

The Seven-Point Mind Training

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Gary's introduction:

Why am I including this quote from Buddhism? While I am a devotee of Pathwork, Pat has been a devotee of a form of Tibetan Buddhism for seven years. Our paths are interwoven and sometimes the views of her path speak to me and sometimes vice versa. This is one of those times where a writing from her Buddhist path spoke to me.

Pat read what follows to me during our coffee time on December 17, 2013. It seemed to directly relate to where I am these days as expressed in my **blog entry for December 19** titled: **From Seeking Answers to Living the Mystery Beyond the Questions.**

For me, what follows, a commentary on a single verse from a root text, clearly speaks to a shift in consciousness, an expansion from the mind seeking and grasping onto concepts and ideas for its pseudo-security to living in adoration to that which cannot be comprehended or conceptualized by the mind but only lived into by the all of one's being from his or her Essence as a part of the All. He also closes with some interesting points concerning any path one takes, realizing we are investing our very lives in whatever we choose to invest, be that a spiritual practice or secular endeavors. (Note: most of the *italics* and all of the **bolding** are mine)

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The following sentence is a root text of a verse from the tradition of the *Seven-Point Mind Training* first written down by Chekawa:

Establish the nature of the path in the sphere of the foundation of all.

Wallace's Commentary

Once we have arrived at this point honestly, with insight and intelligence, the nature of the meditative practice shifts. Now we *free the mind of the conceptualizations* we were using before, free it of any kind of *ideation* or *discursive thought*, any *conceptual grasping to past, present, or future*. The *mind relaxes* in the nature of non-grasping, and yet we maintain a state of *vivid clarity*, free of dullness or agitation.

This state is what Chekawa identifies in this next verse. The nature of the path is our own mind and the foundation of all is sunyata, or emptiness. The ontological foundation (or absence thereof) of all phenomena is emptiness of inherent existence; and from emptiness arise myriad phenomena, whether objective, subjective, or transcendent. Having arrived at the awareness of that emptiness, you

then abide in it free of conceptualization, with the mind at rest, without tension but with vivid clarity.

When conceptualization eventually starts to creep back in, the author advises us at that very moment to direct our awareness to awareness itself. Look right at the conceptualization, and, as it vanishes, maintain the awareness, once again bringing to mind the experience of emptiness. Abide there, he says, relaxing in the sphere of reality, and thereby liberate your mind.

He also encourages us to limit this phase of the meditation to relatively brief periods. This avoids that spaced-out, non-conceptual state we have all experienced, where the mind is peaceful but not very clear, with no real vividness or insight. We may also return to the more analytical, investigative meditation, arrive once again at the insight, and then again enter the non-conceptual, non-grasping state of awareness. During one sitting we may have numerous short periods of this meditation equipoise.

It's time to ask *why* we should do any of the preceding. Even if the world is illusory in nature, even if objective, subjective, and transcendent phenomena do not exist intrinsically, why should we do any of this? In other words, what's in it for us? The answer is the solution to a fundamental problem.

Our minds are not a blank slate without ideas and assumptions regarding reality, our own existence, the nature of our minds and our environment. On the contrary, we instinctively sense that phenomena, internal and external, exist in their own right. And this causes problems. For example, let us bring to mind someone we really despise. Now see if our mind isn't grasping that person as an entity in his or her own right, intrinsically existent, totally independent, and ultimately responsible for his or her own actions. See if we don't also do the same thing for ourselves. In response to the question, "Who am I?" there naturally arises a sense of "I am," a sense of identification with something that apparently exists intrinsically.

In other words, we are not merely ignorant of the nature of reality but actively, day by day and moment by moment, we are misconstruing the nature of reality. We see things as isolated and intrinsically existing. We reify our own existence and that of friends, loved ones, indifferent people, enemies, the environment itself. And here is the real crux of the matter: this reification is fundamentally out of accord with reality. It creates distortions in the mind and enhances the obscurations that shroud the Buddha nature. In practical terms, it is because of this grasping onto intrinsic reality that a false sense of self arises, as well as the myriad mental distortions that are invariably based on this reification. Jealousy, hatred, resentment, anger, craving, pride, conceit, fear, anxiety – all of the afflictions are based on a misconstruing of reality.

