

Evolutionary Panentheism: a Theory, a Philosophy, an Experience

By Roger Kenneth Marsh, ITP Mastery Teacher & GLEE Co-leader

How do you know something outside of yourself? When I ask myself this question, it occurs to me I can know nothing outside of myself except **through** myself, that all my experience is, ultimately, a personal one. I know things through my internal experience of them, through my thoughts, feelings, sensations, images, smells and sounds. All of these things, while potentially activated or stirred by something outside, and potentially aligned with how others may experience something outside, occur inside and are totally personal to me.

Have you ever noticed how two people experiencing the same phenomenon can have two totally different experiences of it? Think of something simple like broccoli. Some people think it tastes delicious while others think it tastes terrible. What's the truth? Does broccoli taste delicious or terrible? Well, actually, both are true - one is true for one person, and one is true for the other. Perhaps this insight can apply to many things in life.



"The world will finally have one religion when each person has his or her own." - Anonymous

Many ITP practitioners, me included, think of our first practice commitment as "You are your own authority." For me, this commitment honors our unique and personal experience of all things. The full commitment as written by George Leonard and Michael Murphy reads:

"I take full responsibility for my practice and for all transformations of my body and being that flow from it. While respecting my fellow practitioners, I fully understand that I am the final authority. "

Michael Murphy has said: "A good philosophy should be experiential." The underlying theory and philosophy of ITP is Evolutionary Panentheism. [Click here to access Michael's white paper on the topic.](#) As with all things in life, it's important we each find our own truth, our own experience, of this theory. Without an experiential component, it remains simply words on a page. By experientially engaging the theory and philosophy, by looking in ourselves for how it occurs or doesn't occur for us, we can begin to develop our own interpretation, potentially bringing it alive in our own body, mind, heart and soul.

In leading The Samurai Game for ITP, facilitator Lance Giroux said in reference to his Aikido training, "It's only a rumor until it lives in the muscle." He was pointing towards the embodiment and actual

experience of any teaching, philosophy or phenomenon in the world. For it to be real and more than just a rumor, it must move from concept to embodied practice.

One of the beautiful things enabled by experientially engaging any phenomenon, is that we can then engage with others in a mutual exploration. There's an interesting underlying joy that arises when my experience of something aligns with the experience of another. For example, I may say "These strawberries are delicious," and another may say, "Yes, aren't they wonderful?" There's a joy in this mutual agreement and alignment of our experience in the world. It's now a shared experience that magnifies and expands my originally individual experience.

I also notice that if someone has a different experience from mine it can be equally delightful. I may further investigate my own experience and find some personal truth in what they have offered, hence expanding my experience. Or, I may simply honor their experience as their own and recognize the amazing array of experiences available to human beings.

Circling back to Evolutionary Panentheism, through my own personal engagement with it, I offer this summary for your consideration: "The divine that is in me, that is in all things, and that is even beyond the world, is becoming more and more known, expressed, and realized in both me, and the world, over time." As I look at my own life I find this to be experientially true. Things I only thought of, that were a rumor in my past, have become real, have become embodied, in my life. For example, the love I experience as the core of my being has become more and more known, expressed and realized in both me and the world over time.

In closing this article, I encourage you to not let the academic weight, or inertia, of terms like Evolutionary Panentheism stop you from exploring your personal experience of it. Like many things in life, once understood, it can be broken down into something relatively simple and accessible. Engage it, digest it and find and explore your own personal experience of it.

Evolutionary Panentheism is a theory, a philosophy and, at it's best, it's an experience.