

The Tao of Self-Fulfillment

A systemic framework to better connect to our world*

A WIDER LENS Blog by Dr. Kenneth Silvestri

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“How wonderful that we have met with a paradox. Now we have some hope of making progress”

— Niels Bohr

What follows may seem to some readers like a new language, which is perhaps necessary when business as usual is failing. It is my sense after working with many people and organizations looking to resolve problems that the solution starts with Self-Fulfillment. Yet Self-Fulfillment is not an individual endeavor. It takes two to know one. Can anyone doubt the urgency today to take care of each other? In order to accomplish this, a prerequisite is what author, educator and filmmaker Nora Bateson describes as “Symmathesy,” which is “to generate mutual learning through the process of interaction between multiple variables in a living entity.” She calls the resulting information from this process “Warm Data,” which is the “interrelationships that integrate elements of a complex system.” Since we are all part of living systems that are interconnected to how nature functions, it is within this framework that we can pursue our



Nora Bateson and Ken Silvestri
Source: Natasha Rabin

interdependence. This is the essence of “Tao,” the absolute principle underlying the universe. *Self-fulfillment becomes a systemic understanding of life and how we are connected.*

Context Beyond Content

Living systems are ecologically driven. They adjust and maintain, but don’t adhere to narrow cause and effect means to exist. In nature, there are seldom dichotomies or opposites, as expressed in the Yin and Yang of the “Tao.” This dynamic emphasizes context

over *content* and is a means of understanding the many contradictions or paradoxes in life. For instance, Self-Fulfillment is usually defined through *content*, which quantifies high self-esteem, a good paying job and family values. Viewing it through *context* would be to ask qualitatively how someone exhibits a good feeling about themselves, utilizes their resources and maintains a healthy family life. Big difference!

Content without context stifles our ability to grow and evolve. This is the core of almost every major problem that confronts us. Ignoring our context makes it too easy to miss our interdependency with others and the world. We all intuitively know, for example, that climate, diet, stress and their many manifestations interact with and influence our human condition.

Here is another important thing to know about systems—they all fall toward disorder. This is called entropy. With maintenance or feedback, this movement can be slowed down through a process known as homeostasis. We can feel its results for instance, by gauging our temperature at 98.6. However, what's important is to understand about systemic activity is that it can also be dysfunctional. A clock can, with a few bent gears, tell a 28-hour day. This is not very useful and potentially injurious, as is some members of a family being influenced by an addictive substance, or using another medication to deal with side effects of previous medication, and so on.

Collaboration Beyond Partnership

The thing to remember is that systems are all interconnected. The whole is more than the sum of its parts and solutions are available when we recognize this. Being mere partners will not suffice in this process, as is the case of the pig and chicken producing a ham and egg sandwich. Interdependency calls for mutual learning in the form of collaboration. In this situation: a happy piggy organic ham flavored tofu and egg sandwich, which has a positive effect on the ecology of healthy humans, food production etc. and of course the pig.

When I go about facilitating those who seek my help, I encourage them to be in the present and explore problems through their relationships. We cannot change the past, but we don't have to minimize or condone injurious patterns that have produced our dilemmas. This consists of respecting those many "liminal" moments, the ever-present times that offer a means to explore new and exciting transitions within our many interconnected possibilities. Just imagine the differences that are available. This,

unfortunately, does not always happen as we tend to polarize things in our culture. The consequence is to miss these opportunities.

Solutions Beyond Maintenance

Mahatma Gandhi said that “our values become our destiny.” Every situation that causes us to assess our injurious patterns can provide solutions. This is where a peripheral lens, one that simultaneously zooms in and out, will lead to wider perspectives. It can also help dissolve paradoxes before they create those devastating “dammed if you do and dammed if you don’t” double binds. New questions arise to help make sense regarding our destiny. What are you not getting at this moment in your life that causes you concern? Have you widened your perspective relevant to identified problems? Do you know what you need to change? What mutual opportunities exist to make significant improvements in your community and society?

Once you recognize how systems work, it is much easier to create supportive environments that encourage mutual learning (Symmathesy) and respect relationships (Warm Data). It will not always be smooth sailing. Like Quantum Physics there will be many different views, all of which can be correct. Unpredictable outcomes will occur, as they do every moment in nature, yet there is an infinite amount of choice for a new avenue of creativity. Probably, this creativity or aesthetic human attribute is as close as we will get to blend with nature. This can include sharing outcomes through collective activism and artistic expression, be it poetry, meditation or any form of art, or mind/body exercises like Qigong, Tai Chi, Aikido, Yoga, etc.

Don’t be too hard on yourself. It is in our innate human capability to accept our fallibility. This is what helps systems re-calibrate and energize to take advantage of those interfacing edges leading to transcontextual explorations. Remember like any ecological system, you can always adjust and eventually amend identified concerns. Ask the happy piggy, the true Tao of fulfillment lies in the patterns that continue to allow us to mutually learn and connect.

*This blog was inspired by a recent conversation with Nora Bateson