

## SACRED, SACRED, SACRED

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Back then, I also had a problem with the idea of the sacred. To my mind, the sacred was always outside myself, wrapped up in the “there” and the “then.” It was in my future and never now. It was there and never here. Of course, I wanted my life to be sacred, but I definitely identified more with the profane. It seemed I had no choice. The ‘sacred’ was something I wanted to get to, not somewhere I already was or even had been. I had not internalized it.

As it turns out, the sacred is not a ‘thing’ at all, but more of a process, a way of living. I know, we label some “things” as sacred, but if you look into them, they are sacred because of their use, and the way they are used. Sacredness is an attitude, an approach to life.

This can be clearly seen in the way that the Tibetans offer a sand mandala. It is not the elaborate colored sand mandala that is the offering. That is just swept into a stream or river after it is made. All ‘things’ are temporary. The gesture, care, and intent while making the sand mandala, that is the offering. To use the above concept of sacred, the sand mandala is not sacred in itself. What is sacred is the process and intent of making and offering the mandala and dedicating it.

No ‘thing’ is sacred in itself. It is just a thing. How ‘we’ use or treat the ‘thing’ is what can be sacred. And the same goes for people. It is not the person that is sacred, but what kind of attitude the person invokes in us that can make them sacred to us. Again, like many wisdoms point out, here the process is the goal, not the end result.

It is not the brand of coat we wear, and not who we are labeled as that is special. Rather, it is how we act that distinguishes us, again: the process of living, not how we end up. I mean, we all end up dying, right? So our value cannot be found only in our end result, but must be located somewhere else in our lives.

I perhaps first saw this clearly when I met the great Tibetan Siddha Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, and spend a little time with him. We were together in a small room, a study filled with various mementos. And there I sat, frozen in self-consciousness, while Trungpa Rinpoche proceeded to examine every object in the place with the greatest delight, picking each one up, peering into it, holding it to the light, you-name-it. I took this all in.

While I was unable to move any which way, Trungpa effortlessly and thoroughly enjoyed that room. Life is so much a case of monkey-see, monkey-do. It had never occurred to me to be that free. I had never seen it done and having once seen it, I never forgot. Not ever. And from that point onward, I began to allow myself those same freedoms. I mean, I had always been free to do that, but somehow never knew it was possible or permitted. That experience with Trungpa Rinpoche is a minor example of what the Tibetans do so well with the mind, with what are called the “Pointing Out Instructions.”

Sometimes we just need to have things pointed out to us. It can be the fastest way to learn. That is what I understand a dharma teacher’s job is, to point out the true nature of our mind so that we can see and recognize it. There are said to be 84,000 dharmas or paths to awareness, each one different. We need to find our particular dharma path, the one that will work for us. It

only takes one, but it does take that.

In my case, I knew I had found the right teacher when what my teacher pointed out to me about how the mind works actually worked. I got it. That is how we know, if it works. There is no other way.

Even if a teacher has a great reputation, if their pointing out does not work for us, then this is not our teacher. And even if a teacher has a terrible personality, is rude, rough, or whatever. If they can successfully point out to us the true nature of the mind, that is enough. A dharma teacher does not have to be our personal friend. It is enough that they can point out the mind to us, more than we could hope for. I don't buddy around with my dharma teacher. My relation with him is sacred. It is what the Tibetans call "Samaya," the bond of lineage that unites teacher and student.

Anyone can talk about how to meditate, as I am doing here. That is not what I mean by a dharma teacher. It is after we finally learn to meditate that we need an authentic dharma teacher, someone to point out to us the true nature of the mind so that we can grasp it.

What I am writing here is not true just because I say it. I say it because it's true. Those of you who read these blogs know that I am kind of sensitive, prone to having my little visions, etc. Please hear me when I say that of all the ups in the "ups & downs" of my life, there is no more useful "up" than having my dharma teacher point out the true nature of the mind and getting at least a glimpse of that nature. It is the up that never comes down because it is not just another experience, but a recognition or realization as to how the mind works.

In the firewall of fear of facing my own ignorance, of admitting that I did not really know much about meditation, I was finally able to overcome that fear and actually learn to meditate. What went before was all pretense, pretending, only I could not admit it. "Spiritually," true meditation has to be the best thing that has ever happened to me, which is why I talk about it so much and recommend it to others.