

Nuances of purpose

“...walk on through the wind, walk on through the rain, though your dreams be tossed and blown; walk on, walk on with hope in your heart and you’ll never walk alone...” You’ll never walk alone; Carousel, a musical from Rodgers and Hammerstein

“...a smile is a glorious victory over misfortune...” RelaxingOne.com, writings archives, est. 2008

What will we turn to when plans fall through, things don’t work out, disappointments and losses occur, worries mount, fear and shame arise, interactions lack integrity, long held beliefs seem to no longer fit, political trends change, health falters, pollution poisons the beauty of the earth, oppression overtakes justice, mental health and balance seem out of reach, stress becomes chronic, desire triggers mistakes, false expectation and evidence appear real, pain dominates consciousness, friends are hard to find, evil seems to triumph, dreams are tossed and blown, uncertainty is the only certainty, knowledge is incomplete, people we trust betray us, the end comes to that which we relied upon, all is impermanent, we are caught in duality, our intentions are misunderstood, we lose sight of wisdom and perspective, there are ghosts in our pockets, we obsesses about what might have been, we’re no longer young, pretty, stylish and popular, or we never were, when we become sick and can no longer take care of our business, or ourselves, when obstacles seem more powerful than our resources, when we want what we don’t have, when we have what we don’t want, when the road of consciousness is an ill fitted wobbly wheel and the ride is bumpy?

Recognize and be aware that from every walk of life and at every stage, at any given moment there may be challenges. Depending upon practices, resources, preparation, organization, and approach, challenges are at times obstacles, and at other times opportunities.

What allows skillful navigation through obstacles and skillful action through opportunities is purpose. Purpose moves through difficulty, and difficulty helps to build purpose. It is, in fact, difficulty which often brings us to purpose, for most human ailments are borne of the illusion of separateness in the midst of struggles.

Mindfulness helps us to work with confusion, challenges and difficulty by allowing for simplicity. Simplicity comes when we dedicate attention, without judgment to continuous practice of a basic task-like paying attention to the breath. This allows steadiness and an opportunity to observe the mind’s workings and an opportunity to make choices (options). There can be a subtle process of allowing thoughts to come and go, realizing that we don’t have to engage with every thought. Subtly we are on the practice path of a shift in our relationship to thoughts, feelings and emotions. Within the choice to cultivate or not to cultivate directions begins steadiness, simplicity, and focus on process rather than content. The awareness of process changes the relationship to thoughts and emotions associated with life situation and circumstances. Empowered to pause from the attachment to such trends of interpretation, liberates us to comprehend the needs of others around us, take actions toward the fulfillment of those needs, which can become the basis for a number of altruistic efforts; these build merit, create meaning and dismantle the illusion of solo selfhood, the chief cause of unhappiness.

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Continuing to be close to my actual present moment experience allows me to struggle less, strive less, resist less, and be grateful for this moment; as it is. At times this will be a challenging or difficult moment or experience. Not all moments are peaceful or joyous, and habits have been formed around responses to challenging or difficult moments, that close to automatically dramatize them with narratives (content focus), and over time, have created sympathetic nervous system patterns of fight or flight. During challenging moments, staying present, being with the range of inclined responses, conditionings and habit traces, allows me to have some perspective and understanding, pauses auto-pilot reactivity and softens past build up of inevitability of and identification with thoughts and emotion forms and concepts (content focus).

There is a recognition of these attributes and inclinations that prepares those upon the road of awareness practice to cultivate a resilient reception of experience on its own terms through the information provided by the emotions and intuitions embedded in obstacles. Moment to moment, we are challenged with ethical dilemmas too complex for the fight or flight system to discern. Some of the challenge is that such decisions are not frequently of the life or death variety, yet have inclusive impact beyond the senses to comprehend impact for later (uncertainty amidst the cycles of suffering humans do not avoid witnessing). One of our living tasks is to notice this suffering in others as well as in ourselves and then to respond to alleviate the suffering if we can. The times when we are knocked off balance by the obstacles, struggles, pain and other forces that serve to remove attention from the present are the harbingers of change, the detritus of illusion that deliver us to the nuances of purpose.

If we are fooled into resisting the obstacle, we are snared into the trap of desire that rejects and dismisses what we have before us—an effort borne of not wanting what is. This achieves escape from the moment while unwittingly placing us off balance for whatever shall follow, making time the constant thief of development. Change as pattern disruption is sustained in intention by consistency of the practice of being present, combined with the application of compassion to allow the practitioner to accept that which is at hand—allowing one to work with what is.

In mindfulness practice we gradually learn that through compassion and acceptance we are able to change the relationship that we have to thoughts and feelings. The same ability to transform and be present with thoughts and feelings is also true of pain and challenges. In the midst of pain and challenges comes one of the most significant obstacles to the ongoing sustained intent to continue to do the work. Stress and the attendant influence of the quality of thoughts, feelings and approach that occur during times of stress are an imprimatur which can overlay the ease, and received perception of felt life experience. These are times when there may seem to be irrefutable proof that life has lost its wonder.

There is a gradual recognition through the facing of these challenges, that even they may be held in a new light. The work to establish such an astounding if ephemeral outcome is so gradual, however, that patience and forbearance must be coupled with focus to sustain the hope that it will occur.

This consideration provides an example of how having a supportive community of fellow practitioners provides not only affiliative bonds, but also the support needed to ease the difficult times. There is the

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local community, the worldwide community and the traditional and historical one to draw upon for support, both teachers and teachings. Self-compassion practices often utilize the body of the greater agency of the energies found in these wisdom sources to steady the bumpy ride provided by the general dissatisfaction of expectation, desire and judgment. After the other alternatives have been exhausted and the clarity that kindness is the universal antidote prevails, the explorer on the sojourn can rest their weary head.

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