Affirming Faith in Mind (9)

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I've been away involving myself in very materialistic ventures. Money making. All those sorts of things you have to do. You get lost in those and then you come back again. You get lost then you come back again. Its good to remember while you are getting lost that you are getting lost because that helps the practice. If you get lost and are unconscious of it, it does not help. If you know you are getting lost that's a good thing. I can't say that I was always that conscious of it while I was away.

I've been corresponding with an old friend, a teacher who has come out of a school of Zen not unlike the Diamond Sangha school. He comes from a teacher called Taizan Maezumi Roshi (Japan, 1931-1995) who was a great teacher.

Lately, this teacher, Andrew Tootell, who lives in Bellingen, and I have been talking. He is an Australian who has been made a teacher with Barry Magid, based in New York. Barry has written some good books. Andrew is sending our conversations off to Barry so we are having a three-way dialogue.

The emails have been interesting. We have been talking about many things. Andrew is of the school of Maezumi Roshi that emphasizes sitting practice more than anything else. Sitting practice is highly emphasized. Traditionally there are two schools in Zen. One is Soto, which emphasizes sitting practice and the other is Rinzai which emphasizes more general sudden awakening. Soto school emphasizes more concentration, sitting meditation and *samadhi,* unity consciousness, oneness and the peace that comes from that.

The Rinzai school emphasizes *prajna* which is sudden awakening to the reality of life. So there are those two schools.

Last century there was a Soto priest, Harada Roshi (Japan, 1871-1961) who felt that Soto was a bit lacking. He must have listened to the ancient criticism that said it is dead sitting and silent illumination. He went on then to study Rinzai and joined the two schools together. Typically in our tradition that came after that, we tend to do both. Janet will attest to the fact that at the SZC Zendo you either do *shikantaza,* which is sitting practice, or you do koan practice, which is more the *prajnaa* practice of Rinzai Zen. So the two things have joined together. Depending on your personality, time of life etcetera, you tend to go for one or the other. Traditionally it has been said that Soto school is more feminine in its way because it is not so goal orientated. The male energy seems to be more goal orientated in life. When you are trying to pass a koan you are very goal orientated trying to get that realization. It's more a yang energy of goal orientation. Whereas in our practice here we can be not so goal orientated. We can be about peace, concentration, meditation, peace, unity as well as sudden realisation.

So there are the two tendencies and they represent the two tendencies in human nature. One is more female orientated, more receptive more process orientated. The other one is more goal orientated, more achievement orientated in a sense, which is usually more male orientated. It's like yin and yang being played out in spiritual life in a certain sort of way, to a certain degree.

So those two schools of Zen have been there, vying with each other, often helping each other and there has been an interesting relationship between these two schools from Ancient China where they originated. Depending on your inclination, your personality, you will be drawn to either. It doesn't matter about your gender – it's got nothing to do with this. A lot of men are doing *shikantaza*, a lot of women are doing koan study. It's not like that, it has a different quality about it. It's more about the personality than the gender.

Initially in our practice, most people who take up meditation see it as a sitting practice. Whether you are doing TM meditation, Theravadin or vipassana practice or if you do the 10-day retreats offered in Blackheath it's mainly sitting practice.

For most people it is about sitting meditation, not active meditation because people are normally busy and rushed so when they sit they tend to relax and we need that in our modern life.

After some time you might say, while I am sitting I am peaceful, I am concentrating. When I am in the battlefield of life, I am all over the place, I am uptight, anxious, hurting, in pain – I am in a state of unease in daily life.

So the enquiry that then arises is "How do I carry this sitting feeling and attitude into every moment in life?"

This is a question I will talk to Andrew about. The question has to arise. You can't be sitting all day long. You have to drive, to talk, to phone people, do banking, to deal with mortgage nightmares. Everybody has got these nightmares in one way or another - every day anxiety. So when we are not here sitting, not meditating how do we deal with those things?

Our teacher from Japan, Hogen used to teach the practice of doing "Now" on the outbreath, a very important practice. If you have just had an argument with someone, something unpleasant happened – three hours later your thinking mind is still mulling over it. It's all thinking about these things. If we do the sharp practice of breathing "Now" on the outbreath like a mantra, thinking mind will tend to drop away. It's the same practice as doing "Mu" in Zen. It cuts off 'the mind's road' we say. You can try this for yourself.

A practice like that can bring you right into wherever you are in the battlefield of life, right there, at any moment at all. This moment is the only moment you have. Whether it's with the baby, whether it's washing up, whether it's doing the stressful phone thing with the bank – this moment is the only moment we have.

