

THE FENG-SHUI OF ANGER

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We usually think of feng-shui in terms of sensitivity to the outer environment, rooms, homes, etc. I learned the essence of what I know about feng-shui from His Eminence Tai Situ Rinpoche, one of the four main regents of the Karma Kagyu Lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Situ Rinpoche visited our center a number of times years ago and he freely shared his love and knowledge of feng-shui with us. For me it was like a transmission.

Among other things, Tai Situ Rinpoche took us on a tour of our own home, pointing out areas of our house that compromised the sense of the peaceful living space we were trying to achieve. And while feng-shui can be as complex as you want it to be, what I learned from Situ Rinpoche boils down to becoming aware of our own innate sensitivity to space. Instinctively we know, if we will relax and trust ourselves.

For example, if I walk through a doorway into an adjoining room and immediately inside the room there is a tall lamp that is so close to my head that some part of my mind cringes or is forced to notice and be aware of it, that is 'bad' feng-shui. I just move or remove the lamp until I no longer notice it. For me, that is the essence of feng-shui, arranging your environment (to your taste) until your mind is at peace within it. I know that this is probably an oversimplification, but sensitivity to space is something we all have and can rather easily become aware of. And like with so many things, awareness is key.

We like to think of feng-shui as having to do with the outside world and its effect on us, but feng-shui knows no such boundaries and is just as active and true within our mind as elsewhere. In fact, we have more in common with one another regarding inner space than we have similarities in how we arrange our living room furniture. Mental and inner feng-shui is at least as important as paying attention to the outside world.

THE THREE POISONS

I have been actively meditating (or trying to) since 1974 when Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche himself took me into a room and taught me how. I am a very slow learner in this and after so many years I have managed to learn perhaps a little. My mind is somewhat more stable than it was and I have been able to let my mind rest, to a degree. But this mental stability does not necessarily extend to what the Buddhists call the Kleshas, which are also called the disturbing emotions, emotional afflictions, or most commonly the Three Poisons, and they are:

Anger (Aggression)
Desire (Attachment, Passion)
Delusions (Ignorance)

Many Buddhists call them the Five Poisons by adding to these three, the kleshas of Jealousy and Pride. These three (or five poisons) are not considered run-of-the-mill mental problems or routine obscurations, but rather deep-seated and powerful emotional afflictions that tend to control us more than we them, should we indulge. It is said that for each of us, one of these poisons is dominant, so: choose your poison.

These three poisons not only can be destructive, they are also powerful (huge!) sources of energy, for good or ill. Just imagine what great vortices these are, energy-wise, if they can move us so easily to such extremes. And they are never very far from us in the mind, either, so inner feng-shui makes good sense. Just a split second or a moment's lapse on our part and the poisons are there, fully present. For example, anger can appear in a moment, in a nanosecond, so we kind of have to tiptoe through the pastures of life being careful where we step.

I guess my point is that, like the proverbial elephant in the room, these poisons are very much with us, very close at hand, and not just some distant possibility. In the inner landscape of our mind, these are major features to avoid and their constant presence is something we all are aware of, even if only to better ignore them. Talk about bad feng-shui, kleshas impinge on our consciousness at all times. They are never really 'not there', but are always prominent in our peripheral vision, just out of sight, but never out of mind. In other words, we must be mindful lest we fall victim to them, and so they admit to feng-shui analysis. Let me say more about mental feng-shui.

I am using anger here as an example, but all of the kleshas (poisons) are right here within our mind, but of course we ignore them as much as possible. They are like fountains of energy that have been painted over by the veneer of society, coat upon coat, painted into a corner where we don't have to see or react to them.

And the kleshas are hidden in all kinds of clever ways. Of course they are buried beneath social taboos and forbidden by the law. We are warned not to go there, and suffer penalties if we do. Take, for instance anger. We are admonished not to indulge in anger, warned, and there are consequences if we do. Law after law is on the books,

So we cap our kleshas off, hide them away, and make them punishable. In 'polite' society we just don't go there, and keep the various extreme effects of kleshas at arm's length. Yet, our ignorance is only a cosmetic solution -- ignoring the obvious. In our current condition there is no way we can cope with, much less subdue, kleshas like anger and desire. It is like grabbing a tiger by the tail. We habitually turn our gaze away.

The most common solution is to keep qualities like anger and desire at arm's length, to get as far away from them as possible, and to avoid them at every opportunity. Although society finds this approach necessary, we should not conclude that keeping our distance from them in any way diminishes their power over us. In other words, shunning kleshas is a cosmetic and not a permanent solution, but it is considered better than indulging them.

Living in a world where we must permanently ignore such great energy centers is also not so good. Talk about bad feng-shui. Just think for a moment how these powerful sources impinge on our consciousness at all times. We must forever be careful not to give them any of our attention, lest they erupt, so they forever have the minimum attention it takes for us to ignore them, and they have us walking around with our eyes downcast so as not to see or invoke them unnecessarily.

And let's not minimize the dangers of kleshas, either. It is a no-win situation. We ignore kleshas at our peril, and if we go with them, give them our attention, we usually end up being controlled by them. They take us over. Tell me this is not one definition (or kind) of suffering.

Like a world populated by land mines, kleshas are always present, and we have to watch our every step. Society has learned to carefully avoid the obvious kleshas around us, locking them

away with legalities and laws, painting them over with taboos and coatings of social veneer. You would hardly know they are there in 'nice' society, but there they are nevertheless, just beneath the surface of 'polite'. And wishing them away won't make it so. Sooner or later, in this life or another, we will have to come to terms with our kleshas and their energy. They await us. Handling kleshas directly is for advanced meditators only.

In this very introductory article, I am pointing out only that our inner and mental space is as important to us as our outer living space, and in fact we spend all of our time in our mind. The mind is the lens (and projector) through which the outer world appears. And like outer conventional feng-shui, much of what we find in our inner mental space can also make us uncomfortable and amounts to 'bad' feng-shui. It is enough here to note that within the mind are some very large energy sources (the Three Poisons) that are very close by, but usually ignored or avoided. They are there nonetheless, and prominent at that.

According to the Buddhists, ultimately, the Five Poisons can and must be known and transmuted into the Five Wisdoms. Each of us will have to do it, someday. As for altering or removing these kleshas, these obstacles, I will leave that for another blog, should there be interest. Mental feng-shui, inner comfort, and peace is at least as important as rearranging the deck-chairs on our personal outer equation, which ultimately will be abandoned anyway. Your thoughts please.