

February 2015

The Self - Part 2

Greetings!

I would like to wish all a very Happy New Year, and thank you all for your continuing support. At this time I want to thank my good friend Allan, who has been the editor of these emails for a while, and also thanks to Geoff, who is still very much in the loop, posting the emails and providing me with last minute feedback. I am very grateful to have Allan and Geoff on board. If it weren't for them, these emails would not be possible.

Things here in Seattle are continuing to move along very nicely. I continue to go to the detention center twice a week, and will be starting another meditation session at the community center. The weekly group meeting is still small, but very strong. The family get together has been going very well. We had a very enjoyable meeting in Olympia in December and the next one will be in Seattle in February. Also I was invited by Reverend Master Teigan and the Bainbridge Island group for their Thanksgiving pot luck. It was a lot of fun and really nice to see old friends.

In addition, I have some special events coming up. I will be giving a talk at the University of Washington in January on the Self, and the church asked me to give a talk on Buddhism in February.

Let me now continue with the subject of the "egocentric self" which we will just call the "self."

The self starts to show itself when we are children. At the family get togethers I have been very fortunate to observe this. I have known most of the children since they were toddlers. Watching them grow up and observing the interactions between them and their parents has been a great learning experience for me. I have been able to see how the meditation and training of the parents really helps the children. When the self starts showing itself in the children, the mindfulness of the parent can guide them away from the aspects of self that cause suffering. For example, the child might say "I don't want to go to bed now" or "I don't want to do my homework, I want to go outside and play." Through meditation and training, the parents can find an appropriate way to approach each situation that the self presents. Some of these approaches may include compassion, explanation, or firmness. In turn, this enables the parents to work on their own training such as patience and anger. This discipline and training allows the children to be much more still and mindful and allows the flow of the Eternal with its love, kindness, and wisdom to manifest itself. When this happens, it can be easier to manage the power of the self, both at this early age and as they get older.

A similar form of training occurs upon entering into training at a Zen temple. The discipline is very strong and daily life is very regulated. This can lead many people, including myself, to focus on the externals of daily life, instead of using the training as a

way to convert the self and move away from the suffering that it causes. I have heard many people in the temple say that they are being treated like "children", which is quite true. The senior monks in the temple are acting in many ways as parents do. When we are caught up in the externals, it is difficult to see the deeper aspects of the training. I have been on both sides of this, first as a novice, then as a senior monk, and I know how difficult this training can be, but how extremely beneficial it is for all involved.

At this point I would like to bring karma into our discussion in terms of its relevance to the training of the self. When karma is discussed, we often hear of the dichotomy between good and bad karma. These are terms that we will use here for ease of explanation. As I will explain in a bit, they are not useful terms in explaining the relation of karma to the Eternal. We have talked about parents being responsible and mindful in the raising of their children. This would constitute the making of "good karma" and leads to the creation of merit. On the other hand, when parents respond to their children with anger, neglect and other manifestations of the self it leads to the making of "bad karma" and produces negative results. In speaking with many inmates in the prison system, I have seen the effects that this kind of upbringing can have. The Eternal, however, with its pure love and non-judgement, does not see things in terms of good and evil or any absolute opposites. Everything will eventually dissolve into the flow and love of the Eternal, which acts as a magnet for the so called bad karma to be converted.

Part of the Buddhist teaching, which I am not going to discuss at any great length at this time, deals with inherited karma from the past. We occasionally see children act out with inappropriate and exaggerated behavior, which seems to come out of left field. This kind of behavior, accompanied by sudden fear and great anger such as temper tantrums, may sometimes be explained by the presence of inherited karma. Even with vigilant and compassionate parenting, behavior such as this often is exhibited and inherited karma may be a factor. For a more detailed discussion of karma, I would like to refer you to the previous emails (found on our web page in the Email list) of July, August, and October of 2012. I really recommend taking time to look at these, as they will help in the understanding of self.

I would like to share some things about myself, which may help in this discussion. When I was younger, I would get these waves of feelings, which would be very strong and left me feeling very disoriented, in a kind of fog. I would feel very alone and couldn't be around my friends, choosing to either watch television, walk on the beach, or stuff myself with all kinds of unhealthy foods, anything to help this "karma" dissipate. My upbringing was not of the nurturing variety. My mother died of cancer when I was very young and she was sick for a period before that, and my father wasn't around much. Basically, I was raised by a very kind housekeeper, who pretty much left me to watch tv. The karmic effect of this was that I became a bit wild and got into a lot of trouble, including often turning to very unhelpful things. The "self" was gaining a strong hold. To compensate for this suffering, I developed certain traits such as being demanding, stubborn, sarcastic, and argumentative. (I'm sure some of my old friends on the e-mail list could add a few more.) Through the training, it has become much easier to catch

myself acting in these ways, and allow these behaviors to be washed by the love of the Eternal.

Many of us now don't have our parents or senior monks around to point out the manifestations of self, when they arise. This is when we have to be even more mindful, still, and meditative in avoiding taking refuge in the self, with its anger, despair, and fear, and return to the flow of the Eternal with Its love, wisdom, non-judgement and acceptance.

To conclude here I wanted to add a little bit from Geoff. I asked him whether anything came to mind from his life of training as a parent. Here is what he had to say:

"Thanks Rev Master Basil. In this email you mentioned children refusing to do something - and we all know this is a very common scenario! One thing I have noticed about my own parenting in relation to this is that more often than not I find myself following my intuitive sense that I should not attempt to soften the blow (to one of my children) of not getting something they want. For example, one of the boys says, "I want juice!!!". As parents we think, no, no more juice today. The "I want juice!" becomes insistent and is followed by wailing, pleading and crying! Our child is suffering, and it is not pleasant as a parent to endure this, so the temptation is to offer something else - "no juice, but look at this great show on tv". However, I have found that more often than not my instinct is not to do this. Rather, it feels right to simply allow the boy to be upset, and to allow that upset to pass (as it always does of course) in its own time. This is not to say that it always feels right to go this way. At other times, for example when I sense that a child is really at the end of their tether, it seems good to alleviate the pain of a "no" with the getting of some alternative. But, typically, I find myself taking the "tougher" line, and when I reflect on this I'm hopeful that in the long run this approach will be beneficial in that the boys will learn that they have to be still with their own suffering rather than trying to find a way round it."

With All My Heart

Reverend Basil