

Chapter Thirteen. The Relation of I-Thou. Of the Book, God is No-thing. The Apophatic Assertion. Copyright Rodger Ricketts Psy.D.,2020. All rights reserved. Protected by international copyright conventions. No part of this chapter may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever, or stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, without express permission of the Author-publisher, except in case of brief quotations with due acknowledgement. Published through CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

## The Relation of I-Thou

Remembering the insights of his personal mystical experience, Buber, in his book, *The Heart of Mysticism*, described his higher states of consciousness: *'Now from my own unforgettable experience I know well that there is a state in which the bonds of the personal nature of life seem to have fallen away from us and we experience an undivided unity.'* With this experience of Awakening, Buber understood the world without the alienating and separating dualistic subject/object dichotomy. Like the Buddha, out of compassion for humanity, he taught how to think and act in a Non-alienated way. This chapter will explore more of the characteristics of the I-Thou relation.

While Buber always emphasized that he understood relating to the world in an I-It manner is necessary, his primary concern was when a person was unable to respond from I-Thou, thus creating alienation and suffering. The relation between the person and Nothingness is a universal relation which is the foundation for *I-Thou*. In Buber's apophatic perspective, it is from the background of the I-Thou relation that I-It arises in the foreground.

## **Virtuous and kind behaviors**

For this potential to be realized, just like for Buddha, virtuous and kind behaviors are encouraged as well as ego-lessness. This promotes sensitivity to the inner and outer world, more serenity, more authenticity, empathy and wisdom with less alienation, ruminations, conflict, hatred, and bias.

The "I-Thou" relation participates in the dynamic and living process of Being. That relationship simply is. Through the I-Thou relation we interact with the world in its whole Being. It is not a means to an egocentric objective or goal, but an authentic relationship involving respect for the whole being of each subject.

Basic to the I-Thou relation, brotherly love is a subject-to-subject relationship. Love is not a relation of subject to object, but rather a relation in which all members in the relationship are subjects and share the unity of being. According to Buber, the I-Thou relationship is *"the existential and ontological reality in which the self comes into being and through which it fulfills and authenticates itself."* The I-Thou relation is characterized by mutuality, openness, directness, and being in the present.

## **I-Thou an expression of Inter-being relations**

Buber considers "I-Thou" communication the fundamental expression of the uniqueness of relation within inter-being. These relation patterns of rapport and affinity are usually found when beings relate with brotherly love, friendship, openness and care. I meet you as you are, and you meet me as who I am. In the I-Thou relationship, I am with you openly in my heart and mind. Living through relationships that enable "I-Thou" brings a deep satisfaction and richness in life and opens a greater sense of the original relation with the Absolute.

One expresses easily empathy and compassion knowing that all are interconnected and one. Such a perspective makes a different world, a world without violence. As Jesus said, *'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'* The Buddha said as well, *"All beings tremble before violence. All fear death. All love life. See yourself in others. Then whom can you hurt? What harm can you do?"*

As all Apophatic sages teach, by being in the moment, here and now, we experience the wonder of existence. As we have seen in other chapters, the ultimate, even the very idea of the ultimate, cannot be known by discursive thinking. In the now we live our life as it is. Also, through the practice of silent meditation we focus on life awareness. With this awareness we experience the interconnectedness of all things, and compassion for all sentient beings.

## **Knowing shatters illusions**

Knowing, then, begins with the release of illusions, with disillusionment. Knowing means to penetrate through the fog, to arrive at the reality; knowing means to "see" the reality without illusion. Knowing is that the ownership of truth is not possible.

The I-Thou relationship cannot be explained; it simply is. Through the I-Thou relation we interact with the world in this whole Being. It is not a means to some object or goal, but an authentic relationship involving respect for the whole being of each subject.

Buber considers "I-Thou" communication the fundamental expression of the uniqueness of relation within inter-being. These relation patterns of rapport and affinity are usually found when beings relate with brotherly love, friendship, openness, and care. In the I-Thou encounter, we relate to each other as authentic beings, without inquisition, prejudice, enmity or predisposition. I meet you

as you are, and you meet me as who I am. In the I-Thou relationship, I am with you openly in my heart and mind. However, there are many people who never live through this deeper level of relation. This is unfortunate because living through relationships that enable "I-Thou" bring a deep satisfaction and richness in life and opens a greater sense of the original relation with the Absolute.

When an I-Thou encounter occurs I am meeting the other as a thou with openness, directness, and presence by means of real mutual action, meaning and confirmation. As Buber wrote, "*This person is other, essentially other than myself.. I confirm it; I wish his otherness to exist, because I wish his particular being to exist*". We are interconnected, "*not just with people, but animals too, and stones, clouds, trees*" (Aitken 1984, p. 10). We are an integral part of everything. Nothing exists by itself; nothing has a separate existence, a separate self.

As human beings we are Being, one with All. The truth is pure inter-being, beyond dualistic thinking of the alienated mind. Thus, we are aware of the impermanence, and the Emptiness of the "IT" world. Serenity comes with the acceptance of impermanence and interrelatedness.

The insights of such Sages as the Buddha, the Hebrew prophets, Jesus and Master Eckhart show that knowing begins with the awareness of the deceptiveness of our common-sense perceptions; our picture of physical reality does not correspond to what is "really real". Therefore, most people are half-awake, half-dreaming, and are unaware that most of what they hold to be true and self-evident is an illusion produced by the influence of the dualistic alienated world in which they live.

Knowing, then, begins with the transformation of illusions, disillusionment and alienation. Knowing means to penetrate through

the fog, to arrive at the reality and to "see" the reality without illusion. Knowing is not to have the truth, as possession is not possible, but to be the truth.

The being mode of knowing allows us, as psychologist Erich Fromm (1992, pp.117-120) also observed, to go beyond ourselves, outside the ego. The goals are to be kind to oneself and another, to transcend the barriers that separate us from one another, and to live life with a recognition of interdependence and impermanence. When communicating at this level, we move beyond social roles, identifications and objectifications. In I-Thou dialogues, we trust and can disclose deep, private, aspects of ourselves that enable us to engage in "I-Thou" relationships.

The Buddha, one of the greatest Apophatic teachers, said in his last words to the monks, *"It may be that after I am gone that some of you will think, 'now we have no teacher.' But that is not how you should see it. Let the Dharma and the discipline that I have taught you be your teacher. All individual things pass away. Strive on, untiringly."* Now, as we have explored in this book the similar meditation instructions and doctrinal perspectives taught by the many Apophatic spiritual teachers, we know we can attain Awakening and know Emptiness and end our suffering, and harmful consequences of dualistic alienation. Let us all follow the Path and accomplish knowing the 'unknowable' – No-thing.