

# **Nikki's Toe: a theory of everything**

**Full Circle: Death as a Teacher, a meditation**

## **In the Beginning**

It was an ordinary day. Lazy clouds crossing blue skies; bright sun upon still waters; the white tops of mountains etched sharply against the horizon; the heron standing still in his favourite fishing spot.

Then it happened.

My world tilted sharply. I watched helpless as my ideas, impressions, memories, beliefs, songs, poems and tears fell pell-mell in the open mouth of this huge idea.

## **We do not know the Mind of G-d**

The circle of women around her opened up. The large male leading the troop ambled over. She backed away a little. She had always been careful of him, even when he was close. He grunted. Then again. She was hugging the child to her. This time it would be different. She would not let them. The child would start to move. The others had been taken away from her too soon. The large male nuzzled her then grabbed at the child. She screamed. He let go. The women stepped back in fear. She looked at the closed eyes of her baby, the eyes that would never see her. She felt cold all over. Dead. The small one was dead. It was not like the young ones of other women. She had seen dead before. Her mother. The old ones. The dog she fed sometimes. The animals they killed. The children that never grew and were left behind. She folded on the ground. She crawled in pain, the baby in her arms still. She could not leave it, food for others who did not want it, had not borne it. She gathered rocks. She dug a hole in the soft ground. She placed the baby in it,

its head upon cool leaves. She piled rocks upon the grave. She would join it soon.

Civilizations as we know them were born of the human attempt at circumventing mortality. Ever since developing consciousness, we have tried our best to court, to camouflage, to distance, to forget, to deny death. Death sits coiled at the heart of our world. We have tried many strategies to confront it: supplicating, adoring, and praising it; projecting its menace upon super beings fashioned in our minds, imitating it, wielding its powers, wresting victims away from its grasp for a while, ignoring it, euphemizing it; using it as entertainment, as a step to thinking, to growing, to living; testing it as Heaven.

Death is ever present in our pain, polemics, political discourse, arts and media. Desperately we clutch at our evanescent youth, we dress up and buy things so we may never die, while we build a world of relentless violence, selfishness and alienation.

Death sits coiled at the centre of our institutions. We have assembled complex systems to deliver us from it, to hide us, to assuage our fear, to inflict it upon others so that we could be spared. We have spawned many experts to tell us why it must be so. Fear of death is the filter imposed upon the power structures through which we see the world.

We have negated death throughout human evolution. Youth culture, avoidance, courting death masquerading as elder respect and culture, power and money are all attempts at transcending mortality.

Beyond religious beliefs, war and its toys, rewards, life pursuits, and the veil we keep on death, we are moving fast towards the vanishing point of our delusions. Yet in many ways we kill those who shake our narrow views: reformer, teacher, rebel, feminine, pacifist, trans-tribal, transgender. Kill in the name of G-d and control the woman, symbol of rebirth. We live in safe increments, we run not looking so we do not stare it in the eye, that nothingness between us and death.

The priests who bargain death away, the kings who order it, the military who wield it, the judges who balance it, the doctors who minister, the

philosophers who explain, the scientists who seek the how's, all play a part on the stage of our universe, with death as a backdrop.

Since the beginning of human time, we have told each other stories to construct our world. We have voiced the tales that sculpt our children's thoughts, hold our memories and our dreams for our future. At the beginning, the plots were simple, action, retribution, good, evil, cause and effect, powers in the elements, rituals as visible symbols of authority, invisible beings. Now we are older. Our stories are changing too. Dominion, then; stewardship, now. As we grow up, so must our gods and our heroes. The link, the common bond, is still death, uniting us all equally.

We have failed to convince ourselves through religions and practices that we and our human world are perfect. Perhaps life is just an energy conversion system, with consciousness a new kind of energy. Perhaps life is a wave, comes out of the void, travels, goes back to the void. We look but we do not see. As a species, we were born too soon to consciousness.

As the future we have constructed built on our simple stories of sin, redemption and progress proves incompatible with our new weapons and the size of our collective footprints, it is time to speak as humans, not as children. Many solitudes march forward. Each pushes the membrane of society's complexities. When under intense pressure it coalesces suddenly around a new shift-shape, for an instant we can see it and then it is gone, the relentless movement beginning afresh. There is tension between the drive to fragmentation and chaos and the struggle for coherence. We are hardwired for categorizing, for connecting the dots, for shaping order out of chaos. Human societies will organize. It is inscribed in our biology. It is time to stare at death in the face and learn.

