

In the Groove of Service

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1) Introduction, Giving More Than You Take: Those who serve others practice karma yoga. Through actions to serve (karma) they achieve inner contentment and balance of mind (yoga). They give more than they take. Mother Teresa, Winston Churchill, Gandhi, Saint Francis, your mom, and Warren Buffett come to mind. Taking other's desires to heart liberates them from acting in self-interest to seek happiness and contentment. Through selfless actions to serve others they break away from seeking contentment in the things they think will bring it. They abandon fleeting and elusive happiness found in possessions, money, power.... In turning away from seeking contentment in things outside themselves they find it where it has always been, deep within. Liberated from endlessly seeking happiness and contentment, and the energy and attention seeking consumes, they rise above personal limitations. Deep within they have nothing to win or lose through their actions to serve others. Balanced in success and failure, the ups and downs of life fail to make deep impressions and influence future actions. Freed from this binding influence of action and the ruse that contentment exists in possessions, they dynamically act in ways that benefit those they serve, and only through that, benefit themselves. To understand the magic in serving others and how it benefits all, we must first recognize how through our ignorance we become bound to our actions in a never-ending cycle to find happiness and contentment through actions. In serving others we realize inner contentment, establish balance of mind and rise to our full potential.

2) Ignorance & Bondage to Action: Definition of IGNORANCE: *looking for contentment where you know it cannot be found.*

Contentment is the goal we seek. Content, we ask for nothing more. We free ourselves from concerns for success and failure. Excited ricocheting mental activity and uninvited thoughts quiet down. Distractions melt away. Inner contentment unburdens us from tightly holding onto what we have and from desiring to possess what we don't need. Everything falls into place and we enjoy acts of living. We devote ourselves to purpose. Unbalanced strong emotions fail to guide our feelings and thoughts. Our actions feel right. We're in the groove and life flows smoothly. We get the job done, easily and effortlessly. If our most refined level of inner awareness could speak, 'This is it. I have arrived.' We have reached a goal beyond which no other exists: we are at home with ourselves.

Contentment attracts us like iron filings to a magnet. The unassailable fortress of contentment lies within and we recognize its primal power to liberate us from the grind, fulfill all needs, organize our lives, and grease the skids of action. We actively seek lasting contentment. When out of contentment we search for opportunities to regain it through actions to acquire the things that make us happy. Happy when content, we presume lasting contentment lies in happiness. Seems reasonable enough: happiness from contentment, why not contentment from happiness? We mistakenly believe that what is on the inside, we can find on the outside through the power of attraction to those things that make us happy.

The power of attraction lies within objects of the senses: a shiny red sports car, scent of perfume, a more rewarding job, touch of silk.... Within objects of the senses lies their appeal. The moment the mind comes in contact with an appealing object a quality of attraction present in that object influences the mind. In identifying with the object and its attractiveness, we desire to have it. Desire establishes contact of the mind with the object, for example, an ad for vacationing in Bora Bora draws us into thinking about warm tropical breezes, swimming through clear waters, freedom from everyday grind.... We see a way to happiness, and through it, contentment. This is ignorance. Because we find happiness within contentment, the mind deludes us into thinking contentment lies in happiness. Ephemeral, happiness occurs when something outside ourselves makes us so. Contentment lies deeper, a self-sufficient state independent of everything, a resolute state with the potential for lasting satisfaction. Contentment is all the fruit in the world that has been and ever will be; happiness is a bunch of cherries. Through the strength of desire, attraction to objects of the senses offers a subtle and convincing promise of happiness and consequently, contentment. The stronger the desire, the more convincing the promise. In this way, desire draws the mind outward and away from inner contentment, the very goal we seek.

Actions fail to achieve lasting contentment in objects of the senses. We look in the wrong direction, expecting to find it "out there." Contentment lies within. We all know this: *the Kingdom of Heaven lies within you*. Yet, we still look for contentment in the things we think will make us happy. Our actions never deliver because they cannot achieve the impossible; attraction and contentment lie in opposite directions. Attraction on the outside; contentment on the inside. Having failed to find contentment in an object of the senses registers a deep impression of dissatisfaction on the mind that comes to the surface as a desire to find contentment when conditions turn favorable. This desire leads to yet another action to find contentment in some new object of the senses that (we think) will make us happy. Out of course, renewed action also fails to achieve lasting contentment. Failure registers another deep impression, which again seeds desire, which leads to action anew. And so it goes. This "binding influence of action" fixes us to a cycle of

impression-desire-action,

and keeps us on the treadmill of action. In looking for inner contentment in objects of the senses, we bind ourselves to actions to achieve them. Contentment, though a worthy goal, forever remains elusive when we act to achieve it.

