

My Life on Five Acres  
BLOG

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**The Tao of the Hamster Wheel**

When I was a kid, my mother and I did quite a lot of shopping at Kmart. I loved to visit the area where they had pets and I would look at the hamsters running on their wheels and I would wonder, "Why are they doing that? They can't go anywhere." Well, 35 years later and 11 years into a 25 year to life prison sentence, I have discovered the answer. **Running in circles, is the next best thing to being there. No matter where you want to be!!** In five years, I have run over 7,500 miles (22,500 laps) on my facility's track and every run has been different. I've completed six marathons (PR 3.29) and usually get to run nine miles, three to four nights a week and twenty to twenty-two miles on Sunday. However, it is not just exercise, it is an active mediation which allows me to release the emotional exhaust generated from living and coping with the finality of my prison sentence. No matter how bad the "actors" in this production (My prison experience) are behaving, every thing is better after a run.

The facility where I am currently housed has an oval track a little over 500 meters in length and three times around it roughly equals a mile. It's a track with some "personality", a personality derived from its physical features and its location. The track is really a paved asphalt surface with a slight camber on the inside concrete gutter. The track surrounds a large grass area used for many different sports and the outside of the track is lined with the housing units and facility program buildings. The powers that be even painted a white line denoting a running lane. That line, although often ignored, is important because the track is the "main thoroughfare" on the facility with all foot traffic from the housing units, dining halls, and work areas emptying into it.

The traffic a runner has to deal with is a significant part of the Tao of the Hamster Wheel. People are frequently "in the way" on the track. Some people stand in the middle of the running lane, unaware and not paying attention. Some people are moving from one point to another crossing through the track and not paying attention. Some people hold conversations in the running lane not paying attention. Some people stand and posture in the running lane, occupying space and willing to defend it with violence and righteous indignation. The common denominator was that they were in the way. Early in my "practice" I would rage at the "discourtesy" of these people. This would negatively impact the quality of my run and ironically, I was running to improve the quality of my life. This response was very unproductive and typical of my "emotional retardation" at the time.

As I progressed in my "practice", I realized that running on this track was a metaphor for life. In the "real world", people are going to be oblivious, indifferent, and sometimes down right contrary and if I raged at every act of "discourtesy" I would spend my entire life being held hostage to the behavior of others. The Hamster Wheel spoke to me, "Just

run. Allow them to occupy that space." So I ran. There have been days when I have had to adjust my line at least 20 times for the same person, but I do it, because I can.

The lesson I learned on the Hamster Wheel was in regard to my need and most importantly my failure to control circumstances and others. I have spent a number years of my life being held hostage to circumstances beyond my control and completely focused on the "external locus". This oftentimes resulted in my engaging in very self-destructive behaviors (addiction), which paved the way for me to express my emotional retardation and self loathing, in ways that harmed and victimized others (Criminality). The Hamster Wheel was telling me to focus on controlling myself. AH HA!!! I love the Hamster Wheel.