

November 2014

The Self - Part 1

Greetings!

The holiday season is upon us, so I would like to take this opportunity to wish all a very joyous season!

Here in Seattle things are going well. We had a very nice family meeting in October, and the other groups are doing quite well. In addition, we will be doing a public talk at the Mercer Island library.

In this e-mail I would like to talk about a topic that we have been discussing in the groups. This is the teaching of the "egocentric self", which we will refer to as simply "the self" from here on in. It is a very complex teaching, and what I intend to do in this e-mail is to offer an introduction and in following e-mails to go into greater detail.

Some have expressed this teaching in terms as "no self" or the self as not real. I prefer not to use these terms as I find them confusing. Like most people, I have always found the self to be a very strong force in my life. Through the training I have come to realize the great suffering that the self has caused me.

The basic teaching is that the self is impermanent and transient, while the permanence of the Love of the Eternal encompasses it and all things. When we use the self, with its delusion and devices as a major refuge and place great importance on it in our lives (which I have found very easy to do), the result is spiritual pain. Instead of taking refuge in the self we want to learn to rely upon the Eternal and its Love. This is where our meditation and training come in - over time we are gradually able to be still enough to see the self more clearly for what it is, and thus to refrain from going in the directions it would have us go. And when we do this we will eventually see that all is within Love of the Eternal, even the spiritual pain.

An example of how the self manifests itself is in its desire to have us run with anger and fear. It will do anything and use anything in its power to continue to fuel this anger and fear (this is suffering!). Another kind of suffering comes from the idea of right and wrong, which is extremely important to the self. It feeds on being right (pride) and experiences great pain and hurt when wrong (inadequacy). We don't have to live in such a way that leads to great suffering.

Also our meditation and training reveal to us what is permanent, full of love, ever present, and non-judgmental, that being the Eternal/Unborn. When we take refuge in It, and see It in everything, including the self, we can move away from spiritual suffering and towards living in peace.

Let me now outline what Shakyamuni speaks of as the five aspects of self, which he calls "Skandhas", which literally means a bundle, pile, heap, or mass. They are: (1) form or matter; (2) sensation or feelings; (3) thought or perceptions; (4) impulses and activity and (5) consciousness.

We will go into a comprehensive explanation of these in the following e-mails. What is important to take away at this point is that we seek to see the Eternal in all these aspects of self and not to loathe them. One of the important points of training is that we co-exist with the self, neither rejecting it nor embracing it.

In the next e-mail we will describe the "Skandhas" and how easily we can get attached to and take refuge in them, ultimately leading to suffering and how the meditation and training can help us move away from the pull of self and live a life in peace with the flow of the Eternal.

Again have a great holiday season and don't overeat as my self wants to do.

Take Care,
Reverend Basil