

Practice Alone Will Not Do

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The biggest ocean waves start with an intention, and then begins the smallest disturbance or movement away from the source—its center. An intention to move gains momentum gradually by unidirectional persistence.

Ocean waves form when wind transfers some of its energy to the water through friction between the air molecules and water molecules. By constant effort, air molecules rub against water molecules and generate a motion away from the source in the form of disturbance within the surrounding water.

One small molecule of air can start a huge wave if it persists in the same direction relentlessly. Both are necessary—effort or energy and direction or intelligence. We may see the first movements as the waves' practice only because it seems that larger effects are not visible, but each 'practice', so to say, is a total effort. The energy is being exerted intelligently, gaining momentum, increasing focus as it goes along. This persistence in the same direction efficiently is not mechanical but living, dynamic—getting more focused, more efficient, and hence, there is less loss or movement in contrary directions. What seemed to be practice, itself becomes a formidable wave that can move or carry anything in its path. The intention, the initial movement, the ongoing movement and the great big wave are not different from one another. The intention itself becomes the wave—it is the wave.

A little acorn or sapling grows into a huge oak or redwood in much the same way. We may call the sapling young and tender, but the young one is full of zeal, energy and clear focus. It knows it has to grow and have its own direct access to sunlight in order to survive, and towards this end all energy is mightily expended. Conditions may not be in its favor, but that does not in the least bit deter the little sapling or the starter wave from all-out unidirectional effort.

Effort is necessary for success in any endeavor. The degree of success depends upon many things, among which unidirectional effort is most important. Unidirectional means operating or moving in a single direction—not changing direction.

In the Bhagavad Gita, we are told that the uncontrolled mind is the greatest enemy and must be controlled. The uncontrolled mind is a mind that does not move in one direction—it changes direction constantly; and just as the intention can never become a wave, no matter how hard it tries, if there is no unidirectional effort—success in control of mind is not possible.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna agrees that it is indeed difficult to control the mind, but that it is possible by practice or abhyasa and dispassion or vairagya. Both of these—practice which

involves the fullest effort and dispassion which is without distraction or dissipation—form a single movement of expending all available energy unidirectionally.

All this may not matter much in the corporate world, as what you do may have little to no connection with who you are; and if you are not satisfied with how people see you—you can always hire an image consultant or the right public relations firm and they can polish your image. They cannot change you, they cannot polish you—just the image people are presented of you.

Spiritual life is an adventure of self-discovery and transformation—it deals with reality, not images. The truth of every moment is clearly seen, and this clarity of seeing is itself transformation. In seeing clearly, there is no gap between seeing and action—the clarity of this seeing is direct perception, which is perception without the interference of any conditioning, and hence it is very potent—it acts. I'm sure you have experienced this often when a danger lurks while driving (or even walking as a pedestrian)—and there is spontaneous action. Thought jumps in an instant later and takes credit for success or assigns blame if otherwise.

Change is instantaneous, though its effects will be seen over time. If you decide to get healthier, for instance—the change in your mindset if unidirectional is total. This inner change will keep guiding external behavior so that you eat in a healthy way and get some exercise; and this movement to all that is conducive is itself turning away from all that is counterproductive. It may take some time for the physical results to be noticed, but inner or psychological change does not take time. Why should it? If you really see that something is good for you or something is not good for you—what has time to do with an all-aboard decision that is empowered to act now?

Two smokers have each been smoking the same amount for the same time, what makes one quit 'cold-turkey' and the other continue smoking? Assume that both have the same health conditions, lifestyle and are even friends—what makes one 'see' the danger of staying the course and other 'not see'? Seeing—direct perception of the danger of staying the course—is itself transformation or change.

Unable, or rather, unwilling to get onboard all at once, one practices with an aim towards total psychological change and initially, efforts seem like struggle, because one exerts in the new direction without having let go of the old—that which is not conducive. The whole mind is not on board and effort is not unidirectional. The same person exerts in multiple directions at the same time and there is great frustration. Practice is not half-effort but the fullest effort possible till all inhibitors are removed and effort hits the mark. It is called practice because the self-sustained inhibitors have not been removed and it has therefore not hit the mark—not because they are like practice sessions for some event.

If you examine yourself you will also notice that when there is frustration, the eyes are also always on the 'reward to come' and this increases the frustration and backflows to weaken the

already weakened effort. The weakness alluded to here is not of force or quantity but one of quality—the lack of devoted attention of your whole being.

Once you have had enough of half-baked cooking which takes much more effort and resources for unappealing results at best—you either inch forward in resolve (which really does nothing substantial), or you are willing and enthusiastic about getting all-aboard the train in good time before it leaves the station. This second phase in practice is where struggle is left behind at last, as unidirectional effort does not involve struggle at all—just focused effort.

