

# CHOICE & CONS



MAYME KRATZ. PHOTO: TIM LANTERMAN

# EQUENCE

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MANY OF US HAVE EXPERIENCED THE FEELING of a buzzing sensation in the center of the solar plexus, a little like a phone ringing as the body signals to us the importance of a choice we are about to make. Reason, emotion, intuition, moral conviction, and spirit can each prompt us to make choices.

Whatever the source or rationale for our choices, they reverberate. They manifest consequences. Our choices invariably affect others. Some choices echo far into the future and determine the options for generations to come. There is always something at stake. But just how much?

Examining the consequences of choice can help us learn and grow, develop accountability, provide insight, and spur more skillful action. But it can also induce fear, paralysis, or other forms of escapism.

As daunting as it is to interpret or analyze, the mirror of consequences should not be avoided, particularly in the name of spiritual detachment. At the same time, overplaying the game of consequences is futile and can lead to heady intellectual speculation, self-justification, or judgmental condemnation of others. Choice would appear to be the guardian of balance and the keeper of discernment!

WE LIVE IN AN AGE OF THE SPIRITUAL smorgasbord: People are mixing concepts, aphorisms, and insights from a broad variety of mystical and faith traditions. A blend of notions culled from many spiritual paths is now surfacing as popular prescription for all and sundry seekers: "Believe everything will turn out perfectly"; "deny the power of the negative by emphasizing the positive"; "always trust your intuition"; "focus on being and becoming over doing or engaging in activism"; "don't get caught up in the world of forms and illusion"; "live in essence."

Such a list is clearly a simplistic reduction of the requirement of spiritual practices that are designed to transcend the limits of the ego. The framework of mysticism is to create a methodology for deconditioning the ego-inhabited mind and to lift the seeker out of the dominant cultural

trance to experience and to "taste" reality in its fullness.

A superficial mysticism is now being applied as broader social commentary. Rumi is on everyone's lips:

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

Such a pronouncement raises moralists to their feet to make us aware that Rumi's words may hold a kind of psychospiritual truth but are no basis for creating a morally enlightened society. The moralist is quick to nail the consequences of our choices. We are urged to remember that our choices can be highly creative or deeply damaging to social order and communal life. Our choices can be a curse or a blessing in the lives of others and for the life of the planet. Moral activists urge us to develop the will to consciously set values, codes, and laws, and to adhere to them.

They point out that through this progressive enactment of new codes and laws in each age, we have created significant evolutionary benchmarks. The development of civil rights and international human rights legislation summarizes our evolving notions of who and what deserve full protection. Law is one important reflection of our moral development as a species.

Social activists will often remind us that progress is not guaranteed, and that it is incomplete in many arenas. They also remind us that there is a constant need to struggle against narrow self-interest and even regressive forces that seek to roll back gains made by previous generations. They spur our conscience to remain vigilant and plead with us to give our attention to everything from poverty to pollution.

Activists are sometimes harshly judged for being overly concerned with deficiencies and inadequacies in social and political systems, and are viewed as too negative or coming from a "scarcity" consciousness. But the reality is that they are trying to grab our attention, and have us focus on concerns that have fallen off the radar screen of our awareness. I, for my part, am grateful that there are people inviting, coaxing, and even cajoling us to make better and more informed choices on behalf of others, of other species, of our precious earthly environment.

THE CHALLENGE FOR THE MORAL AND SOCIAL activist is to avoid getting spun out by the need to change dysfunctional human behaviors and unjust systems. They should seek to avoid corrosive judgmentalism: When ex-

berance for justice leads to the demonization of others, more injustice is being perpetrated. Constant unresolved anxiety, frustration, anger, and even outrage can lead not only to burnout, but to a fixation on the externals of the problem. The attention of the activist can get trapped in the field of action and disconnected from the nurturance of being itself.

Likewise the challenge for the spiritual seeker is to avoid becoming self-absorbed. As the Dalai Lama has pointed out, it is not enough to meditate and to develop compassion for others, one must act.

Robust action can be surrendered to the highest principles of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation as Gandhi and others have demonstrated. These exemplars of higher consciousness have paved the way for a more universal shift in human consciousness. To stand in the fires of hostility, exploitation, and hatred with a stance that is both deeply compassionate and spiritually detached, and at the same time generative of creative and enlightened action, is now the task of the globally conscious citizen.

We can increase our inner strength to make critical choices for ourselves and for the planet by refraining from cluttering up our lives with too much superficial choice. The choice to surrender to higher guidance, to listen deeply to one's inner voice and soul's beckoning, is not passivity, but a higher level of conscious engagement.

WHEN WE LEARN HOW TO TRUST THE DEEP resources of our own being, we discover more than how to find renewal — we begin to touch the place where the universe is alive with fresh insight, new possibilities, and support for our highest ideals. Lest we think this is the easy way out, it is worth remembering that the inner world is the first to test our commitment, to call us to take courage, to take a leap, to make a shift.

Whether you call it engaged spirituality or applied higher consciousness, this inner sourced approach reflects as a commitment to the collective human journey through a science of being that aligns both heart and mind. And that opens both heart and mind!

A commitment to opening both heart and mind is essential for human evolution and for genuine progress on planet Earth. Ideas become fixed and belief becomes rigid in the absence of integration with new perspectives.

We are destined to reach beyond the comfort of the known and the familiar. Each step we take to open is a

choice. Each step has consequences that will secure the status quo, create a new roadmap, or possibly transform old ways in a manner that defies our rational understanding.

When science retreats from genuinely open-minded inquiry, its answers shrink before the evidence and it is held captive by interests other than the truth. The same is true for other fields of knowledge.

THIS IS WHY OPENING HEART AND MIND IS AT the root of IONS' work. We live at a time when competing worldviews and lifestyles feed divisive and destructive energies in the world. We need better answers about the major questions of human existence and our place in the universe than are provided by religious doctrines, scientific orthodoxy, or political opportunism. We must choose a wide and inclusive canvas to portray a vision of healthy planetary civilization, and to describe the immeasurable resources and creativity of human consciousness. We need a new vision that embraces the story of our own becoming and the mystery of our place in the cosmos.

In the game of choice and consequence you are always "it." Because as much as you may have been told that you are on the periphery, a new description of reality, and an ancient truth, would have you in the very center of the universe — inseparably linked to the source of all being. There at the source, in the realm of the eternal, we presume that choice and consequences dissolve before the peace and perfection of absolute reality.

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is  
too full to talk about.

Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other* doesn't  
make any sense.<sup>1</sup>

But as long as we are in this body, we are not off the hook. The phone will ring. Your body, that miraculous instrument of universal intelligence, will register a sensation in your solar plexus, and you know that you are being invited to answer a unique and personal call. Just how you answer may make all the difference.

## REFERENCE

<sup>1</sup> *Open Secret: Versions of Rumi*, translated by John Moyne and Coleman Barks (Threshold, 1984). 