

What Next?

by Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D.

Perhaps you deplore the fact that rainforests are being mowed down at the rate of 42 million acres per year; or you are appalled at the mass slaughter of seals, whales, and sharks, or at the cruelty of factory farming; or you are angry about the lack of governmental initiative to control the emission of greenhouse gases; or you have come to see overpopulation as a root cause of our present planetary crisis; or you feel moved to oppose imperialism and militarism; or you are fed up with the poisoning of the human and animal population by pesticides and other toxic chemicals. Perhaps you condemn the ruthless exploitation of native peoples and other minorities, or you want to cry out against drunk driving.

Whatever your activist cause or causes might be, activism first and foremost implies taking action. But activism ought to follow reasonable principles and respect the canons of logic rather than succumb to uninspected emotions. Here are some basic steps that it would be useful to bear in mind.

1. Be very clear about your motives for activism and spend a good amount of time examining the emotions surrounding your decision and adopted manner of approach. Be particularly soul searching if you feel inclined toward more radical approaches.
2. Be properly informed about your chosen cause or causes. Half-baked knowledge and jumping on a bandwagon without due consideration are bound to prove counterproductive. Be aware that some groups have hidden agendas, which might not tally with your own thinking.
3. Be clear up front what you are willing to do, and what not, in pursuit of your activist goals. Last-minute action, especially under actual or imagined pressure, is apt to be imbalanced and out of character for you. Individuals often act out of character when in a group that is tending to become a mob. To put it pointedly, it is one thing to join a protest march and another to participate in a riot in which property is destroyed and people and animals are at risk of being hurt or even killed.
4. Whatever course of action you decide to take, always act responsibly, that is, as mindfully (attentively) as possible and with as much reverence for life as you can muster.
5. In case of doubt, suspend your activist initiative to reconsider, perhaps in discussion with others but always heeding your own conscience.
6. Be patient! Expect setbacks and persevere. Be prepared that your efforts might be slow to bear fruit.
7. Continue to deepen both your knowledge of a given situation, or of activism in general, and your reverence for life by studying the life and work of humanity's great

benefactors, especially those having demonstrated a commitment to spiritual (self-transcending and compassionate) values.

Suggested Reading

Albert, Michael. *The Trajectory of Change: Activist Strategies for Social Transformation*. Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2002.

Alinsky, Saul. *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*. New York: Vintage Books, 1971.

Amer, Elizabeth. *Taking Action: Working for Positive Change in Your Community*. North Vancouver, B.C.: Self-Counsel Press, 1992.

Dobson, Charles. *The Troublemaker's Teaparty: A Manual for Effective Citizen Action*. Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers, 2003. (An excellent practical reference work!)

Jones, Ellis, et al. *The Better World Handbook: From Good Intentions to Everyday Actions*. Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers, 2001.

Staples, Lee. *Roots to Power: A Manual for Grassroots Organizing*. New York: Association of Social Workers Press, 1991.

Copyright ©2006, 2007 by Georg Feuerstein. All rights reserved.
Reproduction in any form requires prior permission from Traditional Yoga Studies.