

Commuting & Enlightenment: Is it Possible?

By Dr. Stewart Bitkoff

Introduction

This discussion is about using the mind in a different way to overcome a tiresome activity. It is about using spiritual capacity to transcend the ordinary.

One day I found myself using a meditative technique to free my mind from the drudgery of commuting to work. It just sort of happened and came about naturally. This has helped me survive and transcend my daily drive on a monster of a highway- The Major Deegan Expressway.

The Ride Begins

Last year while on vacation in New Mexico, one of my friends remarked, “you know, for someone who has spent most of his life in New York City, you’re not as neurotic as some of the other easterners we meet. They’re always in a rush and rude.”

My friend continued, “a few weeks back, when I was visiting NYC and driving to the airport on the Major Deegan Expressway, I almost lost my mind. It was 90 degrees; the traffic was backed-up. I had to open my windows and turn off the air conditioner. All around me were large trucks and buses. Exhaust was coming into my window and I couldn’t wait for the quiet of New Mexico. How can anyone not go crazy and find peace in that environment?”

I replied, “over the last few years, I had gone crazy at least half dozen times. . .”

When I returned to NYC, I traveled the same route my friend described to work. As I looked about and saw dirt, exhaust and endless rows of vehicles, I realized something; over the years, I had learned to see beyond the Deegan Expressway. While part of me was busy driving the highway another part was doing something else.

Sure I got pissed-off when traffic was backed-up at the approach to the George Washington Bridge and I was going to be late for work. Somehow I learned to still this part of me for the most part and listen to that quiet inner voice which sang of another realm and put things in perspective

Enlightenment Driving to Work?

Daily millions commute to work. Once you’ve been at it awhile you learn ways to adjust. Depending upon your mode of transportation, commuters read, sleep, listen to the radio, share a conversation, eat breakfast, shave with electric razor, fix their hair, order a drink and curse their job.

Necessity teaches we are many things and it is possible to do more than one task at a time. While traveling the highway you see it every day.

The Sufi’s have a saying, ‘the apparent is the bridge to the real.’ In part what is meant by this is that we need things of the world to help us experience or see the underlying unity. This reality is the Truth or perception of the next world.

As I thought about our conversation in New Mexico describing the difficulties of traveling the Major Deegan Expressway, I wondered if it was possible to attain enlightenment traveling to work every day. Particularly if the highway was as crowded, dirty and in need of repair as the Deegan?

Of course it was! A little unusual, perhaps, but anything was possible.

Enlightenment

In some traditions, enlightenment is attained in one glorious moment of insight which is transcendent and unifying. It is an experience which changes the course of the person's life. Most seek to repeat this experience over and over. Some with success. Others not as successful.

In other schools enlightenment is reached through a gradual building of impacts. These are smaller visions or tastes of the Divine. This is a slower process but the goal is similar.

Mystic schools teach each person is capable of learning to put aside the normal stream of consciousness, in order to allow the higher self to emerge. In fact this is the goal of the mystical process; stilling the world so the higher consciousness may operate. Once the student learns to do this, quiet every day thoughts so something else might happen, the student is ready to travel alone.

During the course of the mystic's training various exercises and tasks are prescribed. One of the most familiar is meditation; this is an exercise/activity where the worldly consciousness is quieted by using a word, short phrase, or point of visual concentration. By focusing attention with a device (word, lighted candle) and redirecting attention as it wanders, back to this focus point, eventually, the every day mind quiets. In time with this exercise and others, the higher consciousness emerges. The higher consciousness is a subtle essence and our desires and daily thoughts often cloud our ability to perceive in this manner.

Back to the Ride

Somehow as I drove to work focusing on the movements of the cars, trucks and buses my soul learned to sing. In time this driving activity developed into a visual meditation.

Part of me was busy trying to avoid the other cars, yet, another part sang of its place in the cosmos. While my eyes focused on the road, and my hands guided the wheel and shifted gears, the higher consciousness awoke. It was like listening to public radio, it had its own agenda and helped me realize anew, we are more than the guy who sweats and curses the building traffic.

Do not let me mislead you often my commute is boring and repetitious. Many days, I do not want to drive in the rain and snow. I would prefer to stay in bed. That is what life is like. Some days are better than others. Some commutes are easier; but you have to make do with what you are given. Often it is a matter of attitude.

Freeing your mind of your negative thoughts and fixing on the moment is how the journey to freedom begins.

How To Do It

In this article, I have been making reference to using your mind in another way while driving to work. This is accomplished through a gradual preparation and this preparation includes using a meditative technique while driving your car.

Obviously, this particular technique is done with your eyes open and requires practice. For those who are unfamiliar with meditation and have never tried it, I would suggest familiarizing yourself with meditative practice over a period of time and use it sparingly at first while driving.

Make sure you have mastered this technique in a safe environment before trying it behind the wheel of a moving car. Also I would suggest attempting this under routine and stress free driving conditions. If you are going someplace for the first time and are worrying about getting there safely this is not the time to try this exercise. It should be on a road and under stress free conditions you are familiar with. Also make sure to turn-off the radio and begin to still yourself. Remember you must be in the right frame of mind, fully aware and driving safely to do this.

- For me I focus upon the license plate of the car ahead and begin repeating, silently, my focus word. A focus word is a word, short phrase, visual image, or short prayer from your personal belief system that you are familiar with and enjoy. Examples include: Jesus, God, Allah, Joy and Smile.
- As I continue repeating the focus word and begin to relax, slowly, I feel my consciousness shift and expand. Gradually the higher consciousness awakens and I am one with the moment. Continually I repeat my focus word until I enter a more peaceful, higher state of consciousness.
- As I am distracted by driving conditions, without self criticism, I refocus using the technique described above.

Remember I have been at this many years and for me this technique is now natural and easy to accomplish. Practice at home in your quiet place, and when you feel ready begin to use it on the road.

Don't Limit the Possibilities

Is it possible, really possible, to reach higher and do more than one thing while driving to work? Of course it is. We see it all the time but give it no thought. While driving people listen to the radio, have conversations with passengers, worry about their problems and dream-up wonderful solutions to these problems.

We begin to limit our own capacity and the possibilities when we believe something is not possible. With the correct preparation and practice, why can't someone experience another higher dimension of their mind while driving a car? Unfortunately we see this with those who have had a drink or use illegal drugs and get behind the wheel. They have altered their state of consciousness.

Why can't this be done in a more positive way- using a simple meditative technique?

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If you have ever wondered at the interrelatedness of man,
consider the effect of one stalled car on the expressway at rush hour.

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