We are like the compulsive shopper serially purchasing because no purchase realizes lasting contentment: *impression* created by lack of contentment from a purchase—*desire* for contentment—*action* initiated to achieve contentment through the happiness another purchase will bring. And so on, over and over again. The binding influence of action turns our attention outward and steers us away from contentment, our very purpose in taking action in the first place, and holds us back from living life to its fullest.

3) Liberation from Bondage to Action: Serving others liberates us from the binding influence of action. In serving the desires of others, the outcome (say, helping to finish a

difficult-to-write report, washing the dishes, putting other's needs ahead of ours) belongs to those we serve, not us. The outcome is not personal to us. In fact, we did not desire the outcome; those we serve did. In acting to accomplish *their* desire to achieve *their* outcome we break the cycle of impression-desire-action at the level of *our* desire. In acting to serve others, we abandon actions to achieve lasting contentment, liberating ourselves from the binding influence of action.

Liberated from bondage to our actions, we transcend fields of thought and reach the goal. In swapping selfish actions to seek lasting contentment for selfless actions to serve others, we turn away from the outward flow of attention towards objects of the senses. We turn within. There is no other direction for the mind to go in seeking contentment but inward, where it has always been and always will be. The chitter-chatter, the mind jumping from one uninvited thought to another, and binding circularity of chasing actions in our desire to achieve happiness and contentment evaporate. In becoming purposeful to achieve their outcome, we instantly quiet down. Outside distractions lose their allure. At the very moment we act to serve others we reach the goal of all actions and find contentment where it has always been, within ourselves.

We all taste contentment from time to time. Everything is easy. As it were, we witness a guiding hand direct our actions. Life flows. Steady intellect automatically discerns what is real and true, independent of our dithering and meddling. On the outside, actions segue one to another effortlessly, while on the inside we remain calm, quiet and content — self-satisfied. We feel at home. We have all been there, though perhaps fleetingly..

4) Inner Contentment Begets Balance of Mind: A contented mind is a balanced mind. Contentment just *is*, satisfied in itself; a balanced mind is potential raring to go. A contented mind is at ease, firm, stable, devoid of action. Contentment does nothing other than appreciate its own equilibrium. Balance is manifest equilibrium, equilibrium to act at our subtlest level of awareness. Whereas contentment is whole and dimensionless, balance is multidimensional and supports all activity. Balance of mind gives contentment energy and direction to live life to its fullest, to achieve, to enjoy, to evolve to deeper and more stable levels of contentment and balance.

A balanced mind remains steady as a rock through success and failure, ups and downs, progress and reversals, support and opposition...all the conflicting dualities associated with accomplishing outcomes. Balanced at our subtlest level of awareness, we listen to intuition and inner guidance. We respond spontaneously to the needs of the moment. Surprises, good and bad, hold little sway. Balanced, we find inner strength to overcome challenges. The negativity and friction we encounter in achieving outcomes fail to make deep impressions on the mind and reignite the cycle of impression-desire-action. Balanced, the sharp talons of fear, anger, anxiety and other strong emotions retract, losing their power to drag us out of contentment — and ourselves. Alert and flexible, we spontaneously respond to changes and circumstances as they arise. We keep our eye on the ball. A balanced mind seethes with abilities to accomplish outcomes and points us in the direction of right action.

5) Action, Where the Rubber Meets the Road: As contentment begets balance, balance begets right action. Action is necessary. We act to survive, achieve liberation, and enjoy life. A mind balanced in success and failure and all the conflicting dualities support right actions. What are right actions? Right actions keep us on the path of evolution for realizing contentment and balance of mind. Specifically, right actions deepen and stabilize contentment, reinforce balance of mind, and further, support achieving outcomes and discourage sinful wrong actions that hinder evolution to higher states of contentment and balance.

Right actions deepen contentment and consequently, strengthen balance of mind. In our actions to serve others, we feel content and achieve balance at our subtlest level of awareness. Operating from this refined level, our actions feel right, purposeful and we enjoy performing them. Our strengths come to fore. Actions appear to run on their own. Inner awareness and outer activity sing the same song of liberation. As we easily perform dynamic actions and at the same time feel content in a quiet state of inner awareness, we experience harmony between the two. Through action, harmony integrates contentment into more profound and refined levels of awareness and in turn, reinforces balance. Having experienced it at stronger and more stable levels, some of this balance sticks with us and accumulates over repeated acts of service. Our actions become more dynamic and skillful, and more enjoyable to perform. Through performing actions to serve others, contentment and balance nurture each other, balance deepening and prolonging contentment, deeper contentment strengthening balance. In choosing to serve others, right actions to support contentment and balance naturally follow. Through serving others perform right actions to stabilize contentment and establish balance of mind.