### **Fractals for life**

Life may well create the very conditions for its existence. As it does, it may be. In fractal shapes, characteristic patterns can be found in any of their parts. Any part is similar to the whole at all levels of the scale. Simple relationships of properties found at the heart of any part can give rise to the full system. Change the relationships, change the system. What if awe,

wonder, reverence and love of life joined death at the centre of the human fractal? What world would we inhabit then?

We are part of a thin living web on a small finite planet. Its immune system has been sending us warnings for some time now, largely ignored so far. As I have learnt in my flesh, the immune system is resilient and quite patient. Then one day, following an inescapable last signal, it collapses. I paid attention then. What I learnt as an individual, we must as a species. Sooner than I did.

Awareness of death as the measure of our lives is the perspective we need to guide us towards adulthood. I used to think I was important. Then I looked around and was dwarfed by my inconsequence. Now I am centered in my fractal and can relate to the planet's living fabric.

As we internalize death as the ultimate verdict of how we live, death no longer the foe can become the backdrop against whom all things and existence would be measured. That young woman had a story to tell. Was I listening?

### **Death in our Lives**

How could the age of enlightenment and reason, progress, hope and optimism have spawned the Holocaust, totalitarianisms and a hecatomb of millions of people in one fifty-year period?

War has always obeyed a simple calculation: the fewer of my enemies are alive, the longer I may live. We are moving fast towards a point in time and space when our enemies are increasingly more difficult to tell apart from ourselves. And destroying their habitats is destroying ours too. To save ourselves, we must become our world's and each other's keepers.

Religions at their best were attempts at uniting disparate individuals together in a shared ethical view. They failed. The prophets of the various religions were misunderstood. No worthwhile conversion occurs at the point of a sword. Perhaps the nation-state is a necessary step on the long road from tribe to planet. It was a first attempt at liberating the individual from servitude to blood ties, to the tribe, to exclusionary beliefs. In moving to

inclusion of varied ethnic and political groups under one conceptual umbrella, we may have negotiated an important developmental step. The state is a crude protection for cultural diversity.

In many developed nations there is a fragile new recognition of universal values and human rights born of constructive dissent and recent bloodshed. However, the problem of modern governance is still a fruitless drive for similarities and not a celebration of diversity in cultural differences. We are seeking still a concept large enough to hold humanity in the planet with its multi-dimensional habitats. The challenge is to juggle competing values, rights and interests, aggregated for the common good, against the sobering question of whether we have lived well.

Much has been made of free will in human thought. Now we can see that it exists, influential as the fractal affecting the entire human ecosystem. Not one action is inconsequential. Everything we do alters the whole. As we think, as we do, so moves the world.

Enough limbs have been torn, blood shed, soils plundered, waters sullied and species destroyed. This must stop. As our children pick up guns, as strange epidemics loom large, as fear clenches at our hearts, the signs are clear. We must, each of us, step off our current road. We are one of many species, a part, a conscious part of the living network hugging a small planet, with death our guide to living.

In the wild, single mold cells go about their business of consuming decay and organic matter. When their feeding environment can no longer support them, the cells "together" into a slug and start moving to a new source of food, then scatter into independent forms again.

As better understanding of the dynamics of life starts to nourish our mental ether, different modes of being are emerging. As older, more primitive modes continue to exist along newer more sophisticated ones, they must be contained and educated along to a spreading global environment of shared assumptions. We have exhausted the material manifestation of our current thinking space. As our numbers grow, so does the urgency of collective action. As the slug does when the time comes, we too must move.

This new thinking space is not a building, not an institute, not a think tank, not a museum, not a religion, not a political theory, not a trendy power structure. It is a togetherness, a wave, a new window opened upon our universe, an inclusion of all that is and all that we know. It is a new atmosphere we can all breathe freely. We can travel the road from our small deserts of sand, of tears, of empty to whole new forms. We can reframe our existence into new beginnings.

