

Affirming Faith in Mind (8)

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Miranda Meditation Group

Tonight I'd like to look at the lines in the poem of the Third Patriarch,
Affirming Faith in Mind:

*Once coarse and fine are seen no more, then how can there be taking sides?
The Great Way is without limit, beyond the easy and the hard.
But those who hold to narrow views are fearful and irresolute; their frantic
haste just slows them down.
If you're attached to anything, you surely will go far astray.
Just let go now of clinging mind, and all things are just as they are. In
essence nothing goes or stays.*

The first lines once again as throughout the poem refer to duality. Duality has its roots of course in thinking mind. Does duality exist in non-thinking mind such as animals? We doubt it very much. There might be some scientific experiment that shows there is a duality arising for the animal kingdom, but we don't see the conflict in the animal worlds that we see in the human world. We look at Northern Ireland and its history. The Irish and English conflict, remembered by generations, continues to keep going. That conflict is fed by duality that 'we are different from them'. Or 'we are Orange and they are Green'. So right through the history of the human race we see echoes of this kind of conflict. Right through we see that duality creates conflict.

The two dogs down the street have a quick skirmish, run off. Tomorrow it is unlikely that they will be remembering that conflict they had. They will meet each other with fresh eyes in the moment. There will be a fresh encounter without any carriage of memory or duality coming over. So it seems that thinking mind creates these dualities and then we get conflict. As he says, even coarse and fine, even on that level it seems a very practical, non-conflictual level, we still get conflict. As I go into the shop with my wife, there is conflict on whether I take the coarse curtain material or the fine material. It's the thinking mind there that creates choice, creates conflict and confusion. As Krishnamurti used to say, where there's choice, there's confusion. So we have suffering coming out of that choice.

The Third Patriarch points to that duality, the suffering that comes out of duality. Choice, confusion, conflict — all those sufferings come out of thinking mind. And also the ability to worry about the future and regret about the past can be a great anxiety for people.

The Great Way is without limit, beyond the easy and the hard.

There is no limit. Boundaries are put there by thinking mind. If there is no thinking, there is no boundary.

We talked last week about awareness and attention and we said that if there is an emergency we don't think about giving our full attention. If a child comes in with a bee sting, you don't think 'how am I going to give my full attention?' The situation pushes you into full attention, and when you have got the full attention you know what to do and you act. We said that the practice here is accomplished very well with full attention.

Initially we seem to have to make that effort to give our full attention. Even when we are listening to someone we notice our mind is going on to something we have to do in five or ten minutes. Or something they say reminds us of a chore we have to attend to, or how our life too has a problem like that. All sorts of associations block the attention being 100% attention. We get caught all the time. How often in counseling when someone is talking to you about something, do you think "Oh, that happened to me too and..." You interpose your own story when they are trying to tell you something. That happens all the time because we associate the way we are going with them while they are trying to get their story out. That happens all the time.

Thinking mind brings all this difficulty but if we have full attention thinking mind can't exist in the same old habitual way. How can we have full attention? It is there. Awakening might not come immediately but awakening has a chance of coming. You might say that 'this awakening took time to happen'. It took time to an observer. But the attitude in the moment is that there is no time.

This is the right attitude. At some point with that right attitude the windows open and the breeze comes in. But if I have the attitude in the practice that I have endless time, that I can put things off until tomorrow, I can do this later — then it makes things quite difficult.

If you are on the path, you are on the path. Even if you are half-heartedly practicing, that's a good thing. But it makes things more difficult if you can't give yourself fully in the moment. We ask can you die in the moment, fully give yourselves to this moment? If we have this attitude, it still may be some time before the awakening happens but we are right in the zone if we have that attitude. It might not happen now but we are fully open to it because we are giving our full attention, we are not holding back. In that situation openings happen.