In right actions performed in service to others we readily achieve outcomes. On the level of the senses, we perform actions — in the same way we always have — to accomplish outcomes and realize achievements. Though content and balanced, however, we think and act in a world not so accomplished. In performing actions, we experience all the usual mental and physical undertakings necessary to get the job done: delays and obstructions, heavy lifting, momentum numbing bureaucracy (%\$#&), fuzzy directions...difficult personalities. These obstacles, that otherwise would have frustrated us, fail to leave deep impressions on the mind and influence future actions. Consequently, obstacles have little to no impact on our contentment, balance, feelings of well-being, and purposefulness. In serving others, we naturally fix the objective and become intimately engrossed in the actions necessary for achieving it, unmindful of results. Balanced we perform actions with our full potential to achieve outcomes efficiently and effectively. And in the end, we get the job done with reserves of energy and clarity of mind to enjoy our accomplishments.

Right actions achieved in serving others discourage wrong actions. Wrong actions hinder evolution in contentment and balance; cause harm to others and us; hamper achieving outcomes; produce stress, strain and damaging influences on us and our environment; disintegrate what had been created for the greater good. Wrong actions result from selfish and sinful attitudes of anger, fear, avarice, envy, revenge, hatred, prejudice,

jealousy.... Selfish attitudes unavoidably lay the groundwork for wrong actions and the chain reaction of negativity they spawn. However, serving others obviates serving one's self. Selfless and selfish actions cannot co-occur. In choosing to serve others, we preclude self-serving wrong actions. Further, a contented mind leaves no room for negative emotions and frees us from sinful attitudes. The refined qualities we engender from serving others sets feelings, thoughts and actions on a positive track of life-supporting, self-sustaining actions to benefit all.

6) Establishing Balance of Mind: Establishing balance of mind requires integrating experience with the intellectual understanding of how we achieve balance. First, we need to experience balance through actions to serve others. But without understanding the mechanics of how we achieve balance through actions of service, experiencing it feels random, isolated and disconnected from our lives. Understanding how selfless actions to fulfill the desires of others break the cycle of impression-desire-action makes the connection between experience and understanding, and pulls the experience of balance out of isolation. Through understanding, we realize how to activate and strengthen the experience of balance, encouraging and motivating us to reach stronger levels of it. Increased alertness, clarity of mind and steadiness of intellect achieved through experience increases our capacity to understand. Out of more in-depth understanding, the experience of balance becomes familiar and comfortable, and through these feelings, reinforces our appreciation of it. As experience and understanding reassure, enliven and strengthen each other, we stabilize contentment and strengthen balance.

It takes time to establish balance of mind. Performing actions to serve others breaks the cycle of impression-desire-action. We remain quiet and content on the inside while acting dynamically on the outside. Actions harmonize inner awareness of contentment with outer activity. Harmony deepens contentment and integrates it into our awareness. Balance strengthens. ... Yet, our minds are too weak and insecure to sustain contentment during activity. We again lose ourselves in action. Selfish desires resurrect the cycle of impression-desire-action and we fall back into the binding influence of action. ... We again serve others and achieve balance of mind. Balance accumulates. The mind strengthens. We increasingly identify with inner contentment through our familiarity with it. ... Again, activity and bondage overshadow contentment. ... As we repeat actions of selfless service, harmony between inner awareness and outer activity stabilizes contentment. The mind strengthens and actions fail to make deep impressions on it. The cycle of impression-desire-action breaks down at its source. No impression, no desire, no binding influence of action. Our intellect unites with awareness of inner contentment and we identify fully with it. We see contentment to be our real and true nature. Balance of mind becomes established. We have achieved the goal of all action: nonaction. We maintain nonactive inner contentment while engaged in dynamic outer activity, balanced in success and failure.

7) Karma Yoga, the Practice and the Goal: Experience balance of mind. Help your mother with the dishes. Or perform some other service that feels comfortable and does not overly tax your skill set and cause strain. Put your attention on serving someone else. Naturally, you focus on their desired outcome. In acting to achieve it, you break

the self-serving cycle of impression-desire-action. You feel content. Liberation from the endless grind of serving one's self inspires self-reliance and confidence. Concerns about success and failure fall away. Your strengths rise to the occasion. Actions segue one into another. You feel carefree about the outcome and yet, earnestly engage in actions to achieve it. You feel the flow and get the job done in the least time and effort, with reserves of energy to enjoy your accomplishment. You are in the groove of service and onto something. In serving others you practice karma yoga.

Karma yoga is a practice and a goal. Karma means action; yoga means balance of mind. We achieve yoga through incremental steps of action (karma) to serve others. In practicing karma yoga, we reinforce balance through right action (karma) to establish balance of mind (yoga), the goal. Having reached the goal of all actions we need not act. But act we do, to support and uplift the welfare of others and to enjoy living through our actions.