We must mind we do not step on no-exit roads like relativism or nihilism. Struggling still with exacerbated nationalism and fanatical bigotry, ever torn between roots and the universal, we must remember that we know where the old roads lead, their lure ever tugging at our instincts.

Push the darkness away,  
It slinks back in,  
Bites at the soul.  
Echoes of tears unshed pool in lidded eyes.  
The air is lead.  
What now tomorrow?  
The day dies in fractured hopes  
Unbloomed,  
Lives rotting on the stem,  
The children not yet born,  
The old lost in the sounds familiar.  
Blood, land, heavens, gods,  
So many roads into so many cemeteries.

Some thoughts and actions reinforce our dread of death. Others reinforce our wish to make the most with the time we have. Right action is its own end, leading to well-being and inner peace. Internalizing the sacred as a process, as a presence keeps life from fossilizing.

We yearn for meaning to our existence. Is living futile, purposeful, of any consequence? Why bother with goodness? And what about volleyball? What is happiness? There are neither simple answers nor cure for mortality. That is a basic fact of life.

We are born and then we die. This is the nature of things. We tell each other stories and invent our lives. The issue is what we do with our short time in-between. Human life has an eternal dimension. It may be in G-d's mind or recycled among the planet's atoms, but all of us have a sense of this, as we reach vaguely for an ideal realm of absolute beauty, justice, of what could be.

The world we live in we construct through interaction, through the things we do, the people we touch. Then we build further upon our previous experiences. At birth we are unformed prisoners of our genes. As we grow, we start the long journey to free ourselves from our inheritance, our past, our present, our woes. Some of us stop along the way, held back by harsh conditions or bruised minds. Others continue to what end they know not, driven by an unexplained thirst for completeness.

We are unfinished beings at birth. Our life is a journey to completion. We are not so different from the salmon that spawns then dies, the work done. Our work is to finish ourselves and then die. No wonder myths endure. Our stories are repeated back to us by stories eternal. In reframing, we can go past accepted forms.

How will the centre hold? I travel every day on my inner quest. My job is not to be distracted by various "ego" temptations. I find along the way people, events, readings that provide valued insights and help propel me along. I died to my old self and its perceived hurts and injustices. I died to old identities, old roles. I have no role now. I breathe to hold the centre. I hold my illness in reverence. It lends presence and texture to my life.

I have found the secret to a good life. It is not glamorous but oh so hard to grasp. It is so obvious in places we are not looking. It is in every place yet we do not see it. Be the best you can be. Do the best you can do. Do no harm to others and the planet. It takes effort to live awake.

I used to think that living was about courage and endurance. Then I forgot and thought it was about acceptance. Now I know it is about that and more. Some days I think I understand and know it always. Then I forget and know this angst inside me. Then I find it again and on it goes. Finally I think I get it. My truth I must find every day. Temptations abound. The quest goes on.

Perhaps the yearning for a living synthesis is childish, a throwback to the wish for the simpler times of paradise. However, there comes a point when it is good to stop and give shape to conclusions arrived at in a life of experiencing, thinking, struggling and doing.

And then the dream: I felt a push in the small of my back and stepped into the great hall.

"Well, what are your conclusions on life so far," said one of the ethereal beings floating behind a large desk.

"I, I..." I stammered.

"This is the next stage. Whether you go on or remain depends on where you've reached. So tell us, where are you at now?"

How to distil a life in a moment...I was more than the sum of my... On my way to the next stage, I met a thought. An unexamined life is lived between the carrot and the stick. Aware, we reach independent thinking, with fear the yeast. We will be present still with our rendez-vous with death. What we do till that time comes is up to us, to waste, to kill, or to grow and live. I am alone inside my skin. Yet as a fractal, I can change the world.

### **A Minute**

I lived a lifetime inside a minute.

The sea came up and licked the shore.

Delicately.

The clouds perched on the shoulders of the mountains, waiting.

The sun traveled bright and went away to distant lands.

The air was blue around the edges.

It smelled of things too far and near.

The heron sculpted the horizon. Still.

The beak plunged and the fish thrashed caught in it.

Life and death violent intertwined.

Songs of songs poured from the throats of a thousand birds hidden in the trees.

The winds came up.

I lived a minute inside six dimensions.

