

Punishment

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<http://www.engaged-zen.org/punish.html>

I speak from the perspective of a simple Buddhist priest - I have learned over the years through working with my own children, students, prisoners and my fellow human beings that any form of punishment, be it corporal or psychological, is injurious, causes pain and is counterproductive.

Punishment involves the deliberate infliction of physical or emotional pain or injury - on a being - by another person or persons who exercise a “power over” dynamic toward that being. The deliberate infliction of pain on an individual in response to an action after it has occurred can in no way change the effect of the original action nor can it serve to educate or awaken the individual. The physical or emotional pain or injury of punishment done to a child or an adult creates only fear and trauma, it not only damages the person being punished but it damages and enslaves those who inflict the punishment. The abuse of physical

violence visited on anyone is a deliberate act which scapegoats the person through lack of control over our burden of internalized oppression.

The net result of any kind of punishment is internalized oppression, humiliation and degradation for both the giver and the receiver of the punishment. It is difficult indeed to really see the profound depth of this truth because we as individuals and collectively as a society live within an oppressive and coercive environment. Our vision is completely blocked to the truth by materialism in the physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of our lives. Arrogance and aggression permeate our society, our history, our religious traditions, our so-called “judicial system” to the point that we can not dare to even question the premise of punishment without drawing shocked response from our fellow citizens. We live in a nation surrounded by violence, we worship violence and the infliction of pain in our entertainment, in our day-to-day interrelationships with each other. We forget that this is a legacy of hatred and oppression that we have inherited from

our parents and they from theirs. We forget that our country was founded on the violent conquest and enslavement of indigenous peoples. Our nation perpetrated the institution of racial slavery of African people for generations for the economic gain of the privileged. We forget that our religious traditions have been used to justify the perpetration of genocide and slaughter on indigenous people in the name of “civilization.”

I submit that punishment is uncivilized and serves no purpose other than the perpetuation of oppression. - I was punished, therefore it is justifiable for me to punish another. I was spanked as a child - it did me no harm - therefore I can spank my children. However, deep introspection into our own experience reveals the painful and horrible truth. It is through the means of introspection and insight that we can begin to perceive our addiction to the assumption that punishment is acceptable .

Each and every time we have ever been punished we have been socialized in punishment – we learn to modify our

behavior in the presence of our oppressor who wields power over us out of fear. We internalize our oppression out of more fear and carry it within us. When our oppressor, the one who punishes us, is no longer present, we allow ourselves to feel resentment. In time our internalized oppression builds into hatred for ourselves and others. In the long run our internalized oppression, our internal rage and anger result in depression and social alienation, or, when externalized, the oppression of others. We, in effect, have learned to become the oppressor, we pass on the cycle of violence to our families, our children and our society. Punishment, corporal or otherwise, no matter how it may be justified, is unacceptable and inexcusable, because it destroys any possibility for real healing.

Punishment inflicted for the purpose of influencing others, the alleged deterrent effect, is nothing more than brutality by proxy, socialization in oppression by threat. Deterrence is a myth maintained by the powerful out of ignorance and arrogance and perpetrated on the powerless. People do not consider

penalties when involved in illegal activity, their only concern is "getting-over" on those in power - not getting caught

The only truly effective and successful methods of dealing with correction of behavior comes through compassionate communication, comprehension of social responsibility, education, restraint and discipline. Punishment simply does not, and has never, worked.