

## BACK FROM THE FUTURE

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By Michael Erlewine ([Michael@Erlewine.net](mailto:Michael@Erlewine.net))

I have an abiding memory as a young adult of when I would return home on occasion to visit my folks. I always wanted to show them how much I had changed and they seemed determined to prove to me that I was still the same old "Michael." I can laugh at it now but it was no fun back then.

Each time I came home I had changed some since I last had seen them, worked hard to achieve it, but they just could not (or would not, so I thought at the time) see it. And they sure knew how to get the worst out of me in the shortest amount of time. They had all my buttons down cold and seemed honor-bound to push each one of them. And when I finally flipped out and reverted to my previous behavior, they sure knew how to tell me "I told you so. Same old Michael!"

Why I mention this is that it reminds me of behavior I bet many of us go through related to whatever spiritual practices we might have. I mean it 'is' possible to change; we do make progress and it is totally human to want to look around to see if anyone has noticed how different we have become, how much better we are now. But there is a little Catch-22 with spiritual progress that makes acknowledgement by others of it just a little bit tricky.

Spiritual change is subtle and hard to put your finger on, especially if the whole idea is that we have somehow become more rarified than those around us know us to be. We have moved on, but 'they' might be still right where they always have been. Hmmmm. In that case, how could they possibly know of or recognize my changes if they have not had the same 'rarified' experience? This is indeed a puzzle.

Even more troubling is the question of why am I looking for or need acknowledgement? If I have somehow managed to become kinder and more compassionate, more enlightened, why am I looking for outside recognition and approval from those people whom (in my new kindness) I guess have not made this same transition? I would hope that since I am now a "bigger" person, I would be busy being kinder and more compassionate, especially to them. Why is it that I need something from them, like their approval?

And if I know that those around me have not gotten to where I now am, how can I expect any of them to possibly see or notice me? They have not had the experience and thus have no way of knowing. Worse yet I suppose, why am I looking for something I know can't possibly happen, like acknowledgement from those who have not themselves (at least according to me) had the same spiritual experience I just had. If I am now in a position to guide and help them, why do I need their support and recognition? This all sounds very suspicious and I have a suspicion that something is very fishy here.

More likely, like my visits home to my parents years ago, give me another day or two and I will be right back where I started from, crying over my own spilt milk, and not having such lofty thoughts. An intellectual view alone, as pristine as it can seem, is usually for me just prolog to an experience of change in the reverse direction, back from the future and once again mired in my own past.

I am reminded of a true story that a friend of mine told me years ago about a toddler who was trying to give up his dependence on the baby bottle he always carried around. Running to the edge of the porch, the child threw that bottle as far as he could into the bushes. That was the end of that. However, a couple of hours later, on hands and knees, the same kid (now crying) was crawling around in the underbrush beneath the bushes trying to find that bottle. Sounds like what happens to me when I get too big for my britches.

The Buddhists make a big thing of pointing out that experience goes up and down, forward and backward, while realization is permanent. Realization doesn't change. So a good rule of thumb I have found when I have a lofty experience is to wait three days and see where I am at. Apparently about three days is as long as the human condition can go without sleep or we can hang onto any lofty view we have temporarily acquired, try as we may.

Give it three days and then look around at your view. I am usually right back on my hands and knees in the bushes.

Trying to get a witness to our view or attainment is a futile and foolish task and does not speak well of us at all, a conceptual oxymoron if I ever saw one.

As my dharma teacher tells me almost every time I ask him if there is not anything 'special' he wants me to do. "No, nothing special. Just keep practicing."