Struggle requires friction—something to struggle with, and friction necessitates resistance. If you would really like to change, why should this be difficult? Resistance is psychological—you yourself resisting yourself! —and when this is able to be let go, there is instant relief and the threshold of commitment is crossed. At once, the eyes come off the finish line or reward, as this feeling itself is one of tremendous lightness in the pack that had been toted laboriously so far while barely trudging along.

Feelings start with notions about a person, something or a condition. These notions gain strength by repetition and become dense or intense. When these strong feelings are aroused, there is an irresistible urge towards their fulfillment, and depending on the intensity or state of intensity of the wave of feeling—it can completely override wisdom, awareness or consciousness. These feelings can even present self-justification (counter-wisdom) to replace clear inner wisdom—that it is not only okay to do or to have this, but—it is the right thing.

The feelings become uncontrollable and mature into passion which is the uncontrolled movement of energy that drags the silenced wisdom or consciousness towards its unfulfillment.

Krishna also tells us, "I think yoga is hard to be attained by one of uncontrolled self, but the self-controlled and striving one can attain to it by the proper means." This is true not only for yoga, but for success in any endeavor. Any attainment or success requires intelligent effort and some sort of self-discipline. We are not talking about discipline imposed on one by others, but intelligent effort, which is guided effort, and the perfect response to an ever new and fluid developing situation. Even being in love with one's plan or preference does not work; it cannot be the perfect response because the carpet unrolls as you walk on it only. In yoga, the proper means is not only the most fitting response, but it is proper in the context of the widest background of the divine omnipresence—God, being the only reality. By most fitting is meant, it is not to suit our needs but those of the widest situation possible. Our constant remembrance of God's omnipresence will negate selfishness and disallow ego-centered thought and its resulting activity.

Since God is the divine omnipresence—every effort is conducive to discovery of this or, in other words, the non-existence of oneself as a separate entity. Living in light of this discovery is divine life, and since it is not relegated to one area or aspect of life—time and space do not limit it. The

yogi discovers how to be very efficient, because the whole-souled, devoted attention beneath every blessed action is the means towards direct realization of the truth, and this heightened awareness does not allow dissipation of energy caused by competing priorities.

Swami Venkatesananda writes, "Practice alone can only lead to mastery of the technique of mind control, not mind control." Mind control is self-control which naturally avoids wastage of energy, effort and dealing with its returning effects or results. Practice, or unidirectional effort, is not blind, insensitive or mechanical—how can it be? Towards realization of the divine omnipresence as the only reality, every action is new, fresh and spontaneous. You strive with increased zeal and enthusiasm, tiding over old pulls, thereby decreasing inner resistance or letting go of all that scatters unidirectional effort.

Unidirectional effort is guided by the single truth: the divine omnipresence is the only reality—God alone is. Infinity and eternity coalesce into each present moment and the seeker responds in light of this feeling which takes hold of every cell of his being.

Vairagya or dispassion is not the abandoning of something old, but living in the light of a fuller reality that demands all of you—the old falling away as naturally as leaves falling in autumn. Dispassion is what is needed, and that which results from sincere effort or practice. We can call effort practice only because there are repeated attempts to get onboard fully. But, each attempt is a total attempt, just like a pole vaulter makes several attempts to reach new height. You can call it practice for competition, but each attempt is an all-out attempt. Practice, the big event, realization and discovery are words that are useful in communication, but it is best not to get trapped in them.

Without dispassion, one can attain mastery over the technique but not self-mastery—mastery of the mind. Control of mind requires sustained unidirectional effort which is not possible without dispassion. If there are competing interests, the distracted mind will be very much in control and in the driver's seat.

Control of mind is not a function or capability of the fragmented mind. The whole mind or the undivided mind looks at the mind-fragment of personality like the ocean looking intently at the little wave—till it is seen and thereby known for what it is directly.

There is no suppression, denial or escape—rather, there is a whole-souled facing of everything that goes on in the world outside and inside at the same time. There is total observation in which there is no division between the observer and the observed. That observation sees perfectly as it is not loaded with notions, and therefore it does what needs to be done. Memory has usefulness in that it is a function of the mind, but is never mistaken for the total mind.

Practice alone will not do, it is like a leaky bucket in which we hope to carry water to fill the well some distance away—it just won't work. We will develop good endurance and do a lot of carrying, but the well will stay as it is—perhaps a little lower in water level. A good boat, strong rower,

good effort at rowing will not do if the boat is moored to the dock. Even if the boat is freed from the mooring, one may cover distance physically but still be on land mentally, and so it will make no difference. When the ropes that tied the boat to the dock are finally released—in that release, new movement will be free to express itself.

Dispassion is the absence of passion or pull of any habit, so all of you is always facing you from moment to moment, externally and internally without walls. *Wisdom faces life*, never habit or preference, and this wisdom knows what is best because it is not colored. This dispassion itself is natural self-control which arises from living in wisdom, and this gives guidance and clarity for unidirectional effort—which must meet its mark someday.

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