

THE DHARMA OF KARMA

I feel I should say something about meditation, a practice many of us who read this blog do. In the west, we have like this one word “meditation” to cover hundreds of different practices that are called meditation, and few of them are what the historical Buddha shared with us.

There is nothing wrong with relaxing on a cushion for a few minutes (or longer) and calling it “meditation; that may be your idea of meditation (or perhaps society’s), but please be clear that is not the historical Buddha’s gift to us.

I’m not trying to be exclusive here, but just inclusive of what the Buddha originally meant by the word, so it is not forgotten. And I should mention at least something as to the extent of what the Buddha’s method of meditation embraces. It’s important that, if we don’t know, we at least know what it is about so that we have the option to try it out..

As we get more into the traditional awareness-meditation of Buddha Shakyamuni, this includes not just our formal meditation-period on the cushion each day, but also what is called “post-meditation,” everything we do off-the-cushion for the rest of the day, which can extend the amount of dharma practice we do in a day and make it much more useful.

And, if we keep practicing for years, although many of us always have a bit (or a lot) of formal (on-the-cushion) practices each morning (I do), the line between what we do on the cushion and what we do off-the-cushion in post-meditation the rest of the day gets harder to distinguish. Ultimately, it’s all meditation, all the time. How does that happen?

In my own experience (and practice), meditation has become a continuing process of becoming increasingly familiar with the mind all of the time and at all times. Meditation is so much a part of my life these years, that the word as people commonly use it almost makes no sense to me anymore. What? Is there anything else but meditation?

As I know it, I am so used to meditation (and its practice) that it has stopped being something I particularly have to be aware of, although the increasing awareness that comes from my meditation practice, I am aware of. The process of getting to know my own mind has become like breathing (inspiration), something that I do (and want to do) constantly or at least most of the time. I can’t imagine what life would be without it. For me, it would be a bit of a nightmare. LOL.

In other words, I don’t even think about it anymore. Yes, I am aware when I fill (or empty) the water bowls on my little shrine each morning and offer the prayers and invocations that go along with them, yet these daily actions have become more like a salute or offering I make out of habit and deference than anything else. The rest of my day is even more filled with meditation of the off-the-cushion variety and can have the added benefit of being more spontaneous, tailored to the moment and to whatever is permitted to arise to my attention during the day.

Meditation is no longer something I do just out of habit or because years ago I set out to do so and thus I feel obligated to keep it up, although I do feel obligated and want to keep up. LOL. Let me give an example.

I remember when on time in Nepal with my family, a ticket-agent mispronounced the name of the place we wanted to go to and we ended up taking the wrong tiny airplane, which dropped us off in the jungles of Northern Nepal rather than where we were to cross over into to India. Standing with Margaret and the kids around our five-foot stack of baggage, we watched the tiny plane vanish in the sky just as we realized we were in the wrong place. They had to shoo the cattle off the grassy runway for the plane to take off. Oops! We were really out there in the sticks. There were grass huts.

This eventually resulted in our riding on the backs of elephants through the jungle. And why I bring this up is that riding through that jungle, there were times when there was no path or trail. The elephants (with us on top) literally made a path with their bodies by plunging through the deep foliage, these huge animals shaking the overhead canopy of trees as they lunged forward, which then rained insects from the canopy above down on us. And the elephants murmured and trembled with fear when they sensed something they did not like.

There were tigers in that jungle and we watched a mother, father, and baby rhinoceros bathing right in front of us where we were fording a small creek on those elephants. And crossing a very wide river, the crocodiles, eyes protruding from the water, watched us and hoped for dinner, while we clung to our seats on the backs of those elephants. You know we hung on for dear life.

Anyway, that experience of making our way through the jungle reminds me of how I view meditation after some 45 years of practice. I am busy most of the day in some form of meditation, not sitting on a cushion, but making my way through the jungle of my mind riding the practices of meditation. Where at first meditation was more intellectual or like a hobby, today it is a visceral experience, that of becoming increasingly familiar with my own mind through hands-on moment-by-moment experience. More and more of the time, I am fully engaged. And no, I am not enlightened yet, but I intend to be. LOL.

And my point in writing this is to communicate that awakening, awareness, and the freedom that comes with it, at this point takes all of my attention and requires full immersion; and that is often is a far-away cry from just sitting on the cushion, although I do that each day as well. Meditation as a pastime or hobby, something I used to think I should do, is long behind me. Sure, I think I should do it, but without full effort, awareness, and deep immersion, dharma progress is slow. My advice: don't hesitate. Give it ALL YOU HAVE. 100%. It's not a hobby and like just going to church for an hour on Sunday, it takes more than that for most of us to have any realization. LOL.

I am deeply involved, especially since my strokes, in working my way through the jungles of my mind. It's not just a matter of prayers on paper being read or things to be

intoned or invoked, but the exercise of my own mind in whatever I do, persons I meet, the phone call I take, my comments to you, and on and on. Everything is grist for the mill of the dharma; everything can be taken to the path and has to be – good, bad, or indifferent. It all counts. It's all karma being worked through, IMO.

I write this because, at least in my experience, there was a distinct progression from when I first sat down on a cushion in a corner of my little room, without even a single image of the Buddha, self-consciously trying to meditate (whatever I thought that was); I contrast that with where I am some 45 years later. My ignorance and lack of confidence in sitting meditation (or meditation of any kind) gradually had its corners rounded off like a river polishes a stone.

Or, it's like the way a bobsled crew at the Olympics pushes the sled and then jumps in and keeps their heads down for the run; with the advent of Insight Meditation, a non-dual practice, eventually my second-thoughts, many doubts, and lack of confidence had to be abandoned in favor of full immersion through meditation. Ultimately, there is no choice and the more advanced dharma practice require complete immersion. I used to wonder what I am going through and today it's more like I REALIZE THAT "I" AM GOING THROUGH toward realization. That idea, if that makes sense.

Meditation is not the intellectual exercise that it seemed at start-up, but much more like that ride through the jungle on the elephant of meditation, clearing a path for the first time through my own attachments and fixations.

In summary, where in the beginning I was all eyes (and being self-conscious), on the outside looking in, today I am more on the inside of my body looking out and actively working, day by day, with my mind -- jungle and all.

In other words, meditation of the kind the Buddha shared with us is about increasingly becoming more aware and at the same time increasingly more directly involved with experiencing and ultimately realizing the true nature of our own mind and the mind itself.

And as an aside: of course, every breath counts; and deep breathing from our gut or diaphragm is what allows the true singers to sing.

[Photo by me yesterday.]

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<http://traffic.libsyn.com/spiritgrooves/Links to Michael Erlewine-V2.pdf>

“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.”

