

THE LOSS OF SUBSTANCE: CONCLUSION

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Well there you have a quick tour of my vices, and I am sure I am not alone in having them. When I am sometimes asked "What is the key to beating these vices," I always have the same answer: ever greater awareness.

If I can manage to develop increasing awareness of myself and my surroundings, the rest all falls into place. Awareness allows me to see where and who I am, what is good for me and what is not, aside from what my ingrained habits dictate. I am a stubborn cuss. No preacher or teacher, no amount of proselytizing is going to force me to do anything unless I check it out personally and find it is in my best interests. The one thing I have found teachers good for is showing me how (methods) to become more aware of who I am and what is happening around me.

In every case when I struggled with a bad habit, whether it was cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, caffeine, or what-have-you, it is increased awareness that allows me to determine that it is in my best interests to move away from that habit. And I don't mean in my best interests, intellectually or rationally. I mean in my real-time practical best interests. And it is not often easy and usually involves somewhat of a battle. So far, it has taken most of my life to get this far. That is how hard it is for me to get around to the point at times.

Awareness is IMO the single most important key to handling bad habits. And how do we become more aware? There are many ways, one of the most common being when something almost catastrophic happens in our life or in the life of someone we love. We wake up, if only for a moment, a day or two, or a short time. In that natural gap or "time-out" from our distractions we can sometimes better see the path or way to go on.

In my experience, the preferred method to awareness is some kind of mind-training, call it meditation, mind practice, or whatever you like. I don't mean lighting a candle, burning some incense, and turning out the lights. Unfortunately, in this country we have the one word "meditation" to cover a host of kinds of mind practice. I refer to practices that make you more aware, like being here now, not some soothing blue-light reverie.

And here is where you might want to allow me (please) to get a little enthusiastic, if only because awareness training has been so important in my life. If it sounds too preachy, at least you can understand where I am coming from and why I might want to point what works for me out to you.

In my experience, learning to meditate the way the Tibetan and Zen Buddhists meditate really works. It takes time and patience, but what that is worthwhile doesn't? You have to keep at it and results don't come easily or soon, but they do come and they do work. I have found nothing else even close to giving the returns that an investment in mind training offers, and I have searched.

I came from the 1950s where life was about our crew cut haircuts, pedal pushers, saddle shoes, and coonskin caps. And I came to life in the 1960s where my heart was fixed or imprinted with

the values of that time. Change often is slow. As a Sixties child, I worked with my generation on so many things that only now (forty years later) are becoming more accepted, things like having our babies at home or in a loving home-like atmosphere, home schooling our kids and helping them find their passions before turning them loose, working to pioneer the foods we eat and what is in them, promoting whole and organic foods, preventative medicine, protecting our environment, and much more. None of these changes came quickly.

While the conservative nature of those in power back then made it difficult to impossible for alternative-culture types like me to come in the front door, my generation freely walked into the back door of the future to pioneer the Internet and all manner of sharing information. It was our secret door. No one else knew of its existence. That door was wide open because we created it ourselves, a day at a time. No one would do it for us. Isn't this always the case? Others can only point out methods how to become more aware. We have to become more aware by ourselves.

In my own case, aside from being an astrologer, I became an archivist of popular culture, working to share popular music and film with everyone, which is what the sites I created (AllMusic.com, AllMovie.com, and others) were all about. When I built and directed them, there was not a single ad or product to buy. For me it was all about celebrating the music and films we are part of. All-Music Guide is the largest music database of reviews, sidemen, and albums that has ever existed.

And sites like Facebook prove their worth by bringing us together in meaningful ways, ways that were all but impossible before the Internet. For example, I learned to use a library early on and am highly skilled in searching out subjects. Today the Internet makes the whole world our library and almost everyone has full access to it. What only someone trained in using library tools used to be able to do back then, today anyone can do. The search capabilities of the Internet are the most democratic and equalizing event I have ever witnessed. And the future?

If you trust me at all, trust that learning to use and train the mind is to the future today what the Internet and computers were to the future yesterday. This is the uncharted territory for a modern and future world, the "new land." Meditation and mind training (which may seem foreign and strange just now) will be the coin of the realm tomorrow. It will be then what having a college degree is today, something almost everyone is expected to have. The future, like the proverbial sunken city of Atlantis, is already rising into view for those who have the awareness to see it and we can learn how to put it to use. I can see the future and it belongs to those who are more aware.

Mind training is not about learning to use your mind to learn geometry or to get a degree, but rather learning to use the mind to know itself, turning the mind not outward at the world, but inward, with the mind as the object 'and' the mind as the subject looking, in other words: beyond any elaboration, thought, and duality. This is not mysticism, kooky, or other-worldly. It is a technique that has been taught for centuries, unfortunately not anywhere near where we now live. Its result is enhanced awareness, and that awareness is IMO the key to direction in life. The difference in awareness between one person or another may be small, but it also may well be all the difference in the world. Developing that awareness is the theme of this blog.

Thanks for listening and contributing!

I have put this whole series into a free e-book and will post the link later today where you can find it. Thanks for all your many contributions!

The photo is of a hand mudra called the 'protection' gesture. May it protect the lives and health of us all, and may whatever merit we have accumulated from this blog and its comments serve to benefit all sentient beings everywhere.

