

Affirming Faith in Mind (18) The Sense Domain

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Tonight we will be looking at the next few lines in this poem Affirming Faith in Mind:

*“If you would walk the Single Way, do not reject the sense domain.
Accepting the world of senses conforms with true enlightenment.
The wise do not strive after goals, but fools themselves in bondage put.
The One Way knows no differences, the foolish cling to this and that.
To seek Great Mind with thinking mind is certainly a grave mistake.”*

There is a lot contained in those few lines. After the Buddha left his palace home he pursued his path of enlightenment in the forest with the ascetics. He became a typical ascetic who tended to suppress the senses in various ways: the sense of hunger suppressing food through fasting; suppressing the sexual desire – they were all known as celibate; suppressing other senses as well. In that period he underwent a lot of austerities and at some point became so weak that he needed to leave the forest in order to survive. He was found in a field by a young cow herding girl who took pity on him and compassionately brought him some rice gruel that revived his failing body. He recovered. Buddha then had learnt that extreme austerities and ascetic practices weren't part of the way that could succeed in the understanding of enlightenment, and so he abandoned those ascetic practices although he had to go through that to learn it.

In our practice we follow what Buddha later called the Middle Path where we neither suppress the senses nor indulge the senses. We follow the Middle Path in that regard. Actually in our practice on the single way when we are practicing Mu or mindfulness practice of each moment, we are actually flowing with the senses in their natural way. They are allowed to flow as they need to. When we are hungry we eat, when we are thirsty we drink. On the right occasions we have our sexuality operating when that is the right timing. That is a natural sense of the human as well as in the animal world. It is there for both pleasure and procreation. It is a way of intimacy, closeness and procreation. It is a powerful sense.

People who have typically suppressed that sense show signs of aberration, signs of pathology, as the suppression of any sense will show. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1931-1990, India) used to say that every time he met people who were celibate he found that they could not stop talking about sex. I think that would be true of many celibates that you would meet, whether in the Catholic Church or any other, when you get to know them. Their minds are always focused on sexuality. In that sense it is not an accident that many abuses have been committed in that realm. People who are celibate seem to commit more offences than ordinary household people. It doesn't matter what country; it

is a universal phenomenon that celibates commit the greatest abuses in sexuality and indulgences. Because it is hidden it is a worse thing. If it is not out in the open it festers, becomes poisonous and takes on a life of its own, which is very unhealthy.

The whole notion of suppression is a problem.

The opposite of suppression is indulgence. This also becomes a problem as it is not natural either. Both these problems come out of thinking mind. Like the ascetics and the Buddha, thinking mind thinks that suppressing certain senses would more easily lead to enlightenment.

On the other hand people who indulge in all the senses - whether it is gluttony, overeating and drinking, fulfilling lust - that too has its own problems. Both poles of suppression and indulgence lead to great trouble. The body declines with indulgence. The body also declines with suppression as the Buddha found out. King Henry the Eighth died at a young age. As king he should have been the healthiest man in the kingdom, but with twenty-four course meals every day he could no longer fit into his armor in his fifties. The servants in the cooking house lived to a ripe old age because they ate simple food like beans and vegetables.

Indulgence and suppression are two sides of the same coin. The Third Patriarch says here "*Accepting the world of senses conforms with true enlightenment*". We accept the world of the senses. We don't suppress that world; we don't indulge in that world. It happens as is happens.

There is a famous Zen saying: "*When I'm, hungry I eat, when I'm tired I sleep. Fools laugh at me. But the wise understand.*" How many people live like that? Not many. Most are either indulging or suppressing, mainly because thinking mind is trying to do something.

We don't see animals following these habits, getting too fat or starving themselves. They eat just enough then they move on and enjoy their life. When hungry they eat; when thirsty they drink; when tired they sleep. Things are allowed to move on.

When we are doing our practice, we are really letting the senses take care in the way they need to. With thinking mind out of the way, as we cut the mind's road, senses will follow their own course unhindered and in a natural way.

Thinking mind doesn't need to get involved with the senses. Thinking mind doesn't have to tell us when we are hungry. We know directly and immediately when we are hungry. Bankei the great Zen master used to say, "*When I click my fingers [click!], do you have to think to hear that sound?*" No, because it happens before thinking mind. There is no thinking mind involved in that. Thought comes a moment later.

If I am seeing something, do I need thinking mind to see it? No, thought comes a moment later and adds to what I am seeing. Everything is moving on very naturally and freely without thinking mind. Thought comes later and says: "Oh, that is a beautiful sunset, I want more." Thinking mind has a bowl of delicious ice-cream and thinks: "I want more of that." Thinking mind sees the

goose that laid the golden egg and wants to kill the goose to get more golden eggs. That's thinking mind.

The action of thinking mind distorts the senses, generally speaking.

It indulges the senses or suppresses them in order to get something more. It suppresses the senses to get enlightenment. It indulges the senses just for the sheer joy of extra pleasure. Without that thinking mind operating the senses take care of themselves.

Our whole practice here is to cut the road of thinking mind. So there is no problem with the senses at all. Thinking mind is not needed in the role of the senses. The Third Patriarch well says *"Accepting the world of senses conforms with true enlightenment"* There is no need to tamper with it at all.

