



How You Do Anything Is How You Do Everything

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I first read this quotation from a Zen teacher by the name of Cheri Huber and it really struck a chord: *How you do anything is how you do everything.* At the time I wondered what does that really mean? However, like with so many other profound thoughts, it sparked something within me and then, I yawned, rolled over and figuratively went back to sleep.

A few years later, I encountered the work of Karlfried Graf Durckheim. In one of his books he discussed attending a Zen archery competition in Japan where he observed that one of the judges was given the exclusive job to focus upon the face of the archer and if at *any* point the archer lost his relaxed composure, the shot was disqualified, *even if the bull's-eye was hit dead center!* What?! Doesn't that sound absurd to our Western minds? Who cares how you do it, isn't the point to hit the target?

Durckheim further detailed that, during that same competition, the final archer of the day was an old master, so old he could hardly walk and could barely pull back the bow. When he finally did let the arrow fly, it traveled only a few yards before falling pitifully to the ground. However, at the very moment that the archer released the arrow, Durckheim and the other spectators suddenly experienced a powerful satori or awakening. The Zen master's arrow fell short of its physical target and yet his consciousness created a field of elevated awareness that powerfully affected the spectators. Is this just spiritual lore or is it really possible?

Shortly after reading that account and reflecting on my own life, I recalled an experience as a very disconnected, arrogant and moody teenager. I remember one day in high school arriving early (and probably irritably) after recess for math class to find my teacher preparing to write a series of equations on her meticulously washed chalkboard. I was the only student in the classroom and was probably in a narcissistic fog daydreaming about girls I wanted to impress.

Then it happened. I heard Mrs. White open the pack of chalk and carefully remove a fresh piece. She slowly (perhaps not unlike the Zen archer) strode over to the chalkboard and began to draw. Click, clack, swish. Her movements were deliberate, beautiful and were expressed with such love and care that I suddenly found myself in an altered state of consciousness. Of course, I wouldn't have called it that at the time and had no idea what was happening, but I was clearly entranced. I felt a deep and pleasant tingling throughout my body, an inner tickling, a great pleasure at hearing the sound of the chalk on the chalkboard and strange enjoyment watching her graceful and peaceful but also very decisive movements. I felt graciously suspended in time and could have sat there for hours enjoying the chalkboard artistry without ever tiring of it.

Mentally, I could not register what "this" was and yet life broke through my egoically dulled awareness—something that still affects me to this day. It was something that is difficult to express but that was very real and was transmitted nonverbally and non-intellectually.

Interestingly, my math “arrow” missed the target in that I honestly cannot recall a single math concept from that entire semester. And yet, like with the Zen archer, something was transmitted that has forever changed me and that makes the arrow and the target almost irrelevant. *How we do anything is how we do everything.* Might this be the key to changing our world?

How we pick up our coffee and drink it, how we walk to the bathroom in middle of the night, how we breathe, how we answer the telephone, how we tie our shoes, how we swipe the iPad, how we do anything affects the entire universe. It translates to how we listen to our children, how we pet the dog, how we execute that presentation, how we interact with that client, how we respond to anger arising, how we relate to those flu symptoms and how we reply to an annoyed spouse. Are we connected with ourselves by being anchored in our essence? If so, then we can respond to life from that place of love, our core, instead of operating out of intellectual ego, trying to control and manipulate objects "out there" as a way to hit the target of feeling fulfilled and happy "in here"?

What if hitting the bull’s-eye, i.e. the awards, the job title, finishing the cup of coffee, getting to the top of the stairs, is not really what it's all about? Then each moment becomes an opportunity to enjoy life in its splendid and magical fullness. When we practice connecting with and resting in our true essence and allowing that loving essence to meet and embrace whatever challenge arises, we can respond spontaneously and creatively from our heart-gut instead of out of the false, mental self. And then life begins to open, expand, unfold and delight us.

There are many names for this experience and practice, Eckhart Tolle describes it as presence, the Buddhists call it mindfulness and A Course in Miracles students might refer to it as the holy instant. There is nothing wrong with aiming for and hitting the bull’s-eye. Yet, how we approach the target and live in those small, seemingly insignificant moments not only determines our level of aliveness but also impacts those around us in ways we cannot even begin to imagine.

Did my math teacher and the archer know the impact they had on others? Probably not, nor is that why they did it. But isn't it wonderful to know that your presence in this world can bring beauty and love where it is needed? Isn't it fun to know that daily life can become a canvas even while driving the kids to school or taking the garbage out to the curb?

Even though I constantly still roll over and fall back asleep, it is exciting and relieving to know that I can begin again. In this moment I can wake up and begin anew. I can breathe down into my center, smile and then respond and express who I really am.

What has been your archery or chalkboard experience? How does that inspire you to wake up and live your daily life differently? Click, clack, swish...