
Time

By François San-Gyo Baude

- *"Have you thought about..."*
- *"Sorry, I didn't have time".*

How many times a day do we start this dialogue with others or with ourselves?

And yet, everything is done to help us save time: faster TGV, faster Internet connection, fast-food, etc. Result: we have the impression to live in a world of race, of headlong rush, under the dictatorship of time. Only 24 hours in a day is really too short.

When we "do nothing", a feeling of guilt can invade us; we owe it to ourselves - even on holiday - to have a lot of activities: diving, visits, sports, reading... Yes, during the working weeks, "I didn't have the time, the weekends were too busy, but now I'm making up for lost time". And when we are confronted with something that seems uninteresting, or when we find ourselves doing nothing, we say to ourselves: "I'm wasting my time!"

Result: Time becomes a dictatorship that generates permanent suffering. When will it stop? But when we ask ourselves this question: "When will it stop?", it is a reference to our own death and to the fear of not having finished or achieved something on time. And so, in order not to waste time, we go back to the dictatorship of time.

On the basis of this observation, how can we find other ways, or conceive another method for approaching time, to get out of this suffering?

What is time?

Our representation of time is a kind of continuous, unstoppable flow, which unfolds according to a past-present-future logic. But is this a concrete reality?

This "Western", logical representation of time is conceived by our brain thanks to two capacities: memory (the past) and imagination (the future). We find this very logical and it gives time a "tangible" reality. Time then takes on a "material" dimension (we measure it, we calculate it, it takes on a concrete, real dimension in our mind) and we are then able to gain it, lose it, waste it, even kill it! Then our brain, which is very "playful", wanders with delight between the past and the future. Driving, you swerved to avoid a dog and your car is in the ditch. On the side of the road, you say to yourself:

- "Why on earth did I do that?" (Past)
- "Not today, I have an important meeting at 9 o'clock!" (Future)
- "I should have braked" (Past tense)
- "And on top, the car must be ruined" (Future)
- "All because of this guy who let his dog run loose" (Past tense)
- "I'm going to be called to order again" (Future)
- and so on...

And while our mind wander between the guilt of the past and the fear of the future, (which is an excellent way to ruin our lives, to make ourselves suffer), we do not act... And time flies! Let's take a closer look:

The past does not exist, it is only the mental representation that we make of it. Indeed, what

we remember is not necessarily the reality of this past time. For example, if you revisit a place from your childhood, you will tend to find it very small.

The future does not exist, it is only the mental construction that we make of it.

So, look at the time we spend in 2 worlds that don't exist, ruining our lives most of the time, on purely mental constructions, compared to the time we spend in acting in the present or enjoying the present moment... Like this wonderful sunrise!
Only the present is real.

"Nothing happens in the past, it happened in the present, nothing happens in the future, it will happen in the present. The past is only an old memorised present moment, the future is only an imagined present moment. When the future happens, it is in the form of the present. The danger of escaping from the present moment is the danger of missing out on your life".
Gerard Chinrei Pilet, Master of the Zen tradition.

At this point, we understand that this representation of time in the form of past/present/future is only an intellectual construction and that there is nothing concrete, material and tangible in it. This opens the first doors to get out of the suffering linked to "time":

- If in a given situation my mental construction of past/present/future brings me happiness and efficiency: I keep it

- If, on the contrary, it brings me suffering, I change it... It is only a mental construction!

Of course, in the latter case, this does not mean that we have the immediate resources to change this construction, but we know that it is possible and therefore we enter into an active process to get the necessary resources and not to suffer.

"The blocking experience is not in the world; it is in my mind".
Stephen Gilligan.

But then, what else can time be?

We have just seen that what appeared to be concrete and real, a time that unfolds according to the past/present/future pattern, is only a purely intellectual concept, linked to the functioning of our human brain. However, we should not reject this approach, because it can be very practical in daily life for planning, making appointments, storing information.

Are there other types of time that we experience?

Being able to broaden our perceptions, to acquire other ways of seeing, of acting, will allow us to adapt to more situations.

