

MICRO-KARMA
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The problem with great moments (or insights) is that I tend to naturally want to repeat them, to have them happen again, just as they were, or even better. That wish on my part is like a death sentence, a sure sign they will never come again, at least not like that. And it gets worse.

Not only will those pure moments not reoccur, but my labeling them as "best" or desirable immediately puts a filter between me and that possibility, and every time after that, when I compare any decent moment to that "best" moment (and, of course, I do), the filter becomes more and more of an obscuration, until, top-heavy, it tumbles from my inner sky. What was a pole star in my life has become an anchor pulling me down.

This is especially true for any moment that I might mark as "spiritual." For me, so-called "spiritual progress" too often turns into one of those one-step-forward and two-steps-back processes that quickly mark a point of diminishing returns, like the return of that experience. It won't return, at least not like that.

It can take me days, weeks, months, years, and decades (!) to repeat or even come close to some (what I call) break-through moments. I like to joke with myself about it, and an analogy I use is that of being held under water by life and finally coming up for air and getting a breath, and then wanting that air so badly that I hold my breath so I won't lose it. That would be me.

Of course, I can only hold my breath so long before life knocks it out of me in an attempt to start me breathing again, much like doctors slap the newborn's bottom to make the baby breathe. Life does that to me every time. And I guess it is a good thing too.

Of course I have read all the books, been to the teachings, and even common sense tells me that clinging to a spiritual (or treasured) experience is the perfect way to stain it. Any kind of undue attachment on my part will poison a moment and send me tumbling over and over in inner space trying to hold on to it. And it can't be done. It is like a law of nature.

Sooner or later, I have to breathe. One of my life teachers taught me early-on that a person can only hang on to any thought for around three days, or as long as they can go without sleep. But sooner or later, they must sleep, and in that sleep we tend to let go of what we cling to, whether that thought is good or bad. Our enemies (whatever they are) also cannot hang on to bad thoughts about us, either. That is a correlate.

Like the hummingbird, we are meant to just sip the flowers of life on the fly, so to speak, and then move on. We dare not hold on to anything, if we want to live.

So the obvious point here is to take note of what happens if we label and become attached to a desirable experience. This is an easy experiment to make with your own precious moments -- common knowledge, so to speak.

Less obvious (and here comes the point of this blog) is learning not to be attached (in the same manner) to disappointments, blind alleys, and any bridge-too-far that we set for ourselves. We also grind those experiences into habit by attachment, albeit reverse attachment. We don't want

that to happen again, so of course it does, or at least our negative attachment becomes the glue that underlines the experience in our mind until it becomes an inscription, like an epitaph.

The brilliant Tibetan Buddhists point out that this is how karma is created, not just in the big mistakes we make in life, but much more insidiously in the perpetual rain of self-judgment and negative attachments we record in our mindstream each and every day, and for many of us, almost every moment. These are what add up into real karmic debt that we pay just by living as we do.

It came as a revelation to me when my Buddhist teachers pointed out that by just learning (and training, mind you) to let go of these attachments, positive and negative, we stop recording karma and can begin to go karma-free. We stop accumulating and inscribing in our mindstream a constant torrent of micro-karma that incrementally adds up to certain suffering on our part.

To my mind, the scariest part of karma is not only the dimming of our mind that its accumulation brings, but the fact that all karma which we accumulate also will eventually ripen (and with interest) down the road in ever more serious suffering (even worse dimming). For me, that was something to consider. I had no real notion of this, until I examined it.

The takeaway here (at least for me) is that the most worrisome karma is the endless underscoring of bad thoughts, hurt feelings, emotional reactions, likes and dislikes, the incessant labeling that we constantly do all day long. That is a karma causer, but one that we can do something about, if we wish.

We can learn to suspend judgment, to not-label, to put our over-critical tendencies into neutral gear, and simply stop recording as much karma as we now record. It is that difficult or that easy.

Yes, it takes work, and that is why some of us learn to train our minds through appropriate meditative practices to not underscore, inscribe, and endlessly record and accumulate this micro-karma. In other words, as they say, don't sweat the small stuff.

Make sense?



[Image of hummingbirds from Ernst Haeckel's *Kunstformen der Natur* (1899).]