

## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

October 1, 2013

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A number of you asked for the sequel or answer to "What's beyond the Self?" and we all know that original movies are a tough act to follow. Sequels tend to disappoint. It is true in this case as well, but not as you might imagine. The answer to what is beyond the self is hard to follow, not because it is inferior or Grade-B, but rather because it is too subtle to follow without some increased awareness on our part.

And the word "disappoint" is apt because we are so used to looking for the point of everything, when in some cases having no point IS the point, and a blessing at that. Zen philosophy is famous for disappointing the student on the road to awareness.

This brings to mind the incredible line by the philosopher Hegel in his landmark book the "Phenomenology of the Mind," and I quote "We go behind the curtain of the self to see what is there, but mainly for there to be something to be seen."

Well, that "something to be seen," in this case, is seeing itself. There is no "thing" hidden in or behind the self, like we might think. It is not about thinking or what can be thought. There is no point to it like a place to get to or something to achieve. It is, as mentioned above, disappointing, a step toward getting over always wanting a point or getting something more. That is linear thinking.

Instead, it is all about awareness and our getting more of that, if we have to have something. With the Self it is a case of "less is more," and less self-focus is very much more. This is about letting go of attachment, not adding one more attachment to that pile we already call our self.

It is the de-emphasis of the self that I am referring to, wherein the self becomes more transparent, rather than more opaque, a thinning out of the self as opposed to reification. In other words, at some point the self becomes transparent enough for us to begin to see through it. We are onto it.

And there is nothing to be seen when we see through the self, no distant dim object we make out through the fog of the mind or some wily wizard behind the curtain, but rather just the realization that as the self becomes more transparent to us, lo and behold, we see more clearly. And that is news.

So, what we see through the transparency of the self is "seeing" itself or we could say we see seeing itself seeing and that a step beyond. There is not something to be seen other than seeing itself, which up to now we have never seen. We have always identified with what is seen, rather than with seeing.

When this happens we realize that our preoccupation with the self all this time has

obscured our ability to see the true nature of the mind, just like dirt on a pair of glasses obscures our vision. And with that we learn not to strengthen the self by yet more attachments, but instead to begin to thin out the self so that we can better see through it, again, like we see through a pair of glasses. And that is the result of seeing through or beyond the self for the first time.

Yes, it is subtle, but not so hard to think through, and once you actually experience it in real-time, it becomes obvious that we have been making it harder for ourselves to see by our attachments and reactions, instead of easier. Once we realize this, we stop re-enforcing the self and let it naturally begin to thin out. We learn to use our self as the helpful assistant it is, something which we can see through rather than be enamored of. We identify with seeing and not just what is seen.

The Buddhists point out that the self is not something to remove or deny. It is OK to like ourselves. In fact, we will always have a self and would have to invent one if it vanished. This is why when a tragic event (like the death of a loved one) shatters our sense of self, after a short time of feeling empty, we are hell-bent to reassemble and put the pieces of our self back together again, what I call the Humpty-Dumpty effect. We are not comfortable with feeling naked of the self, with that kind of emptiness.

As the ancient philosophers all point out, it is important to know our selves, not just as this shiny mirror we gaze into that reflects our own image (an image we have created), but rather the self in its transparency, something that we can see through and beyond our reflection. Once we grasp the self as a lens to look through rather than an object to be seen, we realize that the clarity of seeing is what we are all about -- awareness. Of course, this is what the Sanskrit word "Buddha" means, simply "awakened" or "enlightened." We wake up.

This short explanation is very abstract. For this I apologize. However, by fleshing it out with experience, I find it very helpful.

Your thoughts please.

