

WAKING FROM OUR OWN DREAM: DO WE NEED A TEACHER?

July 9, 2012

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Before we return to the topic of teachers, a little personal update. After many days of 100-degree temperatures, the heat wave broke yesterday and cool air actually flowed into our house once again. By that time we were all kind of baked. You could stick a fork in us, so to speak. So things are much better now.

On the cosmos front, solar flares, auroras, and geomagnetic storms continue unabated. Yesterday, for example, a strong M6.9 solar flare erupted at 1:32 PM EDT, ejecting a plasma cloud into space. This continues to be a time of intense solar activity, correspondingly a time of strong inner change, perhaps by now almost a constant in our lives.

Enjoy the change while we have it. This kind of influx will not occur again for another eleven years or so, but it will continue now (probably) for many months ahead, but perhaps not as intense.

TEACHERS

I can see from your comments that we are most familiar with teachers of what are called the 'relative' truths, which simply put are studies of anything and everything in the world, the content of anything.

All 'relative' truths, such as astrology, psychology, gardening, etc. offer us a way to progress, a way to get around in this cyclic world we are living in and have always lived in. If we are 'here', a relative truth (like astrology) can help us get to 'there', to some place we want to go or progress to. It is like traveling on the surface of a sphere. We can go anywhere, all 360 degrees, but no matter where we go across the surface, it will never be toward the center. Relative truths share the quality of being concerned with this world of external things.

With relative truths we are using our minds to look at or study some subject or another. And while there is nothing wrong with relative truths (and relative-truth teachers), in a very real way they can only scratch the surface. With relative truths, we are examining the 'content' of the mind, but not the mind itself.

It is when we use our mind to look at itself that we get into the realm of absolute or 'true' truth. When we learn to look at who is doing the looking, we immediately touch on a whole other kind of truth, one that does not have a looker and an object of study, but the two are somehow one. We learn to look at the looker, so to speak. This is what we are here calling "absolute" truth.

An absolute truth like the dharma is not concerned with the surface or outside of the sphere of

life, but takes us inward toward the center and heart of the mind itself. Our mind is the projector of the movie of life we are all watching.

The practice of sitting meditation is the traditional doorway to this kind of inner truth, and once the mind is calm, another form of mind practice called “insight” meditation allows us to go further, and to look not at the content of the mind (astrology, mathematics, etc.), but at the very nature of the mind itself.

Another way to consider this life is as a dream. We all have this dream we call life that we are living, with its cycles, ups and downs, and what-not. This is the domain of the relative truths like astrology, philosophy, economics, and the like. Our life dream is an endless dream or projection, but one it is possible to wake up from.

The best means to awaken from this dream of life is some kind of mind or dharma practice. The Buddhists teach that awakening from the dream of life is similar to waking up from our nighttime dreams. We gradually wake up and realize we have been dreaming (distracted) all this time. We have missed the point.

This so-called ‘absolute’ truth of the dharma teachings cuts through the relative truths like a knife through warm butter and reveals them to us as we might think of a nighttime dream we just had. We just wake up.

And while relative truths and their teachers are many, those who can point out the nature of the mind itself are few. Even harder to find is a dharma teacher that can successfully point out to each of us personally the true nature of the mind.

In other words, most teachers (relative truth) can show us how to get around and make “progress” within the dream of life. This too is helpful. However, dharma teachers can point out how to wake up from that dream altogether into a much greater awareness.

I write about this, not from the experience of waking up, but by understanding from my teachers how this apparently works. I find it fascinating. What about you?

DO WE NEED A TEACHER?

An analogy of what finding a good spiritual teacher is like is an experience I have had that is common in 3rd-World countries. Let’s take Kathmandu for an example. I well remember getting off the small plane, walking across the wet tarmac (it had been raining), and into the customs office. Blooming plants were all around and the warm humid night air was filled with fragrance. Once inside, it took a long time, passing customs, exchanging money, and so on. After that we were directed toward a double-door and almost pushed from the station.

Emerging outside into the warm, wet night we were faced with a solid wall of cabbies and touts on the other side of the street. They all were waving and gesturing for our attention. It was

scary. Between the touts and ourselves was a policeman or two. It seemed we stood there for some time, not knowing when to cross beyond the police line or what might happen when we did.

When we finally ventured beyond where the policemen stood, clutching all our many bags, the line of cabbies and touts all rushed forward, completely surrounded us, and literally began grabbing and taking away our luggage, which we were hanging on to for dear life.

That experience with the touts, IMO, is what trying to find a spiritual teacher these days can be like, the would-be teachers being the touts. If this is insulting to spiritual teachers, I apologize.

And let me be clear: I am not jockeying to be a teacher, nor do I think I am your teacher or should be. If I were a teacher, I would have students, and I can honestly say that I have no students that I recognize, at least in the world of astrology. A student would be someone that I feel has fully understood my particular astrological lineage and is empowered (in my eyes) to pass that lineage on, you know: carry on the tradition. Nada. So what am I?