I wrote the above in the year 2000. Having survived a grave illness, I was musing on death. Imperceptibly, my thinking evolved to the eternal questions, the questions posed by every thinking human being: where do we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going?

## **Existence**

Tillie died today, January 23, 2006.

When Elle died, I felt the life force leave her, in one terrible instant. She was living breathing, her head snug on my shoulder, and then she was heavily inert. I did not feel Tillie leave me. The vet had sedated her, so she was asleep for ten minutes before dying. She went to sleep so peacefully, so quickly. Death was like her sleep. I was waiting for it, waiting for it to ambush me, and yet I did not feel Tillie die. I was holding Tillie like a baby, wrapped in her blanket. She was warm still. I asked the vet to check and check again. She assured me of the death: dogs' eyes open in death. They cannot be closed. The tongue was blue. The heart was not beating. She was gone.

Elle, Tillie, a dear friend of mine, a few more whose bodies I held or watched. What strikes me so clearly is the sheer brutal physicality of death. From the feel, look, form of a dead body, we cannot comprehend life. No matter how far we think we have come in understanding how things work, life remains an enigma, a mystery, a miracle. In death, the form endures for a very little while. What is called by so many names, soul, spark, all that stuff, is the unique, individual, irreplaceable pattern that is lost, gone, eradicated, its etiology incomprehensible. It is the pattern we seek to grasp and cannot.

We share the beginning and the end.

We share geography and time.

Bound inside our skins, we cannot share meaning.

## **Vigil**

A fresh cloud of evil is loose upon the world.

It came out of nowhere,  
Rekindled, feeding deep.  
It lives in my nightmares  
It sits coiled in my guts  
It peers out of my eyes  
It laughs with the mouths of children.

It swallowed six million  
Then hid in a corner.  
Now it wants many more.

I can smell it floating upon the wind.  
I taste it in the news.  
I hear it in idle conversations.  
I know its shape.

The world is holding its breath,  
Arrested momentarily on the cusp of changes so possibly vast.

I stretch and move in cadence because I need to be as well as I can.  
I sing and play music because what else is there to do.  
I force myself to read, to walk, to eat, to sleep.  
That's all I have strength for.  
Then I take up my useless vigil yet again.  
A fresh cloud of evil is loose upon the world.

**Life is a system; we are cosmic dust endlessly recycled over time, until...**

What do I look for in a painting? Or in music?  
A reaching in different from mine;  
A look that is not mine, a fresh view of the world;  
A perspective, an attentiveness to details I have not seen;  
Frozen music; Surprise; Connections;  
Beauty I can feel in my bones;  
Harmony tangible.

In the eighties, I discovered the writings of David Bohm. He was a physicist who should have earned the Nobel Prize for his work on plasma, the fourth state of matter. Bohm was a visionary, an original, a man of unbound imagination. I became fascinated with his concept of reality enfolding/unfolding. I was enchanted by his notion of the nature of reality: a world in constant flux, a world creating itself anew every moment, a world of elemental dance. Bohm calls his concept the implicate or enfolded order. This notion corresponds to the elementary particle as the manifestation of an underlying other layer of reality, one not yet evolved, one folded into a local region or field. In other words, the elementary particle is not the building block. There are no building blocks. The universe is motion. The reality we live in, the reality of solid and visible bodies located in space and mired in linear time, are manifestations of what Bohm calls the explicate or unfolded order. In his vision, the dynamics of the explicate order where we exist is a function of the implicate order that underlies our level of reality.

Life on earth exists in the explicate order of reality. The idea that our universe is fluid, that the apparent solidity of the world that surrounds me is an illusion, the notion that the process, not the thing, is what is real has transformed the universe for me. I do not truly understand this idea. My mind refutes it strenuously, shies away from it instinctively. However, I am driven back to this idea of many worlds present behind the membrane of our own. It is a magical perspective, the stuff of dreams.

At the moment of the Big bang, the universe burst forth from a microscopic...seed. Packaged in that seed were all the potentialities to be. We are embodied potentialities made flesh, collapsed possibles. I stand at the fulcrum of the world, helping to create it every moment, transforming what could be into what is.

