

SPIRITUAL ACUMEN

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My mind naturally wants some concentration-intensive spiritual work each day. By "spiritual" I mean a meditation-like workout. Obviously, the various kinds of basic meditation are custom designed for this kind of exercise, but that does not mean they are the only game in town. You may have already learned to use your mind in a way similar to meditation.

Like a dull knife that wants to be sharpened, the mind once sharp seeks to remain sharp. We notice quickly when it gets dull and soon miss the clarity and insight that well-honed meditation practice produces and find ourselves seeking it out. Clarity (like all good things) tends to be addictive. And while any practice or situation will do for an expert meditator, for most of us we are lucky if we have even one kind of mental exercise that can get us in the right frame of clarity each day.

As physical exercise keeps us in good shape and we can tell when we are losing tone, it is no different for spiritual and mental acuity. When the clear edge of insight rubs off, we find ourselves looking for ways to restore it. This is why I wrote in an earlier blog that mind training is not just a routine, but also a window and insight into life that reveals, if nothing else, a clearer me, and I like that. I like clarity.

And as in physical health, we might want to jog, take a trip to the gym, or at least go for a walk, my mind becomes restless for clarity and seeks out spiritual exercise when I feel unclear. If we have established a productive dharma practice, we can often find clarity there. Going through a fixed ritual or the discipline it takes to remain aware in sitting meditation can be just the ticket to get free and clear.

If we don't have such a discipline, it is pretty much catch as catch can, feeling around for something in life that will scratch that itch and bring the kind of clarity we have become accustomed to that we call normal. Sooner or later we stumble upon something that perhaps does the trick, but we may not be able to repeat it again on demand. This is why it is an advantage to find some kind of spiritual/mental discipline to train in that will help us reach the point where we generate some light and not just heat.

Some folks do crossword puzzle, play video games, fix things around the house, go bowling, and so on. There are many ways to concentrate and possibly generate clarity. I am talking here about a clear and healthy-feeling state of mind when we just feel good.

Everyone works to maintain a certain standard of living. We exercise to keep in a certain physical shape, and there are also spiritual standards of clarity that, once tasted, we naturally

want to maintain. If someone were to take away my Internet connection, I would really feel deprived, but not as much as if I had no way to maintain mental clarity. As they say, if you lose an arm you can still function, but if you lose your mind, you cannot. I feel similarly about clarity and insight.

The clarity of what is called insight meditation is addictive. As far as I can tell, it is the natural state my mind enjoys.

[This little jumping spider seemed pretty happy when he posed for this portrait holding his latest trophy (and dinner), a fly. I have no idea what the spider said to the fly.]

