
- Use your intuitional impressions, to the extent that they are developed and you are confident in the information you obtain using them, to help you make decisions on the best ways to spend your time in the minutes and hours and days you are spending in this classroom called life on earth.
- Allow your higher self to guide you in choosing your actions and investing your time, rather than choosing only through logic and reason.
- Consider that your sense of time and how you are investing it may be a limited perception, and that the lessons invited into your life that are not of your conscious choosing may also be important.

*Nothing is a waste of time if you use the experience wisely.*  
– Auguste Rodin

- Focus on being totally in the present moment for as long as you can, as often as you can.

The last three suggestions take us more deeply into the connections between our higher selves and our perceptions of time.

### **Broader implications from the analysis of time awareness**

*Each day should be devoted to miracles. The purpose of time is to enable you to learn how to use time constructively. It is thus a teaching device and a means to an end. Time will cease when it is no longer useful in facilitating learning.*

– A Course in Miracles

When we come to understand some of the cultural myths about time, we can see that other cultural myths relating to healthcare deserve examination in the light of our appreciations of mythic belief systems. To some extent, differences in time myths point to cultural preferences for intuitive vs. logical reasoning. Cultures that accept shamanic explanations of time usually have uninterrupted traditions of acceptance of intuitive awarenesses. The benefits here are that spiritual healing is well accepted and an integral part of healthcare. The risks are that there is no systematic assessment of therapeutic efficacy, and without these, then useless remedies and ineffectual healing rituals may be included in the shaman's formulary and practices.

Western medicine, relying strictly on logical reasoning, has increasingly focused on physical (and chemical) interventions for the physical body. This has led to advances in diagnosis and treatments. However, it has also built up a myth of proven benefits for Western medical interventions that is not supported by its own rules of evidence. A very high percent of conventional medical interventions have insufficient research to validate their efficacy. Worse yet, conventional medicine has dismissed intuitive/ bioenergetic/ shamanic healing because it is outside its mythic belief system.

*We've come to believe that the core capacity needed to access the field of the future is presence. We first thought of presence as being fully conscious and aware in the present moment. Then we began to appreciate presence as deep listening, of being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense. We came to see the importance of letting go of old identities and the need to control and, as Salk said, making choices to serve the evolution of life. Ultimately, we came to see all these aspects of presence as leading to a state of "letting come," of consciously participating in a larger field for change...*

*In the end, we concluded that understanding presence and the possibilities of larger fields for change can come only from many perspectives – from the emerging science of living systems, from the creative arts, from profound organizational change experiences, and from direct contact with the generative capacities of nature. Virtually all indigenous or native cultures have regarded nature or the universe or Mother Earth as the ultimate teacher. At few points in history has the need to rediscover this teacher been greater.*

– Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers (in *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*)

### **In conclusion**

*Dost thou love life, then do not squander time, for that's the stuff life is made of.'*

– Benjamin Franklin

Letting go of the myths and fetters of the past, we must connect with the problems of the present and deal with them collectively. Our planet is in need of our healing. It is time to address our world in deeper and more responsible ways. Life cannot survive on our planet if we do not take the time to stop global

heating, environmental pollution, exhaustion of natural resources, and population growth that is rampantly out of control.

*The time is always right to do what is right.*

– Martin Luther King Jr.,

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