

STUFF, AND HOW TO DO IT

June 6, 2013

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

I am good at doing stuff, always have been. When asked which of the five Buddha families I probably belong to, it was an easy choice, the Karma Family, because the attributes of that Buddha family are activity and the wisdom of accomplishment. I can't speak to having wisdom, but accomplishing stuff... I can do that. And since I am frequently asked just how I do that, I thought I could write something about that here.

Like all things, this topic is as complex as it needs to be to make it real for us. And since the universe wants to stay in equilibrium, if we have more of one thing, we probably have less of another. Another way of saying this is that if you want to accomplish things, it will take energy and time to do that, which means you give up doing some other things. For myself, I never cared much about what I missed. So, how to do stuff?

I can cut right to the chase and just say straight-away that in my opinion what we most need to know is what we really feel like doing. Without that, not much is going to get done. And how do we do that?

The best time to determine what we really feel like doing is after some big upset in life, like a big loss or tragedy, because at those times we don't feel like doing much of anything and the place to start is with a clean slate, being empty of the wish to do anything. It is rare, but it happens to all of us. If we don't have a big loss handy, a little slump will have to do.

There are times when we are just naturally emptied out of wanting or desiring anything in this world. We don't feel like going to work, we don't feel like moving off the seat we are sitting on, we don't feel like doing what we have to do, and so on. Life as we know and love it has somehow just gone void for a spell. We have for whatever reasons come up empty. This happens, especially after the self gets shattered and before we start to pick up the pieces and reassemble them, you know, pull ourselves back together again.

The point here is that we can look for those times the self is emptied out and (as the feelings to do things start to come back in again) simply make a list of what we feel like doing. This is not a list of what we don't feel like doing, which at those times is not much of anything at all but rather, as the tides of the self slowly come back, a list of what it is that we "do" feel like doing or... what comes to our mind at those times. I find that it helps to actually write these things down, if you can, and in the order of appearance.

When we are all the way back to normal again, and the self is pumped up (which can take a

while), then take a look at the list, starting at the top. Those first few things on the list are what you feel like doing. They are the ones to bet your life on.

As mentioned, the list should have the first thing that moved us (when the self came back) at the top, and then the next, and so on. If the first item on your list at these times is "nothing," cross that out for now. That is just too "Zen" for this discussion. Also cross out things like "almost nothing" and "very little," and so on. They don't count.

And we all have to pay the bills, so don't get crazy ideas if you don't find "Go to work" near the top of the list. The spider does not let go of one hand-hold until he finds another, and so on. The list should contain things that we actually can do without abandoning our current responsibilities, like for example:

Be with my family or loved ones.
Have time to live.
Find another way to make a living,
Live in the country.
Lose weight.
... and so on.

It's your list, but you get the idea. The short list (the top few) tells us where we will have enough energy and enthusiasm to persevere. Those things way down the list will probably never happen. You don't like doing them as much as you like to think you do.

The beauty of this approach is that starting when the self is empty, tapped-out, shattered, and at its lowest ebb, often the really important things are the first to come to mind. These are what we should pay attention to, like loving our family, being thankful – things like that. These are also things to do.

When the self is full of itself (no pun intended), there is no telling what kind of blue-sky windmills we might set out to tilt at, right? What the self "thinks" we want and what we really want are often two very different things. Remember the word "want" means to lack or need. Find out what you really want more than anything else, and then do that.

To summarize, the secret to accomplishing things in my opinion is enthusiasm -- passion. Without that, I can't do much of anything or won't. I have to find things that I love or am passionate about because that alone is the fuel that keeps me going. Take that away and I have just a normal "to do" list, the kind that your boss might give you, one that you don't much feel like doing. That will never work better than it does now. If you want to set out on the "road not taken," there usually is some sacrifice required, some dues to pay. This was true for me.

In my own case, I followed my heart from around the age of six years onward and it led me to leave high school early (so forget about college), which act resulted in my being more or less shunned by formal society. And by following a vocation (astrology) that was not considered a

right-livelihood by my local banker, and more or less taboo by society, I got little to no support from anywhere for my choices. I was on my own. It is difficult to go against or outside the norm, and it is not like I was all that secure as a person. I was alone on my journey at least until I met my wife Margaret.

I was used to doing what I was really enthused about, following my heart, and I didn't have the heart to give that up. Without my passion and enthusiasm I really was a kind of unfortunate character.

Anyway, this gets us started. If you like, let's discuss, and if there is interest I can probably come up with some more suggestions, other approaches to doing stuff.

[Photo not by me.]

