

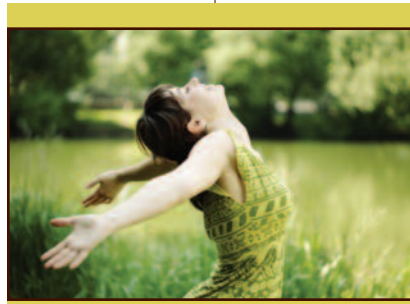
Finding Freedom *through* Non-Attachment

*"Attachment is that which follows remembrance of pleasure."
- The Yoga Sutras II, 7*

IN YOGA'S MONASTIC TRADITION, UPON INITIATION THE MONK IS GIVEN A ROBE AND AN ALMS BOWL. As in many of the world's monastic traditions, the acceptance of these objects represents a commitment to a life of simplicity, virtue and piety. These basic virtues seem at odds with a world that is continually influenced by technology, mass media and the pursuit of material objects. Upon further reflection, one could come to the conclusion that it is impossible to find peace in the modern day world without retreating to a small corner of the world somewhere to contemplate the meaning of life in total silence. This is not true!

While a yearly retreat isn't a bad idea, we can all work to cultivate non-attachment and peace in the real world.

Yoga defines attachment as the confusion between the higher self and sensual pleasures. People usually misunderstand this concept and label the pleasurable activity as being bad. The truth is that the activity in and of itself isn't the real problem – the real problem is the lack of control within the pleasure-seeker. One candy or potato chip is not going to hurt a person, but how many people do you know that can eat just one? When we give into repeated cravings for sweets, alcohol, money or other material things, our morality and focus are compromised. We create neurological patterns for suffering that are reinforced every time we repeat the negative behaviors. This is especially true in our consumer culture that equates the American dream with the accumulation of material things. The thought that the pleasurable thing will bring happiness is mistaken.



Often the fuel of attachment is avoidance of pain. In this light anything from drugs to shopping can be used in an attempt to distract ourselves. Yet we all know that once the party is over or the new shoes get scuffed, the pain persists and we are still left to face ourselves. It is here that where have a choice to break the cycle by becoming willing to feel our pain and seek out support systems to help us cope and eventually heal.

The material world can be viewed in terms of cause and effect (also known as Karma). The power of establishing non-attachment is that unattached mind remains unaffected in all situations and the person possessing that mind can remain at peace amidst the ups and downs of life. For example, the non-attached worker views their job as a chance for spiritual growth. They see it as chance to learn about their own nature and practice compassion towards others when challenging situations arise

Another definition of non-attachment is surrendering the fruits of an action to God, the Universe or a Larger Reality. When a person takes credit for any completed task or feels that they were the reason for an event happening, the ego latches on to credit and inflates itself. In reality, no individual credit exists. Think about it in terms of cooking dinner. When cooking, you are performing a task that someone taught you. That same

person may also have given you life and tended to you as a child. The food was tended to by a farmer somewhere that you may never meet and grew because it was blessed with sun and rain. Someone else made your chef's knife, your cutting board, your dishes, your pots and pans and even your stove! Your power is being supplied by a group of people working in collaboration to keep you lit, fed and

warm. When we consider all of these contributions, we are able let go of any pride in preparing the meal, and simply be thankful for the opportunity to eat well and share a meal with others. In other words, an attached person sees the meal as opportunity for praise/credit, while the unattached person sees the cooking of the meal as being a part of the divine and mysterious processes that are at work in the world.

As we begin to grasp non-attachment and apply it to our lives, we are able to see a reality that is independent of us. This means that the world is not made for us, but simply contains us. When we realize this, there is nothing to lose and nothing to gain – we become free, and when we are free, we can remain unattached. Our suffering decreases and our quality of life becomes much improved. ▲