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Mastering Non-Violence

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"When non-violence in thought, speech and action is established, one's aggressive nature is relinquished and others abandon hostility in one's presence" – Yoga Sutras of Patanjali 2:35

For most of us, our introduction to the path and practice of Yoga is through the body and the practice of Hatha Yoga, which consists of various postures and breathing techniques.

Even after practicing on a daily basis for a number of years, this writer still finds that it is this physical practice of Yoga that rejuvenates and enhances him most on a daily basis.

However, for the last few years I have found the practice of meditation to be a more calming and joyful experience in the long run to do than the various postures and poses of Hatha Yoga.

The calmer and more focused state of consciousness that we cultivate through the practice of meditation leads to a mindfulness that is both joyful and challenging to work with and experience.

It certainly leads to a noticeable growth of being.

In our initial interest and fascination with the postures and meditative practices of Yoga we are exposed to ideas and concepts such as "mastering a pose" and "mastering meditation".

In reality, what we want to try to master in our practice of Yoga or Buddhism is the idea and application of non-violence in thought, word and action.

Violence is a subtle phenomenon in our consciousness, our words and our actions.

It can manifest itself in the way we look at another person, or how we unconsciously judge or criticize others around us.

We can be sarcastic in what we say or use words, expressions and intonations that look down on and ridicule others about their appearance, attitude and verbal expressions and statements.

Although the path and practice of Yoga specifically teaches non-violence as being one of the most important practices, and many teachers will tell us that the true practice of non-violence encompasses all the teachings of Yoga, we may sometimes not be clear as to why we should practice it.

Any form of violence in thought, word and action is disturbing ourselves and our own consciousness and interfering with our attempts to purify it.

Any form of violence in thought, word and action can be strengthening those very defilements and hindrances that we are trying to overcome through our practice of Yoga or Buddhism.

Any form of violence in thought, word and action can be creating obstacles to making a connection with others as human beings who have to face the same challenges as we do in life.

Interestingly, we sometimes feel guilt, shame or confusion when even though we consider ourselves to be a spiritual practitioner, we still see examples of violence in what we think, say or do.

When this happens, we should not be looking at these things in negative ways, but instead understand that the fact that we are mindful of them is the sign of the progress that we are making in our yoga practice.

We can also understand that any tendency to violence is actually a manifestation of energy and that that energy can be changed to something more wholesome.

Changing our mental energies is brought about through the practice of the postures, breathing techniques, meditation and other disciplines involved in both Yoga and Buddhism.

Too many times people have a tendency to give up because they think that they should be getting quick results from their practice.

Many have unwise expectations about what they will receive from their practice.

Others have not cultivated the mindfulness to see the changes that have occurred and understand that the practice of Yoga, Buddhism or any other kind of spiritual or religious discipline is a long and slow one, requiring patience, effort and faith.

When we are mindful and focused on mastering non-violence in thought, word and action, we are well on our way to bringing about an ongoing process of change and purification to our consciousness.

Often, our tendency to violence in thought, word and action is brought about through impatience with life and others, or feel that we are being unfairly victimized.

Sometimes it is a result of a non-attainment of mental and physical desires and feelings of superiority or inferiority to others.

When we understand and practice non-violence, we are also cultivating loving kindness and compassion.

When we practice non-violence in thought, word and action, we are engaging in activities and attitudes that are gentle and nurturing to oneself and others.

When we practice non-violence, we are weakening and alleviating thoughts and feelings that are destructive and demeaning to oneself and others.

This is because an important aspect of non-violence is not just in how we act towards others, but in how we are to ourselves.

Many times our greatest feelings of sorrow and despair are based on negative thoughts and feelings about ourselves.

We tell ourselves, "I failed at this", "I should not have done this", "This was a mistake".

Our actions are also things that are manifestations of violence towards ourselves, especially if we drink excessively or habitually use drugs.

Even some of the things that we go to and associate with pleasure may be indulged in to such an extent that we are actually committing some violence to ourselves.

If we start to think of our spiritual practice as being one where we become more mindful about abstaining from any form of violence in thought, word and action to others and ourselves, we will be living the teachings of yoga, instead of just studying or talking about them.

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