

# The Travelers Within



## Exploring The Power of Paradox

*"I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing."*

— Plato, *The Republic*

Anyone who's traveled the road of life and gathered lessons along the way can appreciate Plato's musings about wisdom. They also understand that navigating life's journey's requires dealing with the challenges of confusion and dilemma, and most notably the conundrum of paradox.

The term "paradox" comes from Latin, "paradoxum," or "para" which means "contrary to expectation" and "dokein," or "doctrines of truth." A paradox is "a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated proves to be well founded or true." This explanation certainly fits many of life's most confounding challenges.

Not only is life filled with absurd and contradictory propositions, it is itself the ultimate paradox. Think about it for a moment; all living things must consume other living things in order to stay alive. Life is compelled to devour itself in order to sustain itself. How absurd and confounding is it that life must actually die unto itself in order to live? If that isn't the ultimate paradox I don't know what is.

Life's self-consuming paradoxical nature is an age-old conundrum the ancient Greeks called the "Ouroboros," (pronounced "ouh-row-bow-ross"). This confounding notion is depicted as a serpent devouring its own tail which symbolizes self-reflexivity and repeating cycles, especially in the sense of something constantly re-creating itself, such as the Eternal Return or the Phoenix which begins anew within the process of its own ending.

The Ouroboros also represents a paradoxical phenomenon called "Primordial Unity," the presence of an omnipotent power within something's essential origins; a resource of infinite capacity that cannot be extinguished even during its own demise. It is this extraordinary resource and the means by which to access it that I wish to explore and share with my fellow life travelers this week.

For those “self-made” travelers who attribute their life successes to willfulness, defiance or internal fortitude I want to clarify that the resource I’m referring to has nothing to do with the virtues of being a “survivor.” The power of the Ouroboros exists beyond the scope of our ego, personal will or even strength of character. This omnipotent resource exists in the paradoxical nexus between the heart of our humanity and the soul of our divinity. In other words, it is a sacred resource we can access, but not from a place of entitlement or ownership, but rather from a space of humility and graciousness.

So how do we access this paradoxical power within? Through one very simple, yet very difficult practice; staying out of our own way by surrendering our need for control, credit or blame. This practice requires engaging in . . . well . . . a paradox. While the crucial point is to “stay out of our own way,” doing so is actually a human impossibility. The next time you look at yourself in a mirror try this little test; see if you can view the space located directly behind your reflected image. No matter how you adjust the mirror there will always be a blind spot, a place you cannot see because you are essentially “in your own way.”

The nature of our humanity and its ego-based identity works exactly the same way; we cannot see into our own blind spots, which includes our unexamined beliefs, prejudices and fixations on our self-image. The practice requires walking away from the mirror, (which means setting aside our attachment to relying on our personal experience as our main credible source of wisdom) and instead asking others to share what they see about us, (being open to receiving feedback about facets of our behavior we cannot ourselves see or even experience).

The nature of our divinity on the other hand is infinitely capable of seeing every facet of who we are. Fortunately, the divine dwells within us and therefore is available to us as an “all-seeing” resource. But unfortunately, many among us are out of touch with its presence and fail to recognize and cultivate it within ourselves or others. Underneath this oversight is the reality that we have not yet learned an essential paradoxical truth about our true nature; that while each of us is a separate individual unto ourselves, we are also shared beings unto a collective race.

By “traveling within,” engaging in self-reflection, setting our ego aside and opening to the feedback of others, we free ourselves to explore the paradoxical power of the Phoenix within us; the separate yet shared self that exists right here within us, between the heart of our humanity and the soul of our divinity.



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