

Being a Good Person

Earlier this year I read a number of articles about DMT (N,N-Dimethyltryptamine). From the many stories about individual experiences that I read about; I realized a pattern: that an underlying reality exists beneath the surface of what our senses perceive. Many people have described beings that inhabit this plane of existence in varying details, mostly that they are black, reptilian, and/or plastic looking. They were also portrayed as benign yet mischievous.

Since reading these accounts I have kept in the back of my mind the idea that beings exist who can perceive our thoughts, view our actions, and judge us based on that. The interesting thing is that when faced with certain ethical or moral choices I thought about those beings. I thought, "*What if they are real?*" Moreover, I would base my decisions on how I would be judged, which is usually not far from my own ethical standards to begin with.

However, I realized that I had replaced the Judeo-Christian mythology of my youth with new-age mythology. Both myths state that I would be judged on my actions and thoughts. Both infer or blatantly state that I would be punished for the wrong choices. Both are mystical in nature. The question then became "*For whom am I basing my ethical/moral choices on?*" The answer should be me, followed by my family, community, and ultimately the entire human race (*because that is who my decisions affect*). The truth is that I had regressed back to that child who believed saying the Pledge of Allegiance was idolatry and that getting an erection from viewing Playboy was a sin. I had returned to childish notions of being judged by a parental type deity that apparently spends eternity watching everyone like a creepy voyeur.

It does not matter if you are religious or what religion you belong to. It does not matter if you act like a good person all the time. The keyword there is act. Are you acting like a good person or are you being a good person? There is a major difference.

If you put a cookie on a table and tell a young child "*Do not eat that cookie*", and then walk away, that child will most likely eat that cookie. As children get older, they start to understand the idea of consequences and will realize that actions determine them. Therefore, an adult saying, "*Do not eat that cookie*" will usually be enough to either make the cookie forbidden or open a dialogue seeking an explanation to that edict ("*But why?*"). As a person matures, he or she will develop respect, empathy, and social perception:

"I will not eat that cookie because I respect the person that said no."

"I will not eat that cookie because it is important to that person."

"I want that person to trust me so I will not eat that cookie."

Let us not forget the always popular: "*I will not eat that cookie because I will get into trouble.*"

Sadly, some adults will still eat that cookie when they are not supervised, especially if he or she believes they can get away with it. That is the key point here. Why you are acting like a good person matters more than the fact that you are acting good at all. Are you acting like a good person because you fear the consequences? If the answer is yes, then you are not being a good person. You are being hypocritical. I am not saying that you should act on your impulses. However, you should re-examine why you are acting like a good person to begin with. Saving yourself is not a good enough reason because when faced with a moral or ethical dilemma a level of rationalization will be induced to permit unethical or immoral behavior. Although, all humans face rationalization of bad choices, humans who "*act*" like good people will most likely exploit those choices and rationalizations. Sorry, but many of you will.

A good example is the case of Tamir Rice and the police officer that shot and killed the 12-year-old boy. Police drove their cruiser up to Tamir in the park. Officer Timothy Loehmann immediately jumped out and shot Tamir within five seconds. Many people have rationalized that the kid had what looked like a real gun (*it was a toy gun*) and that the officer was justified for killing him. Perhaps Loehmann has rationalized that he feared for his life and the safety of others and had no choice but to shoot Tamir, but is this true?

The official police report states that Officer Loehmann told Tamir to drop the gun several times. The question is "*When did he say any of that?*" Did he say it between the time he lunged out of the cruiser and the five seconds it took him to pull the trigger? Was Tamir frightened to immobility? Did Tamir try to explain that it was a toy gun? Did Loehmann shoot Tamir because he was black?

There are many unanswered questions, including what exactly are the standards for hiring a police officer, giving them a gun and authority to use it? However, the reason I bring up this case is to look at the ethical choices Loehmann made.

- Loehmann could have pulled his gun out, **NOT** pulled the trigger, and talked Tamir into obeying his commands.
- Loehmann could have fired a warning shot to let Tamir know he was serious.
- Loehmann could have shot Tamir in a non-lethal way, for example in the leg.

All these choices have potential consequences, such as lawsuits or (*if the gun were real*) retaliatory reactions. Yet, Tamir would still be alive today had Loehmann considered any of these within the five seconds it took him to pull that trigger. It is clear to any casual observer that Loehmann wanted to shoot his gun the first chance he got, and so he did.

Perhaps he rationalized after the fact. Perhaps he had this rationalized all along. The problem is that we task our police officers with enforcing laws within the confines of said laws without ensuring that a code of ethics is instilled in each officer. Another issue is that the police are not vested in the communities they are sworn to protect. This has driven a wedge between every community and their law enforcement officers. Where police used to develop an "*us against them*" attitude, they now seem to relish/resent the fallacy that they work in a war zone. Based on the multitude of video footage available now, thanks to the vigilance of concerned citizens, it seems as though the police are ready and willing to brutalize and kill any citizen who questions their authority.

Officer Loehmann may act like a good person to the people who have rationalized his actions, but he is not a good person at all for shooting to kill another human being within five seconds of contact.

Politicized as that issue may be the point is that being a good person is more important than acting like one. As the Buddhists state, intention is just as important as action. This brings us back to the question of "*For whom am I basing my ethical/moral choices on?*" If someone is basing moral or ethical decisions on whether he or she will be judged by God, Allah, Karma, Aliens, Reptilian DMT space beings, by real judges in a criminal court, or by any external sources that carry negative consequences for them, then he or she is not a good person. If you base your moral/ethical decisions on how it affects others and what the best outcome will be, then you are being a good person.

It is as simple as that.