

Fall 1998

*Does it matter?*

Consequences are the results of our action, or inaction, to what we perceive. They lead to what comes next in our lives. They can be simple and they can be very complex or they can be positive and negative, it is up to the individual how one evaluates and learns from them. I often wonder if I did nothing at all if the world would unfold anyway, whether I have any real input at all. I have also thought if I did everything would the world unfold as if I had done nothing. I came to grips with this initially by (you are going to hate this) defining my terms. As it turned out, I only had to define one term - "world". I soon discovered that there are three parts.

First, is the greater "world" - out there which we see and hear about on TV, or read about in the paper, or magazines. The good stories, of which there seem to be so few, are heartwarming and good. Did we have an affect on it? No. Did it have an effect on us? - other than make us feel warm and fuzzy - no. Same is true for the myriad bad stories that the press seems to think is all we want to hear and see. So, how much effect do we have as an individual in the greater world - next to none.

Then there is the inner "world", the one made up of friends, family and other people we come into regular contact with. Does it have an effect on us? Most assuredly it does! We have to deal with all that we learn from, and about, these people. Some drive us to distraction with their barely comprehensible concerns, while others are inspirational, or become the cornerstones of what and who we are. Do we affect this inner world? Again, most assuredly! How we deal with this world can determine how it deals with us. We can affect it in such a way as to guide the good to us and turn away the bad. We, ourselves, can help or hinder all we come in contact with. A daunting task sometimes, figuring which to do when. It can overwhelm us to the point of despondency and at other times fill us with great joy and fulfillment. There is the danger here of "familiarity breeding contempt" which can sour any relationship if the level of seriousness, effort and appreciation is superseded by a taking for granted all that the others do and are.

There is the cross-over "world", too. This is where the greater world touches the inner world in some way. We come into contact with people we do not know and, as much as they can affect us, we can affect them. This world can have dramatic and powerful impacts on us and us on them! Sometimes one must go out in search of these cross-overs, by traveling somewhere, say to foreign lands to meet and experience the various cultures that exist, or simply talk to strangers. Sometimes the cross-over world is right next door! Portions of the cross-over world we like, love, enjoy or allow then becomes part of our larger inner world. Portions we do not like can be usually left behind, or as sometimes happens, slips in with those portions we like. I think this is where the phrase "taking some of the bad with the good" comes from.

You can also choose not to recognise these cross-over points, to ignore them and remain "isolated" in your own inner world. This is sometimes necessary as you struggle to find out what your inner world is. It seems as though one must know, as much as anyone can know at any given time, your own spiritual world before you have the confidence to make contact with the greater world. The greater world can be very overwhelming. It can even destroy your inner world if you do not have a strong enough hold on it. Few recognise this, fewer can evaluate the cross-over points when confronted

by them and even fewer still can see the cross-over point in the distance and evaluate it from there so they can avoid what they perceive as unpleasant or undesirable contact. I think that is why when students go to university many do not succeed in their first year, they are overwhelmed by the contacts with the greater world, get themselves lost and lose the ideals (or confuse their belief system) of why they went in the first place. Moving into the work environment can do the same. These people must then "find themselves" again, an often very difficult struggle, and find a new place to be.

The "cross over" world can also give one a false sense of security. What I call the "herd syndrome". All within, or at least a significant portion, believe they are all going on a grand adventure together, that they are the same. For example the feeling of young men going off to war, or a "herd" of students all going off to university. They may stay together as a group for security, but this usually does not last very long. The number of cross-overs are too great and one by one the group whittles down as members are carried away by their reactions to the new environments. To be sure, some move on to higher levels having got hold of the "right" cross-over for them, but many grab others that lead them astray.

Sooner, or later, an individual will find they have to rely solely on one's self for courage and conviction - this can happen only if they have a strong grip on their own spiritual (moral values or belief system) world. If one does not have a strong enough hold they can be whisked away on "side trips" overly influenced by other, sometimes good and sometimes bad, cross-overs - addictions of one kind or another for example. Others never had the courage to have their own spiritual world and so glom on to other peoples' worlds for support. They often become very dependent and never leave and when an event occurs they have no control over, say the death of their supporter, their life spirals out of control and utter despondency results until they find another supporter.

Having a strong grip on your own spiritual world is a self test of courage, strength and endurance. The very act of searching for the answers makes you stronger to others, while at the same time making yourself seem weak to yourself. This seeming contradiction is, in fact, the process of self discovery. It is when you feel the most vulnerable, you are at your most powerful. You sense your strengths and know your weaknesses. It is here that you shape your own destiny as you consciously ask the "big" questions in life. You choose your contacts in the cross-over world, you evaluate and learn from them and go on searching. It is a tough way to live, often wracked by misgivings and sometimes guilt. Ultimately, however, it is the most fulfilling as you meet the truly important people in your life. These people give to you a sense of personal empowerment as you come away feeling better for having known them. And they, in turn will feel better for having known you. It is a give and give relationship. Their ideas and beliefs are in concert with yours even if you had no way of knowing for yourself you felt that way to begin with. They give thoughtful meaning to what you have felt was true for some time, and proof that it does matter.