

Affirming Faith in Mind (4)

Peter Thompson

2 February 2015

Miranda Meditation Group

We have been doing talks on the Third Patriarch's poem *Affirming Faith in Mind*. It is a poem about the ultimate reality of right here now and of utmost importance and relevance in our troubled times. As he said, *the wise in all times and places awaken to this primal truth*. It's the deepest awakening possible for humans as far as we know. Whether it's been Jesus, Buddha, whoever else — all the great masters have awakened to this same understanding, this same unitary wholeness, which is our own true nature, our own being-ness. He continually points to it throughout the poem. What is the great awakening? It is the purpose of human existence.

We can amass great fortunes, like magnate Kerry Packer. If we die tomorrow, what's the use? It is absolutely no use whatsoever. How much of that wealth can we take with us? Not one skerrick of it. How mad is that pursuit once one looks at it. Also the pursuit of fame and honour has no meaning. There's no good percentage or any gain in these pursuits.

Yet we unconsciously pursue it because thinking mind is addicted to pleasure and addicted to avoiding pain. So we continually pursue this unconscious madness. The planet is being ruined, human life is being ruined, animal life is being ruined but we still continue to unconsciously pursue those ends to our own destruction.

So the purpose of human life is to transcend our thinking mind in an evolutionary way. We have attained a human birth, which is an extraordinarily high point of evolution. The trouble is it's a two edged sword. On one hand, thinking mind has been destroying us and the planet. Yet it also invented the most marvellous technology and seen us through the most marvellous advances. But in our practice, we drop body and thinking mind and we immediately enter the place that is beyond words and thoughts. We can do that right here now. Time doesn't come into it. It's not going to take a thousand years, one second is enough to realise one's true nature.

"What's the matter with right here now, if you don't think about it?" my friend Sailor Bob Adamson, a teacher in Melbourne, always says. One's true nature is always here now but thinking mind postpones awakening to this fact. One lifetime, two lifetimes, a thousand lifetimes — we are always postponing our awakening. We are always refusing what's in front of our very eyes. Our true

nature is always here eternally present. But we've been postponing that as a habit of thinking mind.

The Third Patriarch addresses that ultimate realisation. What is that? That's what we are looking at tonight, dealing with the lines:

*Attempts to stop activity will fill you with activity.
Remaining in duality, you'll never know of unity.
And not to know this single Way lets conflict lead you far astray.
When you deny that things are real you miss their true reality.
And to declare that things are void also denies reality.
The more you talk and think on this the further from the truth you'll be.
Cut off all useless thoughts and words and there is nowhere you cannot go.*

The Third Patriarch here is pointing to our practice in a deep way. Whether our practice is returning to our breath, returning to our posture or our practice of Mu, a single word of a single syllable, our practice returns us to one thing. The great effort it takes to practice this path becomes effortless effort in the end. At first it's got the rough edges of an ego-effort. It's like someone learning to play the violin, it creates horrible noises around the neighbourhood, in the corridors of the school, the screeching — that's the ego-effort, the initial rough effort. After a while, the effort gets refined and the violin starts to have a beautiful sound. When the strings are not too tight, or too loose, it gives out beautiful notes. Finally we are playing a beautiful concerto by Beethoven. We are able to do that — effortless effort. We understand in the beginning effort is very rough. It is ego-effort, effort-full effort, a rough effort.

So if we find ourselves making a rough effort we ask ourselves "Who is making this effort?" Suddenly we see there is no one there making the effort. There is only effort making the effort. So as soon as we understand this, effort starts to become effortless. It becomes much smoother, there is no ego making the effort. Effort is just making the effort itself. Life is making the effort. Then it evens out and becomes a lot smoother. At one point we say, "Look, Mum, no hands." The bike is steering by itself.

In Japan where the teaching came through from China, practicing the arts of archery, pottery, Shakuhachi, Noh drama, poetry, in the many arts — it is always the same in the beginning. There is rough effort, but the effort gets smoother. After a while the effort becomes effortless effort. In archery the string releases itself at the right moment, the arrow hits the target without any effort.

Right throughout life we encounter this. But the main thing is we have to make the effort. If I lie in bed every morning waiting for inspiration to come, in five year's time I will still be lying in bed waiting for the inspiration to come. There is no effort required to do that. It's the same with the violin string. If it is

too loose you won't get a note out of it. If the string is too tight it snaps. People try too hard — too much ego-effort and the string snaps.

