

DHARMA -- REVERSE-SCHOLARSHIP

By Michael Erlewine

[Here is another run at why (at least for me) scholarship and conceptuality is a practical impossibility.]

If we try to learn dharma just from books and concepts, good luck. When it comes to intellectualizing the dharma (so to speak) through books and concepts, using only conceptuality, I can't read the road signs ahead well enough for that to be all that useful.

I can try (and I have), but learning dharma is not, IMO, just a linear path. In other words, we can't extrapolate through guesswork from where we are right now in our dharma practice to where we will be. At least I can't. I don't always know where I am! Extrapolation must be some kind of curve other than a straight line, whether that be exponential or whatever. Book learning along doesn't cut it or even come close.

Instead, it's imperative that we "realize" where we are at the present (and that's hard to impossible!). Only if we can and do realize where we stand would any of the very abstract scholarship that we might read make sense. That's if we could realize, which mostly we can't.

Of course, if we could realize where we are at, we wouldn't need concepts because we would have the real-time experience. And from that we may eventually be able to actually realize where we are. Yet, even that is doubtful. LOL. Dependence on

dualistic (relative) methods (conceptuality) only makes them more habitual. It's a massive Catch-22.

According to the teachings, trying to realize the nature of the mind through conceptuality (through scholarship), is not impossible, but yet it "IS", practically-speaking, impossible. The teachings say that enlightenment via concepts takes at least (and probably more than) one aeon -- an aeon being something like one billion years. I think I will take the stairs, thank you. LOL.

In other words, each of us always has the option of not trying to scope-out enlightenment conceptually as a scholar might (to just think about it), but rather we can forget about all that and just ourselves go and look at the nature of our mind on our own, which is what all the pith teachings are asking us to do. It not only takes relatively less time, it is just easier all around and less of a headache, as in: it's actually possible. LOL.

To me, trying to figure out the dharma conceptually has been (basically) a waste of time compared to learning to look at the nature of the mind (all by myself) with the help of an authentic guru. And for me, I have no choice. My mind naturally has trouble with concepts; I need hands-on experience to make any sense out of the dharma. I am very touchy-feely. I have to immerse myself in experience to feel anything at all, much less to realize something as difficult as what my experience means or just where I am at in all of this.

The time I spend trying to figure things out conceptually (or with books) is better spent actually

doing the practices that the scholars and their concepts teach or only talk about. By practicing, at least I can actually experience something real until I can realize what all the abstract scholarly texts are trying to say. The pith teachings say “In the midst of experience, realization can arise.” I hope so! And this is my kind of reverse-scholarship. LOL.

I find it much easier to realize the dharma through practical experience (practice) than by books, after which I know for myself through experience what these abstract writings by scholars are all about. Yet it takes trust and time. I have no choice but to ride the road of practice rather than try to travel the road of dharma by reading conceptual maps. For me, my internal dharma-GPS is a better guide.

As mentioned, this reverse-scholarship puts realization first, after which (if I get some realization) I can easily understand what all the scholarship is all about. And to get that realization, first I experience the dharma until I have some realization {however small) and then, second, with that realization I can perhaps relate with what the scholars write about my realization. So, instead of the traditional “Think and do,” I belong to the “Do and then think” tribe. I do the practice until some realization arises and then see what thoughts come. It’s so much easier on my brain. I struggle through experience (rather than think) until the relief of some modicum of experience arises. Thus, I let my experience through practice be my guide, if only because concepts alone don’t work for me.

“As Bodhicitta is so precious,
May those without it now create it,

May those who have it not destroy it,
And may it ever grow and flourish”

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