

THE DOCTRINE OF SIGNATURES

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No, I am not talking about the U.S. constitution or the Monroe Doctrine. And I am not even talking about the doctrine of signatures used by herbalists and doctors all the way back to Galen. I am more referring to how mystics like Jakob Böhme used the term “signatures,” that everything signals or is a sign of its own nature and use. And I also am leaning toward what in the East is called the Great Seal, also called Mahamudra or Dzogchen or Maha-Ati, that the natural world itself is a gesture and perfectly reflects the true nature of the mind.

And most of all I am simply saying that as I progress in life (that is a kind way of saying I am getting older), but I mean here (rather than aging) some kind of spiritual progression. And I should remark that it totally amazed me when I first discovered it that the Tibetan masters have biographies called Nam-Tar, where the simple facts of life, like where you went to school, your personal circumstances, and so on are not in the biography.

Instead, only the teleological progression of spiritual changes or events in life are recorded. How great is that? How forward looking. How different than here in the west where biographies are mostly all circumstantial and the spiritual changes are usually left out. What a flip.

Anyway... I am mostly interested in spiritual changes in myself and others. With most of my friends, the first thing I ask them (or want to ask them) is “What’s new spiritually?,” what have you been thinking of lately, and what gets you up in the morning? That kind of thing.

There is always change at the core of each of us, somewhere deep down or way in or far-somewhere, but still there. And changes at the core, as we know, control the entire periphery. Spiritual changes control our attitude and our attitude, like the sails of a boat, is how we take the winds of changes life offers, and therefore dictates in what direction we head. Make sense?

As I grow older and, hopefully, spiritually a little more adept, I feel like a blind man feels along the corridor of my life for change. I am way beyond drawing any kind of spiritual conclusion from the flotsam and jetsam of outer life, this cyclic turmoil in which we are all immersed. But I am gradually drawing my physical conclusion, day by day.

Like the blind I feel within me changes and I do watch for signs of these changes in my outer life. I love the analogy of a school of fish, which randomly set here and there in the ocean, on some hidden (to me) cue, suddenly ‘school’, and all point in the same direction, and this in a flash.

The cues of life around me seem to do this too, and this is what I mean by signature. Everything in life signals or signs something, and we all read sign language. It is when those signs school or cluster that I am forced to pay a little attention, like those pictures embedded within a picture

that we suddenly see. That is what I mean by “signs.” Do you have them too? Sure.

And I use the word “see” here, but I more mean feel and I live for those thought-free moments when life offers a crystal clear image of reality, of what is true, of truth. It is this truth that can tell the future, because as I like to share here, what is true is the future because while other things will fade in time, the truth will last until then, until the future.

So I cast my net into the sea of sense and retrieve the odd sign now and again of what is real. I can't help but read it. And we all have our heroes.

My hero of heroes is the great Mahasiddha Tilopa, one of the lineage masters of Mahamudra of which I hopefully am a member, who left these six words or phrases of advice for me and for those of us who will hear it. He said.

Don't prolong the past.

Don't invite the future.

Don't think.

Don't analyze.

Don't control.

Just rest in the nature of the mind.