

BUDDHA DHARMA

Innate Natural Awakeness

Have you ever experienced a moment of feeling fully alive? All by yourself, not doing anything, not thinking, simply feeling spacious and energetic, brimming over with curiosity and potential? Surprisingly, this is a quiet feeling; no big drama. Alert and focussed, but not focussed on anything in particular. This is the feeling of one's own mind in its natural awake state, unconditioned by desiring this, fearing that or by habitual depression or agitation.

The British poet T. S. Eliot described this state as:
". . . a condition of complete simplicity,
(Costing not less than everything) . . ."

Krishnamurti, the early-20th century East Indian saint, trained by The Theosophical Society to teach eastern liberation traditions to western students, called the state "choiceless awareness."

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, one of the first Tibetan teachers to be fluent in the English language, referred to it as "basic sanity."

Every culture on earth has produced poets and mystics who weave words into metaphors in an attempt to transmit this state of being, where time and space are open questions and there are no limitations. It is indescribable; yet everyone who has had the experience immediately recognizes an attempt to capture in words the genuine experience. Every human being alive, regardless of culture, has had a spontaneous glimpse, for some just a forgotten moment in babyhood perhaps; for others, poised periods of grace in each and every day.

We have no single word in English for this state. So we rely on Pali, which around 3,000 years ago was the spoken language of much of the territory in northern India/southern Nepal. That word is *budh*. Our English word "bud" comes from this root. "*Budh*" means innate potential awakeness or knowing, just as a "bud" is the innate potential of "flower."

Sometimes when we realize something, or are surprised by a new discovery, we will spontaneously exclaim "HA!" or "Aha!" All human beings do this, regardless of language. So the word *Buddha* exclaims the realization of that innate potential, and has also come to refer to an individual who has had that direct awakening.

The word *Dhamma* (in Pali) or *Dharma* (in Sanskrit, the scholarly language of the same period) means teaching, or law. When we put these two words together: Buddhadharma, we have "the teachings about or laws governing the direct experience of the innate potential of a human being."

Buddhadharma does not have believers; only practitioners -- those who practice the teachings, putting the orderly process of awakening to the test of their own experience. Most exoteric religions have an esoteric or mystical path at their very core . . . Islam has Sufism, Judaism has Kabbalah . . . experiential training whose purpose is enlightenment. All these traditions, from whatever culture, are referred to as "liberation" teachings. Buddhadharma is universal; the principles of awakening are just as true for Christians or atheists as they are for Buddhists. All that is required is an open mind, genuine question, willingness to do the spiritual work necessary, and methods that have proven themselves effective.

At this present time in the western world, there is an unprecedented coming-together, cross-fertilization and flowering of many of the liberation traditions of the planet. When I was in high school in the early 60's, one of our literature texts contained statements written by great mystics and great physicists. The statements were presented without attribution; it was our task to analyze them and try to discern whether each was informed by a scientific or a spiritual experience. It was nearly impossible to do. What a remarkable harbinger of things to come, that the editor of a literature text book for high school students would include such an exploration!

Our founding teacher, Namgyal Rinpoche, was Canadian. He studied at a Christian seminary in the US and spent years practicing the disciplines of the Rosicrucian Order and esoteric Freemasonry in England before he encountered the liberation traditions of Asia. He was first ordained as a monk in the Mon tradition of Burma, and later was recognized as an incarnate lama by H. H. the Dalai Lama and H. H. the 16th Karmapa, who was also my principal Tibetan teacher.

Whether we are engaged in traditional practices from Asia, the study of Western Mysteries, or rafting through the Grand Canyon, what we practice and teach has one purpose: the systematic healing of all the distortions of consciousness of sentient beings, and the orderly development of the full potential that humans are capable of. While this may sound grandiose, and may give rise to cynicism in some, it is vital to declare that enlightenment is a repeatable experiment that has been going on for millennia. The only thing "new" in this context is our contemporary culture, and the ever-fresh,

clear-seeing of awakened minds providing bridges of understanding and familiarity to help us along this ancient path.