If we do a micro-analysis, we could say that there are as many different types of time than people on this earth. Edward T. Hall proposes 9 major types of time ("The dance of life. Cultural time, lived time". Editions du Seuil):

- **Biological time:**

This is the internal rhythm of a life form, to remain in harmony with the environment to which it must adapt. For example, day/night, hot/cold, humidity/drought, seasons, tides, etc. We feel it when we travel with the jet lag that disrupts our internal clock. The biological time of crabs and oysters depends on the ebb and flow of the tides. Michel Siffre's experiments in caves, disconnected from the solar rhythm and without any time references (e.g., watch, regular links

with the surface, etc.) showed that our biological time was closer to 25 hours than our usual life rhythm regulated on days of 24 ours.

- Individual time:

This is our personal perception of time. It is totally subjective and depends on environment and our psychological factors. It is the sensation of a long time that never ends or, on the contrary, that runs away. The best example is a football match: there are 5 minutes left to play, your team wins 1-0. How long do you feel these 5 minutes last? Conversely, your team loses 1 to 0: a fraction of a second, isn't it?

- Physical time:

Thanks to the observation done during thousands of years about unchanging physical phenomena (rotation of the sun, planets, length of day or night, etc.) human beings have been able to determine uniform results. This has enabled him to create the notions of days, solstices, seasons, calendars; and thus, to create a standard for situating events.

The term "physical time" refers to observations of unchanging physical phenomena.

- Metaphysical time:

We can see it as the opposite of physical time, or as its complement. It is independent of our sensitive experience and knowledge; it is an access to a world and/or processes that exist "beyond". It is beyond the realm of the senses. We could call it "time distortion". In concrete terms, most of us have already experienced moments of "d  j   vu", a "d  j   v  cu" that cannot be explained. Studies are regularly conducted on people who had supra-sensory experiences, quite extraordinary, but which cannot be dismissed as "demented" testimonies.

- Micro-time:

This is a temporal system specific to a culture, to a region.

It is unconsciously applied by the individuals who are composing it.

Micro-time is one of the essential elements of culture.

- Synchrony:

It has been discovered quite recently that people naturally synchronise their movements (cf. Grindler and Bandler's work in NLP, and recently in neuroscience with the "mimetic" brain). At the level of a group, for example a city, a company, this synchronisation will give a rhythm to this community. Each city has its own rhythm. It should be noted that non-synchronous individuals disturb and do not adapt. For example, this is the experience of provincials who arrive in Paris and have the impression that everyone is running. If they keep their own pace, they are jostled or even insulted.

- Sacred time:

Sacred time or mythical time is found in ceremonies. When we take part to the ceremony, we enter both the ceremony and the time of the ceremony. One then ceases to live in ordinary

time, or "clock" time, to be in a "magical" time where one does not age. This allows access to the divine, the spiritual.

- Profane time:

This is the time that dominates daily life today and its explicit aspects, the one we talk about, the one we formulate. It is expressed in seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, years, centuries, etc. It is taken for granted, whereas it is an elaboration of our civilisation. As we said earlier, the fact that we can measure it precisely, calculate it, means that we tend to give it a "concrete" dimension and therefore want to control it. It can also be called "clock" time. Although it can be a source of suffering, it is also very practical in social life for structuring, planning and organising (for example appointments, catching a train, etc.).

- Meta-time:

Based on the different types of time we have just seen, meta-time is the sum of studies, writings, reflections of philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists and other researchers on the concept and nature of time. It is not time in the true sense of the word, but an abstract entity, a theory built on the sum of these reflections made from very different points of view.

Zooming in on Hopi Indian time

Let's continue to broaden our perception of time ... And to do so, let's have a look at the cultural way in which the Hopi Indians in the United States operate with regard to time. The Navajo Indians are similar in some respects.

For the record, Westerners consider time as a continuous flow of "past - present - future", very concrete and real because it can be measured and given a numerical value, and this give the impression of being able to master it, control it, lose it, gain it or waste it.

