

THE HOURS BEFORE THE NEW MOON
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If you ask a Tibetan where their mind is, they don't point to their head, but to their heart, actually to the middle of their chest. Here in the West, we point to our heads.

Of course, the mind can't be in two places, one for Tibetans and another for westerners, which is a good sign that the mind is not somewhere, but more like anywhere. The mind is not physical and has no one physical home.

And we have our habits, like using the mind to look out at the world. And we have assumptions, like that our mind is good-to-go, just as it came out of the box. We assume that our mind is transparent, perfectly clear, a proper lens to view the world through. After all, we have been using our mind all our lives. Of course our vision is clear and unimpeded.

And 'our' mind lives on a one-way street. We look only one way, and that is out at the world. It is our habit. For the most part, we have never thought to (or learned to) look "in" at the mind itself.

So there you have it, some of the differences between East and West. We believe the mind is in our head and the Tibetans find it in the heart. We use the mind only to look out while the Tibetans learn to look both ways, in and out. And there are other differences.

The Tibetans don't just assume the mind is clear, just as it is, but rather that we each probably need prescription mental glasses (meditation or mind-training) to see more clearly. And there is more.

Many Asians believe that our mind is a projector, and that what we see out there depends to a great extent on what we fear, hope, and believe in-here. We project our own inner movies on the screen of life and then watch them as if what we see out there is the absolute truth, while much is just our own bias, prejudice, and fears personified. Etc.

Unfortunately, our upbringing and social veneer is in lockstep with a fixed mental outlook (looking out) so that gaps or chinks in our mental armor are few to none. For many of us, it takes a personal tragedy for us to vacate our biases, even for a few days and to actually look around.

And even pointing this out here makes me some kind of a social critic or discontent and what I have to say appear as just another rant. I understand that.

If this particular situation (the way things are) did not cause prolonged suffering, I would just let it go, and not say a thing. When I see people I care for and love causing their own suffering, it is hard to take. And I am not above it all, either. I am my own worst enemy, as well.

The saving grace is what little I have learned about looking both ways, looking out, but also learning to look in and see why "out" is as it is, and gradually remove obscurations so that I can see more clearly.

It makes celebrating tougher. And there is the fact that we are today at the very end of the lunar cycle, in those last hours before a New Moon, which are always tough for me. I wait it out.