

## DHARMA -- MUSICAL CHAIRS

[Local News: The Forget-Me-Nots are up in the garden. I include a photo taken this morning. I love these little flowers and planted a ton of them last year, which are coming up strong this spring.]

After a little bit of travel around the state, it's back to where I am currently, still working through the aftermath of my recent stroke. I apologize if this is getting old for you folks, but it's still news to me. And it's hard to avoid commenting on it.

And, it's bit like musical chairs. As long as I am busy and doing something, I am content. However, the moment I stop, I don't know what to do with myself. As I like to say, I feel I should just find some place out of the way to park my body and let it tread water. I'm sorry that I have to hang around with me when I'm inactive. LOL.

However, I am now aware of this situation and watching it with understanding. Something important is going on here and I am figuring it out. I never used to do this when my gearshift went into neutral, so to speak. Lately, it's almost as if when I'm busy I don't have to deal with reality as I do when I am idle. That's a clue.

For some reason, I get nervous when I'm forced to look reality in the eye. I remember the old saying "Idle fingers are the devil's workshop." I don't know if that is related, but it is interesting. I don't believe we have to pit the Self against the reality of mind (they can work together), but it seems that the kind of opposition I'm describing is common enough. Much of what we call the Self is not "true" to reality, but simply our overgrown comfort zone, a cocoon against reality.

I see no reason why the Self has to be anything but true to reality (dharma) other than the fact that we like to feather our Self's comfort-nest to please ourselves, and apparently, we can't help but stray from the truth in the process. If our Self is little more than a patina or veneer of exaggeration laid on top of the truth (which truth we may have never seen!), then it (that veneer) is not the truth (or itself dharmic) and sooner or later is bound to be wiped clean, certainly at death. I saw that at my stroke. Wiped clean!

If we want to do it sooner, the dharma is the solvent for removing what is not essential from our Self. I am seeing all this in real-time. Many dharma texts say that our meditation practice will take away what is not essential and add for us what we need. That seems to be true.

How all this relates to what I'm going through I'm not sure. However, it could be something like: these times when I am not active (lost in doing something) and forced to just be present, I end up staring myself and reality in the eye. These moments must be some kind of measure of the difference between the actual reality and my comfort level. If they were one and the same, I would feel natural and comfortable. To the degree I

don't, I would like to know why not and will have no choice but to somehow lose the veneer.

So, when these moments of awkwardness arise, instead of fidgeting and trying to ignore the obvious, these days I am doing my best to hold steady, not fidget, and somehow acclimatize with just being present and accounted for. I'm taking it straight rather than hiding my uncomfortableness in distraction or entertainment. It's hard.

It's like my uncomfortableness (when I am inactive) are two magnets repelling one another or like a door I have never opened, but just ram my head up against and turn away. Again, I can't help but feel that my refusal to look reality in the eye is like those bright lights in the bardo after death that we cannot stand to look directly at, but instead we are driven into the shadows where we can more successfully ignore it. It's a sad truth, IMO.

Apparently, the naked, raw mind is something I am not familiar with and, as I point out here repeatedly, the Tibetan word for meditation (GOM) means "to become familiar with." Simple logic points to meditation as something I need to pursue for health's sake, which I have been doing. Obviously, I need to become more familiar with the nature of my own mind. And that nature is nothing like I imagined it was. So, I'm on the right track, just not as far along as I might have hoped to be.

In summary, I am comfortable when I am absorbed in being busy, doing something (being distracted), or writing something as I am now. No problem. However, when I am between tasks or accidentally pop out of absorption and am exposed to not-being-absorbed, then I have problems. Then it's the naked truth or something close.

Why did I never have this experience before when I was idle, alone with myself, and doing nothing? My only thought, and it's just a guess, is that my "old" Self was more entertaining somehow. I was so distracted and absorbed that I didn't notice the elephant in the room, which elephant is just true relatively-unadorned reality. I don't know what else it could be.

Yet, now I notice and obviously don't know exactly what to think about being present without entertainment. It reminds me of when I have to take a medical MRI and they slide you into those huge claustrophobic tubes. They always hand me a set of headphones and ask me if I want music so that I don't have to hear the loud clanking noises of the machine. I always say "no music." The sound of the machine is, to me, like modern classical music. I enjoy it.

I need to develop the same approach with being alone with my current not-so-entertaining Self that has formed after the stroke., I'm not so good with being alone with this non-entertaining Self. I'm not yet ready to want to hear the "clanking" music of reality, what I call the blast of nature living that we call silence. LOL.

I am aware and grateful for my recent realization that as long as we are not enlightened, there will always be a low-level sense of discontent and even anguish happening. Perhaps that is what I am seeing when I am not distracted, what the Buddhists call the “Awe-Pervasive Suffering” of the unenlightened..

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“As Bodhicitta is so precious,  
May those without it now create it,  
May those who have it not destroy it,  
And may it ever grow and flourish.”