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Context to the nugget conversation

Raghu speaks about the distinction between DOING and BEING. He speaks about BEING as a regenerative process, something that heals and nurtures. He also speaks about the need for coherence between what we are doing and who we are being at various points in time and not resolving this is often at the root of what people often describe as a mid-life crisis.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): The other distinction I wanted to talk about Raghu was the one you bring up between doing and being and you use a phrase, which really stayed with me. You speak about being as a regenerative process, something that heals and nurtures. Can you speak about this and how that manifests?

Raghu Ananthanarayanan (RA): See, I was talking to you about the state of shantam, that's available to all of us. When we sleep, deep sleep, we actually get into the state of shantam except that we are not aware of it. That is when even biologically, that's when your regeneration takes place. That's when healing takes place, your brain gets reordered, and all of this kind of thing happens in deep sleep. That is when you get in touch with your being without any external pull or push or any disturbance. So, in the Gita, when they talk finally about Sanyasa Yogam and then Arjuna goes into battle, he is in this state of shantam, he's in the state of quietude inside while being prepared for battle. So, he is not depleting his energies. If I am in the doing mode, I am using my energies and then I have to come back to be replenished, but if I can be anchored in the being, in the quietness while I am acting, I don't get depleted. I can maintain intensity for a long period of time. I can stay in dhyana for three hours like it is recommended. And I am sure if a leader can really be in dhyana on his most interesting and difficult problems, he will get insights from an intelligence much bigger than himself.

DJ: And how does one get there Raghu to ensure that we are operating from a state of being?

RA: See, you have to look at the Mahabharata as a text of yoga. In fact, the first text that discusses ideas of sankhya and yoga and all that is the Mahabharata and between stories between many things there are lots of key ideas of yoga that are discussed. In the last discussion between Bhisma and Yudhisthira lot of ideas of yoga and all that are discussed. The practice of yoga is the practice of how do you get a mind which is normally external, normally depleting itself to quieten itself and become capable of dhyana. That's the key aspect of yoga. I think, anybody who wants to seriously look at business and use of resources of the world, seriously look at science has to understand this mind. He has to develop this mind which means he has to practice some form of yoga and come to this mind, which is capable of this kind of insightful looking at a problem otherwise it would become

very stressful. Because why do you need a leader? You need a leader to help you take decisions in times which are difficult, which are anxiety-provoking, otherwise every manager will take his decision, that's what happens mostly. It's only in crisis that you need leadership. At this point of time if you don't have a person who can absorb that anxiety and be in shantam, be in quietude and have a mind that can really look at everything and stay in focus, you will get jerky answers.

DJ: A related thought Raghu.

RA: Even Chanakya says this, by the way, not just me saying.

DJ: As I was reflecting on this doing versus being, I was wondering is there an insight here around the kinds of choices people make so that you end up in situations where there's resonance between what you are doing and who you are being. Is there something in that space?

RA: There is, there is. I think, there is. See, when you choose to engage in business and things like that, I have seen a lot of people for whom their business is their conviction. There is no internal dissonance between the choices they make in business and the choices they had made as individuals as to what is honourable to do. This internal coherence brings a lot of things with it. It brings the ability to be calm, it brings the ability to be clear. Now, whether you have one battle won or not you know that you are doing the right thing. So, these kinds of internal coherence is what leads to being and doing being in harmony. When this internal coherence is not there you do, I am sure because I have talked to many of these leaders, they experience internal dissonance and they will tell you sooner or later, you know what, I am doing this, I am compelled to do this, my heart is somewhere else. When I talk to many senior leaders, I find this one set of leaders for whom what they are doing comes from conviction. The business they are in what they are doing comes from conviction. They can deal with failures; they can deal with stress with a much greater degree of internal anchorage and internal coherence than people who don't feel this. So, this is being and doing in harmony whereas where a person's internal conviction is not very strong, they are doing it for the money or they are doing it for something else, or position, whatever and they really want to do something else. So, in the conversation sooner or later, you know, I wish I could be teaching, I wish I could be doing something else and classically I am sure you have experienced it too, this happens around 35-40. People are calling it midlife crisis, and I don't see it as a midlife crisis. You have got into work when you are in your 20s because of so many compulsions. And initially, you want to be competent, you want to do this that and the other. So, you are actually working at that point of time for external reasons, and you know that if you have to succeed, your satisfaction is not as important as how satisfied your boss is with your work. So, you are working for recognition not for meaning. Once that threshold is crossed, you have got your own car and two houses or whatever it is, then meaning starts becoming much more important than all this, then this doing being stuff starts surfacing. And that is called midlife crisis. It's really that this person knows exactly... at 40, you know, what you are capable of, what you are not capable of. At 40 you know the world pretty well.