But if we have a half-hearted attitude, or are not really interested, it can postpone awakening indefinitely. Nothing much is going to happen because the window is not really open. Continually giving the full effort to this moment whatever this moment is, leaves the window open for the awakening to come in, the realization to come in. That moment-by-moment, full awareness, full attention allows awakening to happen.

Really, it is about intention. If the intention is there we have come a long way towards giving full attention. The intention is very powerful coming from the unconscious. The intention helps the effortless effort. It is not effort-full ego-effort if we have the intention to do it. It gets done in the end even though it might not get done immediately.

Often in our *yoga nidra* practice we can practice our *sankalpa* and strengthen our intention. We can feel it seep into our psyche as we do our *yoga*

nidra. We have the intention to move or do a certain thing. We can let that operate and it starts to operate very well in that relaxation practice.

There are a lot of things we can do to help keep up the energy in our practice. If we have a lot of negativity it is hard to keep the practice going. When I did the recent workshop down in Otford, I used Dr. Russ Harris's set of values. He gave a whole set of values in his book *The Happiness Trap*. He asks us to choose values that we see as very important or only of small importance. Clarifying our values helps give us an extra sense of energy/direction in our lives. It helps that we know where we are heading in our values. You might value most highly relationships, or you might value creativity very highly. You might value education very highly. Clarifying values fits very well into the Buddhist Precepts. In Zen we have the Ten Grave Precepts that are also clarifying our values. That is important for keeping the energy up and to be on course in our lives.

We have also talked about gratitude. I use the practice of writing down a gratitude list in my journaling course, too. Listing the things you are grateful for, focusing on what you have been given and what you are grateful about, also lifts your energy.

I tell the story about Shiri, my friend in the United States. When I met her, I was practicing in upstate New York in Springwater Centre for Meditative Inquiry. She had been in the States for a while, coming from Israel. After she left the Centre she went to Chicago where she started an ongoing gratitude list on Facebook. Every day she would think of a new thing to be grateful for. After five or six years it was still going. It's quite extraordinary.

Every day you can think of a new thing to be grateful for and it just gives you extra energy. It might be that you are grateful for your next breath, or for the food that came for breakfast this morning. You can think endlessly of new things to be grateful for. That practice counters a tendency in the mind to be negative, to moan, to be unhappy or feeling that you are hard done by, or that things are too difficult. Anything that can undo those kinds of negative energies has to be good for our practice as well.

There are a lot of things on the relative level that you can do, whether it is clarifying values, gratitude lists, and so on. There are lots of techniques that we can do to keep the energy positive. If you are caught in a lot of negative energy, it is difficult to do anything, let alone a spiritual practice.

The Third Patriarch is talking in this poem about the ultimate realisation. It is assumed that people have the other things in place already. It is assumed that people have lives that are fairly orderly. It is assumed that people have a fair bit of positive energy rather than negativity. It is assumed that people aren't caught too strongly in greed, hatred and ignorance. These are all assumed before you even take up this poem. This is the ultimate realisation and he is assuming the other foundational levels are all there in place. That you are not caught in crime, stealing, cheating, deceiving people — it's all assumed before we get to this level. It is conceivable that people have had ultimate realisations from anywhere — prisoners and criminals. That's not a blockage, but it helps to have a stable situation so the mind can relax and things can come in. The energy is relaxed so that you can practice. If you are tired from overworking it is difficult to practice. If you are over-tired how can you keep up a spiritual practice? It is

assumed that a lot of the yogic foundations are in place. It is all part of the order that is required in a yogic life. Zen is the fountain head of yoga. This is not the beginning of yoga. This is the top of the mountain we are talking about here. In our practice here we do some spontaneous yoga, a little stretching and relaxation. We do a quick foundational yoga practice every night here.

So all the yogic practices tie in together but in this poem we are talking about the top of the mountain. This is the ultimate realisation in yoga or in spiritual practice.

Anything you can do — any technique that you have discovered can be good. For me assertion training was an incredible breakthrough. Someone said on our workshop, the five love languages (from a book by Gary Chapman) were a breakthrough for their marriage. Whatever technique you use on the relative level will help, of course. It's not oppositional to this. It's only going to help the practice of ultimate realisation. If it is wholesome, if it is energy-producing, then it is only going to help.