The kabbalists of old held a similar vision of the universe, imagining a world in a constant state of flux, created and creating itself anew at every instant, fed by the divine plenty and nourishing it in turn.

The universe is complex, and creative. There is a deeper order that binds all into fundamental patterns. Consciousness unfolds from it. Bohm's idea of a reality enfolding to its source and unfolding back to its purpose speaks to

me. My reality unfurls and eventually will curl back up into the One. That image anchors me in my own layer of the universe. I find it comforting.

For many years now, I have been engaged in a constant conversation with the Divine. It is one-sided, I shall admit. This inner dialogue is my first thought when I wake and my last before I fall asleep. No matter what I do or where I am during my time awake, I hold the Divine in my mind. I believe in a Higher Intelligence, a Higher Presence, a Creator of encoded self-organizing, self-replicating seeding programmes, unfolding in various ways depending upon time, hospitable environments, conditions and other forces encountered. G-d reaching into His pregnant pocket and in a wide sweep, seeding worlds...

In the beginning, at the instant of the Big Bang, all possibilities were encapsulated. The seeding programmes, the Systems, are fractals of the initial fiery event. Unlike the so called "Intelligent Design," this idea is not deterministic. Life is opportunistic, it evolves as the System finds niches conducive to its further growth and development.

On earth, the System is DNA-based, with its errors and redundancies. Elsewhere, who knows. Perhaps the System is coded to evolve towards higher levels of sophistication as the programmes (us, others) mature. What is the purpose of life? We do not know. Self-reflective consciousness may represent a huge step forward in evolutionary terms, but to what end? We do not know.

There are many theories of consciousness and little firm data on it. Thus I may select the idea that fits best with my view of the world. I see consciousness as a property of the universe, like gravity or electromagnetism. I think living organisms tend towards it. As one climbs up the food chain, there is less reliance on senses, more on judgment, with abstract filters constructed throughout long childhood development and the human big brain.

As life evolves, eventually it will develop the organic machinery for consciousness. We are too primitive still. However one day, a life form evolved from humans may reach it; and feel the pulse of the universe.

## **Complexity is key to the growth of the System**

Born in the fiery glow of the birth of stars, wandering in the cold vacuum of space, ever seeking hospitable shores, the cosmic dust that we are is endlessly recycled over time. We are breathing the same air as Moses, we are swallowing a whisper of Socrates, an atom of Einstein, a tear of Beethoven, a trace of Hannah Arendt. The me I know is a composite being, created and recreated at every moment. Yet why do I not feel that I am an illusion? The "I" is very strong, part of the evolutionary System.

On earth the System has found a home, a foothold, making unfolding possible. Are we the first site? Are there more? Has the System taken a different path elsewhere? Perhaps. Perhaps not.

The very purpose of life may be evolution of consciousness. Life unfolds towards increasing levels of complexity in the right environment. It exists on the edge of chaos, in constant tension. It shapes the environment and responds to its challenges by adapting. Ants and bees societies, where total equilibrium reigns, are arrested. The System's growth has stopped in its evolutionary path. These societies are ossified, thus dead in evolutionary terms. For them, the lack of tension has led to immobility. In human totalitarian societies, the same pattern applies: equilibrium kills the possible, the transformative, the chance at becoming something else.

In human activities, planned economies allow no room for change. In savage capitalism, the economy errs too close to anarchy. In societies where unbridled multi-culturalism threatens the sense of core and shared values, societal coherence is under siege and may just unravel. As in all facets of life, the best human environment is one that maintains creative social patterns. If total equilibrium is the enemy of life, total chaos is too. When the System loses its cohesiveness, its pattern, it may die. Life exists in balance.

Life is consciousness, primitive as in trees or insects, more evolved as in humans. Life is rhythm, swim, walk, run, climb, one foot/feet after the other/others.

The System is not deterministic. It reaches points of further growth by whatever means. In our DNA-based system, it progresses by cognitive

advances, through more and more intricate neural circuitry. The human brain so far possesses the richest such.

Encased in our skins, isolated from each other, we forage for new stimuli. We explore and push the limits of our sensory, physical and emotional environment. We are individual spores yet we are linked together. We need to grow alone yet we cannot do it without the others. We push against and we pull together. We compete yet we cooperate, even at the cellular level. Eventually, like slime spores, when supplies dwindle, when stimuli stop feeding imagination and innovation, we must "together" and walk on.

