

Affirming Faith in Mind (19) Flow'rs of Air

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20 July 2015

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We have now arrived at the lines from the poem:

"From small mind comes rest and unrest, but mind awakened transcends both.

Delusion spawns dualities – these dreams are nought but flow'rs of air – why work so hard at grasping them?

Both gain and loss, and right and wrong – once and for all get rid of them.

When you are no longer asleep, all dreams will vanish by themselves.

If mind does not discriminate, all things are as they are, as One."

Even though the Third Patriarch doesn't talk about a practice here in this poem, it is all about a practice. We can have an understanding from reading Eckhart Tolle or Krishnamurti, or hearing from someone who communicates very clearly about the dharma, about the truth of life; they deepen our understanding. There is no doubt about that.

When Eckhart Tolle's books first came out, people were very vocal that they had had a great understanding. In some ways they became too confident. In Zen we call that the "stink of Zen". This is an early stage of understanding where people get very excited and they show the signs of being too confident, too excited about the whole aspect of understanding.

At that point they tend to forget to do any more practice. They tend to let all that go in the excitement of that moment of understanding something, and they drop any more effort. They feel that they have already arrived and need to enjoy the whole thing in its newest gloss and so don't bother to do any more work. The weeds and thorns tend to grow very quickly back without tending the garden.

Our work here - we call it the practice - is the most important thing. Our path is a radical path because there is no difference between practice and enlightenment. That is a deep *koan*.

In most paths that we encounter in life there is a difference in practicing and an end goal of fulfillment, enlightenment, heaven, nirvana - whatever the goal is in the end. There is a path and a goal at the end. People unfortunately get into a situation where they let time come in, travelling the path of time, and at the end of that time they will be in a place that is very different to a time they are living now. In our path, no, this does not occur. It is a radical path where there is no distance to travel. It is always right here, now. There is no distance to travel.

The statement by Dogen Zenji that "*practice is enlightenment*", is a koan in itself. How can practice be enlightenment? We practice to become enlightened.

That is how the ordinary mind would think. The path here is always undercutting this way of thinking. When we practice here we let go of even that idea, because that is still an idea created by thinking mind. Thinking mind creates the distance we need to travel, creates the time we need to travel to get there. This is all created by thinking mind – it is just more ideas we have to let go.

The Third Patriarch points to thinking mind all the time. He calls it “*small mind*”.

“*From small mind comes rest and unrest.*”

That duality is happening all the time - rest and unrest, good and bad, right and wrong, night and day. Every kind of duality comes out of thinking mind. The nature of thinking mind gives rise to duality.

In non-thinking mind there is no duality. If I put my hand on the hot stove, accidentally burn it, I immediately remove it before thinking mind comes in. Hot is just hot. Screaming is just screaming. I am not judging good or bad, right or wrong. I am not judging anything - I am immediately reacting to get my hand away to avoid the pain.

A moment later thinking mind comes in and says “What a horrible thing that was. What a painful thing that was, how unlucky was I. I won’t do that again.” Thinking mind starts up a whole story about it.

At the moment of the occurrence there is no thinking mind. There is no good or bad. At that time we are in our ancient animal instinctive mind, where all animals are at before thinking mind exists.

The Third Patriarch talks about the rejection of small mind. He says, “*...mind awakened transcends both.*”

The *mind awakened* is already there. It is not that we are going to get it sometime later. The sun is already there as the clouds pass in front of it.

In our practice we are revealing the sun that is already there. We are not getting a new sun from somewhere else that wasn’t there before. We are only revealing the sun that was always already there. What was covering it? Thinking mind/clouds are continually covering it.

When we sit in practice we relax back into the sun that is always behind the clouds, we settle into that sun which is always there. We don’t do anything to thinking mind. We don’t do anything to small mind. We don’t try to make it better. Because it is temporary and passing and changing all the time, how can we make it better? Any attempt to make it better is also going to be temporary and passing and changing.

It is rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic. It is not really going to make any difference. A better thinking mind is in reality not going to be any better than a worse thinking mind. Thought is just thought. Thinking mind is just thinking mind.

Here we allow thinking mind to drop away. Dogen Zenji calls it “*dropping body and mind*”. When we do that, instantly the sun comes out. The clouds drop away and the sun is there where it has always been. It hasn’t left, it has always been there.

Practice is like that. Thinking mind won't grasp the practice, can't grasp the practice. We come here with the attitude of faith right at the beginning - *Affirming Faith in Mind*. We let go everything to do with thinking mind. It can't grasp it. It can't grasp any of our 700 *koans* in the Zen curriculum. As soon as thinking mind gives up and lets go, the response is obvious.