For the Hopi, time is experienced as an eternal present, they live in the "now". Life is perceived as a direct contact with the present moment and its experience.

For example, when a Hopi Indian says: "It rained last night", we know that this is the result of his experience in the present moment. Either he himself noticed the rain, or a friend came home wet, or he saw the wet ground and deduced that it had rained.

As for the Hopi and Navajo, future is unreal and uncertain, and the prospect of future profits does not motivate or interest them. The notion of "ahead" or "behind" has no meaning for them. The experience of time is therefore natural, like breathing and seasons; it is just a rhythmic element of life.

Living in this eternal present means that time is not experienced as an eternal tyrant, nor is it equated with money or progress of any kind. As a result, the cultural reaction time (in the sense of the time needed for members of a culture to deal with a threat) varies greatly:

-- For Westerners: haste

-- For Hopi and Navajo: slow (feel, wait for consensus).

First track to happiness: the Present Moment.

We can now clearly see that one of the main sources of suffering (that we inflict on ourselves!) is our brain's ability to wander in two imaginary worlds, the past and the future, while missing the only concrete thing: the present.

This suffering is fuelled by the mistakes of the past: "Why did I do that! If I had known" where we feel guilty, which automatically propels us into a dark future: "I'll never get out of this", to return to the past "I should have done that...". See our example of the car in the ditch.

To go into the underlying emotional register, we see that this past-future mechanism creates, feeds and solidifies our fear. As much as fear is a beneficial emotion that allows us to flee a danger (the sideways jump when the bus brushes against us) and therefore disappears when the very real danger is far away, it is destructive when we feed it on unreal mental constructions. Fear can then turn into anguish, into neurosis.

In addition to this guilt, this "past-future" fear is often linked to the fear of losing something (past orientation) and the fear of not achieving something (future orientation). This can bring up a very deep fear linked to our existence and our apprehension of death. But in the meantime, we miss out on the concrete, the real, the good times and our ability to act.

We can only act in the present. Effectiveness is "What do I do now to improve the future?" There is a proper time for everything. Right action, such as picking the ripe fruit, can only be done in the present moment. To act rightly, one must have a clear perception of the situation.

Stop lying to yourself:

"I didn't have time!"

Liar!

It's not so much that I didn't have time, it's that I made another choice.

One week is 168 hours. And within that limit I spend my time making conscious or unconscious choices. We always have a choice.

The second thing is to ask ourselves the question lucidly: "What are the consequences of my choice? If we enter into this intellectual mechanism of "I have no choice", it clearly means that we are leaving the choice of deciding our life to somebody else.

Let's go back to secular time.

A week is 168 hours. Let's take away 68 hours for the vital functions, as drinking, eating, sleeping and going to the toilet. As their names suggest it, they are vital and therefore unavoidable, sooner or later. That leaves us with 100 hours a week to do what our life choices are. That's not much, is it? Between the time to devote ourselves to our work, family, social life, marriage, plus time for ourselves, only for ourselves, time that makes sense for us ... 100 hours a week, 5.200 hours a year, 416.000 hours in the life of an 80-year-old.

"I didn't have time!"

Liar!

What did you prefer to do instead?

By this simple method, we have another key to get out of the suffering linked to our mental representation of time. Keep the choices that are good for us and our environment, change the choices that prove, after experience, to be toxic. What do I do now, lucidly, to improve the

future? Present-future.

100 hours a week, 5.200 hours a year, 416.000 hours in a lifetime to give meaning to our life, to realise ourselves, so that when the time comes, we can calmly say: "I can go in peace".

Zen approach:

"The truth is only revealed when we give up all preconceived ideas".

Master Gasan Joseki.

Through this broader look at the notion of time, here are two major keys to living our relationship to time with happiness:

- To be living in the present moment
- To be aware of the rightness of our choices and know how to adjust them, to be in harmony with ourselves and our surroundings.

In Zen practice, at the end of the last meditation of the day, you will hear:

*"With respect, I call your attention!
Each of us must clarify the great question of life and death.
Time passes quickly, like an arrow.
So, let us not be negligent".*