

Affirming Faith in Mind (14) Two Wings to Fly

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I'd like to talk about some different aspects of the practice. In one sense we have two levels of practice. Joko Beck teaching Zen used to focus on No-Mind practice but then she found that she needed to bring back the Theraveda practice of labeling everything. The two practices really go hand in hand. In some ways it's like changing gears in a car. If you see the need for one practice you change the gear into that practice. When you don't see the need, you change back.

The practice of observation, watching and labeling is more a Theraveda practice. Joko reintroduced this back into Zen because she found that a lot of shadow aspects were getting overridden by the No-Mind practice. People went really deep but they found parts of themselves were being repressed and hidden away without being revealed. When these shadow things were unconscious and allowed to run they caused a lot of trouble with people. They had addictions come up and they weren't aware of what was going on because they were focused on the depth, the practice which was covering over some shadow areas.

With the two practices together it's a very powerful tool for our development.

I was starting University back in 1970 and a year later I got involved in *yoga nidra* practice with a psychiatrist in Melbourne, Ainslie Meares (1910-1986, Australia) who wrote a book about it – *Relief Without Drugs: The Self-Management of Tension, Anxiety and Pain (1967)*. He had been to India and Asia and developed this incredible relaxation practice which is like our practice we do here now. For me that practice was a total breakthrough. I was able to relax totally. It was a big breakthrough.

Then I encountered Krishnamurti's teaching a couple of years later. His teachings are about awareness, not unlike mindfulness practice that we do in Buddhism. Very similar but like a twentieth century updated version of that. He used to teach that you have to watch everything that is happening. He called it "everlasting watchfulness." Everything that is happening you just watch as an observer.

Joko brought that style back into our Zen practice. She found that watchfulness very useful because in that watchfulness you don't miss anything. You are watching everything happen whether it is inwardly or outwardly. In that watchfulness there is no conflict whatsoever because whatever you are labeling, you are accepting at the same time. There is nothing unconscious that can be there. If something comes up you label it. After some time of doing that practice you might notice that you go into a deep Samadhi-like state of deep relaxation because there is no conflict in it. What would normally cause conflict is the unconsciousness of something pushing against something else. When you

become aware of it, there is no conflict there. It lets the conflict go and you accept that thing you would have been fighting.

A bad or “evil” thought comes up and when you look at it and label it, there is no more conflict there, you are not fighting it any more. So if you carry this labeling practice on you can reach a deep state of peace. There is not a breath of conflict in you, as Krishnamurti used to say, because there is no fighting in you anymore. Fighting happens unconsciously because there are things we don’t like and we immediately judge them. It is what the Third Patriarch talks about the poem – judging good and bad. If we let the judging go, a horrible thought is just a horrible thought. We don’t fight it – we label and accept it.

It is just as it is.

So the machinery of our heart-mind becomes this smooth beautiful machinery. Anything can be worked with as Joko and Chögyam Trungpa used to say. A fellow recently was telling me about a terrible injury he had earlier in his life. The interesting thing to ask is, “Who is aware of the injury?” That awareness is not touched by the injury. Somehow that awareness is able to look at the injury so it must be separate from the injury. If I have an arm that has been cut off, I am aware of that. The body is damaged but the witness can watch that. The witness is not damaged at all. The awareness is not damaged at all. So it doesn’t matter what happens if the witness can observe it. The witness is separate from that and is not damaged.

In our practice we have to ask ourselves, who or what is the witness? We can say it is awareness. Then we ask who or what is that awareness. As we go deeply into that question we see it is indestructible. The awareness can’t be damaged. Brain, body can be damaged, but the witness can’t be touched.

We can ask, “When did that awareness begin?” We can’t know when that awareness began. Then ask, “Does that awareness ever end?” It doesn’t seem to have any possibility of ending. Awareness is eternal.

Awareness – that’s your true nature.

It doesn’t matter what happens, a volcano, an atomic bomb goes off –that awareness is operating, witnessing that event. That is one way to get to realize what our true nature is. The witness can watch anything. Anything becomes workable. The most horrible thing becomes workable because I can observe it. It doesn’t matter what comes up it is workable. I give it a label, then it is accepted and it’s not a problem anymore.

Awareness is so powerful as a tool in our practice. That’s why Krishnamurti is always talking about awareness. Zen master Ikkyu used the word “attention” all the time. That’s his teaching – “attention, attention, attention.”

What stops us being in attention or awareness? We find we get distracted but when we are aware of the distraction we are back again in that attention. We are back to our true nature. At some point there we suddenly realize that’s my true nature. That’s what I have been looking for and it is already here. That’s what it is – it’s eternal. It has no shape, no colour, no form, it just IS.

Our teacher from India, Vimila Thakar used to call it “is-ness”. It just is.

Some people call it “being-ness”. It has no name, no label – it just is. It’s our true self, our true nature.

That level of practice is very important for us. Yet Joko said at one stage she felt like she was a witnessing machine.

The other level of our practice is where we just throw everything away totally, the observer, everything goes, just to be in no-mind meditation and become one with this whole situation. There is not even a hair’s breadth between this situation and me now. You are not even aware there is anyone watching. The watcher is gone, there is just *this*. That’s what we call in our practice no-mind *samadhi*, no-mind meditation.

If you get absorbed in your stamp album, everything else drops away, there is only that beautiful penny black stamp from Queen Victoria, there is only you sitting there. Your self is gone, time is gone, thinking mind’s gone. That is that no-mind meditation.

Or you could call it the opposite –mind-full, full of mind. Doesn’t matter, it is the same thing. It’s empty, yet it’s full.

So these are the two things that we play with in our teaching.

When I used to go to a party I found it very useful not to be the observer, not to stand back watching all night like a wall flower, not to feel out of it, to be part of the party having fun. The party for me wasn’t the time to be the observer. A little too introvert for me. At the party I practiced no-mind meditation. I threw everything away, got totally involved with people, just becoming one with the situation. Not a hair’s breadth separation from the situation.

I became the party while I am in the party.

The two things go together. What we realize after a while is that after you become the party, totally involved, there is still something watching anyway. Even though you are not trying to be the observer, watching is still going on anyway.

These are the two aspects of practice. I talk to teachers about when they decide to practice different approaches, the feeling I get is that it is like changing a gear driving the car. You know intuitively which is the best practice. When I was at the party it was not appropriate to stand back and observe, watching it from afar. It didn’t feel appropriate. So I approached it with no-mind, and became my glass of wine, I became the person I was talking to, I became the dancing I was doing on the dance floor. No separation.

That’s why alcohol and drug use became so popular because in drinking alcohol you throw away that observer. It’s a shortcut to letting go the separation that you have.

Either way, you can find yourself moving between both at different stages in the day, you move between both. It’s not like one’s good and the other’s bad. It’s not like that. It’s more like what is appropriate in the moment. You will know yourself what’s appropriate. Sometimes in a tense situation you might feel you need to sit back and watch. In another situation like the party, you feel you just want to become one with the party.

Be joyful with the joyful. That's part of our Buddhist teaching. Be sad with the sad, grieving with grieving, be joyful with the joyful. Don't hold back.

The main thing is that we are doing some practice, whatever that practice is. The main thing is we are practicing, that we have a practice. The Third Patriarch talks about the single way and becoming one with the single way.

We say in Zen, when walking just walk one hundred percent When sitting, just be one hundred percent with sitting, with your posture, with breathing, letting everything else go, thinking mind dissolve – letting go as best you can in each moment.