It's very important to not only to see the practice as sitting practice, but it becomes very important to extend it way beyond that into every moment. This is a discussion I am hoping to have with Andrew because his tradition is very much oriented to sitting practice. I feel it has a limitation, a blind spot there. You see it

when people do a vipassana retreat – they come back and they can't handle the daily life. There is no practice given to handle the things in daily life, moment by moment.

One thing psychology has taken from Buddhism lately is the practice of mindfulness. That is the practice of handling moment by moment the things of daily life. It's taken directly from Buddhism. Psychology by and large acknowledges the source of that concept and practice. They haven't tried to steal it behind the back of Buddhism. It's an incredible new development that has come into psychology. It talks a great deal about mindfulness practice, whether its Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, whether its in ACT, the new Acceptance Commitment Therapy, all of those things now are emphasising mindfulness practice. That's one way that the world is trying to deal with this moment by moment reality.

So what does mindfulness mean for us personally? The way it is taught in Theravada tends to be still a mental practice, a partial practice. You are taught to be mindful of what you are eating etc, so in the beginning it is a partial thing because it is thinking mind practicing it.

As an aside, when Vimla Thakar visited here, she used to say, "It's a beautiful word 'Mindfulness' – Mind-full-ness."

I now feel I understand what she was getting at. It means full of mind. It doesn't mean a little piece of mind. Krishnamurti used to say, everybody wants a little piece of mind, P-I-E-C-E of mind not P-E-A-C-E, because true PEACE of mind is NO-mind.

Thinking mind is the opposite of peace, of peacefulness. So true mind-FULL-ness means NO-mind. FULL of mind means NO mind.

As we have often said here, if you give full attention, thinking mind cannot exist. When there is full 100% attention, thinking mind doesn't exist. We often see it when there is something really sharp happening, a game of tennis, a car accident about to happen, there is no mind there because we are giving our full attention. In that full attention thinking mind can't exist. There is only this reality here, ten direction eyes – full reality.

That is Full-of-Mind. That's what the word really means, full of mind. But the way it is taught in psychology and in Theravadan Buddhism, it is a partial practice. And it has to be in the beginning because people can't reach boiling point straight off the bat. They start it as some kind of partial practice. That's understandable.

But when you have those moments when you give your whole attention, your full attention, the mind is full, but at that time it is also empty. There is no mind. The fullness and emptiness go together. Mind-FULL-ness and NO-mind-ness go together. There is no thinking mind there.

Moment by moment we try to work with that. It's hard to work with that sometimes, particularly like me in the last three weeks of my little holiday, totally engrossed with making money, selling houses, renovations, paying workers. I'm back in the world of unconscious *maya* and illusion so it's a big challenge. We have to survive and we have to do that. We are always struggling

with the relative world and the absolute world. We are always struggling with that in our practice. How do we try to bring the two together as much as we can without becoming monastic? As secular people, how do we keep that balance?

That is a Zen koan, a challenging question. It has been often asked. Our practice is in the beginning partial then at some point the attention starts to mature and get more full, naturally. It is a natural process. You can seemingly turn it on and off more easily. When you first start to play the piano, the neighbours are running out telling you to shut up but slowly over time the fingers loosen up, and over time they start to dance across the keys. At some point it is like the piano is playing itself. The beginning was very rough but at some point the piano begins to sing and dance. It is the same in any practice.

The only requirement is that we keep up the effort. Initially in our practice effort is mainly sitting. It gives people the whole feel of what we are doing. You leave everything else behind. You devote a little corner of your room, with a little mat to sit on, whatever you do. You try to do it every day at the same time – that practice, that piano practice, that violin practice. Just that repetition of it has great value in our teaching.

In the poem we recite – Hakuin Zenji's 'Song of Zazen', he extolls all the virtues of sitting practice. So many virtues, so many incredible things come out of our sitting practice alone. Then the question comes, how do we extend it moment by moment? That is the question. If you do a practice such as "Now" or "Mu" then that is great. That extends the practice.

Any questions, comments?

Today I was reading a paper in the Psychology Department of University of Wollongong and they described mindfulness as "intentional attention".

They are putting a programme in place for stress in Year 12 students and this was the first line of the paper: 'Mindfulness is intentional attention'. They have also released an App on mindfulness.

Krishnamurti used to say that awareness of inattention immediately is attention. As soon as you are aware that you are inattentive – automatically you are attentive. It's that awareness of it. When your thoughts wander, and you realize it and come back again. It's just that coming back a thousand, a million times that matters. Coming back.

It's when you don't come back that the worry starts, and the thought bubble keeps on going, and you act things out. You need to pull yourself up, come back to earth. The practice will always bring you back if you allow it to and you continue to do it, and are open to it. When you stop doing it you are back in the old world again of thinking mind and unconscious suffering.