Just before it merges
Into an ocean of memory
The drop of the present moment
Is faultless in its perfection

So complete a world
Pure and elegant
Fleeting too, so elusive
Except to the keenest sense

The mind very silent
The heart fully devoted
The soul humbly empty
Only they can behold.

Surrender to its possibility
Revere its blessing
And make each moment
An impeccable existence

The moment is all we have

By Jagruti Gala
Transcendence is usually perceived as a rare or exotic experience that is the outcome of a spiritual practice. The word itself can elicit a range of reactions from yearning to indifference. This article seeks to demystify transcendence and proposes that it can be more a part of our everyday lives than we imagine, and further, that an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) outlook enables that possibility. Here’s a coaching story to illustrate that.

Coaching and the sweet spot

The client is a thirty-four-year old senior executive in India, who heads IT in a traditional, family-owned business. He belongs to a patriarchal culture where there is a thin line between reverence for and subservience to the leader.

The coach’s question—“What would it be like to acknowledge and connect with the ‘hero’ within you?”—startles him. He pushes back, dismissing the idea as ridiculous.

It is a shock to his system to entertain the possibility that the pain of his unmet needs for connection with his “hero” is creating dependency and blocking his own leadership potential. Then he repeats the question to himself, and in doing so falls into a deep, rarely displayed silence that stretches out.

The silence thrills the coach. This is clearly a moment of striking gold! At the end of the silence, the client does not speak about his heroism but something fundamental seems to have changed. The client seems to have touched the sweet spot, his “essential self” or “positive core” and there is no going back.

He describes the experience as being expansive, like a new sunrise. He realises his lack of inner connection. He then describes the sweetness of being close to “something within” and of savouring that intimacy. He talks of a glimpse of a completely new dimension. While he has no immediate resolution for his work situation, he has a direction, an inner truth and feels relaxed and reflective. Although it is new, the client commits to creating time each day for self-connection because it feels important at an experiential level. He agrees to explore his “heroic potential”.

Transcendence is in moments

Maybe this is the kind of moment that we coaches live for—I know I do. These moments might come in any form—exultant laughter, deep grief, stunned silence, seething rage, quiet relaxation and several others. What is common is the depth of one’s truth that each moment shines with and the feeling of having “come home”, an intimacy with oneself.
If transcendence is about the essential, about surpassing usual limits, about moving beyond the material issues – then I see each such moment as one of transcendence and an irreversible, indelible contribution to the transformational journey of the individual, in the direction of their choice. As these moments connect they begin to shape the “becoming”. Such moments may also be a more abundant and commonplace experience than the word “transcendence” usually conjures.

**The Appreciative Inquiry conversation**

The need to surpass, to go beyond, to break free is a natural and simple human impulse, an instinct to return “home”. I see it as a practice: a continual, cyclical process of turning, like the dervish, from the existential to the essential to the existential, available to all. It is my experience and belief that the “appreciative coaching conversation” is a golden key to support this. Conversations of curiosity anchored in AI principles allow for that ongoing movement.

**Alignment is that place of rest**

To have humility is to experience reality, not in relation to ourselves, but in its sacred independence. It is to see, judge, and act from the point of rest in ourselves. Then, how much disappears, and all that remains falls into place.

In the point of rest at the center of our being, we encounter a world where all things are at rest in the same way. Then a tree becomes a mystery, a cloud a revelation, each man a cosmos of whose riches we can only catch glimpses. The life of simplicity is simple, but it opens to us a book in which we never get beyond the first syllable. Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*

People in all walks of life became my teachers to learn the simplicity that Hammarskjöld describes so well – the one beyond words. They avoided, pushed back and rejected my concepts of spirituality and also received, connected and resonated. This shaped my ability to embrace the diversity of the transcendental experience, often not captured in words. People taught me to listen from that place of rest within me to the similar place within them.

What is this place of rest? It is a felt sense – a place of deep safety and surety – when our entire nervous system comes into a state of calm similar to the effect of meditation. It is that place of “what matters”, what wants to emerge, with a full acceptance of “what is”, agreeable or disagreeable – a clearing in the forest of the mind. Some call it “my soul”, some “my being”, some “my essence” and some...
simply say “so cool man, this is the real me”. The vocabulary may be different, yet the felt sense is the same.

Even as we feel so close to and sure about our individuality, this is also the place where we often feel joined to the rest of humanity: to purpose, to nature, to other life forms and the cosmos. Our identity both strengthens and dissolves in simultaneity. We feel more rooted in our body and we surmount the fear of perishing in any form – physical or emotional. It can be breathtaking or it can be very quiet and subtle.

It is a moment of opening and, most times, all it takes is conversation, deep listening and a simple, curious question!

The unifying aspect of appreciative coaching

In the hierarchical model of needs, transcendence resides towards the top of the pyramid and by default enjoys a “lofty” status. It seems to connote a need for the “other-world” experience that has finality about it, a sense of destination and arrival. This is compounded by the belief systems that divide life into the mundane and the profound.

Spiritual practices and meditation can also polarize our transcendence experience into “on the mat” and “off the mat” as the harmony we desire is more accessible during the practice or in a temple but not in “everyday” life. Well-meaning masters and seers come as guides to help fulfil this need, but can create an inequity of power by their sheer persona, and in doing so perpetuate the gap.

The appreciative conversation is a non-sectarian, universally applicable framework that bridges the gap and creates parity as it empowers the individual to take conscious charge of their experience of meeting life with calm, courage and choice.

For me, one of the most impactful principles of AI is that humans are heliotropic and move naturally towards the life-giving energy. What can be more life-giving than feeling fully the embodiment of our deeply held values, our sense of inner resonance and the dreams contained within that? What can be more courageous than embracing the vulnerability around those dreams? What can be more empowering and self-affirming than choosing the inquiry that helps us say ‘YES’ to life?

Flowing with the natural

In closing, I would like to share a story of this natural life-impulse for transcendence from an after-school community learning centre that I have
During conversation she asked them, ‘What will make you happy? What will you love?’ They said they would love to learn.

founded and run in Vadodara, India. One of the faculty works extensively with the urban poor. She had a new group in her charge, children of rag-picker families who do not have well-built homes to live in. They live in ramshackle huts under trees amidst the refuse of the city all around them. During conversation she asked them, “What will make you happy? What will you love?” They said they would love to learn. She found herself promising them she would return the next day with learning materials.

That entire night she could not sleep, feeling overwhelmed with responsibility and challenged by the inhuman and very dirty environment. She could not trust herself to work in those conditions. After a night of value conflict, she arose with a resolve to be in integrity with her promise. She gathered crayons, paper and books, and proceeded.

As she got closer, she saw the children sitting atop a heap of garbage, looking out for her. Spotting her, they slid down in excitement and ran to greet her. Brimming with anticipation they took her hands and dragged her to the rear of a little hut. They shone as they showed off an area that they had completely cleared, made spick-and-span, and lined with a low wall of broken roof shingles retrieved from their foraging and piled one atop another. They had created a learning space!

She was moved to tears with only one thought in her head, “What if I had chosen to not come?”

The children’s faith in their own potential, their sense of dignity and their willingness to trust and connect was overpoweringly moving and humbling. These are children who have less than nothing and a bleak future, and yet they acted from the most fundamental, natural instinct of the human spirit. Their capacity for joy and attunement to their dream remains an ever inspiring and exemplary story of transcendence and heroism for me. It is the direction I turn towards.

I end with a salutation for every unsung hero who has won the battle of the moment.
REFERENCES


