

Ideas Really Do Have Consequences

Some years ago I spent about 10 days in Burma (Myanmar), a country that has been in the news almost daily since the cyclone devastated a large portion of the nation. Of course the real cyclone in Burma is not the natural disaster, as tragic as that is, but the “cyclone” of corrupt national leadership—a brutal, utterly self-absorbed and tyrannical military regime.

The world is horrified to see these leaders block outside assistance and risk the deaths of millions of people. The regime is willing to allow their people to die from starvation, typhus, malaria, and cholera rather than permit the entrance of those they call “foreign devils.” Those who would bring relief, safety, and assistance are believed to be the destroyers. However, the real destroyers are within, and the leadership’s so-called “protection” will lead to the death of thousands.

My experience there was staggering. I have worked with abused people for decades, including abusive families and communities and churches. Burma was the first time I have entered into, and witnessed, an entire nation that has been abused. The generals at the top use oppression, brutality, force, intimidation, unpredictability, and isolation to control the people. My reflections have led to some sobering thoughts. **It matters greatly what we continually practice and habituate. We become good at what we practice, and if we practice it long enough, the behavior becomes automatic, easy, and natural.**

Sadly, so can the justifications. We can practice an attitude or choice internally for a period of time with the result that a seemingly strange or out-of-character behavior occurs quite naturally—as if it were meant to be so.

For example, we can practice hatred and racism and emulate objectifying or demeaning thoughts until one day the decision to act on them comes so easily we do not even realize we have gone over a new line. The immoral amoral become right and proper. The internal check of our conscience or the guilty flush in our faces no longer signals its warning bell.

Be forewarned, then, those of you who use and enjoy pornography. You cannot objectify women through the use of pornography for years and not have its morally corrosive effects eventually leak out into relationships with live women, even your own spouses and daughters.

People of both genders, you cannot nurse thoughts of leaving a marriage for months or years and not have that result in some form of actual leaving—either emotional or literal. You cannot fantasize an affair with a forbidden other and say “no” when the offer is surprisingly put before you.

The habits of our hearts and minds do matter. They shape us over time. As we nurture such internal habits, we are choosing again and again to bend our will to them until eventually the day comes when we can no longer choose a different course. We have become a slave to sin. And, like any slave, we automatically obey its dark demands.

I have studied the Nazi holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and the Burmese tyranny. I have studied and sat with child abuse, rape, and domestic violence. Such things, national and individual, occur because over the years both individual and corporate will have been bent again and again, an attitude nursed, thoughts allowed and choices engaged.

The small choices matter. The hidden habits of the heart matter. If we practice long enough, the unthinkable becomes doable and logical choice and devastation of our inner cyclones can be massive. We end up destroying ourselves, our families, our institutions, and even our countries.

No wonder that our God, whose habits are holy, tells us that He desires truth in the hidden places.

***An article written by Diane Langberg, Ph.D.
for Christian Counseling Today and used with permission.***

*Diane chairs the AACCC's executive board and is a licensed psychologist
with Diane Langberg and Associates in Jenkintown, PA.
To make an appointment at Diane Langberg and Associates call 215-885-1835.*

[View a list of Diane s books, available for purchase on Amazon.com](#)