



Not Resisting Resistance, by Peter Russell

The building where I used to run a meditation group was on the same street as a fire station; one could almost guarantee that sometime during the meditation a fire engine would come rushing past, sirens wailing. Not surprisingly, people would afterwards complain: "How could I meditate with that going on?"

How often have we felt something similar? There's an unspoken assumption that the mind can only become quiet if the world around is quiet. We imagine the ideal meditation setting to be somewhere far from the madding crowd—a retreat deep in a forest, a peaceful chapel, or the quiet of one's own bedroom, perhaps. It is much harder for the mind to settle down in a noisy environment. Or is it?

I suggested to the group that the next time a fire engine came blasting by they look within and explore whether the sound really was that disturbing? After the following meditation, a participant reported how the noise no longer seemed a problem; it was there, but it didn't disturb her. The disturbance, she realized, came not from the sound itself, but from wishing it weren't there.

When we accept things as they are, "go with the flow," there is ease. This is our natural state of mind -- content and relaxed. Dis-content arises when we resist our experience. Our natural state of ease becomes veiled by a self-created discontent. Thus, we can return to a more peaceful state of mind by letting go of our attachments as to how our experience ought to be and accept it as it is.

Upon hearing this, people often ask: Does this mean I should accept injustice and cruelty, the homeless sleeping on the streets, or the recalcitrant attitude of my partner? Of course not. There are numerous situations that we should not tolerate, and each, in our own way, will be called to do what we can to improve the world. "Accepting our experience as it is" means just that; accepting our experience in the moment. If we are feeling frustrated, angry, or indignant, accept that feeling. Don't resist it, or wish it weren't there; but let it in, become interested in how it feels.

Even more valuably, we can explore the resistance itself. It can be quite subtle, and not easily noticed at first. So I find it useful to simply pause and ask: "Is there any sense of resistance that I am not noticing?" And gently wait. I may then become aware of some resentment towards my experience, wishing it were different, or perhaps just a sense of tension or contraction in my being. Then rather than focusing on whatever I may have been resisting, I turn my

attention to the resistance itself, opening to this aspect of “what is.”•

Rather than dividing experience into two parts—the experience in the moment, and thoughts and judgments about that experience—any resistance is now included as part of the present moment. Not resisting the resistance, the veil of discontent dissolves, and I return to a more relaxed, easeful state of mind.

That is what is meant by a quiet mind. Not an empty mind. We are aware of the world just as before. Aware of sounds, sensations, thoughts and feelings. We are simply allowing our experience to be as it is. Not wishing for something different, not creating unnecessary discontent.

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