

April 2015

Greetings!

I imagine that everyone is grateful for the coming of spring. Here in Seattle we are experiencing an early spring, with the trees and flowers blooming about a month early. It is quite beautiful. The groups are all doing quite well, and we are looking forward to a very nice spring.

Let me now go over again the reasons for going into such depth with the teaching of the self. When we place such great emphasis on the self as a source of refuge and empower the sense of self in our life, ultimately this will only lead to suffering. The teaching helps us see that the self and all its manifestations are impermanent and transient, so when we cling to, or crave any of its aspects, it will lead us to disappointment. There is something we can turn to, something eternal, full of love, compassion, and wisdom, that is always there, that is a refuge of true perfection. Through our training, we can learn to live from that deeper place and when different aspects of self arise we can simply meditate and be still. In so doing we allow the aspects of self to dissolve naturally into the flow of the Eternal, and what was hard-hearted, discontented, judgmental, discriminatory or vengeful (all qualities of the self) becomes instead pure-hearted, still, non-judgmental, non-discriminatory and non-vengeful (all aspects of the Eternal). In this way the self is converted and our true nature can manifest.

The self seeks to be in control at all times and to convince us that it knows "our selves" the best. Let me give an example of how the self attempts to cover up painful or uncomfortable feelings and thoughts that one may be having and to convince us that it is for our own good. For "my self" food can become an extreme craving, particularly pizza and chocolate. There is nothing wrong with liking things. The problem is when they move into a more demanding realm. At times it comes up that I "really want" pizza and chocolate, usually when I am not feeling that great. This is when I need to be mindful of these things that my self wants me to take refuge in. The next step that the self takes is to convince me that I "must have" pizza and chocolate to feel better. At this point I must be extremely mindful. With my training and meditation, I can now resist these strong urges by going with the flow of the Eternal. The "solutions" of the self only lead to the continuation of suffering, which most of us can attest to when we substitute our own examples of urges.

Two other aspects of self that are very difficult for me are worrying and complaining. I notice that when I am quite tired and worn down, these aspects come up. With worrying, it can be anything great or small. When we worry about things that we cannot do anything about the self becomes empowered. As we become consumed with worry, it serves to fuel the self. However, there is a place for concern and responsibility as opposed to needless worrying. If for example, I said something or did something that may have hurt someone's feelings, I could just worry endlessly about it, which is fuel for

the self. Or I can reflect on it and see if there is something I can do that can make the situation better.

Another example is my worrying about the state of the planet. The worrying is detrimental, but I can be responsible by recycling and using less energy. There is a fine line between worry and genuine concern. As you train, this will become clearer.

The other aspect of self that I have to be aware of is complaining, which is a more obvious behavior. When we complain, we are not accepting the situation. This can often happen with current events, where political inclinations lead to a lot of complaining. The self is fueled by this as it is very rare that complaining leads to less suffering, as we get more and more worked up. This leads us away from the stillness that does alleviate suffering.

At the end of this series we will explain how all these aspects of the self manifest themselves in the five components, "The Skandas"- (1) form or matter, (2) sensation or feelings, (3) thoughts or perceptions, (4) impulses or activity, and (5) consciousness.

I would like to end with a poem that I wrote when I was a young monk and caught myself being consumed by complaining. I would like to add worrying to the poem, as I think it also works.

Complaining and Worrying is Suffering

When we go with this attitude

We complain and worry, complain and worry, complain and worry

Not realizing we are pouring gasoline on the fire of our suffering

When we finally say "Enough!"

We can accept, meditate and be still

Doing this, we let the water of the spirit douse that fire of our suffering

Then we see that complaining and worrying is Suffering!!

Take Care
With All My Heart
Rev Basil

