

Affirming Faith in Mind (3)

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Miranda Meditation Group

We are continuing our talks on Affirming Faith in Mind, the wonderful poem that comes out of very early Zen in China which rings down through the ages and still rings true today.

The lines today that we are looking at are:

And not to see the Way's deep truth disturbs the mind's essential peace. The Way is perfect like vast space where there's no lack and no excess. Our choice to choose and to reject prevents our seeing this simple truth. Both striving for the outer world as well as for the inner void condemn us to entangled lives. Just calmly see all unity and false views vanish by themselves.

The Third Patriarch is always trying to bring us back to that position of what Bankei Yōtaku Zenji (Japan 1622-1693) calls the "Unborn." Bankei Zenji says everything gets resolved in the Unborn Buddha-Mind, so whatever it is dissolves in the bigger Unborn Mind. We often use the analogy of drawing in water with a stick, in a still pond. As soon as the drawing stops the water resumes its natural smoothness. The image of the Unborn Mind is like that. Nothing sticks to the Unborn, everything gets resolved in the Unborn. Then we have to ask ourselves; what is the Unborn? That is a personal question and koan for all of us.

The Mind that the Third Patriarch is talking about is the same as the Unborn Mind. Bankei had his realization, which was that "We've never been born. What is it that says that I've never been born? It's certainly not the body mind, thinking mind that says that. It's something within us that is always there, it hasn't been born, it has never changed. The Third Patriarch says in essence nothing goes or stays – that is the reality of the Unborn. On the relative level everything appears to go or stay. If I draw on the pond, shapes appear to be there but they are gone very quickly. Essentially nothing has happened.

In the end we see that the very drawing is the absolute, the absolute is the drawing as well. Those two come together, the absolute is the relative; the relative is the absolute. Anything occurring is still the absolute. Usually to start

with, we focus on the unchanging and then we see that the change too is unchanging, so those two come together.

Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. First we see that form is emptiness, then later we see that emptiness is also form, the changing forms are also emptiness. So there is a oneness there, that cannot be spoken or talked about. Talking about relative and absolute is just provisional and skillful means. In the end there is no relative, there is no absolute as these are just words. As we say in Zen there is only just this whole unbroken reality.

The Third Patriarch throughout the whole poem focuses on the Unborn Buddha Mind of what he calls just Mind. Life itself becomes rather difficult for people if they are exclusively involved in thinking mind. It's just the nature of this and that, win or lose. There is no ultimate finality to it. There's no end to it. This endless becoming, as the Buddha described it, is endless suffering because fundamentally there is nothing to be gained from it — that movement of relative world thinking mind where we are striving after this or that. But as the Third Patriarch says, even striving for the inner world is fraught with difficulties as well. Even here in our dharma practice, if we are making ego effort, is still part of suffering.. Generally speaking people are living to seek pleasure and avoid pain. That's the whole motivation of thinking mind's existence in the human sense. We are driven to seek more and more pleasure and avoid pain. That round of the wheel of suffering is never ending.

The word Dukkha originally meant thirst. We have all sorts of images of people thirsting without end. One of the images of Tibetan Buddhism is of this huge creature with this tiny mouth striving to get nourishment into its body through a tiny aperture for a mouth. So that kind of description of suffering is apt for our daily life. We seem to be caught in this pattern of wanting more and more- we can term it as pleasure for want of a better word — and more and more wanting to avoid pain. These two patterns are underlying motivations for our existence. And that's natural in many ways. It's not something that the Third Patriarch says should be suppressed.

It has its own deep never-ending suffering to it. It's caught in time, it's time bound. We see it throughout history, people fighting endless battles, getting their children killed.

Our dharma, our great teachings, immediately give us a way out of that predicament, of that nightmarish dream of endlessly becoming, trying to get something that's not already there, endlessly trying to avoid the pain that's following us at our heels. And trying to avoid death itself, which is seen as the ultimate defeat, the ultimate pain. So that movement has motivated all of human life to a great degree.

Our path, the Great Way, immediately steps us out of that predicament. This is also the teaching of Dogen Zenji. We don't meditate in order to get

something else, to get better, or get perfect, or to get something more and more in that greedy sense. So when the Third Patriarch included striving for the inner void as part of the problem of the disease — disease meaning ‘lack of ease’ — he points to the same reality as striving for the outer world. This leads us to entangled lives. In not seeing the Way’s deep peace, right now, disturbs us. Every time we are not in the Way’s deep peace we are disturbed in some way or other. It might not feel like that. It might feel like we have got pleasure and we are looking for more of it, but there is a disturbance there. We are not quite satisfied. That thirst is still there. Even in our victory we are looking for more victories. That one victory will never be enough to satisfy us.

That’s life in the relative world — it’s a passage through time, or endlessly becoming, never being satisfied. That is basically what it is. The only really strange thing about that is that human beings accept it, naturally or unconsciously. It has to be unconsciously accepted because as soon as you are conscious of it you start to question it and look for other possibilities. That way of life is inherently unsatisfactory as the Buddha said. That was Buddha’s whole quest, to find something beyond suffering.

So we have the great teachers from the Buddha, coming down through the Patriarchs, to Bankei who I mentioned earlier, all come to this point of rest in No-Mind, Big Mind, the Unborn Mind. It’s already here, it’s always been here. It’s the part of us that says “I can’t remember where I began,” that’s an indication of it. It’s the part of us that says, “I can’t see where it’s ending” that’s an indication of it. So it’s there with us already. We’ve just forgotten it. We are oblivious to it. We are unconscious of it. We’ve been mesmerized by the world, of greed, hatred and ignorance taking over. We’ve been mesmerized by the thinking mind clinging to pleasure and avoiding pain.

So when we come here we practice the letting go of thinking mind because that’s the source of all suffering. Here it’s possible to step straight out of thinking mind into the here, now, and we do it! It’s not always a dramatic thing and often it happens easily here, even for a moment we are out of thinking mind. It’s a great relief because all the lesser problems get resolved in the Unborn, everything gets resolved. Once you step out of thinking mind everything starts to get resolved without extra thinking about it. It’s like putting dirty clothes in the wash; everything comes out in the water. Similarly everything gets resolved in the Unborn — it is our true nature always already right here now. It is just that we get lost in the dream of becoming — a relative-world dream of greed, hatred and ignorance.

But everything is already here and we keep forgetting that, so we practice letting go of thinking mind and we recognize it again. It all lets go and unravels and it will sort itself out.

What greater path could there be? All the great teachings have pointed to this, as the Third Patriarch has pointed out later in the poem. All times and places have come to this place of truth, of our true nature. Once we know it's there then we keep looking for it, we ask for it. We are aware when it's not there after we stray off the path again. There is suffering, clinging, grasping again.

So the whole practice, the great effort, is to move in the great Way, which is already here, which is perfect, so to speak, complete. He talks about it here where *the Way is perfect like vast space where there's no lack and no excess. Our choice to choose and to reject prevents us seeing this simple truth.*

The *choice to choose and to reject* is once again to go with thinking mind. Here we make the choice to be part of the Way, which is perfect like vast space. That's our practice. It's an absolute practice that is already here, there's nowhere else to go, nothing else to gain, and *Affirming Faith in Mind* is about our practice. It is to continually do that which is always completely satisfying right here, right now.