

Affirming Faith in Mind (17) Just Let Go Now

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I want to talk about the next few lines in this poem Affirming Faith in Mind:

*“Just let go now of clinging mind, and all things are just as they are. In essence nothing goes or stays.
Be one with the nature of things, and you’re in step with the Great Way, thus walking freely, undisturbed.
But live in bondage to your thoughts, and you will be confused, unclear.
This heavy burden weighs you down – O why keep judging good and bad?”*

The Third Patriarch in this poem is always pointing to the nature of great mind and small mind, or thinking mind. Great mind is behind thinking mind. Great mind is always there; true self, no self, whatever we call it, it is always there. Thinking mind with all its various thoughts gets in the way, whatever the thought is, good or bad.

We can see that he is talk about judging, “... *O why keep judging good and bad?*” The nature of thinking mind is judging good and bad, pleasure and pain, attraction or aversion. Our practice here is to directly drop thinking mind as he says in the first line here. He is immediately asking us to let go of thinking mind, right here, now. It is often said that if you let time come in then you create a distance between now and the future and in that distance time has a very big role. We are on a path and we are getting better, we are on a progression. That is the normal way we see things with our relative thinking mind in life.

Here in our practice there is a radical difference to that. In his youth, Dogen Zenji studied very closely Theravada texts. You have a sense in Theravada practice that there is a sense of a path, of time, achieving nirvana at the end a long period of practice. It is very much like a course at University. At the end of three or four years, I will have become a lawyer, or an engineer. I am going to reach Nirvana at the end of practice.

Here in our practice, we are always asked to drop thinking mind right here, now. Dogen Zenji who had studied Theravada texts when he was young, moved on to let them go as they didn’t satisfy him in the sense of being on that path forever and ever getting better. There is something about spiritual nature that doesn’t lend itself to getting better and better, like everything else in the world. It is always here in the immediate. Why can’t we access it immediately? We are born with it. Awareness is always there, consciousness is there. This is our true nature, why can’t we have access to it immediately?

The only thing blocking it is thinking mind. He says here: “*Just let go now of clinging mind...*” The nature of mind as well as thinking is clinging. It wants something it considers pleasurable and good. It has aversion to something over

there that is distasteful and uncomfortable. The mind is caught up with that all the time.

Here we don't suppress that tendency. We don't suppress it; we slip beneath that thinking mind, or let go of thinking mind by doing the practice. Whichever way you describe it, it is the same thing. We immediately let go of thinking mind whatever it is thinking. Good. bad, horrible. It regrets its own pain. We let all that go because that is the nature of thinking mind.

That is challenging for people. That's why our meditation rooms are never totally crowded. It is a challenging practice because it is immediate, and that is challenging because you have to wake up to a higher energy than we normally do when we are on a path to get somewhere else. We are in a rut when we are moving to get better and better. Those habits operate like that but here the immediacy of the teaching is always confronting us. The question or enquiry is can we let go of that thinking mind, that clinging mind right here now? Not in the future but right now.

The way we let it go in our practice is we do our practice with awareness and attention, at the start, with an object that is normally the breathing, and the posture. Very grounding, it is here now. By putting our awareness and attention on that, thinking mind starts to let go a little bit. If we do a practice like *Mu*, the first koan in the Diamond Sangha curriculum, the focus on *Mu* automatically starts releasing thinking mind as well.

Just the focus on practice, whatever the practice is, we lose thinking mind.

When I was talking to a Theravada teacher recently, he described a very intimate practice with a lot of techniques to it. One might have thought he was describing how to play a flute; the technicalities of how the fingers move, what part of the flute are touched, how one tends to move through the octaves – a whole range of technicalities.

As Krishnamurti and Dogen Zenji both imply, techniques belong to technology. Meditation isn't really technology. It can be made that way through thinking mind. But ultimately because we are dropping thinking mind we are dropping techniques and therefore technology as well.

Dogen Zenji says that our meditation practice is not really a practice but that it itself is already enlightenment. It is not a technique to get somewhere, it is itself enlightenment because once you drop thinking mind there is no technique left. There are no technologies. There is just this incredible reality that we happen to be part of and born into which is our true nature. It has always been our true nature. All we are doing is returning home to that.

The idea of having a technique to get there that too has to drop away because the technique is part of thinking mind. Theravada Buddhism is a warming up to where we are now. It starts to gather the energy, it starts to gather the awareness, starts to gather attention. Our practice is a higher energy practice that takes off from there.

The Third Patriarch starts to get into it in a true Zen way as he says: "*Just let go now of clinging mind...*" Not tomorrow, not next year, not next lifetime; just now – now by now.

Immediately let go thinking mind. Our skillful means of doing that is our practice - whether it is *Mu* practice, breathing or labeling practice, (which is a very important practice done in this spirit and is very good way to do it).

“and all things are just as they are. In essence nothing goes or stays.”

This sense of nothing ever going or staying is a deeper level of our practice in the first Buddhist teaching of impermanence. We get to that through letting go the thinking mind, which is change itself. Thoughts about the world come and go; thoughts about everything come and go. Thinking mind itself is impermanence. It never stays the same.

There is a quality of our awareness that sees that nothing ever comes or goes in reality on a deeper level. Whether we call it the real mind or reality, it is always there.

That is the realization in our practice; that this reality is always there.

Whatever we come to, if we just hold it and stay with it, the temporary, the unreal will dissolve and behind it the reality will come forth. It is always there. If we watch, whatever it is will start to dissolve. It is only the observing awareness that is always there. The objects of awareness will start to dissolve and change.

