

## The Gap Between Literal and Symbol

June 14, 2015

I'm teaching my cats Archie and Reggie to use the toilet -- we're on month 7. It's taking so long because they learn at different speeds, but also because we get to a certain threshold, and then everything breaks down. We back up and try again.

I bought the litter-quitter seat, bought a book, used different litter, went through all the stages gradually with lots of treats and praise. The goal is by making the pan smaller, the cats will stop needing to scratch and bury, and will just hover over the bowl. We get to the point where the litter pan is about 4" square, when the cats need to take their back feet out of the pan, and up onto the seat with their front paws.

These are big boys. I even made a special seat for them. But I haven't been able to show them what I want them to do, so when the pan gets too small for their back feet, they go crap on the porch. And we start again. We've been through this cycle a number of times. Finally I reached out to an animal communicator to help me ask my cats: all four feet on the seat.

(You know, I was telling some friends that I had an appointment with an animal communicator and most of them laughed. They thought the whole thing was impossible and ridiculous: until I reminded them -- hey, I talk to dead people. It's entirely within the realm of possibility that others can talk to animals.)

First, I was informed that for animals everything exists in the present moment, without consideration for past or future. She told me: they get what you want -- I was telepathically encouraging them, showing them what I want -- but you're not listening to what *their* concerns are. She said, "For you, the litter box in the toilet is symbolic, for them, it's literal. (That and Archie's hips were a little tight)."

Next week I'm going on tour of four southern cities to give talks on spirit communication. Friday night I had a dream that on the last stop of my tour, nobody was listening to me or paying attention, just all chatting amongst themselves. And I was so frustrated! When I woke up and remembered this dream, I thought -- here is the symbol for a literal problem. Isn't it extraordinary how the subconscious mind works?

We all have a sixth sense and we're all connected to one another. That's what makes telepathy and interspecies communication possible. We not only communicate inter-mind, but we're equipped (through dreaming and other methods) to communicate *intra*-mind. In other words, here was one part of my mind (subconscious) explaining something to another part of my mind (conscious awareness):

- The last night of my tour... the last stage of my cat's training...
- Nobody's listening... I'm not listening...

What's the point of this story, you might ask? It's not so obvious as simply a reminder to listen to each other or have enough self-awareness to see subconscious messages as solutions to life's challenges.

What I'd like to underscore today is that cats are completely untrainable. (Just kidding).

What I'm discussing today is the gap between literal and symbol. If you happen to be in the symbol camp, you're one step ahead because you are already able to comprehend that there *is* a literal camp. A symbol by its very nature can be more than one thing. However, if you are in the literal arena, it's a whole different effort to make the leap over to symbol -- even to understand that symbols exist.

For my cats, the litter pan is the literal spot where they process their instinctual business. Scratching, squatting, and then covering their waste. It's literal. It's built into their survival. For me, their litter pan is just representative of a place where cats poop, so if it's plastic, cardboard, on the ground, in a toilet bowl -- it seems so obvious to me this pan with this sand in it just marks the spot where they ought to go. So gradually replacing it with a bowl of water should be a piece of cake, right?

Not if you're processing that piece of cake literally.

In the intra-mind communication of my dream and the rational interpretation of my dream, I can experience both the literal *and* the symbol. I can appreciate that and hold two perceptions in my mind at the same time. Cats, not so much. Also, I can hold a past experience in my mind while I process it in the present and project onto the future. Again: Cats, not so much.

Since that conversation with the animal communicator I've been de-symbolizing a lot around my house and in the way I spend time with my cats and dog and it's had a remarkable effect on my serenity, clarity, and spirit.

I'm not rushing to place meaning on every little thing. I'm not anthropomorphizing my pets' actions so much. I'm seeing my cats for who they are as cats, and suddenly I have a different kind of respect for them.

I'm teaching them now without expectation (for the first time), without an agenda or a future goal, and only with a present-moment appreciation for their literal processing. As a result, in the past few days they've come closer than ever to what I now see as our joint goals.

Because of this understanding, I keep reminding myself to take in the information in my environment, and my relationships, as it is right now, without looking any deeper or searching for any subtext. Without reflection on my previous experience with that environment or person, and without any agenda for the future.

It's hard work, but it's having an impact on my larger world, too. I check myself now when I feel my mind going into overdrive. It's by no means automatic and probably never will be, but what an experience! How often I've backed up and reminded myself, as Ram Dass said: Be here now.

Internally I've de-escalated arguments, self-criticism, judgment of others, and overall quarrelsomeness. Having to operate, at least in my own home in regard to training my cats, in a present-moment, literal framework has done more for me than years of admittedly sporadic meditation.

I hope you'll consider this as a small challenge that may have vast positive repercussions for your physical and mental health.

If you have a pet, start there. Start by just being in the presence of your cat or dog. I'm not saying don't interact, but rather just receive. Be quiet in your mind. If you catch yourself projecting or symbolizing something, try to stop and just take in that moment's data. Observe, witness.

If you don't have a pet, think about one action you have to do daily, like brushing your teeth or washing the dishes. Don't talk to yourself while you do it. Don't think about the day's earlier events or about what you have to do next. Just for a moment, exist in literal space and time.

We'll never stop symbolizing, making references to past experience or projecting into the future. I don't think our minds are built that way. But our *spirits* are! The spirit is timeless, and free of judgment or interpretation. By de-symbolizing or trying to have brief moments of purely literal existence, we let our immortal self out to play for a little while.

And isn't that spirit what we have in common with each other, with animals, with the deceased, and with our Creator? Isn't this the part of us that we're referring to when we say, "We're all One."

When I'm doing my spirit communication work, when I'm doing it correctly, time disappears. When I'm teaching my mediumship development class, that 90 minutes goes by in a flash.

Our spirits exist outside of time and place. We're all one. Blah blah blah -- I've heard that forever: *but* I always thought that was symbolic. But it's it not. It's literal.

And it took teaching my cats to poop in a toilet to finally figure it out. Let me close with just one perfect quote to sum up my talk today:

"The smallest feline is a masterpiece."  
- *Leonardo da Vinci*

Amen.