

FINE POINT

Sacrifice

Thinking Environment

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SACRIFICE

Every decision is a sacrifice.

This reflection by Martha Graham speaks to me. I keep thinking about it and seeing its truth everywhere. Most compellingly, I find it sitting in the centre of the Thinking Session. It explains, I think, the dilemma we can have in choosing or not to continue to generate a person's independent thinking.

In those moments, we see that we have a choice: we can sacrifice our own known input, or we can sacrifice the Thinker's as yet unknown breakthrough thought. The pull is to sacrifice the unknown for the known. To speak. To guide. To shape. To default to ourselves as the more valuable expert.

But every decision is a sacrifice. At the moment we decide, something else dies. Something at least recedes, and there usually withers. So we have to consider which sacrifice to make. We have to weigh the risks.

Risk assessment comes in many forms. The method I like best is from the philosophy of Nassim Taleb in his book *Antifragile*.

The guiding question in considering a decision is:

Will the downside from the loss be greater than the upside from the gain?

If the downside will be greater, don't do it. If the upside will be greater, do.

I honour this because when it comes to generating the best thinking in each other, we can recognise that as the listener we do not lose our known ideas if we continue to listen rather than to talk. We have our ideas. We can retrieve and offer them anytime.

But we don't have the Thinker's still-to-be-formed ideas. And to lose those is a loss with a greater downside for the Thinker (and for us, actually) than would be the upside from the gain of our ideas.

What we don't have we lose forever. What we do have, we have forever.

So it seems to me that in choosing the sacrifice of the known for the gain of the unknown allows us two gains in the end. Once the Thinker has generated all they can, we now have available both people's best thinking.

Sacrifice, then, is gain. Another wonderful Thinking Environment paradox.