I am very grateful to Alan Watts, who was my first teacher, for two things: his irreverence and his insistence that Buddhadharma is fundamentally a dialogue. There is no curriculum; everyone is different, so teacher meets student in a unique exchange when the focus is on enlightenment. It is almost a cliché of this tradition to say that 'the student creates the teacher' but when we choose to engage in the dialogue, we are met. Our willingness makes it personal; no cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all response. The quality of our question and aspiration will determine the sort of answer we get. As our question deepens, the quality of energy that arises in response becomes more and more profound.

"To see the lama [teacher] as Buddha
Yields the blessing of Buddha.
To see the lama as a bodhisattva
Yields the blessings of a bodhisattva.
To see the lama as a good spiritual friend
Yields a corresponding blessing.
To see the lama as an ordinary being
Yields no blessing."¹

Namgyal Rinpoche was fond of saying "If you want to awaken, find someone who you think might be awake, and make it interesting for him or her to be involved with you."

So -- your turn. Are there any questions, comments or complaints at this time?

Student -- Can you say more about the different streams of liberation teaching that are coming here now?

Teacher -- Well, for starters, you will find centres offering every traditional Asian form of practice in just about every major city in the world. Even here on the Sunshine Coast, there are practitioners of most of the major Tibetan schools, and many who would refer to themselves as Buddhists. Then there are also what I refer to as hybrids, such as our own tradition which is

¹ LUMINOUS MIND: THE WAY OF THE BUDDHA; Kalu Rinpoche; Wisdom Publications; 1997; p. 207
For a clear and detailed explanation of the quality of the teacher-student relationship, see TIBETAN BUDDHISM FROM THE GROUND UP; Alan Wallace; Wisdom Publications; 1993; pp. 84-89

informed by the range of experience of Namgyal Rinpoche, and no doubt by my own eclectic explorations.

Another example is the wonderful dialogue initiated by H. H. the Dalai Lama between his monks and Christian monastics. One of the very interesting things that has emerged from that is that the monks, despite the major differences in philosophies and methods, have found they feel more comfortable with one another than with lay people of their own traditions.

In California, an exciting informal exchange has been initiated by Sufi students, who recognized that formal meditation training was lacking in their tradition. They sought out teachers from various traditions of Buddhadharma. Now, the Sufi Orders are very skilled at creating and building community, something that some western Buddhist traditions have really struggled with. So both have benefitted in substantial ways, and respect for one another's paths has grown.

Finally, one of the more exciting dialogues is taking places between western scientists in many different fields and practitioners of meditation from a variety of liberation traditions. You can find out more, if you are interested, by visiting the website of The Mind and Life Institute at <http://www.mindandlife.org>.

Many of my teaching colleagues have undergone substantial periods of training in more than one tradition, and their teaching has a much more universal flavour as a result. Sectarianism, as anyone who looks around the world can clearly see, is one great enemy of peace and freedom on all levels. "My country is better than your country; my teacher has more realization than your teacher; my view of reality is the real one: therefore everyone else's must be false" -- these are all examples of a limited, non-universal perspective. To cultivate *samma ditthi* (totality view) is the first principle of the Buddha's Eightfold Noble Path, and must begin with honest recognition of all the ways in which our personal views are partial (and hence sectarian) and/or incorrect.

I had a very interesting exchange in California with a colleague about how we each prepare for and give classes. Our way of doing things emphasizes immediacy; working from a general idea of topic, to assess what is happening for people in the moment, and respond from there. In my friend's tradition, talks are written, given to senior teachers for comment, revised and memorized. They are then recorded, again assessed by teachers, and then delivered. It is quality control; talks are the same every

time. When a teacher has a collection of 12 or so, they publish a book. I doubt that I could do that!

Student -- Why not? It seems to work!

Teacher -- Because for me, that process seems to suck the life right out of the opportunity for deeper dialogue -- seeing the light bulb going on over someone's head, and encouraging it to continue to shine, in that moment. It's hard to do that if one feels the need to adhere to a script.

Having said that, there has been a suggestion that these talks be written down and distributed, so that more people might benefit from them. I've agree to try. These articles aren't transcripts of the spoken word, but will attempt to bridge from the spontaneity of the classes to more readable English. They will also provide the gracious opportunity to include the ideas forgotten, and the better ideas that didn't show up until the next morning. However, they can't provide the direct experience of being in a beautiful, sacred space with a group of fellow travelers, in the energy of dharma being given and received. That is rare and precious in itself, because it vanishes as soon as we go our separate ways.

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