Such reification is the fundamental affliction of the mind; and the realization of emptiness cultivated through this practice acts as an antidote to the fundamental

misconstruing of reality. It heals the mind by bringing it into accord with reality. In so doing it attenuates the mental afflictions that are based on that dynamic ignorance until finally they vanish as the Buddha nature is unveiled. In other words, here lies the path to freedom: freedom from suffering, and from the evil, unwholesome actions that arise from mental afflictions. That is the reason for the practice, and it is a pretty good one.

We are coming now to the end of the meditative practice for cultivating the realization of ultimate truth. Sechibuwa instructs us at the end to set aside the subject of meditation. Then, assuming we really believe that this practice is an authentic means for realizing ultimate truth and not just speculative philosophy, he encourages us to cultivate great compassion for those who lack such realization. Whether they are white-collar or blue-collar workers, scientists or religious believers, many of even the most educated and intelligent people grasp unquestioningly onto the intrinsic existence of themselves and other phenomena. And in so doing they cultivate the bed of mental afflictions, from which grow unwholesome actions and the suffering that ensues.

So Sechibuwa suggests that we meditate on great compassion for those who lack such realization. Dedicate this practice to them, with the hope that we may lead them skillfully to deeper and deeper truth, healing them of mental afflictions. Finally, he suggests that we relax if we have been sitting cross-legged or in full lotus position, and he encourages us to end with a devotional practice such as the Seven-Limb Devotion. A devotional practice is very appropriate for the conclusion of a meditative practice, wonderfully merging compassion with wisdom.

In studying science of philosophy at a Western university, we are encouraged simply to apply our intellect to solving problems. Great emphasis is laid on reason, encountering paradoxes and solving them, and increasing our intellectual insight. But the study is devoid of a spiritual context, without devotion or reverence. It bears no ostensible relationship to spiritual awakening. On the other hand, in many of the world's religions we find great emphasis on devotion, prayer, humility, and the cultivation of loving-kindness. But there is often an absence of any analytical investigation into the nature of reality, the mind, or transcendent experience. All too often we find religious people disparaging reason and delighting in unnecessary paradoxes in the name of Revelation.

Instead, we see *here something that merges the two*. We can begin with devotions and prayers, asking the ultimate being – as Mafijustri or in any other form – to bless us with understanding that is vivid and deep. Bless us that through our investigation into the nature of reality our minds may be healed and we may lead others out of suffering. We then engage in meditative practice and at the end once again cultivate great compassion, dedicating to others the merit of our investigation. And finally, more devotional practices complete this *sublime marriage of wisdom and compassion*.

Again I emphasize that *we should not accept these practices like a baby swallowing pabulum, simply because the verses are written as scripture.* The Buddha himself is recorded as encouraging his followers to *accept his teachings not out of faith in him, but to test them, as a goldsmith would test gold that he is considering for purchase. Test these teachings in every way possible, because they are not cheap.*

If a goldsmith must pay dearly for a piece of metal, he wants to be convinced that he is getting pure gold. Likewise, *if we are investing something as precious as our own lives, we want to be very sure that we are investing wisely. **And it is our lives that we are investing.*** Even if our formal practice is limited to an hour or two each day, hopefully we are *weaving our spiritual practice into the whole fabric of our waking day so that there is no dichotomy between our work-a-day lives and our spiritual lives.* Further, because we are following one type of practice, we are not following myriad others. *If we are buying this piece of metal, we are not buying all the metal that is being sold by others.*

For this reason, *any qualms we might have concerning this practice are to be acknowledged, bringing them front and center, even writing them down.* We may pick up other books on the topic to see if we can dispel some of our doubts on our own. Once we feel that we have clarified an uncertainty, we can check with an experienced teacher whether our insight is in fact accurate, or whether it is slightly or even totally off the mark. Frequently the most effective way to confront and work through uncertainties is to *discuss them with someone who is well grounded in both the theoretical and practical aspects of the teachings. Discuss them with an open mind and without fear, not feeling that we have to contort our views into some established pattern. A deep faith in Buddha-dharma expresses itself as an intelligent faith.*

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Definitions:

Discursive: proceeding by reasoning or argument rather than intuition.

Equipoise: an equal distribution of weight; even balance; equilibrium.

Ideation: the process of forming ideas or images.

Ontology: *philosophy* -- the branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being

Pabulum: (*lowercase*) trite, naive, or simplistic ideas or writings; intellectual pap.

Reify: to consider or make (an abstract idea or concept) real or concrete