*"The wise do not strive after goals, but fools themselves in bondage put.
The One Way knows no differences, the foolish cling to this and that.
To seek Great Mind with thinking mind is certainly a grave mistake."*

The great Christian mystic Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591, Spain) talks about the dark night of the senses and the dark night of the soul. In all mystical practices, spiritual practices of the higher order, there is a point you get to where you feel a certain dark night of the soul or senses, where you go through periods of pain. Krisnamurti called it "great pain inwardly". One may ask why is that part of the path? The Third Patriarch doesn't talk about it here as he is talking about great enlightenment in this poem. But as part of the path we do go through a great pain inwardly. You might describe it in a whole different set of ways. One way to describe it in a way that Saint John of the Cross would be familiar - is that you go through a period of being very lonely. Senses have been let go of; the usual senses, habits, indulgences.

We go through almost a withdrawal of the usual indulgences of the senses. It is a withdrawal of the symptoms of the thinking mind being withdrawn. Pain ensues like that. Having been attached to all these different things, there is pain when we let go of them.

Depression in the modern age is everywhere. One would assume that a reason for depression is a movement away from pain. When we do our practice, sometimes the pain will come up because we are not escaping from that which we would normally escape. We stay with it and the pain seems to increase because we are not running away from it. If I run away and get a drink, or some entertainment, the pain seems to lessen for a while because I am distracting myself from it.

When we are no longer distracting ourselves from it the pain seems to get greater. One can enter a state of depression by that and seek medical help and start drugging up. That drugging will suppress the inner pain, which won't be useful for passing through the pain. It will only postpone the passage through that pain, through the dark night of the pain.

Most people's practice contains painful periods. Often when the painful period is at its greatest you are closest to a breakthrough. You keep walking the single way; the pain gets greater - letting go the old habits - and at the point of the most crucial pain suddenly there is a breakthrough.

In the physical realm of sport, at the point of the greatest pain in the marathon - you get to the peak of the pain - and then something lets go and it becomes a euphoric state of moving without any impediment, flowing like a river. The endorphins are incredible, they help let go of that physical pain.

It's the same in our practice. If there is a painful period, we practice through the pain and we keep walking. We have always got to keep walking the path. We don't stop and complain about the inner pain.

Unfortunately there are too many doctors who will give you a drug, a company prescribed drug, to suppress thought and feeling and therefore suppress the pain. This keeps people on these drugs for life and prevents them from going through the passage of the dark night of the soul. It therefore prevents spiritual growth.

People opt to move away from the pain rather than understand it in the sense of a path. Gurdjieff calls it *conscious suffering*. Only conscious suffering makes any sense. People suffer anyway, even if they take the drugs. But this is an escape type of suffering. They don't work through it because it has all been suppressed. Feeling is squashed down, thought is squashed down, they don't experience anything any more. That in itself is great suffering.

It is said that 95% of the greatest artists in history were manic-depressive. If they were taking drugs they wouldn't have been creative at all. There would not have been any highs or lows at all. It would have been flat-lined - everything would have been suppressed.

Part of our path often involves an intensification of the sense of pain because we are not avoiding it. We are walking continually through it knowing that behind its peak an opening will come.

Eckhart Tolle found himself at the peak of depression when one night he let go and fell into the depression totally. He totally said "Yes" to that depression. As he fell into the abyss he heard a voice say, "Resist nothing!" Not even the deepest most painful depression. He fell into the abyss he totally let go of everything, and moved immediately beyond his condition.

That is our path. Of course if we have a physical ailment we need to treat it medically. The inner path is not like that. That is why the physical remedies for the physical ailments, don't work in the spiritual realm. They numb you for a while but they don't really work. It is a tragedy in the modern world that that is happening.

One reason it is happening is that people have no idea of the path that will see them through this dark valley. Conventional religion takes them only so far, but they can't see a path beyond that. They walk up the valley; the harder the path gets, the further away it gets and they can't see any path beyond that. That's where our mystical traditions come in: Zen, Sufism, Mystical Christianity, Gnosticism. That's where they begin - at the end of the valley where the path becomes rocky and uphill and you feel you have hit the wall. The guides will come to lead you if you are willing to go further for human evolution.

But you have to be willing to say "Yes" to the path.

To say “Yes” to the path is to do the practice. When we come here we do the practice as best as we can. This practice has a certain taste. That taste is great effort. As soon as I make that great effort and I am on the path, there is a different taste or quality to it.

One mystic said that the taste of salty water is always salty. It is like this. You come here and it has always the same taste to it.

Great mind emerges when thinking mind dissolves. In our great effort to practice, whether we do *Mu* practice; whether we do full mind practice; whether we do *now* practice in this moment, in that effortless effort, thinking mind starts to go into the background, starts to shrink away. Great mind comes to the forefront while we are here practicing.

In here is a microcosm of our daily life. Here we practice what we also need to do in our daily life in whatever way we can.

The Third Patriarch does not talk about the psychological pain involved in the path on the journey itself. He only talks about the ultimate peak of the mountain that we have to reach. The ultimate peak of the mountain is already here but it doesn't seem like that to us here on the journey. We are already there. It is our birthright but we need to reveal what is already there and we need to do that through practice.