We all have our own techniques. Some people love transactional analysis, other love focusing technique — different things for different people. We can't miss them on the Internet these days. Everything that we need is there.

So the poem goes on:

But those who hold to narrow views are fearful and irresolute; their frantic haste just slows them down.

I was listening to a very narrow view on the radio last night. He put out I believe a very narrow view. As we see in every religion, in life. It's not about having narrow views in Zen. It's about having *any* views. The Third Patriarch says here those who hold to narrow views, but it's actually those who hold to *any* views. Even a view that is enlightened is still a view and it is going to get in the way. It is going to block.

Good views are also an impediment. As he says, *don't go searching for the truth, just let those fond opinions go*. So any view can be a fond opinion. You might say, "this is a really right view" but that can still create problems if you hang on to it because every view and every opinion comes out of thinking mind, and that's the problem again.

We do see people who are incredibly narrow and *their frantic haste just slows them down*. We know that, even in Zen. When I went to Japan I saw there monks who have a frantic haste to get enlightened but it's actually slowing them down. You can see it. They are blocking themselves by trying too hard. It's like greed. They are up all night. It's just too much. It is lacking right effort. It's lacking that balance, lacking that intelligence about right effort.

Right effort is a very intelligent balance of awareness and attention. He says at the end of the quote:

*Just let go now of clinging mind, and all things are just as they are.
In essence nothing goes or stays.*

This is our practice when we come here tonight, to let go of thinking mind. How do we let it go? We talked about one aspect, giving full attention. Our

practice of following the breathing, following the posture, just being with full awareness thinking mind just drops away. We don't have to fight thinking mind or deliberately let it go or try to get rid of it. We don't have to do that. We just come back to the practice as best we can and thinking mind goes into the background, starts to let go.

That's how it happens. We don't do it. We don't let go of thinking mind. Who is going to let go of thinking mind — the one that is causing the problem? The ego is going to let go of thinking mind. So it is not how to do it, or who is going to do it. It's just that in the effortless practice thinking mind goes into the background. So that's why practice is so necessary. The Third Patriarch doesn't talk about that, but it is assumed that is in place as well — an ongoing practice.

In essence nothing goes or stays.

In Buddhism, everything is coming or going. Everything is moving, is transient. That's the first stage the Buddha talked about — impermanence. Then there is another stage, illusion. It's a dream. Nothing has really ever happened. Nothing ever goes or stays. It's an illusion. It is drawing in the water with a stick.

He comes back to that point again, *in essence*. We are not talking about the form of things. In essence nothing has ever really happened. That wave that we see crashing onto the beach, in essence it is really only water. It seemed to be a form for a moment. Then it broke so we realized it has gone back to its essence that is water.

That's the main thing in this ultimate realization. Not the form of things. They are only temporary, and we need to keep that awareness of time, of total transience of everything at the same time be in touch with the essence. We see the transience continually happening. If we are clinging to something, there is suffering because it's going to change. This applies even to an opinion, or anything. As he says, if you are attached to anything, you will surely go far astray. And yet attachments arise, a marriage, children, etc. Of course, you are going to be attached.

We have to work with that attachment. We don't say it shouldn't be there. It's a natural human condition to have attachment but we have to work with that because if that person is suddenly gone, there is going to be great suffering. Life does that. We have all had that happen in one way or another.

The way to work with that is to say yes. If there is attachment, practice with the attachment. Breathe into the attachment, stay with the attachment and then it lessens a bit. It is there naturally, for example, if I am attached to my daughter, my car, my house. But you can work with it. It is not going to kill you if it is accepted. Attachment goes into the background although it is still there. It is a natural thing. If I wasn't attached to my partner, you might think there is something wrong. That is alright. All these things are OK but they go into the background in our practice.