DJ: And you know yourself to some extent as well?

RA: You know yourself quite enough man, you have done enough things, you have failed, you have succeeded, you know your competence. So, then you have also got a certain level of stability by that time. So, then you start asking this question, what should I do for the rest of my life? What will give me meaning for the rest of my life? And if you find that there will be all this, work-life balance, this being-doing balance, all that will happen if this coherence happens. If this coherence doesn't happen, it will always be a question.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: When I am working with a leader, an exercise we often do is making a TO BE list. We often have a To Do list which speaks about What all we want to get done in a day. But often, that doesn't quite address the state we are in when we do those things. I ask the leaders to pick one or two elements in a To Be list – to be generous, to be compassionate, to be thoughtful, to be still, to be mindful, to be tolerant and so on. Again, this is not a long list. But a couple of things that you want to bring your attention to time and again.

I think there is also something to be said about the kinds of choices we make in our personal and professional life especially a few years in.

This topic is at the sweet-spot of the kinds of topics we spend time on at the podcast. I could go on and on here with related insights that have come up at the podcast. If you want to dig in more, you can tune into the Curated Playlists – Navigational Principles and Reinventing Self. You might also like the conversations with Bruce Feiler, Herminia Ibarra and Lynda Gratton. Here is an insight from Lloyd Reeb (LB) who runs the Half Time Institute. They work with successful leaders and help them towards a life of meaning and purpose. He speaks about the notion of each one of us being our own Chief Life Officer.

LB: *“the onus is on each of us to think in terms of being chief life officer. If you are going to have to zig and zag and reinvent yourself more than just twice, you know, used to be, I had 20 years of preparation, 30-year career, 30 years of retirement. If you look back even further, the average life expectancy was 48 or 49 just a 100 years ago; that was the average life expectancy here in America. So, you didn't even have the last 30 years. You basically came to your 50s and you retired worn out, you were a manual worker not a knowledge worker, your contribution dropped off with your energy dropping off. Today, so many talented smart people in India, their contribution can continue well into their 80s. And very many of them have global exposure because India is such a part of the global supply chain. And so, it's true that they are going to have endless opportunities going forward and the more opportunities you face the more important it is to know who you are, what you care about, why you do what you do and to have some metrics along the way and then to revisit that plan. One of the things that Peter Drucker challenged Bob to do early on was to create a life decades exercise. And that was to start with the current decade and define it using a single word or two. And that takes a little bit of difficult thinking, right? To put a... to describe the current decade of your life with a single word or two and then to go back to the decade prior, when you were younger, and describe it with a single word or two and how you spent your time, and then go back a decade earlier, pretty soon you are in your teen years. But the power of the exercise is as you look forward and you describe the next decade of your life with a single word or two and then two decades after that and all the way into your 80s or 90s and what happens is it starts to provide a trajectory in your mind and you start to realize that you have agency, you have responsibility to be planning and thinking about the future. So, we have so many options, comes the responsibility to learn, both the leadership and the intentionality and the skills to be an effective chief life officer. You can no longer rely on your company to map out your life for you. And chances are if you come home from your company and you have given it all you have got, and you have nothing creative to give to your spouse or your family or your neighbors or your community that you will end up largely disappointed in the second half of your life or the next season of your life.”*

DJ: Personally speaking, when I was an Executive Search Consultant at EgonZehnder, I felt a disconnect with having many evaluative and borderline salesy conversations with the people around me. I was deriving energy from conversations where I would be on the candidate's side helping them resolve the situations they were in but that is not the primary agenda of a Search Consultant. After

transitioning from the world of Poaching to Coaching, I am finding greater resonance between who I am being and what I am doing and I feel I can see that play out in how I show up in some of the other domains of life.

Back to what Raghu says, solving for coherence between Who you are being and what you are doing is paramount for us especially towards the later years of our life.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Lloyd Reeb that is referenced: [Being a Chief Life Officer](#).

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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