
I AM THE GREENEST?

BY KIRA RYDER

Our minds are designed to understand the world through opposites: good/bad, Hummer/Prius, factory-farmed/organically grown, hemp/fur. This mechanism is how we learn and start our navigation in the physical world. If we didn't understand the categories of "dangerous vs. safe" as little tykes, we wouldn't make it very far. And yet the same design that allowed us to survive our vulnerable early years begins to ensnare us if not investigated and understood within a larger context.

As we take our first steps toward examining and refining our behavior in respect to our environment, we often end up relying on the inborn logic of the mind. But if the effort towards treading lightly on the planet and causing the least amount of harm does not eventually spring from deep within our hearts, there can be no real transformation.

Physiologically, the inhale breath is designed to promote the exhale breath. The buildup of toxicity in the body is more harmful than a lack of oxygen. The number one cause of toxicity in the body is our negative mental and emotional state. Not our cell phones, not what we eat, not the pollution, but the state of our mind determines our individual and environmental health.

But the cleanup is not easy. The more toxic our thoughts, the more deep breathing, stretching and inner work we need to do to free ourselves of the buildup. The more garbage we have produced, the more effort required to clean it up.

Because of how our minds are wired to learn, most spiritual paths offer a set of moral and ethical guidelines. The practice of yoga offers the 10 Yamas and Niyamas. Buddhism has 10 Precepts. *The Bible* offers us the 10 Commandments. There is an equivalent of the 10 Commandments in the *Quran*. And some Native American traditions are believed to share 10 Principles. The idea is that "practice makes perfect."

The guidelines are presented as "God-like" behavior and the belief is that by acting in these ways, we will at least be mimicking our image of our Highest Self and therefore receive approval among similar believers as well as from our personal Higher Being.

Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" came with a list of "10 Things to Do." Simple and relatively easy to achieve, with suggestions like "use less hot water, recycle more, plant a tree," the list has most likely been a useful starting point for many. On any path of change, the first actions might feel artificial,

externally imposed and constricting. Yet, as the habits start to take root, it is not unusual to feel pride in our new behavior.

This is the awkward phase. As we rely on a new set of conditions to meet to validate our "greenness," it is tempting to judge ourselves as "doing good," and judge others as doing bad." In the complex dance of "greening," judgment-motivated behavior will only divide us internally and externally. "She's a good person because she rides her bike to class. He is a bad person because he has too many cars. I'm a good person because I installed solar panels. I'm a bad person because I have a garden that needs water." If we stay caught in this trap, we will only feel aligned to those whom our mind perceives as similar to us. Our connection to all beings everywhere will be obscured.

One of the primary qualities of an open heart is optimism. New technologies of renewable resources are being discovered every day. As with the making of poetry, art and music, constraints often result in unimaginable creativity and beauty. The evolution from the "green mind" to the "green heart" requires effort, self-investigation and surrender. When we are acting from deep within, we are not so concerned with how other people are measuring up to our standards or how we are measuring up to theirs. The guidance we receive from our hearts does not need approval.

It took having too many bags for me to finally get good at remembering to bring one with me to the grocery store. Now when I forget it, I feel sad with a little twinge of worry that someone will see me with the new plastic. So, on this path, the values of my community *have* pushed me towards being more conscious. The collective understanding of "good behavior" helped guide me. But to be angry with myself or anyone else for "not measuring up" defeats the purpose of my efforts. To be of the greatest service to our environment is to do my personal best, maintain a soft and open heart, take a few breaths and relax about what everybody else is doing.

Kira Ryder is grateful and honored to live in the beautiful Ojai Valley. Her yoga studio, Lulu Bandha's, home of "Stiff White Guy Yoga," is conveniently located in the heart of town right next to the Sunday farmers' market. Compelled to share everything, her writings about yoga and cooking appear on lulubandhas.com and channelchow.blogspot.com