The observer is reality. If we can stay with that, like holding an ice cube in our fingers, that holding will show the true nature of the ice cube evolving. Then behind this is the unchanging reality.

The practice is wonderful, the practice is immediate, and shows us the true nature of life and ourselves. It doesn't require thinking mind. Where I agreed with the Theravada teacher is that the main thing when doing the practice is remembering the practice. It doesn't matter what practice you are doing, if you are forgetting the practice it doesn't help.

The main thing is not so much the kind of practice you are doing, it is the act of remembering. It brings back the awareness, it brings back the concentration, brings back the attention. It's not an argument about styles of practice; it is more an interesting awareness of how we forget. Then we wake up again and remember.

It is that coming back, whatever the practice is, that is the important thing. That is the awareness, waking up again.

Awareness of inattention is attention. That is the important thing. Technicalities about how we practice don't matter that much. Awareness of the beginning of the breath, the middle of the breath or the end of the breath is very technical. If you leave all that aside, it doesn't matter what practice you are doing, the main thing is the remembering that is bringing you back to the practice. It doesn't matter how technical it is if you are forgetting to do it. It won't make any difference.

The awareness of inattention is attention. This is fundamental to any practice that you do.

In the *Shodoka* it says you can waste a lot of time on the leaves and branches but the important thing is to go immediately to the root. If you waste a lot of time talking about leaves and branches, the technicalities, you get caught again in this and that, good and bad. You get caught again in duality. If you go to the root itself, as the Third Patriarch says: *“Returning to the root itself, you will find the meaning of all things.”*

So practices that take us to the root itself are very important.

One of the questions that is very good in our practice is to ask: “Who is doing this practice?” This is a root question. It takes us to the root of who is actually doing the practice. And you will look at this and you will sink deeper into your awareness with that question. You will find that there is no one doing the practice. It is the practice doing the practice in a very deep way.

The big self is practicing the big self. Kosho Uchiyama Roshi calls it *“the big self becoming the big self.”* Self becoming self is the deep practice. So any question that takes you deeper is a good question.

“Be one with the nature of things, and you’re in step with the Great Way, thus walking freely, undisturbed.”

“...The nature of things...” is anything arising every moment of life; thoughts, feelings which arise in front of us. How do we respond to those? This is where I enjoy talking about labeling practice. Our teacher Hogen used to say we are always in aversion to this “now” moment. We always have some contraption to pull us away from this moment. We always have to be somewhere else. We are never relaxed and fully involved in the “now” moment.

Because of that we are always in conflict to what is happening now. There is always a subtle notion of something not being quite right. We label whatever is happening now, such as in the beginning of our practice when we can say “sitting, sitting, sitting”. This starts to gather the energy to here, now, because that is what I am doing – sitting. Then, focusing on that for a moment, acknowledging “sitting, sitting, sitting”, the concentration starts to gather to here, now.

Instead of using the word “now” on the outbreath I can use the word “sitting” That too brings me into the now moment. When a thought arises I say “thinking, thinking, thinking.” Saying it three times helps sink you into it rather than saying just once. Maybe it is a kind of superstition but it has a better feel of sinking into whatever is happening. Whatever is arising life is giving us. We are acknowledging that so we are not in conflict with what is arising. The moment we label what is arising we start to embrace it a bit because we are naming it, we are starting to accept it. Then as we pass through it, it flowers and dies like a wave and we are on the other side. It is no longer there as a problem or something to be resisted.

I find that the labeling practice helps in being one with the nature of things. We get exactly the same result if for example we are doing *Mu* practice. By taking thinking mind away we are automatically one with the nature of things,

because thinking mind is the thing that is resisting what is happening. Once we take that away we are automatically in flow with the nature of things.

When I first started *Mu* practice I noticed everything started to flow in ways that hadn't been flowing before. It was quite extraordinary because I was taking thinking mind away. It was obvious that was the obstruction to what was happening now. I was always resisting the nature of things in some subtle way. But if you take thinking mind away you are just flowing with whatever is there in the natural way.

Today we have talked about two practices that parallel two practices in Theravada practice - a practice like *Mu* or a labeling practice. The Theravada teacher saw practices such as *Mu* as a concentration practice. The other practice for him was labeling the hindrances as they arise. This is what we have been talking about here; labeling whatever arises in the moment enabling you to embrace it as it arises.

Both of these practices put us in step with the Great Way. The Great Way initially might seem like a path that we follow around the room. But then the Great Way has no form. It is not really a path. It is just what is right here, now. The idea of a path is just a conception of a path into the future. This is an imaginary type of conception in creation.

There is no path there at all. As a teacher used to say, how can there be a path to here, now? Here, now is here, now. The next here, now arises and there is no connecting link between the two. There is no real path connecting them.

There are two levels of seeing it. One is a relative way of seeing it where there is a path, like a university degree taking four years, and the other way is where there is just completely *now, now, now*, without any connection, just one fresh *now* after another. This is more the absolute practice that we do.

...thus walking freely, undisturbed.

But live in bondage to your thoughts, and you will be confused, unclear.

This heavy burden weighs you down – O why keep judging good and bad?"

The freedom of the burden is, if we practice with the single way, bringing everything to the one. The energy gathering, we follow each other around the room walking, without any choices involved. There is no confusion. We can let thinking mind go. It is so simple in our practice together. How do we then take that into our daily lives? That is a nice little koan that we have to take up all the time in our daily lives. It can be done – it has to be done to become a real practice. We work out a way ourselves; the best way to do it. But if we forget to do it, it has no value. Gurdjieff called it "*self-remembering*". It is the same as sitting here. A thought bubble comes up, it is labeled and then we remember to come back to our practice.