

THE POISONS IN THE MIND

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[I know... I am incorrigible. When I have a topic I want to communicate about, I can't let it go. No point in apologizing. You are free not to read these blogs, just as I am to write them when I am moved to write them. Like an itch, I need to complete the concept here, so here goes.]

Things are not always what they seem. It can be a topsy-turvy, upside-down world we live in. What we see coming in is not always the same as what we see going out. In recent blogs we have been discussing developing an awareness of our reactions, the myriad of times each day that we react despite ourselves, despite our "self."

I have mentioned in earlier posts how the self opens and closes down like an iris, wincing in an attempt to control what it does not like to know. We are a victim of our own likes and dislikes. The self, with all its filters, prejudices, likes and dislikes, is like walking around in an airtight space suit, trying to protect anything we don't like from reaching us at all times.

The self also prevents us from breathing, smelling, touching and feeling the world as it naturally is, fresh and pungent. We are embedded in the cotton-mass of the self, suspended in space with no gravity (graveness) reaching us, somehow unable to get to our real senses. You get the idea.

Our involuntary reactions are fault lines in the self where reality shines or seeps through. These automatic reactions are chinks in the armor of the self through which a little bit of fresh change gets past our air-tight seal. We are touch-sensitive, and some things reach us despite the self's automatic attempts to prevent feeling anything to the quick. These are reactions, the same ones that we've encoded as prejudice, bias, and so on. In truth, we have everything kind of upside-down and backward. I will try to explain.

Our self tries to avoid being reactive because our reactions can hurt (they are cries for help), yet without reactions we would feel almost nothing at all. Reactions are perhaps the only signs we get that we are still alive in there. So we don't want to seal off our reactions so that we are wholly untouchable, but just the opposite. Using a form of tonglen practice presented earlier, we want to be aware of and open up our reactions (one by one) and let them air themselves out until their internal pressure is equalized and becomes normal. Eventually the self (our self) has to enter the real world and be normalized, and to give up on trying to protect itself from the truth as it really is, whatever we could agree that might be.

The takeaway here is that in a very real sense, our constant automatic (yet painful) reactions are good signs, waypoints on any map of our future. Think about it. Because we can sense these very sensitive reactive areas, then it follows that by feeling our way along and through to

making friends with our reactions we open up the self to reality. We come out of the closet.

Most selves are frightened, fearful, protective, and constantly busy moving heaven and earth in a desperate attempt not to feel at a loss. Our involuntary reactions are the little cries for help that escape our self despite all efforts to contain them. When the self is troubled, we kind of wince our way through the day. Know what I am talking about? You should. And here is the point:

We can use the reaction-tonglen practice (described in earlier blogs) to become aware of our reactions and to open them up to the air of reality. And by doing this methodically, we can move up the line to yet stronger reactions and do the same thing, eventually coming face to face with what the Buddhists call the Five Poisons (kleshas or conflicting emotions): anger, desire, ignorance, pride, and jealousy.

The Buddhist teachings point out that the Five Poisons are in fact the Five Wisdoms and that at some point in our trajectory toward awareness, we will transform the five poisons into the five wisdoms. The so-called five poisons (anger, ignorance, etc.) contain within themselves the five wisdoms. Think about that for a moment. Now how is that going to happen?

The very five kleshas that poison our system, when purified, transform themselves into the five wisdoms. Actually, they don't transform themselves. We transform them through our practice, one by one. In my opinion, this is something to consider. So we might ask: how do we purify the five poisons?

As pointed out in previous blogs, first we have to recognize and become aware of our reactions. Once aware of them, we gradually desensitize their effect on us. We make friends with them. This takes time and practice. And as we become more skillful in this, we move up through the reaction food-chain and begin to encounter not just reactions, but what are called the kleshas, the five poisons: anger, desire, ignorance, pride, and jealousy. It is here that we find the mother-lode of trapped energy.

I will continue this tomorrow if there is interest.

