

## September 2013

Greetings!

I hope everybody had a nice summer. Here in Seattle the weather has been the best anyone can remember. We would like to welcome a bunch of folks who have recently been added to this email list. Also, we would like to thank Geoff who is trying to keep going with the putting together of the email. With his newborn and three year old sons, and a full-time job, his plate is quite full. Geoff mentioned that he really enjoys working on the email and we are very grateful. If it is delayed here and there we will know that Geoff is trying to find an opening to work on it. Thanks again Geoff.

In the last email we talked about complaining and how it causes us suffering. We talked about how our training and meditation can help us to see our complaining, let it be converted into acceptance, and so help us move away from the suffering it causes.

In this email I would like to go over two more things that cause us to suffer. These two are particularly big for me, in the sense that they have been very strong in my life. But, before I go into these I would like to go back to Shakyamuni's Enlightenment, and some things that led up to it. When he first left his palace he saw four forms of pain and suffering that greatly disturbed him. One was a sick person (some stories say the person had leprosy). Second was a very old person. Third was a dead person. Fourth was a woman giving birth.

He said to himself that there must be a way to be free of all this suffering. He brought this line of thought to his meditation and his eventual enlightenment.

During his enlightenment he came up with some very deep insights. One was The Four Noble Truths. For our purposes here, I will just mention three of them. The First Noble Truth was that in this existence there is suffering. In the Third Noble Truth he shows us that there is a Place where suffering can be seen for what it is, accepted, and finally put to rest. He calls this place Nirvana.

As we have said before the word "Nirvana" has picked up a lot of baggage. What Shakyamuni meant by "Nirvana" was the Eternal, and Its unconditional Love. When suffering comes up for us there is this Place, this Unconditional Love that we can always go to. It is much deeper than the suffering and we can find peace there. Returning again and again to the Eternal through our meditation and daily training is the essence of the spiritual/religious life that Shakyamuni pointed to in the Third Noble Truth.

There is the kind of suffering that he saw (birth, old age, disease and death) that is just part of this existence. Many things fit into this category: tsunamis, droughts, etc. There is also another kind of suffering that we inherit and generate ourselves. This comes out of greed, hatred and the attempt to make this impermanent self a refuge (delusion).

These are the roots of the many emotions and thoughts that we go with in our heads. As we cling to them mentally we start to move them into our daily life forming habits of behavior that cause us suffering. Shakyamuni's second Noble Truth was that this kind of suffering is caused by clinging and craving. This kind of suffering can also be washed by the Love of the Eternal and our spiritual training. As we train and meditate we start to see the unhelpful attitudes and habits that we cling to, and we start to see the suffering that this causes. By letting these delusive attitudes and habits go (the opposite of clinging) and returning over and over again to the Eternal, letting Its Love and Wisdom permeate them, we can gradually convert them, seeing them for what they are: things that pull us away from peace, our meditation and the Eternal.

Now I would like to go back to the two things that I mentioned that I have a strong tendency to cling to. Still to this day I have to be very mindful when they arise.

The first is "reasonable anger". This is anger caused by someone who is behaving badly or who is trying to cause me trouble or harm. For instance, I recently had anger arise at the two heads of State, the leaders of Syria and Russia. This type of anger has, and still can, cause me great suffering when I go with it. When the anger arises I get hard-hearted, closed-minded and very irritable. Many times I get a headache and I can get ill. What I've seen through my meditation and training is that at these times I'm not seeing the Eternal and Its Love in everything, and in particular, I'm not seeing It in the person or persons who are triggering the anger. Our life of meditation and training greatly helps us in recognizing when we have left our sitting place, when we have been pulled out of meditation. In this case, when I see myself getting angry and irritable, it is a signal that I have been pulled away from meditation. Then what I need to do, what works, is to meditate with the situation, going deeper than right and wrong, so called good and evil, letting the flow of the Eternal permeate my anger and my hardened attitude. As I do this the anger dissipates and my hardened opinions about another person (or persons) soften into sympathy and compassion. This does not mean that one now feels that the behavior or situation that triggered the anger is good or right, it's just that one's heart remains open to all and there is an appreciation that beneath the troublesome behavior of another (or others) there is great suffering. When we know this, and when we know through our training that the basic mechanism – painful karma giving rise to harmful thoughts and actions – is the same for all of us, it is much easier to maintain a non-judgmental attitude and a heart that is open. I cannot tell you how helpful this has been for me. I am extremely grateful for this wonderful training.

The other thing that has caused me great suffering is going with an attitude of negativism. I looked in the dictionary for a meaning of "negativism" and I found one that was very relevant; "a habitual attitude of skepticism or resistance to suggestions, orders or instructions". This definition fits to a tee the way I was, and the way I can still be at times. I know from personal experience that this is a very painful and disturbing

way to live. A consequence of this attitude is that you find yourself getting into trouble a great deal. When I started my spiritual training and meditation I was able to see how permeated I was by this frame of mind. When it arises now I am able to see it, bow to it, and then let it go, allowing it to vaporize in the stream of the Unborn. Again I am very grateful.

To see what causes our particular kind of suffering (fear, anger, greed, skepticism etc.. etc...) is very big. Once we do this we can learn to exercise patience and compassion, and resolve to move towards what gives us peace. The habits of mind that cause us suffering are very strong. They have a kind of gravitational pull. We know the kind of energy we need to leave the gravitational pull of this planet. So, our training takes great energy, resolve and persistence. But we can do it, and it is very, very worth it. To live within the flow of the Eternal is an unsurpassed joy.

Take Care

Rev Basil