

## SUN STORMS INSIDE OUR HEAD

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There are still lower-level flares (C-Class) taking place on the sun, and I should move on to other topics, like the flowers of spring here in Michigan. However, this series of huge flares coupled with the three-eclipse-time we are still in has caused a lot of disturbance in many people that I know, and in myself as well. Like the Sun itself, my self is in flux just now. With that (almost an apology) said, I feel like continuing this thread on the self and change.

Can you imagine what pours through our mindstream (stream of consciousness) even in a single day? Mind stream? It's more like a mind river or at times even a storm surge. And what remains? Not much, some impressions and selected memories.

Those memories, however, are not all nostalgia either. We equally are imprinted by or remember the good, the bad, and the ugly. And the tip-of-the-top, the best of the lot of memories, whether loved or hated, are reserved for the museum of our Self. And then there are the fixations.

As I like to say, attachment is the glue that holds the self together, and if something really impacts us, for better or for worse, it becomes part of our self and we begin to identify with it as "us." And that, my friends, is sticky. Again, don't fool yourself into thinking that our self is made up only of treasured or much-loved moments. It is not about nostalgia. Once we identify with something, good or bad (and it is up to us), it goes into the closet of the self and remains there until its memory is worn out of existence or we can release it. And that can be a long time. Like a sore tooth, we keep peeking (by reaction) to see if it is still sensitive, and that is what keeps it forever on our mind. We further underscore it every time it comes up and we react. This is the nature of the self.

And the key to freedom from self-dependence, is the fact that the self is composed of many distinct impressions, and is not simply a unified whole entity like we imagine. Like the seeds in a sunflower, and there are many, each of our reactions is a separate seed or impression. Because the self is blind and has no overview of its own "self" (meaning that it is not an entity), it can be successfully deconstructed one memory at a time. This is the beauty of the dharma practice called tonglen that I have been describing in recent posts.

As mentioned, the self is not of one piece (there is no Over-self), and the individual pieces that make up the self are not of the same degree of imprint. Some are stronger or deeper, while others are lighter and weaker. And we don't have to go searching through our self for ways to liberate it; not at all.

Instead, the only requirement for self-liberation (or whatever we can agree to call it) is to develop a little awareness, which simply means to become more aware of what comes to our attention throughout the day. That is all we have to do begin unraveling the self.

Every reaction that we have is based on something we have previously identified-with enough to register or log it into our self as good, bad, or indifferent. So when we bump into that attachment again on the road of life and react, just look at the reaction and do some tonglen with it. Tonglen is as simple as acknowledging the reaction, accepting it as our own projection, embracing or

taking it in, and then sending out good energy in response. In other words, make peace with our own reactions.

Tonglen is the Mahayana Buddhist practice for the type of self-liberation practice described here, while in Vajrayana Buddhism, another form of meditation practice is used called Mahamudra.

As pointed out, we don't have to dig in or hunt through the memory-collection of the self for sensitive hotspots to do tonglen with. It is enough to just relax and allow the self to bring events to mind, one reaction at a time as our day unfolds. Just watch the show. With our perpetual fountain of reactions, we can undue attachment to the self a response at a time.

Of course this may take quite a while, but we can mix this practice with our daily routine. In fact, that is the preferred way to do it, like: all day long. As each reaction comes to mind, as we are aware that we are reacting, we just neutralize it with some tonglen to take the starch out of it, a reaction at a time.

Sure, some deep identifications will take repeated treatment, perhaps even months or years, but by attending to the reactions that bloom in the moment, gradually, like a glacier melts, we will reduce the frozen mass of the self to something manageable, and it will thin out and become transparent.

Our goal is not to deny or get rid of our self. The Buddhists say that can't be done anyway, because we would just have to go out and invent another personal assistant to help us get through the day. The self is necessary a middleman, but does not have to get in the way.

What we want to do is tone down the attachment to the self, thin it out until it is no longer an obstacle, and does not stand in our way. In time the self will become transparent, and we can gradually see through it and begin to identify with the awareness beyond and behind it. Our innate awareness surrounds the self, and not vice versa.

As an added bonus, concurrent with this process of deconstructing the self, we end up transferring our consciousness from the self and learn to identify with the pure awareness that is our mind, rather than with the composite self that we have created and drawn around us. In fact the deconstructing of the self is simultaneous with our taking up the vantage point of a more pure awareness. That is the process of enlightenment.

