

Cycling is the most efficient and ecological form of transport known to us. It has qualities of being sustainable and social, and rolling on a pair of well-oiled wheels can also bring us closer to physical awareness and beauty. Many of the Dharmic metaphors that we are familiar with are embodied in parallel in the cycling life. Cyclists like to find the path of least rolling resistance (by maintaining high tyre pressure, something around 100psi, and also by using the minimum tyre grip on the road). Perhaps most importantly, our balance is suspended by forward movement, since the big day when, as children, we removed the stabilisers. Without a forward momentum, however little, we very quickly fall sideways.

I remember very vividly the day I learned to cycle without stabilisers. My father brought me down to the car park next to the local library, and my older brother tagged along on his bike. I remember pondering the impossibility of balancing on a bicycle without these devices and struggling to believe what I saw before me: my brother doing loops around my dad and I as if it were nothing. I couldn't reconcile what I thought with what I saw. Obviously I had seen many people on bikes always, but never alongside this mental struggle about the stabilisers. The two phenomena were mutually opposed, like the tangle of a koan.

The theme of exploration is of utmost importance to both of these ways of life. Traversing a county, country or continent is best done from atop a saddle. People are much friendlier and timidly display their curiosity toward the cyclist. I remember once in Sardinia, finding myself gorging on pasta as I was presented photo after photo of my host's grandchildren. The man in question and I shared not one word of common language but he had nevertheless approached me and brought me into his house. The immediacy of this open-handed charity is common among cyclists. There is a code among them, which is based not on a one-of-us mentality, but on awareness of the fears and tribulations of their fellows. A cyclist fears cars, potholes and discovering a technical problem in a remote part of the countryside. It is part of the conditionality of cycling and is universal among those to do it in much the same way as spiritual friendship provides an avenue to connect with others in a truly human way. It's much more than our relationship to one another as pedestrians. I suspect that this is the case because of the lack of technology involved with walking as compared with cycling. Technology is an extension of the human. We must grapple with it and constantly improve it – and it is this relationship with our mode of transport that is the common condition through which we empathise. I remember another incident where I had overtaken a cyclist on the inside. He caught up with me later when I stopped for a spot of shopping. He had become angry with me. But we talked about it in calm tones and it quickly became apparent to me that it was not possible to respond angrily to this man (partly because I had been in the wrong). We parted ways as newly-made friends wishing each other a safe journey and a good weekend.

To use a bicycle brings one's awareness to a point. For us to work a bicycle, we must use all of our faculties at once, and it happens quite naturally and easier than when we make a concerted effort to do so. In fact we could say that *cycling induces awareness*. The union of physical movement with mental awareness is the key thing here. Even the great media and communications theorist Marshall McLuhan tell us that cycling 'is the prime symbol of the Cartesian mind in its acrobatic relation of mind and body in precarious imbalance.'

Now all this is well and good, but just as it is necessary to learn the techniques of meditation, it is equally necessary to know the secrets of bike maintenance in order to find the path of least resistance. And we find that concentration becomes further refined when attending to an ill bicycle. Tuning a front brake, for instance, we become aware of the interconnected nature of different aspects of mechanics of this beautiful machine. We see how the rim of the wheel may rub against the brake pads. The brake may be too tight, or the wheel untrue. A spoke may be loose. We see how the parts wear together – a chain and sprocket for example. We witness the change in nature of the shape of the sprocket teeth over time. We can almost feel the wear of the bike's components as we push the pedals. There we have it: embodied

interconnectedness and impermanence before starting a days work!

And in tandem (sorry!) with this is the physical awareness of how we move these things. The pedals describe a circle. But it feels as though we push them down. I try to push mine forward as they swing over the tops of that circle when I'm pushing myself up a hill. And when I remember to do so, the feeling of my legs changes dramatically. I experiment where to hold the handlebars depending on the topography as it rolls under both me and my bike. Ultimately cycling is a constant process of questioning of one's body with the mind, questioning one's mind with the body, and not falling off.