

KARMA AND AWARENESS

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Karma is so close. I used to think that karma, like the ten commandments in the Bible, referred to the big things we should not do, like “Do not kill,” “Do not steal,” etc., things I don’t do anyway, so why worry about karma? But karma is so much closer than that, like a magnifying mirror right in front of our face. Even the smallest details of life are karma-ridden. They count, add up, and we are counted by everything we touch and do, as well as how we do it. There are no exceptions. Could this be true?

When I asked the Buddhist teachers and drilled down on it a little, the truth was even more explicit than I had even imagined. It would take some advanced calculus to grasp the scope of the differential involved in karma. There are no limits, edges, or end to it. Nothing short of complete and total awareness is enough, and I don’t have that yet... but it is on my list.

And trying to be aware is so, well, just that, “trying,” just so tiring, and hard to do, that I have to take some rest along the way, as this little poem I wrote suggests:

TESTING THE REST

Learning to rest the mind,
Really puts my practice to the test,
So sometimes I just need to take a break,
And simply get some rest.

Practice makes perfect, but dharma practice takes effort, and effort takes energy, and we only have so much of that. It took me a long time to stop mistaking my practice of meditation for the result of meditation, as if they were the same. Practice takes effort, and effort and true meditation don’t mix. The sheer diligence and effort it takes to learn meditation overclouds any actual meditation that might be happening and itself becomes an obstacle. Remember the old phrase “Trying doesn’t do it; doing does it.”

Trying-to-meditate, like the scaffolding on a building, must be removed before we can actually meditate. We ‘practice’ meditation, but we must stop “practicing” and just meditate when we finally learn how, like the guy who jumps on the bobsled after pushing it so hard.

Meditation with effort is necessary, but counterproductive. It takes effort to build the habits needed for meditation, but then that very effort needs to be given up. It is a little bit like the old “hurry up and wait” admonition, only here it is “put some effort into meditating and then drop the effort.” Hmmmm. Easier said than done. It is only through meditation training (or the equivalent) that we develop the awareness we need to handle our karma.

True awareness has no lapses, no time-outs or rest-stops, and no gaps. It is on 24x7 and, like WD-40, penetrates into the finest minutiae, to the limit of our mind. The mind is the limit, and the mind is limitless, so our awareness should be infinite; eventually, it just has to be. This won't happen overnight and not without an initial effort. Meditation requires the effort to form a habit and then allowing the mind to rest in that. Drop the effort.

Right now most of us are all bottled up, just waiting to relax our mind and let ourselves out. And we CAN learn to do this. There is nothing to do in meditation but relax and allow the mind to naturally rest as it already is. Of course, trying to relax has to be an oxymoron, but that is what we have to do. The Tibetan lamas tell me that each of us often rests the mind naturally during the day, but we are not aware of it. So we CAN do it, just not consciously when we want to. Meditation on demand, that's what we need.

So what's stopping our whole society from jumping in and learning to meditate and relax the mind? The simple answer is "lots of things." Meditation is too linked to being quote, "spiritual, unquote, and thus somehow 'religious' in a derogatory sense. And the New Age wave of the 1970s kind of put the kibosh on meditation in the public's eye. Lava lamps, burning candles, trance, séances, and scores of other practices were labeled meditation when, in the history of mind training, they are at best footnotes.

I have spent most of my adult life probing the limits of the psyche and mind looking for peace and release. In all that time the only magic bullet I have found is awareness. Of course, I find it ironic that the word Buddha simply means the awakened or aware "One." It was staring me in the face all the time. And it has been the magic bullet I always imagined might exist somewhere. For example:

Just try to be compassionate. Very hard to do, try. Yet the moment we develop even a little awareness, compassion, kindness, generosity, and all those good things just naturally dawn, effortlessly. In my experience, awareness really is the cure-all.

And while developing a little awareness initially takes some effort, it is one-stop shopping, all you need from here on out. As you can see, I can't recommend it enough.