In Buddhist terms we try to take the Middle Path, in between too tight and too loose. We just have to have the right balance in our practice. Not too tight as when the string breaks and not too loose where I'm lying in bed. I drag myself out of bed in the morning, and if I'm an artist I make marks on the canvas. The old saying in Christianity is "if you move towards God, God rushes towards you. God helps those who help themselves". If I'm lying in bed waiting for inspiration when will it come? So in the practice we say "leave the window open, the breeze will come in by itself". Awakening will happen, but if you don't make the effort, the window remains closed. How can the breeze ever enter the room? There's no opening for it. The only other way that the window gets open is if there is a crisis and the window suddenly gets flung open because of the crisis. We know of people in a crisis having an awakening because unbeknown to themselves, as an unconscious reflex, the window has been flung open letting the breeze in.

Our practice as the Third Patriarch says, is not about fighting or resistance. *Attempts to stop activity will fill you with activity.* Trying to stop the activity of thinking mind creates conflict. We're not about fighting our thoughts, we're not about fighting automatic reactions. We are continually going somewhere that's neutral, going to a practice, whether it's breathing or another practice. Breathing is always here now and if we return to our breathing we step out of thinking mind. Thinking mind lives in the past and lives in the future. It regrets the past and plans the future. Thinking mind can't exist fully in the here now. If I'm driving and there is about to be an accident, thinking mind is the first thing that dissolves. I just have to act quickly to avoid the wombat or kangaroo and I act without thinking mind. It's just full attention to the moment.

So what we do in our practice is not to try and stop thinking mind, we don't try to suppress it. By going back to the breathing which is always in the here and now, thinking mind starts to fade, starts to drop and dissolve. It becomes obsolete through non-use. As soon as we are not using it, it starts to go into abeyance, into the background. The more you use thinking mind, the more it wants to be used. The muscle builds up all the time.

Stephen Hawking was using his thinking mind all the time. It allowed him to produce some marvellous theories of space and black holes and time but he was still within the realm of thinking mind. It hasn't stopped or been dropped. It has only increased. But it helps in the relative world to do those things. We have breakthroughs in science: nuclear energy, splitting the atom and the atomic bomb. This couldn't have happened without Einstein's work but it has proven to be a destructive, horrible thing. Einstein was devastated when he saw that his work was used to create the atomic bomb. He was, as a total pacifist — totally aghast.

So in technology, thinking mind has had a huge role; we've got better bathrooms, better cars, better computers. Has it made us happy?

In a Buddhist sense, no it hasn't. It has made us more comfortable but not happy. There's a big difference. To be comfortable can put us to sleep very easily in a deep way, in a negative way. But we are not happy. We are still thirsting the thirst that Buddha saw two thousand five hundred years ago. The thirsting, *dukkha*, means suffering. We are still craving for things we think we need. When the Third Patriarch says *just calmly see all unity*, he's talking about the unity that's already here now. It's the non-dual aspect that's already here now as an appearance and in that appearance is what we call emptiness. Emptiness is essence. So when you see the wave breaking on the beach, in that wave you see water. Water is the essence of the wave. So form is emptiness, emptiness is form. The shape of the wave is water, the water is the shape of the wave. If you say that wave doesn't exist, you are saying that reality doesn't exist. You are mistaken. The form still exists but within the form the essence is still the water. So the wave is water, water is the wave. You can't separate the two. If I take the water out of the wave there's no wave. If I take the shape out of the water there's no wave. Water is the essence, and the wave is the momentary relative part of it. The two are really one.

We talk in our practice of the relative and absolute, but essentially the two are the same. There is not a category of relative nor a category of absolute. The absolute is the relative, the relative is the absolute. The two are really just the same. In our practice, affirming faith in Mind is affirming faith in the essence of everything. Normally we are just totally obsessed with form; we go to the movies and it's the images on the screen we are obsessed with. We are not taking notice of the screen on which those images appear. The screen is eternally there, images come and go very quickly. Initially we don't see the water in a wave, we just see the shape of the wave, we don't realize the wave's essence is water. The wave will end, it will last only a few minutes as it comes in to the shore, crosses the shore and its gone. To where does it return? To water, water, water.

These are all analogies for the practice and the path. He says here *the more you talk and think on this the further from the truth you'll be*. Words are just pointing to the moon, they are not the moon itself. They are necessary, but in a moment we will be letting all those words go. The waves will be coming in, they'll splash on the shore and then they'll be gone. We will be returning to our essence.

It's important to study words up to a point and then move on to our practice. We chant this poem every week. It's pointing to the same reality that is the essence of our lives. We come along here to drop body and mind. There's no time involved with this. If we allow time to come into this, it won't happen. It's not a matter of time. It's going beyond time. Time is thinking mind. Thinking

mind has created time otherwise time doesn't exist. Time is only there because of thinking mind and we are not principally thinking mind. We are something much deeper.