For life to grow, the System must find energy. Possibly on other worlds energy exchange does not come with death attached. On ours, it may just have been chance that an organism swallowed another and grew twice as fast. A cycle of life at the expense of other lives had just begun. If only that first organism had looked to the sun and not to its neighbour for sustenance, our earth would have been very different.

As a species, we have shown an ability to coalesce into collective behaviours. For the most part, this process has not been to the good. We have come together to kill because of unfounded rumours, we have come together as a lynch mob, as followers of strange and harmful cults, we have come together as enablers of totalitarian regimes. Human history is replete with carnage wrought by humans coalescing into hate paths leading inexorably to wreckage, despair and death.

Yet we own a capability to join together to save lives, with courage, and dedication, sometimes placing personal survival at risk. So the species' potential for coalescing into a truly higher level of humanity exists. It is still too tenuous, buried too deeply. It may just be too soon. The violence inherent in the current state of life is good and bad: it is a source of mayhem and death but also of crucial energy, risk-taking, passion and creativity. It may prod us to the next stage. Or push us into the precipice. As in the primordial waters from whence it arose upon this earth, the great seeking head of life hunts for the next transmutation.

**The System brings meaning and purpose**

Throughout human history, some have risen and spoken of higher ideals, of kinder ways of living, of shared human and universal destiny. Invariably the message was simple, articulated in the flavours of the times in which it was told.

When the System detects an increase in the complexity of human consciousness, it triggers a moral tutorial, repeated in various forms over time, with instructions made clear at crucial developmental points, with carrot and stick type lessons. Instructions take into account the sophistication achieved so far by the people who have listened. This may explain for instance why complex meditation techniques developed around the world at roughly the same time.

The System sends signals periodically. For the System to go the next stage, there needs to be a global tipping point, a global qualitative change in humanity's consciousness. We may be incapable of it. Or not.

In our time, the System may be stuck: the current cacophony, incoherence and savagery of our world may be preventing us from hearing the message.

**Now you see it, now you don't...**

Suddenly I was jolted forward towards a place of coherence. I felt urged to reconsider the bits and pieces I had thrown in the space of my pondering.

Like the salmons who return to the original site of the spawning, we finish creating ourselves and return to our beginning. I am the current shape of the many worlds that live within my skin. Do the bacteria that inhabit my gut strive for the same completion that I do? Do we create the worlds we think up?

Like the young woman of the dawn of human times, we grieve for and bury our old selves and birth the new. Can we rationalize the process of our life or is its timing independent of our efforts? I have tried many times to will the process only to have it occur when I least expected it. Most inconvenient I say!

We stand upon the yesterdays of the billions of cells that died before we took form. Suffering is the process of growth. It pushes ossified

boundaries, breaks down calcified defenses, borrows holes into protective walls, provides vital space, expands the horizons and the reaches of brains and hearts. It is the energy that propels us forward. Can suffering be understood within the framework of a purposeful universe? As soon as I write framework I have already limited my idea. I need a word that moves, that flows, that blurs and mists.

How do we develop the machinery for consciousness? Can awareness be willed into existence? Whether free will exists or not is irrelevant. Free or not, human will dictates human survival. It is predicated upon human ability based upon abstractions, concepts, ideas and notions of what the world is and how it works. The idea precedes the action, always. Human-made systems and machines are the embodiment of ideas. The Hebrews' idea of one invisible unique G-d propelled time into what had been until then the timeless wheel of human fate.

I have this vision of the endless spirals the human collective weaves about itself as it gathers what it knows, what it has learnt; buries its young, its old, its almost born; stretches its neurons towards the heavens and invents its tomorrows in every moment. A relational universe in motion. Not an Omega future but one we cannot possibly fathom.

And I know that when or even if I get this orgasmic feeling of clarity in my current thinking, it will immediately be followed by the internal chaos with which I am so familiar, as I strive for the next and the next. Thinking is exquisite torture...I live in awe, in wonder, in gratitude, in reverence.

Nikki Basuk

<http://www.nikkibasuk.com>

Copyright © 2008 by Nikki Basuk