

How To Stop “Going At” Life

Source: [The Green Bough](#)

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I was taught to “go at” things. Studying, working, writing, organizing, yard work, house cleaning, sewing, reading, praying, fasting, . . . You name it, in my childhood anything worth doing was worth doing fast and going at it hard.

The shaman with whom I trained decades ago had been a US Marine. Yeah, that was part of the appeal: twenty-two days of ceremonial fasting and praying alone in the wilderness; combat training in the daytime and nights of ceremony on the Mohave desert; martial arts testing to see if we could stay centred and focused no matter what. One of the student’s leg broke during a test. We all heard the bone snap. She went to the hospital and we just kept at it.

I used to apply the “go at it” motto to everything including my spirituality.

Old habits die hard.

The last seven months have been the most sedentary of my life. (ME/CFS/FM flare plus a broken foot bone that took a very long time to heal) I recently decided to exercise to see if I can regain some strength. The problem is, if I “go at” exercise I risk crashing the next day and ending up in bed for a week or two. . . or ten.

But I have no sense of where the line is. How much is too much? I can feel fine in the moment and be unable to get out of bed the next day.

So, I consider something on the lightest side of reasonable (like four sets of twelve reps on the weight machine at the local community centre) and cut that in half. This is harder than it sounds. I can hear my brother telling me I'm a wimp, can feel my mother shaking her head in disgust. And I think- what's the point? How can it have any impact to work this slowly and effortlessly?

But here's the thing: yesterday I noticed that I did not even break a sweat doing the twenty minute brisk walk I'd been doing for ten days. I thought I must have the wrong song on my headset, but nope. I had actually improved so much that the speed I was going felt effortless! How is this possible?

And I realized that not only was I taught that I needed to "go at" whatever I was doing in order to earn the right to be here and belong, I was also taught to believe that real gains were made (earned) only when we push ourselves.

And apparently that isn't true!

I will increase my cardio. A little bit. Just enough to get my heart pumping a little. And I will stay at that new rate until my heart rate no longer increases at all.

What if we don't have to try so hard?

What if pushing ourselves, pushes us right past the sweet spot of being fully here and present?

What if tenderness is more potent than toughness?

What if it's not even that slow and steady wins the race, but that there simply is no race unless we create one? What if it's not a marathon or a sprint. . . . but just a life lived as one small, brief and highly biodegradable human being?

What if what we have to offer is how we do whatever we are doing in this moment? And that is enough. ~Oriah