

DHARMA -- SEEING YOUR SELF IN THE MIRROR OF OTHERS

This is a second blog about finding yourself mirrored in others through the process of reflection – mirroring. I have had trouble communicating this and it is not an easy read, because you have to keep in mind whether you are mirroring or being mirrored; and anytime we have to deal with something that is a simple binary-switch, we can lose track of which of the two meanings is operative. They kind of flip. I will try to keep them straight.

I find it is helpful to be clear whether we are reflecting others (they see themselves in us) or we are ourselves being reflected in the mirror of the mind of those who might be our teachers. Rephrased: are others seeing themselves in us (with us reflecting them) or are we seeing ourselves in our mentors those we look up to (with us being reflected). There is all the difference in the world between these two and each of us does both, depending on the situation.

For example, we are not a subject that is searching to find ourselves when we discover that we are reflecting (being a mirror for) others, rather than being ourselves reflected. Instead, we are in the process of reflecting others. Others see themselves in us. As the German philosopher Hegel said “We go behind the curtain of the Self to see what’s there, but mainly for there to be something to be seen.”

In summary, we either are (1) finding (or seeing) ourselves being reflected in others we look up to (or try), (2) ourselves reflecting others younger in experience than us, or (3) somewhere in-between. We are always reflecting (mirroring) to those younger in experience than we are and (at the same time) we can be reflected (see ourselves) in the mirror of souls older in life experience than us.

As a younger person coming up in life, we can’t help but find ourselves (see ourselves!) reflected in others older in experience than us, in those we look up to, like our life teachers. We see something of ourselves in them (if only a glimpse), ourselves either as we want to be or don’t want to be. In other words, older souls are a mirror in which WE are reflected or search for our reflection in. We may think we are

seeing how they are (and who they are), when in reality we can only ever see ourselves and never them. And this is because we can't see beyond our Self. It's our filter; it's all we know.

I consider it an axiom that those older (more experienced) souls never (as in: can't) reveal themselves to us; they can only serve to reveal ourselves to us. We see (and discover) ourselves in the mirror of our teacher's mind. They reflect. That's how we learn or a major way we learn.

As we too grow older, we begin to reflect or mirror others more and more, until a greater number of younger people are, in turn, reflected in us (in the mirror of us); and, as we age, we ourselves are reflected less and less. We begin to reflect more instead of be reflected. We are all mirrors to youth as we age. They can either see themselves in us or they can't. We either can mirror them or we cannot. If they can see themselves in us, we can serve as a guide; if they cannot, we can't guide them.

This is not hard to witness, if we look, but we do have to look. We look up to and into other's eyes that we admire or who present themselves to be admired and we either see (or do not see) ourselves in them. We are being reflected in their mind's mirror, if they can reflect. With someone like a rinpoche or our particular root teacher, we are most perfectly reflected in their long-gone mirror. In a true teacher, our reflection is as perfect as it gets. We can see ourselves in them and through that insight we can help to guide our life.

As we ourselves grow older, perhaps more and more younger people are reflected in us. We each become the mirror in which others see and groom themselves. There is no escaping this natural reversal of roles, from reflected to reflector. They are connate.

We are always on one side or the other in relation to people we look up to or who look up to us. When we are young, we look up to almost everyone, but as we grow up (and older), other, younger people begin to look up to us. Like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon, we find ourselves transforming into a mirror and we gradually begin to reflect. And this goes on until, as elders, our inner-mirror is almost totally reflective.

As I wrote when I was young and realized this:

“Ah,
Who could let such a bargain pass,
As this poor century will allow.
On coming in, I’m asked to leave.
And when asked to leave, I bow.”

That’s just how I saw it.

This process is not occult, but is so obvious that it is occult only by its very commonness -- reflecting, reflected. This whole process is like an exquisite ballet we each take part in. In my experience, it is almost never mentioned by society; it is taken for granted by just about everyone. Yet, to me, this seamless mudra is a knot that unties itself much like the traces of a bird vanish in the sky through which it flies. Now you see it, now you don’t.

This is a dance about a center, a center that is only there because of the dance around it. As young people, we look up and believe the center is there. As elders we look back and believe it was there. When we in the very midst of the prime-of-life, we are too much “it” to know anything at all. LOL.

This is an elaborate misdirection, where no part is really there, but where each part is always implicitly implied. This indeed is a seminal mudra, a grand gesture that, like an arc, embraces the entire spectrum of life in a single sweeping movement, neither confirming nor denying any degree of experience.

[Design idea by me, illustrated by my brother Tom Erlewine.]

“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”

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