

The Lesson - Living in the moment

- Source: Peter Gunning

One day, shortly after my teacher, Khen Ratcliffe, had become the owner of what was to become the Tan-y-Garth Yoga Study Centre in mid Wales he imparted to me one of the simplest yet greatest lessons I have ever received.

Khen and I were raking, side-by-side, doing our bit to help get the kitchen garden from its overgrown state to a more acceptable one. I noticed that his strip of raked soil was immaculate, reminding me of a raked Zen garden, whilst mine was somewhat of a shambles with bits of weed and stones poking out of the soil.

So, as we were on our own, I said to Khen "Why is your strip immaculate and mine is such a mess?"

He gave me a rather searching look; you know the sort, the look that goes straight in, and holding my gaze he said, "Do you really want to know?" So I said, "Yes," to which he replied, "Because you are not in the here and now."

"I've heard you say that many times," I said, "but can you actually show me how to be in the here and now?"

"Well," he said, "you are probably thinking 'When the raking is finished we can have a coffee, then perhaps help with the decorating, then have a meditation' aren't you?"

I was rather stunned; it was like he had just read my mind.

This is what he told me: "Take hold of the rake and keep your attention on where the rake is meeting the soil. When you become aware that you are thinking of anything else, bring your mind back to observing the rake working the soil."

I followed his instructions and was immediately aware that my mind quickly went to other things, exactly as he had said. So I returned to being aware of raking. I kept doing this with quick and surprising results.

The first thing I noticed was that my strip of raking became as immaculate as Khen's. The second was that I was no longer losing energy but actually feeling energised, and the third, that I had actually become interested in the mundane experience of raking, and that I was perfectly happy to be doing it.

What a revelation it was to me. How amazingly simple, how obvious, how rewarding.

I'm reminded of the second aphorism of Patanjali: "Yoga is the control of the thoughts in the mind." And Jesus' teachings to take no thought for tomorrow and to be inwardly still.

Khen used to say, "The only enemy is inertia!" by which he meant the way thoughts go round and round, constantly repeating old ways of thinking ~ and consequently of behaving. Sure enough, so often have I come out of my usual thinking mode to realize that I have been anywhere but in the moment. In other words I had been either in memory or fantasy. Then, sometimes, the memory of that wonderful lesson I was given returns and I pay attention to what IS and not to what I think or feel it ought to be.

Another great teacher said, "My job is to make the simple complicated enough for the mind to grasp."

I share all this with you trusting it may be of some use in your own personal "journey of awakening."