To practice karma yoga, act to serve others and so, perform right actions. Act to break the binding influence of action. Act to enjoy action itself. Act to integrate inner contentment into deeper and more profound levels of awareness. Engage in actions that fit your personality and feel spontaneous to perform. Spontaneous actions allow harmony to flow, deepen the experience of contentment and balance, and strengthen the mind to where impressions fail to make deep impressions on it. Challenge is good. Challenging actions require us to dig deeper, intensifying and prolonging the experience of service and contentment. Through actions to serve others, we liberate ourselves from the endless cycle of impression-desire-action and become established in yoga.

Having established yoga (balance), we live in freedom from karma (action). We remain quiet and content inside while simultaneously acting dynamically. Intellect realizes its separation from the mind engaged in feelings, thoughts and actions. We primarily identify with that inactive, quiet and unmoving awareness of contentment deep within the mind. Desires appear on the surface level; within us desires no longer occur. We sustain inner freedom, remain uninvolved with activity and yet, manage desires and actions effectively.

There are no objective criteria to determine if someone is established in yoga. Would you recognize one if you saw one? Probably not. How they speak, sit, walk, present themselves...their mannerisms, diet, profession, attire, politics...provide no clues. Less prone to emotional outbursts of fear, anger, and sorrow, and freed from longing, the ups and downs of success and failure, delays and obstructions...hold little influence over them. But, these inner qualities are subjective, relative, and difficult to observe and draw conclusions from. On a deeper level, those established in yoga experience inner awareness of contentment in all states of consciousness and so witness waking, sleeping, and dreaming. But this inner depth of experience remains hidden to the outside observer.

8) Swimming Against the Current: A common belief holds that we achieve a balanced mind through efforts to remain *indifferent* to outcomes and the actions needed to achieve them (likewise for *dispassionate* and *neutral*). If this is true, how does the

practice of indifference break the cycle of impression-desire-action? In point of fact, it does not. Indifference reinforces the cycle. Right out of the box, the practice of indifference runs into a huge problem. In our desire to remain indifferent to the outcome, indifference becomes the outcome. Indifference is our *raison d'etre*, and we epoxy ourselves to actions to achieve it. In pursuing our desire to achieve indifference we fix "desire" into the cycle of impression-desire-action. The more desirous and determined to achieve indifference, the stronger the binding influence of action.

It gets worse. The desire to remain indifferent induces fear. We establish rules on how to behave and act indifferently. We judge ourselves on the success and failure of our ability to follow these rules. Rules engender fearing consequences of breaking them. Fear is bad *juju*. Constant fear of losing an indifferent attitude pulls us away from experiencing harmony between inner awareness and outer activity. Too, fear dulls the sharp edge intellect needs to cut through the veil of ignorance and achieve liberation.

We hit rock bottom and deceive ourselves. 'Me. Me. Me. It's all about me conjuring an attitude of indifference.' Performing service to others — the essence of karma yoga — takes a distant second to acting indifferently. We get it backwards in thinking actions performed with an attitude of indifference are those right actions required to achieve contentment and balance of mind. Just the opposite, first achieve contentment and balance through serving others, right actions naturally follow. Getting it backwards, we move backwards. We become dull, ineffective and incapable of serving ourselves, let alone others.

9) Conclusion, Go with the Flow: To achieve contentment and balance of mind use the mind's natural inclination to seek lasting contentment. If "desire" wants action to reach inner contentment, then act. But act counter-intuitively to achieving it. Rather than hammer away on one selfish, fruitless action after another to find contentment in objects of the senses, act in a way opposed to seeking contentment. Act on the selfless desire to serve others and break the cycle of impression-desire-action at the level of (our selfish) desire.

Led by the mind's natural inclination to seek contentment and charmed by the presence of it deep inside, our attention abandons its outward flow. We turn within. Drawn inward by contentment itself we transcend refined levels of awareness. With no obstacles holding us back, the mind instantly reaches the non-duality of inner contentment. We achieve balance of mind. [Proof: Hold the door open for someone. Instantly, the mind quiets down. Distractions lose allure. We feel content. We taste inner contentment and balance.]

Establishing balance is a free lunch. Through rewarding acts of service, harmony between inner awareness and outer activities deepen and stabilize contentment. Over time contentment integrates into the nature of the mind, reinforcing balance. Through experiencing profound and prolonged levels of contentment and balance, the mind strengthens. Actions fail to make deep impressions on the mind. Liberated from the binding influence of action and the cycle of impression-desire-action, we realize lasting contentment and establish balance of mind. We identify fully with inner contentment.

Having recognized the value of actions (karma) to serve others, establishing balance (yoga) is a matter of course, each on our own path (dharma) and each in our own time. Naturally and effortlessly.