

Duxter Discovers How Time Works

As the forest became lighter for him he noticed a cottage, off in the distance, through the trees. So he veered off his path, following one that presented itself and headed towards the cottage. He noticed that it was very old, a white stucco building, framed by thick logs and a slate roof. Smoke billowed from the chimney. Someone was home.

He approached the cottage and saw an ornate sign on the front door:



Duxter knocked on the door, which was slightly ajar. It opened slowly. He peered inside. A very old Clock was crouched over a large wooden table, looking through a watchmaker's eyepiece. It seemed absorbed in its task. Duxter was not sure if he had been noticed. The Time Maker had not looked up.

“Good afternoon. Please have a seat,” it said. “I will be with you in a moment.”

Duxter looked around the shop. On the table next to him, lay the latest copy of the IN TIME Journal. Duxter leafed through it and saw articles and advertisements outlining the latest methods and tools used in the trade. The articles listed on the cover included, “Time waits for no one - ten ways of catching up to it.” Johannes Peitre himself had written a piece entitled, “What time is it really? - Zen and the art of keeping time.” Duxter was impressed.

On all the walls hung timepieces. Large old clocks with huge faces, small ornate ones, ones in need of repair, some yet to be completed, and beautiful new ones with smaller hands and unblemished faces not yet ravished by time.

“What can I do for you, young man?”

Duxter was not young but he was certainly not as old as this clock who, if the sign was right, must be over four hundred or so years of age. Anyone would be younger than that.

“Is there a piece you like?”

“Forgive me, I have never talked to a clock before.”

“You are forgiven for that oversight,” it said, smiling.

“I am merely travelling through. I hope I am not intruding.”

“Not at all. I make time for everyone,” it said, chuckling at its own humour. “Please, let me show you around.” The clock came around the table. “Can I get you some tea, or lunch perhaps?”

“Tea would be fine.” The clock was gone for many minutes and returned with a tea trolley.

“I was noticing that all the clocks are noted by levels. Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, Level 4 and so on.”

“Yes, and do you notice the hands, how they move?” Duxter got up to take a closer look. He went to the only

clock not classified by a number.

"In fact, the clock I am seeing has no hands. I cannot even tell what time it is."

"Ah, yes," said the Clock, fixing the sandwiches on the tray. "You are looking at a very, very young clock. A clock of this age is a pre-apprentice and has yet to grasp even an awareness of time. It will though, with experience and training."

"You see," the Clock continued "it does not know that it does not know and therefore lives completely in Bliss and so has no need for hands. For it, the only time is the present. The apprenticeship will start for this clock shortly and go on for as long as it takes."

"An apprenticeship?"

"Yes. All clocks go through an apprenticeship. They must understand how time works. Many are on time. A few are out of time. Only those that reach a state of being 'in time' will be allowed to go on."

Duxter followed the clocks around the wall. His eyes fell upon a clock that seemed to be out of control. Its hands were moving backward and forward, sometimes not moving at all. Sometimes it was keeping time, sometimes rushing time and sometimes slowing time down to a crawl. Johannes, who had gone back to the worktable, looked up from a timepiece he was working on. "Ah, yes, I have yet to be able to rectify these ones as they go through this stage of their growth," he said, dropping his work and coming to stand beside Duxter. "My only observation is, clocks go through a particularly difficult time at this stage in their development. They are aware of time but do not, as yet, know how to control it. They do much experimenting and you are now seeing the results of that experimentation. This is what I call the 'they know that they do not know' period. It can be very frustrating for them."

But he laughed as a wizened but patient teacher might at a pupil who has made a significant but wrong discovery. "The real challenges are those who 'think they know what they do not know'. Ah, but they are impetuous. Making many mistakes and making many discoveries. All that I can do is let them find out for themselves and be there when they are ready to listen."

Duxter smiled. He was thinking of his own children. "How long did it take this clock to reach level two?"

"For this clock, fifteen years, although each will do it at its own time," said the master, holding the clock in his hand and lovingly stroking it, as Duxter might his own daughter's hair.

"This training takes many years," responded Duxter. "I mean, this clock has been on the wall for fifteen years and has yet to learn all there is to time and being a clock. I don't know if I could be that patient," laughed Duxter.

