

Being Present in the Moment

Aloha Friend,

I attended a New Year's Eve meditation offered by a Buddhist priest in Waimea. Very positive energy. Got me clearer on many things. And I am realizing it's not about being on some ethereal plane to be awakened. It's about living deeply, fully present in the infinite moment. It living here and now embracing impermanence and the reality of no-self.

The Tibetan teacher Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche says is succinctly :
"Attaining realization is not such a long path once we become able to integrate all our movements of energy in our practice, because then every action is governed by presence and becomes a step on the path and an expression of virtue.". The crux seems to be embracing the ultimate reality that there is no birth and no death, just energy manifesting into form, and then dissolving into emptiness.

Dear Friend,

Glad you liked the haiku and its explanatory story. Do the English use the expression "hit the nail on the head"? Because what you state in saying "words are not necessarily the best means of communication, indeed they are sometimes an actual barrier to real understanding. " hits the teachings of the Buddha on emptiness right on the head. Because the Buddha taught that the habit of mistaking the words we use to label aspects of reality for the actual reality is at the crux of our confusion. Words are tools we use the understand our world. But they are tools with a significant limitation. If we lose awareness that words are tools or labels, and make the mistake of thinking that that really represent the reality we experience, then we get lost in confusion. We start to think that things that appear in our minds with the word labels that we attach to them are externally existent and separate from ourselves. Buddhism asserts the non-duality of reality - that all things are connected and interdependent (oneness). This is at the limit of my present understanding of the Buddha's teachings, but I feel it's reality, and am moved to grow in my realization of its core truth. Buddhists teach that awareness is self-liberating. To see reality clearly, just as it is here and now is the liberation. I walk down that path with a light and grateful heart.

The Buddha taught his students to be in the moment; to stop and look deeply into the nature of all things. It wasn't a philosophical suggestion about being living with mindfulness. It is a literal instruction - be in the moment, beyond thought, being concepts, beyond attachment or aversion. We are very seldom actually present in the moment. We are usually busy fretting about the past or planning for the future - a minds whirring about like neurotic little mice in a cage. From what I have learned from reading about research into perception when we relate to the world with our brain we are never really literally in the moment. There is a lag of several milliseconds where the brain processes the input it gets from the sense organs and creates a picture of what it thinks that reality is for our minds to "see". That is not being in the moment, it is being out of phase with it. One has to look directly with the pure awareness that is fortunately our core nature to really be "in the moment" beyond concepts, judgments, evaluation or brain facsimiles of reality. Why is that important? Because, Buddha Nature, Buddha Mind, the life force, the Tao, the

holy spirit - or whatever you want to name it - exists and can be experienced only in the moment of Now.

I am honored by your kind words. Yes, being suspended in time is living in the moment, since time is another concept (there is really just a flow of moments/now). The ideas that I was sharing are from a book I am presently reading by an esteemed Tibetan Buddhist teacher Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche entitled Pointing of the Dharmakaya (Dharmakaya is the true nature of the Buddha, identical to transcendent reality which is the essence of the universe). In this book Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche says "we nevertheless have a very strongly entrenched habit of seeing external things as being separate from ourselves, because we naturally experience our perspective or viewpoint as being a mind that is looking out at the world that is somehow outside of and separate from the perceiving mind". This is what the non-duality of reality deals with - the mind viewing an object is not separate from the object being perceived - they are interconnected, they are one.

This reality, this universe is quite wondrous, wondrous beyond all words

Dear Friend,

I'm definitely not qualified to be the Buddha's spokesperson, but I will share my incomplete understanding of the teachings. Since Buddhists do not recognize a separately existing self, it also means that death is illusory also. I think Uncle Dave was correct. The elements that form the aggregate that it is us coalesce, manifest as a human, then disperse. It is transformation, not loss. The Buddhists add the idea of a subtle body, something that survives the death of the physical body and is incorporated into future incarnations. All of this does flow within the reality of interconnectedness.

As for not feeling connectedness to violent humans, that's where compassion comes in, and it can be a challenge. At Koloa Library we have a very mean spirited woman who puts us on edge every time she comes in. She seems to revel in being nasty and verbally abusive (and occasionally loudly belligerent). She is a big challenge for me as a Buddhist. I find it very hard to generate compassion for someone who enjoys inflicting emotional suffering on others. I have really worked on it, and I am slowly getting to the point where I can see her as a tormented, unhappy person and feel some compassion for the personal hell she must inhabit.

The darker, much worse case people you refer too - murderers, rapists, sadists, psychopaths - that is a whole higher level of challenge. I try to remember that we were all born as innocent babies. For some after that their upbringing must have been hellish to produce such monstrous behaviors. But these monsters are humans, for some there is hope of some level of redemption.

The Buddha teaches that all beings, over the course of endless lifetimes, have been our mothers, our fathers, our sisters or brothers. It's why we must strive to generate compassion for all beings and their suffering. That and the reality of interconnectedness. Not saying this is in any way easy. Not saying we should condone or not deal strongly in stopping monsters from hurting others - of course we must do that. We can try and feel compassion for the hell that a person went through to become a monster. We do not have to be ok with the monstrous behavior.

Dear Friend,

No presumption noted. You are kind regarding my blather. I am one-fourth Irish, so I can wax a little towards blarney sometimes. I completely agree with your take on the subtle body. It's like our spirit seed and nectar in one (with the essence of all we have learned in our many lifetimes within it). What a serendipitous encounter with your teacher. If you seek it, I pray you find a new one. I know there are a lot of Tibetan Buddhist centers in England and Scotland. I agree with your view on philosophical extremism. My path of Buddhism is called the Middle Way after all. I guess it really comes down to how you respond to the realization of how much you don't know and understand. You can get defensive and shield yourself in orthodox doctrine, or you can open to a sense of wonder at how amazing our Universe/multiverse is, and be grateful for the chance to learn more.