

Looking in the Mirror

By Kim Roberts

Let's face it, it is not always fun. And yet our mirrors – the places, people and events that create friction in our lives - reflect our true nature back to us. By showing us where we still cling to our identities, the disturbing influences in our lives become our teachers. These disturbances are gifts: rather than getting angry or pushing them away, we should embrace them. They are not distractions or things leading us away from the path; the things that disturb us ARE the path. The disturbances are neutral. It is our reactions to them that create unrest.

Truth is the Ground

Yoga is not about creating a disturbance-free environment where perfection will replace our human foibles. It is about coming to terms with things as they are so that life no longer needs to knock us off our feet. We flow with the evolution of events, accept the lessons and incorporate (embody) them in whatever way seems appropriate. Then we continue our journey along the path with integrity.

The truth (things as they are) is not always palatable; we need to learn the ways we deceive ourselves in attempts to avoid the truth. Looking into our mirror, we may see fear and weakness, pride and ignorance, jealousy and anger. And yet if we do not acknowledge all aspects of ourselves, we will not be able to disengage our identification with them. The very nature of observing a thing alters its course. So we must continually look with a fresh perspective. Whatever image we have of ourselves is just that: image, which is illusory and impermanent. I am not the same person I was at age 12, yet the core essence is familiar. Instead of identifying with the passing illusions, wisdom dawns by shifting our allegiance to that core essence.

The Path is the Goal

So how do we look in the mirror? Practice. It is only by training the mind to be present that we gain the ability to see who we really are. Sometimes we have a 'good' practice where we feel energized and strong, flexible and present, uplifted. We usually consider this to be preferable, as if performing well enhances our status. But often it is a "bad" practice that is most informative. It shows us our weakness and lethargy, our bad attitude and laziness, our lack of discipline or hyperactivity. We call these practices bad because we don't like what we see. But it is precisely in seeing these parts of ourselves that the work, the real practice happens. Can we accept these parts of ourselves? Can we love ourselves despite or indeed because of our

vulnerabilities? So often we try to hide those areas we are ashamed of, even from ourselves. Can we muster the courage to look at these areas squarely without flinching? Can we love them? Then we are really practicing. Until this happens, it is purely performance.

The path is the goal. Our practice is to be completely present during the journey. Do we confuse the yoga path with a striving for perfection? If we get caught in chasing the goal, we miss what is happening in the present. When we are present during the journey the goal will present itself. If we are busy denying or rejecting aspects of our life as we move towards our goal, then we are in fact not going anywhere, and our goal eludes us.

Authenticity – the Fruition

The fruition of our path is authenticity. So in practice, we look at our patterns of relating in order to see how we are inauthentic. If the goal is to be authentically present at each moment, then we don't need to do anything in particular. We need merely to stop doing what prevents us from being here and now, fully. It is said that one should not try to practice. Trying implies a fixation on future results and so a denial of the reality of the moment. More important than adding to our experience is to strip away anything extraneous to that experience: judgments, thoughts, and concepts. When we see precisely what is, and incorporate this into our experience, then we can say we are walking the path.

What we are seeking is nowhere else but right here, hidden by all of our conceptual ideas and preconceived judgments: the framework of ego. What keeps us from being present are the myriad ways we have learned to protect ourselves from perceived threats. We determine what it is we perceive to be a threat, and then watch ourselves as we transform into the self we use to manage such perceived threats. With practice, we may discover that the scary monster we visualized is not a monster at all but a pile of pillows in the darkened corner of our room. We simply turn on the light of awareness to dispel the fear and annihilate the demon. We shift our perspective.

Authenticity occurs only when we can see, accept and love ourselves exactly as we are, without waiting to be something better in the future. Compassion for both self and other is a prerequisite for progress along the path to realization. Developing compassion is what allows us to accept those parts of ourselves that we might otherwise prefer to deny, paving the path towards transformation and ultimately liberation. Only then does the mirror truly become our teacher.