"Ah, well I am not sure if it is patient. It lets me know in no uncertain terms that it feels ready to go out into the world." Johannes smiled. "Being a master timepiece takes great skill and knowledge," the old clock went on. "And clocks must reach the mastery level before they can leave here. Think about how significant time is to you. Virtually everything you do, your whole life in fact, revolves around time. When a clock is ready, you will be running your life by it. They must fully understand time for you, to be as effective as you need to be. They have a very important role to play and they take this responsibility very seriously."

Duxter thought back to the alarm clock in his knapsack, how it had helped him.

"I must sit for awhile." The old clock started to pour the steeped tea.

Duxter moved along the wall to a level three clock.

"That one has been here for twenty-five years," said the master, handing Duxter the tea.

Duxter noticed that this clock seemed to be more in control of itself. The hands were moving slowly but consistently around the face of the clock.

"This clock," said the master, "is still in the learning period of understanding. It is beginning to be aware of its competence and so can control itself, but has yet to understand. You see, a clock expresses its feelings through its hands. This clock's hands are moving slowly because it feels that it is taking too much time to become a master time-piece. It is entering the time paradox. It has the time to learn but does not want to take the time. It is at this point when some clocks do not make it. They become too impatient, not prepared to put in the effort and energy necessary for mastery."

"What happens to them?"

"I must put them at the back of the shop and start the process over with them. They will understand eventually."

"When does mastery occur?"

"For a clock, mastery occurs when it becomes unconscious of its ability to keep accurate time. Its hands move around the dial with simplicity and effortlessness. I know that this stage is reached when I can look at the clock and be unaware that the hands are moving at all, yet know that time is being accurately measured just the same. In short, I know what time it is," said the master, smiling.

Duxter laughed.

"What is time really, Duxter? Over the span of a lifetime, a month, a year is of little concern. What makes it of concern is one's perception or feelings of what is happening at any one moment. If one is experiencing difficulties or change, that same year can feel like an eternity. A clock that

is challenged, will need to take a wide perspective on its development and learn to be patient, knowing that it has the whole rest of its life to be a clock."

"Yet that wide perception, as you call it, is very difficult to keep," Duxter responded. "I mean, while you are going through it, you feel like it will go on forever. How do your clocks keep that wide perspective?" "I teach them how to look at themselves from outside their point of development and to see their entire lives. They see how much time they really do have left and how much they have accomplished over that time. I must say right here that it doesn't mean they become unwilling to work toward mastery, as if they had all the time in the world, it just helps them to separate the unproductive emotions from the reality. When they can do that, they are able to put their training into perspective. They learn to take what we call a 'whole lifetime perspective'. Did you notice, Duxter, that no clock here has a sweep second hand?"

Duxter looked more closely. "Hm. Yes."

"No clock," the master went on, "will get a sweep second hand until it can master time without it. Then it will receive the sweep second hand as an honour and graduation recognition."

"What about this clock?" Duxter looked at a Level Four clock. Its hands were moving much faster.

"This clock is at the other end of the time paradox. For it, time is moving faster, or so it feels anyway, so the hands move around the face faster demonstrating its fear that it will run out of time. Yet, when it reaches this stage, most clocks will take the time necessary to learn their craft. One or two more years, more or less, will make no difference. It has already taken the time. It knows that when it has mastered time, it will have many more years of productive life.

It has more patience and understanding of how mastery and life works. It is close to completing its learning. In fact, this one will slow itself down any day now and keep time like the true master I know it is. I expect great things from this one.”

“Is it finally understanding whole lifetime perspective?” asked Duxter.

“Clocks reach mastery at different times,” responded the master. “For some it is reached earlier, for others, later. It makes no difference. You will still be able to use it effectively.”

“This is quite a shop you have here,” said Duxter.

“Thank you. Well, you might be interested in knowing, Duxter, that we started to look into working with calendars, but I find them so one-dimensional and quite regimented.”

Duxter laughed as he sat down to finish his tea. He looked over at the old clock who was resting his eyes. Duxter wondered how long had it taken the old clock to become a master. He thought about his own development and how he might be able to make some changes relatively quickly, but it might require a little time and focus to make others. And when he really thought about it, all the clocks reached mastery at different times, depending on the natural flow of their own development. They couldn’t push time nor could they slow time down. Was life not like that anyway? It just was. He might have to accept that the solution to his filling in the gap (the clarity of his purpose) would happen when it happened.

Like the forest, he would watch and listen for it.

The clock was snoring in the chair, its head bobbing back and forth. Duxter wrote a note of thanks and left the cottage. He stored his new insight and experience in his knapsack. Another, less useful, experience from his past disappeared.