

HOW PERSONAL IS PRIVATE?  
Plus Flare and Eclipse Update.  
May 23, 2013

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[I have another theme here, but before I get into that, please note that the last of the three eclipses will occur Friday night, May 25, 2013 at 00:25 AM EDT (around Midnight on Saturday morning). This will be a Full-Moon eclipse. I have no idea whether there will be any more largish solar flares, but there was a good-sized (M.5) one yesterday (Wednesday), and it had a strong CME Event (Coronal Mass Ejection), which is headed toward Earth and should sweep by on May 25th. So we will get both an eclipse and a solar event on the Full-Moon eclipse day. The solar flare Wednesday was large enough to kind of (in my experience) serve as a setback to what I am calling the reorganization of the self... at least to a degree. It seemed to retard the sense of my returning to normal, and extended the chaos for a little longer.]

I would like to talk about what we call "spirituality." The whole concept of spirituality is so confusing in these modern times. Here in America we consider our spirituality as "private," perhaps based on First Amendment rights and, sadly, meditation is lumped into the concept of spirituality. It is considered politically incorrect to ask about someone's spirituality. We don't go there. That is considered personal and private. It would be funny if it did not also have consequences.

The problem is that here is a whole nation, most of whom will on principle not talk about their spirituality, including their meditation technique and experiences, yet who are at the same time at least somewhat at a loss as to what they are doing when they say they "meditate." I am not saying no one knows how to meditate, just that far too many have never properly learned how. If they are honest, they know they don't know, because nothing is happening. Or worse: they don't even know they don't know. I understand this is a strong statement, so please hear me out.

In Tibet there are large monasteries filled with monks who, aside from their various dharma practices, debate, discuss, and instruct each other at least on all the basic meditation techniques. Basic meditation technique is open source, transparent. There is nothing private about meditation instruction and how to do it in Tibet. It is an open book and not considered personal.

Sure, your relationship with your root teacher may be personal and private, but not the basic techniques you are using, like shamata meditation. In this country, the whole area of meditation is considered private (too personal to discuss) and there certainly are no open standards to measure against. We are free to set our own standards, which freedom only holds us back.

In this regard we stack the deck against ourselves. Meditation techniques need to be separated out from our cloistered ideas of "spirituality," and vetted by those who actually have been trained in it. By definition we don't know what we are doing when we practice meditation. That is why it is called practice. We need to let some air in. As a nation we would do well to learn which mind-training techniques actually work and which amount to spiritual materialism on our part, just stroking our ego.

I had the good fortune to actually find teachers who did not let me persist in my isolated sense

(and home-made notions) of spirituality, but actually marched me through the steps of actual meditation training until I got it. And they did not buy all the guff I came up with along the way as to my "right" to do it my way, to be secretive about it. No one was fooled by that, and after a while I just gave it up and got in line and learned how to meditate correctly, based on authentic teachings reaching back 2500 years.

I came real close to protecting my pride by cutting and running when I had to face my own stale excuses for not just learning to meditate properly. I had the ridiculous notion that somehow, because I was an astrologer and was, you know, "spiritual," that I should place out of meditation 101. Rinpoche never blinked. He gently pointed out to me that when it came to meditation, it was better for me to simply start at the beginning. It would save time. That stung a bit, but I am so grateful that I managed to squash my pride enough to just do what was suggested. It has made a huge difference in my life.

So, by all means let's separate our first-amendment rights to freedom of religion from the detailed methods needed to learn how to meditate that are openly taught in Asia. There is nothing private about basic meditation technique any more than learning to type or ride a bicycle is considered private. Lava lamps are not required.

Meditation is not something (at least in learning the authentic techniques properly) that you learn by yourself. It is not private, but needs all the open air and the asking of questions possible. We should discuss our meditation experience with an experienced meditator UNTIL such time as we stop practicing and actually just meditate. Then we can be private about it, if we wish.

Having learned something about meditation myself, please hear me when I repeat: there is nothing private about meditation. It is a technique like any other technique, something we need to learn how to do properly and then practice until we get the knack of it. We can call it a spiritual skill, but the skill or technique part of it is like any other technique. We have to learn it properly.

Without being able to ask questions and get feedback while we are learning, we run the risk of not learning meditation properly or, worse, doing it ineffectively and never really being able to actually meditate. I worry that too many people are quietly doing whatever they think is meditation, in the dark (so to speak), afraid to ask someone with experience with the technique for help or insight. I spent years doing this myself and it was a huge waste of time. It is almost an American peculiarity that we always know best, even when we don't know at all.

Learning meditation, at least the kind that the Buddha did, requires some instruction and, more important yet, someone to monitor what we are doing until we reach the point that we actually can meditate. We need to ask questions while we are learning, share our experiences with an instructor, and get clear feedback until we know what we are doing.

There are dharma practices that should not be discussed, not because they are "secret," but because they should not be practiced until the basics are learned. However, beginning meditation practice is not one of them. Basic meditation technique can be discussed, and should be, in order to get it right. It is fundamental, meaning it is the foundation on which everything else is based. If it is shaky, it is not a strong foundation and it just won't work. You have the idea.

I would love to hear your thoughts and experiences about this.