We come here in that spirit of faith in the sun that is always there behind the clouds.

He goes on to say, "*Delusion spawns dualities – these dreams are nought but flow'rs of air – why work so hard at grasping them?*"

Most of the time in our lives we are grasping something to do with thinking mind. Some plans for the future, some pain from the past we are trying to resolve. There is always grasping with thinking mind, trying to make something better. It is always the act of grasping. These are just *flow'rs of air*. This is an ancient Buddhist image. Flowers of air are just delusions that seem to be there, like a mirage, and you grasp at them and find they are not there at all, even those things that we think are real, they are not real. Even if they were real for a moment, they are gone the next moment so in a sense they have got no deep reality.

We give up all that practice here. How do we give it up? Dogen Zenji says, "*think non-thinking*". That of itself is another *koan*. How do you do it? You just do it – think non-thinking.

You can say it in a lot of different ways, but it is the same practice that we do here, however we do it. If for a moment we forget ourselves, we forget our thinking mind. Self-forgetting, you might say, is the practice. How does this self-forgetting happen? It happens like how sleep happens, not through any thinking mind effort. The moment we are nodding off to sleep it has happened by itself. I haven't tried to go to sleep. It happens. But because I have put myself in a comfortable position with the right conditions, sleep comes by itself.

Here we put ourselves in the right posture, with the right kind of people who support each other's practice. Dropping off body and mind becomes possible in this conducive situation. We are putting ourselves in the conditions for this to happen. It is not as if we do it. We don't drop thinking mind. It is not any direct action of our own. Can this happen due to a direct action? No, it drops by itself because we are in the right situation, just like you go to sleep when you are in a comfortable bed at night.

He talks next about duality, "*Both gain and loss, and right and wrong – once and for all get rid of them.*"

How do we get rid of them? We sit in faith in our posture here. We make no effort to get rid of them but we maintain this effortless effort to keep the posture, to keep the right attitude and they start to drop away by themselves.

He goes on, "*When you are no longer asleep, all dreams will vanish by themselves.*"

Things will drop by themselves *when you are no longer asleep*. Trying to get rid of the dreams, to get rid of the thoughts won't work. We don't try to get

rid of anything but by going to the source as best we can, things start dropping away. By thinking non-thinking, all these things will start dropping away. All these dreams will vanish by themselves. When you are awake you don't try to get rid of dreams. They have already vanished. Here when you become awake for one moment, your dreams have all gone.

The aim is to be awake, not to get rid of the dreams. There is a subtle difference there. A lot of people spend their lifetimes trying to get rid of various thoughts, labeling them bad thoughts. They spend their life fighting that inner battle.

The practice here is very skillful. We don't do that. We just aim to be awake and the dreams will dissolve by themselves. We aim to be awake and thoughts will dissolve by themselves. It doesn't matter if it is a good thought or a bad thought – all thoughts will dissolve by themselves.

The root cause of any mental conflict is that we are fighting ourselves, trying to get rid of something within ourselves. Lady Macbeth was up all night trying to get the blood out of her hands. She was trying to get rid of the evil things she had done, a reaction from her guilty mind. It is an ancient reflex to try to get rid of something, to fight something that you think is bad.

Here we don't worry about any of that.

We have all done these incredibly bad and wicked things. We don't even worry about that at all. We might for a moment confess to ourselves, acknowledge our mistakes and forgive ourselves, yes. Then we leave it and come back to the source itself. That too is a dream and will dissolve if we leave it and come back to the source. We don't fight any of these things, these sins of the past, any wicked thing that has happened. We don't try to fight them and they will resolve themselves.

The great master Bankei said, "Everything gets resolved in the unborn Buddha mind." We can also say, "Everything comes out in the wash."

Some people are caught in their thinking mind. The more they fight it the worse it becomes. Then they try to fight harder, it becomes a vicious circle.

The moment they give up and return to the source it is all resolved instantly. As Bankei says, everything gets resolved, in the ocean of awareness.

"If mind does not discriminate, all things are as they are, as One."

Thinking mind is many things, many thoughts. The source is only one: nothing. The Third Patriarch here says everything is seen with equal mind. The source is one undifferentiated no-thing. This isn't different from things. It doesn't have an identity by itself. It is identical to things. There is no differentiation whatsoever. That oneness itself has to then dissolve. It is only there for a moment, you become aware of it, then you have to let go of that sense of oneness as well. Even that has to go because it then becomes a concept.

When you have one, then you have two. So oneness itself has to dissolve.

Our whole practice is to allow that sense of oneness to be there. It is already here. The many thoughts are covering over that oneness that is already there.