I am an older family person who has been around a bit, and who has taught himself much of what he knows. As a child of the 1960s, I like to share what I am interested in with others. If I can be of use in that way, I am grateful.

That being said, in my own life, teachers have been very, very important. I don't consider myself lucky, like winning the lottery, but I have been lucky in finding life or spiritual teachers. Since I have perhaps learned something about having teachers and what they are about, I'd like to share just a few thoughts with you. I imagine some of you must wonder about having a teacher.

First, as often is the case with me, the Tibetan Buddhists seem to have the best understanding as to what a teacher's true job is, so let's start with that, which is like starting at the top. And please think about this carefully. I had to.

A dharma teacher's job is over when he or she has pointed out to the student the true nature or his or her mind, AND the student has recognized that nature. Period, end of story. Another way to say this is that a teacher is someone who is capable of actually pointing out to us personally the true nature of our mind, and we can get it. Anything else is gravy, like if they are a nice person, have good manners, are clean, dress well, or whatever we might imagine is desirable in our idea of a teacher.

Although teachers can be our "friend," that is not part of their job description, nor is hanging out with our teacher very likely. I mean, anything is possible (and almost all things eventually happen), but don't look for it. Life teachers are not folks we get too personal with in a social sense.

And teacher's personalities are none of our business. When I met the Ven. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, and we were in a one-to-one situation, the first thing he did was to drink a bottle of

sake AND teach me to meditate. The learning to meditate was the teaching; the drinking sake was none of my business.

The same goes with trying to judge the effectiveness of a teacher by seeing if they measure up to some internal standard we have. If we knew what a teacher has to know to teach us, we wouldn't need a teacher. Right? My first life-teacher used to say: "Don't ever say 'nobody knows,' just say 'I don't know.'"

In other words, we are in no position to grade teachers, except as to whether they can actually teach us and whether we can in-fact learn what we most need to learn from contact with them. There are said to be 84,000 dharma teachings, so there must be at least 84,000 kinds of students. We each only need one teacher, the one who can teach us, and even that seems to be hard enough to find.

Your teacher might be a butcher, a baker, or a candlestick maker, etc. They may be fat, thin, tall short, kind, nasty, attractive, repulsive, and so on. The only relevant question is whether they can point out to you the true nature of your mind (and how it works) so that you recognize it.

Of course, if they just happen to be kind, compassionate, gentle, soft-spoken, and appear wise, etc., so much the better, but where the rubber meets the road is whether they can introduce you to your own mind so that you become aware of it. And please note:

Being introduced to our own mind is NOT the same as enlightenment or even close. Recognizing the true nature of the mind and how it works is the first (and single) step that ends for us the confusion of endlessly searching for the 'way', and instantly puts the responsibility for our own eventual enlightenment squarely in our hands, rather than our looking for something outside ourselves, like (you guessed it), for a teacher. Got it?

The takeaway here is that the teacher's main job is to redirect our search for something we have been looking outside ourselves for (like to find a teacher) back upon itself, i.e. pointing out to us that it is only inside that we will find the true nature of the mind, and then our finding it. The teacher is the one person who can do that for us. In other words, the teacher is kind enough to bother to redirect us to where we should have been looking all along, and skillful (and patient) enough to help us get it. We all already know we are supposed to look within, but who has shown us how to do that and where to look?

And for those of us who think you are going to just get a do-it-yourself 'nature-of-the-mind' kit, please think again. The Tibetan Buddhists are very clear that each of us has been wandering in cyclic existence forever and we have yet to recognize the true nature of our own mind, even though it has been right here in front of us all this time. The chances of our lucking upon it or finding it without direction are infinitesimal. It won't happen, which is why dharma teachers exist: to point this out to us. So, we do need a teacher, and just have to find one teacher, not a dozen, the one for us.

We can all locate yoga teachers, math teachers, Pilates teachers, astrology teachers, and all kinds of other teachers of what the Buddhists call the 'relative truths'. A relative truth is one that can help us get moving and making progress, moving perhaps from here to there. Astrology is one of these truths. It is relatively helpful, but not absolutely helpful.

Only an authentic (authentic-for-us) dharma teacher can reveal the 'absolute' truth, the most important truth, by being able to successfully point out to us the true nature of our own mind so that we can at last see it. This is called in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition the "pointing out" instructions and in the Zen Buddhist tradition "Kensho."

How important is it to find an authentic teacher IMO? The answer is VERY important. Is it easy? No, it is difficult, because there are so many would-be teachers out there that can't help us. Even otherwise authentic teachers may just not be our teacher, are not capable of grasping just what it is that we personally need to wake up, and then giving it to us.