

THE BABY AND THE BATHWATER

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I am reminded of a line in one of Franz Kafka's journals, in which he writes: "Everything I write, it already has perfection." This was many years ago and it took me a while to puzzle that one out, but as I understand it, what Kafka was saying is that rather than perfect his writing, instead he perfected his mind, with the result that anything he subsequently wrote reflected the perfection of his mind. He chose to improve his mind over just his writing technique. Of course, the two work hand in hand, meaning obviously writing was a form of meditation for Kafka.

There is a similar story of the great Tibetan yogi Marpa and his root teacher, the Mahasiddha Naropa. When Marpa met Naropa, Naropa created before him a vast and wondrous shrine, telling Marpa the shrine was the very embodiment of sacred wisdom. Then Naropa asked Marpa which one he should bow down to first, himself or this incredible shrine. Marpa bowed to the shrine, and Naropa then pointed out that he had made the wrong choice, for without him there would be no shrine. It is all about priorities.

I went through the same kind of experience when I first mixed my meditation practice with nature photography. Since photography was the focus and object of my life back then, as my photos improved, I attributed it to my photographic technique, but was not at first aware that I at last was successfully mixing my mind with an appropriate object, in this case photography. It was improvements in my mind that made all of this possible. Of course this is the baby and the bathwater syndrome all over again.

In my case I thought my photography was getting better, but what was really happening is that my mind training was getting better. Of course, my photos were also getting better, but it was only thanks to my mind practice improving.

The take-away from the whole experience is that my mind became better through using photography as an object of meditation; therefore my photography also benefited, but that is secondary. The proof of this is that not only has my photography improved, but so has everything else I do, like writing these blogs. It is the mind that makes all of this possible, not the photography or writing. This is the difference between the mind itself and one of its objects of meditation, like photography.

It is a simple question of priorities, like the old game of Pick-Up-Sticks; you have to know which stick to pick up first that will open up all the rest. I was focused on the photography, but had not yet realized that I was actually successfully mixing my dharma practice with an object, in this case photography. I had my eye on the photography, but had not yet realized that my mind had finally found an object of meditation that did not invoke in me all kinds of obscurations. It just worked. I could focus through the lens on an object with little to no distraction. There was no

effort involved, or any effort was absorbed by my love of nature. And it is the mind training that resulted from that experience that today affects every other aspect of my life.

I write this here for those of you who might see how important training the mind through meditation can be. In my opinion, it is the first thing to accomplish. All else follows.