

On Portals

or

A Brief Guide to Time Travel

All big mountains are gravity-fed playgrounds. Every descent is another opportunity to step into the gravity stream and ride it in such harmony that movement and being cease to be separate. The skier in the flow passes through a portal that allows a glimpse, however short-lived, of the elasticity of time. This evidence that all of time already *is*; this demonstration, if you will, that eternity is connected to our temporal world in every moment we call the present, is accessible to all elite skiers.

I wish I could be more ecumenical in conferring access to such portals, but there is absolutely no way through the gate while one is still struggling with mechanical issues. Skills have to be engrained and they must be fundamentally correct. If this sounds like a meritocracy, it is. One cannot get through a portal in time while carrying baggage, which includes all the tonnage on technique the average advanced skier hauls around in his or her head.

Not to mention the steamer trunk-load of fear one may drag to the edge of a portal. There's no way anyone's getting in with that luggage. Not that fear isn't an occasionally useful feature, and in many instances it's perfectly understandable, but it has to be left behind if one wants to pull off the trick of stretching time.

Lest this sound like metaphysical malarkey, let's take a run together. From the top of a big mountain like Snowbird, Utah, we'll have a vast spectrum of portals from which to choose, so let's head there. To improve our chances of success, let's cover the mountain with two feet of fresh snow delivered by a west wind that fills in the faces of the Peruvian Cirque. We'll look for a line somewhere between Great Scott and the Middle Cirque where the fall line plunges straight to the valley floor. Somewhere in that trajectory lies a portal to timelessness. It's up to us to find it.

Any description of the pre-flight routine is always distorted because events are perforce presented as a series while in practice several steps

may happen at once. Circumstances may also require some flexibility in one's approach (consider: other skiers), so dogma isn't as important as karma. So, recognizing this sequence may sometimes be scrambled, let's first peak over the rim and check out our line. It's clean, with a little rubble to skier's right to keep clear off. It's time for baggage release: stop thinking about, well, everything but line and flow. We are about to switch from thinking being to sentient being, all feeling and reaction. We align our skis with the fall line: this is no time for a timid entry. One more, fully focused look, then a crucial click of our poles together before rocking back and rolling forward into the future.

Let's hit the pause button for a second. Just before pushing off, we clicked our poles, which was probably the most important moment in this run. It's an engrained signal to stop any and all monkey chatter. Whatever we thought, whatever we visualized, whatever we feared one second ago is banished, gone. This allows us to become one with our movements right from the start, so flow and rhythm aren't delayed but instantly engaged. Since we left our fear up on the lip, we can open the throttle, invite gravity to increase the tempo and unleash its thrusters.

Snow is now flying over both shoulders in unbroken waves as we settle into a pattern of extending our legs to a fathomless bottom and riding a surging ski back towards the surface, and weightlessness. We sink again, nothing but a ball of sensations, of snow, of cold, of sliding, of speed, of joy; and then, as our skis rise again to plane in perfect harmony across the hill and set to plunge again, we move into the next moment. We're already there, already sinking in, already fully extended to the side before we got there. We started the turn in the present and ended it in the future. The sense of disconnection from time's metronome is sustained for a few more turns and then the energy that fueled the transformation is exhausted.

The moment has passed, but the genie is out of the bottle. Time has been exposed as a fraud. What we thought were unbreakable chains, as it turns out, have only the power we give them.

Jackson Hogen
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