

Coming Home from the Parade

Can We Live Without Images?

by Alan Harris

IF ONE EXAMINES his own thought, he may find it to be entirely made up of images. The images may be visual, tactile, musical, sexual, egoic, gustatory, and so on. Life for humans consists of a succession of these images that overlap, interweave, and contradict each other. And the mind is not content with the images it has. It builds or seeks out new images to experience and add to those that already make up the consciousness.

Each person has an overall self-image which consists of all his collected images from the outside combined with his inner psychological or egoic images. The psychological images and those collected from the outside may be mixed inseparably as a complex network of sensations, aspirations, regrets, and memories.

The thirst for new images may be termed desire, seemingly a universal condition among human beings. Desire sets up a subtle interplay between psychological and remembered images. Images may take on a pleasurable, neutral, or painful aspect, depending on the person's own self-image and his physical characteristics. Desire influences the personality toward pleasurable and familiar images. One wants to have more images like the known ones that have been pleasurable, and one wants to avoid the repetition of remembered pain.

There is seemingly an inborn desire in each human for psychological security. But security is not only elusive on the physical and psychological levels, it is only temporary even if attained. Each person looks to his images for his security. He has an image about his house, about his car, about his spouse, about his family, about his bank account, about his job, and certainly about himself. But inwardly he fears that this frail network of security is like a spider's carefully spun web, which the next gust of wind or passing animal may destroy.

Rituals and beliefs are units of sequential images which become familiar and therefore seem to offer security. They also offer an arena for pleasurable activity that builds on and reinforces the current belief system. Whether belief systems are built from inside or adopted from an external source, the individual sets himself up to be led by an authority who has more knowledge, more images, more experiences to share about these beliefs. In the physical or psychological presence of this authority one feels secure because the authority is perceived as farther along on some linear continuum or path. The follower wants to be not where he perceives himself to be, but where the authority is. Since he can't be in both places, he is subject to subconscious nagging by a self-created and unresolvable conflict.

Concepts are interlocked sets of logical images formed by a more or less fixed pattern of mental action. The bookstores and libraries of the world are filled with both visual images and verbal concepts which lead one almost anywhere he desires to proceed, at least in the arena of knowledge and so-called psychological progression.

Some people seek security by surrounding themselves with many books in the home, more books than it would be ever possible to read in a lifetime. Security is sought in the sheer volume of agreeable concepts and in the comfortable feeling that one can choose from many mental paths in the future.

In the universities of the world, students and professors alike feed and grow on a steady diet of images transmitted through books, word of mouth, and various other media. These images serve to prepare students for the vocations, and their careers will bring in still more collections of images. University study brings a parade of comparisons and choices, but always between images. Students learn to build, receive, blend, and retain their images, and finally package themselves in a cap-and-gown image for presentation to the market place.

What is missing, one may ask, from the parade of images within which humanity passes its days and expends its energy? It can be seen that the comfort or relief offered by images is always temporary, yet every attack of pain or boredom sends a person out for more images, and they are everywhere to be had.

Is there a true security which is somewhere other than in images? One might reply that there is security in love or in God. But upon examination, one may find that love and God are merely words, collections of images and concepts based on thought and conditioning from without. Is there a security that is entirely free from images, from concepts, from time, from place, from physical and logical desire, from inertia, from boredom?

How to find security is a question asked directly or indirectly by most thoughtful persons. Abhorring this vacuum, gurus, psychologists, metaphysicians, philosophers, scholars, priests, economists, politicians--authorities of every kind--have rushed in with their various formulas for security, few of which agree. The answers they give are mostly more images and concepts that build upon the old ones, more formulas for progression toward psychological triumph, more academic courses for intellectual distinction, more schemes for monetary prosperity. A follower of such authorities may, with great effort, achieve some kind of temporary security, but eventually a loved one dies or an economy crashes or a war begins, and he finds himself asking the same question again: where is my security?

Can one drop images entirely? Is there security in no images? One might reply that the human body can survive only through the sensory images that help keep the organism regulated. Allowing for the essential physical images, can one drop all psychological images? One may discover that not only do these "me-related" images fail to bring security, they can lead to wasted energy, baffling complexities, painful insecurities, and even despair.

Can there be a psychological transparency which does not hold onto "me-related" images, yet which allows the natural sensory images their necessary functioning and interplay? For example, can one experience another's anger fully and not hang onto or nurse a psychological image of this anger? Can one experience intense pleasure and not hold an image of it or crave its repetition? Is it possible for one to drop his psychological self-image completely?

If all psychological images are dropped, what remains? Perhaps nothing--at least nothing knowable. But in that nothing might there not be complete security? Not

psychological, not physical, but complete? To a mind steeped in images, the image of nothing might be ugly or frightening. It threatens all tradition, culture, and personal experience, and therefore one wants to drop it immediately. Then drop it. Can one drop even the image of nothing? Is there a nothing which is not an image of nothing, but a true nothing? Can this nothing somehow understand completely all the somethings and make room for a love beyond images?

What would happen in the world if each person could instantly understand the parade of images that comprise his life--understand the desires that lead to more complex images, understand the false security that images and desires bring? If each one could just watch this parade, not as a judge from the reviewing stand but as a participant in it--simply watching it and then coming home--would the life of humanity be transformed? And where would home be, if not in some parade? Can a mind saturated with images come home from the parade and find truth?

Can one drop everything to gain nothing, so to speak? Can he drop his clutter of psychological images to find a nothing which is understanding and love, a nothing which is also the unknown? And if he does this, will anything at all be lost?

Any answer offered here might only be another image or concept, but if each person would explore for himself his stream of images with no reliance on any authority or any book, where could be the harm?

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