

Questions for Reflection
Talk 8 Series 12

Here is a plan for reflection during the week:

For overcoming ignorance the Dalai Lama has laid out a 4-step program which he introduces by explaining that basically we are training in non-violence and with this type of training one gradually comes to see that it is indeed possible to transform consciousness. 1) The first level in the practice of nonviolence is to restrain oneself from engaging in activities that harm others; 2) the second level is to implement antidotes to the "afflictive emotions" that drive bad actions (e.g., anger, hate, jealousy, pride, etc.); 3) the third level is to overcome even the predispositions previously established by afflictive emotions which is done initially by directly focusing on eradicating intellectually acquired obstructions to realizing our actual existence as interconnected beings and then gradually 4) in the fourth level the innate obstructions are removed. Those conceptual elaborations are ceased through cultivating the view that realizes emptiness. That reality--the emptiness into which all of the afflictive emotions have been extinguished through the antidote of wisdom--is the true cessation of the sources of suffering: liberation.

For level 1, please examine your behavior and determine if there remains any part that may be harmful to others. Identify that part and do something to stop or lessen it.

For level 2, please pick out one afflictive emotion that especially bothers you and implement antidotes to this particular emotion. This is about raising consciousness.

For level 3, identify at least one intellectual obstruction to realizing our lack of inherent individual existence and find a way to soften it.

For level 4, we want to increase our practice of zazen by some amount and/or quality.

For those of you who have been practicing zazen on your own and perhaps not feeling the kind of progress the Dalai Lama is speaking of, it would be good for you to find an on-line zazen group so that your practice is 1) with other people and 2) more regular in both time and frequency. It would be good to practice one period a day formally with other people and thanks to COVID, you can do this from your homes. Please choose, from the many options, one group session that works for your schedule and start to practice this way for awhile. It will mean organizing

your day around your time for zazen rather than sticking it in here and there like an unwanted cousin.

QUESTIONS

1) You've gone over this before but can you give some examples of how we can go about "taming our minds?"

[Any activity that involves training will begin the process. Training means focusing on something outside of yourself. School does this. Holding down a job does this if you are a generous worker and keep in mind what will be best for everyone. Conscientious community living does this. Military service does this as well as other kinds of service. If you need to accomplish something like learning a language, you can turn it into a kind of training by setting up a daily practice. "I practice learning Mandarin one hour a day." Then you do this no matter what. The "no matter what" part is critical. In this way you learn how to accomplish purposes of your own instead of purposes for others (like teachers or bosses). You learn to say "no," and to prioritize your higher self. Along the way you get "trained." You can also coach your children to set up practices for themselves, like doing their homework or setting the table, and then when something comes up in their lives that they really want to accomplish they will already know how--"Make it a practice." Thank you.]

2) Today for the first time, when you were saying that thing about Buddhists basically being neither vegetarian nor non-vegetarian, I "got" that for a Buddhist, impartiality would be the higher virtue. Is that correct?

[Very good. From the twelve links we can see from the fourth one, contact, where discriminations are first made--pleasant, unpleasant or neutral--that discriminations, especially strong ones, are where the wheels of trouble really get rolling. Food is a prime arena for discriminations to be acted out. The Buddhist monk is basically a mendicant, a beggar. She owns nothing and begs for food. Therefore she must be impartial. All she has to eat is what is placed in her bowl by a donor. The impartiality involved is considered a higher value than non-meat-eating probably because it is a fact that killing must take place for our survival. If we don't kill a cow, we kill a carrot. The best we can do is to consider it an exchange and donate the merit of our virtuous lives to the cow say, whose life got sacrificed to the cause of whatever good thing we've done. I'm glad you noticed the

high value placed on impartiality here. What are called "food trips" aren't tolerated well in a Zen community. Thank you.]

3) Do you know of places that do on-line zazen daily? I'd appreciate some guidelines about where to start looking.

[Here are monasteries or temples that offer on-line zazen:

Sonoma Mountain Monastery

Zen Mountain Monastery (on the East coast)

Sanshin Zen Community (in Bloomington Indiana)

Great Tree Zen Women's Temple (in North Carolina)

San Francisco Zen Center]