

## DHARMA: WHAT GIVES ME PAUSE

In writing these blogs, I can't emphasize everything at once or each time I write. And what really gives me pause can't be repeated or emphasized enough, IMO, but I will mention it here and emphasize how important it is.

What little I know about realization by way of the dharma tells me that "Realization" is not a walk in the park. It's hard won; otherwise, we would all be enlightened by now. Of course, like any of us, I can read all kinds of dharma teachings and books. However, as helpful as reading may be, it all comes down to what I understand, what I have personally experienced, and (most of all) what I have actually realized, if anything. And that's a pyramid with "Realization" at the tip of the top. LOL.

With the dharma, it's not enough to just stick our toe in the water. Baptism in the dharma, so to speak, requires full immersion and nothing less. We must be all-in. And very, very, very few people can get the dharma all-at-once. For most of us it takes time and lots of it. And here comes my worry: what little realization I have tasted makes me stop and think, gives me pause for thought. Why is that? Some of you might be interested and, IMO, this is not an easy truth.

What I want to share with you here could probably be just my own problems speaking up, but I doubt it. You may be much more fortunate than me, yet in my case "realization," what little I have realized, did not come easily. It seems that in order for me to listen, absorb, and learn the dharma at heart, which means more

than just conceptually, I have to sober-up (so to speak) or be somewhat in dire straits.

In other words, it takes quite a lot to bring me down from my ivory tower of conceptuality long enough to take in the reality of what is. In fact, to me it often seems that everyone is walking around acting as if they are going to live forever. And perhaps if we factor in rebirth, it's true, but in what form? Nevertheless, like driving a car, we had better keep our hands on the steering wheel and the tires touching the road. I am speaking to myself.

What few breakthroughs I have had in dharma did not come when I was at the top of a cycle, feeling great, but rather just the opposite, they came when I was forced to taste the blood reality, when I was at the bottom or the bay, so to speak. My nose has to be forced to the grindstone before I "really" get much realization. And so, what am I saying here?

What I'm saying is that as hard as hard-times can be for us to weather, when it comes to the dharma, tough times can be a godsend, often the only thing that will get our attention. Otherwise, we "Sail on Silver Girl" like the line from the song "Bridge Over Troubled Waters." We never touch the ground. In every image of the Buddha of our times, Shakyamuni, his right hand reaches down to touch the ground. That's tells us something important, kind of the mudra for our times.

The tough times, the times beyond enduring, like when a loved one dies or whatever touches us deeply are the times that give me pause from the incessant distractions apparently I am so fond of. It's the times

that my Self is shattered, like Humpty Dumpty, and it takes hours, days, weeks, or whatever for me to put my self back together. These times are when I'm outside or beside myself, times when I can be most open to dharma.

I know that we can also realize dharma in the good times, but, sadly, at least for me, I listen better to truth when I am not distracted by my everyday fixations. And times of great sorrow and interruption, when I'm staring out into the void, have been, for me, the times when the dharma has most come home to roost. It gets my attention. Of course, it could be just me, but I doubt it. It could be you too.

And so, these times of interruption from the merry-go-round of life, these hard times are ones not to just hunker-down, wait it out, and weather, but times to take note and make full use of. For me, these often have been times of great imprint, when whatever reorientation I am capable of are stamped into my consciousness.

Apparently, most of us have been skimming off the top of life for innumerable lifetimes, with our tires seldom (if ever) actually touching the road. Just as the good times are necessary to keep us going, so the hard-times are at least as important to guide us. That's my two cents.

I am reminded of a song written by my daughter May Erlewine called "Rise Up Singing," in which is the line "You know, trouble ain't built to last." Here is that song, for those of you who are gifted with time enough to hear it.

“Rise Up Singing” by May Erlewine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BldOMLsLFeg>